

MOBILE MYANMAR



Save the Children

The impact of social media on
young people in conflict-affected
regions of Myanmar

Photo: Save the Children

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The advent of social media in Myanmar following the transition towards civilian rule announced in 2011 has given young people an important new platform for civic engagement and expression, and access to information and knowledge. However, while young people are highly engaged with social media and it has potential to bring benefits to their daily lives, this research reveals a number of alarming trends. Emerging new dangers such as online sexual harassment and hate speech are widespread and deeply concerning, and threaten to impact the safety and participation of girls and minority groups. Most young people lack the digital citizenship skills required to protect themselves from the online dangers and emotional and mental health impacts of social media highlighted in this report. The study finds evidence that young people across Myanmar suffer from ‘hate speech fatigue’, often exacerbated by repeat exposure to fake news and propaganda targeting specific communities. Over time, this effect limits young Myanmar users’ willingness to seek out or engage with reporting and blocking functions that may help combat fake news and hate speech online.

Understanding the impact of social media on social and political discourse in Myanmar is of urgent, critical importance. While the young people in this study saw great potential for social media to increase empathy and understanding between different groups, the struggle to curb anti-Muslim hate speech, in particular, and the structural and violent oppression it begets, is still very real. As recent global events have shown, democratic processes are especially vulnerable to disinformation campaigns and the spread of fake news and hate speech. Myanmar’s democracy is still new, and with elections upcoming in 2020, social media could well play a role in shifting voter attitudes, especially among young people.

About this report

It has been clear for a number of years that digital connectedness is playing an important role in the lives of young people in Myanmar. Yet research on its impact has been limited. Very little substantive research has tested the actual impacts of increased exposure to online hate speech and fake news on populations of any age in Myanmar, let alone young people. The assumption that platforms such as Facebook increase the reach and speed of transmission of dangerous discourses is logical, but evidence is scant on the ground as to how variables like trust in the reliability of information on those platforms affect attitudes and offline behaviour of various audiences. Moreover, though international researchers increasingly study the emotional and psychological impacts of social media use among young people, such studies are yet to be duplicated in Myanmar.

In response to this information gap, between November and December of 2018, Save the Children Myanmar undertook a piece of research to examine the impact of social media use on young people living in conflict-affected regions of Myanmar. In total, the research team conducted 16 focus group discussions (121 participants in total) and 38 key informant interviews. The study focused on how diverse groups of young people in Kayah and Rakhine States engage with issues of hate speech, propaganda, fake news, rumours, incitement to violence, and the impact of that engagement on young people’s on- and offline emotional well-being, attitudes, and behaviours. In addition, a short social media use survey was administered to 232 young people, including to all focus group and interview participants.

This report begins with a brief background and introduction to the research and an overview of the research methodology, including the primary research questions and sampling strategy. Key findings from the study are then presented, along with recommendations for advocacy and programming. This is an abridged version of a full-length study report, including a full literature review examining prior relevant studies from Myanmar and further afield, available at www.savethechildren.net.

INTRODUCTION

The introduction of cheap, easily accessible, web-enabled mobile communication devices in Myanmar is one of the most notable and profound changes to have emerged out of Myanmar's political transition from military to civilian rule in 2011. It sparked, as McCarthy notes, "a dramatic transformation in how people consume information, maintain relationships, build communities, and mobilise social movements" (McCarthy, 2017, p. 92).

Though internet access in Myanmar became available in the late 1990s, until 2011 it was restricted to the wealthy and/or politically connected. Prior to liberalisation of the telecoms market in 2011, Myanmar had the lowest mobile penetration in the world at 2.6% (Qiu, 2014). The arrival of two international mobile providers – Telenor and Ooredoo – alongside the state provider MPT saw over 42 million sim-cards sold by mid-2016, around half of which regularly used internet data (Nyunt, 2016).

With the sudden widespread uptake of internet access, Myanmar's population joined others across the world in utilising social media platforms to maintain and build new relationships, and to keep up to date with, and express opinions on, national and international events.

While bringing a host of practical, material, and social benefits for Myanmar's population, the ubiquitous use of social media platforms has had a well-publicised dark side. According to a Telenor report, 78% of Myanmar internet users have poor digital literacy skills due to their lack of previous experience with digital media (Telenor, 2018). Without the tools needed to navigate the online world safely, responsibly and – in the case of fake news and hate speech – critically, Myanmar users are especially susceptible to disinformation campaigns.

The dangers of hate speech have increasingly come to the forefront as exemplified by the recent unveiling of the 2019 United Nations Strategy and Plan on Hate Speech by UN Secretary-General António Guterres. At its launch, Guterres declared that, "Hate speech may have gained a foothold, but it is now on notice." The UN Strategy and Plan on Hate Speech defines hate speech as: "any kind of communication in speech, writing or behaviour, that attacks or uses pejorative or discriminatory language with reference to a person or a group on the basis of who they are, in other words, based on their religion, ethnicity, nationality, race, colour, descent, gender or other identity factor. This is often rooted in, and generates intolerance and hatred and, in certain contexts, can be demeaning and divisive" (United Nations, 2019).

As the most prevalent users of social media platforms, young people in Myanmar are particularly at risk from potential negative effects of using social media. This is a cause of concern as Myanmar is a relatively young country – estimates suggest that 55% of Myanmar's population are under 30 years of age, and 33% are between 15 and 35 years old. The national median age in Myanmar is 27, although in the two areas of focus – Rakhine State and Kayah State – that figure is even lower, at 26 and 23.6 respectively (Grizelj, 2017).

Extensive international scrutiny of one platform – Facebook – has repeatedly alleged that the rapid distribution of provocative content (as enabled by the site) played a role inciting intercommunal conflict in Myanmar as far back as 2012 (Mozur, 2018). Criticism of Facebook's community management systems increased with the escalation of violence in Rakhine State in 2016–17. Although Facebook has made and continues to make attempts to address these issues (for example, by strengthening its community guidelines), it is yet unclear whether the platform has a holistic and whole-scale strategy for curtailing the spread of fake news and hate speech on its site.

