

A conversation with Sarah Frank, February 6th, 2020

Participants:

- [Sarah Frank](#), PhD Candidate & University Lecturer at University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Juliette Finetti, Research Analyst at Charity Entrepreneurship

Note: These notes were compiled by Charity Entrepreneurship and provide an overview of the major points made by Sarah (Frankie) Frank.

Summary: This conversation was one of Charity Entrepreneurship's interviews with experts in the field of family planning. It covers the following topics:

- Potential for impact of promoting contraception on pornographic websites or other forms of advertisement, including evidence of its strengths and weaknesses, challenges and considerations related to its implementation, and promising implementation strategies.

Assessment of the intervention: Promoting contraception through pornography, either by getting porn actors to endorse contraception publicly or through advertising contraceptive methods on pornographic websites is a promising strategy because of the wide global reach of pornographic content, and its default role in sexual education. There is no direct evidence for this intervention because it has never been implemented before, and besides attitudes surveys, research on pornography is rare. Although there is a body of evidence from contraception and family planning advertisement on social media, it is unclear whether this would be applicable in this context. There also seem to be some major limitations to using pornographic websites or influencers from the industry to promote contraception, outlined below:

- The industry might be reluctant to promote contraceptive use on their websites, since evidence suggests that men make up about 70% of viewers, and the implication is that this may not be to their liking.
- The industry is poorly perceived because of social stigma and some association with sex trafficking, so working with this sector will be highly controversial.
- Content on the internet, including videos, posts, or pictures, can be commented on without our control, which may cause the initial message to be distorted, along with the impact on people's behavior towards contraception.

Conversation notes (summarized)

1. Strength of the evidence and effectiveness

There is not a lot of research on contraceptive advertising on pornography websites. This is partly because it is not a very “sexy” topic. There is a good amount of evidence that use of condoms is not attractive in pornography, and that the predominantly male audience does not appreciate condom use – This is clearly highlighted by the fact that the entire porn industry moved out of its county in Los Angeles recently, because the law required condoms to be used during filming.

Most advertisements for pornography are targeted at male viewers, and focus on things like male genital enhancement. That being said, female viewership is around [30%](#) worldwide on the largest website Pornhub, potentially presenting opportunities to reach this audience with female-targeted contraception advertisements.

Although evidence regarding advertisement on pornographic websites is sparse, there might be some data on advertisement in the more general family planning and contraception areas on social media. There are also some studies about contraceptive advertisements and their impact on women’s attitudes towards birth control. Data about the number of views on porn websites, and how often people click on advertisements, could be easily gathered, which would make it easier to track intermediary outcomes – this evidence might be sourced through websites themselves or advertising engines.

2. Strengths and limitations

In general, Frankie was supportive of the idea of using pornography as a medium for contraception promotion, since it has never been done before, which is partly a consequence of the stigmatization of the industry. At the same time, an increasing number of young adults in the United States obtain some, if not most, of their sexual education from engaging with pornographic content, so it would be a positive step to integrate messages about safe sexual practices.

Whether the websites would host these advertisements is unclear, as not much is known about administrative aspects of the porn industry. But presuming it were possible to display ads on pornographic websites, the reach would be massive, because pornography has a global presence. The target audience will need to be defined; there exist different categories of pornography that are culturally attractive to people, and some form of contraception might not be available in some places. In the global South, we can assume users will be predominantly male and relatively urban, with access to the internet. The extent to which

women view pornography in lower income countries is unknown, because even the concept of a female sex drive is taboo in some places. Entrepreneurs will need to comb through individual studies and surveys in specific countries.

One significant drawback is that support for this intervention may be poor, because pornography is generally perceived as a socially disreputable industry. While not true of the entire industry, there can be sinister aspects to producing pornography in some regions (for example, in the Global South), which may involve sex trafficking and exploitation. Another limitation of the social media approach is the potential lack of control of the conversation ensuing in comments, which might lead people to question about their contraception choices.

3. Promising implementation strategies

Influencers strategy: Frankie suggested that besides advertisements, we might look into how adult film stars could themselves endorse certain contraceptive methods and promote contraception on their personal profiles. Actors and actresses today have more control over what they are able to publish outside their contract with production companies. This could offer an opportunity to share a message related to contraception on Instagram or Twitter, where adult film stars tend to have very active profiles and follower counts in the millions. Teaming up with Instagram influencers is a common marketing strategy adopted by many companies, already. This approach could also take the form of an interview with a porn star where they talk about their contraception habits, which could be relatively simple to host on a website such as YouTube. Frankie also suggested a campaign-style video/marketing strategy with multiple adult film stars discussing contraception.

Ads strategy: If advertising on websites, we might consider targeting a female audience, as women- and female pleasure-centered spaces exist on the web. Categories such as “porn for women” or “preferred by women” would be a good starting point. To do this, entrepreneurs might use intermediary companies that buy a window on the website to put up the ad (for example, [Traffic Junky](#)). It is unclear whether marketers can select the pages/categories within which their ads will be displayed.

Geographies: Family planning and internet use are both on the rise in Southeast Asian countries, and contraception and abortion are highly contentious issues in central South America currently, so it could be promising or challenging to target these geographies respectively. Frankie did note that although she did not know what porn usage in these areas looks like, somewhere like Mexico could be a good place to start. Eventually, entrepreneurs could expand to Brazil and Argentina, which might have good internet adoption and access to pornography, but may be poorly informed about birth control, abortion, and related issues.

4. Cost

From a quick search about ad-hosting prices, Frankie calculated that the cost could be about \$2 per 1,000 views, with many new viewers every day. For the approach involving adult film influencers, compensation to endorse contraception on social media or during a promotional interview may be required.

5. Other stakeholders

Frankie could not think of anyone already implementing this intervention. In terms of funding, it might be difficult to garner support for this because pornography is associated with sinister dealings, including sex trafficking in some cases, and many will not be comfortable knowing that the pornographic industry may profit from funder donations.