



“You Can’t Ask That”: Asking and Understanding to Achieve more Inclusive Societies

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Learning Objectives

In this case study, learners have an opportunity to:

1. Understand how social marketing can contribute to social wellbeing and promote behaviour change to achieve more egalitarian societies.
2. Identify problems related to inclusion and equality in advanced societies such as the existence of vulnerable groups subject to stereotypes and prejudices that require actions to improve their social wellbeing.
3. Learn about the design and implementation of public social marketing programmes to promote the social wellbeing of vulnerable groups through social engagement.
4. Reflect on decisions by companies and public organizations regarding the problems of society and the improvement of the social welfare of vulnerable groups.
5. Find out how online television entertainment provides opportunities for learning and social change to promote understanding and inclusion of vulnerable groups.
6. Learn how information and communication technologies (ICTs) enable the co-creation of entertainment-education programmes with society and in which the general public can interact with vulnerable groups.

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1 Introduction

To ensure social wellbeing for all citizens, the inclusion of people of diverse backgrounds and circumstances is crucial. Due to stereotypes and prejudices, however, certain groups suffer situations of social exclusion that impede both their labour market and broader social integration, causing them to experience poorer quality of life and lower wellbeing. Therefore, to achieve a society that offers equal opportunities to all, it is important to identify actions that promote greater inclusion and equitability.

Social marketing can help to achieve these aims, by offering strategies and tools geared towards facilitating social change that seeks to foster positive behaviours and a reduction in negative behaviours (Dann, 2010). At the same time, all forms of media, not only digital media and related platforms, are now available online, rendering it increasingly easy for the public to access entertaining audio-visual content that could be orientated towards positive social change and more just and inclusive societies (Peñaranda-Casablanca, 2021). One major example of this orientation is the television programme “*You can’t ask that*” (“*Eso no se pregunta*”, in the Spanish version), which features people from stigmatized collectives. It aims to combat prejudice and discrimination, and to better understand certain groups that sometimes find themselves excluded or misunderstood by society. On this programme, individuals from such minorities give their spontaneous answers to questions that have been posed anonymously, in a bid to help the general population to become more familiar with the reality of stigma and comprehend how the individuals concerned would like to be treated by society.

The aim of this case study is to raise awareness of social stereotypes and how social marketing can contribute to a more inclusive and tolerant society. To this end, a format similar to the “*You can’t ask that*” television programme is used. This entertainment-based approach offers viewers the opportunity to learn about the needs of socially excluded groups as well as a values-based education that can bring about behaviour change to achieve a more egalitarian society.

2 Case Development

2.1 Online Television Entertainment-Education Contents for Social Change

The role media plays in social development and change has attracted much research attention over the years. Early communication scholars relied on social learning theory,¹ which holds that individuals can learn new information and behaviours by observing other people (either in person or in the media). Singhal et al. (1993, pp. 1–2) defined entertainment-education as “the process of putting educational

¹Proposed by Bandura (1977).

content in entertainment messages in order to increase knowledge about an issue, create favorable attitudes, and change overt behavior concerning the educational issue or topic". Considered a media strategy, entertainment-education draws on various theories from the social sciences and communications fields, among them social learning theory, audience involvement, and the elaboration likelihood model.² The entertainment-education approach to media content deliberately uses explicit and implicit messages to educate audiences and achieve behaviour change.

Additionally, several scholars and practitioners³ began researching and developing more strategies for participatory communication in which communities took an active role in the development of media messages and approaches. In a parallel manner, entertainment-education also became more participatory as producers recognized the complex nature of social problems and the importance of audience feedback.

The effectiveness of entertainment-education can be enhanced by social media because of their interactive content and rapid dissemination in society. Indeed, the globalization of digital technologies is now a reality in all countries and has brought with it a revolution in telecommunications, new forms of socialization, and knowledge of different societies worldwide. Social media represent with particular importance a major space in this phenomenon of globalization, because they enable massive, efficient, and immediate socialization, communication, and learning.

There are many benefits of the use of social media, both in educational and work environments as well as in the purely social and entertainment settings. For example, it has been shown that viewers who have strong ties to television programmes interact more with the content than those without such ties (Hoffner & Cantor, 1991) and that social media enable the general public to interact with and even co-create the programmes with which they feel most connected (Tully & Ekdale, 2014). Seizing on this notion, governments and NGOs produced media with the goal of "entertaining", "educating", "developing", and "co-creating" the masses.⁴ This is the case of the "*You can't ask that*" programme, which is broadcast on both traditional television channels and social media platforms.

