Background
MTV Shuga is a television drama series that launched in 2009 as part of an MTV initiative, Staying Alive Ignite! The overall focus of the show is on decreasing stigma associated with HIV as well as promoting responsible sexual behavior. The first two seasons took place in Kenya and were commissioned by MTV Networks Africa, the MTV Staying Alive Foundation, PEPFAR, the Partnership for an HIV-Free Generation, and the Government of Kenya. The show was a huge success and aired in 40 African countries before launching globally on 70 television stations. In 2013, production transferred to Nigeria, where a new season, “Shuga Naija”, expanded beyond the television show to include a 360-degree mass media campaign including website, social media, community outreach, pop-up events with testing & counseling services, a celebrity tour, and training of peer educators. Season 5 transitioned to South Africa, for the “Shuga: Down South” edition before returning to Nigeria in 2018 for Season 6. In 2018, it was announced that a new three-year partnership between Unitaid, MTV Staying Alive Foundation and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine would continue the series in South Africa as well as Cote d’Ivoire from 2018-2022 and will incorporate new innovations such as pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) to prevent HIV. The show has an estimated viewership of over 700 million people.

Why we chose MTV Shuga
- In our effort to evaluate the brand and marketing approaches of global health and development products and services, we seek to include a range of programs, including social marketing of products and services, behavior change programs, and edutainment. With a long history (almost 10 years) and wide viewership (700 million), MTV Shuga makes for an ideal edutainment case study.
- While there have been many TV shows with health-related “edutainment” goals, MTV Shuga has achieved a high level of popularity based on their marketing strategies and a highly engaging storyline.
- There have been several external evaluations of MTV Shuga’s impact that contribute to the general literature on whether “edutainment” is an effective strategy for changing health behaviors.
- MTV Shuga is a rights-free1 show that relies on donor funding for support. This offers an interesting example of the sustained investment that is required to support ongoing behavior change campaigns.

1) Rights-free refers to the right to use copyright material without the need to pay royalties or license fees
Findings
• MTV Shuga is a best-in-class example of a heart & mind opening brand that encourages people to think and feel differently. Like many behavior change initiatives, the impact is difficult to measure at the population level. However, the continued popularity of the show suggests that Shuga has truly captured the attention of their target audience in a real and lasting way.
• MTV Shuga is highly relevant, driven by robust audience understanding, frequent message testing and a willingness to adapt messages based on audience feedback. This is done through pre-testing scripts in focus groups, using a variety of feedback mechanisms (online, via SMS, phone hotlines, and in-person events) to check for clarity and understanding, adjusting subsequent content, and involving audience members in the overall process (recruiting cast from each location).
• Employee engagement – cast members who are passionate about the overall vision behind the show – makes the brand highly authentic and potentially increases overall impact. In addition to acting on the show, the cast members publicly promote the type of behavior change that the show hopes to elicit via social media, interviews, etc.
• MTV, as a parent brand, gives the Shuga platform a strong overall identity. Because Shuga is part of the overall MTV brand (a highly recognizable, international youth brand that is also highly flexible in terms of visual expression), Shuga is able to shift location, characters, and even modify the logo, while still remaining “on brand” and relevant to viewers.
1. IDENTIFY THE AUDIENCE AND BEHAVIOR CHANGE OBJECTIVE

MTV Shuga targets young people ages 16-25 with a specific focus on youth ages 16-19.

The goal of MTV Shuga is, “to improve the quality of life and health of people in African countries with an HIV-burdened population by empowering individuals with the agency to protect themselves and others from sexually transmitted infections (STIs), particularly HIV/AIDS, such as by getting tested for HIV. Each season integrates new messages around relationships, sexuality, and health, supporting seven concrete behavior change objectives: 1) consistent and correct condom use; 2) empowerment to negotiate safe sex; 3) HIV testing after risky exposure; 4) positive attitudes towards people living with HIV; 5) contraceptive use in one’s last sexual encounter; 6) knowledge of three different forms of contraception; and 7) desire to use forms other than condoms.

We rated this best practice as excellent. While the target audience definition is large the project can reach the audience (the show reaches an estimated 720 million and social media reaches 118 million). Also, while there are several behavior change objectives, they are interrelated and focused on HIV prevention.

