



Maximizing media advocacy in campaigns targeting expectant teenagers in Kenya: A case of “Shujaaz” multimedia platform

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on media advocacy in youth-responsive health communication campaigns targeting pregnant adolescents in Kenya. Media campaigns are instrumental in not only providing accurate information about sexual and reproductive health, but also in reducing stigma and influencing health-seeking behavior among pregnant adolescents. To reach the diverse audience of pregnant adolescents in Kenya, media campaigns adopt multiple platforms such as print media, radio, social media, and television with the support of government institutions, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), influencers, and international organizations. The study is guided by the two theories: Health Belief Model (HBM) and the Media Framing Theory. The study used a qualitative case study approach with Shujaaz Inc., one of the most popular multimedia platforms in Kenya that targets young people through comic books, radio programs, social media, and videos. The target population comprised expectant teenagers selected to represent diverse ages, places of residence, and educational levels. Through purposive sampling, 18 expectant teenagers participated across three focus group discussions, one in-depth interview with the Shujaaz programs coordinator, and 15 links of digital content for content analysis. Data analysis was conducted through thematic analysis, involving verbatim transcription, coding, and categorization of recurrent themes. The study reveals that Shujaaz's effectiveness is rooted in relatable characters, culturally relevant narratives, and interactive multimedia content, which improve message engagement, comprehension, and retention, while fostering community support and reducing stigma around teen pregnancy. These findings support the conclusion that although Shujaaz Inc. shows how multimedia platforms can be used to effectively communicate to the youth of Kenya through culture-based participatory communication, there is a clear indication of the gap in the provision of content needed by the teens who have become pregnant. This emphasizes the importance of providing balanced preventive and comprehensive services to all pregnant teens. The study recommends participatory, culturally sensitive, and innovation-oriented communication strategies to enhance the health and wellness of pregnant adolescents, providing practical lessons for future media campaigns in Kenya.

Keywords: Health Communication, Media Advocacy, Multimedia Content, Pregnant Adolescents, Sexual and Reproductive Health

I. INTRODUCTION

This study focused on media advocacy in health promotion campaigns by Shujaaz Inc. Shujaaz is a media organization based in Nairobi, Kenya, that produces content such as radio shows, comics, social media, YouTube, and Soundcloud content aimed at empowering young people and influencing desirable behaviour change. *Shujaaz* also operates in the rest of East African Countries; working among the youth by embracing authenticity, inclusive, non-judgmental communication, and trusted media strategies that reflect the reality and culture of the target population. This study explored the *Shujaaz* media campaign targets expectant teenagers in Nairobi and Kajiado counties in Kenya.

Globally, adolescent pregnancy is a major public health concern that requires both clinical interventions and strategic health communication. In this case, media engagement is a key tool for influencing social norms and responsive policymaking (Poljak & Russell, 2025). In the United States, for instance, studies in New York City and Chicago demonstrated that media-targeted campaigns can be impactful in influencing adolescent sexual behaviour. It was observed that New York City's poster campaigns increased awareness about the consequences of teenage pregnancy. The poster campaigns were part of the adolescent pregnancy prevention media campaign by the New York City Department in 2013. The campaign used subway posters, billboards, and bus adverts discouraging adolescent pregnancy (Rankin, 2014). In Chicago's advertisement dubbed “*pregnant boys*” the public was engaged to challenge gender norms (Arafa et al, 2024; Scharrer et al., 2022). These examples affirm that media extends beyond just information dissemination, stimulating parental alertness, shaping public discourse and communication about sexual health, and influencing preventive efforts and behaviours among adolescents in diverse contexts.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, where teenage pregnancy rates remain among the highest indices worldwide. Media advocacy and strategic health communication, hence, should play crucial roles in empowering teenagers and influencing

community norms. In Uganda, for instance, youth-led campaigns, such as those organized by *Reach a Hand Uganda*, used the social media, radio, and peer education to mobilize adolescents and promote sexual and reproductive health rights and support for school re-entry for teen mothers (Ssemakula, 2024). In Nigeria, empirical studies shows that media advocacy and communication programs such as interactive TV series and radio discussions have significantly increased dialogues that increase adolescents' knowledge of sexual and reproductive health, empowering teenagers on informed decision-making and promoting preventive behaviour (Omang et al., 2025). These examples highlight the importance of integrating both traditional and digital media platforms in disseminating sexual and reproductive health attitudes and awareness, challenging harmful norms, and enhancing access to supportive services.