A small number of research studies have been undertaken in recent years to gain insights into social media use in Myanmar (see Literature Review section in the full-length version of this study report, available at www.savethechildren.net). However, to date very little substantive research has investigated the actual impacts of increased exposure to online hate speech and fake news on populations of any age in Myanmar, let alone young people. While international researchers are increasingly studying the emotional and psychological impacts of social media use on young people, such studies have yet to be conducted in Myanmar.

METHODOLOGY

Objectives

The overall objective of this scoping study was to examine the impact of social media use on young people living in conflict-affected regions of Myanmar. Rather than examine overall digital access and literacy, the study focused on how young people engage with issues of hate speech, propaganda, fake news, rumours, incitement to violence, and the impact of that engagement on young people's on- and offline emotional well-being, attitudes, and behaviours. The study findings will be used to inform the development of youth-focused digital and media literacy materials to support good digital citizenship, foster critical thinking skills, and encourage empathy and tolerance online.

The study was designed to leverage the flexibility of qualitative research tools. Guided focus group discussions (FGDs) were supplemented by structured observation and child-friendly participatory methods. A brief social media use survey and key informant interviews (KIs) with young people, parents, teachers, and community leaders were used to gather additional contextual data. Full details of the methodology are available in the full-length study report, which can be accessed at www.savethechildren.net.

Primary research questions

The key questions that guided the current study were:

1. How do young people perceive/view Facebook and other forms of social media (Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, WeChat, WhatsApp, blogs, etc.)? How do young people use different types of social media, and for what purposes?
2. What kinds of online content and social media messages are young people sharing, and why? What barriers/challenges do young people face in using social media?
3. How do young people think social media affects their thoughts, feelings, behaviours and/or attitudes? What kinds of impacts does social media have on their psychological well-being?
4. Do young people trust what they see and read on social media? Why or why not? Do they check the accuracy of the information they receive online, and if so how? How do young people judge the accuracy or truthfulness of online content and social media messages?
5. Do young people feel that what they do on social media has an impact? What kinds of impacts?
6. What are the most common forms of hate speech and threat narratives in Myanmar? What are the experiences of young people regarding hate speech on social media, and how does it make them feel? What do they think of it and how do they react to it? How does hate speech/propaganda/fake news impact on their behaviour and attitudes? Does it lead to feelings of out-group bias?
7. What is the impact so far of local anti-hate speech campaigns such as Panzagar (flower speech) on Facebook? Who can be positive influencers for young people online?

Research design and sampling strategy

The research design was mixed-methods, consisting of: 1) FGDs with young people (121 participants aged 18-36 years); 2) KIs with young people, parents, teachers and community leaders (38 participants aged 18-55 years); 3) a short social media use survey administered to all FGD participants and a convenience sample of participants recruited at youth centres, tea shops, universities, high schools, and other public spaces in each of the selected research sites (232 participants aged 13-35 years).

The methodology used a stratified sampling technique to ensure diversity in the participant population. The following stratification of townships and villages is based on Myanmar units of governance. However, it should be noted that in many areas (for instance, Kayah) these units fail to grasp community distributions in ethnic minority areas. As such, purposive sampling was used at the village and participant level to account for the bias introduced by using central state units.

At the **township level**, sites were selected on the basis of Save the Children Myanmar programming and feasibility of access, and diversity of population, specifically:

- Loikaw townships (Kayah)
- Sittwe townships (Rakhine)

At the **village level**, purposive sampling was used to select villages. The purposive sampling criteria included:

- Religious diversity
- Rural/urban distribution
- People living in camp areas for internally displaced people (IDPs)

More specifically:

- In Kayah State:
 - a) Loikaw urban (Buddhist);
 - b) Loikaw urban (Christian);
 - c) Loikaw rural villages (Buddhist)
 - d) Loikaw rural villages (Christian)
- In Rakhine State:
 - e) Sittwe urban (Buddhist)
 - f) Sittwe urban (Christian)
 - g) Sittwe IDP camp (Rohingya Muslim)
 - h) Sittwe IDP camp (Kaman Muslim)

Rural villages in Rakhine State were not sampled due to limitations of time and resources, and anticipated delays in the research permissions process.

At the **participant level**, purposive sampling was used to select FGD and KIs participants to ensure that the overall sample was:

- Gender balanced
- Religiously diverse
- Ethnically diverse
- Educationally diverse
- Age diverse

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

The focus group discussions, key informant interviews and social media use survey conducted in this study collected a vast amount of data and insights regarding the experience and impact of social media among young people in Myanmar, which are discussed in detail in the full-length version of this report (available at www.savethechildren.net). Several common themes were identified throughout the study, which are summarised here with selected direct quotes from participants, translated by the research associates who conducted the interviews and focus groups.

General usage

- More than half of young people sampled in this study were heavy users of smartphones, typically self-reporting between 1 and 5 hours use a day, about half of which was spent using social media.
- A common theme among both young people and adults was that young people use their phones whenever they are not working or studying, distracting them from other more active tasks and keeping them up late at night.

“They use before going to school, lunch time and when back from school. They don’t study anymore and don’t do other activities. When their phone battery is low, they play while charging the battery.”
Female, 35 years, Kayaw Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State, urban)

- Facebook was identified by the majority of participants as the most popular social media platform among young people.
- Posting and sharing news and information was the most common reason for using social media. Almost half of all respondents said that they share health tips online.

Online safety

- The vast majority of both adults and young people believed that young people are not safe online, given the prevalence of online threats such as scams, hacking and harassment.
- Parents do not teach their children how to use social media safely because they typically do not use social media themselves and therefore do not fully understand the online dangers.

“The elders in our villages don’t use Facebook so they don’t know how to teach their children.”
Male, 25 years, Kayan Christian, Kyun Taw village, (Kayah State, rural)

- Instead, parents mostly try to limit the amount of time their children, especially daughters, spend online as a safety measure.

“Some parents don’t allow their children to use their phone. Mostly girls are restricted as they are seen as vulnerable. Boys are not restricted as they are tougher.”
Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Kyun Taw Village (Kayah State, rural)

- Few young people know how to adjust the privacy settings on their social media accounts in order to help prevent hacking and harassment. Many young people are aware of blocking and reporting functions, but few actually use them.

Fake news and propaganda

- A little over half of young people surveyed reported using social media (particularly Facebook) to read about news and current events. Slightly more than half of the survey respondents said that they still get just as much news from traditional media, such as television, radio and newspapers.
- Trust in news on social media was generally low, though many adults (and some young people) thought that young people generally do trust what they read on social media because they don't have the critical thinking skills required to identify or validate potentially fake news.

