Intro: Media Consortium

**Define Impact**

Let’s consider the impact of today’s event that Vince and his team at Media Impact Funders has put together:

Reach—impressive # of you, but yet a small overall group

Quality—top decision makers and thought leaders

Conversation—the quality of the people here will only make an impact if you end up talking about what you have learned and share it with others.

The TMC effort is to try to measure some of that conversation. When a news story goes out into the world, we want to know not just how many people read it, and not just how many of those people are key decisionmakers, though both those data points are important. We want to know if our news stories change how people talk about the issue in question. We want to know if our intervention into the conversation has made a difference.

We don’t usually use the words “news” and “change” or “stories” and “intervention” in the same breath-- but isn’t that what “impact” means? A well-reported story will change how people think and talk about the issues. This is a non-partisan observation. If I find out that drone strikes have killed a major terrorist, I may change to a more positive attitude about drone strikes. If I find out that drone strikes are killing innocent civilians, I may change to a more negagtive attitude about drone strikes. If we offer powerful reporting, we will be able to measure our impact by how conversations change.

**Explain the Study**

The Media Consortium’s impact study looks to see what kind of a conversation already exists about a particular topic. Then we create interventions—news stories--to try to understand what kinds of stories will change a conversation.

Normally only large corporations have the wherewithal to do this kind of study. With the help of John Schwartz, however, we were able to find an amazing partner in Gary King, Albert J. Weatherhead III University Professor and Director for the Institute for Quantitative Social Science at Harvard University and co-founder of Crimson Hexagon. Using Crimson Hexagon’s servers and an algorithm he designed, Gary can track every conversation about a particular topic on twitter, and parse whether the conversation is positive or negative about that topic.

In Phase One of our study, we worked with Gary to come up with a set of issue areas for him to track—issues that we hoped would be relevant to the news cycle 18 months later! We chose immigration reform, abortion and reproductive health, education reform, and the Syrian war.

In Phase Two of the study, Gary and his team began setting a baseline for conversations in those areas.

We have now launched Phase Three of the study, which consists of experiments to see if news stories by Media Consortium members change these conversations.

I’m going to let Gary explain the ins and outs of his work, but before I do, I will just give you one example of a test we have already run.

**Where is Your Plan B?**

Many Media Consortium members follow the reproductive health beat. They were aware that the FDA had issued new regulations in June mandating that the emergency contraceptive, Plan B One-Step, be sold over the counter. As often happens in news reporting, the fight over Plan B got a lot of attention, but only a couple of outlets—like RH Reality Check—were reporting on implementatin.

With a generous grant from Quixote, we organized 9 other outlets to report on Plan B implementation. The question was, is Plan B One-Step now easily available for women over the counter? We were interested in the answer—which turned out to be mixed. Plan B One-Step is not at all available for certain women, including native women on reservations and immigrant detainees. For most of the rest of us, Plan B One-Step is available, but not always easily accessible. A number of pharmacies are stll requiring ID.

We were also interested, however, in getting people to talk about Plan B implementation and emergency contraception generally. This was not an issue that was particularly salient, as Gary likes to say—no one was really talking about it. We tried to intervene by publishing 8 pieces within one week, using a pop-up microsite, creating a video, and adding a crowdfunding tool, as well as promoting the collaboration with a hashtag and a pr push.

**Impact from Plan B**

Our impact metrics so far are interesting. As expected, given that half the outlets involved mainly had regional reach, the total number of views, XX, was strong but not overwhelming. In addition, we got a 9 minute slot on the national radio show Counterspin. We did very well in our qualitative metrics. The Association for Emergency Contraception pushed out our site to all the members of their list, and plans to feature our efforts at their next meeting. In fact, our data will be used by researchers at Princeton for a study they are doing on Plan B.

What really struck me, however, were the results we saw from our impact project. As Gary will show you, we saw a slight increase in people talking about emergency contraception, but an even bigger decrease in people talking negatively about it. We don’t know what that means. That actually excites me because it demonstrates how much we have to learn about metrics analysis.

**Media Consortium**

The Media Consortium has become a living laboratory for this kind of work. Our 63 independent news outlets became members because they want to build their impact. Over 25 of these outlets have given Gary and his group full access to their Google Analytics—and that’s really unheard of for any organization.

Our members are willing to be out on the cutting edge because we know journalism is changing at a razorsharp speed, and if we don’t get out ahead, we will be left behind. I know the rest of the people in this room feel the same way. That willingness to experiment—to get out in front of a problem—perhaps that is the largest impact this focus on impact can have.