In the Kenyan context, media advocacy has been incorporated into multi-sectoral communication efforts addressing teenage sexual and reproductive health, including strategies for reducing teenage pregnancy. In Kwale County, initiatives led by United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) Kenya often used radio segments, TV programs, and community participation to increase awareness about sexual and reproductive health services for the teenage population (Kwachi et al, 2023). Similarly, in Migori County, media campaigns used community dialogue on adolescent pregnancy prevention, enhancing access to youth-friendly services, and called on local policymakers to take action (Nyaga & Mwangi, 2025). This demonstrates that in Kenya, media campaigns not only provide youths with vital health information but also function as a key strategic tool to mobilize communities, drive policy decisions, and support systemic responsive communication on teenage sexual health and pregnancy, emphasizing the intersection between media, empowerment, and health outcomes

Effective health communication techniques are used to provide appropriate knowledge, tools, and support to expectant teenagers to help them make informed decisions regarding their health and well-being. The current research targets investigating the nature and effectiveness of health communication efforts on expectant teenage girls in Kenya, with a special focus on the Shujaaz multimedia platform. The study is therefore based on Framing theory and Health Belief Model (HBM) which help to conceptualize the nature and the effectiveness of the health communication messages received through the Shujaaz platform in view of making an assessment of the perceived effectiveness of these messages among expectant teenagers. Media works well with young people because it uses youth -responsive platforms such as TikTok, YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to deliver relatable messages. The study examines how media engagement influences the knowledge, attitudes, and behaviours of expecting teenagers, making campaigns effective in dealing with issues specific to the demographic group in question.

Shujaaz, as a dynamic multimedia platform, has carved a niche in the Kenyan youth landscape, combining comic books, radio series, and interactive social media with community outreach to inform youth on various subjects, from sexual and reproductive health to education (Hutchinson et al., 2019). With this integrated approach, impelled by credible community outreach programs, Shujaaz assumed the role of a trusted source of information and empowerment for youth in Kenya in changing behavior and unleashing a new generation of leaders. It aims to make relevant health information more accessible and interesting through the application of relatable characters and culturally relevant storytelling (Hutchinson et al., 2019). Although multimedia platforms such as Shujaaz are potentially able to change health outcomes, only a few studies have reported empirical evidence of their efficacy in a Kenyan addressing the information needs of expectant teenagers. The study addresses this gap by estimating the reach, reception, and impact of Shujaaz's health communication efforts.

Through the exploration of message content, reach, and relevance, this study has endeavored to identify key factors that contribute to or limit the success of health communication campaigns in this vulnerable population. In this regard, the qualitative study entails the interviewing of key stakeholders involved in the Shujaaz platform, content analysis of campaign material as well as focus groups with expectant teens and to elicit their views on the content, design, and impact of this platform in addressing the health needs of these expectant teenagers. This research further gives insights into the strengths and weaknesses of the project, with findings adding to the general discourse on the techniques of health communication and influencing future interventions aimed at improving health and well-being among expectant teenage youth in Kenya.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Adolescent pregnancy remains a persistent challenge in Kenya. A report from the Kenya Demographic and Health Survey indicates that about 15% of girls between the ages of 15–19 have begun childbearing, reflecting the vulnerability facing this demographic group (Monari et al., 2022). Further, a survey by Ajayi et al. (2021) indicates that teenage pregnancy in Kenya is linked to limited access to relevant information on sexual and reproductive health information, low contraceptive use, and socio-economic inequalities, particularly among less-educated and rural populations. Similarly, Nyaga and Mwangi (2025) found that, among other factors, gaps in sexual and reproductive health knowledge significantly influenced teenagers' reproductive behaviours, increasing the risk of pregnancy.

Although media has been increasingly utilized to disseminate reproductive health information and promote behaviour change, there is a need to maximize the existing communication strategies in order to sufficiently address these informational barriers faced by adolescents. Moreover, there is limited empirical information on how communities

are strategizing media advocacy to reach pregnant teenagers specifically towards accessing youth-friendly services to improve the health outcomes. This gap necessitated this study, which focused on a context-specific problem by critically examining how media advocacy is utilized. Findings indicate that Shujaaz Inc. has optimized media use in information giving on adolescent pregnancy.

1.2 Research Objective

- i. Examine the forms of media advocacy platforms employed by Shujaaz in health communication campaigns among expectant teenagers.
- ii. To evaluate messaging strategies adopted by Shujaaz Inc. in health communication campaigns.
- iii. Assess the effectiveness of the media advocacy in influencing behaviour change outcomes among the targeted teenage population.
- iv. Explore the mitigation strategies for strengthening media advocacy targeting expectant teenagers

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Review

The study used the Health Belief Model (HBM) and the Media Framing Theory. The theoretical framework in this research provided a structured foundation on which the study problem was conceptualized. Theories helped to explain relationships between the key study variables and constructs, and also grounded the study on scholarly knowledge. The application of these theories helped in linking the existing literature and the data analysis and reporting of the study outcomes. The application of the theories enables the determination of the ways through which the messages are created and received and the ways through which they affect the formation of attitude, beliefs, and behavior.

