

The national drugs campaign media essay



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The National Drugs Campaign (NDC) was created by the Australian Government to decrease the drug use amongst the Australian population. They achieve this purpose by spreading information about the dangers of drug usage and encouraging the public to abstain from drugs. A campaign has been launched since 2001 for this cause, which included 4 phases to be launched at different times within a ten year span. It is one of the longest-running public education campaigns on illicit drugs in Australia.

Although illicit drug usage may be decreasing due to NDC's campaign, ecstasy usage remains stagnant. According to the Mental Health Minister, Helen Morton, "The latest National Drug Strategy Household Survey showed 4.1 percent of Western Australia survey participants had used ecstasy in the past year, similar results to 2001 and 2004" (Morton). In fact, according to the National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre of Australia, ecstasy has been used by approximately 8% of the entire Australian population, with approximately 3% having used in the preceding 12 months. (Ross).

In order to reduce these statistics, the NDC started a new campaign targeting ecstasy in January 2011 called the "Ecstasy. Face Facts" campaign. I feel that this was a successful approach to use in order to fulfill the needs of their overall campaign. One of the NDC's main objectives is to reduce illicit drug usage, and since ecstasy was not in decline, it only makes sense to focus the next campaign specifically on ecstasy.

As part of their communication model, they created objectives of this particular campaign. These includes increasing the knowledge to their audience about the perilous facts of ecstasy, reducing the usage of ecstasy

and other illicit drugs these users may have tried, preventing anyone from ever trying illicit drugs, and supporting them to refrain from any drug usage. The NDC released several public service announcements, which was their entire campaign, in order to promote positive consumer behavior. According to the National Drugs Campaign, there are four overall messages that need to be conveyed to the audience. These messages include the following:

There are specific risks and harms associated with using ecstasy;

There are real risks and harms associated with using illicit drugs;

There are real benefits to not using ecstasy and other illicit drugs; and

There is a range of information available on the facts about using ecstasy and other illicit drugs.

The communication channels of this government advertising campaign consist of integrated media activity with radio, print, outdoor, online, and in-venue advertising, public relations and promotions, and information resources such as National Drugs Campaign website (australia.gov.au/drugs) and the 1800 250 015 information line. Some public relations activities include sponsorships of the In The Mix website, popular radio programs on Nova FM and Austereo, the Future Music Festivals, the Rock the Schools and I Am With The Band initiatives and National Youth Week 2011.

The communication channels in which to reach NDC's target audience is an important factor to get their message across. I feel that the chosen mediums of advertising, especially through print and radio, are a fast and easy way to reach a mass audience while still grabbing the attention of the target

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market. Having online tools such as the website, and interactive in-venue advertising also incorporates new ways of reaching and communicating with the youth of Australia, which research shows us is how they want to be informed of these issues. Finally, having PR activities that include sponsorships that young people idolize and are familiar with will help to better relate to them. Youth marketing and public relations activities that are aligned with music further engages youth in ways that are meaningful to them.

It was also an important decision that the NDC chose to use print media other than television to get their point across. They chose to advertise more in magazines that teenagers would read, such as Cosmopolitan. This way they would reach their target audience. They also were able to have a more personal impact on their viewers through their visual communication. The entire layout of the advertisement, including the typography, pictures, and colors were all put together meticulously. Since there is only a few moments before the onlooker of the ad decides whether or not they will continue reading, it needs to have all aspects of the print to be attention-grabbing, which it is.

Research conducted by drug and alcohol experts and the Australian National Council on Drugs led to the development of the target audience. It was decided the campaign would target the youth aged 15-21 years who are at risk of using ecstasy and/or other illicit drugs and parents of 13-17 year olds. According the research conducted by the National Drug Strategy Household Survey, 38. 1% of Australian over the age of 14 had tried illicit drugs. . This is the key transition time in young peoples' lives. Since they are highly

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influenced by their environments and their social stimuli, they are more at risk. Since teenagers in Australia are using drugs at such an early age, the target audience should be 15- 21 years, and it is also necessary for parents to start worrying about the safety of their children as well. Thus, the target audience for the advertisements is a logical age.

Before the advertising campaign was made, a creative brief was formed which highlighted the consumer insights as well as the creative strategy that NBC would use. Formative research was conducted with people aged 12 -25 to explore youth attitudes and behaviors to illicit drugs. They examined positive and negative perceptions of drug use, key drivers and barriers to trial, and identified effective channels with which to communicate with young people in relation to drugs (National Drug Campaign). The research results indicated that young Australians had previous knowledge between the image or specific drugs and perceived effects of them. These findings encouraged NBC to target communication about particular drugs, rather than simply grouping all drugs together. This research also identified different segments of young people, defined by clusters of particular attitudes to drug use and their lives, which have been critical to the formulation of the campaign's creative strategy (National Drug Campaign).

