

Streaming for Social Change at Scale

VICTOR OROZCO-OLVERA

Common Perceptions

Governments and development institutions spend billions each year trying to positively change social norms and behaviors. Yet systematic reviews show that traditional approaches are not effective in promoting behavior change, nor do they have reach and scale compared to mass entertainment media.

One promising area for changing social norms and behaviors on a large scale is HIV prevention. In 2017, an estimated 1.2 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa became infected with HIV. More than one-third of these infections occurred in young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Nigeria, where this study took place, has the second highest HIV/AIDS burden globally. Unsafe heterosexual sex is the primary source of transmission, causing approximately 80 percent of new cases of HIV in 2014. Systematic reviews of HIV prevention campaigns show that while they effectively promote awareness, they are often ineffective at reducing risky sexual behaviors and HIV transmission (Krishnaratne et al. 2016).

An alternative way of shaping social norms and behaviors is using mass media—commonly referred to as edutainment, which is short for education-entertainment. The media used to engage at scale includes television, movies, radio, social media, and app games, with streaming services being the largest growth industry.

People are biologically wired to remember and relate to experiential stories—much more than abstract concepts. Impact evaluations show that experiential stories are more effective at shifting social norms and behaviors than less emotive

and relatable content. However, despite this evidence and its potential to accelerate and scale influence, the use of mass edutainment has remained limited: why?

Questions We Should Be Asking

Governments and development agencies are increasingly turning to edutainment to communicate with young people and other high-risk populations. Edutainment programs can inspire audiences to engage in new thinking about what is possible, and change audience perceptions of what is “normal” and socially acceptable behavior. For example, the television series MTV Shuga seeks to address the spread of HIV/AIDS by fusing sexual health messaging with engaging storylines. Weki’s story aims to improve attitudes toward HIV-positive people.

This study (Banerjee, La Ferrara, and Orozco-Olvera 2019a) is a clustered randomized trial conducted in urban and semi-urban communities. Young people aged 18–25 were invited to a series of entertainment screenings. The treatment group viewed MTV Shuga, while the control viewed a placebo television drama that lacked educational messages. Hosting community screening events in both the treatment and comparison communities enabled researchers to attribute any impacts they found to the MTV Shuga program itself, rather than the community screening component of the activity.

The study measured impacts 8–10 months after program exposure using surveys and objective behavior change measures for HIV testing, condom demand, and Chlamydia biomarkers.

Our Findings

MTV Shuga improved participants' knowledge about HIV, including greater awareness about transmission, testing, and available drug therapies. Viewers were 14 percent more likely to know about needing to take a second HIV test and that this test should be done after at least three months. The show also positively influenced viewers' attitudes toward people living with HIV: viewers reported being more willing to buy from an HIV-positive shopkeeper; and closer to Weki's story, were more likely to allow an HIV-positive boy to play football.

Most importantly, the program promoted safer sexual behaviors (see figure 3.2). Young people in the treatment group were almost twice as likely to have visited local HIV centers and been tested in the last six months than youth in the comparison

group. Viewers were also less likely to report having concurrent sexual partners than those in the comparison group, particularly those who initially reported having more than two partners.

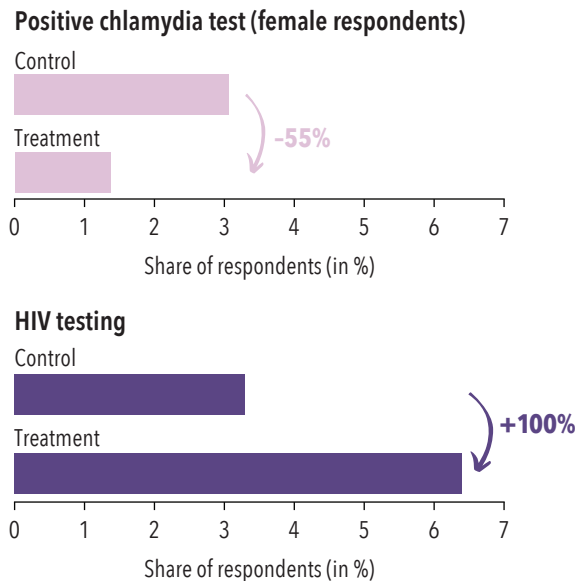
Exposure to MTV Shuga led to a 55 percent decrease in women's likelihood of testing positive for Chlamydia. Positive test results occurred in 3.1 percent in the comparison group versus 1.7 percent among viewers. The effects for men were in the same direction, though the difference was not large enough to be statistically significant. A recent meta-analysis also confirms that edutainment can effectively promote safer sexual behaviors among young people in both developed and developing countries (Orozco-Olvera, Shen, and Cluver 2019).

Policy Implications

Because mass media can reach large segments of the population at low costs, edutainment has the potential to be more influential and cost-effective than traditional HIV behavior change campaigns. MTV Shuga is broadcast on public and private channels in all Sub-Saharan countries. Preliminary results of a cost-benefit analysis suggest the investment could have been recovered by as little as 1 percent of the show's potential youth audience in its five main market countries.

Furthermore, even small "doses" of high-quality edutainment may prove effective. For example, MTV Shuga's short subplot on domestic violence improved the attitudes and behaviors of viewers (Banerjee, La Ferrara, and Orozco-Olvera 2019b). The incidence of sexual violence decreased by a third among Shuga viewers compared to the control group. Among women, the decrease was even stronger in the reporting of physical violence.

■ ■ **Figure 3.2** Select Impacts of MTV Shuga Viewership



Note: Exposure to Shuga led to a 55 percent decrease in the likelihood that women test positive for Chlamydia. Furthermore, the probability that viewers tested for HIV (as measured by the redemption of vouchers received at health camps) increased by 100 percent relative to the control group mean.