2.1.1 Health Belief Model (HBM)

This research was guided by the Health Belief Model (HBM). The HBM postulates that the practice of health-related activities among individuals is motivated by various perceptions such as susceptibility to the adverse effects, seriousness of the consequences, the advantages associated with the adoption of preventive actions, existence of barriers, cues for action, and self-efficacy (Anuar et al, 2020; Alagili & Bamashmous, 2021). In the context of this study, the Health Belief Model helps in conceptualizing how pregnant teenagers engage with health media messages of change their perceptions of susceptibility to health risks, the severity of early pregnancy risks, and the perceived benefits of practicing the recommended behaviour. The theory also helps to assess how media messages are used to eliminate the perceived barriers and provide cues to action, thereby optimizing informed reproductive health decisions among teenagers.

2.1.2 Media Framing Theory

Framing theory suggests that media do not simply reflect reality; they actually create one through their selections and presentations of information (Goffman, 1974). In this study, the framing theory helps to conceptualize how media shapes the way health issues, such as adolescent pregnancy, are presented by the media and interpreted by audiences. The theory demonstrates how media messages in health campaigns are framed to highlight risks and key individual responsibilities, which can significantly influence how pregnant teenagers understand media messages and respond to health campaigns. In this study, framing theory is useful in explaining how media messages construct meanings around teenage pregnancy and reinforce behaviour change by promoting empowering narratives towards influencing attitudes, perceptions, and optimizing positive intentions among teenagers. The theory offers a scientific approach to examine the ways in which the campaign can frame the issue of teenage pregnancy in a manner that affects public perception and understanding of the issue. Through the framing of the advertisements, the inherent biases or communication barriers can be determined. Therefore, the theory helps the researcher to evaluate the effectiveness of media advocacy strategies and also guides the design of relevant and impactful youth-specific health messages.

2.2 Empirical Review

2.2.1 Media Advocacy Platforms Employed by Shujaaz in Health Communication Campaigns

The concept of media advocacy has grown in importance as a key element of health communication intervention among young people. According to modern health communication scholars, media advocacy is not just awareness-raising but involves using communication tools for affecting attitudes, social norms, and behavior (Isbel et al., 2025). The increased penetration of technology in society has revolutionized health communication and provided avenues for reaching out to young populations using multiple forms of media that promote interactivity and participation.

It has been demonstrated that youth are more likely to use digital media, social media, mobile technologies, and communication media that allow interaction to obtain information about health issues. For instance, Ackah et al. (2024) showed that digital and social media platforms have become crucial channels for sharing information about sexual and

reproductive health with young people in Sub-Saharan Africa due to their confidentiality, availability, and ability to allow peer interactions. Moreover, it was demonstrated by Thapliyal et al. (2024) that health communication programs that incorporate social media, mobile communication, and storytelling attract more participation and message retention among adolescents compared to conventional media channels.

In line with the view provided by Tufte and Mefalopulos (2009), participatory communication techniques foster a sense of audience involvement in the communication process as opposed to being passive receptors of information. These techniques work best among adolescents since they facilitate dialogue and ownership, as well as personal identification with health-related messages. In this regard, Martin et al. (2020) established that young people tend to be more receptive of information on health when the mode used is participatory and includes peer involvement.

In the Kenyan society, Shujaaz has been identified as one of the leading multimedia platforms for youth engagement in the transmission of development and health messages. According to Hutchinson et al. (2019), the application of the multimedia technique by Shujaaz helped to improve the sexual and reproductive health knowledge of young individuals due to the inclusion of relatable information on solving daily problems. However, little is still known about the media advocacy platforms utilized by Shujaaz in campaigns intended for expectant teenagers. This research aims at identifying the types of media advocacy platforms used by Shujaaz in health campaigns among expectant adolescents.

2.2.2 Messaging Strategies Adopted by Shujaaz in Health Communication Campaigns

The success of health communication campaigns can be attributed to the content, relevancy, and message delivery of campaigns. Current literature highlights the significance of audience-centered communication techniques taking into account the sociocultural and developmental aspects of adolescence. As per Martin et al. (2020), adolescents tend to believe in health information that is genuine, relatable, and communicated by credible sources. Literature on reproductive health communication among adolescents illustrates how effective storytelling can be used to initiate behavior changes. Current literature suggests that young people are able to relate to the characters, learn from their experiences, and assimilate communicated messages in their life situations (Hurston & Comello, 2021). In this regard, Green (2021) also states that narrative transportation fosters emotional response to messages.