"I don't think they trust everything they see or read on social media because only two-thirds of the information online is true." Female, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State, urban)

"Young people don't have much critical thinking. Parents have more critical thinking as we have more experience. Only 25% of young people can differentiate between fake and news. Others trust things easily because they are still lacking knowledge and experience. Young people from villages are worse." Male, 52 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State, urban)

- The most common ways of checking the validity of news were to ask friends and family, read the comments on the post, or seek out a second news source.
- Trust in news was largely dependent on the reputation of the source, with participants from all regions suggesting large international news broadcasters such as Voice of America and the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) were the most trusted. Some also said that locally known news agencies were also trusted within their own region.
- Young people say adults are mostly responsible for the spread of fake news, as they share it uncritically (both online and offline) due to low media literacy.

"The parents are worse than their children. They repeat and share old news, and also spread the news verbally by telling their friends at markets. Eighty percent can't differentiate between fake and real news. Children only share news to their circles. But parents spread news quicker as they have more friends." Female, 35 years, Kayaw Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State, urban)

*"The elderly who are over 50 years believe that Facebook is the news."
Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State, urban)*

- The most common reaction to fake news was to simply ignore it, while others felt the need to take action by either posting a comment to warn others that it is fake, or mocking it by posting a 'haha' emoji in the comments (which also alerts others to the fact that it is fake).

"Mostly they just ignore or skip fake news. They hardly take action like giving comments or reporting it." Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State, urban)

- While fake news can affect young people's understanding of political and ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, young people also reported that realising that the news was fake and meeting diverse people both online and in person had changed their perceptions for the better.

"It doesn't change their attitudes but makes them fear. For example, after reading news or posts about a Rakhine issue, they became scared of Kalar people when they meet them."

Female, 35 years, Kayaw Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State Urban)

"Before I was scared of Muslims. I participated in a project that brought us to a Muslim school and their teacher explained about their Islam religion. I found out that there are many similarities [between] our religions, like they also use the old testament. The teacher said Islam is not a terrorist religion. I think they are a very religious society."

Male, 18 years, Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State, urban)

Hate speech

- The hate speech ecosystem affects everyone. In this study, internally displaced Muslim young people were the most likely to report having been impacted by hate speech, however, Christians also mentioned being the victims of hate speech and fake news. Maramagi youth felt racially discriminated against, and many Chin youth felt marginalised and discriminated against by the Rakhine community, who in turn felt discriminated against by the Bamar community.
- Some young people were aware that third parties were using hate speech and fake news to stir tension and division between other ethnic groups. As with fake news, hate speech was more often ignored or mocked than reported.

"There are some and certain groups of people, a third party, who are purposely creating more tensions between Rakhine and Muslim community who are currently having a conflict.

They will use and create certain fake accounts or fake news to cause problems against each other by using the social media platform. I am not so sure why they are doing it."

Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State, urban)

- During the study, participants frequently conflated hate speech and fake news. One explanation for this is that fake news often functions as hate speech in Myanmar, in that false news reports are made with the intention of vilifying a particular group. In this way, hate speech often takes the form of fake news about specific groups, from political parties to ethnic minority groups, to spread fear, entrench negative stereotypes, and further a particular agenda. Given this, the distinction between hate speech and fake news should itself be problematised in Myanmar.
- Young people believed that besides making minority ethnic groups feel marginalised, online hate speech can lead to offline conflict.
- Very few participants had come across anti-hate speech campaigns either online or offline. However, some noted that there were influential individuals who made efforts to counter and stop the spread of hate speech online.

"There are very few pages working to counter hate speech. There are some doing this, but they are not effective because the messages that they want to give don't reach those who spread hate speech." Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State, IDP)

Online harassment

- The prevalence of sexual harassment of girls and some boys is deeply concerning. Perpetrators of harassment were usually male strangers who tried to form relationships with girls, send inappropriate sexual content, or extort them for money, naked photos, or declarations of reciprocal love.

“A friend of mine posted her pictures on Facebook. Someone then photoshopped her picture into a sexy image and tried to extort money from her... She was very worried and asked me for a suggestion. I told her not to pay the money but to block that account. She followed that and the account stopped threatening her.”
Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State, urban)

- Victims of harassment reported being scared of offending their perpetrator and escalating the situation.
- Many girls believed that online sexual harassment reflected the offline harassment they were subjected to from boys and men on a daily basis (e.g., ‘cat calls’, derogatory comments about clothing choices). There was a distinct lack of awareness by boys that this constituted sexual harassment and was such an issue for girls.

“It is the nature of youth [for] boys to tease a girl when she walks alone. I don’t think this is harassment.” Male, 23 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State, urban)

- A proliferation in the availability of adult content (i.e., pornography) was suggested to be responsible for the ways some boys related to girls in offline relationships.

“The young people watch 18+ content video or images. This can result in rape or sexual harassment. They want to have experiences of what they see online. There have been 4–5 rape cases because of watching 18+ content video online.”
Female, 30 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State, urban)

- Online romantic relationships were identified as problematic, both in terms of leading to early marriage or sexual activity and the potential for social media to be used as an online sexual harassment tool after a relationship breakdown.

“Often those cases are targeted mostly on the teenage girls and female youths (18–25 year olds) and when they have problems in their relationship, they were blackmailed and harassed online by their pictures being photoshopped and posted on Facebook by their ex. There are so many cases like this here.” Female, 36 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State, IDP)

Sharing behaviours

- Using social media (notably YouTube) to gain knowledge, educate themselves (including learning English), and seek online and offline education opportunities was a common theme among all young people.

“We can learn English from online as we don’t have a practical field. We can download English dictionary software. We can learn about how to do business and other skills online [to get] job opportunities.” Male, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State, urban)

- Half of survey respondents reported posting selfies on social media, however, girls, particularly those from rural villages, were less likely to do so.
- No participants admitted to posting about the government or divisive issues (many said that they ‘wouldn’t dare’) but reported seeing such opinions posted by others, mainly in the comments of news story posts.

