Public communication for the fight against syphilis: an experience report of the campaign "Eu sei. Você sabe?" (2020–2021)

Comunicação pública de combate à sífilis: um relato de experiência da campanha "Eu sei. Você sabe?" (2020–2021)

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Aiming at strengthening the discourse about syphilis prevention and promoting organic actions with strategies directed to digital communication platforms, the campaign "Eu sei. Você sabe?" ("I know. Do you?") was developed and placed between mid 2020 and early 2021, within the scope of the project "Sífilis, não" ('Syphilis, No'). **Objective:** In this article, we aim to report the planning and execution of this public communication campaign to combat syphilis by reflecting on the aspects of conception, strategic and creative planning, and placement of the campaign. **Methods:** The reflection was anchored in a descriptive study and in the report of this experience through a scientific narrative, considering the guidelines established in the planning and the period of execution (still under development). **Results:** The results of this campaign include the production and placement of various materials for digital circulation to disseminate content, such as cards (posts) for different social media websites in different formats; layouts for posters, banners and handouts (printed and digital); institutional website; card videos; sound spots; layouts for digital booklets and newsletters, among others. **Conclusion:** From the point of view of planning and production, the goal of the campaign was to contemplate the diversity of audiences with actions and materials, by adapting imagery, language and communication channels. It is not yet feasible to measure the reach or the audience size and response, although we can project it as positive in view of its context.

Keywords: syphilis; advertising; health policy; social networking.

RESUMO

Introdução: Visando ao fortalecimento do discurso de prevenção à sífilis e de promoção de ações de comunicação orgânicas com estratégias voltadas para plataformas de comunicação digital, foi desenvolvida a campanha "Eu sei. Você sabe?", entre o segundo semestre de 2020 e o primeiro de 2021, no âmbito do projeto "Sífilis Não". **Objetivo:** Neste artigo, objetivamos relatar a experiência das etapas do planejamento à execução dessa campanha de comunicação pública de combate à sífilis. Para tanto, refletimos sobre aspectos que envolvem desde a concepção, percorrendo as planificações estratégicas e criativas, até a veiculação da referida campanha. **Métodos:** Essa reflexão ancora-se em estudo descritivo e no relato de experiência como narrativa científica, levando em conta as diretrizes estabelecidas no planejamento e o período de execução (ainda em desenvolvimento). **Resultados:** Constituem-se como resultados dessa campanha a produção e a veiculação de diversos materiais direcionados para a circulação digital, com vista à divulgação de conteúdo, a saber: *cards* (publicações) para diferentes *sites* de redes sociais em formatos variados; *layouts* para cartazes, *banners* e panfletos (impressos e digitais); *site* institucional; vídeos cartelados; *spots* sonoros; *layouts* para cartilhas digitais e *newsletters*, entre outros. **Conclusão:** É possível verificar que a campanha "Eu sei. Você sabe?", do ponto de vista do planejamento e da produção, buscou contemplar, nas ações e peças, a diversidade dos públicos, adequando aspectos imagéticos, de linguagem e de canais de comunicação. Quanto à dimensão da audiência, ou seja, da repercussão, ainda não é viável mensurá-la, embora possamos projetar que será possível considerá-la positiva, em face do contexto de sua realização.

Palavras-chave: sífilis; publicidade; políticas de saúde; rede social.

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Court of Accounts (TCU) of Brazil indicated, through a technical note in 2017[1], that failures in communication about syphilis were one of the factors that led to the increase in number of cases across the country, to the point of decreeing an epidemic[2]. A thoughtful reflection on this note by the TCU requires the analysis of data from the website of the Brazilian Ministry of Health, which provides a collection of all advertising campaigns on infectious diseases since 1998. There were 91 campaigns (between 1998 and 2020): 42 of them were focused on the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV)/Aids; 37 addressed various actions on sexuality or sexually transmitted diseases/sexually transmitted infections (STDs/STIs); 7 focused on viral hepatitis; and 5 referred to syphilis.

Based on TCU's request to the Brazilian federal government to develop actions against syphilis, a project was agreed upon and prepared in the Tripartite Inter-Management Committee—a federal forum for articulation and agreements that acts in the management of the Unified System of Health (SUS) nationwide, made up of SUS managers from the three spheres of the government: Union, states, Federal District and municipalities. This project is linked to a parliamentary amendment being executed through the Terms of Decentralized Execution, managed by Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte. Entitled "Project for Rapid Response to

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Combating Syphilis in Health Care Networks", or project "Sífilis, não" ("Syphillis, no!"), it has been worked on in the areas of governance, research, communication, technology, education, comprehensive care, and surveillance.

For the component of communication, the execution of three advertising campaigns is planned for the duration of the project. The first campaign is focused on creating a visual identity to connect "Sífilis, não" with the general population, combined with the creation of social networks and the posts intended for the 2018 carnival period. To that purpose, arts were created adapting carnival songs to the theme of syphilis.

The second campaign, named "Lembre de se cuidar" ("Remember to take care of you"), was produced and publicized between November 2018 and May 2019. This stage was conducted by an advertising agency hired for this purpose.