Source: http://www.comminit.com/unicef/content/mtv-shuga-multi-platform-communication-initiative-achieving-hiv-behaviour-change-adolesc#_ftn6
2. UNDERSTAND THE AUDIENCE

MTV Shuga is grounded in audience understanding and empathy. The overall insight – it is not that youth lack knowledge about HIV/AIDS, but rather that they lack role models, opportunities for discussion about topics related to HIV/AIDS, and a forum to sort through their own emotions relative to sex and relationships – is not something that youth would articulate, but is based on understanding their spoken and unspoken needs.

In addition, MTV Shuga grounds each season in formative research. For example, before launching in South Africa, the team led focus groups and surveys with over 3,600 South African youth, collecting information on HIV stigma, HIV risks, sources of sexual knowledge and SRH support, sexuality and relationships, enjoyment and desire, and engagement with social media and other technology. Audience understanding is also built into the process on an ongoing basis. Throughout each season, the team collects feedback from the audience through text answers via a USSD platform as well as the MTV Shuga website. This feedback is used to tweak future episodes to make the story more relevant and to clarify key messages, while also helping to identify unspoken cultural norms. In the case of Season 5 in South Africa, MTV Shuga received more than 252,000 responses from nearly 44,000 viewers to 25 questions about messaging and storylines throughout the season.

“We start each season by figuring out what our priority messaging is, then we bring together a group of young people who will talk to us and tell us their stories. This process is absolutely crucial to making sure we get the story lines right and it’s fascinating to be in the room when it’s happening. I have seen a mixture of kids, some were HIV-positive, some were negative, some worked in HIV, some went out clubbing every night, some were at university—they were all just kids—talk to our producers about the challenges they face and the situations they must navigate. By building our stories on a factual basis, we end up with something that feels real. Everything—from the slang the kids use to the way they dress—is vetted by the young people in the script writing workshops. Even once we’ve got a script written, the actors are able to say, “You know what? I just wouldn’t say these words” and we let them help us shape the dialogue so it reflects reality.”

– Georgia Arnold, Executive Director of MTV Staying Alive Foundation

3. ARTICULATE AN INSIGHT

The tension is represented by the fact that youth hear about the risks of HIV on a near-daily basis, but the information that they receive doesn’t help them to process their emotions around sexuality and relationships. Once we think about this, we realize that it is true, but yet, it’s not obvious until it is stated. The default belief is that youth need more information! It is emotional because it deals with relationships and sexuality – and has the potential to liberate youth from the fear they suffer as a result of all of the information they’ve received. Lastly, with the proper interventions in place to help youth process their emotions, they can think and feel differently about sexuality, relationships and HIV/AIDS.

INSIGHT:

Everything about sexuality and HIV/AIDS is associated with fear, stigma, and judgement. It is not more information that youth need, but rather a means to process the information without fear, stigma, and judgement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BAM360 team criteria for an audience insight</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It has tension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The show examines the ramifications of sexual decisions on the lives of young people, their partners and their loved ones. Each episode features a new audience insight around particular relationship themes. Taken together, the episodes aim to inspire empathy among the target audience and to provide a forum for youth to experience their emotions and reactions related to HIV and other sexual health topics.
4. DEFINE THE BRAND VISION – CLARITY & RESONANCE

The vision is clearly articulated and likely to be well-understood by employees and stakeholders alike. It is unlikely that this vision is understood by the audience; however, in this case the appeal (and success) of the campaign is based on audience resonance, driven by multidimensional characters that inspire empathy and youth-oriented programming. MTV Shuga’s approach – to be a provocative and risqué brand that seeks to meet youth where they are – is what enables them to achieve the overall vision.

VISION

MTV Shuga is “a ground-breaking 360-degree mass-media behavior-change campaign that aims to improve the sexual and reproductive health of young people.”

MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHARACTERS

Each character has a rich backstory that inspires empathy for their experiences. There are still “good guys” and villains, but each episode reveals a bit more about why they are the way they are. Viewers may not be able to relate to every character, but they can empathize with their experiences.

YOUTH TO YOUTH APPROACH

Shuga was so effective on Kenyan youth because of the fact that it was modern, it was hip, it was fast and furious... In Shuga, it’s young people telling young people, advising young people. So I think that is very effective and young people respond to that.”

