



NOV 2019



**MOBILE MYANMAR:  
THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON YOUNG PEOPLE IN  
CONFLICT-AFFECTED REGIONS OF MYANMAR**



**Save the Children**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**SYDNEY**

## Prepared for Save the Children International by

### Authors

Brad Ridout, The University of Sydney  
Melyn McKay  
Krestina Amon, The University of Sydney  
Andrew Campbell, The University of Sydney

### Research Team

Joy Wiskin  
Paul Miki L Seng Du  
Theh Mar

**Cover photo:** Phyo Phyo Nay Win

## Published by

Save the Children International

Strathmore Building #03-01,  
Tanglin International Centre, 352 Tanglin Road, Singapore 247671

Email: [andy.nilsen@savethechildren.org](mailto:andy.nilsen@savethechildren.org)

Website: [www.savethechildren.net](http://www.savethechildren.net)

November, 2019

### Suggested citation

Ridout, B. McKay, M. Amon, K. & Campbell, A. (2019). *Mobile Myanmar: Impact of social media on young people in conflict-affected regions of Myanmar*. Yangon, Myanmar: Save the Children Myanmar and The University of Sydney.

© Save the Children International 2019.

You may copy, distribute, display, download and otherwise freely deal with this work for any purpose, provided that you attribute Save the Children International as the owner.

### Disclaimer

This publication does not necessarily reflect the policy position of Save the Children International or any Save the Children Member organization. The information in this publication was based on available information at the time of preparation. No responsibility is accepted by Save the Children International or any Save the Children Member organization for any errors or omissions contained within this publication.

## CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	6
Summary of key findings .....	7
General usage.....	7
Online safety .....	7
Fake news and propaganda .....	7
Hate speech .....	8
Online harassment.....	8
Sharing behaviours .....	9
Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing .....	9
Impact on society.....	9
Key issues and recommendations.....	10
Recommendations for Government.....	10
Recommendations for Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) .....	10
Recommendations for academic researchers .....	11
Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other local actors .....	11
INTRODUCTION .....	12
What are we trying to understand? .....	13
LITERATURE REVIEW .....	14
Useful statistics on social media use and hate speech in Myanmar .....	14
Recent Myanmar studies of particular relevance to the scoping study .....	14
Relevant academic work on social media use in Myanmar.....	19
Relevant studies from outside Myanmar .....	20
Existing Initiatives.....	21
Panzagar / ‘Flower Speech’ .....	22
‘Think Before You Trust’ – Burma Monitor .....	22
Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation (MIDO) .....	22
The Impact of Freedom of Expression, Religion and Belief: Measuring results through online initiatives .....	22
BACKGROUND CONTEXT ON FOCUS AREAS.....	23
Rakhine State – key demographic, conflict, and other relevant information .....	23
Kayah State – key demographic, conflict, and other relevant information .....	24
METHODOLOGY .....	25
Objectives.....	25
Primary research questions.....	25
General usage.....	26
Online safety .....	26
Fake news and propaganda .....	26
Hate speech and harassment.....	26

Sharing behaviours .....	27
Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing .....	27
Impact on society .....	28
Guiding principles and ethics approval.....	28
Team structure and roles .....	29
Selection of research sites .....	31
Research design and sampling strategy.....	31
Scope .....	36
Data Collection Methods.....	36
Social media use survey.....	36
Focus group discussions .....	36
Key informant interviews.....	36
Data analysis.....	36
Strengths and limitations .....	37
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS: KAYAH STATE.....	38
General usage.....	38
Online safety .....	38
Fake news and propaganda .....	40
Hate speech .....	42
Online harassment.....	44
Sharing behaviours .....	45
Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing .....	46
Impact on society.....	47
FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS: RAKHINE STATE.....	49
General usage.....	49
Online safety .....	49
Fake news and propaganda .....	51
Hate speech .....	54
Online harassment.....	55
Sharing behaviours .....	56
Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing .....	57
Impact on society.....	58
KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: RESULTS .....	60
General usage.....	60
Online safety .....	60
Fake news and propaganda .....	63
Hate speech .....	69
Online harassment.....	73
Sharing behaviours .....	74

Impact on daily lives and psychological well-being.....	76
Impacts on society .....	80
<b>SOCIAL MEDIA USE SURVEY: RESULTS.....</b>	<b>87</b>
Demographics.....	87
Phone use .....	87
Social media use .....	87
Social media apps.....	88
Social media activities.....	90
News on social media.....	90
Impacts of social media .....	92
<b>DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....</b>	<b>94</b>
Summary of findings and key analysis points .....	94
General usage.....	94
Online safety .....	94
Fake news and propaganda .....	95
Hate speech .....	96
Online harassment.....	96
Sharing behaviours .....	97
Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing .....	97
Impact on society.....	98
The research in context: Myanmar perspective .....	98
The research in context: Global perspective.....	99
Key issues and recommendations.....	104
Issue 1: Myanmar’s young people lack digital citizenship skills .....	104
Issue 2: Online sexual harassment is highly prevalent and harming young people in Myanmar .....	104
Issue 3: Online hate speech has real world impact and is a barrier to social cohesion .....	105
Issue 4: Lack of online resources to support the mental health and education of young people in Myanmar .....	106
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>107</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>108</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>115</b>
Appendix A: Social Media Use Survey .....	115
Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide.....	122
Appendix C: Key Informant Interview Guide .....	134
Appendix D: Social Media Use Survey Full Results .....	139



## 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. But while young people are highly engaged with social media and its 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 and 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 very 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 on those platforms affect changes in the attitudes and offline behaviours 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 is based on the data collected from that study. It begins with a literature review, examining prior relevant studies from Myanmar and further afield. It then provides an overview of the research methodology, including the guiding research questions, selection criteria, and team structure. The analysis is divided by region (the results of focus groups conducted in Kayah State and then Rakhine State), followed by a further section discussing findings from one-on-one interviews with young people, community leaders, parents, and other key informants. The report then details the results of the social media use survey, before presenting key findings and recommendations for advocacy and programming.

## Summary of key findings

### General usage

- More than half of young people sampled in this study were heavy smartphone users, 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.
- 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.
- Instead, parents mostly try to limit the amount of time their children (especially daughters) spend online as a safety measure.
- 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.
- 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 VOA (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 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).
- Whilst fake news can perpetuate fear and 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.

## **Hate speech**

- The hate speech ecosystem affects everyone. In this study, Muslim IDP 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. Maramagyi young people felt racially discriminated against, and many Chin young people 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.
- 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 were aware 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.

## **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 young girls, send inappropriate sexual content, or extort them for money, naked photos, or declarations of reciprocal love.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.



## 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.
- Half of survey respondents reported posting selfies on social media, however, girls (particularly 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.
- 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 wellbeing

- Muslim IDP young people said seeing hate speech on social media made them feel sad, stressed, angry and hopeless. Despite this, many Muslim IDP 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.
- Several Muslim IDP 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. It also gave them a sense of hope by connecting them to people from other ethnicities who are working towards equality.
- 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 (e.g., 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.

## Impact on society

- Social media may give young people an outlet to be more outspoken with their opinions and feelings.
- Both young people and adults spoke of the addictive nature of social media (especially 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.
- 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.

## Key issues and recommendations

The most urgent areas of concern raised by this study can be distilled into the following four key issues, for which possible solutions and recommendations are proposed, grouped by the sectors that we propose should take the lead on these.

1. Myanmar's young people lack digital citizenship skills
2. Online sexual harassment is highly prevalent and harming young people in Myanmar
3. Online hate speech has real world impact and is a barrier to social cohesion
4. The lack of online resources to support the mental health and education of young people in Myanmar

## Recommendations for Government

- Support the development of a digital citizenship curriculum to be introduced in all schools, with a key focus on staying safe online and critical evaluation of online content (especially fake news).
- Introduce laws to govern technology-facilitated Gender-Based Violence (GBV) and create a regulatory body with the power to compel social media platforms to address instances of image-based abuse in a timely fashion.
- 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.

## Recommendations for Non-Government Organisations (NGOs)

- 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.
- Partner with actors tackling GBV to promote awareness of the prevalence and impact of online sexual harassment in Myanmar.
- Develop online video campaigns aimed at young men and women to communicate the impact of online sexual harassment and provide information about how to respond and take action.
- Recruit celebrities and key influencers to promote digital safety and media literacy through multiple avenues, including sharable social media posts and videos.
- Recruit celebrities and key influencers to promote peace, tolerance and diversity through positive messaging and encouraging connections between people from different cultures.
- Develop an online video campaign to humanise the victims of hate speech 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 deradicalized in their views of minority groups could also be very impactful.
- 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.

- Partner with government to develop e-learning opportunities for young people to increase their English skills, computer skills, vocational skills and general level of education. These should be tailored to Myanmar young people and ensure they are available in both Myanmar language and local languages. Encouraging telecommunications providers to make online education platforms free to access (i.e., not require data costs) could maximise their accessibility. Rohingya<sup>1</sup> young people would particularly benefit from distance education given the restrictions on their freedom of movement.

### **Recommendations for academic researchers**

- Develop and trial online support services for emotional and mental health issues among young people in Myanmar 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.
- Conduct more studies into the suitability and efficacy of affordable and scalable online and offline interventions to address youth mental health in Myanmar.

### **Recommendations for Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) and other local actors**

- 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.
- Use social media to connect existing youth networks across Myanmar to promote dialogue, peace and understanding between different cultural groups.

---

<sup>1</sup> In this report, the term 'Rohingya' is used to refer to the members of the Muslim community in Rakhine State who have self-identified as such, in affirmation of the right of self-identification of all communities. Aside from the Rohingya community, Kaman Muslims also make up a proportion of the Muslim community in Rakhine State.

## 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, p. 2).

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 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.

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. The assumption that platforms like Facebook increase the reach and speed of transmission of dangerous discourses is logical, but little is known as to how variables like trust affect changes in attitudes and offline behaviours. Moreover, while international researchers are increasingly studying the emotional and psychological impacts of social media use on young people, such studies are yet to be conducted in Myanmar.

## **What are we trying to understand?**

The key questions that guided this scoping study, and the literature review below, were as follows:

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?

Further guiding questions are detailed in the Methodology chapter.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review makes use of online, open-source material, and two recent studies conducted by one of the authors (McKay), one of which is unpublished. This review is by no means exhaustive, rather it was intended to signpost and highlight relevant learnings and insights from programmatic studies, academic studies and other relevant initiatives relevant to the design of the current study.

The main limitations to the literature review were time permitted, and relevant material that was and was not publicly accessible online. A conscious decision was made to discount literature from before January 2015, given the rapid contextual and technological changes Myanmar has experienced since then.

### Useful statistics on social media use and hate speech in Myanmar

Facebook is, by a substantial margin, the most widely used social media platform in Myanmar. The popular idea that 'Facebook is the internet' is so often repeated in relation to Myanmar online use, it's clichéd (Silverman, 2018). According to one online aggregator, Facebook accounts for 92% of all page referrals, with the closest competitors being YouTube and Pinterest at 2% each (StatCounter Global Stats, 2018).

According to Search for Common Ground, an estimated 9.7 million people in Myanmar were registered on Facebook in 2017, a number which doubled since 2015 (Grizelj, 2017). Statistica (2019) reports that the number of Facebook users in Myanmar has since doubled again, totaling 21 million in January 2019. A recent study from Phandeeyar discovered the average joining year was 2012, the average number of Facebook friends was 1,080, and the average user spent almost 3 hours per day on Facebook (McKay, 2017a).

Myanmar Facebook's general user population skews young (84% are reported to be under 35 years; McKay, 2017a). It is also majority male (61%), and urban, with the majority of users clustered around Yangon (33%) and Mandalay (7%). The number of monthly active users in Loikaw (Kayah State) is estimated at between 90,000 and 120,000; in Sittwe (Rakhine State) that same figure falls between 50,000 and 60,000 (Facebook, 2019).

Young people are also very active users. In a study of two urban areas – Yangon and Lashio – an estimated 85% of younger users reportedly log on once a day or more, while only 5% report never using social media at all (compared to 30% of older users; Grizelj, 2017).

A 2017 report found that young people have misgivings about the platform, however, with over 20% feeling that there are more negative impacts than positive. Respondents in Yangon and Lashio also believed Facebook's ubiquity increased tensions between their communities, with 55% saying the overall impact is both negative and positive (Grizelj, 2017).

One of the most obvious issues to have arisen with Facebook's sudden spread across Myanmar is the role it plays in the creation and dissemination of fake news and 'hate speech'. Hate speech can be defined as speech that is intended to foster hatred against groups based on race, religion, gender, sexual preference, national origin, or other traits. At the least it fosters hatred and discrimination, and at its worst it promotes violence and killing (Aall, 2011). A 2017 study identified 150 separate Facebook pages producing and/or sharing hate speech content, with 120 being classed as 'active producers' of content (Search For Common Ground, 2017).

### Recent Myanmar studies of particular relevance to the scoping study

This section reviews the methodology and key findings from three recent studies undertaken in Myanmar, which are highly relevant to the questions guiding the current study. These were chosen as they were recent (conducted in the last 3 years), designed in whole or in part to gain insights into social media use in Myanmar, and use a mix of methodological approaches. This is followed by a review of recent relevant academic work conducted in Myanmar, and a rapid scan of relevant programmatic and academic research conducted internationally.



