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FROM ONLINE TO OFFLINE: USING DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA TO ELIMINATE HIV IN VIETNAM

Taking a 21st century approach to HIV prevention and control

DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN VIETNAM

The meteoric rise in internet and social media use over the last decade is no more evident than in Vietnam. Among a population of 94 million, approximately 53 percent of people in Vietnam are now internet users.¹ With over 57 million active Facebook accounts, most people using the internet are also using social media. This means that Vietnam ranks among the top 10 countries according to numbers of Facebook members, despite being the 15th most populous country in the world.²

The HIV epidemic in Vietnam is concentrated among key populations: men who have sex with men (MSM), transgender women (TGW), people who inject drugs (PWID), female sex workers (FSW), and their sex partners. In 2015, a representative four-city survey by the PATH-led Healthy Markets initiative, funded by the U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), found that 88.9 percent of MSM reported owning a smartphone, 97.6 percent had a social media account, and 80 percent used Facebook regularly. In another online study in Hanoi, 66.2 percent of MSM respondents stated that they already used the internet to seek HIV prevention information, and 73.4 percent said they sought sex partners online.³

“Social media is a powerful tool to connect with MSM and TGW, especially those who are ‘hidden’ or hard to reach. There are no time or distance barriers. MSM and TGW are comfortable in this space. It’s a huge part of their everyday life and this is where they feel free to be themselves. Some MSM and TGW can only be approached on social media, so that is where we need to be for them.”

Nguyen Tan Thu, an Online Change Agent

DEVELOPING A DIGITAL AND SOCIAL MEDIA ECOSYSTEM

Healthy Markets has developed a thriving digital and social media ecosystem that promotes uptake of HIV goods and services through interconnected channels that include Facebook, online dating apps and communities, shared value partnerships with major media stakeholders like MTV Vietnam, and dedicated apps that connect health care service providers and clients.

DIVERSITY OF APPROACHES FOR A DIVERSITY OF KEY POPULATIONS

A key strategy for Healthy Markets is to define sub-segments of MSM, TGW, and other at-risk populations, and identify the social media tools and approaches that best resonate with them. These populations tend to be young, self-identify as gay or openly present as a TGW, and can be reached with gay or trans-oriented online platforms, but also include those who are more hidden due to social barriers or other constraints.

In some cases, this segmentation technique results in reaching populations through more than one social media platform—further reinforcing HIV-related messaging. In other cases, it provides an entry point for the hard-to-reach. For these populations, social media platforms and pages that are aimed at more general groups—rather than channels designed specifically for open MSM or TGW—and more subtle messaging are more suitable.

MEETING PEOPLE WHERE THEY ARE: ON SOCIAL MEDIA!

KEY POPULATION-DRIVEN FACEBOOK CHANNELS

Healthy Markets' social media ecosystem centers around two key population-driven Facebook channels: Xom Cau Vong (Rainbow Village) for MSM and Co Nang Goi Cam (Be Me. Be Sexy) for TGW, launched in 2015 and 2017, respectively. Co-created with MSM and TGW communities, these platforms offer a much-needed open space for MSM and TGW to connect and exchange lifestyle and HIV prevention and care-related information. As the first online platform for TGW in Vietnam, Co Nang Goi Cam is especially groundbreaking. Xom Cau Vong and Co Nang Goi Cam now have over 230,000 and 19,000 followers, respectively.

The pages share curated information about HIV, safe sex, and other MSM and TGW-specific health issues, often through the lens of real-life dilemmas and experiences, interspersed with other popular topics to keep interest and engagement levels high. They also directly promote and link to offline services and products, like high-quality and affordable condoms, community-based HIV and sexually transmitted infection (STI) testing, and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP).