- Lupita Nyong’o, Actress in Seasons 1 & 2

1) http://www.mtvstayingalive.org/campaigns/
5. DEVELOP THE BRAND IDENTITY

The Shuga brand identity is based on the overall MTV brand, which is well-established among youth as a source of pop culture, music, and entertainment. While Shuga has adapted the identity to each location, it is able to do so because the overall MTV brand is widely recognized and highly flexible (the design approach allows for different colors, treatments, etc.). Were it not for the strength of the overall MTV brand, modifying the brand expression would not be recommended.

**Distinctive:** Public health messaging tends to be stigmatizing and overly scientific, and often promotes potentially unrealistic behaviors such as abstinence or monogamy. In contrast, Shuga’s vibrant, provocative, and risqué approach is highly distinctive and appealing.

**Reflects brand vision:** The MTV Shuga brand is real, provocative, and sexy, supporting the overall brand approach of meeting youth where they are. This identity carries through to their online presence, including the resources available on the [MTV Shuga website](http://www.mtvshuga.com), where the content is engaging, real, and edgy.

**Has a Personality:** The MTV Shuga personality comes across in the vibrant color palette; the real, multi-dimensional characters; and the sexy, provocative drama.

**Executed consistently:** Despite changing country locations three times over the last 10 years and having a slightly different visual expression in each location, the overall MTV Shuga brand has remained highly consistent in its overall look and feel. The strength of the overall MTV brand, which has a strong yet flexible identity, gives MTV Shuga a strong foundation on which to build different executions that match each region, while still remaining true to the overall MTV brand.
6. COMMUNICATE A BENEFIT

**Edutainment Platform:** The benefit – entertaining information about sex and relationships -- is clear and believable. The highly engrossing and somewhat voyeuristic format enables MTV Shuga to resonate with the audience.

In addition to the learning and new ideas that are developed by watching the show and empathizing with the characters, viewers can also learn more online, where hot topics are summarized. Topics include everything from real-life sex and relationship issues, plot recaps, to information about the show itself.

https://www.mtvshuga.com/downsouth/?savechoice
7. TOUCH THE HEART, OPEN THE MIND

Edutainment Platform: MTV Shuga effectively uses its storylines and robust character development to inspire the audience to think and feel differently about HIV, risky sexual behavior, and the decisions that we make within relationships. The peer education campaign has helped the show to expand beyond television and into the community with a grassroots approach to inspiring discussion about HIV. In more recent seasons, the show has taken on more stigmatized issues such as sexual orientation, with the inclusion of a new character, Reggie, who is discovering his identity as a gay man throughout the season.

The show has also demonstrated some real-life behavior change among its target audience. Evidence from program evaluations, including an experimental evaluation that included screening of a “placebo” film, found improved knowledge of HIV, increased reports of HIV testing, and decreased rates of chlamydia among the treatment group, suggesting that the show really has inspired the audience to think and act differently.

REGGIE'S STORY

Reggie is a talented soccer player and graffiti artist who is trying to get to grips with his sexual identity, and map out his own way in life. Reggie's father is a teacher at his school and wants him to follow an academic route and be 'more serious'; through the season he struggles to get his dad's respect and acceptance. Reggie deals with coming out to his two closest friend Bongi and Q; Bongi is very supportive and accepting however Q turns his back on him. Will Reggie decide to ignore what people think about him and be the most authentic version of himself?
8. SELECT THE RIGHT MARKETING VEHICLES AND ENSURE MESSAGE CONTINUITY

**Edutainment Platform:** The use of television for edutainment is not a new or unique strategy for behavior change campaigns. However, the MTV Staying Alive Foundation approach of maintaining a rights-free program that is accessible on television, online, and on the radio ensures a greater level of access for the target audience. The show has won awards recognizing their use of communication channels, including the 2018 Insight to Impact award for “Best Use of Communication Channels” that was announced as part of the 2018 International AIDS Society conference.

