

A Thin Line (United States)

<http://www.weforum.org/best-practices/creative-good/thin-line-united-states>

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Scope of Good Practice

[A THIN LINE](#) is MTV ' s pioneering campaign to fight bullying, abuse and discrimination in the digital age. The multi-year effort empowers America ' s youth to identify, respond to, and stop the spread of digital abuse, which includes pervasive issues like cyberbullying, sexting and digital dating abuse. MTV has built a coalition of authorities on these topics and is engaging its audience through thought-provoking PSAs, integration into MTV's top-rated shows, an original film, innovative online and mobile tools, curricula, and more. The campaign has reached over 35 million on-air and mobilized over 1,500,000 young people to take action against digital abuse.

The Problem Addressed by the Campaign

Digital abuse is an issue that includes behaviors like sexting, cyber-bullying and digital dating abuse. There are a number of challenges to consider when discussing the issue: young people often fail to look at potential long-term consequences; digital abuse is often viewed as something that cannot be changed; and teens today are the first generation fully immersed in the social and digital world. With these challenges in mind, MTV set out to create awareness of the behaviors that constitute digital abuse while highlighting the potential consequences of being involved as a victim, bystander or perpetrator.

Background Research

MTV and the Associated Press conducted three studies: one prior to the campaign ' s 2009 launch, followed by waves in 2011 and 2013. They provide an in-depth look at bullying, abuse and discrimination in the digital age, and quantify how young people are experiencing, affected by, and responding to digital abuse. The 2011 and 2013 studies are two of the few nationally representative polls to track trending data on these issues over the last four years.

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The 2013 survey found that 49% of young people report experiencing digital abuse, down from 56% in 2011. Sexting is down nearly 20% from 2011, with only about a quarter of young people reporting that they have sent or received sexts, compared with one in three in 2011. Additionally, young people report less pressure to send naked pictures or videos of themselves, down over 40% compared to 2011 (12% vs. 7%).

Since 2011, more young people are seeking help from friends or family, with 66% saying that asking a parent for help made the situation better, up 35%. Retaliation is now cited as the least effective response: less than 30% viewed retaliation as an effective response in 2013, compared to nearly 50% in 2011.

Strategy

To effectively create awareness of behaviors that constitute digital abuse, MTV created the concept of A THIN LINE in recognition of the gray area that often exists between what 's innocent and inappropriate in the digital realm. Using that filter, MTV was able to avoid preaching to the audience, and instead presented scenarios that empower them to "draw their own line" as individuals and as a generation. In general, the campaign strives to offer solutions to combat every type of digital abuse so the audience never feels paralyzed with fear but instead empowered to take control.

Creative

MTV 's pro-social campaigns have always placed a premium on the personal stories of young people confronting issues in their own lives. A THIN LINE focuses much of its creative energy on showcasing the experiences of its audience both on-air and online. Utilizing real stories has allowed MTV to present the realities of the issue as well as the potential consequences, ultimately letting the audience come to its own conclusions on where to draw their line.

To help focus the campaign 's messaging and creative approach, the campaign was structured in three chapters. The first chapter focused on romantic relationships and addressed issues like sexting and constant messaging. Later, the campaign took on digital abuse among peers, including topics such as cyberbullying and harassment; finally, the campaign tackled discrimination in the digital age.

Media

MTV is using all of its platforms to help young people safely navigate the evolving digital landscape. Elements of the campaign include:

- PSAs addressing digital behaviors and potential consequences.
- Evocative news specials like "Sexting in America: When Privates Go Public," which examined how sexting is changing the dynamics of youth relationships.
- TV integrations: "True Life: I Have Digital Drama," which illustrated how constant-connectedness is creating new trust and harassment issues for 21st century couples, and an episode of "If You Really Knew Me."
- "(DIS)CONNECTED": an MTV original movie inspired in part by the tragic, true tale of Abraham Biggs – a 19-year-old who battled bipolar disorder and ultimately webcast his suicide after being egged on by a digital mob.

- AThinLine.org: houses facts, interactive media and a running conversation on digital abuse, as well as

connections to resources.

- "Draw Your Line": a crowdsourced online visualization tool that celebrates the ways young people are taking action, and has rewarded them with tickets to the MTV Video Music Awards and voicemail recordings by Justin Bieber.

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- “ Over the Line? ” : an application that asks youth to define the line between innocent and inappropriate digital behavior.

Impact

Young people have already responded in force to the campaign:

On-air:

- The campaign ’ s specials have reached more than 35 million viewers, been streamed online 800,000 times and helped stoke a national conversation.
- Campaign PSAs have aired over 1,000 times on MTV, which reaches 100M U.S. households.

Online:

- “ Over the Line? ” users have submitted over 10,000 stories and registered nearly 375,000 ratings.
- Nearly 75,000 people have posted their positive actions to “ Draw Your Line. ”
- The campaign ’ s site has been a top referrer to the National Dating Abuse Helpline.

According to a study conducted by the Harmony Institute, “ (DIS)CONNECTED ” prompted young people to change their attitudes and behaviors, with a majority of viewers reporting that the film made them less likely to engage in future digital abuse, and more likely to intervene when they encounter digital abuse. Young people shared their personal connection with A THIN LINE in the study. Wendy, an eighteen-year-old, remarked, “ I haven ’ t found any other sites that allow for the expression and help like A THIN LINE does. ” Alexa Homeyer, a twenty-year-old college sophomore at the University of Arkansas, had a close friend commit suicide in 2010. After watching “ (DIS)CONNECTED, ” she went online and uploaded a video, describing its influence on her and how others could help. “ I did the video on YouTube because [“ (DIS)CONNECTED ”] made an impact on me, ” she said. “ Even after I posted the video, I looked up more about [digital abuse]. I was just surprised that there were people that think it ’ s a game. They egg these people on, [and] then these people actually do commit suicide. So, I thought that was really eye-opening. ”

In total, the campaign has already inspired over 1,500,000 young people to take action and help stop the spread of digital abuse.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Through the campaign ’ s targeted and interactive approach, it is capturing the attention of its audience, challenging them to lead the fight against digital abuse. The campaign also hopes to inspire other campaigns against digital abuse to keep the following in mind:

- Start a conversation with the audience about the grey areas of the issue, rather than being didactic.
- Celebrate and normalize positive behavior so it doesn ’ t seem like digital abuse is the norm.
- Provide clear pathways to help for those who are struggling themselves or want to help a friend.
- Make sure the young people you ’ re reaching are given a voice to help shape your campaign.