

How Can a TV Drama About Love, Sex and Growing Up Increase Knowledge and Shape the Sexual Health Behaviors of Young People?

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MTV SHUGA is a 360-degree mass-media behavior-change campaign that aims to improve the sexual and reproductive health of young people. At the center of the campaign is a popular TV drama that weaves messages on issues like HIV, family planning, transactional and intergenerational relationship, safe sex and healthy relationships, into the storylines of young characters. MTV SHUGA has aired in Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa



“Luke: At first it wasn't rape but it became a rape because Tsholo only agreed on sleeping with a condom, a condom [unclear]. That they didn't agree on, sleeping without a condom. **Amanda:** But it's not rape. Tsholo did not say no [...] **Shawn:** So, you're telling me that if you're afraid of somebody, you're afraid of somebody, that person who's actually trying to have sex with you and you don't say no, that means that you're allowing it, but you don't want it.”
 -Dialogue (debate)



METHODS

This thematic analysis explores how the storylines and characters in the newest season of MTV SHUGA ('Down South') can shape awareness, knowledge, and opinions of sexual health and personal relationships among young people in South Africa.

The Data

CADRE conducted focus group discussions (FGD) to test if the episodes scripts were relatable and relevant to their target audience. The group was comprised of young people ages 19-24 from surrounding Johannesburg: 5 females and 4 males met for 12 semi-structured discussions in which they read one script, then discussed for one hour. All discussions were recorded and transcribed.

Objectives

1. To identify the mechanisms by which the scripts shape awareness, knowledge, and opinions of sexual and reproductive health and personal relationships.
2. To understand how the participants' context may affect the identified mechanisms.
3. To create a conceptual framework which hypothesizes how MTV SHUGA campaigns can lead to the intended outcomes.

Hybrid Analysis

The Sabido Methodology informed the deductive approach of the study, including pre-defined themes for the initial coding framework. These were modified to incorporate other prominent mechanisms of influence, identified from recurring reactions and thematic analyses until sub-themes were identified inductively.



“Faith: Most people think when they're HIV positive their life has ended automatically but Femi proved them wrong, Coalstove proved them wrong and Bongji proved them wrong, that you can still be HIV positive, live longer. You can even live longer more than the people who are HIV negative if only you exercise, eat healthy and avoid drinking alcohol and take your medication, ARVs.” -Observation

FINDINGS

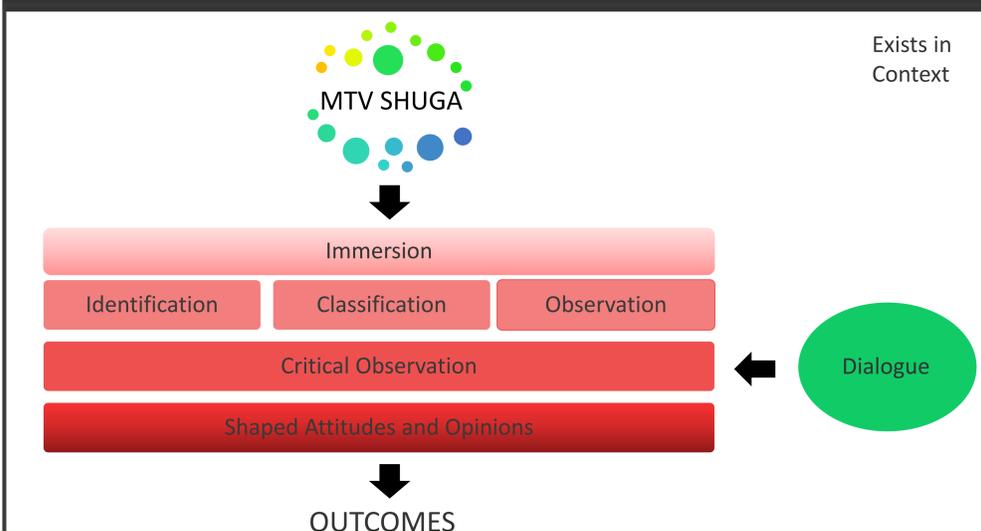
Mechanisms observed:

- ✦ Except for one individual, all participants **immerse** themselves in the show. The participants enjoys the drama and excitement of the scripts.
- ✦ Participants have a natural tendency to **classify** characters and their actions into good, evil. Some characters are more challenging to categorize so participants analyze how characters can change their behaviors to become "better."
- ✦ Bandura's Social Learning Theory is a mechanism that appears throughout the findings. In the scripts, characters are consistently punished for poor choices and rewarded for positive choices. **Observing** consequences helps the participants decide if the characters are demonstrating "good" or "bad" behavior.
- ✦ Participants find the show realistic and can **identify** with some characters and storylines personally.
- ✦ Halfway through the drama, the FGD participants move from passive spectators of the show to **critical** participants in the story. They put themselves in the characters shoes to understand what motivated their choices. Participants navigate situations where "right" and "wrong" choices are not clear.
- ✦ In the last few discussions, participants **look outward** to see how the lessons from MTV SHUGA can apply to their lives and community. Participants see MTV SHUGA as a credible reference that can serve as a lens through which to observe right and wrong in their world.
- ✦ **Dialogue** shapes the participants' views as it reinforces messages, normalizes awkward topics and builds supportive networks.
- ✦ **Context** can either support or disrupt the messages of MTV SHUGA. In the focus groups, gender norms and the social status of youth are contextual factors that derail some of the MTV SHUGA's messages.

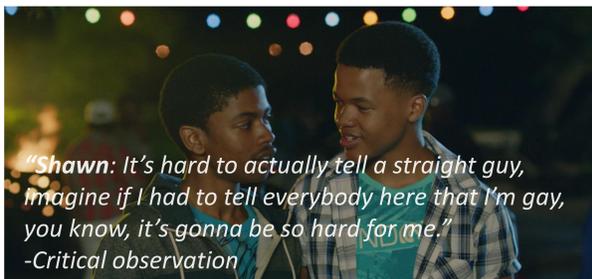


“Amanda: I relate to Khensani's story because the last time I said I also had a friend who, actually it wasn't her idea, her mother took her to the [illegal and unskilled] fly-by-night doctor to terminate her pregnancy, and she was five months' pregnant. She felt very sick.” -Identification

HYPOTHESIZED THEORY OF CHANGE



“Faith: No, as I have stated, I have never seen an HIV AIDS person, so I don't relate to it. **Kim:** Guys, we need to put ourselves in these shoes, characters. You never know, you might have HIV one day, you know. **Shawn:** Yes, you're right.”
 -Looking outward (shaped attitudes)



“Shawn: It's hard to actually tell a straight guy, imagine if I had to tell everybody here that I'm gay, you know, it's gonna be so hard for me.”
 -Critical observation

TAKE AWAY

- ✦ As multimedia campaigns escalate in coverage and popularity with young people, TV and radio series like MTV SHUGA offer them an opportunity to engage in a deep, immersive and sustained way, to become involved in the storylines and promote awareness and dialogue of sensitive SRH issues among peers and families.
- ✦ The mechanisms identified here can help in the careful development of new campaigns, to maximize their positive impact on the health outcomes and social lives of young people.
- ✦ Mass media interventions should plan ways to foster dialogue about the intervention with members of the community.

“She prioritizes her life, and weighs things, relationships, her education, my family, my job[...]She's still the one that I look up to.”
 - Classification

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