“I don’t dare to post news about politics because sometimes the news we read can be true or fake. We have to think about how people will think of us and the consequences before posting this kind of news... I don’t dare to express opinion on politics because I am worried how people will think of me and also the legal consequences.” Male, 19 years, Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State, urban)

- A common perception among adults was that young people often share controversial posts and stories without considering the consequences, while many young people thought that older adults were the ones who most often did this.

Impact on daily lives and psychological well-being

- Internally displaced Muslim young people said seeing hate speech on social media made them feel sad, stressed, angry and hopeless.

*“The hate speech can have negative impacts on the psychological and emotional state of the youth. This can make them lose their hope and beliefs for their lives.”
Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State, IDP)*

*“Stateless people can only be found in the jungle or places where no one goes [but] they call us stateless people. When I hear this word, I don’t want to eat, I don’t want to go to school, I don’t want to work, I don’t want to sit in the shop, I just want to drink poison and die.
This is how we feel. It is more than words to express how we feel.”
Male, 20–24 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin (Rakhine State, IDP)*

- Despite these negative feelings, many internally displaced Muslim young people said social media gave them a sense of escape from their camp, entertaining them when they felt sad and connecting them to the outside world. However, for some this reminder of the outside world just made them more upset.

*“One positive thing is when someone feels sad, using their phone can relieve the sadness.”
Female, 22 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State, IDP)*

“Young people nowadays do not know about freedom of movement, so when they see someone their age is free to go anywhere, they want to be free to do anything they want, but our young people are not able to because of the current conflict, so they get very upset. We are also human after all.” Male, 46 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State, IDP)

- Several internally displaced Muslim adults thought that social media played a positive role in the moral and religious education of their young people, many of whom had never attended a mosque or religious school due to their displacement.

*“Within family, they can learn about religion from social media... Some people don’t go to mosque and have never attended religious school before. By having a phone and social media, they can learn about religious practice. When they understand about religion, their social interactions also change.”
Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State, IDP)*

- It also gave them a sense of hope by connecting them to people from other ethnicities who are working towards equality.

“Social media can raise awareness for our people. There are some Burmese and Rakhine who are working for equality. By seeing this, the people [in this camp] will think there are people from other religions and races who have a good heart and are working for equality. And they have hope that there is a way for them to approach people from other backgrounds. Without social media, they wouldn’t have this kind of awareness. Before when we met white people, we used to believe that they’ll bring destruction to our religion. Some religious leaders taught us like this. As we can interact with people from other backgrounds and learn about them, it broadens our mind.”

Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State, IDP)

- Overall, most young people thought that social media has both a positive and negative impact on their lives.
- The most common positive impacts of social media on young people’s daily lives were the ability to connect with friends and relatives across distance, and the ability to gain knowledge.
- The most common negative impacts were associated with fake news, harassment, hate speech, and other offensive content.
- Some young people felt that social media was useful for dealing with stress and difficult emotions (eg, viewing humorous or inspirational posts, posting poems or song lyrics that describe how they feel), and for exposing them to and helping them to understand other cultures.

“Sharing one’s feeling and posts that encourage others who are feeling down and tell them not to give up in their life.” Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State, IDP)

“Before no one knew about our culture. Because of Facebook, many people from this country know about our culture now.” Male, 18–22 years, Maramagyi Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State, urban)

Impact on society

- Social media may give young people an outlet to be more outspoken with their opinions and feelings.

“You can write whatever you want online but not offline.”

Male, 31 years, Kayah Buddhist, Ve Thae Ku village (Kayah State, rural)

“The way you write online and speak offline is different. Even myself, when I write posts online, it seems to be ruder. We tend to use [offensive] words to exhort people [to listen to us].”

Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State, urban)

- Both young people and adults spoke of the addictive nature of social media (especially social media-based games for boys) and the impact that this was having on the quality and quantity of offline relationships with family and friends. The perception by some parents that phones were a waste of time and money was a common cause of family conflict.

“Using phones creates a distance with people who are near us but makes us become closer with those who are far from us.” Female, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State, urban)

- Young people and adults both believed that social media has great potential to increase empathy and understanding between different groups in Myanmar society and foster peace and tolerance, with some saying that they had already learnt a lot about other cultures via Facebook.

*“We can promote peace and unity between different young people through social media by organising more training and awareness raising sessions.”
Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State, urban)*

*“By seeing other ethnic groups presenting their cultural or traditional dress on Facebook, it can help us learn more about those different ethnicities and diversities through Facebook.”
Male, 28 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State, urban)*

DISCUSSION

The research in context: Myanmar perspective

The finding that Facebook and its sister app Messenger were by far the most commonly used social media platforms in Rakhine State and Kayah State is consistent with previous studies of social media use trends in Myanmar more broadly (Grizelj, 2017; McKay, 2017a; Oo & Thant, 2019). In its recent study, Phandeeyar noted the growing popularity of TikTok, compared with Twitter, Instagram, and other internationally popular social media apps (Oo & Thant, 2019). TikTok was common in Rakhine State, where it was more popular than Twitter, but not Instagram, which was still relatively common among Rakhine urban respondents. While the widespread use of group chat-based platforms such as WeChat and Viber in Muslim IDP communities has been identified previously (Thu, 2016), the popularity of IMO, which has similar functionality but a much larger group size limit, is documented for the first time in the current study.

The Phandeeyar study found that apps like Instagram were less popular in Myanmar compared with other countries, in part because they are dominated by ‘cele’ users (a term used in Myanmar to signify a popular user with online influence; Oo & Thant, 2019). Young people from Myanmar often found cele users annoying, and claimed that their conspicuous displays of wealth, drinking, and western dress made them bad influences. Importantly, they made note of the psychological impact they had on young users, saying that seeing these images could affect the confidence of young people. There were similar comments made by young people in the current study, with some adding that cele users degraded the dignity of Myanmar and contributed to the harassment of women. In contrast, some young people liked the broader exposure to fashion and pop-culture that social media gave them.

The majority of young people in the current study reported that they check the accuracy of news they read on social media. However, Meers (2015, p. 4) suggested that “people are not always as diligent as they say they are in the way that they check the information they receive”. While there is no way to determine how accurate self-reports of checking behaviour are, there is a general perception among young people that their peers’ trust in news on social media is low, and that it is adults (who are less acquainted with Facebook) who are most actively sharing fake news.