The third campaign, "Eu sei. Você Sabe?" ("I know. Do you?"), takes the same line of communication previously used in the two other actions. However, it has a digital communication bias and was produced within the university, with academic research and practical execution walking together from its planning to its final review: a significant difference compared to the two previous ones.

OBJECTIVE

Bearing all this in mind, the objective of this article is to report the experience of the third communication campaign of the "Sífilis, não" project, by analyzing its full development: the design stage, the strategic and creative planning stages, and the release of the campaign "Eu sei. Você Sabe?"

METHODS

Considering that we refer to a descriptive study[3] in this article, we aim to present the specificities that constitute the elaboration of the project "Eu sei. Você Sabe?". In this way, our goal is not only to describe the process itself, but also to depict the knowledge resulting from it, taking the experience report format as an important scientific narrative[4].

So, to favor the understanding of the "Eu sei. Você Sabe?" campaign, we address three dimensions:

- strategic planning, which deals with the aspects guiding the development of actions and audiovisual materials;
- creative planning, focusing on conceptual, imagery and textual choices;
- resulting materials, relating to the final products.

Experience report

Campaign strategic planning

The third campaign is based on the need to combine syphilis testing and treatment between health agencies and individual care, inviting the population to question their prior knowledge about adequate prevention, treatment and testing procedures. Using a positive tone, dialogues and educational communication—which is characterized by permanent strategies and actions of planning, implementation and continuous evaluation of processes, programs and products developed with the objective of constituting and consolidating "communicative ecosystems"[5] —, the campaign has been carried out continuously by means of organic strategies in communication channels. The bibliography on HIV/Aids and other STI campaigns highlights that the social media are used by young people as the main sources of learning about sex[6]. The main challenge of creating the design of media campaigns aimed at the prevention of syphilis, HIV/Aids and other STIs is increasingly moving away from a historical position that was based on a pedagogy of self-care and prevention based on fear, with negative and threatening tone[7].

The campaign aims to establish a dialogue about prevention, diagnosis and treatment of syphilis through digital communication platforms that are able to mobilize the interest audience (pregnant women, young people, managers, health professionals, black population, population in social vulnerability, homeless population, indigenous people, population deprived of liberty, alcohol and drug users, sex workers, among others). Such audiences were drawn from the analysis of the 2020 epidemiological bulletin, with data from 2019 by the Ministry of Health[8].

The strategy chosen for the dissemination of this campaign was a more assertive and targeted communication for each audience on various social networking sites such as Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, WhatsApp, and Twitter. Through these channels, educational and dialogic content about prevention measures, rapid testing in Basic Health Units, guidelines for sexual partnerships, primary symptoms of syphilis, among other topics is made available.

Creative planning

Different aspects make up the campaign's dynamics, ranging from planning/creation (strategic and practical choices) to campaign dissemination. All stages are anchored in technical contributions from the fields of advertising and design.

First, we highlight the title of the third campaign: "Eu sei. Você Sabe?". Its textual construction tries to generate curiosity and enable the establishment of inferences regarding the care with one's own body and infection by syphilis, which still spreads very quickly in Brazil.

Considering such background, we developed a concept-sentence that summarized the intended concept and theme[9]: "Tem uma mensagem para você" ("There is a message for you"). The function of this catchphrase is to notify people about issues related to syphilis. Strategically, this theme can be adapted to each target audience, as established in the communication plan, as it associates with their contexts and particularities.

A balloon is the main visual element (**Figure 1**), and it represents a conversation with the audience about the importance of syphilis prevention, diagnosis and treatment. This "balloon" is a universal resource used to represent dialogues and, although its use precedes the digital environment, it is characteristic of messaging applications (WhatsApp, Messenger, Telegram and chats on social media sites such as Facebook and Instagram), widely used in the world. This further reinforces its association with the concept of the campaign and, consequently, with the digital environment, the main locus of placement.

The campaign's verbal and imagery languages were created in a way to establish a relation between the pieces. Both aspects contribute to giving an identity to the campaign, with emotional or rational appeals. Visual identity refers to a set of formal elements that visually

represent an idea, a product, a company or an institution. The identity system comprises a logo, which is the basis for its construction, a visual symbol formed by elements (typography, colors, graphics, among other semiosis) that can be identified by the audience[10].

Thus, a logo is developed based on the concept-phrase "Eu sei. Você sabe?" in conjunction with the balloon element, also used in a stylized way throughout the pieces. As for colors, one cannot forget their importance for a sensory experience, acting on the emotions of human beings. They "constitute psychological stimuli for human sensitivity, influencing the individual in liking or disliking, denying or affirming, abstaining oneself or acting on something"[11]. The color palette chosen, aligned with the other elements, represent the diversity of the audience, expanding the visual system as to help assimilate and memorize the campaign. Thus, orange and yellow were chosen as the main colors (with affective associations related to energy, warning, alert, hope, lighting), along with green and blue, which provoke affective associations related to well-being, health, safety and trust.

From the strategic point of view of creation, considering aspects foreseen in the communication plan, a fundamental concern was the representativeness and diversity. In order to give a more inclusive treatment of sociocultural and phenotypic diversity — given its importance for the social integration of the groups represented[12]—, the intention was to contemplate all target audiences in a representative manner.

