



Insights From Verified

Using Evidence-based Insights to Create Behavior Change

Research on persuasion and behavior change shows that to convince people to take action related to their health, we need to help them:

- ✓✓ feel that what we are asking them to do is normal and expected
- ✓✓ understand that they, and their community, are at risk
- ✓✓ believe that they have the ability to do something about it

Insights that helped us persuade young people in South Africa to adopt COVID-safe behaviors

Hi, I'm George, an Associate Campaign Director with Verified. I worked on our Zwakala campaign in Khayelitsha, South Africa.

Young people in Khayelitsha live in a close-knit community. There is a lot of social pressure to fit in and do what your peers are doing. We wanted to create a campaign that met young people where they were and in the language they were speaking. The term Zwakala is young people's slang meaning "to come together." Using slang was a way to generate interest in our message. It was a conversation starter that got them excited about the campaign (even before they even knew what it was actually about).



We recruited community champions who volunteered their time, voice, and expertise to help us develop and deliver the campaign. Our champions were local role models who interacted with young people in the township on a regular basis, like Siya the football coach or Sizwe who runs a pharmacy. This really created a campaign that was contextualized by, and grounded within, the community, and fostered a sense of local ownership. The results were sharp, friendly and local.

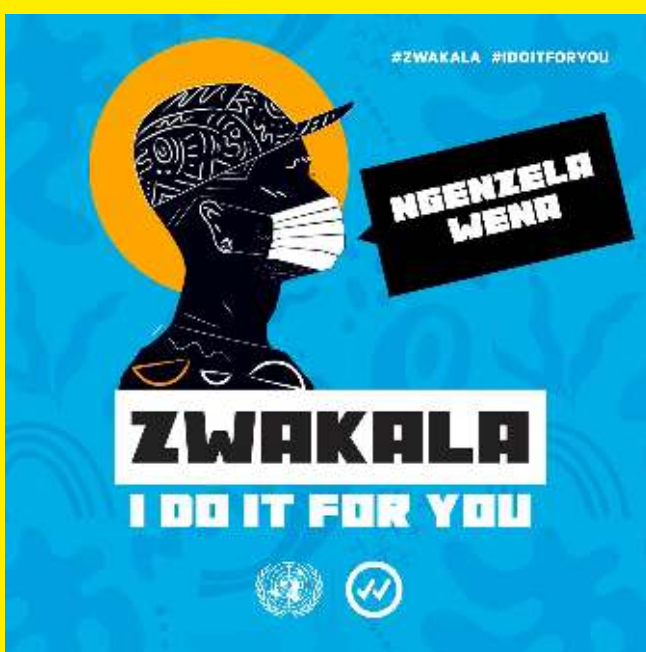
Shape what behavior your audience considers normal.

Social norms—how people think their peers feel or act—guide people’s behavior. Elevate stories that show people in action and help make that behavior normal and expected.

- ✓✓ Use trusted messengers (role models) to show that other members of the community are taking action.
- ✓✓ Make it personal. Share stories that help your audience understand why they should act.

Case Study

Normalizing COVID safe behavior for young people in Cape Town



With our partners in South Africa, including the South Africa Red Cross, we organized focus groups in Cape Town to learn what young people were thinking and feeling about COVID-19. To create a campaign that was relevant to the community and could be woven into the fabric of everyday life, we collaborated with influential young people in Khayelitsha. Through this process of consultation and collaboration, we developed Zwakala. Launched in June 2021, the campaign encouraged young people to adhere to come together and protect their families, loved ones and communities through adhering to COVID safe behaviors, such as mask wearing, physical distancing, handwashing, and getting vaccinated.

Our community champions integrated COVID messaging in their everyday roles. For example, Zola, the CV Guru who helps young people write CVs, emphasized the importance of being COVID safe and linked it to getting (and keeping) jobs, while Siya, the football coach, emphasized the importance of hand washing to keep everyone safe on the pitch.

“Our community champions let us know what they wanted to see their peers do and what kind of content made sense. They helped us understand what young people wanted, and what they were thinking and feeling. Their insights drove the campaign— they were really the ones shaping the narrative and the kind of messages we put out there. Elevating community voices increased local trust, support, and, most importantly, buy-in, for our messaging. This helped us shift social norms in the community.”

- George



Combine hope and fear in your campaign messaging

It is important to make your audience feel at risk *and* that they can do something about it. No matter what type of message frame you are using, make sure it is empowering.

- ✓✓ Use fear to create a sense of threat. Make the audience feel that they and their loved ones are at risk.
- ✓✓ Center what they can do to change the situation and make them hopeful that their actions will make a difference.