As summarized below, the themes have evolved over time; however, the overall messages around risk reduction and HIV knowledge/awareness remain as top priorities for the show. Another admirable achievement is the show’s ability to maintain a consistent overall look and feel despite using new production crews and cast members each season. With overall guidance from the executive producers, the visual cues and messaging are repeated in a consistent and continuous manner.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Season</th>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Main Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Season 1 (2009)</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>How risky sex and dangerous behavior can influence your future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 2 (2011)</td>
<td>Kenya</td>
<td>Rape, transactional sex and homosexuality, HIV testing, stigma, condom use, gender inequity, risky multiple partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 3 (2013)</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>How Lagos youth deal with love, sex and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 4 (2014)</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Adolescent girls, stigma, prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT), HIV testing, gender-based violence, losing virginity, and the disclosure of HIV status</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 5 (2017)</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Abusive relationships, sexual assault, back alley abortions, HIV, and stigma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 6 (2018)</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Included a broader focus on family planning along with continued HIV messaging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Season 7</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td>Toxic masculinity, gender-based violence, adulthood, self acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Future Seasons</td>
<td>Cote d'Ivoire</td>
<td>HIV prevention and self-testing, PrEP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>South Africa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9. DELIGHT THE AUDIENCE

**Edutainment Platform:** MTV Shuga has an exceptional commitment to delighting its audience. Each 22-minute episode is packed with emotion as the characters confront the challenges of daily life. Beyond the show, the 360-marketing campaign seeks to delight the audience through a wide variety of communication channels. Transitioning to radio, a graphic novel, and community pop-up events means that the program content is even more accessible to its target audience.

The MTV Shuga website is also designed to delight its target audience and has several interactive features such as a “which character are you” quiz, profiles of the characters and the cast, Q&A for advice on relationships, sex, dating, pregnancy, and resources for teens on HIV testing/counseling, and advice on negotiating condom use. While the content is intended to be educational, it is transmitted in a youthful and engaging format, without any judgment or shaming.

Additional “behind the scenes” content is available on Youtube and the Shuga website. Short clips with the cast make the characters and the show more relatable.

**Behind the Scenes - Which Shuga actor is the biggest flirt?**

**MTV Shuga Graphic Novel**
10. INSPIRE AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT

**Edutainment Platform:** Engagement includes social media, recruiting from the audience, responding to questions via the brand website, and hosting events. With the shift to a 360-degree campaign in Nigeria, the brand added a graphic novel, music videos, and a tour that spanned three states. Open castings for each new season have proven to be a highly engaging way to grab audience attention. The tryouts in April 2019 saw 1000 aspiring actors hoping to star on the new season in Nigeria. The audience chooses the final cast member by voting for their favorite online or via SMS.

MTV Shuga has engaged an impressive number of viewers across the continent, with an estimated 720m views and over 118m people reached through social media.

MTV Shuga Website hosts all the episodes by season. It also features character profiles, resources for sexual health such as Q&A and service referrals, and sneak peeks “backstage.”

Open castings in April 2019 for the new season of Shuga in Nigeria saw a queue that spanned over 2 kilometers in the center of Lagos.

Call a Character (2014): Shuga launched an interactive voice response platform to talk to viewers about their own situations and experiences. There were over 4,500 calls received in 2014 from audience members. They also created a character on the show who works at an HIV/crisis center helpline. Audience members are encouraged to text or call “6222” helpline for information on HIV.

11. TEST MESSAGE EFFECTIVENESS

Key messages are tested with audience members in focus groups before each season. The team uses this feedback to adjust the script to ensure comprehension and authenticity. The team also solicits feedback online and through SMS after each episode to assess audience reactions to the main theme of each episode. This information is used to inform future content.

One study conducted by Johns Hopkins after the first season in 2009 confirms the effectiveness of Shuga’s message testing. The study found a high level of message effectiveness, with 90% of respondents agreeing that the show had an impact on their thinking, in particular about HIV testing and living with HIV.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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| Johns Hopkins Assessment (Season 1, 2009) | • Among a sample of 1,000 young people in Nairobi, 60% of youth had seen MTV Shuga, and at least half of those had seen it twice or more.  
• Almost 50% (of viewer group participants) talked about the MTV Shuga characters and messages – mainly with close friends, but also with family members and other acquaintances.  
• Among the Nairobi youth who were aware of and had seen the campaign and program, over 70% had talked about MTV Shuga’s characters and messages with others.  
• Over 90% of the Kenyan participants believed the show had an impact on their thinking.  
• Among those who had seen the show in Kenya, 84% said the show had an impact on multiple partners, 85% for HIV testing and 87% about living with HIV.  
• Kenyan participants said they were more likely to take an HIV test after watching MTV Shuga. |