Regarding hate speech, the recent observational study by McKay (2017a) identified the phenomena of ‘hate speech fatigue’ – the apathy that results from the high volume of hate speech encountered on social media. In the current study, this phenomenon was more often described in relation to fake news (which often includes hate speech). As in McKay’s study, rather than explicitly challenging, reporting or notifying others about such content, some participants in the current study reacted by simply ignoring it or posting a ‘haha’ emoji, which has actually become a method for notifying others that a

post is fake news (but also increases its visibility in their friends' newsfeeds via Facebook's algorithms). McKay (2017a) also found that instead of using the share function, social media users in Myanmar are more likely to copy and paste text into new posts. While this was not specifically mentioned by participants in the current study, it is consistent with the difficulty that they often experienced in identifying the original source of news. As a result, young people are forced to rely on discussion in the comments or on offline networks to determine the validity of online information.

Another recent study that informed the research questions of the current study was that undertaken by Grizelj (2017), who concluded that social media channels are better suited for engaging with young people to promote acceptance of diversity than traditional channels. Support for the suitability of social media for promotion of social cohesion was found in the current study, with multiple examples of social media being the channel through which young people developed understanding and acceptance of other cultures and communities, particularly Muslims.

Phandeevar's most recent study (Oo & Thant, 2019) also identified online harassment as a pressing issue for youth, particularly women and girls. As in the current study, Phandeevar found that harassment often stemmed from a lack of understanding regarding privacy controls. In particular, Phandeevar notes that most of the users in their study were unaware that entering a phone number was optional for account setup. As a result, users regularly divulged their personal contact information without being aware that it was unnecessary.

The research in context: Global perspective

General concerns around social media use

The results of this study confirm that the prevalence of smartphones and social media use among young people in Myanmar is high compared with developing countries in Africa, the Middle-East, parts of South America, and even some European and Asian countries, as it rapidly approaches the level of countries in the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD; Poushter, Bishop & Chwe, 2018). In the USA, more than half of teens say that they spend too much time on their phones (Anderson & Jiang, 2018), yet only 10% of Myanmar youth in the current study said this, with over 20% actually saying they don't spend enough time on their phones. Many young people in Myanmar reported using their phones whenever they are not working or studying, in turn being distracted from other more active tasks and keeping them up late at night. Similar heavy use patterns across the span of the day have been observed in OECD countries (Graafland, 2019) where parents are concerned about the potential impact of screen time on their children's sleep, mental health and physical activity. Recent systematic reviews have found significant negative associations between screen time and sleep outcomes (Hale & Guan, 2015; Carter et al., 2016). However, current evidence suggests that screen time has a negligible impact on mental health (Orben & Przybylski, 2019) and physical activity (Gebremariam et al., 2013) when the broader context of adolescent activities are taken into account.

In the current study, most of the concern from both parents and young people focused on the negative impact social media is reportedly having on the quality of offline relationships with family and friends, suggesting a need for education around digital nutrition (i.e., maintaining balanced, sustainable ways of managing technology use; Brewer, 2019). Another concern raised by some Myanmar parents was the potential for young people to start romantic relationships with people they have only met via social media, leading to marriage at a young age. The extent of this across Myanmar is not known, but it is not common in OECD countries, though clearly there are big cultural and religious differences between these two contexts.

The most common social media activities among young people from Myanmar were sharing news, followed by sharing health information and education opportunities. The identification of these as primary activities differs to those typically identified by young people from OECD countries, who

engage in more online gaming, general chat, and original photo and video sharing, particularly via Snapchat and Instagram, which have risen in popularity among young people at the expense of Facebook in recent years (Martin, Wang, Petty, Wang, & Wilkins 2018). Facebook remains the most popular app for news among young people in many parts of the world, and social media the most popular news source in general (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Around a third of Myanmar youth surveyed in the current study said they primarily get their news from social media, which is consistent with the worldwide average across countries with emerging and developed economies (Smith & Anderson, 2018). Playing games on social media was popular among boys in Myanmar, as was posting selfies, but both were less popular among Myanmar girls who were advised not to post pictures of themselves to prevent image-based abuse.

Online harassment and other dangers

Global statistics on rates of image-based abuse are only speculative. However, the Australian Office of the eSafety Commissioner (2017) recently published a report indicating that one in ten adults have experienced image-based abuse, with rates highest for women under 24 years, at one in four. The prevalence of image-based abuse was not measured quantitatively in the current study, but qualitative responses suggest that it is a significant issue for girls in Myanmar. However, few victims said that they took any action in response to image-based abuse or harassment, with many saying they feared retaliation from perpetrators. The Australian eSafety Commissioner report found that 76% of victims did not take action, with the most common reason being a belief that doing so would not change anything (fear of retaliation was not recorded as a reason among this sample). However, of those who did take action, 87% said that doing so resolved the problem for them, likely due to the powers that the eSafety Commissioner has to compel social media platforms to act in these cases. This highlights the importance of not only educating young people in Myanmar about the actions they can take when confronted with image-based abuse, but providing them with support and avenues for legal recourse also.

Apart from the differences outlined above, overall young people in Myanmar use social media in much the same way as young people from other countries, with urban youth in particular doing a significant amount of their socialising with peers online. However, in Myanmar young people have much less awareness of how to safely deal with the privacy, social, political and economic dangers of online interaction compared with other countries that have had a more gradual, scrutinised and regulated uptake of social media. For example, 89% of Australians aged 16–17 years know how to block people on social media, and 92% know how to change their privacy settings (Australian Communications and Media Authority, 2013). In contrast, only a small minority of young people in the current study knew how to use the blocking, reporting and privacy functions of Facebook. This makes young people in Myanmar vulnerable to the online dangers highlighted in this report such as online harassment, image-based abuse, hacking and online scams. In addition, while many respondents in the current study said they avoid posting controversial political stories or comments, they are unlikely to be acutely aware of the Myanmar Government's media and communication laws, which change on average several times a year, specifically around speaking out against the government or Myanmar military (Thuzar, 2019). The criminalization and reported intimidation of internet users under these laws largely contributes to Myanmar's low 'Internet Freedom Score' (Freedom on the Net, 2018). Freedom on the Net (2018) also reports that by international standards, the prevalence of online harassment, hate speech and political persecution in Myanmar are at high to very high levels, particularly against women.

