



Breaking the association between HIV and ART is key to increasing men's treatment uptake.

“We Are Equal”: Increasing service uptake through strategic communications

M. Rodrigues, N. Hasen, M. Chissano, S. Sharma

BACKGROUND

Mozambique has approximately 2.1 million PLHIV; 710,000 are men, of which only 62% are on ART. With our partner, Ipsos, PSI conducted qualitative research to identify Mozambican men's barriers to treatment. A key finding was that both men and their influencers associate ART with HIV. Men fear that being on ART would limit acceptance by peers, creating a key barrier to treatment uptake.

A strategic communication campaign, “Somos Iguais” (We Are Equal) was launched under the Meeting Targets and Maintaining Epidemic Control (EpiC) project in Mozambique. The goal of the campaign was to reduce negative associations with ART by normalizing PLHIV on treatment. From May to August 2021, 4,211 ads reached an estimated 30,496 people through TV and 16,131 through radio; over 20,000 were reached daily through social media. Key messages included “We are all the same, the virus doesn't define us” and depicted people taking ARVs in daily settings around friends and family.

METHODS

- Cross sectional study reaching 2,285 people across all 11 provinces of Mozambique
- 60% of respondents PLHIV (45% women); 40% non-PLHIV (39% women)
- Majority of respondents were 25-34 (50%) while 21% were 35-44, 14% 22-24, 11% 18-21 and 4% 45 and over
- Study data was triangulated with analysis of social media analytics and program data

RESULTS

- 79% of respondents recalled campaign messages
- Respondents reported preliminary steps towards behavior change as a result of campaign exposure, including discussing HIV with someone else (54%) and seeking health services (21%)
- Analysis of social media interactions showed 82% of private messages requested information or help related to HIV; this was unrelated to whether the post contained HIV or non-HIV content.

CONCLUSION

Breaking the association between HIV and ART is key to increasing men's uptake of treatment. Mass and social media campaigns normalizing HIV treatment behaviors can play an effective role in changing negative attitudes and increasing service uptake.

Testimonials by real PLHIV made the campaign relatable

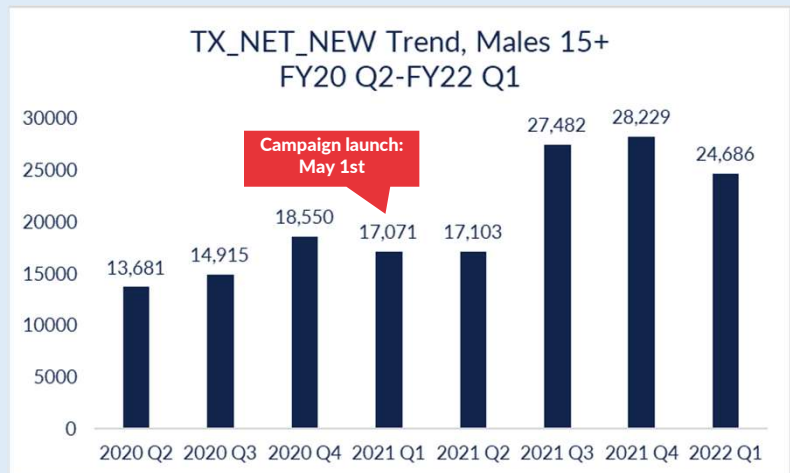


“My cousin's support was very important, and I thank her very much”

You are giving a lot of strength to others. Good example! God bless you!

Congratulations for your courage and strength. This is not the end of the world.

I'd like to be part of this, but I don't know what to do. I have been diagnosed HIV-positive.



An analysis of ART treatment data collected through PEPFAR supported treatment facilities shows a significant net gain in clients on treatment following the launch of the Somos Iguais campaign. While the gain can be attributed to multiple initiatives in the country, these results, combined with the results of the rapid survey and social media engagement analysis demonstrate the power of strategic communication in promoting ART initiation and retention.

