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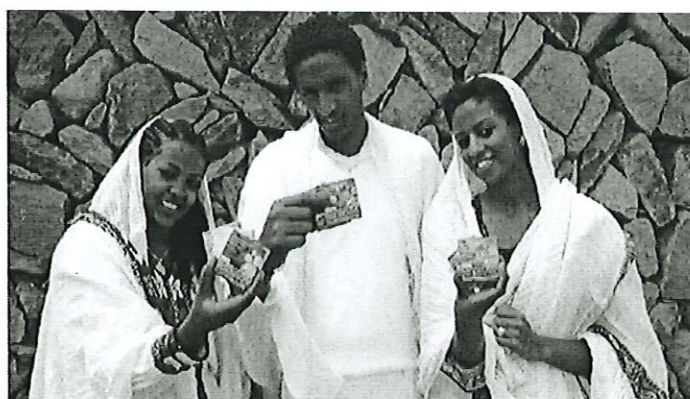
## In Conservative Cultures, Social Media Opens the Door to Condoms

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Promoting condoms as a tool for family planning and HIV prevention in conservative, traditional societies like Mozambique and Indonesia should be a hard sell.

But social media and internet platforms have made it easier for young people around the world to access information, overcome cultural barriers, and engage in discussions that often sell condoms more as a lifestyle accoutrement than a prophylactic device. This was driven home to me one day when I sat down at a restaurant in Jakarta and was amazed to see a teenage girl sitting with her parents and wearing a DKT “Fiesta” condom foil strung on a necklace.

I’ve been selling condoms overseas since 1996 with [DKT International](#), a nonprofit that uses commercial techniques to deliver health products—primarily for family planning and HIV prevention. During my early days working in Ethiopia, a country that had and has a serious HIV problem, we struggled to reach young people.

Ethiopia is a conservative society with strong religious cultures, but also is home to a young population that was increasingly exposed to outside influences. TV and radio were popular among youth but also watched by adults, who invariably squirmed (and complained) when colorful condom ads were aired. Because we needed to accommodate the concerns of these older media consumers, the ads ended up focusing generally on HIV protection, safe sex, and condom quality.

Today, such promotion is easier. Ethiopian university students can [sign up online](#) to learn about contraceptives, chat with each other about sensitive subjects, and access educational information. Messaging can be more hard-hitting and edgy because social media typically targets a younger audience. Through YouTube, DKT runs [condom ads](#) for ‘Sensation’ condoms, showing young people posing with condoms while celebrating Ethiopia’s diverse cultures.

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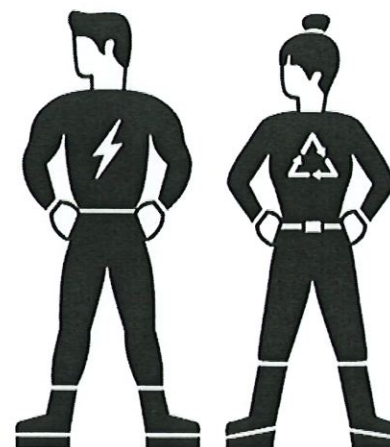
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Similarly, in Indonesia, a predominantly Muslim country of 230 million, the DKT 'Fiesta' condom brand now has pages on Facebook, [Twitter](#) and [YouTube](#) that talk about safe sex and condom use in a ways that might make some Americans blush. Young Indonesians, like their counterparts globally, are spending more and more time on the internet and less time on traditional media. Condom education and outreach have adjusted to these new media use patterns accordingly.

The explosion in social media use for condom promotion is global. From [Facebook pages in Mozambique](#) to [Twitter accounts in Brazil](#), young people are finding important new ways to get the information they need and voice their concerns and ideas.

This is partly because of existing synergies between the internet and condoms. Sexual material is plentiful on the internet; people are already looking for sexual stimulation through digital platforms, so reaching them when they are in that state of mind is a natural link. Additionally, the internet is generally anonymous, which is important for young people asking potentially embarrassing questions.

Is social media a cost-effective investment for condom promotion? I think so. Last year, DKT sold more than 650 million condoms globally, somewhere between 5 and 7 percent of the world's total sales. While it's difficult to attribute those sales directly to the role of social media, there is no question that it has helped to expand markets, draw in new users, and strengthen brand positioning. Investment costs have been fairly low because many of these platforms are essentially free, and expanding the user base has been relatively fast and organic, drawing on a large pool of interested young people who naturally thirst for more information on these issues.

The digital world plays an increasingly important role in how young people learn, interact, and take up new behaviors; those of us who grew up during a different communications paradigm would be wise to ascertain how best to capitalize on these technologies to ensure we are not left behind.

*Image courtesy of DKT*

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