Research into Myanmar Facebook use (unpublished)

Organisation/Author: Melyn McKay for Phandeeayar

Date: October 2017

**Relevance:** This as-yet unpublished report (McKay, 2017a) has strong relevance to the scoping study. Phandeeayar set out to explore Facebook use and behaviours among a population sample roughly reflecting that of Myanmar, with a focus on how people in real-time respond to online material deemed ‘hate speech’. Methodologically it also moved beyond earlier studies which have focused on simply asking respondents to describe their social media behaviour. Instead Phandeeayar created a practical simulation to observe research participants mid-use. The results provide rich and detailed insights into the idiosyncrasies of Facebook (and broader social media) use in Myanmar.

The findings from this research were used to develop a second study on ‘digital cultures’ (Oo & Thant, 2019), which was to be conducted by Phandeeayar in 2018. This study looked more specifically at digital use, content preferences, and online safety.

**Methodology and limitations:** Around 70 participants were included in the study from four areas with the highest concentrations of users – Yangon, Mandalay, Monywa and Taunggyi. A dummy Facebook profile was created by Phandeeayar and populated with shared content from around the web. Specifically, the profile included current events news, posts from noted extremists, fake news sites, and entertainment news. The Focus Groups Discussion (FGD) participants were first asked to log into their own Facebook accounts in order to observe the way they interacted with the app or page itself. Phandeeayar noted that its study was limited by its small sample size, and the brevity of its FGDs (2.5 hours). Its ambition for a diverse sample were in some cases skewed by age, professional, and educational background in the make-up of its FGDs. While it was able to gain a closer insight to ‘real-life’ social media behaviour, there were still concerns about participants demonstrating social desirability bias in the FGDs.

The second study (Oo & Thant, 2019) included 23 focus 137 participants in five locations including Hlaing Thar Yar, Yangon, Meikhtila, Taunggyi, Kalay, and Hpa’an. As before, Phandeeayar’s team of researchers conducted FGDs which included observation periods that enabled the researchers to ask questions about real-time behaviors. Though larger in scale, the study otherwise used many of the same selection methods and was thus subject to the preceding study’s limitations.

**Key findings:** Despite these limitations, both studies provide granular and relevant insights for the current study. As well as providing some useful headline statistics on usage time and network size, the studies looked at a range of relevant issues including: where people went for news; how respondents assessed the credibility of popular sources of news; how respondents engaged with content; and how they used Facebook tools (reactions, emojis, GIFs, etc.) specifically to express nuanced reactions. One of the most interesting findings, to this regard, is a noted preference for trusting individuals over organisations – e.g., participants were more likely to trust posts found on a journalist’s personal profile than news articles posted by a mainstream newspaper.

The first study also identified patterns of behaviour linked to age, gender, educational background, and location and posited a number of typical Facebook ‘Personas’ to be found in Myanmar. Phandeeayar found localised differences in how people decide which information to trust, which often reflected pre-social media practice in those areas. For example, in more provincial locations (Taunggyi/Monywa), the Facebook pages of local journalists were particularly prominent and trusted sources of news. In the past in these towns, people would check local rumours with local journalists in their personal networks – this function has now migrated online, with Facebook pages of local journalists being popular places to go to see if something is credible or not. However, Phandeeayar also reported that the traditional offline method of contacting journalists personally was still a popular means of rumour validation. Of considerable importance was its identification of ‘hate speech fatigue’ – a phenomenon describing the apathy resulting from the sheer volume of hate speech material encountered online. Rather than challenging, reporting or blocking such content, some respondents simply ignored it or mocked it by reacting with a ‘haha’ emoji – which unfortunately works to increase the offending post’s visibility vis-à-vis the Facebook algorithm.

The second study identified apps – beyond Facebook – that were commonly in use. For instance, file-sharing apps, which allow users to download content for offline use, were extremely popular among younger participants. The study also found conflicting views on the benefits of digital learning. On the one hand, parents generally restricted children and adolescence from making social media profiles until after they finished their matriculation exams; on

the other, both young people and their parents understood digital learning as an essential means of self-development and improvement. This led to another critical finding for the study team, that social media profiles (including Facebook) are not necessarily seen as a digital reflection of a singular offline person. Rather, different accounts are used for different online activities: the same person might keep one profile for reading news, another for conducting business, and still another for sharing videos and memes. That a single person might use multiple profiles is not seen as malicious or duplicitous, but rather, as a means of curating one's online experience. This finding, that western notions of identity and privacy might not map directly onto Myanmar internet use, has important implications for campaigns seeking to mitigate the effects of fake news and hate speech, as well as for those who aim to improve digital safety and security.

*Youth-led participatory research on social cohesion in urban areas*

*Organisation/Author: Irena Grizelj for Search for Common Ground (SFCG)*

*Date: May 2018*

**Relevance:** This report (Grizelj, 2018) focused on the role of both mainstream and social media in shaping public opinion and mobilising people in Myanmar, but given its focus on young people in a conflict affected area (Lashio) its findings are still highly relevant to the current study. SFCG conducted the research to inform a 12-month long programme of radio and TV content to promote acceptance of diversity as a social norm in Myanmar, and to build social cohesion and intercommunal harmony. The study concludes that the prevalence of social media use – particularly Facebook – by young people should indicate that social, rather than traditional, media channels are the best means to engage and influence young people on these issues.

**Methodology and limitations:** 52 young researchers were given brief training in qualitative research approaches and deployed to Yangon and Lashio. The latter was chosen to better understand the experience of urban youth living in close proximity to armed conflict. Over 5 days, gender balanced teams overseen by a lead international consultant interviewed more than 500 respondents in total, sourced through a snowball approach. They were guided by SFCG's 'Youth Mapping Methodology Toolkit' and its 'Listening and Learning Approach', both designed with youth-centred research in mind. The main limitations were: the inexperience of the researchers, leading to a lack of depth in the qualitative data; restricted time to train (4 days) and deploy (5 days) the research teams; and a lack of diversity in the research respondents, attributed to the snowball approach, which relied on personal networks of the researchers who were mostly of a similar educational and economic background.

**Key findings:** In addition to useful statistics for this demographic drawn from a relatively large sample size, this study provides insight into the experience, concerns, and aspirations of young people in two very different urban areas in Myanmar. While young people in Yangon are similarly exposed to poverty, crime, and drug issues, they are spared the direct and indirect impacts of armed conflict that affects the daily life of young people in Lashio. The report provides a helpful overview of the key concerns of young people in both areas – crime, drugs, lack of opportunity, and sexual harassment – which should be appreciated when designing any intervention. It also gives an insight into how young people mobilise for causes to benefit their community, including interfaith and social harmony initiatives. The study found that the main channel through which young people mobilise and connect is Facebook – as noted by 80% of respondents. Additional insight into the exact means of connecting, i.e., through messenger, private groups, pages, or public timelines, weren't gathered. Young people's attitudes towards the role and influence of social media was a key focus of the study, with Facebook emerging as one of the most influential sources of young people's opinions, on a par with peers/friends and teachers (but still below parents). Respondents were asked to reflect on both the positive and negative role it could play in community cohesion. Over a quarter felt that social media has increased openness and decreased tensions, while over 20% felt that there are negative impacts and increased tensions as a result.





*Community Information Flows to Reduce Inter-Communal Violence in Burma*  
Organisation/Author: Emily Speers Mears for Search for Common Ground  
Date: December 2015

**Relevance:** Although the study is now almost 4 years old, it provides a series of relevant insights, drawing on a sophisticated conceptual framework on rumours, informed by SFCG’s work in Africa, which is worthy of deeper exploration (Mears, 2015). Its main objective was to understand the impact of rumours and manipulated information on inter-communal conflict and outbreaks of intercommunal violence in its areas of study. Its focus on two locations with a recent history of intercommunal conflict – Amarapura and Lashio – will be a useful precursor to learn from given the current study’s focus areas of Rakhine State and Kayah State. The study was the inception for an initiative by SFCG and the Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation (MIDO) – ‘Community Information Management to Reduce Intercommunal Violence in Burma’. Of particular interest was its analysis of how attitudes and behaviour towards information on social media were affected by the conflict context, as well as positioning these in a longer historical context of community information flows in Myanmar pre-2011.

**Methodology and limitations:** The research areas were selected as sites particularly vulnerable to intercommunal violence, based on the presence of clear ethnic and religious divisions, a history of violence, economic inequity between communities, high unemployment, and ease of accessibility for the research team. Fieldwork was undertaken by a small research team of six Myanmar nationals, led by an international consultant. The team had history of working together before and were not externally recruited for this research. It took place two weeks prior to and two weeks following Myanmar’s November 2015 election, and consisted of 10 FGDs and 20 Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) in Amarapura/Mandalay and 9 FGDs and 17 KIIs in Lashio. Participants were gender-balanced, and from a wide of range of socio-economic backgrounds. Due to the heightened political sensitivity of the research period, and the brevity of the research duration (just 10 days in each location), the findings are only a snapshot, taken during a time where many were reluctant to talk openly – or at all – about any topics considered remotely sensitive.

**Key findings:** The report sets out to test in Myanmar the overriding conclusion of the academic literature on rumours that “ambiguous situations create a vacuum which rumour fills” (Donovan, 2007, p. 59). SFCG’s own work on this identified five conditions in which negative rumours like ‘hate speech’ or ‘fake news’ were more likely to spread, including lack of education, lack of transparency, and lack of media credibility. These conditions were found in Amarapura and Lashio, and were exacerbated by a history of conflict and present insecurity, making people more susceptible to sharing, believing, and responding to rumours, true or not. The study looks at how this translates into social media use, but not extensively. Even as far back as 2015, people in both locations reported a high level of skepticism about local news on Facebook, and professed to check for themselves on its veracity by analysing the sources of information, fact-checking with trusted friends and family, or in the case of local news going to the source to check for themselves in person. However, the study also notes that “people are not always as diligent as they say they are in the way that they check the information they receive, and it is certainly the case that when people feel threatened or frightened, they are less likely to check information before they share it on, or respond to it” (Mears, 2015, p. 4).

## **Relevant academic work on social media use in Myanmar**

Although the pool of relevant academic work conducted in Myanmar to draw on for this literature review is still small, there are academics working in this space whose work is worth noting for thematic and/or geographic reasons.

For example, Gerard McCarthy draws on his ethnographic and survey research in central-east Myanmar (Bago Region and Kayin State) through 2015/16 to provide insight into the link between online and offline behaviour (McCarthy, 2017). His doctoral research explores informal institutions and the contemporary social, political, and moral legacies of military rule in provincial Myanmar. As part of his work he has focused on the internet, cyberspaces, and social media activism.

Drawing on social media related trends and behaviours encountered during his fieldwork, he highlights the transformational role Facebook has played since its arrival. It has: accelerated local grievances into national, and even international, causes (e.g., the planned destruction of a famous church in Kayin State by Buddhist monks), allowed people to publicly express party-political allegiances for the first time, and given people the tools to build echo chambers that deepen and encourage divisions between neighbouring ethnic or religious communities.

He provides a useful historical lens for Facebook's popularity as a 'rumour mill' between friends and other local networks in Myanmar, based on its likeness to how people during the era of severe censorship gathered information about the world around them, and cautions future researchers to: "resist the temptation to conceive of 'cyber-space' as an isolated domain of social action, but rather see it as an extension of pre-existing relationships, networks and cultural practices" (McCarthy, 2017, p. 86).

Also of relevance to the current study is the Myanmar Media & Society (M.MAS) Project – a partnership between Oxford University and Myanmar IT for Development (MIDO) and led by Matthew Walton. It looks at the ways in which a developing media sector and a growing online community is influencing people's perceptions and priorities during Myanmar's political transition. It has a particular focus on understanding narratives that justify religious violence as well as the actions that seem to have been effective in preventing the escalation of conflict, and the role social media is playing in both.

The M.MAS research team has also conducted focus group discussions and oral history interviews with a wide range of individuals in seven areas: three locations where violence has occurred already – Meikhtila and Mandalay (Mandalay Region) and Lashio (Shan State) – and four locations where violence has not occurred, but where the historical context and recent developments make research extremely salient – upper and lower Irrawaddy Region, Mawlamyine and Yangon (Walton, 2018).

Looking forward, a major research project called "Social Media in Armed Conflict: The Case of Myanmar" at The Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO, 2017a), is running from 2017-2020. As part of this, a doctoral thesis – "Social Media in Armed Conflict through a Gender Lens: The Case of Myanmar" – is already in progress (PRIO, 2017b). Both could be of considerable relevance to the current study.

## **Relevant studies from outside Myanmar**

In recent years, an enormous body of research has been developed on the experience of children and young people online. The European Union and various UN bodies (UNESCO, UNICEF) have been particularly active in this space, as well as academic institutions from across the globe. Such is the interest in the effect of social media on youth development and offline behaviour, studies have been conducted by practitioners from a diverse array of academic disciplines using a broad range of methodologies, ranging from mass surveys, to simulations, to complex software-led, multi-year studies.

While there is broad agreement that many positives can be reaped for young people via ever greater online connectivity, consistent warnings have been made about the pressing need to tackle the very real dangers they face, including cyber-bullying, radicalisation and sexual exploitation. Mitigation and protection efforts are having to battle with rapid change in social media technology and the ever-evolving online behaviour they encourage.

A 2017 international study commissioned by UNICEF looking at the digital experience of children from around the world sums it up neatly, calling for "faster action, focused investment and greater cooperation to protect children from the harms of a more connected world", while recognising that "the constant churn of new technologies...is making it hard for policy to keep up" (UNICEFfemale, 2017, pp. 6-7).

A large body of scholarship has focused specifically on what role social media plays in religious or political radicalisation of young people in different parts of the world, and what can be done to prevent it. A mapping of global research on this was conducted by UNESCO in 2017 (Alava, Frau-Meigs & Hassan, 2017). The mapping concludes that around the world, governments are working to prevent radicalisation via social media, based on an assumption there is clear cause and effect between more extreme content online and greater risk of real-world violence.