Evidence about the effectiveness of small doses of edutainment is reflected in a recent DIME trial in India (paper not yet circulated), which shows that short videos (less than 30 minutes) delivered through social media reshaped gender attitudes and reduced the social acceptability of violence against women. Moreover, who delivers the message also matters for combating vaccine hesitancy. For example, in Indonesia, immunization messages on Twitter were 70 percent more likely to be passed on when authored by celebrities (Alatas et al. 2021). Lastly, in India, 25 million people received an SMS with a link to a YouTube video of Nobel Laureate Abhijit Banerjee speaking about COVID-19. The result was increased symptom reporting, social distancing, and handwashing (Banerjee et al. 2020).

By partnering with the fields of behavioral science and impact evaluation, as well as researchers, technical specialists, and social media experts, we can maximize these initiatives' effectiveness and inclusiveness, and get a better sense of their impact.

There is still more to do to reach offline populations, and we need more ambitious public-private partnerships to target full ecosystems, especially in low-income settings. This is a task for everyone at the World Bank, as well as donors, private partners, and national governments. The call and challenge for scalable innovations in development investments for current and future crises is a great motivator.

The policy impact of DIME's research on development investments is being reflected across institutions, regions, and sectors. For example, in the Kyrgyz Republic and other Central Asia countries, the IFC Central Asian Financial Inclusion Project is supporting the production of a soap opera and complementary social media campaigns to improve financial literacy outcomes.

In Nigeria, the World Bank's Accelerating Nutrition Results in Nigeria Project is supporting the production of a mass media campaign across TV, radio, and social media aimed at promoting behavior change related to health and nutrition. The campaign includes a soap opera that will be translated into five languages and nationally broadcasted on public TV channels. Finally, in Iraq, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) project for Strengthening Resilience in Dealing with Crises and Conflicts in Ninewa is supporting the production of a ten-episode docuseries aimed at promoting social cohesion objectives. Each episode is centered around the true-life stories of individuals living in Ninewa and their experiences rebuilding their community after the military defeat of ISIS. The World Bank's Mind, Behavior, and Development Unit (eMBeD) and DIME are supporting the intervention design and impact evaluation, respectively.



*This case study is based on an impact evaluation conducted within DIME's Gender, Economic Opportunity and Fragility research program. See: Banerjee, Abhijit, Eliana La Ferrara, and Victor Orozco-Olvera. * 2019. "The Entertaining Way to Behavioral Change: Fighting HIV with MTV (English)." Policy Research Working Paper 8998, World Bank, Washington, DC.*

The Narrating Behavior Change program of the World Bank's DIME department links project teams across Global Practices with researchers and edutainment producers to develop rigorous and innovative evaluations that both improve the evidence base for policy making and induce the systematic use of edutainment in development investments.

See also the following blog posts and articles:

- *"How to Tame COVID-19 Vaccine Hesitancy: Edutainment and Lotteries?" <https://blogs.worldbank.org>.*

org/developmenttalk/how-tame-covid-19-vaccine-hesitancy-edutainment-and-lotteries.

- “Using Social Media to Change Norms at Scale.” <https://blogs.worldbank.org/voices/using-social-media-change-norms-and-behaviors-scale>.
- “Using Entertainment Media to Reach the SDGs.” <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2019/11/12/using-entertainment-media-to-reach-the-sdgs>.
- “The Entertaining Way to Behavioral Change: Fighting HIV with MTV in Nigeria.” <https://www.nber.org/papers/w26096>.
- “Watch The MTV Soap Opera That Is Secretly Teaching Sex Ed.” <https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2017/04/18/522869551/watch-the-mtv-soap-opera-that-is-secretly-teaching-sex-ed>.

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- Banerjee, Abhijit, Eliana La Ferrara, and Victor Orozco.* 2019b. “Entertainment, Education, and Attitudes Toward Domestic Violence.” *AEA Papers and Proceedings* 109: 133–137. <https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/pandp.20191073>.

Banerjee, Abhijit, Marcella Alsan, Emily Breza, Arun G. Chandrasekhar, Abhijit Chowdhury, Esther Duflo, Paul Goldsmith-Pinkham, and Benjamin A. Olken. 2020. “Messages on COVID-19 Prevention in India Increased Symptoms Reporting and Adherence to Preventative Behaviors Among 25 Million Recipients with Similar Effects on Non-Recipient Members of their Communities.” Working Paper 27496, National Bureau of Economic Research. <https://www.nber.org/papers/w27496>.

Krishnaratne Shari, Bernadette Hensen, Jillian Cordes, Joanne Enstone, and James R. Hargreaves. 2016. “Interventions to Strengthen the HIV Prevention Cascade: A Systematic Review of Reviews.” *Lancet HIV* 3 (7): e307–317. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-3018\(16\)30038-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S2352-3018(16)30038-8).

Orozco-Olvera, Victor,* Fuyuan Shen, and Lucie Cluver. 2019. “The Effectiveness of Using Entertainment Education Narratives to Promote Safer Sexual Behaviors of Youth: A Meta-Analysis, 1985–2017.” *PLOS One* 14 (2): e0209969. <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0209969>.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

DIME conducted the MTV Shuga study from 2014 to 2019 in partnership with the MTV Staying Alive Foundation, the Nigeria National Agency for the Control of AIDS, and JPAL affiliates Professors Abhijit Banerjee (MIT) and Eliana La Ferrara (Bocconi University). Study donors included the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and FCDO. Funding partners for the program included African governments, UNICEF, PEPFAR, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and the Elton John Foundation.

**Development Impact Evaluation (DIME), World Bank.*