

“Female Condoms Are”: Analysis of the PATH organization’s contest films

Gemmé Campbell

With the growing number of sexually transmitted infections and unplanned pregnancies in the United States affecting the 18 - 25 age group, it is important to examine innovative forms of reproductive protection. The female condom is a barrier contraceptive that works to prevent pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections by preventing skin-to-skin contact (FHC, 2011). Considering the female condom is a desirable innovation, it is important to look at how to improve the diffusion of this vital health technology. Recently an international nonprofit organization, PATH, asked filmmakers worldwide to submit short films finishing the phrase “Female Condoms Are...” to tell a story about how the female condom has enhanced their lives as well as the lives of others. PATH is an international nonprofit organization that seeks to accelerate diffusion of health innovations and recently asked filmmakers to submit short films promoting the female condom (PATH, 2014). PATH named twelve finalists and awarded cash prizes to the top four short films.

My study examines how the short films promoting the health technology might be perceived by young adults (18 – 25 years of age) by looking at common themes present in the top twelve films and comparing the themes to previous research examining young adults’ perceptions of the female condom. The themes I find are compared to previous research that has identified the characteristics of female condoms that are important as well as influential to young adults. The female condom as a preventive innovation is posed with a difficult challenge as its relative advantage may seem low as its preventive

advantages may seem non-immediate. Rogers contends “relative advantage is the most important predictor of the rate of adoption of innovations” (Rogers, 2002, p. 991).

Identifying factors that may stress relative advantages may help create strategic messages, influencing the rate of adoption of this product. The key themes I found throughout the finalist films were protection, control, advantages, visual portrayals, and negative portrayals. I analyzed these themes and how they are presented in each of the films and made recommendations for future communication. With these recommendations in mind, messages concerning the female condom can be more effective for the target audience in adopting the female condom.

My study has practical implications for future communication about this product that may influence the process of diffusion of this health technology. This research also extends the theory of diffusion of innovations to include communication surrounding innovations on social media, which uses mass media as well as interpersonal channels.

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