However, the report cautions that proof of a strong causal link remains weak, and evidence on the effectiveness of countermeasures are thin (Alava, Frau-Meigs & Hassan, 2017). It notes that much emphasis has been placed on placing Media and Information Literacy (MIL) at the heart of education, drawing on techniques developed to combat propaganda in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. However, such is the rapid arrival and uptake of social media, few longitudinal studies have been completed on how effective MIL programmes have been, and the Asia region is singled out for a significant paucity of data available.

With growing concern in most advanced economies about the growing usage and dependence on social media services among young people especially, some studies have sought to understand the longer term psychological and physical effects of social media use on young people at the national level. The results are not encouraging. For example, a study in Korea, using data from longitudinal surveys, found strong evidence that online social networking is adversely associated with the psychological status of Korean students, measured in terms of self-reported mental problems and suicidal thought (Kim, 2016). Another study in the United States indicated a strong causal link between images of harmful behaviour (e.g., smoking, alcohol use) shared among high-school students in California, and the increase in smoking and drinking among the same peer groups (Huang, et al., 2013).

Given the increasing predominance of social media as the first point of call for news across the world, others have sought to understand the role social media has on the psychological well-being of young people at a very local level, and during episodes of acute uncertainty. For example, one 2017 study sought to understand the role of social media during a lock-down following a university campus shooting in California. Through anonymous surveys completed one week after the event, students reported feeling greater stress from receiving conflicting information on social media, and the stress was more acute among those who identified as heavy social media users. Intense periods of stress were documented when 'official' (i.e., the University's own media) channels went quiet, and social media was the only source of news (Jones, Rebecca Thompson, & Silver, 2017).

Should Myanmar continue to follow the pattern of more developed economies in patterns of connectedness and social media use among the young, it should prepare for more young people being online for ever greater periods of time. As a 2018 Pew Research Centre study concluded of American teens: "smartphone ownership has become a nearly ubiquitous element of teen life: 95% of teens now report they have a smartphone or access to one. These mobile connections are in turn fueling more-persistent online activities: 45% of teens now say they are online on a near-constant basis" (Anderson & Jiang, 2018). The same study noted how quickly trends in social media platform use were prone to shifting (e.g., there has been a general decline in the use of Facebook), and even among the youth category there were marked differences when gender, socio-economic background and ethnic group were taken into account. This will make measures aimed at protecting young people from the adverse effects of social media will have to be as adaptable and agile as young people's social media use is fickle.

Despite the scale of the challenge, increasingly sophisticated approaches to better equipping young people to navigate the online world safely are being developed. Of particular note is a two-year European Commission funded programme nicknamed SELMA (Social and Emotional Learning for Mutual Awareness; SELMA, 2018).

The SELMA programme launched an online toolkit in late 2018 designed to "empower young people to become agents of change... help them to better understand the phenomenon of online hate... [and] provide them with tools and strategies to act and make a difference" (SELMA, 2019). The toolkit targets young people (age 11–16) and covers a diverse set of themes, including: "what is hate speech", "why is there hate speech content out there", "how does hate speech make me feel", "what's my role and what can I do", "are my people really using hate speech", "how can I influence my people", "how can we effect change in our community", "working with online stakeholders", and "changing the world". The toolkit provides additional support for those seeking to understand the phenomenon of hate speech, its social and emotional impacts, how to monitor it, and how to influence change. SELMA's first 'hacking hate hackathon' hosted youth teams from Italy, Denmark, Greece, the UK, and Germany in Berlin and invited them to pitch ideas for how best to counter online hate.

## Existing Initiatives

The following organisations and initiatives are worth understanding and exploring further, given their focus monitoring and/or actively countering online hate-speech in Myanmar. For a more detailed mapping of organisations

working in this space in Myanmar, see Search for Common Ground's 'Stakeholder mapping of countering hate speech in Myanmar' (O'Connor, 2017).

### **Panzagar / 'Flower Speech'**

Panzagar is probably the highest profile example of a coordinated home-grown campaign to tackle hate speech in Myanmar. Founded in 2014 by activists including former political prisoners, it began as an offline campaign using peaceful protest to highlight the real-world impacts of using hate speech. Campaigners would actively counter-rally against nationalist organisations in the streets of Myanmar's major cities, and due to growing support across the country the decision was made to move it online. Working directly with Facebook, Panzagar developed stickers for people to share across the platform, with Facebook able to provide statistics on their use. In one year, February 2015-2016, they received 2.7 million downloads – and even more impressively the stickers were used 12.9 million times in messages (Davis, 2017). Although the key personalities have now moved on, some of the core mission is continued by The Seagull Foundation (The Seagull Foundation, 2018) and the Panzagar Facebook page, which has more than 210,000 followers (Panzagar, 2018).

### **'Think Before You Trust' – Burma Monitor**

Burma Monitor was founded in 2017 as part of the Phandeeyar 'Tech for Peace' incubator, with the goal of raising awareness of how to spot and dissect 'fake news' online. The Burma Monitor team of Yangon-based activists and developers started an online campaign under the 'Think Before You Trust' brand. It began by uploading examples of fake news the team had spotted online, and debunking it via fact-checking or photo analysis. The team collated lessons for its growing community of followers on how to spot fake news or fabricated photos, with advice on what to do when they found it. Over time its community of followers began to submit examples of dubious content for the team to dissect and verify. Phandeeyar's end-line assessment of the campaign highlighted it as a particularly successful campaign when compared with its cohort peers, particularly in engaging young people – 94% of its Facebook fans were between the ages of 18 and 34 (McKay, 2017b). The Facebook page remains active with over 65,000 likes (Think Before You Trust, 2019), and has an accompanying website (although this appears less popular with users).

### **Myanmar ICT for Development Organisation (MIDO)**

Started by one of the founders of the Panzagar campaign, in 2016 MIDO, through its Safe Online Spaces (SOS) initiative, began monitoring Facebook for what it has defined as six indicators of hate speech: threats, accusations, dehumanisation, encouragement of violence, bullying and harassment. It developed a training workshop which it deployed at dozens of locations across the country in early 2016 to educate people on Facebook privacy, digital security, news literacy and assessing accurate news sources (Aung, 2016). Its more recent work has been in partnership with the Oxford University Myanmar Media and Society Project, where it has been working to develop 'Peace Memories' – oral histories of how in the past different religious communities had lived together peacefully in Myanmar, which can then be shared online to counter divisive narratives (Walton, Schissler, & Thi, 2017).

### **The Impact of Freedom of Expression, Religion and Belief: Measuring results through online initiatives**

This was a joint initiative led by SFCG with its local partner, MIDO, to build on the previous work of both organisations in this space, of which the above referenced stakeholder mapping was part. Its goal was to support local organizations to better quantify and demonstrate the impact of their work combating the negative influences of hate speech online. Through three two-day design labs to measure the effects of hate speech, they brought together 23 local organisations working on this area to produce a collaboratively designed toolkit and user guide for monitoring and evaluation of the impact of counter hate speech. The toolkit is now being applied by local organisations (Search for Common Ground, 2018).

## BACKGROUND CONTEXT ON FOCUS AREAS

### **Rakhine State – key demographic, conflict, and other relevant information**

Rakhine State has been the epicentre of recent intercommunal and religious violence that has made headlines around the world. Violence against the Rohingya Muslim community has drawn criticism from the UN and most leading members of the international community, and the role of social media – particularly Facebook – in enabling and instigating violence in Rakhine has been the subject of intense scrutiny by international organisations and international media (McKirdy, 2018).

Given the current conflict context, accurate state-wide data (including estimates on Rakhine’s population) are hard to collect and therefore highly contested. However, Rakhine State has long been one of the poorest and least-developed states/regions in Myanmar, and the ongoing conflict has only exacerbated the situation for Rakhine’s population of roughly 3 million people (World Bank, 2018).

According to a recent nationwide living standards survey, Rakhine ranks 14/15 states and regions on number of households not connected to electricity and has by far and away the highest incidence of households without toilet facilities and access to clean water (World Bank, 2018). Rakhine’s population is also on average slightly younger (with a media age of 26) than the Union average (27 years; Grizelj, 2017).

Although precise data on mobile phone penetration in Rakhine is not readily available, it is worth noting that Rakhine, alongside Chin, was the last state/region in Myanmar to receive coverage from new market entrants Telenor and Ooredoo (Tun, 2016). As few as 50% of households own at least one smartphone (only Chin State has a lower figure), and only 15% of people reported using the internet daily in the previous 7 days, ranking it third from bottom out of the 15 states and regions on that metric (World Bank, 2018).

Despite the relatively low access to and use of mobile phones and mobile internet suggested by the above data, there is little doubt that social media – and particularly Facebook – plays a key role in the dissemination of hate speech and other forms of online abuse between Rakhine residents. As far back as 2013, aid organisations like MSF International reported Rakhine staff being subject to personal attacks and death threats via Facebook (MacGregor, 2013), leading to resignations and ultimately MSF’s temporary withdrawal from Rakhine (Hodal, 2014).

In 2015, as part of a wider investigation into six locations that had recently experienced intercommunal violence, The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies (CPCS) reported a number of enabling dynamics in Sittwe (state capital of Rakhine State) which allowed fake news, hate speech and rumours to spread more rapidly. High amongst them was the community segregation put in place after the 2012-13 intercommunal violence. With little if any offline interaction between members of Sittwe’s Muslim and Buddhist communities, people had little information with which to verify increasingly incendiary claims made about those from a different faith group (Kirkham, 2015).

Research conducted by Internews in 2016 looked more closely into ‘information ecosystems’ in three locations in Rakhine – Sittwe, Buthidaung and Thandwe. The Internews research team sought to understand the ways in which information circulates in Rakhine State, what information people say they need and can access, how they meet their needs through informal and formal networks, which channels of information they trust, the role of rumours, and the impact of ICT and telecommunications. One of their findings in particular correlated with those of CPCS – Buddhists claimed that Muslims listen to Imams, while Muslims claimed Buddhists listened to monks, yet during the interviews and focus groups religious leaders were not deemed particularly influential with regards to trust and information flows (Thu, 2016).

The research also unearthed granular insights into how different ethnic and religious groups in Rakhine had very different attitudes to different sources of information. Rakhine Buddhists, for example, reported to place more trust in local media, whereas Rohingya and Kaman communities placed more trust in international media. Facebook was the most popular social media across all groups, but Viber was also playing a growing role in Kaman communities (Thu, 2016). Mobile phones more generally are playing a vital role in connecting the fragmented Muslim communities who face restrictions on movement. They are used by religious and community leaders in Muslim communities to coordinate needs and share information between villages that are otherwise unable to communicate (McKay, 2018a).



A recent (unpublished) report provides a useful mapping of the key online influencers in Rakhine on current affairs (McKay, 2018a). Prominent among trusted online influencers inside Rakhine were current and former military officers, high profile monks, and key figures in the National League for Democracy (NLD). Prior to the latest outbreak of conflict, young people in Rakhine were reportedly monitoring the Facebook pages of key military and ethnic armed group figures to verify rumours they heard as the crisis unfolded. Many of these voices are active in questioning or actively undermining the version of current events provided in international media. Unsurprisingly, the report notes, Rohingya voices were coming from influencers outside of Myanmar.

## **Kayah State – key demographic, conflict, and other relevant information**

Although one of Myanmar’s smallest states (population c. 300,000), Kayah State ranks as one of its most complex. It has at least nine different ethnic groups, and seven armed groups across seven townships, with fluid and often contested power-sharing arrangements between these groups and the central government (McKay, 2016). Kayah has a long history of political separation from the rest of Myanmar (during WW2 it was even annexed into Thailand), and its remoteness and long history of internal conflict has resulted in “a dearth of research on the political conflicts that have had a devastating impact on the ground...and socio-economic challenges facing many communities in Kayah State are little documented or understood” (Kramer, Russell, & Smith, 2018, p. 11).

Peace-talks during the Thein Sein administration raised hopes of bringing an end to decades of internal conflict and simplifying the complex map of internal control. The signing of a ceasefire agreement between the Tatmadaw and the largest ethnic armed group in Kayah –The Karenni National Progress Party (KNPP) – was a significant step forward to normalising relations with the Union government. However, two years on since the NLD government took power, political control within the state remains highly factional, with a multitude of smaller armed groups jostling with the KNPP for territory and lucrative control over mining concessions and cross-border trade in licit and illicit goods. Older ethnic and religious rivalries (largely between Buddhists and Christians in the case of the latter) within the state continue to simmer beneath the surface.

Findings from a recent nationwide living standards survey (World Bank, 2018) paint a contradictory picture on quality of life for people in Kayah. The state is one of the poorest in the Union, with largest average household size and high fertility rates. Its population also ranks towards the low end within the Union on levels of literacy (81%) and numeracy (80%), and there have been high levels of out-migration in recent years. However, youth unemployment in Kayah is particularly low (McKay, 2018b), and its population is unusually well-connected. While no detailed analysis of social media use/behaviour within the state has yet been carried out, Kayah has the second highest rate of households with electricity (behind only Yangon), and 85% of households have at least one smartphone (ranking it 5/15 within the Union). It also ranks second, again only behind Yangon, on the percentage of the population aged 15 and above who had used the internet (from any source) daily in the prior 7 days (26%).

From recent news reports, traditional and social media in Kayah State play a key role in mobilising political protest. This may be connected to the fact that despite its small size, Kayah State has a vibrant and vocal civil society, with a particularly high proportion of students (around a fifth of the state population, although less than 2000 are in tertiary education; Oudot & Baudey, 2015).