The Shujaaz platform utilizes a peer-to-peer communication framework involving relatable characters, youth-oriented stories, and real-life events reflective of their experience. This mode of communication corroborates the findings by Hutchinson et al. (2019) concerning effective dissemination of reproductive and sexual health messages through storytelling and peer influence mechanisms. According to So et al. (2021), health communication interventions need proper framing and targeting of intended audiences. Contemporary literature has established the importance of culturally appropriate communication in shaping the behaviour of adolescents. In a recent study, Ackah et al. (2024) discovered that adolescents were more likely to engage with messages that were in line with their social realities and cultural background. It is important, therefore, to analyze how Shujaaz uses messaging to communicate the specific needs of expectant teens in Kenya.

2.2.3 Effectiveness of Media Advocacy in Influencing Behaviour Change Outcomes

Behavioral change continues to be the ultimate goal of both health communication strategies and media advocacy efforts. It is evident from prior studies that communication strategies, especially if well planned, can affect health knowledge, attitude, intention, and behavior among adolescents. As pointed out by Albarracin et al (2024), behavioral change interventions through communication campaigns positively influence the decisions and health behaviors among adolescents through consistent messaging and audience targeting. In the same way, Isbel et al. (2025) argue that there have been positive impacts on HIV/AIDS prevention and sexual infections awareness as well as substance abuse prevention among adolescents through health communication campaigns using media. Therefore, media advocacy can be useful in ensuring desirable reproductive health behaviors among adolescents. Social Cognitive Theory proposed by Bandura (1986) applies behavior change strategies among adolescents through media due to the power of observational learning and modeling in behavior change. For instance, recent studies conducted by Ula and Rahagia (2025) revealed that adolescents' decisions and behaviors were influenced positively by digital health interventions with peer role models.

Further research in Kenya shows that peer influence is another key factor contributing to reproductive health behaviours among youth. Calhoun et al. (2022) in their study found that the perception of contraceptive use among peers influenced the reproductive health behaviours of youth. The above discussion, therefore, indicates that platforms such as Shujaaz, aimed at reaching out to peers, have great potential to bring about behavioural outcomes among expectant teenagers. While previous studies confirm the efficacy of health communication interventions in bringing about healthy health outcomes, very little research has been done on the ability of media advocacy efforts undertaken by Shujaaz to bring about behavioural outcomes among expectant teenagers. This paper will therefore seek to determine how effective media advocacy has been in bringing about behaviour change among the target group.

2.2.4 Mitigation Strategies for Strengthening Media Advocacy Targeting Expectant Teenagers

According to current literature, enhancing media advocacy programs requires more involvement from the audience, enhanced use of digital media, culturally sensitive messages, and evaluation mechanisms. In addition, health communication practices of today are emphasizing the importance of the co-creation strategy where teenagers will be involved in the development and delivery of health messages. According to Martin et al. (2020), participatory communication strategies enhance the credibility, message acceptability, and relevance among the adolescent audience. Also, studies conducted by Ackah et al (2024) show that combining digital communication and engagement strategies within the community contributes significantly to making reproductive health communication programs effective. This means that health communication can reach teens using different channels but also engage in discussions and give feedback on various health communication initiatives.

The increasing trend in using the internet and digital media for communication has led to new challenges associated with the accuracy of information provided. For instance, according to Odgers and Jensen (2020), adolescents regularly come across false information regarding their health problems in the digital space. Additionally, research highlights the significance of collaborative partnerships in improving media advocacy programmes. As suggested by Isbel et al. (2025), effective adolescent health communication intervention requires collaborative efforts between media companies, health care providers, educational organizations, parents, and community leaders. These efforts increase the effectiveness of programme sustainability and help to reinforce health information in different settings. Although the Shujaaz project has been successful in developing media messages that address the needs of youth, there is a lack of research into the mitigation methods that may help improve the effectiveness of the programme amongst expectant adolescents. This research attempts to identify mitigation techniques that may be used to enhance the effectiveness of media advocacy programmes.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research approach and case study design to provide a thorough understanding of media advocacy in the context of expectant teenagers, which is a delicate and understudied group. The approach helped achieve data triangulation using various data sources such as FGDs, interviews, and content analysis to capture more detailed experiences compared to those captured using quantitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study design also focused on the bounded system of Shujaaz Inc., and it therefore helped in analyzing the impact of cultural, social, and economic aspects in shaping the reception and behavior changes related to messages. Qualitative methodology also had ethical considerations of involving vulnerable individuals (Pietilä et al, 2020).

