

Chapter 7

It's All About the Heart: Analysis of Media Campaigns on Cardiovascular Health

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aimed to provide responses, within the issue of cardiovascular health, to the effectiveness of the relation between the message's content ("what") and form ("how") and the triad of (cognitive-affective-behavioral) effects. The qualitative content analysis, concretely thematic and rhetorical types, was applied to a corpus of five ads from international campaigns (2015-2019) and three static Portuguese ads (2018-2019). One online survey of Portuguese university students (N = 55) was conducted. The findings show that the ads' issues vary from irreparable losses to the encouragement of healthy behaviors. The pathos tends to elicit various reactions (e.g., alarm, call to action, empathy, fear, guilt, hurt, worry). The logos are constructed of discursive devices (e.g., construction of a narrative, use of questions, selection of colors with connotative purposes, descriptions of concepts), evidence, and stylistic devices. Most of the respondents recognize the cognitive and affective influence, but not the behavioral effects.

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INTRODUCTION

Being healthy and avoiding diseases are goals of joy and are at the center of the satisfaction of any human being. *Can communication be a success factor in achieving these goals? Can health communication improve the quality of life?* This proposal tries to bring and discuss answers to heart disease, the first cause of death in 2000 and 2016 (WHO, 2018), including Portugal, whose disease mortality rate is 29.7% (Sociedade Portuguesa de Cardiologia, 2019). An estimated 17.9 million people died from heart disease in 2016, representing 31% of all global deaths (WHO, 2017). Communication can represent a promising variable, once most cardiovascular diseases (CVDs) can be prevented by avoiding behavioral risk factors, such as tobacco use, unhealthy diet and obesity, physical inactivity, and harmful use of alcohol (WHO, 2017).

Heart disease refers to various types of conditions that can affect heart function (Wedro, 2017), composing a group of disorders of the heart and blood vessels and including coronary heart disease, cerebrovascular disease, peripheral arterial disease, rheumatic heart disease, congenital heart disease and deep vein thrombosis, and pulmonary embolism (WHO, 2017). There is an alarming increase in specific cardiovascular risk factors (CVRF), such as smoking, hypertension, high cholesterol, diabetes, family history of heart problems, bad nutrition habits, obesity (e.g., Wedro, 2017), with a huge impact on the state of health of the population at large. So, we are facing a cardiovascular disease pandemic that has complex multi-factor causes in which different demographic sectors of society are implicated.

Living in societies of consumption and abundance that invite to excesses, individuals indulge in unhealthy habits and there is a need for awareness of the disease and for the prevention of risk behaviors. Cardiovascular health promotion should extend throughout the life of the individual from infancy, when heart-healthy habits are acquired, to old age (Castellano et al., 2014). Exploring the best evidence available, the American Heart Association – AHA (2020) defines the ideal cardiovascular health based on seven factors – “life’s simple 7”. It is a set of factors that can help to predict and protect the heart health of persons, being composed by four “modifiable behaviors”, which consist in actions that can be done to lower chances of developing heart diseases (not smoking, healthy weight, eating healthy, and being physically active), and three measures (blood pressure, cholesterol, and blood sugar).

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