In recent months the NLD government’s decision to erect a statue of General Aung San in the state capital, Loikaw, has mobilised a powerful movement of civil society and student groups in opposition, and a protest in July 2018 ended in clashes with police and more than 20 arrests (Khaing & Aung, 2018). Social media has played a central role in the dispute – secretly recorded comments by Chief Minister claiming he would call in Tatmadaw troops to handle future protests went viral on social media (Han, 2018). The stand-off has highlighted this historically strong feeling of separateness from, and neglect by, the central government.

## 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. These digital and media literacy materials will be used as part of Save the Children Myanmar's SHIFT project. SHIFT is an innovative youth-led digital campaigning platform offering youth groups the resources, funding, and mentorship necessary to drive their own issue campaigns in their communities. All participants of SHIFT will undergo a two-day digital and media literacy training program to learn how to stay safe online, analyse content critically, and digitally connect with their peers across the country.

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 (KIIs) with young people, parents, teachers, and community leaders were used to gather additional contextual data.

### Primary research questions

The key questions that guided the current study were as follows:

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?

To answer these research questions, the following guiding questions were devised by the Research Advisor in consultation with the Research Lead and Academic Partner. They were divided into seven areas of interest to structure the FGDs and KIIs. At the analysis stage, 'hate speech and harassment' was split into two separate areas of interest due to the high volume of responses and divergent themes that emerged.

## **General usage**

- How do young people engage with Facebook and other forms of social media (Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Snapchat, WeChat, WhatsApp, blogs, etc.), and do they currently use or intend to use these?
  - What are the most popular platforms for young people, and why?
  - How do young people differentiate between platforms? (in terms of functional and emotional equities)
  - What drives young people to use new social media platforms?
- How much time do young people spend on their phones each day?
  - How much of that time is spent online?
- What barriers/challenges do young people face in using social media?

## **Online safety**

- How do young people understand/define individual and community ethics on social media?
  - What are the unspoken rules for social media use?
  - Do they know how to block people?
  - Do they know how to report offensive, abusive, or dangerous content?

## **Fake news and propaganda**

- What are young people's information and news seeking behaviours on-line?
  - Do young people trust what they see and read on social media?
  - Why or why not?
- How do young people judge the accuracy or truthfulness of online content and social media messages?
  - Do they check the accuracy of the information they receive online, and if so how?
- Are there individuals/influencers that they trust more than the digital versions of traditional the media (e.g., newspapers)?
  - What makes them especially trustworthy?
  - Who can be positive influencers?
- What do young people do when they see fake news?
  - Do they report it, mock it, share it to debunk it, etc.?
- Do they know about the 'Think Before You Trust' campaign by Burma Monitor?
- What other social media spaces are used to share information and news?
  - Are young people part of special Facebook groups or group texts used to share information/memes/etc.?
- Do young people have any behaviours that promote fake news unintentionally?

## **Hate speech and harassment**

- Do Myanmar young people differentiate between hate speech and harassment?

- If so, how?
- What are the experiences of young people regarding hate speech and harassment on social media?
  - What do they think of it?
  - How does it make them feel?
  - How do they react to it?
- What are the most common forms of hate speech and threat narratives in Myanmar?
  - What do they think people are trying to achieve by spreading them?
  - Who is usually the target audience?
  - Who is most often the victim of hate speech and harassment?
  - How does seeing this hate speech make young people feel?
- Do young people have any behaviours that promote hate speech unintentionally?
- Are young people aware of local anti-hate speech campaigns such as ‘Panzagar’ (flower speech), and ‘Respect’ on Facebook?
  - Who can be positive influencers?

### **Sharing behaviours**

- What kinds of online content and social media messages are young people sharing, and why?
  - Which platforms do they use to share?
- Do young people use social media to boast or vent about their lives?
  - If so, why?
  - What do they expect to feel when they share these things?
  - What reaction (if any) do they expect from others?
- Do young people use social media to express their own or others’ opinions about the government, other groups of people (i.e., by gender, ethnicity, nationality, or religion), or other general thoughts about how society should operate?
  - If so, where do they voice these views?
  - And do they consider possible offline consequences?
  - If not, what influences their decision to not voice their views?

### **Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing**

- What are young people perceptions of the overall experience of social media – positive or negative?
- Do young people think social media affects their thoughts, feelings, and/or attitudes?
  - If so, how?
- Do young people think that life has been made easier or more complicated by social media?
  - In what ways?

- Do they think they spend too much or too little time on social media?
- Do young people use social media to cope with difficult or unpleasant emotions?
  - If so, how?
- Do young people sometimes post/comment in mean, angry, or aggressive ways?
  - If so, how do they feel after posting?
- Do young people see themselves as having different identities on and offline?
  - If different, does this cause them any discomfort?

## **Impact on society**

- Do young people feel that what they do on social media has an impact off-line?
  - If so, what kinds of impacts?
  - Are they mostly positive or negative?
- How does hate speech/propaganda/fake news impact on their behaviour and attitudes?
  - Does it influence their perceptions and relationships with people from other groups?
  - Does it change how they feel about people who share it?
  - Does it affect their understanding of the conflict context in which they live?
  - Does it strengthen/diminish their trust in media, on the whole?
- Does social media impact inter-ethnic/religious interactions and relations?
  - If so, how?
- Do marginalised communities use social media to navigate oppression or bias?
  - If so, how?
- What do young people see as the biggest difference (if any) between on-line and off-line community behaviour?
  - Is this the same for differences in individual behaviour?
- Do young people think that social media is beneficial for their (offline) society / culture?
  - In what ways is it positive?
  - In what ways is it negative?
- How do young people engage with social media to mobilize and advocate for themselves?
  - How are young people using social media to mobilise around civil society?
  - How are young people using social media to campaign and advocate on issues that matter to them (i.e., development needs)?
  - What has been the role of social media in creating a political and/or ethnic identity for young people?

## **Guiding principles and ethics approval**

The scoping study incorporated the following elements:

- **Participatory:** The scoping study maximised participation and was grounded in an empowerment perspective. Research methods such as focus group discussions and key informant interviews were structured in a way that allowed participants to move beyond being research subjects and become actual participants in the research process at all stages. A learning component for participants is an essential to the research process, as is the use of innovative methodologies.
- **Child-sensitive:** All members of the research team underwent training in child-safeguarding and child participation prior to engaging with children/young people. The scoping study adhered to child-safeguarding principles including do no harm. The well-being of children was prioritized and the research methodology ensured that they were not put in harmful or distressing situations.
- **Gender-sensitive:** The scoping study respected existing gender norms and practices, and accommodated the differing needs of women, men, boys and girls. When possible, research was be conducted with single-sex groups in order to ensure female participation and to enable sex-disaggregated findings.
- **Conflict-sensitive:** The methodology is grounded in principles of conflict sensitivity and included stakeholders and participants representing a variety ethnic, religious, class, and non/citizen backgrounds.
- **Collaborative:** Thorough out the design and analysis of the scoping study SCI maintained regular communication with other organisations planning and/or conducting related research. In particular, SCI met regularly with Phandeeyar, with whom research questions and initial findings were shared to prevent unnecessary overlap.

Ethics approval for the survey, FGDs and KIs were gained from the Ethics Review Committee of Save the Children US. All participants were provided with a Participant Information Statement which explained the purpose and format of the research and provided contact details should participants have any concerns about their involvement in the research. FGD and KIs participants 18 years and over were required to sign a consent form in order to participate. Consent and signatures from caregivers of any participants 17 years and younger were sought in the first instance, and where not available, the underage participant was asked to sign an assent form themselves. In addition, oral consent was obtained prior to the recording of FGD and KI sessions.

## Team structure and roles

The team structure reflected the need to take language and access issues into consideration when working in an ethnically and linguistically diverse, conflict-affected environment. This also meant that a compromise was drawn between the convenience of a larger team, (including support roles such as dedicated notetakers) and the considerable benefit of keeping a low profile. Moreover, given the qualitative nature of the research, the larger the team becomes the more difficult it would become to ensure that data collection was standardised.

As such, the team structure prioritised a smaller, but more deeply engaged research group with applicable language skill and experience in qualitative research methods.

### Research Advisor: Melyn McKay, Research Anthropologist, PhD(c)

Melyn McKay is an anthropologist and technical specialist with experience in research design and social media use in Myanmar. She contributed to the literature review and design of the methodology, including tools. This ensured that the team benefited from relevant existing research and best practice as pertains to conducting research of this kind in the Myanmar context. Melyn was on hand to provide support during data collection and processing. This meant the research team had a dedicated specialist on call to troubleshoot any issues that arose during the course of the scoping study and provide an external perspective on the eventual data set.



**Research Lead: Joy Wiskin, SC-Myanmar Protecting Children in Conflict (PCiC) Advisor, MS Conflict Analysis & Resolution**

Joy Wiskin served as the linchpin holding together the field team and served as the key point of coordination between the field team and Save the Children Myanmar (SC-Myanmar), as well the Research Advisor and Academic Partners. Joy recruited and trained the research assistants in the methodology and research tools. She also accompanied the team for piloting and data collection where appropriate, while bearing in mind that the presence of a foreigner can in some cases introduce difficulties for participation and logistics (in the case of travel approvals, and on-site translation). Joy also adapted the research tools based on feedback from the piloting, oversaw quality control over notetaking and translation into English, conducted daily debriefs with the Research Associates during data collection, and prepared the data files for analysis by Academic Partners at the University of Sydney. She also provided review and feedback on multiple drafts of the report.

**Research Associates: Paul Miki L Seng Du and Theh Mar**

The Research Associates were selected through SC-Myanmar's rigorous vetting process from a pool of more than 38 applicants. The selected Research Associates were responsible for facilitating Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) and Key Information Interviews (KIIs). Whilst one Research Associate facilitated the discussion/interview, the other took notes, alternating these roles between sessions, usually based on the gender of the FGD or KII participant(s). The FGD/KII facilitator also produced their own analysis of each session, particularly key findings (as they remembered them) to supplement the notetaking/translating by the notetaker.

The Research Associates translated all session notes and analysis into English and participated in processing sessions and in a preliminary analysis workshop with the Research Lead. They also reviewed near-final drafts of the report for accuracy.

**Academic Partner: Cyberpsychology Research Group, The University of Sydney  
Brad Ridout, PhD, MAPS, Research Fellow and PBA Registered Psychologist  
Krestina Amon, PhD, Lecturer  
Andrew Campbell, PhD, MAPS, Senior Lecturer and PBA Registered Psychologist**

Lead Academic Partner Brad Ridout was responsible for reviewing the methodology, research tools, ethics protocols and providing ongoing technical expertise as needed. Brad led the analysis of all qualitative and quantitative data provided by the Research Lead, and the writing of the Results and Discussion and Recommendations sections of this report. Krestina led the coding and analysis of the FGD results (double-coded by Brad), while Brad led the coding and analysis of the KII results (double-coded by Andrew) and quantitative analysis of the survey results. Brad, with assistance from Andrew, also conducted the final analysis using a cyberpsychology lens, and wrote the recommendations, in consultation with the Research Advisor and the Research Lead.

## Selection of research sites

Given the findings of the literature review, which suggested that digital cultures are highly varied throughout Myanmar, the methodology focused on a limited number of locations rather than on attempting a broader sample. This means that the research cannot be considered ‘representative’, however, to achieve a sample size large enough to be representative, the team size would need to balloon or the timeline would have to be extended – both of these options would have limited the eventual data quality. Another major consideration was the desire to complement Phandeevar’s ‘Digital Cultures’ research project, which focused on urban hubs, by focusing on more rural/isolated and conflict-affected areas. As such, the methodology used three criteria to guide the selection of research sites:

- Areas with existing relevant SC-Myanmar programming;
- Areas with a history of conflict;
- Areas with high mobile/internet penetration vis-à-vis other development statistics.

Given these criteria, Rakhine and Kayah States were selected.

## Research design and sampling strategy

The research design was mixed-methods, consisting of: 1) FGDs with young people; 2) KIs with young people, parents, teachers and community leaders; 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.

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 SC-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 KIIs participants to ensure that the overall sample was:

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

Recruitment of participants was achieved through snowball sampling (using existing SC-Myanmar and Research Associate networks), which had the benefit of being logistically straightforward. However, it should be noted that this method potentially introduced additional confounding factors into the analysis regarding how offline social networks might influence online use.

Participants for the FGDs were identified and recruited by SC-Myanmar staff, and in the case of Rakhine, by the Research Associates' networks. In Loikaw, young people were recruited by field-based education staff while in Sittwe, young people were recruited by Education in Emergencies (EiE) and Child Protection in Emergencies (CPie) staff. These urban and village-based participants were recruited from SC-Myanmar target areas and are direct or indirect beneficiaries of SC-Myanmar programming. Muslim IDP recruitment was facilitated by Rohingya camp-based staff, such as camp-based education liaisons and program assistants, who interact with their communities on a daily basis. Recruitment of Rakhine, Chin, and Maramagyi young people was facilitated by the Research Associates' networks in Sittwe, with many of these participants identified by local Rakhine civil society organizations (CSOs). KII participants were recruited by SCI-Myanmar staff, using snowball sampling from FGD participants, and in some cases by convenience sampling in public spaces. Tables 1 and 2 present a summary of the demographic profile of FGD groups and KII participants across locations.