3.2 Study Area

This research was conducted in Nairobi and Kajiado County, Kenya. In Nairobi, the in-depth interview was conducted with Shujaaz's programs Coordinator who is also the Spokesman, and links for content analysis were also identified in Nairobi. In Kajiado, expectant teenagers participated in Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Kajiado County is located in a population of 1,117,840, with a total area of 21,292.7 square kilometers as of the 2019 national census {Kenya National Bureau of Statistics (KNBS), 2023}. Kajiado shares boundaries with counties of Nairobi, Nakuru, and Kiambu to the north; Narok to the west; and Machakos, Makeni, and Taita Taveta counties to the east. To the south are the Tanzanian border provinces of Kilimanjaro and Arusha. This study finds both a challenging and promising setting in Kajiado County for studying the effect of media campaigns on expectant teenagers, given its high teenage pregnancy rates, sociocultural context including early marriage and female genital mutilation, limited access to information and health facilities, and ethnic diversity.

3.3 Target Population

The target population comprised expectant teenagers aged 13 to 19 years from Kajiado County, Kenya. Participants were chosen considering good representation of different ages, places of residence, and educational levels.

3.4 Sampling and Sample Size

A purposive sampling technique was employed. The sample comprised 18 expectant teenagers across three focus group discussions (FGDs), one in-depth interview with the Shujaaz programs coordinator, and 15 links of digital content published by Shujaaz Inc. for content analysis. For the qualitative content analysis, the sample size of 15 digital content links was chosen through purposeful sampling, consistent with Neuendorf (2017), who recommends 12-30 pieces of data for a thorough analysis, depending upon data richness and thematic saturation (Mayring, 2014; Krippendorff, 2018).



3.5 Data Collection Instruments and Procedures

Three 45-minute Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with a purposive sample of 18 expecting girls aged 13 to 19 years from Kajiado County. The FGD sessions were moderated over two days at a community centre, a church, and a hospital. The FGDs investigated the perceptions and experiences adolescent girls have with current ICT-based Sexual Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) platforms, including whether they use such platforms, what factors influence access, and how relevant they feel the platforms are in light of SRHR needs and experiences of adolescent girls living in rural-urban settings in Kenya.

An in-depth interview was conducted with the programs coordinator for Shujaaz. Additionally, content analysis of Shujaaz content was undertaken to assess its alignment with the needs and interests of the target audience. Entire interviews and discussions were recorded and transferred into audio files, then transferred into a computer.

3.6 Data Analysis

Interviews were verbatim transcribed and later repeatedly read aloud to get a basic sense. In the first instance, the transcript of the interviews was read line by line. Thereafter, it was divided into coherent chunks, and such chunks were then truncated, abstracted, coded, and labeled. Subsequently, the codes were re-read and categorized and subcategorized with respect to their similarities and differences. The data coding was carried out by the first author while the co-author refined the thoughts. Thematic analysis was used to locate recurrent themes and patterns, showing, in addition, the weaknesses of the platform and possible areas of development.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The rights to privacy, and anonymity of the participants were respected in this study. The audio data were kept in a secure area; moreover, they were anonymously stored. The setting for the interviews was discreet and unthreatening. The collected data was guaranteed to be treated in confidence, and participation in this study was purely voluntary; participants could withdraw their participation at any time. Participants gave written consent regarding the recording of the interviews.

IV. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

4.1 Findings

4.1.1 Forms of Multimedia Platforms Employed by Shujaaz Inc. in Health Communication Campaigns

Through the integration of a variety of communication tools and techniques, Shujaaz utilizes both conventional and digital communication tools including comics, Shujaaz magazine, radio shows, Facebook, Instagram, SoundCloud, Short Message Service (SMS), and community mobilization among other communication methods. The combination of the several communication tools makes it possible for the campaign to reach out to its youth audiences using platforms that are familiar and within reach of them. Through the delivery of information on various platforms, Shujaaz ensures its youth audiences get multiple interactions with the same content.

From evidence collected from the participants of the program, it was observed that the application of a variety of platforms made it easier for participants to engage in the communication process. The presence of various ways of accessing the communication materials provided a platform for participants to access the content as per their choice and convenience. Some of the participants listened to the information from the radio and comics, whereas others engaged with the material via the social media platforms.

One of the biggest strengths of the campaign is its ability to use youth-related narratives and characters. The participants have admitted that the inclusion of fictional characters and other youths with whom they could identify made them connect with the campaign. In this regard, they were able to see examples of positive role models dealing with various problems ranging from sexual and reproductive health issues, relationships, education, to personal development. As a result, such social learning helped increase self-efficacy and motivation to change behavior and make wise choices.

