UC San Diego
CENTER ON GENDER EQUITY AND HEALTH

Beyond the buzz: Do digital blitz media campaigns change health behavior?

RESEARCH BRIEF

In low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), health marketing campaigns are increasingly adopting digital blitz media strategies, which use engaging, short-form media or influencer-promoted content. Prior evidence shows that blitz media campaigns can quickly achieve high audience reach,[1,2,3] yet evidence of their influence on health behavior remains unclear.

In 2025, UC San Diego's Center on Gender Equity and Health (GEH) conducted a rapid evidence review assessing the impact of 18 health-focused digital blitz media campaigns on social behavior change (SBC) outcomes in Africa.

Methods

Blitz media was defined as short-form, high-reach social media or influencer-driven digital campaigns. To assess impact across health campaigns, SBC outcomes were categories as: 1) Behavioral effects, 2) Intention and communication shifts, 3) Knowledge, attitudes, norms, and self-efficacy. Researchers consulted PubMed and prior desk review sources to identify quantitative evaluations of blitz campaigns on SBC outcomes, published from 2010 to 2025 in English, which reported isolated impacts of blitz-media from long-form campaigns.

KEY INSIGHTS

- **Emerging evidence:** There are signals that digital blitz media campaigns *can* drive behavior change, but evidence is mixed and inconsistent, suggesting the need for more research.
- **Better together:** Digital blitz + long-form campaign exposure had the most consistent positive effects on intention and communication, suggesting blitz media may be a viable opportunity to amplify exposure to and effects from long-form campaigns.
- **Tailored impact:** Digital blitz campaigns tailored to young adults and women had stronger evidence for behavior change, suggesting that when deploying digital blitz campaigns, programmers should carefully consider and design for their focus audience.

WHAT IS BLITZ MEDIA?

Blitz media refers to short-form, high-reach, social media or influencer-driven digital campaigns. Including:



Influencer campaigns



Memes/ short videos



Social media advertising campaigns



Social listening data



Social media embedded in long-form campaigns

Blitz media is not: edutainment-education dramas, serial storytelling, radio/TV/print media, community-based events

Results

The rapid review identified 18 studies on the effect of blitz media on SBC outcomes across countries in Africa. Of the 18 included studies, Nigeria (n=5) and Kenya (n=3) were the most frequent campaign settings. Prevalent health topics of blitz campaigns included family planning (FP) (n=4), gender norms, (n=4) and COVID-19 (n=4). Facebook (n=11) and WhatsApp (n=8) were the most used media platforms for blitz campaigns with others including common social media sites; most interventions used multiple channels**.**

Emerging evidence:

Blitz media campaigns can drive behavior change, but results are mixed

Researchers found that blitz-only campaigns can impact behavior change in some cases, but evidence is limited and inconsistent. About 40% of analyses on blitz-only media campaigns included in the review had a positive impact on behavioral outcomes (8 out of 19 exposure/outcome analyses) (**Table 1**). For example, a 2022 nonrandomized controlled trial in Ibadan, Nigeria, found that the blitz media campaign iCARE (using WhatsApp, Grindr, and Facebook) was associated with increased HIV testing and linkage to care for men having sex with men.[4] In contrast, a study on the blitz-only Breastfeed4Ghana campaign (on Facebook and Twitter) found no significant association with breastfeeding knowledge amongst the general population.[5] While our rapid review suggests **blitz-only media campaigns can drive changes in health behavior, evidence is limited. More research is needed to understand *when, for whom, and for what behaviors* blitz-media alone can impact.**

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TABLE 1 . Directional summary of SBC outcomes by blitz approach*

Campaign approach	SBC analyses across campaigns	Negative	Neutral	Positive
Blitz only (N=5)	Behavioral (n=19)		11	8
	Intention/Comms (n=10)		8	2
	Knowledge, Attitudes, Norms, Self-efficacy (n=21)	3	14	4
Blitz + low-intensity long-form (N=9)	Behavioral (n=17)	2	11	4
	Intention/Comms (n=1)		1	
	Knowledge, Attitudes, Norms, Self-efficacy (n=53)	6	27	20
Long-form + blitz (N=4)	Behavioral (n=3)		2	1
	Intention/Comms (n=9)	1	2	6
	Knowledge, Attitudes, Norms, Self-efficacy (n=21)	1	12	8

**Note: this chart displays findings extracted from 18 studies; N refers to the number of studies by campaign type, n refers to the number of analyses per exposure/outcome pair, most studies reported multiple analyses. Negative and positive directionality was assessed at a significance level of p<0.05.*

Better together: Pairing blitz + long-form media showed more consistent positive effects on health intention and communication

Researchers found that 67% (6 out of 9 exposure/outcome analyses) of campaigns that combined blitz media with long form media (e.g. edutainment, TV, radio) positively shifted health intention and communication. A 2018 longitudinal study among youth in Kenya found the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) *Shujazz* campaign, which combined blitz media (on Facebook, SMS, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp) with long-form media exposure (comics and radio), led to an 18-percentage point increase in ever using condoms and 19-percentage point increase in recommending condoms to friends and partners.[6] Similarly, a 2024 quasi-experimental study in Kenya on the SRH Girl Effect's *Tukisonga* campaign found improved FP use outcomes among youth when blitz strategies (on Wazzi, WhatsApp, YouTube) were combined with long-form media and in-person engagement.[7]

Tailored impact: Blitz campaigns tailored for young adults and women show stronger signals of impact

The rapid review found evidence suggesting blitz media approaches tailored to specific populations, rather than broad one-size-fits-all approaches, could improve SBC outcomes. To date, there are examples of digital blitz media influencing the health behaviors of young people and women. In 2024, using pre-and post-exposure surveys, researchers in Tanzania found the national blitz campaign, One-by-One: Target Covid-19 (on Twitter, Instagram and Facebook), increased vaccine confidence and uptake among young adults (aged 24-35).[8] A 2023 cross-sectional survey of the SRH blitz and long-form campaign *Merci Mon Héros* in Côte d'Ivoire, designed by youth, shifted FP attitudes and norms among women (aged 25+), while there were no significant changes among male participants.[9] Aligned with the World Health Organization's (WHO) people-centered care principles,[10] the rapid review demonstrated that blitz media campaigns should prioritize community participation and responsiveness.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Consider blitz media as the megaphone: Blitz media could be a strategic amplifier to expand messaging reach and reinforce SBC outcomes of long-form media or interpersonal approaches.

Tailor the impact: Design messaging for specific audiences, like younger adults and women, where early evidence suggests higher impact of blitz media campaigns.

Build the evidence: More research is needed to isolate the impact of blitz-only campaigns on health behaviors. Identifying the appropriate populations, approaches, and health behaviors for digital blitz media will help create more context-sensitive campaigns that maximize relevance while minimizing stigma.

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