Xom Cau Vong and Co Nang Goi Cam post information in vibrant and attractive ways that appeal to their target audiences. From left to right, posts that promote the combination of PrEP and condoms, HIV self-testing, and social health insurance. PATH

“Our online community provides a safe space for people at risk of HIV to learn and talk about safer sex and services like HIV self-testing and PrEP. We can reach more people online, especially those who are afraid to discuss these topics publicly. We can then translate these online conversations into offline action.”

Le Minh Thanh, Director of social enterprise G-link

NETWORKS ARE KEY TO MAINTAINING ENGAGEMENT

Xom Cau Vong and Co Nang Goi Cam cannot operate alone. The key to successful social media channels is being dynamic—to interact, connect, and engage with others. Healthy Markets encourages connections and interactions between Xom Cau Vong and Co Nang Goi Cam and other Facebook pages run by partners like MTV Vietnam (which has over 1 million followers), social media influencers and opinion leaders, and other key population-led civil society organizations (CSOs) and social enterprises. Healthy Markets also works with these CSOs and social enterprises to create engaging Facebook pages of their own and develop online marketing skills to leverage these channels to promote and sell their goods and services.

FROM ONLINE COMMUNICATION TO OFFLINE BEHAVIOR CHANGE

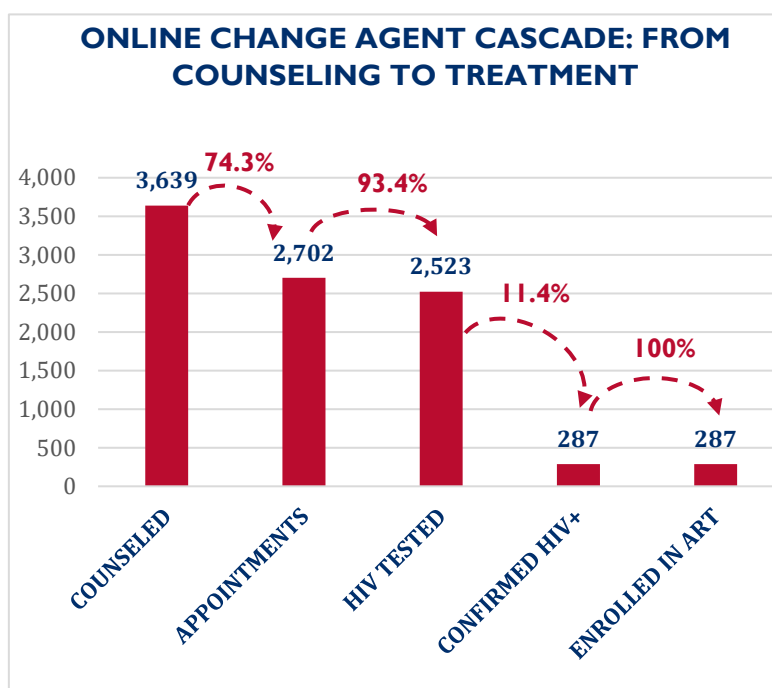
Xom Cau Vong and Co Nang Goi Cam are not just online education platforms—they provide an entry point to lifesaving services like community-based HIV testing and pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP). The pages are managed by a team of Online Change Agents (OCAs) who translate online support into offline behavior change. OCAs are people within the MSM and TGW communities who are trained and equipped to provide online counseling and support for a broad range of MSM and TGW-specific sexual health issues. They are able to refer at-risk individuals for HIV services and conduct offline community-based HIV testing themselves.

“Empathy and understanding is the key to the success of the model. As a peer, I understand the particular language and special needs of my clients. The HIV counseling becomes more meaningful because we can relate to each other. There are no barriers.”

Nguyen Tan Thu, an Online Change Agent

OCAs can organize offline appointments for either lay or assisted self-testing for HIV at a time and location that is convenient for the client. At the appointment, the agent can easily and quickly administer either a finger-prick blood or oral fluid rapid HIV diagnostic test. If a client receives a reactive result on the rapid test, the OCAs can then counsel and support them to access confirmatory testing and (if confirmed as HIV positive) treatment.