Fake news and hate speech

While almost all young people in the current study had come across fake news stories on social media, few admitted to having shared or believed false information. In fact, some suggested that it was actually older adults with poor digital and media literacy who were mostly responsible for the spread of fake news. In contrast, many adults blamed the lack of critical thinking skills among young users. Interestingly, a recent study into fake news regarding the 2016 US election campaign found that the likelihood of sharing fake news stories increased with age (Guess, Nagler & Tucker, 2019), though it should be noted that no participants under 30 years were included in this study. More research is needed into the mechanisms behind the spread of fake news both in Myanmar and internationally, but it is likely to be primarily related to low digital and media literacy rather than age per se, which would explain the differing views between generations in Myanmar. The results of the current study support this hypothesis, with young people saying that they have become less susceptible to believing fake news (and less trusting of news overall) with more experience on social media, and it is users who are new to social media who are most likely to believe fake news.

However, being able to identify fake news unfortunately does little to stop its spread. Fake news is more likely to be shared on social media than the truth (Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018), and in Myanmar this often occurs inadvertently by commenting on the falsehood of such stories (McKay, 2017a). Young people from both Kayah State and Rakhine State were aware that it was often third parties systematically spreading these fake news stories to cause conflict between other groups for their own political gain, something that could be likened to the reported role of Russia in spreading fake news during the 2016 US election campaign (Badawy, Ferrara & Lerman, 2018). This suggests that while improving digital and media literacy is definitely important (for both young people and adults), tackling the proliferation of fake news across Myanmar requires a multi-pronged approach that includes both education and regulation, with Facebook needing to play a bigger and more effective role in responding to reports of fake news. This includes Facebook not only removing such stories and preventing their re-posting, but also proactively searching for content from these deleted posts that may have already been copied and pasted elsewhere. The finding that many young people in Myanmar respond to fake news by posting a 'haha' emoji could be used by Facebook to assist in flagging potential fake news stories for review.

The overlap between fake news and hate speech means that encouraging culture change around tolerance and acceptance of people from different ethnicities (particularly Muslims who were the most common target of hate speech in the current study) will also be important going forward. While there was little awareness in the current study of existing anti-hate speech campaigns, young people believed that social media has a significant role to play in fostering peace and tolerance between different groups in Myanmar society. Given this and the fact that most young people in the current study were largely disengaged from and dismissive of fake news and hate speech targeting outgroups, there is significant opportunity to promote tolerance and diversity and to encourage connections between people from different cultures, through creative, positive messaging that appeals to young people and capitalises on the popularity of sharing stories and videos that feature Myanmar celebrities and/or humour.

Research into hate speech on social media is a relatively new area of investigation internationally. Most studies into hate speech to date have focused on automatic detection (Del Vigna, Cimino, Dell'Orletta, Petrocchi & Tesconi, 2017; Waseem & Hovy, 2016; Qian, ElSherief, Belding & Wang, 2018; Davidson, Warmsley, Macy & Weber, 2017; Badjatiya, Gupta, Gupta & Varma, 2017). However, the few studies into the prevalence of online hate speech estimate that it is widespread, with 40–70% of young people reporting being exposed to online hate speech, and 11–21% personally targeted (Netsafe, 2018; Oksanen, Hawdon, Holkeri, Näsi & Räsänen, 2014; Hawdon, Oksanen & Räsänen, 2014). The most prominent contexts for hate speech were sexual orientation, physical appearance and ethnicity, followed by political and religious views (Oksanen et al., 2014). Compared with these international findings, the qualitative findings of the current study suggest that hate speech is currently more prevalent in Myanmar than other countries. With the exception of sexual orientation, which was not identified by respondents in the current study, the most common contexts for hate speech in Myanmar (i.e., ethnicity, political and religious views) are fairly typical.

A recent study by Hawdon et al. (2014) investigated hate speech across four countries with high digital uptake (Finland, Germany, the UK and the USA). It compared both the impact and recourse of consumers affected by online hate speech in each nation. While individuals across these countries responded differently to hate speech, each nation responded to victims' calls for removal or protection from such messages in similar ways – through a regulatory body, the use of government media communication laws, and education programmes – all of which Myanmar is currently lacking. Despite their longitudinal exposure to developing digital technology, federal and state media laws, and resourcing for digital education programs, each of the four countries in this study has since reported increases in concerns around cybersafety, cyberbullying and hate speech between 2016 and 2018, even with proactive approaches (Cook, 2019). This raises the question – at what rate would online hate speech and online harassment increase in Myanmar in the coming years without any regulatory practice or nation-wide digital education programmes?

Online psychological and emotional support

While the need for regulation and education around online safety and digital citizenship in Myanmar is obvious, the current study also points to a need for psychological and emotional support to deal with the hate speech, harassment and other negative interactions on social media that young people encounter. Although many of the impacts of social media on mental health discussed by participants were negative, the current study also revealed that Myanmar youth are actually using social media to cope with mental health issues – for example, by using it as an outlet to articulate their feelings, deal with stress, or to distract themselves from difficult emotions.

Young people across the world are increasingly seeking support and information regarding their mental health online (Rickwood, Mazzer & Telford, 2015). However, there is currently very little credible online information helpful to young people in Myanmar. The fact that seeking and sharing health information on social media was so popular among the young people sampled in the current study suggests that there would likely be a significant appetite for online mental health resources, were they available in their languages and tailored to their context.

In addition to the provision of mental health resources online, there is a well-established body of evidence supporting the efficacy of online tools such as apps, websites, online games and social media to effectively treat mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety (Ridout & Campbell, 2018; Spijkerman, Pots & Bohlmeijer, 2016; Clarke, Kuosmanen & Barry, 2015; Ali, Farrer, Gulliver & Griffiths, 2015; Christensen, 2014; Campbell & Robards, 2013; Ridout & Campbell, 2014). The delivery of varying online mental health interventions, from psychoeducation (online mental health education), to self-help apps, chat groups, and social media support groups, are all avenues well established in Australia, the UK, the USA and Canada. Given the barriers to mental health support young people in Myanmar currently face, and the fact that they are already turning to social media to engage in knowledge-seeking around health issues, there is a promising opportunity to use social media and the online space to develop and connect Myanmar youth with mental health information and online support services. Given young people in Myanmar view social media, and Facebook in particular, as a search engine or knowledge platform (McKay, 2017a), social media could play a significant role in connecting young people in Myanmar with online mental health resources they desperately need.

