

**AUDIENCE RECEPTION OF SEXUAL BEHAVIOR CHANGE MEDIA MESSAGES IN
KAMPALA - UGANDA CASE STUDY OF GET OFF THE SEXUAL NETWORK
CAMPAIGN**

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ABSTRACT

The study's overall objective was to understand how people with more than one sexual partner received, engaged with and made sense of "Get off the Sexual Network" media campaign. In order to do this, the study relied on two audience specific theoretical frameworks – the Uses and gratification theories and the decoding and encoding theories. The study's main assumption was that of an active audience, with the ability to engage with and make meaning of a given message as opposed to a passive mass of people. The study used non-probability sampling and purposively selected 45 respondents – 30 men and 15 women, from who it gathered primary data using in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Because of the qualitative nature of the study, the data analysis started during data collection. During the interview, emerging issues were taken note of, and they were later categorised into themes and explored further in the subsequent interviews and discussions. These themes and subthemes were eventually reconstructed into narratives. The study revealed that audiences are very active participants in the entire communication process with the ability to engage the media messages, assessing its relevancy and applicability in their personal situations. The study also revealed that where fear arousing media images or text are used, audiences assess the threats and efficacy contained in those messages – based on individual belief, values and motivations – and these factors determine where he/she will adopt or dismiss the action recommended in the message. Several other factors – including gender, religion and the type of marriage played very critical roles in how the audiences perceived and engaged with the media messages. Men were more relaxed about the need to get off the sexual network compared to women, while polygamous men considered the messages inappropriate for them. Media campaigns are prone to being misunderstood and interpreted by the different individual target audiences. Fear arousing messages may not always lead to a positive reaction especially if it contradicts the audiences' comfort zone. And probably this explains why married couples or those in long-term relationships continue to be at very high risk of being infected with the HIV, despite the massive public campaigns against sexual networks. In conclusion, the study revealed that audiences are not homogenous and passive participants, but rather very highly individualized and active, who engage with a given media messages; with the powers within them to discard or even selectively expose themselves to those that appeal to them.