**Table 1: Demographic profile of FGD groups**

	Location	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Education	N
<b>Kayah State urban</b>							<b>28</b>
1	Loikaw	Mixed	17–19	Kayan, Bamar, ImmTar, Shan	Buddhist, Christian	Grade 9 to 3 <sup>rd</sup> year university	6
2	Loikaw	Male	18–22	Kayan, Bamar, ImmTar	Buddhist, Christian	1 <sup>st</sup> to 3 <sup>rd</sup> year university	9
3	Loikaw	Female	19–22	Kayan, Shan	Buddhist, Christian	1 <sup>st</sup> to 4 <sup>th</sup> year university	5
4	Dee Maw Hso	Mixed	18–22	Kayan, Karen	Christian	Grade 10–11	8
<b>Kayah State rural</b>							<b>30</b>
5	Ve Thae Ku Village	Mixed	18–31	Kayan	Buddhist	Grade 7–11	6
6	Lo Bar Kho Village	Mixed	18–28	Kayan	Christian	Grade 9 to graduated university	6
7	Kyun Taw Village	Mixed	17–25	Kayan	Christian	Grade 5 to graduated university	8
8	Htee Te Kaloe & Daw Lyar Ku Villages	Mixed	18–25	Kayah	Buddhist, Christian	Grade 9–11	10
<b>Rakhine State urban</b>							<b>30</b>
9	Sittwe	Mixed	21–26	Rakhine	Buddhist	Graduated university	6
10	Sittwe	Mixed	18–28	Chin	Christian	1 <sup>st</sup> year university to graduated university	6
11	Sittwe	Mixed	17–23	Maramagyi	Buddhist	Grade 11 to graduated university	9
12	Sittwe	Mixed	19–26	Rakhine	Buddhist	1 <sup>st</sup> year university to graduated university	9
<b>Rakhine State IDP</b>							<b>33</b>
13	Thet Kel Pyin IDP camp	Male	20–24	Rohingya	Muslim	Year 5–10	9
14	Thet Kel Pyin IDP camp	Female	16–18	Rohingya	Muslim	Year 2–7	8
15	Thet Kel Pyin IDP camp	Female	16–22	Kaman	Muslim	Year 10	8
16	Basara IDP camp	Male	18–23	Rohingya	Muslim	Year 6–10	8

**Table 2: Demographic profile of KII interviewees**

	Location	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Religion	Education	Occupation
<b>Kayah State urban</b>							
1	Loikaw	Female	18	Kayan	Christian	Grade 11	Student
2	Loikaw	Female	25	Kayan	Christian	Grade 10	Volunteer
3	Loikaw	Female	30	Kayan	Christian	Grade 10	Volunteer
4	Loikaw	Female	35	Kayan	Christian	Grade 10	Trainer
5	Loikaw	Female	36	Kayan	Christian	Graduated university	Activist
6	Loikaw	Male	34	Kayan	Christian	Grade 11	Kayan National Party Chairperson
7	Loikaw	Male	20	Kayan	Christian	Grade 9	Student
8	Loikaw	Male	20	Shan	Buddhist	Grade 10	Unemployed
<b>Kayah State rural</b>							
9	Ve Thae Ku	Female	32	Kayah	Buddhist	Grade 10	Farmer
10	Ve Thae Ku	Male	22	Kayah	Buddhist	Grade 8	Farmer
11	Ve Thae Ku	Male	31	Kayah	Buddhist	Grade 10	Farmer
12	Lo Bar Kho Village	Male	27	Kayan	Christian	Vocational	Electro-Technician
13	Lo Bar Kho Village	Male	34	Kayan	Christian	Grade 9	Farmer
14	Kyun Taw Village	Male	24	Kayah	Christian	Grade 10	Farmer
15	Kyun Taw Village	Female	19	Kayan	Christian	Grade 9	Farmer
16	Kyun Taw Village	Female	20	Kayan	Christian	[Missing]	Farmer
17	Htee Te Kaloe & Daw Lyar Ku Villages	Female	22	Kayah	Christian	Grade 10	Student
18	Htee Te Kaloe & Daw Lyar Ku Villages	Male	24	Kayah	Christian	Grade 10	Farmer
19	Htee Te Kaloe & Daw Lyar Ku Villages	Male	35	Kayah	Buddhist	Grade 5	Village Administrator
<b>Rakhine State urban</b>							
20	Sittwe	Female	19	Chin	Christian	[Missing]	Field Assistant
21	Sittwe	Female	22	Rakhine	Buddhist	Graduated university	Field Assistant
22	Sittwe	Female	27	Rakhine	Buddhist	Graduated university	Unemployed
23	Sittwe	Male	19	Rakhine	Buddhist	1 <sup>st</sup> year university	Student
24	Sittwe	Male	20	Rakhine	Buddhist	4 <sup>th</sup> year university	Student

25	Sittwe	Male	20	Rakhine	Buddhist	2 <sup>nd</sup> year university	Student
26	Sittwe	Male	52	Rah	Buddhist	Grade 9	Security Guard
27	Sittwe	Male	55	Chin	Christian	Grade 10	Security Guard
<b>Rakhine State IDP</b>							
28	Basara IDP camp	Female	18	Kaman	Muslim		Teacher
29	Basara IDP camp	Female	22	Rohingya	Muslim	Grade 8	Unemployed
30	Basara IDP camp	Female	36	Rohingya	Muslim	Graduated university	Personal Assistant
31	Basara IDP camp	Female	52	Rohingya	Muslim		Parent
32	Basara IDP camp	Male	18	Rohingya	Muslim	Grade 11	Teacher
33	Basara IDP camp	Male	18	Rohingya	Muslim	Grade 10	Unemployed
34	Basara IDP camp	Male	24	Rohingya	Muslim	Grade 8	Unemployed
35	Basara IDP camp	Male	29	Rohingya	Muslim	Graduated university	SC-Myanmar Staff
36	Basara IDP camp	Male	29	Rohingya	Muslim	Grade 11	SC-Myanmar Staff
37	Basara IDP camp	Male	35	Rohingya	Muslim	Grade 6	Religious Leader
38	Basara IDP camp	Male	46	Rohingya	Muslim	Grade 9	Camp Manager/ Chicken Farmer



## Scope

The data collection period for the scoping study was limited to 15 total working days, plus a day of piloting in each location, taking the total in-field days to 17. In total, 8 FGDs and 19 KIIs were conducted in each of the two states, resulting in an overall sample of 121 FGD participants and 38 KII participants. There were 232 in-scope responses to the quantitative survey.

## Data Collection Methods

### Social media use survey

The survey was a brief quantitative tool in Myanmar language, administered on paper to collect data on general social media and mobile phone usage using a range of check-box questions and Likert-type scale items (survey available in Appendix A).

### Focus group discussions

The FGDs were organised in neutral locations to ensure several hours of uninterrupted time with participants. Urban location selection considerations included air-conditioning/airflow, access to tea/coffee/water and light snacks, proximity to easy lunch options, distance from loudspeakers, wooden over metal roofing (if possible) in case of rain, and access to toilets. FGD participants were divided by either gender or age cohorts where possible. The FGDs followed the same general outline, covering the seven areas of interest detailed above (the FGD guide is available in Appendix B). All FGDs were conducted in Myanmar language and facilitated by one of the Research Associates, while the other Research Associate took notes (the Research Associates alternated these tasks between sessions, dictated by the gender break-down of the FGD and/or KII participants). All notes and verbatim quotes were later translated into English by the notetaker. Where necessary, SC-Myanmar staff were available during the FGDs and KIIs to provide translation between local language (Rohingya and/or Kayah/Kayan local languages) and Myanmar language.

### Key informant interviews

The KIIs were conducted to validate the FGD findings, produce detailed responses to address the seven areas of interest and help identify any programmes/activities within the community designed to improve digital and media literacy skills. The KIIs were also an opportunity to speak to parents and other adults about their perspectives on young people's social media usage. The KIIs followed a similar general outline to the FGDs, but without activities and with more detailed questions (the KII guide is available in Appendix C). All KIIs were conducted in Myanmar language and facilitated by one of the Research Associates, while the other Research Associate took notes (the Research Associates alternated these tasks between sessions). All notes and verbatim quotes were later translated into English by the notetaker.

## Data analysis

A simple content analysis was performed to analyse responses to all FGD and KII qualitative questions, which were collated by the Academic Lead from the translated field notes into Microsoft Excel. Demographic information was also collated for each response to allow for analysis within and between age, gender, ethnic and religious groupings. Each response was read and assigned an open code that summarised the key idea in their initial response (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Similar codes were grouped under themes. Krestina led the coding and analysis of the FGD results (double-coded by Brad), while Brad led the coding and analysis of the KII results (double-coded by Andrew). Any disagreements were resolved by consensus (Krippendorff, 2004). Quantitative analysis of the survey data was conducted using SPSS.

## **Strengths and limitations**

A mixed method approach allowed for the collection of both quantitative survey data regarding how young people in Myanmar engage with social media, and qualitative insights into the impact social media has on their daily lives. All research tools and materials were piloted, first in Yangon and then again in Loikaw and Sittwe, leading to effective suggestions to improve materials before the study began, and ensure they were regionally appropriate. The FGDs were necessarily lengthy but proved to be highly engaging for participants. Games and activities (e.g., quizzes, analysis of visual examples of social media posts, drawing examples of what they have seen on social media) were successful in relating topics of interest to participants' experiences, and keeping them engaged over a long period. KIs with young people, adults and community elders provided valuable detail to supplement the FGDs.

Both the FGDs and KIs were conducted by two trained and experienced Research Associates, who alternated between facilitator and notetaking duties. All sessions were recorded for future reference, however full transcripts were not possible due to budget and time constraints. Instead, detailed information and verbatim quotes were recorded by the notetakers, who later translated all notes from Myanmar language into English themselves. Unfortunately demographic information was not recorded against every direct quote, so some quotes featured in the following sections are missing information (e.g., age, ethnicity). While conducting qualitative analysis using translated data is not optimal, the Academic Partner team worked closely with the Research Associates to ensure that all interpretations and analyses accurately reflected the original information recorded in the sessions.

There were some sampling and time limitations that resulted in inconsistent size and age distributions between FGDs and KIs, due to limited availability of participants from certain demographics. For example, for the KIs the facilitators were only able to recruit one village elder in Kayah State (and no religious leaders), only two Chin and no Maramagyi young people in Rakhine State. Muslim IDP samples were skewed towards educated youth and adults due to lack of social media experience among those with lower levels of education. Rural villages in Rakhine State were not sampled due to resource and time constraints. For subsequent studies, conducting data collection in rural villages in Rakhine State should be prioritized as the perspective and experiences of rural community members will likely be significantly different to their urban and IDP counterparts. There may have also been selection bias, in that the interest that young people who volunteered for FGDs had in participating may have reflected their above average use of and interest in social media, and thus bias responses towards those of heavy and/or more knowledgeable users. Conversely, given the negative attitudes towards social media of some adults interviewed, it was possible that adults most disparaging of social media were also those most interested in taking part in the KIs. Another potential limitation was a perceived reluctance for some participants to openly discuss topics of ethnic or political conflict, particularly in urban locations. Finally, facilitators noted that some Muslim IDP participants had limited capacity to communicate in Myanmar language, which may have limited the level of detail given in answers to some questions.

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS: KAYAH STATE

This section presents a summary of the qualitative analysis of the 8 FGDs conducted in Kayah State. In total there were 58 Kayah State participants (28 urban-based and 30 rural-based) ranging in age from 17–31 years, and from religiously and ethnically diverse backgrounds (see Methodology Section for full details of FGD demographics). Direct quotes included in this section contain as much demographic information as was recorded against that quote from the field notes in each case. All FGDs followed the same general outline, covering the seven areas of interest detailed in the Methodology Section (the full FGD guide is available in Appendix B). The area of interest ‘hate speech and harassment’ is separated here into two separate areas due to the high volume of responses and divergent themes that emerged.

### General usage

The most commonly used app in both the rural and urban locations in Kayah State was Facebook. The other apps participants from both locations mentioned were Messenger, TikTok, Twitter, Viber, and YouTube. There was a mixed response regarding other apps. Some rural participants used and/or knew about apps such as Instagram, WeChat, WhatsApp, and Snapchat, but many of the participants in the urban location did not.

Rural participants noted that they use the more popular apps like Facebook because everyone else uses them (i.e., they are trendy), easy to use, and cheaper than making calls. More specifically, Facebook is used to search (i.e., get information and read the news) and connect with family and friends. It was pointed out that it was helpful to have these functions all in the one place. It was mentioned that it was easier to find information through Facebook compared to Google (which was mostly used to download new software Messenger and Viber were also used to connect with family and friends). It is possible that Google is considered more difficult to use due to its inability to reconcile Zawgyi and Unicode font encodings, which can inhibit efficient searching in Myanmar language.

### Online safety

Participants from the urban locations all agreed that being online was not safe for young people. Their reasons included inappropriate use of personal images, receiving calls from strangers, and the potential for their account being hacked.

Across the rural and urban locations, there was a mixed response from participants having known about and/or having used the block feature. Rural participants discussed blocking users that were both known and unknown (i.e., strangers) to them. Reasons for blocking friends known to them included because they posted offensive material or simply posted too often. Reasons for blocking strangers included having received inappropriate messages or images. Accepting friendship requests from strangers seemed to be common across all locations, though many said they only accepted requests from people from their own ethnicity or community.

*“One Burmese guy approached me, we became friends at first and later he started share some inappropriate pics, so I just blocked him.” Female, 19-25 years, Htee Theh Kaloe & Daw Lyar Khu villages (Kayah State rural)*

With regards to the report feature, participants from the urban locations reported that they have used this feature to report pages with inappropriate images. Others have joined friends to report a particular page that was inappropriate or had been asked by a friend to report their account when it was hacked into. A non-Facebook user from the urban locations noted that they were not interested in the block or report feature, as they primarily used search engines to obtain information. Participants who have blocked and/or reported noted they were self-taught in using these features.