From March 2016 through May 2018, ten trained OCAs counseled 3,639 clients, of which 74.3 percent were successfully referred to community-based HIV testing services. 11.4 percent of those tested were then found to have HIV and subsequently supported to enroll in antiretroviral therapy (ART). Results like these show that the OCA model creates trust and represents a new age of peer outreach, where the ability to access and support clients is unrestricted by time or geography.



COLLABORATION WITH OTHER POPULAR SOCIAL CHANNELS

Facebook is just one of the most popular channels for MSM. Healthy Markets also partners with two gay dating apps that have a sizable user following in Vietnam (Grindr and Hornet) as well as Blued, a Chinese app that is seeking to break into the Vietnamese market. All are platforms used to connect MSM with one another, but they are also spaces where some MSM discuss and promote risky behavior, such as barebacking and chemsex. They therefore provide an ideal space to reach those at high risk of HIV with information and links to HIV-related goods and services. Grindr tends to reach a slightly older demographic than Facebook. Out of the three partnerships with these three apps, the one with Grindr is the most advanced.

GRINDR

With 270,000 members in Vietnam, Grindr connects MSM within their community; represents a modern lifestyle that brings men together with the people, places, and things they care about most; and has a commitment to supporting MSM to do so safely.

Since 2016, Healthy Markets and Grindr have worked together to promote awareness and understanding of health-related issues, goods, and services specific to MSM, including PrEP and HIV testing. Grindr has placed hyperlinked banner advertisements and broadcast direct messages through the app that promote locally produced, high-quality condoms marketed for key populations at risk of HIV; HIV self-testing services; PrEP, and HIV service scheduling app Toi Hen (see below). Importantly, Grindr has offered a significant discount to Healthy Markets in order to enable greater reach of the campaign.

These campaigns have proven very effective; during a significant promotion of PrEP services in April and May 2018, Healthy Markets saw a 2.6 fold boost in PrEP enrollment. Clients coming in for PrEP said that Grindr advertisements and banners prompted them to seek services.



VÊU MÊ SAY, CHỌN NGAY PrEP
MỘT VIÊN MỖI NGÀY, ĐÁNH BAY HIV

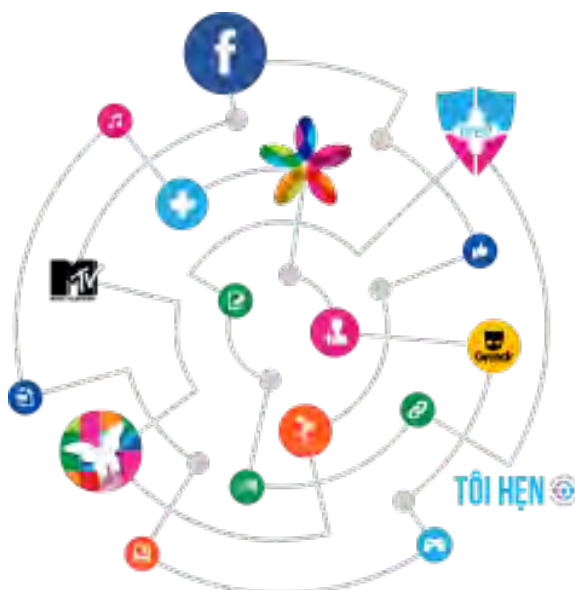
TÌM HIỂU THÊM

PrEP advertisement on Grindr in April and May 2018, inviting members to click on the link to find out more: “[For] Passionate love, chose daily PrEP. One pill a day, a HIV bullet. Find out more.”
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LEVERAGING BIG DATA TO REACH THE HARDER TO REACH

The campaigns and approaches discussed above reach primarily MSM and TGW, who are mostly young, “out,” and urban. As a result, uptake of HIV services, such as community-based testing through the Healthy Markets’ pilot, have resulted in significant engagement from young MSM and TGW (around 80 percent of clients are between 13 and 24 years of age). Those outside of this demographic are less likely to be members of Xom Cau Vong or Co Nang Goi Cam and are harder to reach due to social barriers.