2.2 "You Can't Ask That": Entertainment-Education for a More Egalitarian Society

"*You can't ask that*" was produced by the ABC Australian public TV channel and has run since 2016.⁵ In the programme, little understood social groups always take centre stage. Because the programme format is versatile, it allows addressing diverse groups with different needs. In each episode, the public can ask members of

² See, for example, Moyer-Gusé (2008), Singhal and Rogers (2004), and Sood et al. (2004).

³ For example, Mpofu and Salawu (2012), and Servaes (1995).

⁴ e.g., Peñaranda-Casablanca (2021), Tully and Ekdale (2014).

⁵ <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/you-can-t-ask-that>

marginalized or vulnerable groups controversial questions, such as people of short stature, Muslims, sex workers, or transgender people.

Due to the programme's enormous success and its ability to adapt to different cultures and societies, "*You can't ask that*" has been produced in many other countries, including Israel, Canada, Italy, France, Holland, Norway, the USA, and Spain (ABC TV, 2022). In addition, the programme has received awards and recognitions in several countries for its originality and social value, among them the prestigious EBU Rose d'Or award for Reality and Factual Entertainment in 2017 recognizing the best international television and online entertainment (ABC TV, 2022).

2.3 The Spanish Version: "*Eso no se pregunta*"

In addition to the above versions of the programme, it has also been aired in Spain on the TeleMadrid public television channel (in collaboration with Globomedia) under the title "*Eso no se pregunta*".⁶

"*Eso no se pregunta*" has a strong social component and aims to raise society's awareness of the most vulnerable groups in an entertainment format. Each programme is designed for a specific group in which around 11 people of different ages, genders, levels of education or income take part. Participants may include a public figure who serves as a point of reference. In addition to the participants, the programme also involves other members of society, who, through questions, show their interest in learning more about the group that is the focus of the programme.

Since it was first broadcast, groups of people subject to stereotypes or prejudices have been invited to the programme: functionally diverse people (such as people with Down's syndrome, Asperger's syndrome, blindness, etc.); people with racial, cultural, ethnic, and/or religious diversity (such as those of Roma-Gypsy ethnicity or Muslims); people with certain illnesses or disorders (such as AIDS or Alzheimer's); people with difficult pasts or in need of a second opportunity (such as formerly incarcerated people, people with a past history of substance abuse, or people without housing); people who have suffered a tragedy or survived traumas (such as victims of bullying or first responders); and people with intriguing life experiences (from Olympic/Paralympic champions to centenarians) or those with different lifestyles or who find themselves at a crucial moment in their lives (Drag Queens, volunteers, or young people who want to become independent) (Table 1).

During the programme, several participants respond to the same anonymous question. They offer their opinions, share their experiences, express their desire to be understood by society, or explain how they can be helped in situations they encounter in their daily lives. The responses vary depending on the age, gender, or experiences of each person. Table 2 shows some of the aspects discussed by members of these groups, who stand out for their sincerity and capacity to find solutions to situations they experience on a day-to-day basis.

⁶<https://www.telemadrid.es/programas/eso-no-se-pregunta/>

Table 1 Groups that have participated in the programme

	Groups that have participated in the programme	
Functional diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Asperger’s syndrome – Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) – Blind people 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Down’s syndrome – Obsessive compulsive disorder – Short stature/Achondroplasia – Wheelchair users
Racial, cultural, ethnic, gender, and/or religious diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Black people – Members of holy orders: Priests and nuns – Muslims 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Roma-Gypsies – Transexuals
Illnesses/disorders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – AIDS – Alcohol use disorder – Alzheimer’s – Depression – Eating disorders – Gambling disorder 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Internet addiction disorder – Mental disorders – Multiple sclerosis – Obesity – Rare diseases
With difficult pasts, in need of a second opportunity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Adoptees – Former substance abusers – Long-term unemployed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Migrants – People without housing – Reintegrated people
Suffered a tragedy, survived traumas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Bullying 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – First responders
With intriguing life experiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Former elite athletes – Foster parents – Identical twins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – People with high intellectual capacity
Lifestyles and/or life moments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Children – Drag queens – Fairground workers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Villagers – Volunteers – Young people who want to become independent

Source: Telemadrid (2022a)

Each episode of the programme runs for about 40 minutes and attracts a large audience, especially when it addresses issues such as Asperger’s syndrome, Down’s syndrome, or mental disorders (3,223,891 views and 83,783 likes for the programme on Asperger’s syndrome; 2,247,845 views and 83,900 likes for Down’s syndrome; and 1,556,655 views and 53,063 likes for the one on mental disorders) (*Eso no se pregunta*, 2022). The programme’s large audience and viewing figures on social media show that people want entertainment that contributes to the understanding and inclusion of vulnerable groups. Many viewers share opinions about why they like the programme and highlight the value of this type of entertainment not only for their own personal growth but for all members of society (Table 3).

