EXPLORING FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH IMPACT IN ENTERTAINMENT-DRIVEN NARRATIVE CHANGE

A Case Study of Hollywood, Health & Society Projects, 2012-2021

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USC Norman Lear Center
Media Impact Project

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RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS
Interest in narrative change approaches has been increasing over the last several years in the advocacy and philanthropic spaces.

With support from the California Health Care Foundation, the USC Norman Lear Center’s Media Impact Project embarked on a learning project to:

- Explore what is needed to generate impact through entertainment-driven narrative change
- Align impact expectations among key stakeholders
- Understand factors associated with successful narrative change investments (the focus of this analysis)
To identify factors associated with impactful narrative change investments, we conducted a case study of investments in the Lear Center’s Hollywood, Health & Society (HH&S) program over a 10 year period (2012-2021).*

We analyzed:
- Factors directly related to the investment (“Investment Factors”)
- Factors related to the context surrounding the investment (“External Factors”)
- Outcomes associated with the investment

* HH&S is not representative of all entertainment-driven narrative change efforts. This research focuses on HH&S because they cover a wide range of topics and were able to provide extensive data on investments and outcomes. This study is not an evaluation of HH&S’ impact. Rather, we are using HH&S as a case study to explore the characteristics of investments that achieved high impact.
Since 2001, HH&S has provided the entertainment industry with accurate and up-to-date information for storylines on a wide range of health, safety and security topics.

Funders of HH&S support a variety of outreach services to the entertainment industry, including:

- Briefings and consultations between content creators and experts
- Events and panel discussions
- Quarterly newsletters
- Social media posts
- Public service announcements (PSAs)
- Topic-specific provision of facts, information, and resources (tipsheets), specifically for writers and producers
The case study was carried out through 4 research tasks:

1. Formative research to identify key indicators related to investments in HH&S, contextual factors,* and outcomes
2. Development of simple return-on-investment (ROI) metrics for HH&S projects
3. Pattern analysis of associations between investment and external factors and ROI metrics
4. Qualitative research to contextualize and validate quantitative findings with HH&S staff insights, HH&S event survey results, impact studies, and external data sources

* Context here refers to various factors, events, and developments outside of the analyzed investment that help to (1) understand the background of the investment and the project and (2) suggest potential explanations for the results that emerged in the analysis.
To identify key indicators related to HH&S investments, outcomes, and factors facilitating those outcomes, we conducted:

- Four sets of interviews with 3 HH&S staff members
- A survey of 3 HH&S staff members

External factors were further informed by:

- Final grant reports, HH&S event surveys, interviews with narrative change experts, and a review of research on the impact of entertainment-driven narrative change*

We then developed a simple logic model illustrating the anticipated relationships between investments, HH&S activities, and outcomes.

* See interviews with narrative change experts, funders, and practitioners here. Email danawei@usc.edu for a copy of the review of research related to entertainment-driven narrative change.
Through this formative research, we identified:

- 13 investment factors, such as
  - Duration of investment
  - Percentage of HH&S activities funded
  - Number of HH&S tipsheets produced

- 3 external factors
  - Writers’ interest in topic
  - Favorability of sociopolitical context
  - Quality of HH&S’ existing relationships with shows and showrunners*

* Also includes relationships with writers, producers, and entertainment industry insiders
Through this formative research, we identified:

- 3 key outcomes:
  - # of consultations connecting content creators with subject matter experts
  - # of aired storylines resulting from consultations
  - # of viewers of aired storylines*

These outcomes can be viewed as incremental indicators of progress toward entertainment-driven narrative change in relation to a particular topic category.

