Pre-testing Communication Materials:
Some Quick Tips!

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Why Pre-test?

- You are not the target market!
- Pre-testing allows you to ensure your campaign products are understood, attractive, acceptable, identifiable and persuasive by/to your target audiences.
- You also gain great insights for future campaign development.
Who Should Pre-test?

- Ideally, a third party research agency (ad agency may not be the most impartial body).
- Qualifications: experience in conducting and analyzing focus group discussions (FGD) – moderator should be as senior as possible.
- Once selected, research agency (including fieldwork team) should be fully briefed on campaign objectives and materials.
What To Pre-Test?

- All important campaign materials need to be pre-tested, including slogans, taglines, logos.
- For mass media, TV commercial (TVC) should be pre-tested first given that it is the anchor. Then radio, poster, etc. Promotional items need not be pre-tested unless you want target audiences to indicate preferences.
- Ideally, you should ask ad agency to generate 2-3 concepts or different approaches to pre-test.
**What To Pre-Test? (2)**

- **Materials should mimic as closely as possible the intended finished product:**
  - For TVCs, if rough cut is not available, ask agency to produce “animatics” which is a series of still shots with a voice over reprising the main frames from the story board.
  - Avoid having the focus group moderator read the script as there is a risk of bias in over-explaining what is going on or not reproducing it faithfully.
- **Consider doing a dry/test run with research agency before proceeding with the full study.**
Pre-test Audiences

- Materials should be pre-tested with target audiences as defined in creative brief.
- Recruitment should follow standard FGD procedures and guidelines.
- Other audiences should also be included as needed (e.g., Stakeholders) – research objectives will need to be adapted. For example, in Cambodia, HIV+ people were recruited to get their reaction to a TVC aimed at encouraging sexually active men to get tested.
5 Key Research Questions

- Pre-testing ≠ testing impact!
- Rather, pre-testing explores the 5 following research questions:
  - Comprehension
  - Attractiveness
  - Acceptability
  - Identification
  - Persuasion.
Comprehension

- Are the concepts, materials, copy understood by the target audience? In other words, what is the take-away?
- Need to get spontaneous then assisted comprehension. For longer products (eg. Videos), more time may be needed for this.

Illustrative FGD questions:
- After seeing this storyboard, please describe what you have just seen and heard. Please describe how you understand the flow of the story.
  - **Probe:** What are the characters doing?
- What are the key messages conveyed by the storyboard? What do you think the advertisement is all about? What in the storyboard makes you say that?
- What is the storyboard asking/telling you to do?
- What is the problem that is addressed in the TV storyboard?
  - **Probe:** What problem do the characters face? What about the solution?
- Is the conversation in the storyboard clear and understandable to you? If not, what change do you want to make?
- Is there anything that is confusing in the storyboard? Please specify and explain why it is not clear. How would you change it to make it clear?
Attractiveness

- Is the concept/storyboard attractive to the target audience?
- Illustrative FGD questions:
  - Is the storyboard interesting and attractive to you?
  - **Probe:** Is the background attractive? Why? Is the script interesting what makes you say that? Do you like the characters? Do you find the story to be creative and engaging? (Make sure to cover all aspects of the storyboard)
  - Which part of the advertisement strikes you the most? What message caught your attention? Why?
  - Was there something in the storyboard that had an impact on you? Please describe this.
  - In terms of the characters in the TV storyboard, who among them caught your attention? Why did they catch your attention? Are they realistic?
  - Aside from the characters, have you seen anything else in the storyboard that is attractive to you? Please describe this.
  - If this storyboard was shown to people living in your household, do you think they would find it interesting and attractive? Why or why not? What aspects would they find attractive or interesting?
Acceptability

- Does the target audience identify itself with the concept/ad? Who does it think is more concerned by it?

Illustrative FGD questions:

- What do you like most about this TV storyboard? Why do you like it?
- **Probe:** Please specify with reasons.
- Is there anything you dislike about this TV storyboard? What do you dislike, and why?
- **Probe:** Please specify with reasons.
- Is there anything about the TV storyboard that is not acceptable to you or people in your community? What is not acceptable and why?
- What about the advantages and disadvantages of the product/proposed behavior/solution, were these conveyed by the TV storyboard?
Identification

Does the target audience identify itself with the concept/ad? Who does it think is more concerned by it?

Illustrative FGD questions: Who are the main characters in this storyboard? Where are they? What do they do? Who do they look like? Please describe them.

- **Probes:** Who are they similar to in reality?
- Did anything in the storyboard resemble someone or anything in your community where you live? Why did you say that?
- Who do you think will be interested in this storyboard?
- **Probes:** Who are they? In what ways will this storyboard be interesting to them?
- While seeing the storyboard, who do you think of? Could you see yourself as one of the characters?
- **Probes:** Could this story happen to you?
Persuasion

- How convincing is the storyboard/concept to the target audience?

Illustrative FGD questions:
- What are your reactions to the messages in the storyboard?
- After seeing this storyboard, will you change your behavior? What will you do differently?
- Would you tell people you know about what you saw in this storyboard? What message would you tell them?
- In your opinion, how do you think your friends would react to this storyboard? Why?
- How do you think people in your community will react to this storyboard? What are they likely to do?
- In terms of overall appeal, do you think people are likely to do XXXX after seeing this ad?
- **Probe:** Why? What about you, yourself?
Typical FGD Flow

- Warm-up.
- For each concept/material:
  - Comprehension
  - Attractiveness
  - Acceptability
  - Identification
  - Persuasion.
- Suggestions from participants.
- Wrap-up/closing.
Common Pitfalls To Avoid

- Inadequate pre-test materials.
  - **Solution:** do dry run to test the pre-test materials!

- Inadequate probing by FGD moderators.
  - **Solutions:** brief the entire team thoroughly, highlighting specific areas where you anticipate potential issues, do dry run and get preliminary feedback prior to proceeding with full study, insist that team leader at research agency supervise FGD moderators closely.

- Inadequate analysis.
  - **Solution:** request research agency for mock-analysis of 1 group before proceeding to full study.
Key Outputs From Pre-test Research

- Research agency should produce the following:
  - Assessment of how each concept/material did on the 5 research questions.
  - Identification of the “winning” concept (based on above, if 2-3 concepts are tested).
  - “Problem areas” that need to be addressed in revisions and recommendations as to how to modify them.
How To Manage Pre-test Results

- Pre-testing ≠ democratic election!
- Just because something did not test well does NOT mean you have to change it but it does mean you need to re-assess it.
  - Example: you are doing a TVC which aims to change social norms about HWWS. To this end, the TVC uses positive role-modeling and shows caretakers washing their hands before feeding child using chop-sticks. The pre-test reveals that target audience views this as unrealistic. Does this mean you need to change this? No! You are trying to show a “better world” and lack of realism may be acceptable in this case.

- Conversely, just because the materials tested well does not mean you should go ahead!
  - Other factors (eg. Stakeholder perceptions, possible duplication with other campaigns, gender inequities, etc.) need to be taken into consideration.
**How To Manage Pre-test Results (2)**

- Review research findings internally and decide what needs to be addressed. List “problem spots”.
- Meet with ad agency to discuss possible ways to address these changes. Be involved in identifying possible solutions. Ad agencies can be defensive and resist revisions but continue to dialogue!
- Review all changes against creative brief!
- Once revised, a new round of pre-testing may be necessary if significant changes were made. However, scope of research questions can be diminished (eg. Perhaps attractiveness has been sufficiently covered).
Good luck!!!

Remember, pre-testing can be a tremendous learning opportunity so get involved!!!