Content analysis of the campaign suggests that one of the greatest strengths of the campaign is related to the use of entertaining communication skills to ensure people's engagement and interest in the discussed health messages. Specifically, they include well-designed characters, humor, drama, storytelling, quizzes, and peer-to-peer interactions. Such approaches are especially important because young people often do not react well to regular forms of health communication. In this way, they allow for lowering barriers to sensitive topics and encouraging reflection. The use of social media by the campaign to engage audiences through interactive multimedia was extremely important in making it possible for there to be a two-way flow of communication in this campaign. Young people were able to comment, share their experiences, make inquiries, and get feedback on issues in their environment. In effect, this made them active rather than passive receivers of the information that was being disseminated.

4.1.2 Messaging Strategies Used by Shujaaz Inc. to Target Pregnant Adolescents

Results show that Shujaaz used health communication approaches which were embedded in the local culture and thus increased the effectiveness of health communication campaigns towards expectant teenagers. The health communication campaign used regional dialects, social settings, cultural references, and Sheng, which is an urban youth slang in Kenya, to ensure that messages were delivered in a way that made sense to the target audience. For instance, The Campaign Coordinator stated:

"Shujaaz speaks directly to young people by using language that reflects situations they are very familiar with, therefore making the content interesting." (Campaign Coordinator, 16th July 2024).

Such culturally sensitive and relatable health messages brought closer the sender of messages and receivers, increasing the credibility of messages conveyed. Shujaaz also used a non-judgmental and sympathetic communication tone, which was much appreciated by the expectant teenagers. Findings from focus group discussion showed that adolescents involved in the discussions did not feel condemned but rather respected when communicating through the campaign messages. It addressed the stigma often associated with the teenage pregnancies by providing a communication context where teenagers could freely express themselves. Relatable characters and stories were also used to enable teenagers to relate better with what was being communicated to them.

Additionally, the interactive aspect of the campaign also played an important role in increasing audience participation. Using social media sites, SMS-based communications, call-in lines on radios, and other forms of interactive communication, the youth were engaged in asking questions, exchanging experiences, and communicating about health issues amongst themselves. This interactive process made the audience feel more involved and helped disseminate the message of the campaign among peers. It was felt by the participants that being able to engage with the campaign's message made them feel more connected to the message and gave them a sense of ownership.

Further, the messaging approach proved to be compatible with the information needs and communication behaviors of the targeted group of youth. Through tackling pertinent topics related to sex, contraception, pregnancy prevention, and dreams, Shujaaz managed to appeal to its target audience by developing a culturally appropriate message. According to participants, the messages were seen as realistic, interesting, and related to real life situations of their peers. Hence, teenagers were more likely to discuss these messages among their peers, thereby increasing social learning about positive health behaviors. All in all, it can be said that a culturally appropriate, interactive, and youth-centered messaging approach proved crucial in improving the success of Shujaaz's health campaigns targeting expectant teenagers. However,

"Much of the content is designed to prevent early pregnancy rather than support those already experiencing it." (Campaign Coordinator, 16th July, 2024)

This reveals a limitation in addressing all segments of the target audience. Expectant adolescents felt empowered and informed, but this empowerment was primarily in relation to general knowledge that can help prevent their condition in the future, indicating that the campaign is more successful at reducing stigma and isolation than at providing direct support for current pregnancy.

4.1.3 Effectiveness of Media Advocacy on Health-Seeking Behaviors of Expectant Teenagers

Majority of the pregnant teenagers felt that being exposed to Shujaaz had caused them positive behavioral change through the adoption of prenatal checkups, better nutrition, and avoidance of risky behavior. The various multimedia forms employed by Shujaaz ensured that comprehension, retention, and recollection of information was possible. Diversity in multimedia form assured that all learning styles were covered and that information could be reinforced. Majority of the teenagers felt that incorporation of social media helped with learning because questions could be raised and answered immediately.

"When young people see their own lives being reflected in the stories, they are more likely to have confidence in the message and take action" (Coordinator stated on 16th July 2024).

Cultural congruence with campaign messaging facilitated a sense of trust and emotional connection between the communicators and recipients, thus making the behavioral change process more effective. The findings revealed by the content analysis indicated that messages written in the language of the community were well-accepted, illustrating the feasibility of implementing a culturally-based approach in health communication. Social support through community development on the platform ensured positive behavior maintenance. Nonetheless, the effectiveness of this campaign was mainly focused on prevention. As noted by the coordinator in his response on 16th July 2024,

"Much of the content is meant to prevent teenage pregnancies from happening rather than assist teens who are going through pregnancy" (Coordinator stated on 16th July 2024).

This implies that there is an issue with inclusivity, considering that although the communication is highly effective among the youth population, it fails to target the teenagers who are already going through teenage pregnancy.

