



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Entertainment, Storytelling & Social Change in Global Poverty

An Impact Evaluation of *Stand Up Planet*
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By **Caty Borum Chattoo**,
Center for Media & Social Impact, American University
with **Dan Reines & Tim Talley, SmithGeiger, LLC**

Global Poverty & Storytelling

As 1.2 billion people around the world continue to live in extreme poverty – an income level of about one dollar a day¹ – finding ways to attract public attention and support efforts to alleviate the problem is crucial. Preventable illnesses like malaria and HIV/AIDS, along with malnutrition, a lack of access to clean water, and poor sanitation, collectively contribute to the deaths of thousands of children every day. This dismal status quo poses challenges for the resources, peace and security for all nations, not only those impacted directly by disproportionate levels of illness, malnutrition and lack of opportunity.²

In a world that recently passed the 7-billion population threshold,³ extreme poverty is a challenge with complicated long-term solutions, but one with progress and hope on the horizon. In the nearly 15 years since the United Nations adopted the Millennium Development Goals, the collaborative efforts of a global development ecosystem – wealthy donor countries like the United States, local governments, international humanitarian organizations, in-country NGOs and social service agencies, social entrepreneurs – have resulted in victories and innovations for the future. Can media storytelling help change audience perspectives about the daily lives of people living in poverty around the world? How can the message be communicated to young people and those who don't already care about these issues – reaching beyond the choir? What kinds of storytelling can engage U.S. audiences and encourage their interest and concern – and even actions? Understanding the role and impact of storytelling and audience engagement is essential for those

working to change the dire status quo. The purpose of this research is to understand how audiences are engaged, motivated and changed – in terms of their knowledge, attitudes and behaviors about global health and poverty – after watching an hour-long comedic travelogue documentary TV program about the topic, *Stand Up Planet*. Additionally, we endeavor to learn how perceptions of this complex social issue may be different for viewers who watch entertaining, light-hearted storytelling that balances facts with comedy (*Stand Up Planet*), compared with a sober journalistic format (*The End Game*) on related topics.

Our aim is to learn how audiences engage with the topic of global poverty, but also to provide broader insights for individuals and groups who endeavor to create social change through storytelling.

Methodology in Brief

- Data-gathering phase: September 2014
- Pre- & Post-Viewing Online Survey (Recruited Screening): 1,258 U.S. respondents
- Dial Testing: Minute-by-minute audience engagement assessment while watching
- Moderated Chats: Follow-up online chats with 20 respondents

Summary of Key Findings

***Stand Up Planet* – comedy, entertainment, not didactic – is effective in encouraging the audience to care more about global health & poverty.**

The overwhelming majority of people who watch *Stand Up Planet* feel it is a high-quality show, achieving an unusual balance as both “informative” and “interesting.” Of all program elements, they enjoy both the comedic tone and meeting the comics from around the world, as well as learning about the groups and people making a difference in global poverty. After watching, viewers are significantly more likely to say they are aware of, and care more about, “the daily lives of people living in poor countries,” not only about the specific global development topics (HIV and sanitation) in the show. In other words, they are not focused solely on the instructional elements of the program, but on the much more expansive idea of caring about lives lived around the world – a connection with empathy and attitude shift that may be valuable over time. After watching, they are also significantly more likely to believe in their own ability, along with foreign aid from the U.S. government, to act as effective agents for change.

“Caring more” may be more important than “learning more” in changing attitudes & actions.

When it comes to encouraging audiences to care about a social issue like global poverty, a format that balances entertainment with facts may be more effective than explanatory, serious delivery of information alone. Both shows make people think, but *Stand Up Planet* makes them *care*, and *The End Game* helps them *learn* to a greater degree. Equal numbers of *Stand Up Planet* viewers experience happiness and sadness while watching, and they see the show as a balanced mix of entertaining and informative; they are more likely watch it on their own and take a range of higher-commitment social actions (volunteering, voting, contacting an elected official, attending an event) than those who watch *The End Game*. Viewers who watch *The End Game* experience sadness while watching, they learn more about the topics and feel that the show is high-quality and informative; they feel it gave them a much better understanding of an important social issue. But they are less likely to watch it on their own or take higher-level social actions than the comedy-focused show.

Comedy is more effective than a sober narrative tone in generating awareness, concern, empathy and intended action on global poverty.

As a piece of entertainment, *Stand Up Planet* works. But importantly, the documentary also succeeds as a motivator of attitudes and intended action, in large part because of the comedic tone. On all interested measures – awareness, concern and intended action around global poverty – *Stand Up Planet* is the top achiever; but *The End Game* viewers clearly say they learned more. Learning is not a driver for attitude and behavior change in this study – it’s all about awareness and caring. Given that the underlying meaning of “entertaining” as it applies to *Stand Up Planet* is comedy – as seen through advanced analysis – this can be extrapolated

as a finding about the power of entertainment and comedy vs. somber journalistic storytelling about global poverty.

Light-hearted storytelling is key in engaging “Persuadables” – not just preaching to “Supporters” who already care.

Although Supporters – those who already care about global poverty – are engaged and willing to take action after watching *Stand Up Planet*, Persuadables, who don’t already care, are significantly more likely to change their attitudes, interest and intent to take action around global poverty after watching. After watching *Stand Up Planet*, Persuadables see a range of particular issues in global health and poverty as significantly more important, with the highest gain in connecting with “the daily lives of people living in poor countries.” After watching *Stand Up Planet*, Persuadables’ belief in the value of U.S. foreign aid to help poor countries increases by a significant degree, as does their own sense self-efficacy and that of NGOs to help. Given that dial testing revealed no perceptible partisan difference in engagement with the show, we could surmise that global poverty and health is not a social issue that has yet been captured by the ideological culture wars – and thus, the Persuadables are still persuadable.

The comedy format particularly connects with its likely target – young people.

Stand Up Planet’s entertainment and comedy format connects with young people and persuades them to share with others. Although the broad audience who watches *Stand Up Planet* (aged 18-49) agrees the show is memorable, unique and generally engaging, young people (aged 18-24) are significantly more likely than older viewers (aged 45-49) to find *Stand Up Planet* compelling, entertaining, funny and unique. They are also significantly more likely than the older audience to share information about the show with others.

Content that is accessible and engaging is the key to motivating action – and offers valuable insight for marketing storytelling designed to inform through entertainment.

All audiences – the general audience, young people, and even those not yet reached by global poverty and health information – find *Stand Up Planet* to be accessible, something they would watch on their own, and motivating for action. In the choice between overt, didactic fact-offering content vs. content that may focus on empathetic portraits, entertainment (and even comedy), the unexpected learning of entertainment content may be the more strategic choice – *if* motivating attitudes and action is the goal (which is not the objective for all storytelling projects on this topic). Marketing this kind of project can be valuable given its likely appeal to a broader audience (beyond the choir), thus increasing its likely reach.

Regardless of the emotion experienced while watching, a strong level of “involvement” in a story connects with social action.

A strongly-held emotion is highly motivating, whether it's sadness or happiness or fear. But narrative involvement (level of transportation into the story)⁴ is the key, given that it may break down cognitive barriers that bolster viewers' resistance to argument or persuasion. But what is the major difference between the two shows that could explain why it moved viewers to a greater degree in attitudes (awareness and caring) and likely actions? In *Stand Up Planet*, the difference is the entertainment value, which is all about the comedy.

Facts wrapped in entertainment and comedy may lead to greater concern for people living in poverty.

In several areas, viewers' changes in interest, attitudes and concern about global poverty from pre-viewing to post-viewing are significantly different for *Stand Up Planet* compared to *The End Game*.

- Areas in which the audience shift before and after watching is significantly larger for those who watched *Stand Up Planet*:
 - An understanding of issues around improving health, education, and economic opportunity for the world's poorest people
 - An understanding of the daily lives of people living in poor countries
 - The perceived importance of HIV prevention
 - The perceived importance of sanitation-related diseases
 - The perceived importance of women's issues and gender equality around the world
- Areas in which the audience shift before and after watching is significantly larger for those who watched *The End Game*:
 - A belief in the efficacy of NGOs as an agent for change
 - An understanding of the impact of malaria on the lives of people living in poor countries

Mixing entertaining stories with facts keeps the audience engaged in a tough topic.

In dial testing to examine the audience's involvement and assessment show of the show as “compelling,” the mix of facts and entertainment in *Stand Up Planet* show a consistent engagement pattern; viewers indicate that they find the scenes heavy with facts to be less “compelling” than the purely entertaining moments, but the combination keeps viewers paying attention throughout the entire program.

Viewers are more likely to choose entertainment like *Stand Up Planet* than a sober journalistic treatment like *The End Game* – suggesting an impactful way of reaching new audiences with a tough topic.

If the goal of global development storytelling is to share insights and change perspectives about people living the poorest countries around the world with audiences who are not already thinking about the issue, then entertainment that creates a connection between “us” (the U.S. and other wealthy donor countries) and “them” (those working or living in poverty in faraway places) offers a powerful tool. Viewers of *Stand Up Planet* are significantly more likely than viewers of *The End Game* to identify strongly with a character in the show, to find the events relevant to their daily lives – and, most importantly, to say it was a show they would “watch by choice.”

Online Chat: Select Quotes

STAND UP PLANET VIEWER CHAT

On what works about *Stand Up Planet* overall:

It highlighted so many of the chronic problems that the vast majority of the world's people face, yet it did so in a positive spirit by showing how much individuals who really set their minds to improving the situation can accomplish.

- Male, 25 to 34

There was not anything really that I did not like which is why I gave it the highest rating possible. Kudos to the team that put it together!

- Male, 45 to 49 (*and yes, this was a real quote. I thought you might like to read it.*)

On the value of comedy in *Stand Up Planet*:

I enjoyed how they presented the content with a comedic tone, while still giving viewers some valuable information. It kept the hour-long program more engaging.

- Male, 18 to 24

Yes, at first I thought that stand up comedy mixed with how people live in other countries and their rough life was not a good idea, but then it makes sense and it actually worked! Not everybody will agree with it but I think its awesome!

- Female, 25 to 34

On whether they would watch *Stand Up Planet* outside of a test setting:

If I knew what it entailed, I would probably watch it as it carries an inspiring message and so many intricate personal stories/cultural scenes/striking information. Human interest stories with a global component tend to keep my attention rather nicely, and who doesn't love comedy?

- Male, 25 to 34

If I came across it or it was recommended I would definitely watch it. I feel like it should be more widely spread, because I had never heard of it till now. One specific outlet where I know I would have watched it after hearing about it is The Daily Show with Jon Stewart. He tends to bring in guests during his last segment that are vocal about a specific issue. In the past I have read books, done more research or gotten involved somehow. And the content from the film fits the style and format of the show. I just personally think it would be a good fit from this film and a great way to give it more exposure, especially to the audience the film seemed to be trying to target, a younger more proactive one.

- Male, 18 to 24

On how *Stand Up Planet* changes minds:

I've never seen a show like this where you can change so many lives by doing stand up comedy. This show changed my mind about comedy and about all the issues concerning India and other countries!

- *Female, 25 to 34*

I'm the kind of person that focuses more on the issues in her country, and even though you know people are having a rough time in other countries right now in every possible way, you don't know how deep it is until you see it in shows like this. You never really understand about global poverty until you see shows like this. The children dying from preventable illnesses most of the time because of something as simple as not having clean water.

- *Female, 25 to 34*

I liked the different comedians and seeing different parts of the world. It helps one to understand the problems that other parts of the world are going through. Seeing the areas in India where people go to the bathroom right on the ground was eye-opening.

- *Male, 35 to 44*

On what viewers learn from *Stand Up Planet*:

I did not know the statistics about India. I knew there were slums right near big cities, but not of 54% of people having to "sh*t" outside because of an inadequate amount of toilets and that there are 1,600 children dying because of the sanitation issues. Also I honestly did not know circumcision helped reduce the risk of HIV. But as far as the complete disparity in poverty levels and actually witnessing it first-hand, that wasn't new to me.

- *Male, 18 to 24*

I learned more a lot from the sanitation portions and HIV portions. I did not know that 54% percent of India used the restroom outside or that circumcision helped prevent HIV. The jokes about MTV cribs in the small container home and how life was like for Mpho (not sure if I spelled that correctly) as a kid after the apartheid, they were enjoyable and insightful as well.

- *Male, 18 to 24*

[I learned about] the poverty issues that people have to deal with in other countries. I didn't realize it was so bad, especially for girls and women.

- *Female, 25 to 34*

I learned that 40% of India lives in poverty. Also that getting a circumcision reduces the chances of contracting HIV in South Africa.

- *Male, 25 to 34*

On whether they would share information about *Stand Up Planet*:

But in terms of talking about it with friends and family, yes. I will definitely be sharing this film, if possible, with them. I will also most likely do some research on companies supporting these world issues and promote them more.

- *Male, 18 to 24*

The issues are important to me, but I don't know how interested my "social media friends" would be in me posting that. I usually just put up family pics.

- *Female, 25 to 34*

On whether they would take action:

Yes, because when people have more knowledge about the situation, they will help in any way they can. Donating, blogging, talking about it through social media and of course people will hear it, talk to their friends and help in any way they can.

- *Female, 25 to 34*

I would probably take it upon myself more to try to find new ways to create opportunities to help those in need...whether it's through donations of time, money, food, or whatever was needed.

- *Male, 25-34*

On how *Stand Up Planet* helps people understand what they share in common with people in far-off places:

It's a show about a comic who is interested in world issues and wants to tell the story of comics from other countries. Basically helps us to understand other cultures and how in the end, we are all alike. ... We all face issues that challenge us, it's how we persevere that makes us the same.

- *Female, 35 to 44*

I liked seeing the conditions in the other countries and how they lived so I could relate and understand the situation.

- *Female, 35 to 44*

Well, even though I'm going through some rough times, I would say it's just an economical matter. These people are having more difficult issues for sure than just the economical factor. I actually feel blessed after watching the video.

- *Female, 35 to 44*

On what other social issues they would like to see get the *Stand Up Planet* treatment:

If there were other similar programs, the first one that pops into mind is women's rights in other countries. I know it was touched on in this one, but only briefly in comparison to the sanitation, HIV and apartheid issues. Maybe a sequel with female comedians from Middle Eastern countries, where women a beginning to have more of a say. Included with it could be more information on the hunger issues affecting the world too.

- Male, 18 to 24

There are so many things that could be addressed that are major problems for the majority of the world's population: health problems brought about by poverty, lack of education, poor employment prospects, domestic violence, discrimination against women or religious and ethnic minorities, government corruption...it's tough to focus on just one.

- Male, 25 to 34

Topics like the importance of education, women's way of life in poorer countries, access to sanitation, infrastructure and the like.

- Male, 45 to 49

Advice for *Stand Up Planet* producers:

I'd like to see them travel to even more remote places on another episode. Places that I dont know much about. I like to learn. Mexico or more places in the Middle East. Each destination differs.

- Female, 25 to 34

I would just say there needs to be more exposure of this [show], through social media and other outlets.

- Male, 18 to 24

Have a little more of the stand up in the show, I love that!

- Female, 25 to 34

THE END GAME VIEWER CHAT

On what works in *The End Game*:

This is the type of documentary I love to watch. It made me sad and happy all at the same time. I wish there was something that could be done... I get tired of watching all the nonsense on TV and this show is something I can watch with the family and also learn at the same time. I love shows like that.

- Female, 25 to 34

On the difficulty of watching *The End Game*:

The scenes that depicted the children suffering were difficult to watch, particularly the scene where the child, whom we previously saw receiving treatment, died and we saw him covered with the blanket.

- *Female, 18 to 24*

I wouldn't really say boring but the environment and the issue is a bit depressing.

- *Male, 25 to 34*

I did not like to see the children suffering and the child that was shown that died, but I also know that this is the reality of poor countries and awareness of this is everything in the battle to save lives.

- *Female, 35 to 44*

Guest: I would like to have seen the children and their families after they went home. I would have liked to share in their home life and share some of their happiness as well as I shared their sadness and despair while sick and fighting for their lives.

- *Female, 35 to 44*

***The End Game* is a show that viewers would watch – but maybe not often (or not really).**

Not every day, perhaps, but I like to watch documentary films of this type at least a few times a month... I like to watch heavy material in a certain amount of moderation so that I do not get too emotionally upset.

- *Female, 18 to 24*

Yes [I would watch] because I would like to show my kids and family how other people live in other countries to show that some have it better than others and that we should be thankful for what we have because some people don't have much.

- *Female, 25 to 34*

On what they learn from watching *The End Game*:

I learned how deadly malaria can be and I did not know that mosquitoes carry the disease.

- *Female, 35 to 44*

On what they would do next (mostly talking about the film):

If presented with a way, even if small, to make a difference I know that I will be inclined to do so.

- *Female, 35 to 44*

I usually don't address issues like this on social media but I would use word of mouth to talk about it with people. I think some topics are way too serious for social media where people can be cruel and indifferent.

- *Female, 35 to 44*

On how *The End Game* viewers relate (or don't relate) with the people in the film:

Life right now is tough for everyone. We all have this in common. We all have different diseases popping up every day. So in return, we are all the same. No different.

- *Female, 25 to 34*

I think I'm living in luxury compared to their situation but there are some homeless people in the U.S. dealing with similar situations as well.

- *Female, 45 to 49*

I don't have anything in common, two very different aspects of living.

- *Male, 25 to 34*

End Notes

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3. United Nations News Centre. (October 31, 2011). As world passes 7 billion milestone, UN urges action to meet key challenges. <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=40257>
4. Green, M. C., & Brock, T.C. (2000). The role of transportation in the persuasiveness of public narratives. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, Vol. 79, No. 5: 701-721.