* Viewership was dropped from the ROI and pattern analyses because it was not consistently reported across grants.
To carry out a simple ROI analysis, we narrowed the indicators to:

- **One investment factor**
  - Total amount of funding

- **Two outcome indicators**
  - # of consultations: phone consultations with experts, script reviews, and writers’ room briefings on given topic(s) of interest
  - # of storylines resulting from these consultations that aired or were scheduled to air at the time of grant reporting
We coded total funding, # of consultations, # of aired storylines in 83 HH&S grant reports over 10 years, representing:

- 38 grants
- 17 funders
- $11 million total investment
- 9 topic categories:
  - Maternal Health, Reproductive Rights, Mental Health & Addiction, Aging, Climate, Nuclear Threats, Social Determinants of Health, HIV, Multiple Health Topics (CDC)*

* From 2012-2017, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) funded HH&S outreach on a number of priority public health topics, including cancer, heart disease, and opioids. Since the CDC priority topics were wide-ranging, there is overlap with the other grants and topic areas.
The investments produced a total of:
- 2,065 consultations
- 1,393 aired storylines

We calculated two ROI metrics for each topic:
- # of consultations per $100,000 invested
- # of storylines per $100,000 invested

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topics with Most Consultations per $100k</th>
<th>Topics with Most Storylines per $100k</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Multiple Health Topics (CDC)</td>
<td>Multiple Health Topics (CDC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Mental Health &amp; Addiction</td>
<td>Maternal Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Climate</td>
<td>Aging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Maternal Health</td>
<td>Nuclear Threats, Climate, Mental Health &amp; Addiction (tied)</td>
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<tr>
<td>5 Nuclear Threats</td>
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</table>
To analyze patterns of correspondence between HH&S investments and outcomes, we:

● Reviewed 83 grant reports from 38 grants
● Conducted interviews with 4 HH&S staff members
● Conducted a survey of 3 HH&S staff members

We identified 13 investment and 3 external factors for further analysis.

● 5 factors related to the structure of the investment (e.g., number of funders)
● 8 factors related to the allocation of resources in the investment (e.g., funding a specific HH&S activity)
● 3 factors related to the context surrounding the investment (e.g., sociopolitical context)
Research Task 3: Pattern Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment Factors</th>
<th>Factors Related to Investment Structure</th>
<th>Factors Related to Allocation of Resources</th>
<th>External Factors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Number of funders</td>
<td>● Percentage of HH&amp;S services funded</td>
<td>● Favorability of sociopolitical context</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Total funding duration of project/topic*</td>
<td>● Number of events</td>
<td>● Writers’ interest in the topic(s)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Average grant length per project/topic**</td>
<td>● Number of tipsheets</td>
<td>● HH&amp;S’ existing relationships with shows and showrunners***</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Grant flexibility</td>
<td>● HH&amp;S webpage dedicated to project/topic</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Inclusion of multiple topics under one project</td>
<td>● Number of social media posts</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>● Number of HH&amp;S original videos</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>● Number of newsletter stories</td>
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<td>● Number of Sentinel Awards honors</td>
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</table>

* Total funding duration = number of months the entire project/topic was funded (typically across multiple grants & funders)
** Average grant length per project/topic = funding duration divided by number of grants within each project/topic
*** Also includes relationships with writers, producers, and entertainment industry insiders

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For each factor, we split the 9 topic categories into 2 groups:

- High on factor – at median or above median for that factor
- Low on factor – below median for that factor

We split the two main ROI outcome metrics (consultations and storylines) the same way:

- High ROI – at median or above median for that outcome
- Low ROI – below median for that outcome
For a given factor-outcome pair, if the majority of the 9 topics were “high” or “low” on both factor and outcome, we considered this to suggest a correspondence.*

For example, we saw a correspondence between investment in tipsheets and storyline ROI:

- 6 out of 9 topic categories (a majority) had low tipsheets along with low storyline ROI (2 topics) or high tipsheets along with high storyline ROI (4 topics).

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Low Tipsheets</th>
<th>High Tipsheets</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low Storyline ROI</td>
<td>2 topics</td>
<td>1 topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Storyline ROI</td>
<td>2 topics</td>
<td>4 topics</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* We acknowledge that a correspondence between factor and outcome on 5 or more out of 9 topics is a low threshold. These findings should be considered descriptive and preliminary, to be interpreted in conversation with data from other sources.
We found preliminary evidence of correspondence between 7 of 13 investment factors and HH&S outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investment Factors</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More funders</td>
<td>More consultations per $100K invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longer average grant length</td>
<td>More storylines aired per $100K invested</td>
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<tr>
<td>More grant flexibility*</td>
<td>More consultations per $100K invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More topics included*</td>
<td>More consultations and more storylines aired per $100K invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More HH&amp;S activities funded*</td>
<td>More storylines aired per $100K invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More tipsheets created</td>
<td>More consultations and more storylines aired per $100K invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creation of topic-specific webpage</td>
<td>More consultations and more storylines aired per $100K invested</td>
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</table>