Source: The Compass for SBCC
12. EVALUATE PROGRAM RESULTS

There have been several evaluations of MTV Shuga to assess impact on HIV testing and risky sexual behavior. These studies, like many that attempt to measure the influence of edutainment on behavior change, rely on self-report; it is therefore difficult to attribute specific changes to the show itself. However, the experimental evaluation that was conducted in Nigeria included a control group that was exposed to a “placebo” show. This study design allowed the researchers to tease out more concrete behaviors among the target audience and found positive results in terms of STI screenings and sustained knowledge of HIV risks and testing practices. We scored MTV Shuga as “excellent” on program results given their creative yet rigorous design of evaluations and the evidence that they measured for the effectiveness of their programming.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation</th>
<th>Findings</th>
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| Population Council Assessment (Season 2, 2011) | - Study compared the use of MTV Shuga series 2 as an educational device in non-facilitated viewings versus facilitated viewings and showed that exposure to the MTV Shuga TV was associated with statistically significant increase in recent HIV testing (<5 months ago; p=0.0024 in control groups, p=0.001 in intervention groups).  
- The intervention group also displayed a significant increase in recent HIV testing from baseline (48%) to endline (62%). |
| Experimental Evaluation Of MTV Shuga: Changing Social Norms And Behaviors With Entertainment Education (Summary) | - The study included 240 community screenings of MTV Shuga and of a placebo program in southwest Nigeria. Interviews with more than 5,000 participants were conducted before and immediately after the screenings, and again six months later.  
- The prevalence of chlamydia among females in the treatment group was significantly lower than in the control group (1.3% versus 3.1%, a reduction of 58%).  
- The evaluation found that individuals who watched MTV Shuga were 35% more likely to report getting tested in the last six months (9.3% versus 6.9% in the control group).  
- The treatment group was almost twice as likely to go to the centers and get tested after six months of watching the show (6.4% versus 3.4%).  
- It also led to improved knowledge of HIV testing: respondents in the treatment group were 43 percent more likely to know about the three months waiting period (10.1% in the control vs 14.5% in the treatment group). |

Source: The Compass for SBCC
13. MEASURE BRAND PERFORMANCE

We assume strong brand performance based on the show’s reach and success; however, we did not score this best practice, as we did not have data on the MTV Shuga brand measures. Furthermore, since Shuga borrows from the overall MTV brand, it would be important to look at overall MTB brand measures as well.
14. EVALUATE MARKETING VEHICLE EFFECTIVENESS

No available data. Best practice not evaluated.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ELEMENT</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Structure</td>
<td>MTV Shuga is a project of the MTV Staying Alive Foundation. The MTV Staying Alive Foundation is a registered UK charity with a small team in the UK responsible for fundraising and project management, and a board comprised from a wide variety of sectors. The Foundation has been active for over 20 years with support from donors and partner organizations. The MTV Shuga team consists of 7 additional full-time staff whose roles range from research/content development to marketing and partnerships. Each season, the MTV Shuga team hires a production crew and actors from the region in which they are working. While the show has a “partnership” with the MTV brand, they do not receive any funding from MTV, but rather rely on external donors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Process &amp; Decision-making</td>
<td>Insufficient Information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People &amp; Capacity</td>
<td>MTV Shuga benefits from a combination of strength and continuity of its executive leadership and local talent. Georgia Arnold has been the Executive Director of the MTV Staying Alive Foundation since its launch in 1998. She also serves as the Executive Producer of MTV Shuga and has been credited with the long-term success of the foundation and the show. The production crew for the show itself relies on local talent, with directors, crew, and cast members recruited in each location. Since Season 2, the show has used open casting calls to find local actors that make the show feel more authentic. Open roles are advertised on tv and radio and the top finalists are voted on by the audience to select the winner. The opportunity to act on MTV Shuga has launched a successful career for many of the actors on the show, including Academy Award-winning Lupita Nyong’o who starred in the first two seasons of MTV Shuga. There is very little information available online about the benefits or potential challenges of recruiting a new production crew and cast each season, but many critics of the show have said that the use of local talent has been a critical strategy for engaging with the target audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rewards &amp; Incentives</td>
<td>Insufficient Information.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>