

RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT

Drugs and mass communication

Behind that charming box that occupies a prime position in all of our homes, lies the journalistic enterprise of mass consumption, whose general objective is mass communication. To launch an informative product through a medium with audiences totalling millions of people, we find ourselves up against the obligation to appeal to many people with different tastes. The only way of achieving this, is to carry out a segmentation of the different publics and produce mass information for all of them, with the aim of flooding the different audiences with knowledge and culture (politics, economics, art, etc.). Thus we have a mass communication medium converted into a manager of culture.

Given the nature of this medium, the correct treatment of information on drugs finds its first obstacle: reductionism, simplification or reduction to the median of the message, precisely owing to that need to satisfy the enormously different viewer profiles.

At this stage, we need to reflect on television's capacity to take on the great responsibility of transmitting information on drugs, adapting to reality and to the great complexity of the phenomenon. Taking into account, in turn, the credibility that society affords this medium, we must question whether it is the ideal instrument for disseminating messages aimed at modifying attitudes and behaviours around a problem like that of drugs, which is not a simple one.

On television, a spot or a round table on drugs, is watched at the same time by the parents of consumers, consumers in general, drugs traffic-

kers, teachers, police agents, politicians, specialists in addictions, etc. Who are we trying to reach? All audiences? Complicated, isn't it? But not impossible. All we have to do is avoid aiming for effects and reflect seriously on "the language spoken by the audiences" that we aim to reach and then produce the material with the right codes to be interpreted as we wish.

Taking into account that knowledge of reality comes to us in an indirect way (via the media) rather than through direct experience, when tackling the broadcasting or consumption of information on drugs from the television, we must bear in mind that it is transformed into an interpreter of reality, and a shaper of many of the images (representation) that society acquires on the majority of issues.

Another aspect to be taken into account is the advertising of brands on television. It is necessary to understand that this medium obtains a considerable part of its income from influencing the mass consumption of certain products that represent brand values. The advertising treatment of information is based on persuasion, on convincing about the benefits acquiring a product or hiring a service can give and also, on the consumption or hiring being done on a mass scale.

Therefore we find ourselves before the evident question of, is it possible to communicate, in an efficient way, information based on the control of consumption (drugs) through a medium in which a large part of programming is designed to eliminate any obstacles to consumption?

Evidently the answer is yes; we can communicate about drugs from television with success. The proof is in the positive evaluation of prevention campaigns carried out by different public and private organisations. But to achieve this, we need to take into account the nature of the medium that we wish to use to broadcast our message. In this way we will be able to optimise communication strategies, whether on the

television or in other media, that show their efficiency by reducing the supply and demand of drugs, as well as preventing the spread of illnesses resulting from their consumption, in a social fabric that is as sophisticated as it is vulnerable.

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