Healthy Markets is working with older (25 years of age or more) MSM and TGW to create a profile of interests that appeal to them and to then design advertisements using Facebook’s ad manager. This enables Healthy Markets to connect with MSM or TGW populations that are not part of Xom Cau Vong and Co Nang Goi Cam. Using user-supplied data such as age, gender, location, interests, and other groups and pages joined or followed, Healthy Markets can identify, segment, and target harder-to-reach groups with specific messaging that appeals to them.



SMARTPHONES HELP US MANAGE OUR LIVES—WHY NOT OUR HEALTH?

Now that many adults in Vietnam have smartphones, mobile applications play a larger and larger role in everyday life and offer new ways to support hard-to-reach key population groups to access lifesaving HIV-related information, goods, and services. Along with OCA support, the apps developed by Healthy Markets provide a bridge between online information and offline services.



TÔI HẸN

Taking the step from learning online about community-based HIV testing, STI testing, or PrEP to actually booking and attending an appointment can be a difficult one to take. Many MSM and TGW experience or fear stigma and discrimination throughout their everyday lives, so going to or even calling a community service provider can be a daunting prospect. Healthy Markets developed and introduced Toi Hen (I Reserve), a web-based and mobile app that enables anonymous, confidential scheduling of HIV lay provider or assisted and unassisted self-testing appointments with local CSOs. Toi Hen users simply select the service they need, choose a local provider and preferred date and time, and wait for a call. Toi Hen is now also being expanded to allow scheduling for PrEP services.

“There are many obstacles preventing you from having HIV tests. Toi Hen is the right tool to help you to solve almost all of those obstacles—linking you to flexible appointment times, high-quality services and accurate results.”

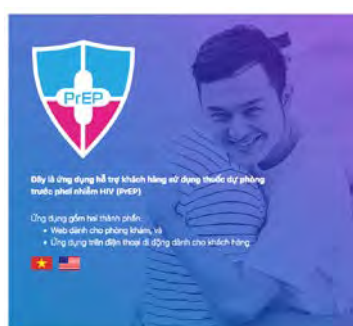
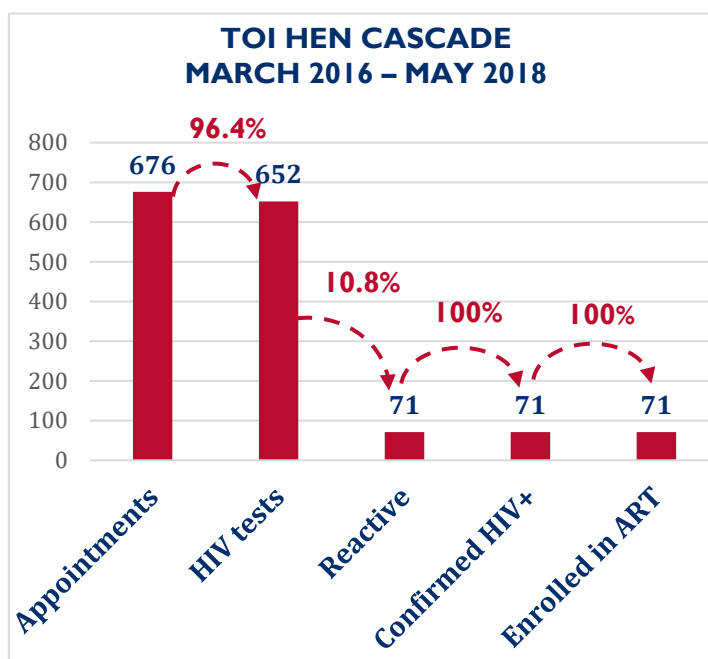
Toi Hen user, Ho Chi Minh City

Toi Hen is promoted through Xom Cau Vong, Co Nang Goi Cam, and CSO Facebook pages; gay dating apps Grindr, Hornet, and Blued; and on the TV shows co-created by Healthy Markets and MTV Vietnam. Toi Hen is steadily growing as word spreads about how easy, quick, and convenient it is to use.