With so many participants unaware of how to use Facebook’s blocking and reporting functions, facilitators demonstrated to each focus group how to use these functions, and how to hide personal information such as phone

numbers in their accounts. During these demonstrations, participants asked questions about these features such as where the reports are sent if they were to use it, showing concerns about whether blocking or reporting someone could backfire and cause other problems for them.

Participants from all locations shared a lot of examples of what not to do when using social media, showing a clear indication of what is considered to be inappropriate. The common responses from both sites were that users should not share fake news, inappropriate pictures or videos (specifically of a sexual nature), or personal information. Some suggested not posting actual images of themselves or others, which could be used by hackers or sexual predators). Participants from rural and urban locations commented on the need for privacy, suggesting people should avoid comments or posts that could hurt another user's dignity or infringe on other people's privacy. Rural participants also made particular mention of not cursing in the comments and posting things that could ignite arguments and conflict (including topics on religion and race).

Participants from the urban locations noted that people should take responsibility in what they post and like rural participants, agree that social media should be used to look up and share useful information (examples included educational posts, career prospects, and health information). Participants from urban and rural locations noted that there should be a focus on posting positive speech, such as inspirational posts and poems.

There was consensus between rural participants that the adults in their lives have not taught them about cyber safety. Participants reported that the adults do not know how to use smartphones (only to make calls) and thus cannot teach them how to use it, let alone teach them how to stay safe online.

*“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*

There was minimal mention of siblings' role in teaching about online safety, and one mention of teachers explaining what to do and not do. There was also one mention of a participant's father suggesting other ways to use their time instead of being on Facebook.

*“My father told me instead of using too much Facebook, to read something that can benefit [me]”. Female, 20 years, Kayah Buddhist, Htee Theh Kaloe & Daw Lyar Khu villages (Kayah State rural)*

While most rural participants revealed that their parents do not control or limit their social media/phone use, there was mention of parental concern over the amount of time they spend using their device. Some participants noted parents advising or limiting their time spent on their phone in the evenings (e.g., 10pm curfew).

In contrast, there was a mixed response from urban participants regarding parents' and/or teachers' involvement with their social media use. Some suggested that their parents do not know how to use social media and so cannot teach them about it.

*“Parents don’t know how to use phones. When we use, they will look. As they don’t know about it, they couldn’t teach us.” Male, 18 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“My parents don’t have phones and don’t know how to use phones. They just told us what they heard from others. They heard news about a teenager who got a boyfriend and ended up married young, so they warned me about using Facebook.” Female, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Dee Maw Hso (Kayah State urban)*

One participant reported that when their parents ask them about certain posts they see using their own social media account, they will take over and clean up their parents' social media by unfollowing certain pages. Other urban

participants noted that their parents (and also some teachers) are unaware of what is real or fake online. However, compared to the responses from the rural participants, urban participants gave more examples of tips from parents and teachers on how to use their social media accounts (presumably because their parents and teachers are more digitally literate compared to rural parents and teachers). These included not posting too many images (especially not personal or identifiable images), not sharing real information about themselves, not tagging friends (as other people will be able to view the images also) and communicating only with people they know. A participant reported that a teacher suggested limited screen time due to physical damage of the eyes. Some urban participants were restricted from social media by not being allowed a phone or internet use until high school or their exams are over. As such some university-aged participants were relatively new to using technology (and/or the internet). According to the facilitators, the girls from the urban locations shared more tips from their parents, while the boys noted that they were scolded for using their devices for too long.

## **Fake news and propaganda**

Participants described fake news as either news that is not true, as presenting information that is over exaggerated or used as scare tactics to trick people, or as propaganda:

*“Making people believe in the thing you want to do. For example, a political party uses propaganda to get more support.”  
Male, 22 years, Kayan Buddhist, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Common examples of fake news provided by participants from both the rural and urban locations included the use of images which were not their own, photoshopped or fabricated images, false information describing images, and scams (including chain posts and ‘hopeful posts’ about winning lotto or prizes).

Facilitators from the rural locations noted that there is no direct translation of the word ‘propaganda’ in the Kayah and Kayan languages, and as such these participants don’t know what it is, and had difficulty differentiating the concept of propaganda from fake news. However, the concept of propaganda was understood by the majority of urban participants and described as something that ignites conflict and gets people to choose a side. Participants from both rural and urban locations note that it often focuses on religion and showing either positive or negative sides of a particular religion using extremist language.

*“Propaganda is news related to race and religion that attack other sides.” Male, 25 years, Kayan Christian, Kyun Taw Village (Kayah State rural)*

Participants from both the rural and urban locations reported having checked whether something was fake news or not in the past. Examples of how they do this included checking the quality of the writing (i.e., was it a personal point of view, were details provided, etc.), check the quality of the image used, check if the organisation is reputable, read the comments, check against other news sources, and if it is local news, observe what is around them. A few participants from both rural and urban locations reported that they would simply decide for themselves. Some urban participants said that they would base their decision on the legitimacy of a story on how many likes and shares it had received, or how often they had seen it.

*“For hot topics, I normally look at the comments people gave. Some say what is truth and some say biased point of views. They can help verify the news as the comments show different point of views. For example, when someone posts a picture, some people [post comments about] when this picture was taken and where you can find the information. I will look at the website and date of the news to check if the news is real or not.” Male, 18-22 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“If the news repeatedly appears over the next [few] days, then I will believe it.” Female, 18-22 years, Kayan Christian, Dee Maw Hso (Kayah State urban)*

When asked how they respond to finding out that a news story is fake, the most common responses were to ignore or skip the post. However, some participants feel the need to take action such as unfollowing the account, telling their friends not to share fake news, or adding to the comments:

*“I argued but gave comments in positive way like ‘you shouldn’t attack people like this’” Male, 22 years, Kayan Buddhist, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

There was a mixed response from participants in the rural locations regarding their trust in posts on social media, but there was minimal reflection as to why or why not. Some participants noted that they believed what friends and family said about the news, some would only trust the larger organisations, and another said they believe print media more than Facebook. Others commented that people sharing fake news often have their own agendas (e.g., getting likes, shares and comments, promoting their own personal interests).

However, there was a consensus of participant responses from the urban locations in that they do not trust what they see on social media. Instead, they trust their local news organisations. Participants responded that they also check with trusted friends, contacts based where the news is from, or people who have had the experience with or are from the particular cultural/religious background the news is about.

*“[I read a news story saying that] although Philippines have many graduates, they could not find jobs locally and have to work in other countries [i.e., Myanmar]. Instead of trusting them right away, I asked my teacher who has been to the Philippines.” Female, 19 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Participants from both the rural and urban locations reported that fake news can impact on the attitudes and behaviours of people. For example, one rural participant noted that they will believe the fake news (or allow it to influence them) if they see it more than once. Another noted that the impacts of fake news can include hurting the dignity of people and causing anger and online fights. Participants from both locations noted that they can get agitated and confused about not knowing what to believe. Others noted that parents and the elderly are more susceptible to being fooled by fake news than young people.

*“Some parents are very trusting of others, especially elderly [who] easily trust the news and posts from Facebook. So when they ask me several times whether news [stories] are right or not, I got angry with those who posted them.” 17-19 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Participants demonstrated that they understand how fake news impacts on other people emotionally, and they would want friends to consider the consequences of their actions on other people before sharing fake news.

*“[When] sharing fake news, we need to think about our own actions before we do it. Since we are human and have feelings, it can affect others by one’s action.” Female, 20 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

A rural participant commented that the constant sharing of fake news by users should have consequences (which may not be the responsibility of Facebook). A few rural participants reported that they don’t interact with fake news,



so they don't have particular feelings about those who share it. Others thought that it depends on whether they know the user who is sharing the fake news.

Most participants believed that people from other countries have negative misconceptions about Myanmar.

*"Some use the wrong information and post them in English – that [causes] international communities to have misunderstandings about Myanmar." Female, 18 years, Kayan Buddhist, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*"Most people from other countries do not know what is happening in Myanmar, they just see the news online or from the fabricated media. They do not know whether it is the real news or not." Female, 18 years, Kayan Buddhist, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Urban participants believe that fake news also affects their peers' understanding of conflicts in their community and in Myanmar more broadly, using such methods as photoshopping images or posting old news

*"Look at the Rakhine issue, they use old pics from other countries and photoshop it to confuse the readers, that kind of news is igniting the issues." 17-19 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*"Yes, there are impacts on the country. Some fake news is using the old posts to distract the peace." Female, 18 years, Kayan Buddhist, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Some said that fake news had influenced how they viewed Muslims in the past but that these perceptions changed after realising that the news was fake, or after meeting with Muslim people in person.

*"When I first looked at a video that showed Muslims destroying a Buddhist temple and killing Buddhists, even though they are fake, it would make me sad and angry. We thought why do our people have to suffer like this. But when I realised [it was fake], I felt better" Male, 22 years, Kayan Buddhist, 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, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Facilitators from the rural locations noted that there was limited discussion about how fake news influenced their perceptions, and that the boys were found to be most vocal when discussing fake news in general. When examples of real and fake news that included hate speech were presented to rural participants to differentiate, they got emotional, especially when topics were related specifically to their community or village. However, most participants across all locations were able to differentiate between what was real and what was fake news.

## Hate speech

Some participants were asked to write down, draw or provide screen shots of examples of hate speech they had encountered. Hate speech was described by participants from both the rural and urban locations as the use of inappropriate and offensive language (e.g., curse words) to attack, insult or spark anger in another person, to ignite fights and arguments. While not initially defining hate speech in terms of prejudice or discrimination, there was a

consensus between all participants that hate speech is often seen in the comments of posts between specific groups of people, particularly related to religion. For example, creating religious or ethnic conflict, trying to sway people to choose a particular side, pointing out the negative behaviours of certain groups of people and using derogatory terms, most notably, “kalar” for Rohingya and other Muslim groups in Myanmar.

The word, “kalar” is an extremely derogatory term that is frequently used in Myanmar against Rohingya and other Muslim groups in the country, regardless of their actual ethnic identity. The term is commonly used as a racist slur to insult and highlight a person’s “dark” skin and/or “foreign” ancestry. Though accounts of the term’s origins differ, today, the term “kalar” is almost exclusively used to mean a person from the Indian subcontinent, but more importantly, it is increasingly used to indicate that the person is Muslim (Gravers, 2015). The growing use of the term “kalar” or “Bengali” to denote “foreignness” has become a wide-ranging ethnonym for all Myanmar Muslims, serving to further marginalise and “other-ise” Rohingya and other Muslim groups as not belonging in Myanmar. The term is frequently used in cases of hate speech in Myanmar.

*“I see some posts regarding Bengali aka Rohingya. Some try to cause tensions between Catholics and Muslims. I saw one person photoshop and post that the Pope is saying to kill Muslims. So, it can affect the community and cause misunderstandings on Islam and Rohingya.” Female, 19 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“There is a Karenni soldier who always posts hatred against Bamar. I don’t like what he posted. Before I didn’t like Bamar either. But now I’ve become more considerate. He said our Kayah people are always victims and we shouldn’t get married to Bamar people. Sometimes I posted my comments under his posts and he cursed at me under comments.” Male, 19 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“U Wirathu is from the side of military dictatorship and he always said offending words against NLD. He spreads hatred against Kalar people. He is an extremist and doesn’t see Kalar as human. He only sees Kalar as bad. He doesn’t follow the Buddhist way. I don’t know why there is no action against him.” Male, 19 years, Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

A participant pointed out that online conflict can also result in offline conflict.

*“Here we have some gangs, and if one of the gang members post some pictures and get negative feedback from other gangs in the comments, they will attack each other outside as well.” Male, 18 years, Dee Maw Hso Urban*

Facilitators noted that some rural participants had difficulty differentiating between the concepts of hate speech, harassment, and fake news. One rural participant believed that hate speech was not produced by rural-based people.

*“The people here are not like people from the cities, we are pure. We just keep things to ourselves even it is right or wrong. We don’t say things that are bad”. Male, 23 years, Kayan Christian, Lo Bar Kho Village (Kayah State rural)*

What came out across all locations was that while the participants had difficulty expressing and describing the direct impact hate speech has on their attitudes and behaviour, they were able to articulate how seeing hate speech made them feel. Participants from both rural and urban locations revealed several feelings about seeing hate speech posts, including feelings of sadness and empathy for people targeted by hate speech. Responses reflected that they feel bad and show worry about the tension it causes between people, especially those who may not be equipped to differentiate between news that is fake and real.

*“No direct impact on us but mainly I feel bad. I am just trying not to get involved and control myself.” Female, 18-22 years, Kayah Buddhist, Dee Maw Hso (Kayah State urban)*

*“I felt bad and sad to find out some people from Myanmar have very narrow minds.” Female, 20 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Other feelings reported included anger and resentment, particularly towards hate speech targeted at their own ethnicity and community. Some participants were embarrassed by certain comments that were made, and some empathised with the feelings posted by others. Another participant questioned how people can treat others in that way.

In relation to how participants respond to these kinds of posts, the girls from the rural locations said they responded by blocking. One girl noted that they feel bad and would like to respond to perpetrators of fake news with curse words, but instead only do so silently to themselves. Boys on the other hand reported retaliating by responding in the same manner they have been treated, when they feel offended.

In the urban locations, there were a variety of responses to hate speech. Some skip and ignore, one participant said they discuss and sometimes debate the topic with their friends, while another said they try to engage positively in the comments and trying to ‘solve’ the issue.

