From online reach to offline services: Using social media strategies to increase uptake of and access to HIV Testing Among MSM in Vietnam

**BACKGROUND**

- Rates of HIV are increasing among men who have sex with men (MSM) in Vietnam.
- Face-to-face outreach efforts only reach a fraction of at-risk MSM, who also often experience social barriers to sexual health education and services.

A 2015 study conducted by the USAID/PATH Healthy Markets (HM) project found that 98 percent of MSM surveyed across four provinces regularly used Facebook, and preferred to use social media to seek information about sexual health.

**METHODS**

- HM partnered with MSM-led community-based organizations to design a prototype HIV prevention and sexual health behavioral campaign, “My Future, My Choice”.
- A Facebook page, Xóm Cầu Vồng ('Rainbow Village'—www.facebook.com/xomcauvong), is the central platform, which promotes discussion on health and sex including condom use, HIV testing, pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP) and anti-retroviral (ARV) treatment.
- Key MSM influencers were trained to interact with Xóm Cầu Vồng followers, translating social media outreach into meaningful behavior change on HIV prevention and treatment.
- HM and partners also designed ‘Tôi Hẹn’ (‘I reserve’), a web-based and mobile app (www.toihen.vn) to enable clients to book appointments for HIV testing and other HIV services.

**RESULTS**

- Rainbow Village has now over 230,000 members. It is significantly more popular than other well-known HIV or LGBT Facebook pages in Vietnam.
- An HM Facebook user study (n=424) found 50% of respondents visited Rainbow Village at least once a week, 75% were not in contact with HIV outreach workers/peers, and 18% self-assessed at substantial HIV risk.
- A rapid survey on primary HIV testing motivators (n=3,989) found that 35% stated online content as the reason for testing, 8% of whom tested HIV-positive — compared to 5% of those motivated by face-to-face peer interactions/referrals.
- From October 2016 to March 2018, among 3,626 MSM reached by online peer influencers or the I Reserve app, 77% tested, 11.8% of whom were HIV-diagnosed and 100% were enrolled in treatment. This compares to an overall 8.8% HIV positivity yield among MSM seeking HIV lay or self-testing.

**CONCLUSION**

- HM has demonstrated that online channels such as Facebook and apps are effective for engaging a large number of MSM in Vietnam on HIV issues, and for enhancing uptake of HIV testing.
- Online interventions effectively reach MSM who may never be contacted through conventional face-to-face peer outreach, and are more effective in reaching higher risk MSM.
- Online strategies should be further scaled and adapted alongside face-to-face interventions to reach more diverse segments of at-risk MSM.
- Online communication and interactions offer wide reach but measuring impact can be a challenge. This requires creative approaches and ongoing innovation!