* Factors with asterisks show preliminary findings that were consistent with HH&S staff’s initial hypotheses.
We found preliminary evidence of correspondence between all 3 external factors and HH&S outcomes:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>External Factors</th>
<th>Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A more favorable sociopolitical context*</td>
<td>More storylines aired per $100K invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High quality of existing HH&amp;S relationships in relevant topic category</td>
<td>More storylines aired per $100K invested</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater writer interest in the topic(s)*</td>
<td>More storylines aired per $100K invested</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Factors with asterisks show patterns that were consistent with HH&S staff's initial hypotheses.
To provide context and external validation to pattern analysis findings, we:

- Conducted follow-up interviews and a survey with HH&S
- Brought in insights from grant reports, HH&S event surveys, interviews with narrative change experts, and a review of evidence of impact in entertainment-driven narrative change*

* For the pattern analysis, the outcomes of interest were consultations and aired storylines. Data sources for the qualitative analysis focused on different outcomes. For example, HH&S interviews focused primarily on consultations and storylines, while the definition of impact was broader. The research review focused on audience impact outcomes, such as knowledge, attitude, and behavior change. The narrative change experts we interviewed relied upon varying definitions of impact.
A larger number of funders for a given topic category appears to correspond to more consultations per $100k invested.

Topic categories that had more funders or pooled funding corresponded to more consultations. This association suggests the potential promise of strategies like pooled funding and co-funding – strategies also highlighted as important in interviews with narrative change field members.

Topics with longer grants, on average, had more storylines per $100k.

Grants with longer durations could have seen more positive outcomes because writing, producing, and airing storylines takes time. Staff interviews indicate that it can take up to 2 years to see consultations come to fruition with aired storylines.
Key Findings: Pattern Analysis & Qualitative Analysis (Investment Factors)

Having more grant flexibility appears to correspond to more consultations per $100k.

Working with more flexible grants allowed HH&S more autonomy and say in how time and funds are prioritized, according to staff interviews. As found in interviews with narrative change field members, trust-based and flexible funding allows organizations to respond to external changes and shift project course if needed.

Having multiple topics within projects appears to correspond to more consultations and storyline per $100k.

Projects that allowed the coverage of multiple issues or more general issues were linked to more positive outcomes than projects that were narrowly focused on a single issue, according to staff interviews.
Investing in more HH&S activities appears to correspond to with more storylines per $100k.

Funding more HH&S activities, such as consultations, events, travel, production of tipsheets, and social media work, corresponded to more positive outcomes (storylines). According to staff interviews, this may have been in part because HH&S was able to utilize different outreach channels and reach more members of the entertainment industry.

Creating a topic-specific HH&S webpage and more tipsheets on a given topic appear to correspond to more consultations and storylines per $100k.

Sharing and producing internet-based resources for creatives could have led to more reach, according to HH&S staff interviews. Our research review also speaks to the potential power of sharing online resources since audiences have more access to information, beyond in-person events or briefings.
A sociopolitical context favorable to the topic appears to correspond to more storylines per $100k.

For example, as the Ukraine conflict became publicized, entertainment industry interest in the Nuclear Threats topic grew, according to staff interviews and reports. Thus, the presence of the topic in the news and public consciousness could facilitate relevant storylines being more likely to make it to air.

Topics on which HH&S reported high quality existing relationships with shows had more storylines per $100k.

Social capital brought in by HH&S could play a role in outcomes. HH&S has long-standing and trust-based relationships with some creators, executives, and TV shows – especially in the medical space – that could help facilitate more interactivity and contact and thus, potentially, more aired storylines.
Greater **writer interest** in engaging with a given topic appears to correspond to **more storylines per $100k**.

→ Creators use their lived experiences to inform their storytelling and production choices, according to staff interviews.

→ Creatives’ interest also gets piqued with major contemporary events.

According to staff interviews, after the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement, writers expressed more interest in covering topics from the lens of race and racial disparity in America, for example, looking into maternal health issues with a focus on the experiences of Black women.