Moreover, digital and social media function as additional mechanisms of co-creation as they allow the audience to interact further with the programme in two ways. Firstly, through social media, viewers can suggest topics to be addressed on the programme and which groups to be invited (e.g. people with depression, people who want to become independent, or people with a technology addiction). And, secondly, because social media allow viewers to submit questions and bring up

Table 2 Examples of participants' responses by group

Down's syndrome: "Maybe they look at me because I'm pretty".
People in wheelchairs: "The chair isn't a burden, it's the tool that makes us free, that gives us wings".
Mental disorders: "We're treated like things, like useless objects, and we have feelings and are human beings like everyone else."; "The only drugs I've ever taken were given to me by my psychiatrist".
Former substance abusers: "It's great to get off drugs by looking at the past and living in the present to build a future".
People without housing: "I'm not invisible to others, the truth is that they look down on me".
Foster parents: "You never have a made-to-measure child at home".
Adoptees: "Every child who has suffered a history of abandonment, in the end has a wound. In fact, even if you are treated well, somehow it remains".
Bullying: "It's not something that happens in a day. It's one day after another for quite a long time. It's usually months or even years".
Volunteers: "Enjoy life to the fullest but share a little with others".
I want to be independent: "A few years ago I wanted to have children, but now I've ruled it out in the short term. Maybe if I'd become independent, I would've pursued that goal".
Children: "I'd be a teacher to help children who have forgotten their worksheets or homework".

Source: Telemadrid (2022a)

issues in which they are particularly interested in a direct and anonymous manner.⁷ The use of online media also increases viewers' understanding about each of the invited groups as the programme's website provides objective information and data about them.

Finally, it is important to mention that the Spanish version of the programme has also enjoyed wide recognition nationally: it received the Ondas 2020 Award in the category of Best Programme broadcast by non-national channels for the episode on mental illness, and the Iris Award in 2018 for combining public service with entertainment and for "giving a voice to groups that are less visible in the media and providing a sincere response to their daily problems" (Telemadrid, 2022a).

3 Conclusions

"*You can't ask that*", or "*Eso no se pregunta*" as the Spanish version is known, is an example of how social marketing has the capacity to promote behaviour change and achieve a more inclusive and tolerant society. The format of the programme allows vulnerable groups to interact with society at large. It is based on entertainment-education content that can be broadcast on television, but also through online platforms. This type of content can serve to raise awareness among society of the circumstances and perspective of vulnerable groups and identify mechanisms that promote their inclusion in society.

⁷e.g. at <https://www.telemadrid.es/programas/eso-no-se-pregunta/envia-tu-pregunta/>

Table 3 Examples of comments shared by viewers

Blind people: "I like watching this type of documentaries because it makes me see the world from a different perspective, and also makes me empathize with people and informs me".

Asperger's syndrome: "Well, I tell you one thing, many of us who don't have this syndrome, we should learn a lot from these people in the video, from their dignity, their courage, their honesty and their generosity in opening up to us, I take my hat off to them, very good, brave people!!!!!!".

Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD): "Listening to testimonies helps you better understand what each person goes through. But above all, seeing that it is not bad but difficult to have this disorder lightens my heart a lot".

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD): "The misinformation we all have about mental disorders and illnesses is appalling . . . it makes it twice as hard for people who suffer from them".

Muslims: "I'm Catholic and I liked this video about Muslims a lot; in fact it clarified a lot of my doubts. The problem I see, and it happens in all religions, is that there are good and bad followers, prejudices and labels, and it is true that I feel that as a society they suffer from being singled out and discriminated against due to the global image they have been given and cultural intolerance".

Transsexuals: "My thanks to all those who made this video possible; honestly, I'm over 50 years old and just getting interested in understanding who transsexuals are, I feel very ashamed and apologize for my ignorance . . . (so many topics are silenced in this humanity!!), my sincere wishes that these topics are spread more and more every day and that you are people who can feel integrated in this society like everyone else".

Black people: "I don't think I've ever heard black people talking about themselves and how they experience racism. A big step".

People with obesity: "They've been very brave to talk about it, I hope they manage to feel good, in whatever way they can. I hope society matures and accepts all of us with respect, without discriminating on the basis of superficial aspects".

Mental disorders: "This video should be shown in high schools, universities and everywhere! The general public needs to have information and the mentally ill deserve all our respect and empathy".