*“Just when I see the posts who are attacking religion (Christianity). Although it is not directly attack on me, I started to get involved and also defend in the comments. I said, ‘instead of attacking each other, let’s just have our own faith separately without spreading hatred’. I tried to solve it.” Female, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Dee Maw Hso (Kayah State urban)*

When asked about anti-hate speech campaigns, only one participant from the Loikaw urban location identified a specific campaign – a ‘Peacemaker’ group who made posts about peace. The majority of the participant responses from both rural and urban locations instead described seeing posts and comments that were inspirational, motivational, and encouraged positivity. They reflected that these positive posts promoted guidance on ‘living peacefully with other groups of people’ and understanding others in an attempt to prevent conflict.

While the use of Facebook was said to relieve feelings (such as anger) and allow them to show their own feelings by sharing what they agree with, participants noted that fake news made Facebook less trustworthy, and contributed to the creation of tensions, making offline situations worse.

## **Online harassment**

Rural participants described cyberbullying and online harassment mostly in terms of publicly sharing scandalous information that insults someone or harms their dignity. A common theme was the inappropriate use of someone else’s personal image, known outside Myanmar as image-based abuse:

*“I have once heard from my friend that someone from their community got cyberbullied and blackmailed by a stranger, approached through Facebook. She was threatened that her pictures would be posted online. She had to pay money to avoid that incident. But since it is someone they do not know from online, they could not sue them.” Female, 20 years, Kayah Buddhist, Htee Teh Kaloe & Daw Lyar Khu villages (Kayah State rural)*

Most participants from the rural locations were embarrassed to share examples of harassment they’d seen online. Examples that were shared included when partners are intoxicated and verbally rude, when they received inappropriate sexual images from strangers (including sharing news of homosexual marriages which they considered harassment), stories of extortion using personal images to demand money, the use of offensive language and being challenged to fight.

Common responses of participants from the urban locations were similar, but also including strangers pretending to be someone they are not to make initial connections with them, and then intimidate them later. Participants also reported being harassed by strangers repeatedly calling them on their phone. Some participants were not aware that they could change their privacy settings to hide their personal contact details, so they would instead deactivate their account, or change sim cards.

*“One guy tried to call me every time and even said he wants to marry me. I am not sure how he got my phone number, but he kept on saying that we have talked to each other before, I just simply could not remember. He called me 50-100 times per day. [It was] taking too much time, so I had to think about whether I still need to use [my phone] or not. I ended up using an application to block and accept only my friends.”* Female, 19-22 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)

*“When I started use Facebook, one person added me as a friend, he said he is from Dee Maw So. So, I thought he is a good guy since we are from the same ethnicity. He said later he is actually from another place, he threatened to use my pics on Facebook for other use. I was so scared and begged him. I had to deactivate that account.”* Female, 19-20 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)

## Sharing behaviours

Participants from all locations had very similar sharing behaviours regarding the content of their posts. This included sharing posts they found interesting and funny, celebrity news, inspirational quotes and poems. Many participants posted educational information and things that they thought might be useful to others (e.g., ‘how to...’ posts, scholarship information), or posts from people who needed help and support. Some shared posts about their personal feelings, their relationship status, or activities they participate in (e.g., travelling). There was, however, some disagreement among rural participants how and about whether feelings should be shared online.

*“I do not post about my feelings. My feelings are something I should keep it for myself. Sharing to others is not good.”* Female, 20 years, Kayah Buddhist, Htee Teh Kaloe & Daw Lyar Khu villages (Kayah State rural)

*“I am not against your words, but I believe by sharing my feelings, it can help me relieve sometimes.”* Male, 22 years, Kayah Buddhist, Htee Teh Kaloe & Daw Lyar Khu villages (Kayah State rural)

*“When I listen to a song, I copy the verses that represent my feeling and post them on my page.”* Male, 22 years, Kayan Buddhist, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)

There was a mixed response from participants regarding posting about politics. Rural participants reported that politics is mainly discussed outside of Facebook due to others using offensive commentary, the possibility of fake news, and the consequences that could follow:

*“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 consequence 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 consequence.”* Male, 19 years, Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)

*“I read news about Ngar Min Swe, who used his real profile and attacked the Army with words. I read some of his posts and they are really good ones. Because of his posts, he was arrested and put into jail by the Army.” Male, 19 years, Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

## Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing

The discussion about participants’ overall social media experience produced a mixed response in both rural and urban locations. A common response was that it depended on the person, for example, what they were using social media for and how long they had been using social media.

*“[New users] don’t know how to search pages that can be useful to them. They just listen to music, watch video and share what they see.” Male, 18-22 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Others said that using social media could be both a positive and a negative experience. Positives included gaining knowledge from learning new things and acquiring skills, the ability to help people, reading news about society and raising political awareness, access to educational information leading to a possible scholarship, and connecting with and building relationships with existing and new family and friends.

Negatives included that social media was a waste of money as it is sometimes not used for anything useful (e.g., costly to spend money on games), can impact health negatively (such as the physical issues of sore eyes using the device for too long and lack of sleep), lead to early marriage (due to the easy connections made on Facebook), and certain posts can negatively impact young vulnerable children. Most participants agreed that social media can have a negative impact on relationships and communication issues between friends and family, with some suggesting that more time devoted to relationships online than offline.

*“Using Facebook is affecting the relationship with each other, we can’t communicate anymore. Some young people are using Facebook just for fun and not for [anything] interesting or education.” Female, 19 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“It can make us lazy and distance our relationship with families and friends.” Male, 18 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“Some friends give more time to friends on the phone rather than from outside [offline].” Female, 19 years, Kayan Christian, \*Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

The consensus from rural participants was that Facebook has made life easier for them. They report that social media has been used to cope with difficult emotions, and one participant enjoyed being validated on Facebook through the posts that they make (i.e., getting likes). A comment from an urban participant, however, pointed out that people are now relying on social media for information and therefore not needing to go out, leaving a negative impact on health.

*“As we can get every information from the phone, we don’t want to go anywhere, and it can affect our health. As we don’t go out, we don’t know what is happening in our surroundings”. Male, 18 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Participants noted that funny posts received more likes compared to educational posts. Friends were said to boast about the number of likes their posts received, making them feel sad when they don’t receive as many. The reactions from friends to their posts (particularly the “haha” emoji, which is often associated with mocking someone) caused

anger in some participants, so some changed their more personal posts to the 'only me' setting so they weren't visible to others.

*"When I posted about my feelings and my friends just gave me 'haha' [emoji reaction], I got mad." Male, 18 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

When asked how they felt after using social media, the majority of rural participants reported feeling neutral. Urban participants did not specifically address this question, but one participant noted that they felt out the loop when they weren't on Facebook, as being on Facebook connected them to their peers and broadened their view of the world.

## **Impact on society**

When asked about the overall impact of social media on society, there were a range of differing responses between locations. Positive impacts identified by rural participants included the ability for young people to gain information (e.g., health tips) and connect with and make friends in different locations, while negatives focused on being a waste of time and money (for phone credit).

*"Some health tips that I found out online can give us a good healthier life. Like I had a headache before, and when I [followed] a post of suggesting to drink hot water every morning, I got better." 18-25 years, Htee Theh Kaloe & Daw Lyar Khu villages (Kayah State rural)*

*"Make new friends and also maintain the friends from outside [of one's village]." 18-25 years, Htee Theh Kaloe & Daw Lyar Khu villages (Kayah State rural)*

*"There are more negatives. It costs money and wastes time. It can also destroy one's life. It might be useful for people who work in office, but for farmers like us, it doesn't have much benefit." Male, 25 years, Kayan Christian, Kyun Taw village (Kayah State rural)*

While there were positive impacts identified by urban participants (e.g., easy to find relevant and up to date news, online shopping), the majority of urban responses suggested that social media has a mostly negative impact on society. A key theme was the negative impact on relationships, with many saying that young people no longer know how to communicate with each other, don't spend time with one another offline, and when they do they talk about online interactions.

*"It causes distant relationships among friends. When people fall into Facebook world, they don't talk to person next to them." Male, 18-22 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*"Communication and relationship – before we had a very good community life, and [lots of] chats between family members. But now nobody chats with each other." 18-21 years, Dee Maw Hso (Kayah State urban)*

Other negatives of Facebook in particular included making them anxious about political news and being a distraction from completing tasks at hand.



*“I feel very... scared when I hear political news outside, like KNPP [Karen National Progressive Party] and Tatmadaw [Myanmar Armed Forces]. I feel anxious.” 18-22 years, Dee Maw Hso (Kayah State urban)*

*“Sometime when we work, we just think about Facebook so we can’t complete our work.” Male, 18-22 years, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

There was a mixed response from rural participants when asked how online behaviours compared to offline behaviours. Some said that they find young people talk a lot more online and are a lot more polite compared to when they are face-to-face, while others said that they do not experience any difference. Regarding their own online identities, one rural participant reported that they can share whatever they want to online, but do not feel the same liberation offline. In contrast, an urban participant reported that that sometimes they posted positive comments despite having negative thoughts on the matter.

Rural participants also discussed differences in behaviours between users and non-users. Some said that compared to Facebook users, non-Facebook users will go to sleep earlier than Facebook users, and are happier and not as anxious. Some participants noted that being a social media user has made it easier to communicate with their family, and that their online friends are mainly those they know from their state. An urban participant felt that social media is needed in order to keep up to date because unless you are online, you cannot follow what is being discussed.

When asked about the use of social media for advocacy among young people, rural participants said that they and their peers did not use social media for this purpose. However, there were examples of social media being used to seek community support (e.g., blood donations, a Viber group for sharing information between villagers). Only a few urban participants had seen examples of social media being used for advocacy, such as messages about demonstrations and rallies regarding political and environmental issues, and groups promoting ‘peace’. An urban participant noted that they personally don’t use social media to campaign and advocate on issues and note that even the government does not lead initiatives to address the issues that are happening on Facebook.

While there were few examples of Facebook being used to raise awareness and help locals support one another, most agreed that if young people were taught how to understand and use Facebook more effectively, it could be used to positively change lives. Rural participants suggested that conducting training in the villages or allowing villagers to educate others about using social media would be useful. Urban participants made some suggestions for using social media to increase empathy and understanding in society, such as sharing information about other places and people (e.g., risks of natural disasters), and pictures and posts from people who have emigrated from Myanmar to other countries (e.g., celebrating ethnic festivals and cultural practices).

## FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS: RAKHINE STATE

This section presents a summary of the qualitative analysis of the 8 FGDs conducted in Rakhine State. In total there were 63 Rakhine State participants (30 urban-based and 33 IDP camp-based) ranging in age from 17-31 years, and from religiously and ethnically diverse backgrounds (see Methodology Section for full details of FGD demographics). Direct quotes included in this section contain as much demographic information as was recorded against that quote from the field notes in each case. All FGDs followed the same general outline, covering the seven areas of interest detailed in the Methodology Section (the full FGD guide is available in Appendix B). The area of interest 'hate speech and harassment' is separated here into two separate areas due to the high volume of responses and divergent themes that emerged.

### General usage

The most commonly used apps mentioned by both the Muslim IDP camp and urban participants included Facebook, Google, Messenger, Viber, WeChat, WhatsApp, and YouTube. Muslim IDP participants also mentioned using IMO, Skype, and TikTok, but these were not used by urban participants (though some knew of them). The apps that were mentioned by participants from both locations as known but not used included Instagram and Snapchat.

Facebook was described as the most popular social media platform due to the following features: the majority of people use it; easy to use; allows them to connect and communicate with existing friends and family and those they had lost touch with; allows quick access to news and information; helps them learn English. However, some participants said that they did not use Facebook, because it was costly (presumably due to data usage as the app itself is free), and/or it was banned by their parents due to inappropriate content.

When compared with other popular apps, Facebook was said to have additional capabilities (such as sharing pictures and making comments) that other popular apps don't have (e.g., Viber is good for chat only). Urban participants also reported that while Facebook is the go-to platform to search information and news, Google was more trustworthy and is used more to validate news they see on Facebook.

In some Muslim IDP groups, IMO was more popular than Facebook because it was used to communicate with friends and family who lived overseas, and it had better reception (likely due to being less data-consuming than Facebook). One urban participant expressed a preference for WeChat over Facebook, saying that its news is more reliable and up to date, has more international users, and does not set limits on group member numbers.

### Online safety

Participants were asked whether it was safe to be online and there was consensus from the participants from both the Muslim IDP and urban locations that it was not safe. Most responses focused on dangers such as their personal images being taken and photoshopped inappropriately, fake accounts posing as them or their friends to use for financial scams or blackmail, or their account being hacked into (including by the government) and misused. Other reasons that participants suggested made social media unsafe were that news and information available can be fake, and that these kinds of posts can create or increase conflict. Participants also reported being contacted by strangers and receiving inappropriate images and messages.

There was a mixed response regarding the use and knowledge of the block feature. There were a variety of reasons participants gave for why they used the block feature. Participants who did use the block feature used it to block strangers due to harassment (including receiving rude and inappropriate sexual language and images, continued unwanted contact, and being attacked for not responding to messages), financial scams, or seeing altered images and inappropriate use of friend's images. Some also reported blocking friends for posting too many details about their life or posting too many images. Other participants noted that instead of using the block feature they unfollowed the account. Some Muslim IDP participants also mentioned receiving harassing phone calls from strangers, noting that they had to change their sim cards because they did not know how to use the block feature on their phone.

There was a mixed response regarding the report function. Some knew how to and had used it, some had seen it but hadn't used it, while others didn't know how (facilitators showed these participants how to do so during the FGD). Participants who knew about the report function said it was easy to find on Facebook, and those who had used it did so to report accounts that had either hacked into their friend's accounts or shared false and inappropriate content, such as news stories that were discriminatory.