Two authors of this report (Ridout and Campbell) have recently developed an online mental health platform tool for Kids Helpline, which provides counsellor-lead mental health support and psychoeducation for Australians aged 13–25 in a safe, closed and anonymous online social network (Campbell, Ridout, Amon, Collyer, & Dagleish, 2018). At present, Australia is the only country offering this initiative to its population. The potential for social media to deliver mental health psychoeducation, self-help and group support in Myanmar is both a cost effective and timely way to roll out a basic mental health service. It presents a grassroots opportunity in lieu of no current national service. However, establishing these kind of services in Myanmar would require a lead service body and regulatory body to ensure quality of evidence-based practice delivery via e-mental health tools. With neither body currently in place, the recommendations in this report focus on suggested first steps to provide online triage support for young people from Myanmar who require emotional support.

KEY ISSUES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The most urgent areas of concern identified in this study can be distilled into the following four key issues, for which possible solutions and recommendations are proposed below. These are based on the insights gained from the experiences described by participants in the study, current international evidence-based practice, and the expertise and experience of the research team and Save the Children staff on the ground in Myanmar.

Issue 1: Myanmar's young people lack digital citizenship skills

Most young people in Myanmar do not have the digital safety skills and knowledge to adequately protect themselves from online threats such as scams, hacking and harassment. While some are aware of blocking and reporting functions, most do not know how to use them, nor are they aware of how to change the privacy settings on their social media accounts. Media literacy skills are also lacking among young people in Myanmar. While trust in news found on social media is generally low among young people, most do not know how to properly check the validity of news. Given the rapid uptake of social media in Myanmar, the prevalence of fake news and online dangers, and general lack of guidance from parents and teachers, there is a desperate need and great enthusiasm for a digital citizenship curriculum tailored to Myanmar youth.

Digital citizenship is a broader concept than just online safety and media literacy, and issues that should also be covered in a curriculum aimed at young people include online etiquette and communication, cyberbullying and harassment, online commerce, online rights and responsibilities, and awareness of one's digital footprint. A focus on digital nutrition, which refers to maintaining balance and wellness in the digital age (Brewer, 2019), would also address the reported tendency for young people in Myanmar to use social media for long periods of time at the expense of their offline relationships.

Recommendations

- Save the Children to advocate with other education actors in Myanmar to the Ministry of Education for a digital citizenship curriculum to be developed and introduced in all schools, with a key focus on staying safe online (including how to use privacy and security settings), and critical evaluation of online content (including how to identify and respond to fake news). Due to sensitivities within Myanmar around the term 'citizenship', it may be worth considering alternative terminology to make curriculum more palatable.
- Non-government organisations (NGOs) to recruit celebrities and key influencers to promote digital safety and media literacy through multiple avenues, including sharable social media posts and videos.
- NGOs to support ongoing efforts by Facebook to: a) ensure that all Facebook tools are available in Burmese and other local Myanmar languages; b) increase the number of Burmese and Myanmar local language content moderators working for Facebook; c) improve effectiveness in responding to fake news and hate speech reports (and flagging via 'haha' emojis), by both removing offending posts and preventing their re-posting.
- Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to develop urban and village workshops to teach media literacy and digital citizenship skills to parents and teachers, and teach them about appropriate community standards for social media use.

Issue 2: Online sexual harassment is highly prevalent and harming young people in Myanmar

The most alarming theme to arise from the current study was the prevalence of online sexual harassment of girls on social media. Girls were vulnerable to harassment not only from online predators who contact them with unsolicited messages, often containing inappropriate sexual content, or requests for sexual images, money, or declarations of reciprocal love (usually by threatening to misuse or photoshop their images and post on social media), but also from ex-partners, who often used similar techniques to defame or seek revenge on young women for having ended their relationship. As well as these explicit dangers, girls are also subject to an online culture of disrespecting women that appears to reflect offline cultural norms of casual sexism, with many boys and young men not realising that this constitutes harassment. Reported impacts of online sexual harassment and image-based abuse ranged from shame and public humiliation to attempted suicide. It is clear that there is not only a need to provide information and support to girls regarding how to respond to and protect themselves from such threats, but to educate wider society, particularly boys and young men, about the impact, unacceptability and illegality of online sexual harassment.

Recommendations

- NGOs to partner with actors tackling gender-based violence (GBV) to promote awareness of the prevalence and impact of online sexual harassment in Myanmar.
- Government to introduce laws to govern technology-facilitated GBV and the creation of a regulatory body with the power to compel social media platforms to address instances of image-based abuse in a timely fashion.
- NGOs to develop an online video campaign aimed at young men to communicate the impact of online sexual harassment on young women and promote on social media.
- NGOs to develop an online video campaign aimed at young women on how to respond to online sexual harassment and promote on social media.

Issue 3: Online hate speech has real world impact and is a barrier to social cohesion

The psychological and sociological impact of hate speech is felt by multiple ethnic groups in Myanmar, but the most common targets of hate speech in the current study were Rohingya Muslims, who frequently encountered posts on social media inciting hatred and violence against them. This is obviously concerning given the reported link between hate speech on social media and violence against Muslim communities (McKirdy, 2018), but also the psychological impacts on Rohingya young people reported for the first time in the current study (including depression, feelings of hopelessness, and suicide ideation). This is not to mention the impacts that being marginalised and confined to IDP camps has on their freedom of movement and ability to take part in Myanmar society.

While there are anti-hate speech campaigns already in place across Myanmar, very few respondents in the current study were aware of them. A number of young people instead spoke of having their negative perceptions of other cultures and ethnicities changed through exposure to and positive interactions with people from other cultures on social media. There was consensus that social media has great potential to increase empathy and understanding between different groups in Myanmar society and foster peace and tolerance.