Rare diseases: "Sometimes people aren't evil but they don't know how to behave towards those with disabilities—we'd like to act in the best and most natural way possible, but don't know how".

Reintegrated people: "Thank you for such a great programme, I really enjoyed the topic. Having the possibility to learn about the life stages of these people is very enriching. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to put myself in the shoes of these people and having the chance to learn so many things we often ignore."

Migrants: "I loved it. As a Spaniard I'm very happy that there are people like this in my country. You are all great. And I apologize for some small-minded compatriots with little compassion".

Source: Telemadrid (2022b)

Some of the keys to the success of "You can't ask that" (or "Eso no se pregunta", in Spanish) are:

- **The programme offers entertainment-oriented content.** This type of content is demanded by the public and provided to them in the form of episodes where the entertainment and amusement of viewers is ensured.
- **Content that increases the social visibility and understanding of the circumstances of vulnerable groups is offered.** Each episode offers content that enables learning about the circumstances and characteristics of the

participating groups, as well as a vision of how each group wishes to be treated by society and the solutions and opportunities they need.

- **Additional content is available about the vulnerable groups that participate in the programme.** To draw society’s attention to and raise awareness about these groups, the programme’s website publishes information about each one, their personal circumstances, the intervention programmes available to them, and the most important organizations that represent them.
- **The programme can be broadcast via television and other digital platforms** in line with current trends in leisure and entertainment consumption.
- **The programme is co-created with society and enables interaction.** The philosophy of the programme is oriented towards the participation of society. Each programme is produced on the basis of questions that are sent in anonymously by viewers who are curious or want to know more about the participating groups. This allows the programme to become a dialogue without intermediaries between society and the participating groups. In addition, the use of social media (such as having its own YouTube channel) makes it possible for viewers to share their opinions and emotions after watching each episode.
- **Ability to adapt to the specific needs of each society.** The programme can be adapted to the demands of each society at any given time. Thus, for example, if we compare the groups in societies such as Australia and Spain, we can identify some common themes (such as people in wheelchairs or with Down’s syndrome) and others that differ (for example, in the Australian version, a group of “recent war veterans” participated in the programme, but not in the Spanish version; while the programme in Spain invited a group of “young people with a desire for independence”, while Australia did not). The programme also allows the topics to be adapted according to the educational objectives to be achieved.

4 Discussion Questions

Question 1—Do you think entertainment programmes are effective in promoting social change and achieving more egalitarian societies?

Question 2—Do you think that the objectives of “*You can’t ask that*”, or “*Eso no se pregunta*” in the Spanish version, are important?

Question 3—What factors do you think have contributed to the success of “*You can’t ask that*” or “*Eso no se pregunta*” in the Spanish version?

Question 4—Do you think that society’s participation and co-creation through ICTs are important for the programme’s success?

Question 5—How can the use of social media and new technologies contribute to making the programme more innovative?

Question 6—What new groups could future editions of the programme focus on? Why?

Teaching/Classroom Notes

Synopsis

Societal wellbeing demands that we include people with different profiles and circumstances. One major example of this orientation is the television programme "You can't ask that" ("Eso no se pregunta" in the Spanish version), which features people from stigmatized collectives. On this programme, individuals from such minorities give their spontaneous answers to questions that have been posed anonymously, in a bid to help the general population to become more familiar with the reality of stigma and comprehend how the individuals concerned would like to be treated by society.

The proposed case study examines how entertainment can be used to address prejudices and stereotypes with a view to achieving a more inclusive and tolerant society. The case study will demonstrate that "You can't ask that" offers a versatile format that brings together entertainment and values-based education that can be widely and readily disseminated.

Potential Audience and Instructor's Material

This case has been developed for use in the framework of Marketing and Social Marketing courses in general and Wellbeing of the society and SDGs seminars in particular. The potential audience for this chapter would be: undergraduate students pursuing degrees in business administration or marketing and graduate students pursuing MBA and master's in marketing or in Social Marketing; or Executive Programmes and Seminars (about Social Marketing, Wellbeing of the society or SDGs).

Learning

1. Understand how social marketing can contribute to social wellbeing and promote behaviour change to achieve more egalitarian societies.
2. Identify problems related to inclusion and equality in advanced societies such as the existence of vulnerable groups subject to stereotypes and prejudices that require actions to improve their social wellbeing.
3. Learn about the design and implementation of public social marketing programmes to promote the social wellbeing of vulnerable groups through social engagement.
4. Reflect on decisions by companies and public organizations regarding the problems of society and the improvement of the social welfare of vulnerable groups.
5. Find out how online television entertainment provides opportunities for learning and social change to promote understanding and inclusion of vulnerable groups.