Case Study

Increasing risk perception through showing that COVID affects our communities.



Our campaign focused on increasing risk perception among young people in Khayelitsha. Our focus groups and social listening revealed that young people didn't feel at risk from the virus. They were, however, concerned about their older family members and the people in their community. This led us to emphasise the risk of COVID-19 to the wider community, and how young people could lead the way on reducing that risk. Instead of asking young people to protect themselves, we centred our messages on how they could be community leaders and role-models, and help to protect the people they loved and those around them.

“Young people in Khayelitsha expressed a strong interest in being leaders in their community, but weren't quick to take up COVID safe behaviors, like mask wearing and physical distancing. We needed to make them understand that their friends, family and loved ones were at risk from COVID-19 and that young people had the power to stop the spread and they could be community leaders during this time of need. We sought to change the narrative around precautionary measures and vaccines. We reframed it as a symbol of leadership, strength, protection, and coolness, instead of it being a chore or a bother.”

- George



Empower people to be able to accomplish what you are asking.

- ✓✓ **Make it easy for people to act. Include tools and resources that help your audience to make the change that needs to happen.**
- ✓✓ **Create empowering content. If your audience feels like their actions will have an impact, they are more likely to do them.**

Case Study

Centering What YOU can do to protect your community.

It was essential that our audience felt empowered to change the situation and make a difference in their community. To begin, we focused on one simple, easy to do action: wearing a mask. Mask-wearing had been thought of as a sign of distrust (in that it could imply that the other person was infectious). We wanted to shift that narrative, showing that mask-wearing was a way to protect your community and show care for the the people you loved. Later we expanded to other behaviors, like physical-distancing and getting vaccinated.

“Young people have the power to lead, protect, and serve their families and communities to keep them safe. In Khayelitsha they are invested in protecting the older people in their communities. We brought young people into the conversation and let them dictate the message. We amplified their voices and ideas when creating messages about what protective measures people should follow and why. The campaign was about celebrating young people who are showing leadership and acting as agents of their own change: ‘I’m doing it for you and doing it for the ones I love’.”

- George

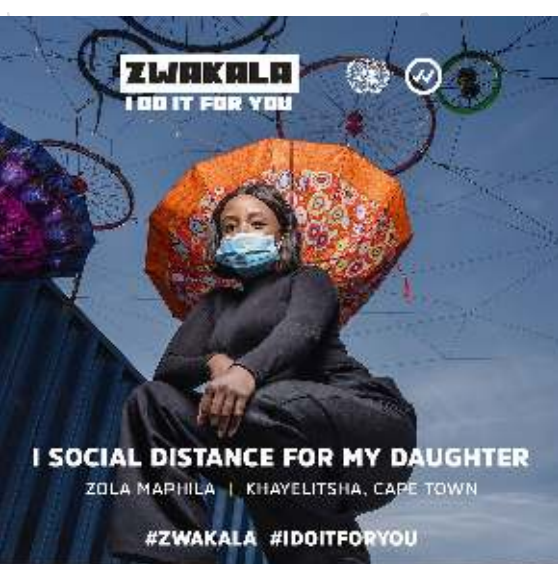


Impact

The success of the Zwakala campaign led the South African Government and partners like UNICEF to adopt its model. It was expanded nationally in South Africa, with a messaging focus on vaccine confidence and uptake. The campaign tool-kit we created for our partners, including the United Nations' Information Centres, has allowed them to adopt the model for campaigns in other regions. Our current campaign in Kenya is also following this model, in partnership with the Kenya Ministry of Health.

“A lot of campaigning focuses on celebrities, high profile influencers, and general audiences. They don’t always explore the power of specifically targeted campaigns that use micro-influencers and community champions as the primary voices. The success of this campaign really showed the power of collaboration and working at a very local level before scaling. Always land in a small place, work with the local community to test your idea, and let it grow.”

- George



Common Mistakes and How to Avoid Them

✓✓ Only engaging with high profile influencers

- ✓✓ Community leaders and micro-influencers with small, but loyal and active followings, can be more impactful on their audiences than influencers with national and international profiles.

✓✓ Increasing risk perception too much

- ✓✓ Identifying risks is often an important part of motivating people to act. But, if a risk feels unavoidable or outside of their control, they may feel that they can't do anything and ignore the message.

✓✓ Not including a clear call to action or providing resources to support audiences taking action

- ✓✓ It is important that people know what they need to do and are equipped to do it. Make sure you are clear about what you are asking them to do, and offer guidance and tools to help them along the way.