4.1.4 Mitigation Strategies for Strengthening Media Advocacy Targeting Expectant Teenagers

There were various strategies suggested by participants for solving issues noted regarding the health communication campaign carried out by Shujaaz. One of such strategies was giving a lot of information on how to manage pregnancy and antenatal care. It should be acknowledged that the participants admitted that Shujaaz is effective in creating awareness and providing general guidance but pointed to the fact that there could be much information that might be useful. Participants believed that practical information regarding such aspects as nutrition, complications during pregnancy, mental well-being, preparing for the birth process, and visiting clinics regularly should be provided.

Another problem raised by participants is linked to the lack of accessibility. As it has been already mentioned, Shujaaz is very dependent on digital media and not all young people have access to the internet, mobile phones or have enough money to be engaged in online activity. As an approach to dealing with this issue, participants believe that other forms of communication should be used. Further, there is a need to expand the distribution of printed communication materials among adolescents. Posters, pamphlets, and educational brochures can be helpful in reaching adolescents who do not have access to online information. The information can then be distributed via health care centres, schools, and other community institutions.

The participants also recommended designing communication content that considers the circumstances of expectant adolescents. It is clear from their feedback that campaigns often concentrate on discouraging adolescent pregnancies while paying little attention to adolescents who are expecting a baby. Messages that offer emotional support, advice, and reduce stigma against expectant adolescents should be developed. On balance, the study indicates that although culturally informed communication increases the interest in messages and their relevance, it might not necessarily address the needs of all targeted audiences adequately. Consequently, there is a need for audience-focused communication materials that integrate relevant health information and emotional/psychological assistance to expectant adolescents.

4.2 Discussion

The study revealed that the Shujaaz program utilizes the use of multiple platforms that include comics, radio programs, social media platforms, and the SMS program to facilitate communication to the pregnant teenagers in the Kajiado County. According to Carradini and Fleischmann (2023), the use of multimodal channels improves the communication campaign messages by making them clearer. In a similar study, Ibrahim et al. (2024) revealed that the use of multiple media channels facilitates interaction leading to clarity of communication. This is another assertion validated in the current research. The findings reveal that multiple media channels were effective in communicating to teenagers in Kajiado County. Multiple media channels increase exposure to health communication messages. This, according to HBM, increases perceived susceptibility and severity of teen pregnancy health issues while providing a cue to take action. According to the theory of Media Framing, use of multiple media channels influences how audiences interpret the message. For instance, Shujaaz has used humorous quizzes and relevant characters in order to frame the problem of teenage pregnancy as a health problem rather than a sin. This will reduce defensiveness and improve understanding of the message.

With regard to strategies for communicating, the study showed that culturally anchored communication, involving local dialect, social environment that resonates well with the participants, linguistic code switching, including Sheng language, and non-confrontational stance improved the receptivity, credibility, and stigma mitigation of messages. Kreuter et al. (2003) argued that culturally anchored communication creates a match between the messages being conveyed and the values and experience of the target population. This was evidenced in the study. Of note here is the importance of linguistic code-switching; according to Baker (2026), youth-oriented messages resonate best with audiences that receive messages in the language that they can understand. Linguistic code-switching brings the communicator psychologically closer to the audience, thus facilitating shared identity. From the HBM perspective, culturally anchored communication makes it easier for the audience to see the benefits and reduce the perceived barriers to the recommended health behaviors by minimizing stigma. According to the Campaign Coordinator on 16th July 2024, "Shujaaz addresses its audiences directly by using a language that resonates with their experience." Nonetheless, there were significant weaknesses noted, as the campaign seemed not to pay attention to already pregnant adolescents.

Concerning effectiveness for health-seeking behaviors, the exposure to Shujaaz facilitated desirable behavioral change through regular prenatal visits, healthy diets, and no risky behaviors. This finding supports Wakefield et al. (2010) in their assertion that media advocacy can be used to change health behaviors and social norms. The World Health Organization (2017) indicated that health communication is used by people to develop healthy behaviors, an assertion supported by the current findings obtained in Kenya. The use of social media helped teenagers to learn effectively since they could interact with the material and pose queries which were answered in real-time, in line with findings by Ibrahim et al. (2024). Through HBM, exposure helped develop perception regarding susceptibility and seriousness of early pregnancy. As the Coordinator stated on 16th July 2024, "When young people see their own lives being reflected in the stories, they are more likely to have confidence in the message and take action," directly supporting the HBM construct of self-efficacy. But the major weakness in the campaign is that it adopts a preventive approach.



Even though the Media Framing Theory argues that a positive framing approach to prevention works well for primary target groups, this approach might alienate those who are pregnant from the start. According to the Coordinator, “a lot of our messaging has been about preventing early pregnancies as opposed to helping those already going through it.”