6. Learn how information and communication technologies (ICTs) enable the co-creation of entertainment-education programmes with society and in which the general public can interact with vulnerable groups.

Time Frame for Class Discussion

This case can be taught in one session of 60–120 minutes, depending on the number of students participating in the discussion activities, as well as the previous work that students have done before class.

Suggested Discussion Questions

Question 1—Do you think entertainment programmes are effective in promoting social change and achieving more egalitarian societies?

Question 2—Do you think that the objectives of “*You can’t ask that*”, or “*Eso no se pregunta*” in the Spanish version, are important?

Question 3—What factors do you think have contributed to the success of “*You can’t ask that*” or “*Eso no se pregunta*” in the Spanish version?

Question 4—Do you think that society’s participation and co-creation through ICTs are important for the programme’s success?

Question 5—How can the use of social media and new technologies contribute to making the programme more innovative?

Question 6—What new groups could future editions of the programme focus on? Why?

Analysis

Answer to Question 1—Do you think that entertainment programmes can be effective in fostering social change and achieving more egalitarian societies?

Based on the case study on “*You can’t ask that*”, and specifically the social learning theory of Bandura (1977) and entertainment-education process as explained by Singhal et al. (1993, pp. 1–2), students will be able to identify entertainment-education as a deliberate effort involving explicit and implicit educational messages to increase audience knowledge and often to elicit behaviour change. Students can do research to learn more about the application of entertainment-education and find other examples where they think it is being used.

Answer to Question 2—Do you think that the objectives of the “*You can’t ask that*” or “*Eso no se pregunta*” in the Spanish version, programme are important?

In this question, students link the needs of the groups that participate in the programme with current data about their situation in terms of level of social inclusion, education, health, employment, and wellbeing. The students can also reflect on the position that these groups should achieve in an egalitarian society in line with the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda, and what these groups could contribute to society.

Answer to Question 3—What do you think have been the success factors of the “You can’t ask that”, or “Eso no se pregunta” in the Spanish version, programme?

After reading the case study, students identify key factors that may have contributed to the programme’s success, such as: (a) it offers entertainment-oriented content and content that increases the social visibility and understanding of the circumstances affecting vulnerable groups of interest to society; (b) the programme is flexible, since in addition to being broadcast on television, it is also shown on digital platforms; (c) members of all walks of society can participate in the programme; and (d) it has a versatile format that can be adapted to the demands of each society (so that the participating groups can be selected accordingly).

Answer to Question 4—Do you think that engaging the public and co-creation through ICTs is important for the programme’s success?

To answer this question, students should apply their knowledge of social marketing and its orientation towards users and/or society and the potential of ICTs for co-creation with society. This will allow them to identify that a success factor of the programme is that in each of the countries where it is broadcast, means are provided for orienting the programme towards society and for co-creation (by allowing members of society to participate, i.e. by proposing the topics to be addressed, posing questions to the participating groups, or establishing mechanisms so that viewers can share their thoughts and emotions after each episode).

Answer to Question 5—How could the use of social media and new technologies contribute to innovating the programme?

This question can be answered by students who identify an opportunity for innovating and improving the programme through the use of social media and new technologies. To answer this question, students could investigate how other entertainment programmes use social media and new technologies and propose the ones they consider most appropriate for a programme like “You can’t ask that”.

Answer to Question 6—What new groups could be the focus of future editions of the programme?

Like the previous question, this question can be answered by students who identify an opportunity for including new groups, realities, or objectives to be addressed by the programme. To answer this question, students could investigate the reality of other currently stigmatized groups for whom social inclusion is particularly difficult to achieve.

Additional Suggested Questions—Based on the answer to the previous question, create and design a “You can’t ask that” submission about a group that you consider to be vulnerable in your social environment and for whom you think greater social inclusion is important.

This question can be answered by students who identify an opportunity for fostering the inclusion of a group in their social environment that they consider to be currently stigmatized and vulnerable and for whom they consider that greater visibility through a programme such as “You can’t ask that” would be positive.

Additional Suggested Questions—Find information and learn about the group you have identified, the associations or institutions that represent it, and the profile

of the people you think should participate in the programme. Prepare the necessary materials to communicate your proposal to those in charge of the programme so that they can evaluate whether to broadcast it in the future.

At this stage, the teacher could mentor the students to ensure they have the necessary knowledge about the reality of the selected group and the possibility of improving the group's social inclusion. Based on this information, the students could prepare a proposal to submit to those in charge of the programme.

This can be a motivating opportunity for students' personal growth and for the improvement of the society.

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