

# Using social media for patient and community engagement: MSF's experience in Lebanon

\*Jinane Saad, Mario Fawaz, Jesse Verschuere

Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), Beirut, Lebanon

\*[msf-lebanon-com@msf.org](mailto:msf-lebanon-com@msf.org)

## Introduction

Internet penetration in Lebanon is thought to reach around 75% of the population (data from 2016), and an estimated two-thirds of the Syrian refugees living in the country are thought to have internet access. The high rates of internet penetration provides an opportunity for MSF to use social media as a tool to increase the ability of its projects to reach and engage with populations in need of medical services. To further explore the potential of social media in helping engagement with patients, MSF set up a Facebook page for its Lebanon projects in March 2016. This was used as a complementary tool alongside existing health promotion (HP) approaches in Lebanon, providing a two-way communication platform between MSF and the community.

## Methods

We describe the engagement with the community through social media initiative in Lebanon, using retrospective analysis of the online interactions via its Facebook page between Jan 2018-Dec 2018. We extracted data from Facebook, using Hootsuite and Sysomos, as well as manual extraction of data relating to page views, fans' profiles, comments, and private messages. We also analysed the content of a random sample of private messages and comments sent to the page in specific periods during 2018. In addition, we gathered perceptions and feedback on the use of online engagement from Lebanon field teams through meetings and emails.

## Ethics

This description/evaluation of an innovation project did not involve human participants or their data; the MSF Ethics Framework for Innovation (or equivalent) was applied to help identify and mitigate potential harms.

## Results

During the time period evaluated, the MSF Lebanon Facebook page reached approximately 50,600 fans (users who "like" the page), with 60% identified as from the areas targeted for MSF services, including Bekaa, Beirut, and North Lebanon. Facebook accounts classified as belonging to females (52%) and males (47%) were almost equally represented. During 2018, 7,610 direct messages were received through Facebook, many of which were enquiries about job opportunities, and MSF Lebanon's activities and services. A deeper analysis into individual months revealed that in October 2018, for example, 22% of the direct messages received were enquiries related to MSF Lebanon's activities and

services. In 2018, 52% of the MSF published content of the Lebanon Facebook page related to activities in Lebanon; 27% about Lebanon projects, and 12% about HP. Feedback from field teams showed that the communities they are engaging with, including patients, found the MSF Lebanon Facebook page a useful source for information on MSF services. The page may have provided a valuable route for gathering feedback and complaints from the community about MSF services.

## **Conclusion**

Our findings suggest that digital engagement with the communities can provide complementary tools, as part of broader community engagement and HP strategies. As of Jan 2019 we have started a regular analysis and reporting system, feeding information to operational and medical teams from these online conversations with communities. We are also planning a digital HP campaign, with specific resources for implementation and measurement of impact. Limitations of our work include difficulties on assessing the impact of digital HP on communities, and challenges in extracting Facebook analytics. Our findings may be specific to regions with high internet penetration.

## **Conflicts of interest**

None declared.

## **Jinane Saad**

Jinane Saad is Lebanese, and has a Master's Degree in Communications, as well as Bachelor's Degrees in Languages and Literature, together with nine years of professional experience in the communications field. She joined Médecins Sans Frontières in October 2015 as Field Communication Manager in Lebanon. In 2018 she worked in Yemen and Sudan for short missions.