“I decided to use Toi Hen as it’s so convenient and simple; all you need is one click. And all the services providers listed on Toi Hen are very well-known and prestigious, so I was very comfortable and confident to use it. It was very fast and easy; 15 minutes after booking on Toi Hen, I got a confirmation call from the service provider. I was able to select an appointment time of my choice.”

Toi Hen user, Ho Chi Minh City

From March 2016 to May 2018, 676 people have used the application to schedule and attend appointments for HIV services, 96.4 percent of which received HIV testing. The application is proving particularly effective in accessing both hard-to-reach and higher risk groups as well; almost all of those tested had never been contacted by face-to-face peer outreach before. 10.9 percent of people tested were subsequently diagnosed with HIV, all of whom were successfully enrolled in antiretroviral therapy services—compared to a 1.6 percent positivity rate at conventional testing services and a 4.2 percent rate from community-based HIV testing.



iPREP

Pre-exposure prophylaxis for HIV is a daily oral medication that, when taken as directed, can drastically reduce a person’s likelihood of HIV infection. Like most medications, correct administration and adherence is critical to PrEP’s efficacy. In June 2018, the Healthy Markets project launched a beta version of the iPrEP smartphone application to help PrEP clients in Vietnam adhere to PrEP treatment, seek STI testing, and engage in safer sex.

iPrEP sends daily automated reminders to take PrEP drugs and provides easy access to contact details of nearby service providers. Service providers can also benefit from the web-based application; their portal reinforces client retention and clinical quality through monitoring and tracking clients in the system for follow-up testing and counseling. These metrics are also reported to Healthy Markets for appropriate monitoring and support, so clinics do not have to take the time to extract the data manually.

THE FUTURE IS DIGITAL

The HIV epidemic has no one solution, but it is clear that in the 21st century, traditional peer outreach and mass media campaigns are not enough. If Vietnam is to achieve the UNAIDS 90-90-90 goals by 2020,^a both civil society and the government must harness digital technology and social media.

“Over 50 percent of Vietnamese people have access to the internet, and almost all of them are using social media. The majority of populations at risk of HIV are online, and we need to find creative ways to reach them through new and exciting social media channels.”

Dr. Hoang Dinh Canh, the Vietnam Administration for HIV/AIDS Control

Healthy Markets is already disrupting the status quo of traditional HIV outreach by bringing the results of the digital and social media campaign to mid-level government. In March 2018, in collaboration with the Vietnam Administration for HIV/AIDS Control at the Ministry of Health (MOH) and social enterprise partners, Healthy Markets held the first ever social media forum for HIV prevention and control in Vietnam.

The event brought more than 100 people together, including members of the Vietnamese government, civil society representatives, and entrepreneurs, to examine the future of effective social and behavior change communication in an increasingly digitized world. The event provided a platform for local civil society organizations to share among each other and with public health leaders how they use social media, e-commerce, and other digital tools to increase awareness, reach, and uptake of HIV products and services.

As a result, the lessons learned from Healthy Markets' digital and social media strategies are now informing the MOH's first national guideline for using social and digital media for HIV awareness, prevention, and control.

This guideline will support public and private sector stakeholders to develop their own campaigns and strategies and boost uptake of HIV goods and services nationwide.



Participants at Vietnam's first social media for HIV prevention and control forum take part in an interactive quiz. PATH

^a 90 percent of all people living with HIV being aware of their HIV status, 90 percent of all diagnosed HIV-positive people receiving sustained antiretroviral therapy, and 90 percent of all people receiving antiretroviral therapy attaining viral suppression

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