Two main visuals that have been used in outdoor advertising such as posters and billboards are called the Ecstasy Girl advertisement and the Ecstasy Lab advertisement (National Drug Campaign). The Ecstasy girl features a visual of a haggard, disheveled girl who looks like she is clearly a drug user. The caption above says " Insomnia, memory loss, or psychological problems". The second advertisement features an ecstasy " lab" which consists of a

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visual of a repulsive bathroom and tubes attached to the inside of a toilet going into beakers. These beakers imply that the drugs are made in this kind of setting, with unknown contents. The caption above reads “ Made using drain cleaner, battery acid or even hair bleach. Then popped in your mouth.” The second of these advertisements is more widely known, and the message of the contents of ecstasy was used in other forms of media such as video and radio.

The cultural setting of the Ecstasy Girl advertisement is an illustration of all teenagers. Though it may show a young, blonde, Caucasian women, it still represents all of the youth that is having problems due to drug usage. It is a physical depiction of the entire target audience. Even the Ecstasy Lab advertisement with a picture of a “ lab” may only show the setting of one place where the drugs are made. However, it is still a physical depiction of what contents go into ecstasy, and illustrates that the contents of drugs are never pure.

In the fourth stage of the communication model, the message that is being sent is interpreted by the audience. The way that teenagers would interpret these public service announcements is critical to make sure the objectives of the NDC are being met. Thus, in order for these advertisements to have any impact on it audience, it needs to pass the hierarchy of effects model. This means it needs to stimulate their attention, interest, desire, and action. I feel that this advertising campaign does create attention since the visual depictions are both extreme and invoking. The colors (yellow, blue, white) are eye-catching. Even the font they use for the words is large and capitalized, demanding attention. By reading the copy, the audience would

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then gain interest, since the copy in the advertisements is thought-provoking, harsh, and blunt. Then they would look at the pictures again and associate with the words to realize what the message is trying to convey. When they finally put it all together, it would create the desire to listen to the message, and abstain from trying drugs, which is the action that the NDC is trying to invoke.

Since the National Drugs Campaign is run by the Australian Government, it is government advertising which is a public service that promotes good behavior. It is not in competition with other brands or companies. However, it does have other organizations that support the campaign, even if they have their own strategy for trying to decrease drug use. For example, Drug Aware, a drug prevention program in Western Australia took its own approach to handling the ecstasy escalation in their region. Instead of using print advertising, they did everything online. They created a new youth-oriented ecstasy campaign website interface on the 'Drug Aware' website, where visitors can watch videos featuring the Ecstasy experts, read up on the facts, or chat live and confidentially with a qualified drug counselor (Drug Aware). Other smaller drug awareness campaigns don't always take the harsh approach of the NDC either. However, I feel showing the youth the more daunting facts of drugs first will grab their audience's attention and keep it, which is what they need to do to portray their message.

In order to measure the feedback of the advertising campaign, the NDC would need to test the audience's reactions after viewing it. There are several ways of evaluating whether or not the campaign is effective. NDC could investigate the audience's campaign awareness and reach by testing

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campaign recognition and recall, credibility of the advertising for ecstasy, whether attitudes and behaviors in relation to illicit drugs has changed, and if people start getting more informed and abstain from drug use. Past campaigns have resulted in high outcomes for effectiveness. For example, in the previous campaign in 2010, 70% of ecstasy users and 44% of young people said they had recently seen, read or heard advertising about illicit drugs (National Drug Campaign). Since the creative strategy for advertising is being used from previous campaigns, these results could be a reflection for the current campaign effectiveness results. Since this campaign is an improvement on the previous one, we can hopefully expect even better results, especially since the current one has more of a focus on ecstasy users.

Unfortunately, there are still some setbacks to the current campaign. There are no actual television commercials for the campaign. Though they may have radio spots and some online videos, NDC has underestimated the influence of television. A small glance at a poster, or a 20 second radio spot may not be enough to capture the attention of someone, if looked at just once. Fortunately, this problem has been moderated due to the saturation of posters and outdoor advertising of the NDC. This way, if the poster didn't catch someone's eye once, seeing it several times will cause them to actually read it. Though the NDC has not put money into television spots, they did allocate their marketing to enough outdoor advertising to make up for this.

Though we may not be able to measure the post-campaign evaluations yet, since the campaign has only just come out, we could still critique what NBC

has done so far. The two advertisements that have been their main focus both appeal to the audience's emotions and fears. I think this is an appropriate approach because showing the audience appalling facts about drugs will alert them into abstaining from them. Sometimes messages need to be harsh, especially to the youth, to hinder them from using drugs. Also, since the government and the National Drug Campaign is a credible source, the audience will be able to trust the messages that they are seeing. I feel this campaign will really make a difference to NDC's target market. The exposure to this campaign will help NDC in reaching their objectives.

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[http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/17B917608C1969ABCA257317001A72D4/\\$File/mono-63.pdf](http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/17B917608C1969ABCA257317001A72D4/$File/mono-63.pdf).

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