For this purpose, the casting was made up of 19 people who voluntarily modeled for the campaign. The photoshoots took place on the premises of the Department of Distance Education, at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the models were allocated at different times to respect all biosafety recommendations. The following step was selection, treatment and use of images. In addition to the photos, small videos were produced to compose new content.

Figure 1 – Logo of the campaign "Eu Sei. Você sabe?".

Characters were built inspired by the target audiences, that is, archetypes of the real audience, which helped in the elaboration of specific communication actions. We understand that, while the target public is a segmentation of the market sorted by behavior and sociodemographic factors, the characters are an idealization of the audience, which is inserted in a reality and have concerns and anxieties; a type of humanization.

RESULTS

In order to synthesize the relationship between the resulting material and the quantity, we started to stick to what was produced, approved and placed or distributed between the second half of 2020 and mid-May 2021. Then we excluded materials that were still in some stage of the approval flow or that had not been put into circulation (even if foreseen in the planning).

The distribution was divided into two blocks: the first was focused on digital channels (online) and the second, on physical and traditional media channels (offline).

- Offline channels: layout for handouts (1); shirt print (3); poster layout (6); banner layout (1); layout for booklets (1); sound spot (1); layout for banners and flyers requested by project supporters (8). The set of images in **Figure 2** illustrates the approach taken in the campaign;
- Online channels: stickers for message application (3); layout for email marketing (1); promotional video (2); piece for personalization of pages on social media and content sharing sites (13); institutional website of the campaign (1); piece in banner format (1:1 and 16:9), for publication on the timeline and stories (presentation feature with limited exposure time) of social networking sites (38), including static and carousel types, which results in a greater number of images compared to pieces actually created and that can also be shared in messaging applications; piece in banner format (1:1 and 16:9) requested by project supporters (4).

In the set of images in **Figure 3**, the attention given to the representation of diverse audience of campaign 3 is a recurrent aspect that was planned since the briefing.

DISCUSSION

The strategies used in the "Eu sei. Você Sabe?" campaign are based on studies carried out by researchers at Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte. This practice is different than usual, in which research groups assemble an initial summary with basic information and the entire process is conducted by independent creative professionals.

The team responsible for the third campaign was made up of different professionals: infectious disease physicians and other public health agents, professionals with communication skills for writing, proofreading, creative direction, artistic direction, and final art. All of them are researchers in the health area, specifically on syphilis, and the design creation and validation process was agreed upon and aligned with professionals from the Department of Chronic and Infectious Diseases of the Brazilian Ministry of Health.

The presence of professional researchers in this creative process allows for continuous adjustments during the production of the pieces, based on the analysis of what had already been published

and the needs identified by epidemiological data. As a result, production gets directed to reach audiences not yet covered, including a placement plan that also adapts to new demands.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, part of the population remains in remote work. We opted, then, for placing the third campaign mostly on social media sites, that is, posts in electronic media, without applications in external media, unlike what happened in the second campaign. This lessens the impact for large masses and for the audience that does not have access to the Internet; however, it allows for a more controlled and effective targeting via management mechanisms in the platforms used.

Regarding messages aimed at the audience with no access to digital technologies (devices with internet connection or even profiles on social media), other specific actions were carried out in person, such as the printing of booklets and handouts. This helps to reach this audience.

Strengths

In this report, we presented a unique public communication experience, as it took into account the interdisciplinary nature of practices and processes of different actors such as scholars, health and social communication, and the government. This is interesting insofar as it allows the development of new perspectives of action on the topic of syphilis from a communicational point of view and aimed at different audiences.

Figure 2 – Set of posters for the campaign "Eu Sei. Você sabe?".

Figure 3 – Set of posts for the campaign "Eu Sei. Você sabe?".

Limitations

We believe that the experience report of the campaign "Eu sei. Você sabe?" can be more comprehensive, since it is possible to add more information about the audience to current data. This quantitative and qualitative verification of the audience, associated with a reflection on flows and processes, would allow a verification of associations between intended content and meanings and understanding produced, favoring the evaluation of the campaign in association with other factors.

CONCLUSION

The production of the third campaign of the project "Sífilis, não" was an innovative movement because of two central aspects. The first one has to do with the production flow. Relying on professional researchers to create the process makes the experience more dynamic and effective when it comes to reaching the audiences that most need quality information about syphilis. The second is related to the production of the campaign, which, added to the academic knowledge from its outset, fosters the creative process and qualifies the making of items, setting up a placement plan and optimizing the validation of the pieces. This makes the flow even more efficient.

We think that our experience can function as a parameter for future communication actions in public health in Brazil (or in other countries, depending on context adaptations, obviously), based on the replication of this academic research method and in combination with practical execution, represented in this article by the project "Sífilis, não".

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Participation of each author

Idealization: MSOJ, JWL. Research: MSOJ, KSA, JWL, RRA. Text: MSOJ, KSA, JWL, RRA. Revision: MNT, JSL, GAT. Images: JWL, RRA.

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Conflict of interests

No conflict of interest to report.

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