

The Chi Initiative *Report by Madelon Willemssen*

Aiming to reduce the number of rhinos being killed for their horn, TRAFFIC and partners are trying to reduce consumer demand for horn in Viet Nam through the application of a five-step process for behaviour change. This evidence-based process includes consumer research into the motivations and practices around consumption and engages behaviour change theories and practices to develop, deliver and evaluate the impact of targeted messages directed at rhino horn consumers.

Specific behaviours in Viet Nam over the past five years have principally related to rhino horn consumption to demonstrate social status, as a hangover cure, and the offering of horn as a gift. Formative research in 2012 found that 4% of a sample of 600 respondents from Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City (HCMC) reported previously buying, using or offering rhino horn as a gift (TRAFFIC, 2013).

As part of the five-step process, a “consumer archetype”, later dubbed “Mr L”, was generated; this synthesized the key characteristics, psycho-demographics and socio-economic signifiers for the main consumer group in order to help development of specific social marketing messaging. Mr L is 35–55 years old, married with children and earns around USD1500 a month or more. Seven profile statements were developed to conceptualize the beliefs and attitudes driving rhino horn consumption by Mr L:

- Mr L believes that rhino horn is an effective agent for detoxification or hangover cure;
- Mr L believes that rhino horn can bring a person improved socio-economic status;
- Mr L believes that rhino horn is a valuable gift to gain favours and respect and can strengthen his business relationships;
- Mr L is not worried about fake rhino horn, or how to find real rhino horn;
- Mr L identifies rhino horn as having more value because it is illegal and dangerous to obtain;
- Mr L believes that rhino horn is a valuable gift to gain favours and the respect of others;
- Mr L believes rhino horn works because it is so valuable and expensive.

With this understanding, the Chi initiative was developed and officially launched in Hanoi on World Rhino Day (22 September), in 2014. The “Chi” brand and its delivery were specifically designed with Mr L in mind, building on the word’s meaning and broader contextual connotation that “strength comes from within”. This grounded the messaging firmly within the significance of “Chi” in Viet Nam and other cultures in Asia.

Three additional consumer surveys in 2014, 2016, and 2017 focused on the evaluation of behaviours and motivations of Mr L and the results of these surveys can be found in the Chi briefing paper (TRAFFIC, 2017).

Qualitative indicators provide evidence that the Chi initiative had a positive impact on the Mr L target audience. For example, there was an increased level of exposure to Chi and its messages in the target audience (from 27% in 2016, to 57% in 2017), while in 2016 64% of respondents were identified as promoters, unwilling to recommend rhino horn consumption to their peers and



social networks. Furthermore, the Chi initiative resonated with its target audience: Chi Partners—individuals actively involved in the Chi initiative—were uniformly and consistently reporting to be less likely to use rhino horn.

From this consumer research, it can be concluded that Chi is reaching, has resonance with, and engages Mr L on the behaviour change journey towards the desired zero-tolerance for rhino horn consumption.

Through the evaluation of the impact of Chi, significant regional differences have emerged between the Mr Ls in Hanoi and HCMC. The data suggest that there could be a surge in rhino horn use for sexual enhancement in HCMC, a behaviour not specifically targeted by the Chi initiative, which focuses mainly on the display of wealth and status. Differences in motivations between frequent and occasional users were also found, the latter often driven by curiosity and the wish to offer rhino horn to superiors as a gift, whilst the former are motivated by strong beliefs in the wellbeing effects of rhino horn. The Chi initiative will continue, once funding has been secured, and efforts will be made to address these changing motivations between Hanoi and HCMC, with specific messages directed at the frequent user group and to undermine the use of rhino horn for sexual enhancement.

It is important to continue to address the illicit rhino horn trade chain from all angles, including demand reduction programmes and effective law enforcement. This is in line with the “Twin Track Approach” of measures to impose a societal control and restrict choice, whilst issuing messaging to shape motivation (e.g. TRAFFIC, 2016). It is critical that behaviour change messages are targeted directly at prolific consumer groups and through the right channels of civil society organizations, peer networks and government partners, so that they can be evaluated and managed. Furthermore, key to improving the effectiveness of law enforcement is to increase the risk to wildlife criminals (poachers, traffickers, traders and consumers) and to provide an effective deterrent—i.e. of being apprehended and prosecuted, to restrict market supply, and at the same time support the shift in social norms of individuals.

REFERENCES

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