With regards to mitigations strategies, more information about pregnancy and pre-natal care, accessibility due to insufficient access to mobile phones and internet facilities, provision of more printed material, and content which responds emotionally to the challenges faced by the pregnant adolescents were proposed. This finding resonates well with the view of Dada et al (2026) who assert that successful health communication involves strategic diffusion of messages. The problem of accessibility relates to the overall digital gap experienced by sub-Saharan African countries, while the call for provision of printed material presents one of the mitigation strategies. As per the HBM, accessibility will improve cues to action and perceptions regarding the advantages of visiting a healthcare facility. Shujaaz is ideally a successful media advocacy campaign in Kenya; however, important shortcomings have been identified including emphasis on the prevention component of health and neglecting the aspect of providing support services to pregnant adolescents. In future campaigns, there is a need to incorporate both preventive and support services while addressing accessibility problems using different mediums of media and being culturally sensitive to the target group.

V. CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusion

The study sought to explore media advocacy in youth-oriented health communication campaigns among pregnant adolescents in Kenya through a qualitative case study of Shujaaz Inc. Guided by the Health Belief Model (HBM) and Media Framing Theory, the study concentrated on exploring four main objectives; exploring the type of multimedia platforms used by Shujaaz, the messaging approaches used, effectiveness of media advocacy on health seeking practices and mitigation approaches that will strengthen future campaigns. The findings of the study show that Shujaaz Inc. is an effective and innovative approach to media advocacy among adolescents in Kenya. The multi-media platforms used include comics, radio, social media, SMS, and community outreach. The multi-media platform ensured high audience participation, trust and understanding of information. Different learning styles have been addressed in the campaign through different platforms and thus ensuring high effectiveness of the health messages conveyed among the targeted audiences.

With regard to messaging strategies, the study concludes that culture-driven communication emerges as an important component for the success of campaigns. Specifically, speaking in a regional dialect, setting social contexts familiar to young people, engaging in code-switching (speaking Sheng language), and adopting an empathic tone without judgment helped make campaign messages more acceptable and less stigmatizing. It is crucial for expectant teenagers to see themselves in the message conveyed, which contributes to their engagement and motivation for taking actions. As far as effectiveness is concerned, the conclusion drawn from the study is that contact with Shujaaz media advocacy has a positive impact on expectant teenagers' behavior, encouraging them to visit clinics regularly for prenatal checkups, eat healthily, refrain from any risky behavior, and improve knowledge retention. Furthermore, interactivity associated with media campaigns conducted by Shujaaz helped adolescents get their questions answered promptly, contributing to learning.

In contrast, another major limitation of this study is that the Shujaaz campaign primarily aims at prevention, with a majority of its content focused on preventing early pregnancies as opposed to supporting adolescents who have been through this experience. While prevention of early pregnancies is still the main objective of the Shujaaz campaign, its limited scope implies the exclusion of a significant portion of the targeted population that has gone through such a challenge and whose needs have not yet been met. As a result, the study finds that future campaigns should seek to include all the aspects discussed above by offering emotionally-sensitive material for adolescents who have become mothers; providing comprehensive information about correct approaches to pregnancy and antenatal services; considering all the accessibility issues by using both electronic and printed means; and keeping the same cultural tone in the process.

Shujaaz Inc. provides useful insights for practitioners working in the field of health communication in Kenya and elsewhere. This case study has proven that the combination of multimedia technology, culturally-specific content, and interactivity can be used to successfully engage young people and impact their health-related behavior. On the other hand, the gaps found during analysis show that constant monitoring is essential for ensuring that none of the target population groups are forgotten. Striking a balance between prevention and assistance, along with removing access barriers, will enable media advocacy to live up to its full potential.

5.2 Recommendations

It is recommended that any media advocacy program aimed at pregnant teens not only focuses on creating awareness but should incorporate detailed knowledge about antenatal care, maternal nutrition, safe pregnancy practices, and birthing preparations as well. The content needs to be formulated in conjunction with the advice and assistance of

medical personnel to provide the required level of accuracy. The other recommendation of the research relates to incorporating multiple mediums for health communication programs. While focusing primarily on using the Internet to spread such messages, the researchers suggest implementing printed material as well as community communication programs, in order to increase the penetration level. Collaboration with government agencies, such as the Ministry of Health, could help achieve greater success in terms of information reach.

It is also necessary to enhance participation and interactivity in the media health campaign strategy. The designers of such campaigns need to consider using techniques like peer group support programs, discussion boards, and question-and-answer websites in order to enhance participation of pregnant adolescents in these programs. This will help them gain a sense of belonging, share knowledge, and receive emotional support. With regard to future research recommendations, the findings of the study suggest the need for further studies to explore how the use of media advocacy strategy aimed at male adolescents can be used to promote responsible sexual behavior among this category of teens. Further research also needs to be done to find health communication strategies which enhance peer group support among adolescents affected by teenage pregnancy.

Declaration of Interest

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