

YouTube, 'drug videos' and drugs education

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Aims: This article reports on findings to emerge from a project examining YouTube 'drug videos' in the light of an emerging literature on the relationship between YouTube and health education. The aim of this article is to describe the variety of discourses circulated by the 'drug videos' available on YouTube and to consider the implications of these for mediated drugs education.

Method: The method used is a content analysis of a sample of 750 'drug videos' in which both video text and loader comments are used to code 'drug discourses'.

Findings: The findings point to the circulation of a variety of 'drug videos' of which official drugs education materials represent only a small proportion. The 'drug videos' created by YouTube users circulate a variety of 'drug discourses' including the 'celebratory' or hedonistic but also 'cautionary' videos intended to 'warn' or 'discipline' but others offer an 'amateur' or 'vernacular drugs education' while still others develop 'consumer discourses' which evaluate substances and technologies of intoxication as commodities.

Conclusions: The findings suggest that in the symbolic environment of YouTube drugs education strategies based upon 'old media' assumptions become highly problematic. This is firstly, because official drugs education material now has to compete with a variety of alternative discourses circulated in the 'drug videos' created by YouTube users. Secondly, some of these videos offer an alternative 'vernacular drugs education', or offer alternative understandings of drug use. But thirdly, in the era of Web 2.0 technologies such as YouTube, lines of communication are no longer characterized by simple linearity but multiple directionality, which mean that official drugs agencies are now even less assured of communicative control than in the past.