Reviewer's report

Title: Exposure, reach and impact of a mass media campaign targeting sexual health amongst Scottish men who have sex with men: a pragmatic outcome evaluation

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Reviewer: Jesse Clark

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The manuscript presents what is described as a “pragmatic” approach to analysis of the reach and influence of a HIV prevention/sexual health promotion campaign for MSM in Glasgow, Scotland. The authors are open about the deficiencies and limitations of their post-test analysis of a health promotion intervention in which they were not part of the development process. However, given the large amount of space in the Introduction and Discussion sections devoted to discussing the importance of theory-based mass media interventions as well as the integration of mass media education with other components of a comprehensive HIV prevention strategy, and the limitations of non-RCT study designs in previous evaluations, it is odd that the research presented does not incorporate any of these issues.

Major Compulsory Revisions

1) Specifically, additional information on the MYPIC intervention itself is needed. As presented, the intervention appears to consist of posters displaying men interacting in sexual and non-sexual situations accompanied by a number (the reason for which is not explained), the logo, and the website for the intervention. Even though the authors were not involved in developing the intervention, additional detail about what was included (and, ideally, what the theoretical principles guiding the campaign) would be important.

2) The sampling strategy for the evaluation of the campaign is questionable in terms of its representability for the larger community. Although delivery of the campaign was segmented according to “gay scene” and “non-gay scene” venues, only gay bars were used to recruit participants in the evaluation. In addition, the Time Location Sampling methods used do not appear to be based on a random selection process (e.g., random selection of Venue-Date-Time units based on a comprehensive survey of MSM/TW-associated sites). The fact that all attendees at the venue in the given recruitment time frame further limits generalizability.

3) The authors use multiple measures of intervention exposure (as well as of sexual risk behavior), which is helpful in providing a nuanced understanding of exposure. However, there could be more discussion of the different levels of exposure in the Discussion section. In particular, the fact that only 7% of respondents were able to name the campaign unprompted and 34% recognized
the campaign name or logo suggest a fairly low level of actual exposure in the community.

4) As the authors note, the cross-sectional post-test evaluation is limited in assessing causality of the association between the campaign and HIV/STI testing and sexual health behaviors among participants. It would help to specify whether the campaign included display of posters in HIV/STI clinics and other HIV testing sites. If so, the association between recent HIV testing and campaign exposure could be further undermined. The authors recognized this limitation and frame it as part of a pragmatic approach to evaluation in the context of limited funding resources, but additional consideration should be given to how much these limitations influence the ability to accurately evaluate mass media campaigns, and how to potentially overcome these limitations.

**Level of interest:** An article whose findings are important to those with closely related research interests

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests