From the Studio to the Street:
Cultivating Democratic Norms in Uganda

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Communication interventions can make valuable contributions to the democratic development of citizens. This article reports on a nongovernmental organization's (NGO's) effort to leverage a television rap news program in Uganda to strengthen viewers' democratic norms. Two different approaches addressing government failures and malfeasance are tested with an experiment conducted in six villages outside of Kampala. Results indicate that soft news segments can influence viewers' perceived democratic norms and shape downstream behaviors as well. Beneficial effects were strongest when participants were exposed to stories that featured relatable citizens demonstrating desirable democratic attitudes and behaviors. Treatment effects were most pronounced among less politically sophisticated participants. Results suggest that media interventions are most likely to change perceived norms when they employ messages that depict individuals modeling the desired norms. Second, results show that entertainment news can be a genre used for communication interventions that employ theoretically grounded messages. These lessons are likely both transferable to interventions in other contexts.

Keywords: soft news, democratic norms, entertainment-education, Africa, global communication

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In the academy and beyond, a new wave of pro-democracy interventions centered on cultivating democratic norms and values is developing (Gerber & Rogers, 2009; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Citizens in democracies must believe in the power of the citizenry for self-rule to flourish (Scholte, 2002). In established democracies, a web of infrastructure that develops and reinforces the necessary democratic norms and values is in place: civics courses, youth councils, get-out-the-vote drives, and so on. Fledgling democracies face a host of challenges; often, they are required to develop entirely new electoral, constitutional, and legislative processes while asserting legitimacy and maintaining peace. Fostering democratic norms and values in these contexts often falls to foreign governments and NGOs that enter nascent democracies with the intention of building citizens' capacity for self-rule (Castells, 2008).

This article reports on one NGO's effort to use a nationally broadcast television rap news program, *Newz Beat*, to support the development of democratic norms among viewers in Uganda. Motivated by a burgeoning body of research on perceived norms (Gottlieb, 2016; McNally, 2016), the program's producers developed two different approaches to crafting news stories about corruption and governance. Drawing on Tankard and Paluck's (2016) exploration of norm perception as a vehicle for social change, these formulations employ two discrete norm-modeling strategies. Together, these tactics are an attempt to develop a viable norm-change strategy that works within the context of an entertainment news program (as opposed to the serial dramas more often utilized in related interventions). In this article, the efficacy of these story types is assessed with a two-wave experiment conducted in six villages outside of Kampala.

Overall, experimental results indicate that *Newz Beat* segments can influence viewers' perceived democratic norms and potentially shape downstream behaviors. Beneficial effects were strongest when participants were exposed to news stories that featured relatable citizens who demonstrated desirable democratic attitudes and behaviors. The second messaging approach—which relied upon institutional signals—was not as successful. In addition, treatment effects were more pronounced among less politically sophisticated participants. Taking a wide view, findings from this study support the conclusion that media interventions are most likely to change perceived norms when they employ messages that depict individuals modeling the desired norms. Second, the results show that entertainment news can be a genre used for communication interventions that employ theoretically grounded messages. These lessons are likely both transferable to interventions in other contexts and related to other, disparate topics.

Newz Beat and Corruption Coverage in Uganda

Newz Beat is a weekly rap news program written, directed, edited, and performed by a team of Ugandans and broadcast nationally in both English and Luganda on NTV, the largest commercial terrestrial and satellite network in the nation. The show airs several times each Saturday and Sunday and, according to research provided by GeoPoll and Kantar Media, it attracts an audience of two to three million viewers weekly. In a typical episode, a team of "rap-porters" (or "news-icians") cover three to five diverse topics of potential interest to viewers in segments that are roughly 45–120 seconds long. For example, a recent episode reported on the adoption of a new sex-ed curriculum by the Ugandan government, the nation's poor road safety, a 93-year-old Uganda's efforts to preserve a disappearing tribal culture and language, and the rise of Sandal-Man—a homegrown Senegalese superhero. Since 2014, several hundred episodes have been produced.

Newz Beat's format and content are intended to appeal to the world's second youngest population (median age: 15.7) so that people who may not be interested in traditional news outlets have an option that serves them (Central Intelligence Agency, 2017). The program is produced by Peripheral Vision International (PVI), an NGO that uses communication messages to support the health, safety, and prosperity of Ugandans. PVI has a mix of Ugandan and Western staffers engaged in all aspects of its work: creative, administrative, and research. Its funding comes from an array of foundation, government, and NGO partners. PVI's leadership is involved with *Newz Beat* at a high level (negotiating the terms of its broadcast, for example) but the program's staff has considerable autonomy to select and craft stories for each episode.

Uganda is nominally a democracy but, in practice, it has been ruled by Yoweri Museveni for more than 30 years, and elections are often marred by vote-selling as well as outright fraud (Kavuma, 2016; Segawa, 2016). Though there is ostensibly free speech in Uganda, in practice, those who criticize the government face censorship or potentially worse outcomes (Kwon & Burnett, 2016). While taking into account this risk, *Newz Beat's* production team seeks to broaden the array of information available to Ugandans in order to empower them as citizens so that they are better positioned to take action on important concerns. For example, corruption is a persistent and pressing issue in Uganda that festers at the root of many other problems (Human Rights Watch, 2013). Direct coverage of corruption is fraught with peril for journalists, and it may accidentally amplify public cynicism (Chong, De La O, Karlan, & Wantchekon, 2015; Faller, 2015). But not only does corruption rob the public of just and functional governance, it also undermines citizens' faith in democracy. As such, it is a critical matter that warrants publicity.

Emboldened in part by *Newz Beat's* format (which some may perceive as less serious or threatening), the program's producers sought productive ways to cover corruption and other governance failures. Ideally, successful examples of such coverage will increase viewers' democratic capacity so that they are better able to advocate for their own interests. Striking the right balance in challenging the status quo without triggering cynicism, being censored, or having unintended consequences is a challenge (Shaker & Falzone, 2015). This study is an examination of the efficacy of a pair of attempts to create story templates that nurture democratic norms, thus empowering citizens, without yielding unwanted outcomes.

Cultivating Citizens' Perceived Democratic Norms

Campaigns designed to cultivate democratic norms hinge on the idea that citizens, not groups or institutions, are the basis of democracy. In other words, the beliefs of individuals must be addressed before they are likely to become effective participants in self-rule. For example, if people believe that voting is useful and important, they are more likely to vote. One way to validate a behavior like voting is to show that other, similar people vote (demonstrating a descriptive norm) or that others believe that voting is important (an injunctive norm). When individuals perceive voting to be normal and valued, they will be more likely to vote. In this way, nurturing positive perceptions of democratic norms creates the foundation for a participatory culture to grow from the bottom-up.

        The model for effecting social change by shifting perceived norms is best articulated in the recent work of Elizabeth Paluck (Paluck, 2009b; Tankard & Paluck, 2016). Prior research shows that it is difficult to alter individuals' personal attitudes with media messages, but it also indicates that mass media are adept at conveying what other people think and do (Mutz, 1998). Leveraging this strength, Paluck melds elements from entertainment–education research (Singhal & Rogers, 1999; Singhal, Wang, & Rogers, 2013) with lessons from psychology (Cialdini et al., 2006; Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004) to craft narrative entertainment (often in the form of serialized radio dramas) that specifically includes the presentation of normative information. Results from a series of her experiments (several of which took place in sub-Saharan Africa) indicate that a shift in perceived norms can presage change in individuals' attitudes and behaviors (Paluck, 2009a; Paluck & Green, 2009). The promise of Paluck's approach is that it offers a subtle, yet powerful, avenue toward designing entertainment media that can trigger real change across audiences, contexts, and issues.

        Tankard and Paluck (2016) outline a pair of recommended approaches for communicating normative information that inform this project. First, they suggest that some people—social referents—exert outsized influence upon perceived norms held by members of the public. Social referents often derive their influence from the number and strength of their interpersonal ties—but they may also be individuals highlighted by mass media. A second way to shape perceived norms is by communicating institutional signals. Major institutions in society that are perceived as important and legitimate can validate beliefs or behaviors with their policies or actions (which are often covered by media). Beyond merely conveying information about other institutions, media, by selectively focusing on some topics and not others, affect the salience (and perhaps the perceived prevalence) of specific behaviors and beliefs.

        The theoretical underpinning of these two approaches to shaping norms is still being explicated. The influence of social referents is, in particular, tied to identification: greater identification leads to a stronger effect upon norms (Paluck, 2009a, 2009b). Identification with mediated portrayals is more likely to occur when the audience and the referents are similar and the depiction is perceived as realistic (Cohen, 2001; Moyer-Gusé, 2008). So, media texts that include referents (or characters) engaged in activities that resonate with the daily lives of the intended audience and that employ familiar archetypes—teacher, mother—can prompt the audience to relate to the mediated model. And, as Hopkins and Kahani-Hopkins (2004) contend, it may be possible to use discourse to construct commonality as a basis for identification. Though some research (Cohen & Hershman-Shitrit, 2017) explores whether psychological homophily between audience members and characters facilitates identification, it is not clear whether certain kinds of people are more or less likely to experience identification with mediated referents.

        Less theoretical clarity explains the mechanisms that dictate norms change following exposure to institutional signals. Tankard and Paluck (2016) suggest that audiences may presume that an institutional signal is rooted in some source of legitimate authority—elite opinion, popular will—and thus infer a normative lesson. Though there is some research regarding judicial decisions (Tyler & Jackson, 2014), the empirical basis for this causal chain is limited. Little is known about the antecedents of such a process: Are certain types of people more attuned to institutional signals? Do particular personality traits (or types) lead to differences in response to institutional signals? How do institutional signals interact with preexisting knowledge? These questions and others require further research.

Developing News Stories to Strengthen Democratic Norms

Norm-change campaigns often utilize serialized entertainment programming, but a growing body of literature on soft news in Western contexts (Baum, 2002; Hardy, Gottfried, Winneg, & Jamieson, 2014; Holbert, Hmielowski, Jain, Lather, & Morey, 2011) suggests that entertainment news can alter political knowledge, attitudes, and behavior. Transferring Tankard & Paluck's (2016) messaging guidelines from a narrative entertainment–education context, however, to an entertainment news program poses some challenges. To start, news production is marked by a number of constraints—factuality, timeliness, newsworthiness—that do not apply to fictional content. In particular, dealing with actual descriptive norms can be problematic for news because presentation of the real baseline—for example, corruption is pervasive and tolerated, dissent is dangerous and discouraged—may reinforce realities that are contrary to the desired outcome. Additionally, identification is typically thought to be more likely to develop with exposure to media from certain (entertainment) genres over longer periods of time (Cohen, 2001). Fictional content can gradually cultivate affective ties between the audience and characters that may not develop as naturally in the context of a news program. Though Cohen (2001, p. 250) asserts that identification may develop with people portrayed in the context of a news program, he argues that it "(a) is less likely and (b) would probably be manifested in different ways." Still, given the hybrid info-tainment nature of *Newz Beat*, there is flexibility in story-selection and framing that allows segments to be crafted in a manner that applies key principles from prior research focused on cultivating perceived democratic norms.

With this context in mind, researchers, PVI leadership, and *Newz Beat's* staff met and worked together to apply Paluck's guidelines to their story production. For the first (Citizen Heroes) approach, they designed a series of stories that focused on regular Africans who, in the course of their own lives, took a stand to make change within their own communities. The aim of Citizen Heroes segments is to shift perceived norms by showing relatable social referents in familiar roles who embody good citizenship behavior. For example, one such story focused on South African students who protested an increase in school fees—and succeeded in stopping it. A second story focused on an Angolan rapper who recorded protest songs about the misappropriation of natural resources (diamonds and gold) by elites in his country. These stories do not always address corruption directly. They do, even if corruption is a background matter, focus on the actions citizens can take to improve government responsiveness. In the second reporting approach (Institutional Response), international instances of government corruption are the subject—with special attention paid to institutional signaling. Here, legal punishment for examples of public graft is covered so that the rule of law is emphasized. For example, one story focused on the sentencing of Ehud Olmert, Israel's former prime minister, to six years in prison for taking about $150,000 in bribes while serving as the mayor of Jerusalem. Care was taken to select and cover incidents that depicted corruption at a relatively small scale to make the stories relatable to the Ugandan audience. Depending on the perceived legitimacy of the foreign institutions (courts and governments), the expectation is that Institutional Response stories that document the exposure, punishment, and accountability of those engaged in corruption can act as institutional signals to reject corruption (Tyler & Jackson, 2014).

Newz Beat's producers adopted these two strategies to cultivate good citizenship norms for several reasons. First, the two approaches were feasible ways to depict corruption (and responses to it) within the context of a restrictive speech environment. Second, stories created within these frameworks would be

believable for viewers and would jibe with their perceived realities. (On the other hand, stories that attempted to provide summary information that portrayed corruption as aberrant in Uganda would have flown in the face of viewers' personal experiences.) Third, because the program is broadcast and not narrowly targeted, producers wanted to explore multiple message strategies to increase the likelihood that the program would resonate with disparate segments within the audience.

More specifically, there is a wide disparity in political sophistication in Uganda, and the two story types were designed accordingly. Many Ugandans (especially near the capital of Kampala) are multilingual and have completed university programs, but others throughout the nation have not had similar access to education. Less sophisticated viewers may not have the preexisting civic and political context to connect coverage of institutional signals denouncing corruption to democratic norms. In fact, for many Ugandans, even the basic concepts related to democratic governance are still vague and remote. Given this knowledge deficit, Citizen Heroes segments were designed to encourage identification with accessible social referents doing plausible things—i.e., students protesting for lower school fees—that embody positive democratic norms but do not require much prior knowledge to comprehend. Less sophisticated viewers should be able to understand these stories and, ideally, more sophisticated viewers may also identify with these segments since they likely also have had experience as students (or in the other roles depicted). Meanwhile, more sophisticated viewers who have a stronger understanding of democratic governance should be more likely to grasp the intent of Institutional Response segments that signal intolerance for corruption and support for accountability. For more sophisticated viewers, these Institutional Response segments should provide a second approach to strengthening democratic norms without causing an iatrogenic response among the less sophisticated (who simply may not absorb their meaning).

Hypotheses

To summarize, we posit five hypotheses. First, we test for the overall effect of the *Newz Beat* treatments upon subjects' perceived citizenship norms.

H1.   *When participants are exposed to either the Citizen Heroes or Institutional Response treatments, their democratic norms will strengthen significantly compared with participants in the control condition.*

In addition, we explore the efficacy of the different treatment messages depending on participants' basic political sophistication. The Citizen Heroes treatment should be accessible to all participants; the Institutional Response treatment is likely only to impact more sophisticated participants (but should not have a negative impact upon less sophisticated participants).

H2a.   *The Citizen Heroes treatment will strengthen democratic norms significantly among both more and less sophisticated participants in contrast with participants in the control condition.*

H2b.   *The Institutional Response treatment will strengthen democratic norms significantly among more sophisticated (but not less sophisticated) participants in contrast with participants in the control condition.*

We also expect to find a relationship among the experimental treatments, democratic norms, and participants' approaches to selling their votes in an election simulation (explained further below). Democratic norms should be negatively associated with a willingness to sell votes. For some participants, the influence of the treatments (and strengthened democratic norms) should thwart vote sales entirely. Meanwhile, for other participants, the treatments may not thwart sales, but they may lead participants to demand a higher price for a sale.

H3.   Participants with stronger democratic norms will be less likely to sell their votes but, if they do sell, they will be more likely to demand a higher price.

H4.   Participants exposed to the Citizen Heroes or Institutional Response treatments will be less likely to sell their votes but, if they do sell, they will be more likely to demand a higher price.

Data and Methods

To assess the effect of these *Newz Beat* story types upon perceived citizenship norms, a pre- and posttest experiment was conducted in May 2017.[1] Data was gathered in the Mityana District outside of Kampala, Uganda, in six villages: Busimbi, Kinvunikidde, Businziggo, Bulera, Buye-Kikumbi, and Nakaseeta. A geographical approach to recruitment was chosen to facilitate the collection of data at multiple time points; the specific villages were chosen to satisfy various practical concerns and because their residents are a cross-section of Ugandans that roughly reflect the general audience for *Newz Beat*. Residents of these villages are diverse in age, occupation, income, and education; as such, they are a better microcosm of the national population as a whole than subjects recruited solely in central Kampala or in rural areas farther afield. In advance of data collection, the research team prepared introductory materials describing the research project and *Newz Beat* for local government officials (the resident district coordinator first and then local council members). Following in-person meetings, these officials reviewed draft study materials (including the survey instruments) and granted official approval for the research to take place in their communities. No remuneration of any kind was provided to government officials.

After a power analysis informed by prior research, 1,080 participants were sought for the experiment. To avoid biased recruitment, participants were solicited from every household in the six villages by going door-to-door throughout each village. After refusals, this yielded an initial sample of 1,153 participants who completed the pretest survey. Two weeks after the baseline survey, participants were recontacted for a follow-up interview. All interactions took place in a private location inside or near the participants' homes, according to their preferences. Following local convention, participants were given a bar of soap as a token of respect and appreciation for their time. Bars of soap are often used as an incentive for this kind of research because they are useful, not unhealthy (like soda or candy), and not so valuable that potential participants are likely to put themselves at risk to obtain one.

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1 This project was approved by the Institutional Review Board at Portland State University, protocol #174116.

During the second interview, each subject watched one of three episodes of *Newz Beat* created expressly for research purposes. These stimuli were composed of previously aired news segments edited together to mimic the program's typical length (about five minutes) and format while systematically varying the content. The episode for the control group was comprised of stories ("3D-Printing and its Applications") with little information relevant to corruption, government, or citizenship. There were two treatment groups: a group that was exposed to Citizen Heroes stories and a group that was exposed to Institutional Response stories. Stimuli were all created by *Newz Beat's* in-house editor following the specific guidance of researchers who selected segments from the show's archives that best embodied the story strategies that had been collaboratively developed. The stimuli were shown to subjects on an Android tablet in a video that began with a short excerpt of a music video (the same one for each condition) that was included to allow time for equipment adjustment. Immediately following the video, participants took a posttest survey.

Careful attention was paid to data quality during and following the survey interviews. Stimuli videos were produced in Luganda—the primary local language spoken in Mityana—and enumerators were trained to administer the survey orally either in English or Luganda according to the participants' preferences.[2] To guard against the falsification of interviews, the location of each interview was geotagged automatically on the tablets. In addition, the quality of interviews was checked through partial audio recordings (made without the enumerators' knowledge) for 20% of cases at random and for all cases in which a speed test (triggered by passing too quickly through questions) was failed. After accounting for attrition and a small number of bad interviews (duplicates, incompletes, and miscellaneous glitches), 974 subjects completed both pre- and posttest surveys, falling slightly short of the targeted number of participants. The average pretest interview took 35.4 minutes; the average posttest interview took 34.4 minutes (including time spent watching the video stimuli).

The pretest survey measured demographic traits, media preferences, and gathered baseline measurements of many political attitudes and behaviors. Among these questions, participants were asked, "Do you know what a democracy is?" All subjects, regardless of response, then were given the following definition: "Democracy is the government by the people; a form of government in which the supreme power is in the people's hands and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system." This simple definition was provided to help clarify subsequent questions such that the responses would be more meaningful—but the question also captures a baseline measurement of each participant's political sophistication. In the analysis that follows, subjects who said they did not know what a democracy was are, at times, separated into low- and high-sophistication groups from those who said they did know what a democracy was. These groups, respectively, are the focal groups for the Citizen Heroes and Institutional Response treatments. See Table 1 for sample descriptives; an ANOVA shows there are no significant demographic differences across the experimental groups.

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2 A small number of participants (*n* = 22) reported only a poor understanding of the stimuli, possibly because they did not speak Luganda.

Table 1. Sample Descriptives.

	Control	Citizen Heroes	Institutional Response	Total
Age (*M/SD*)	29.9 (11.0)	31.2 (11.6)	30.7 (10.7)	30.6 (11.1)
Female (%)	61%	60%	61%	60%
Education (*M/SD*)	9.5 (4.0)	9.7 (4.3)	9.2 (4.3)	9.5 (4.2)
Know Democracy (%)	71%	67%	67%	68%
Norms Index: Time 1 (*M/SD*)	2.29 (.32)	2.28 (.31)	2.26 (.32)	2.27 (.32)
Norms Index: Time 2 (*M/SD*)	2.34 (.30)	2.38 (.32)	2.36 (.31)	2.36 (.31)
Norms Change (*M/SD*)	.05 (.33)	.11 (.33)	.10 (.32)	.09 (.33)
Sell Vote for 10k UGS (%)	9%	5%	4%	6%
Sell Vote for 10–80k UGS (%)	15%	16%	13%	15%
Avg. Vote Sale Price (*M/SD*)	4,615 (15,533)	5,037 (15,329)	4,563 (15,442)	4,747 (15,412)
N	305	332	337	974

Turning to the dependent variables, both the pre- and posttests included a six-item battery that measured perceived citizenship norms. These questions were drawn from the 2015 Afrobarometer, which included a sample of Ugandans. Following pretests of the instruments conducted with individuals waiting for bus or mutatu service in Kampala, language in some survey items was adjusted slightly to aid local comprehension. Administered in random order, the questions were:

> For each of the following actions, please tell me whether you think it is something a good citizen in a democracy should always do, never do, or do only if they choose.
>
> 1. Do you think that voting in elections is something that a good citizen should . . .
> 2. Do you think that complaining to government officials when public services are of poor quality is something that a good citizen should . . .
> 3. Do you think that paying taxes he or she owes to the government is something that a good citizen should . . .
> 4. Do you think that requesting personal assistance to help with school fees or funeral expenses from elected leaders is something that a good citizen should . . .
> 5. Do you think that agreeing with the majority of people in his or her community on political issues is something that a good citizen should . . .
> 6. Do you think that avoiding criticizing the government is something that a good citizen should . . .

For analysis, responses to these questions are averaged into a Norms Index (ranging one to three, low to high); items four, five, and six are first reverse-coded. Change in perceived norms is assessed by subtracting the pretest score from the posttest score; a positive score indicates strengthened perceived norms.

The posttest also included a voting simulation modeled after one implemented by Gottlieb (2016) in a study of accountability in Mali. Vote-buying is prevalent in Uganda and is an obstacle to the notion of electoral accountability (Muguzi, 2015). In the simulation, participants select between two candidates in a hypothetical election: a challenger and an effective incumbent who is, critically, unwilling to provide gifts to voters. If participants initially select the incumbent, they are subsequently given the opportunity to sell their votes to the challenger for 10,000, then 20,000, then 40,000, then 80,000 Ugandan Shillings.[3] If at any point they choose to take the compensation offered to vote for the challenger, the simulation ends and their sale prices are recorded. Treatments that strengthen perceived democratic norms should discourage vote sales, as should stronger perceived democratic norms. To test these notions, we evaluate both the decision to sell a vote as well as the price at which sales are made.

Results

Figure 1 depicts the change in perceived democratic norms between the pre- and posttest measurements. Democratic norms strengthened more for subjects in both treatment groups compared with the control group alone. The effect approaches, but does not reach, significance ($p = .08$) when all groups are compared (*H1*). The overall comparison does obscure substantial differences in the way that more and less sophisticated subjects responded to the treatments. Among less sophisticated participants ($n = 309$), the difference in norms across conditions between pre- and posttest is significant in a one-way ANOVA, $F(2,309) = 3.21$, $p = .04$.[4] A posthoc analysis implementing Dunnett's test shows that perceived norms strengthened significantly more ($p = .02$) in the Citizen Heroes condition ($M = .17$, $SD = .34$) than in the control condition ($M = .06$, $SD = .34$). This result provides initial support for *H2a*. Among more sophisticated participants, there is no significant difference in perceived norm change across groups.

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[3] This compensation ranges from about \$2.50–\$20. Two hundred and twenty-four participants selected the hypothetical challenger immediately and therefore were not asked the subsequent questions about selling their vote. As a result, $n = 750$ for these analyses.

[4] All p values are two-tailed.
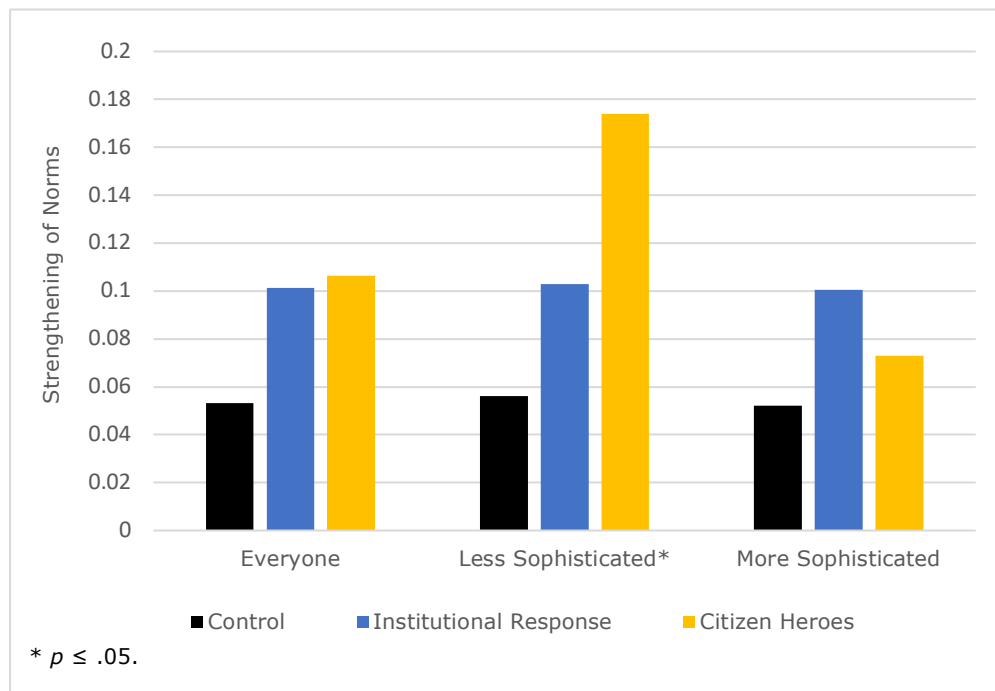
Figure 1. Change in perceived norms T1 to T2.

GLM univariate regression models presented in Table 2 provide additional context for this analysis. Here, the dependent variable is participants' perceived norms at the posttest measurement (time 2); the model controls for perceived norms at the pretest (time 1), age, education, gender, and treatment condition (with the control group omitted as the reference category). Among all participants, the multivariate model shows that the Citizen Heroes treatment effect is significant (β = .04, p = .05). Though this effect seems to be driven by change among the less sophisticated, the Citizen Heroes treatment is not significant (p = .06) in a model that includes just those participants. Multivariate analysis (using PROCESS Model 1) finds no significant interaction between condition and sophistication. Together, these results provide partial support for *H1* but not for *H2a* or *H2b*.

Table 2. Predicting Perceived Democratic Norms at Time 2.

	All Participants (N = 974)	Less Sophisticated (n = 309)	More Sophisticated (n = 665)
	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)	Coefficient (SE)
Norms at Time 1	.41***	.44***	.40***
	(.03)	(.06)	(.03)
Age	.01**	.01	. 01*
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Education	.01**	−.01	. 01***
	(.01)	(.01)	(.01)
Female	−.05**	−.12**	−.03
	(.02)	(.04)	(.02)
Citizen Heroes	.04*	.08	.02
	(.02)	(.04)	(.03)
Institutional Response	.04	.02	.04
	(.02)	(.04)	(.03)
Control	-	-	-
Intercept	1.30***	1.34***	1.26***
	(.07)	(.14)	(.09)
R^2	.22	.22	.24
F	45.47	14.07	34.24

$* p \leq .05. ** p \leq .01. *** p \leq .001.$

Turning to the results of the voting simulation, Table 3 contains a group of logistic regression models that depict participants' decision to sell their votes. The first model in each pair predicts whether or not participants would sell their votes at the first opportunity they were given, for 10,000 Ugandan Shillings (roughly $2.50).[5] Among less sophisticated participants, exposure to the Citizen Heroes treatment is negatively associated with vote sales at 10,000 Shillings (p = .03); participants in the Citizen Heroes condition are 83% less likely to sell their votes for 10,000 Shillings than those in the control condition. This finding provides some support for *H4*, though there are no treatment-specific effects for all subjects or just the subset of more sophisticated subjects. However, among all subjects—and particularly the most sophisticated subjects—there is a negative association between democratic norms and a willingness to sell votes. Overall, subjects are 64% less likely (p < .01) to sell their votes per point on the norm index. Among just the more sophisticated subjects, the difference is 74% (p < .001). These results support *H3*.

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[5] Because 224 participants immediately offered their votes to the hypothetical challenger, they were not asked to sell their votes to this candidate and are excluded from these analyses.

Table 3. Predicting Willingness to Sell Vote.

	All Participants (*N* = 750)		Less Sophisticated (*n* = 226)		More Sophisticated (*n* = 524)	
	Sell 10k	Sell Any Price	Sell 10k	Sell Any Price	Sell 10k	Sell Any Price
Norms Time 2	−.76 (.51) .47	−1.02 (.34)** .36	−.71 (.88) .49	−.21 (.63) .81	−.78 (.63) .46	−1.36 (.40)*** .26
Female	.15 (.33) 1.16	.13 (.22) 1.14	.45 (.68) 1.57	−.34 (.41) .71	.01 (.40) 1.01	.34 (.26) 1.40
Age	−.03 (.02) .97	−.03 (.01)* .97	−.05 (.04) .95	−.03 (.02) .97	−.02 (.02) .98	−.03 (.01)* .97
Education	−.04 (.04) .96	−.01 (.03) .99	−.04 (.08) .96	.03 (.05) 1.03	−.04 (.05) .96	−.03 (.03) .97
Citizen Heroes	−.53 (.37) .59	.14 (.25) 1.15	−1.75 (.81)* .17	−.28 (.46) .75	−.03 (.44) .98	.34 (.30) 1.41
Institutional Response	−.67 (.39) .51	−.12 (.26) .88	−.71 (.60) .49	−.18 (.46) .84	−.66 (.52) .52	−.12 (.32) .89
Control	-	-	-	-	-	-
Intercept	.52 (1.32) 1.68	1.48 (.88) 4.39	1.08 (2.49) 2.94	−.29 (1.72) .75	.20 (1.59) 1.22	2.18 (1.03) 8.88
Nagelkerke R²	.042	.046	.113	.029	.033	.077
Χ²	11.36	19.76	10.43	3.76	6.01	23.60

* *p* ≤ .05. ** *p* ≤ .01. *** *p* ≤ .001.
Cells show B(SE) then Exp(B).

Discussion

Analysis of these results offers both narrow, *Newz Beat*-specific and broad, context-spanning insights. At the microlevel, the results suggest that Citizen Heroes stories are likely the safest, most consistent approach that *Newz Beat* can use to cultivate viewers' democratic capacities. Taking a broader perspective, these findings further contextualize the utility of different strategies to effect norm change. Though there is substantial reason for enthusiasm around Paluck's tactics, there is still much to learn. Findings here suggest messages which utilize social referents that encourage identification are the most likely to yield desired outcomes and that norms campaigns in general can, with the right messages, be effective.

On the whole, the findings support the notion that mediated interventions can nurture stronger democratic norms that, in turn, can yield positive downstream effects. Though the relationships among perceived democratic norms, treatment condition, and participants' willingness to sell their votes are not all consistent, the Citizen Heroes treatment produced stronger democratic norms that were, in turn, also negatively associated with participants' willingness to sell their votes. There is also some evidence that the Citizen Heroes treatment dissuaded vote sale—at least initially at the lowest possible price—among less sophisticated participants. Even more broadly, the apparent connections between norms, treatment conditions, and vote-selling in this study provide evidence for a virtuous path of influence that may extend to other behaviors as well. These findings, even if imperfect, support the underlying motivation for this line of research—to find ways to use media to bolster democratic norms and behavior—and should inspire further work in this area.

In this study, the Citizen Heroes treatment condition had the intended strengthening effect upon perceived democratic norms among participants—a small effect that appears to be concentrated among the less sophisticated participants. This project was not designed to test the casual mechanism for change, which limits its utility in explaining these results. It is possible that more sophisticated subjects either did not identify with the figures portrayed in the treatment or had more firmly established attitudes that were less susceptible to change. At the same time, it is also possible that less sophisticated participants are more inclined to identify with mediated referents or that they are simply more impressionable because they have a smaller information base. Unraveling these possibilities—and the broader questions around the relationship between psychological make-up and identification—warrants further research.

Meanwhile, the Institutional Response stimuli had no significant effect upon participants. Given the weaker theoretical foundation for this approach to norm change, this null finding is not totally surprising—but it is still a cautionary note for others who may seek to use a similar strategy to shift norms. The institutions covered by *Newz Beat* were, by necessity, foreign; they may simply have been too distant to impact norms related to domestic citizenship. Different institutions may have been perceived as more relevant, credible, or authoritative—possibly leading to the desired outcome. Identifying the ideal institutions—local, perceived as legitimate, and sending the appropriate signals—is a challenge that frustrated this project and that other interventions should carefully address.

Together, participants' divergent responses to the Citizen Heroes and Institutional Response treatments suggest that the impact of social referents may precede or be more accessible than the normative lessons offered by other message features or strategies. Learning from modeled behavior is intuitive; discerning the meaning of an indictment requires some level of preexisting knowledge. It may yet be possible to use institutional signals within a media intervention to shape norms, but doing so successfully will require additional exploration to better predict who might be responsive to institutional signals and which institutions are most likely to resonate with different audiences.

Taking a wider view of the findings, there is evidence that the less sophisticated subjects were more likely to be influenced in general. Realistically, those identified as less sophisticated in this study exhibited a large democratic deficit: by their own acknowledgement (though not necessarily through their own fault), they did not know what democracy was. Many hurdles had to be cleared before they are likely to understand and adhere to citizenship procedures typical to democratic structures—and it may be rational for them not always

to do so in their present circumstances (Faller, 2015). Yet, the less sophisticated participants may be the most important viewers for *Newz Beat* to reach. In a democracy, every voice and vote theoretically carries equal weight: building the capacity of the less sophisticated is a critical step in cultivating an empowered public. Similarly, less sophisticated audiences are often at higher risk of a variety of negative health outcomes—so reaching, and influencing, them is also of particular importance for health-focused interventions (Cutler & Lleras-Muney, 2012).

Thus, the malleability of the less sophisticated participants underscores the importance of communication interventions like this one. People with limited resources will form attitudes and engage in behaviors drawing upon whatever information they have at hand. Consequently, providing useful and relevant information to these audiences is very valuable: the incremental impact of each piece of new information when very little information is possessed can be high. But with little knowledge or experience, less sophisticated audiences may struggle to critically assess new information or grasp its nuances (Tichenor, Donohue, & Olien, 1970). Accordingly, the successful messages in this study were basic demonstrations of desirable behavior that required little preexisting knowledge to grasp. Other norms interventions—be they focused on politics, health, or other outcomes—would be well-served by adhering to a similarly simple, straightforward messaging approach.

Finally, this project illustrates the applicability of Paluck's approach to cultivating norms for developing nonfiction, soft-news content. As prior research in developing democracies shows, it is difficult to create informational interventions that reliably shape citizens' political attitudes and behaviors in the desired fashion (Conroy-Krutz & Moehler, 2015; Gottlieb, 2016; Moehler & Conroy-Krutz, 2016). Doing so within the practical constraints of producing a news program adds several additional challenges. News is a collaborative product of many people working together under a deadline, with a set of facts that they do not control. Its creation cannot be controlled as assiduously as that of a radio drama. News is, by nature, unpredictable. That said, identifying key principles to guide story selection and development can help structure production such that the broadcasts have beneficial effects. The principles that work for *Newz Beat* in Uganda may, with some localization, be relevant to efforts in other nations. Not all communication interventions are best served by producing a telenovela; other genres offer affordances that can be conducive to different conversations and topics. And, as Cohen (2001) predicted, it may be possible to use a genre like soft news to achieve outcomes similar to those stemming from dramas. This, in turn, suggests that at least some of the lessons from drama-focused entertainment-education research can be drawn upon for the production of programming in other genres.

While the findings of this study offer clarity into the effect of mediated social referents upon perceived norms in one specific context, an array of opportunities exist for further research. Broadly speaking, additional exploration of norm interventions is needed to isolate the causal mechanisms and conditions that precipitate norm change. For example, in this study, the addition of questions that measured identification with individuals portrayed by *Newz Beat* would have permitted empirical investigation of the process of norm change. Additionally, pretesting that identified institutions respected by the target audience would have better grounded the production of the Institutional Response segments. Questions that assessed the perceived legitimacy of institutions covered by *Newz Beat* also would have been useful. Other researchers interested in norm campaigns should consider including similar extensions of their own work. Further research of norm campaigns with

different audiences, topics, and contexts that address these limitations is needed to identify best practices to guide future interventions.

In terms of the narrow concerns of *Newz Beat*, several methodological extensions would further elucidate the findings. To start, the treatment could be actual broadcast episodes of *Newz Beat* rather than special edits. Second, exposure to many of these episodes could take place over time. Third, the research design could take into account the communal setting that is often a part of television viewership in Uganda and the impact of the social setting upon the shaping of citizens' norms. These exposure changes would better simulate the actual viewing experience of *Newz Beat* and would be in-line with entertainment-education studies that examine the influence of long-form narratives—but there are trade-offs. For example, the design employed here was advantageous in that it guarded against attrition and included a more balanced gender mix by sampling at the home rather than in public. Separately, replication or extension of this work with populations beyond Mityana and, possibly, including viewers under 18 would further contextualize the findings. Evaluating the durability of measured effects and, perhaps, assessing the influence of the actual broadcasts (possibly through a natural experiment made possible by variations in access or language comprehension throughout Uganda) rather than with viewing parties or individual exposure via tablets are also long-term research possibilities.

The findings in this study may also be affected by limitations stemming from the survey instruments. Though drawn from the Afrobarometer, the reliability and validity of the democratic norms questions may not be optimal. The socially desirable response to some items—such as whether citizens should vote or pay taxes—is very apparent and it corresponds to prodemocratic values. For these questions, responses to both the Afrobarometer survey and our survey show very high support for the norm. For other questions, social desirability and the norm are not aligned. The responses to these questions—should people in a community agree—show more variance, but this may in part indicate confusion rather than a meaningful response to the norm. Comfort with conventional public opinion surveys is not as high in Uganda as it may be in the United States; more effort should be taken to develop context-appropriate measures. This would also contribute to better assessments of political sophistication and many other relevant attitudes and attributes.

Conclusion

In both established and fledgling democracies, it is critically important to nurture citizens' democratic norms as a check against the creep of authoritarianism. To this end, mass-mediated programming is an appealing culture-building tool because it is affordable, pervasive, scalable, subtle, immediate, and, if made well, the audience will actively choose to consume it. Good intentions do not, however, necessarily yield positive outcomes. Norm-focused communication interventions can have positive effects—but they may also have no effect or even negative effects. The possibility of failure should not, however, dissuade efforts to cultivate engaged, efficacious citizens. Through careful development that includes the application of theory, successful programming can be created. Such programming can not only strengthen democratic norms; it can also lead to empowered behavior that yields real, beneficial change.

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