Recommendations

- NGOs to develop an online video campaign to humanise the victims of hate speech (particularly internally displaced Muslim young people) and communicate the real-world impact that hate speech has on the lives of victims, including psychologically, and on Myanmar society (i.e., conflict and violence). Stories from young people who have been deradicalised in their views of minority groups could also be very impactful.
- NGOs to recruit celebrities and key influencers to promote peace, tolerance and diversity through positive messaging and encouraging connections between people from different cultures. Young people in Myanmar are heavy consumers of popular culture and music (particularly online) so there are opportunities to use celebrities and the medium of song and other creative avenues to raise awareness and get these messages across.
- NGOs to consult with young people from a range of cultures, as this will be key to ensuring that anti-hate speech and harassment messages connect with the target audience.
- CSOs to use social media to connect existing youth networks across Myanmar to promote dialogue, peace and understanding between different cultural groups.

Issue 4: The lack of online resources to support the mental health and education of young people in Myanmar

The internet has become an important source of information and social support regarding mental health for young people (Rickwood et al., 2015). However, there is currently very little credible mental health information online suitable for young people in Myanmar. Seeking and sharing health information was one of the most common social media behaviours reported by young people in Myanmar, suggesting that there would also likely be a significant appetite for suitable online mental health resources tailored to them, were they available. Online mental health support interventions run by accredited mental health professionals have been shown to be effective in OECD countries (Ridout & Campbell, 2018; Campbell et al., 2018). However, the mental health sector in Myanmar currently lacks a lead service body and regulatory body to ensure quality of evidence-based practice delivery. Suggested first steps therefore focus on providing online information and triage support for young people in Myanmar who require emotional support, while more research into the suitability of both online and offline interventions for young people in Myanmar is conducted.

Another common use of social media reported was to connect with and undertake self-led e-learning. Many young people reported using social media (YouTube in particular) to develop English skills, computer skills and vocational skills, as well as participate in formal online distance education programs. However, it is apparent that there are few online opportunities for young people who do not already have strong English skills. Rohingya young people would particularly benefit from distance education given the restrictions on their freedom of movement.

Recommendations

- Academic researchers to develop and trial online support services for emotional and mental health issues among Myanmar youth as a matter of priority. For example, investigate the suitability and efficacy of the app 'Mee Pya Tike' for providing emotional support via online chat sessions.

- In the absence of widely available psychological services in Myanmar, Save the Children to advocate for the Ministry of Health to partner with Save the Children and other actors to provide online psychosocial ‘fact sheets’ in multiple languages to educate young people (and adults) about positive coping mechanisms to deal with stress and other emotional issues.
- A recent review of mental health interventions in Myanmar (Nguyen, Lee, Schojan & Bolton, 2018) found that there have been very few evaluations of programmes to reduce child mental distress. Academic researchers to conduct more studies into the suitability and efficacy of affordable and scalable online and offline interventions to address youth mental health in Myanmar.
- Given the thirst young people in Myanmar have for online educational material to increase their English skills, computer skills, vocational skills and general level of education, there is a need to increase and develop e-learning opportunities. Government and NGOs should partner to develop opportunities tailored to Myanmar young people and ensure they are available in both Myanmar language as well as in local languages. Internally displaced Muslim young people are particularly in need of distance education opportunities due to their displacement and lack of freedom of movement.

CONCLUSION

Though it has been clear for a number of years that digital connectedness has played an important role in the lives of young people in Myanmar, research on its impacts has been limited. Myanmar is highly fragmented, both from a geopolitical and sociological point of view, so there are inevitable challenges in understanding social media use and developing initiatives to address its negative aspects. This study thus represents an important addition to a growing conversation, one which seeks to better understand the ways in which online experiences translate to offline lives.

Despite recent actions and commitments to improve its response to the inflammatory and dangerous fake news and hate speech that has spread across its platform in recent years, Facebook and other social media companies will fail to address the issues highlighted in this research by applying western understandings of digital behaviour to other user communities. Historical, political, technical, and cultural contexts work in concert to determine the ways in which users navigate digital spaces. International actors must invest and partner in understanding these various factors if they hope to support young people in Myanmar to develop the digital skills required to create healthier, more pro-social online environments.

In particular, Myanmar users differ from their global peers in the way they use Facebook to find and consume information. Where others may use search platforms like Google, differences in Myanmar fonts limit the functionality of these search platforms for Myanmar users. Facebook, however, reconciles Zawgyi (the most popular Myanmar font) with Unicode on the backend, which means searches return more and better results compared to Google. This has a significant impact on the information ecosystem within which young people in Myanmar exist and creates both limitations and opportunities for dealing with pervasive problems such as hate speech and fake news.

Whilst Myanmar’s recent experience of social media has been turbulent, and in many ways defined by the prevalence of dangerous online discourse, for young people it also offers hope. Not only is social media used for self-improvement and education – including, for those confined to camps or constrained by conflict – it offers young people opportunities to connect with those who are different from them, which in some cases, changes their perception for the better.

In pursuing these opportunities, international and local actors should always be aware of the gender, class, and geographic differences that shape the online experience of young people in Myanmar. For example, rural young people may struggle to make use of online tools requiring large amounts of data, and girls and young women may be fearful of online spaces that expose them, their photos, and their personal information to strangers. Programmers must be careful in the way they construct digital spaces so as to ensure they are safe and welcoming to all potential users lest they deepen an already sizable rural/urban, male/female division in Myanmar's social media use.

Most critically, perhaps, is the importance of recognising links between online use and offline psychological and emotional health. Like many countries in the world, mental health care is limited in scope and quality in Myanmar. However, young people seek out online spaces and forms of expression when they experience psychological or emotional distress. Similarly, young people, particularly those who are already marginalised, report that fake news and hate speech can leave them feeling excluded, hopeless, and even suicidal. Any programming with online components must therefore take mental health and its provision seriously. Given the popularity of health content with young people in Myanmar, and their willingness to share it, the creation and provision of online mental health resources could have considerable reach and impact.

Regardless, more research is needed. In addition to working to better understand operational questions, such as why young people in Myanmar seek and accept strangers as friends, studies that explore sociological aspects of social media use are direly needed. In particular, the authors support further research examining (for example): the link between low digital literacy and the spread of fake news and hate speech; the relationships between online and offline harassment of women and girls, particularly from the point of view of young men and boys; and any relationship between the use of Facebook as a search engine and the growing sense within Myanmar that the country is globally misunderstood.

With such a young population, Myanmar will almost certainly continue to be significantly affected by social media. As such, it is critical the next generation of social media users receive the necessary support and education as early as possible.

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