*"I reported news and posts on Facebook that insulted Rohingya people based on religion." Male, 23 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin (Rakhine State IDP)*

Facilitators noted some gender differences in the experience of online harassment, particularly among urban participants with girls much more likely to be targeted and impacted compared to boys. Participants reported being harassed by strangers online for something as simple as not replying to the stranger's message. In some of the groups, girls said that the impact of this meant that they became scared to make friends with men both on- and offline.

Participants from both locations reported similar broad examples of what not to post online: these included harassment, hate speech, propaganda, fake news, posts that are not beneficial to the public, posts that can cause trauma (e.g. depicting terrorism and violence), and posts that do not have good intentions. There were many specific examples provided such as posts related to superstitious luck, relationships (e.g. pictures of couples without the consent of the partner, pictures of couples being affectionate, and conflict between couples), extremist posts related to terrorism (political and religious), news with images of nudity, and content that could easily influence others (e.g., pornographic content, violence, suicide, smoking, influential celebrities that may be considered 'out there'). Some urban participants warned against sharing personal information in posts (including adding location to images and posts) while Muslim IDP participants focused more on not cursing or making rude comments (particularly ones that will hurt other user's dignity or insulting other religions and other countries). One Muslim IDP participant mentioned not challenging or going against the government, which was supported by another participant who said there is a need to follow the laws of the country (likely in reference to Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunications Law, which is being used to restrict freedom of speech online, especially against the government).

Participants noted several examples of what social media should be used for. These included sharing educational posts to promote more knowledge (e.g., health information, educational posts, and job opportunities), interesting and inspirational posts (e.g., poems), and sharing news that would be beneficial to the community (e.g., new laws, news of natural disasters to help them plan for any future occurrences).

*"I shared news about the enactment of law for protecting children under 18 in Myanmar, which everyone should know." Male, 23 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Several participants from both locations noted that their parents don't teach them about using smartphones or social media, because they themselves don't use them. One Muslim IDP young person said they were the one to teach their parents about the report feature. Rather than teaching about responsible use, participants reported restrictions made by their parents on their phone and social media use. Many were restricted from using Facebook until after matriculation exams or graduation or were banned altogether (but could use other apps instead). Others were not given phones until after they passed their exams. Reasons parents gave for putting these restrictions on their children's social media use included that they were too young, it distracts from study, includes violent content, and leads to being immoral. Some parents did not give a reason for banning Facebook, especially parents of Muslim IDP girls for whom there are often strict gender norms.

The few participants whose parents did teach them about safe and appropriate social media use said they were taught not to talk to strangers, watch inappropriate videos, have online relationships or post couple images if they are in a relationship, or use social media excessively – particularly late into the evening as this disrupts sleep (one

participant reported having his phone taken away following use until 2am). Girls from the urban locations were warned by their parents about online relationships because of what they heard about girls who met boys online and ended up marrying early.

Most of the feedback from urban participants noted that it was primarily their teachers who helped direct them on how to behave and what to do and not to do online. Examples suggested to them included not sharing false information or posts related to politics, war and conflict, ensuring they know the validity of information before they share it, and not sharing too many pictures.

## **Fake news and propaganda**

Within the Muslim IDP camps, some participants were not able to describe or understand what fake news is, and when shown an example by the facilitator, some participants could not differentiate between what was real or fake. Those who did understand fake news said it is fabricated information, lying about the truth, the misuse of photos (i.e., using photoshop) to harass others, and news that includes wrong information. Some Muslim IDP young people were able to provide examples of specific fake news they had experienced.

*“Someone was still alive in hospital, but a news story spread that he/she had already died.” Male, 24 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pjin, (Rakhine State IDP)*

The urban participants were better at articulating their understanding of fake news, describing it as news that is not accurate and aimed to persuade (often posted by non-credible sources). Most urban participants were able to correctly categorise examples of fake news, real news, and propaganda. Examples of fake news they had seen previously related to conflict, religion, superstitions about luck, and celebrities.

*“There are some fake news about Chin and Rakhine neighbours who got in a fight, one person [reported this as] ‘Chin and Rakhine community are having a fight’. This kind of post can cause so many issues.” Male, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

When asked if they knew what propaganda was, responses included that it aimed to persuade other people, was based on religion and race, spread rumours and fake news, and created conflict and agitation. While there was a mix between participants who could and could not differentiate between fake and real news, facilitators observed that it was not clear to most of the participants how fake news and propaganda are different.

Participants believed that there were two main reasons people post fake news: either they believe it because they haven't tried to validate the information, or they know it's fake but want to spread it to create conflict. Participants reported that in order to check if something is fake news, they looked at how the story is written (including the writing style, spelling and language used), and check the details of the source provided (such as the organisation's addresses, phone numbers, email, weblinks, etc.) provided. Participants also suggested that they would use any pictures or videos provided with the text to help them determine whether it is trustworthy information.

Consensus was that news posted by known or large news organisations are deemed to be trustworthy, and that they check other stories they read against news by these organisations. An urban participant reported that they think there is a difference between how local and international news organisations report news about conflict.

*“RFA (Radio Free Asia) is linked with an international news agency and ‘My Media’ is a local news [agency]. Sometimes these news agencies present news about on conflict in a different way. ‘My Media’ only focus on news of this country, and they have difficulty presenting their news to international readers.” Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Some participants check the comments of the post or ask whether the story is real in the comments. Participants have also reported to have checked with friends or people they know with relevant experience (e.g., if a story is about something that happened in a particular town, they will ask someone they know from that town). Only a few participants reported not checking to verify if news is real, with some urban participants responding that they 'just decide for themselves' whether the news is real or not.

*"I read the news from beginning to end and then decide if this is possible or not." Female, 21 years, Maramagyi Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

When asked about young people and their ability to differentiate between fake and real news, the majority suggested that a great proportion of young people cannot do this well.

*"Most young people easily trust what they see and they will post bad comments." 21-26 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"Fake news can influence the perception of young people and cause misunderstandings that can lead to negative consequences." Male, 23 years, Maramagyi Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

While one participant suggested that young people will stick to what they believe despite what they have read, most thought that fake news had an impact on young people's beliefs about what is happening around them.

*"During the Rakhine and Kalar conflict, we got a news that 500 or 1000 ARSA soldiers were coming from the west door [Myanmar-Bangladesh border], so we had to assign guards for the village for about a month. In our area, the phone signal is not good, and this kind of fake news really caused trouble for us." Male, 22 years, Maramagyi Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"One time, I shared a post of a YBS bus [where it was] written 'Taw Tar tway ma Htine Ya' ('Villager can't sit on this seat') but as I did not know the truth I claimed that 'look they are discriminating [against] us'. But one of the teachers explained that it was photoshopped. It intended to incite misunderstandings." F (teacher), 18 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin, (Rakhine State IDP)*

The sharing of videos depicting negative behaviours by people from other cultures was also said to negatively impact on young people and influence their behaviour towards certain groups. Some participants mentioned hate speech and propaganda being distributed to stir a fear of Muslims, resulting in panicked reactions from the Rakhine community.

*"In 2012 just before Rakhine and Muslim conflict escalated, some DVDs were distributed to villages in Rakhine State. The villagers would come together to watch the DVD. The video showed terrorists from other countries beheading people. It doesn't have anything to do with the situation in our country. But people became traumatised and scared of the Muslim people from this. The Muslims were also scared of Rakhine people. Although Rakhine people are in large numbers, when they heard a bicycle horn of a Muslim pass by, the Rakhine women would sit down and cry [in fear] holding their children. They became really traumatized from watching those DVDs." Male, 26 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Several reasons were provided as to why young people might believe fake news to be true: if posted by someone they trusted; if they were only new to Facebook and thus lacked experience; because young people may use their feelings to decipher beliefs in the news rather than looking at facts; or if they had a low education level.

*“People who have little education can be easily persuaded... this can incite conflict. But those who have higher education can determine what’s right and wrong.” Male, 28 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

The verbal spread of online fake news was also mentioned, with the repeating of incorrect information to other people who are not online potentially causing wider spread of negative impacts.

When participants hear news about what is happening in their community/country, they said it makes them feel sadness and anger. However, when it is fake news, some participants suggested that they don't feel anything about the news, they instead feel anger towards the people who share and spread the fake news, questioning why they would do this. Muslim IDP participants were concerned about how fake news (or the omission/distortion of news) could guide how people in Myanmar feel and act towards them.

*“Fake news can alter the information and belief in people minds, like if people see smiles and happy faces from our IDP camps, other people who do not know will think that ‘Oh they are on vacation but not displaced and in trouble’. They just do not know the main information, what is happening.” F (teacher), 22 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin, (Rakhine State IDP)*

When asked what they do when confronted with fake news, most urban participants said they would ignore or skip the post. Some reported taking action so they don't see it anymore (such as hiding the post or unfollowing the account) or mocking the post by commenting with the 'haha' emoji. Muslim IDP participants were more likely to take stronger actions to address fake news, such as making a comment on the post to either tell others it is fake news or asking the user not to post such fake news.

Some participants from both locations reported to have taken part in sharing fake news. A Muslim IDP participant noted that they shared fake news thinking it was real until a teacher corrected his understanding of the information that was presented, whereas urban participants revealed more active sharing of fake news, but only between friends for fun (i.e., not shared publicly).

There was a consensus from participants from both the Muslim IDP and urban locations that the proliferation of fake news had diminished their trust in what they see on social media. Participants from the Muslim IDP camps noted that there is likely to be more fake than real news on Facebook, because anyone can post anything they like. One IDP participant said that as they relied on Facebook to get information from outside of their camp, they had to be selective about the news agencies they follow. An urban participant noted that they do not read political news because the majority of stories are fake news. Another urban participant said that they trusted Facebook when they were a new user, but with more experience they can now use their judgement to critically analyse the content and whether to believe the news or not. It was agreed that trust in online news was largely dependent on the news organisation or the reporter of the news and that with more fake news around, there is now a blur between what is real and what is fake and thus more uncertainty.

*“Because of fake news, it makes people not to trust real news. When things really happen, people won’t believe in that.” Female, 21 years, Maramagyi Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

When asked if there were individuals or influencers online that they trust more than online versions of traditional news sources, Muslim IDP participants said that they trusted social media posts by Rohingya activists such as Ro



Nay San Lwin. Most urban participants said ‘no’ to this question and instead spoke of offline influencers such as religious leaders (e.g., Buddhist monks) who they said are highly regarded in the villages.

## Hate speech

When asked to describe hate speech, some urban participants focused on more general acts of aggressive speech (such as between sports fans, towards celebrities, belittling or cursing someone, insulting someone’s dignity) rather than on abusive speech expressing prejudice against particular groups. When asked the difference between hate speech and harassment, two Muslim teachers from the Basara IDP camp noted that harassment hurts one person, while hate speech can affect a group of people.

Facilitators noted that urban-based young people were very reluctant to discuss intercommunal conflict. In contrast, Muslim IDP participants were more willing to discuss the discriminatory aspects of hate speech, describing numerous examples of being insulted and harassed online because of their ethnicity and/or religion. The included being called ‘Kalar’ and told they that are ‘stateless’ people who don’t belong in Myanmar.

*“We have many feelings. We were born in this country. We always see the posts in Facebook saying Kalar is like this or like that... You can tell how much we feel about this. I was born in this country. My mother was born in this country, but they don’t accept us. There is no word to describe how much we feel.” Male, 20-24 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin (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)*

Participants were asked to write down, provide screen shots of or draw examples of hate speech they had encountered. Most examples provided across all demographics focused on hate speech directed against Rohingya or Muslims more generally, however there were also examples of insults towards the Rakhine ethnic group and the Arakan Army. When asked how these examples made them feel, common responses were feeling angry, sad and depressed, discriminated against, threatened, resentful, and like they wanted to take physical action against people who post these types of hate speech.

When asked why people spread hate speech, responses included having a one-sided view, not wanting peace, being full of hatred, ‘like a psychopath’, not seeing other groups as human, wanting others to suffer, or wanting to make themselves feel better. Some mentioned that there were third parties (i.e., not part of the groups in conflict) who spread hate speech to cause conflict between other groups. One participant reflected on how hate speech has real impacts on people’s living conditions.

*“Before we lived in the city but now, we can’t live there anymore [because of hate speech]. Now we are in difficult condition. Here, all family members have to sleep in one 8-foot square room together. One family has about 11 or 12 members including sisters, brothers, father and mother. It is difficult for us.” Male, 24 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin, (Rakhine State IDP)*

There was a consensus between the urban focus groups that hate speech and harassment posts impact on behaviour and attitudes negatively. Participants reported that these kinds of posts drive a wedge between friends, make people dislike one another, lead to offline retaliation, and inflame simple fights between friends into larger fights between communities.



*“It happened to me. My childhood friend is Rakhine. When we were young, we were good friends. But when we finished high school and know things, because of the Palewa issue, we don’t talk to each other anymore. We avoid each other online.” Male, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“In Palewa, a simple fight happened between two friends (Rakhine and Chin), [but] it also led to a big fight between the Rakhine and Chin communities.” Male, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

In comparison, there was minimal discussion from Muslim IDP participants about the impacts of hate speech on their behaviour and attitudes. Many said that while they feel sad and angry when they see hate speech, it doesn't impact their behaviour or attitudes as they comfort themselves (e.g., meditation).

Overall, responses to hate speech were similar to those for fake news (as they often overlap and in many cases, become easily conflated). They included using the report function, commenting on the post, sending a direct message asking why they share those kinds of posts, or using the “haha” emoji. Some urban participants noted that if it were a friend of theirs that made the post, they would tell them not to post something so offensive. Another noted that they had seen organisations posting advice not to comment on such posts as it can cause racial conflict. A few participants noted seeing examples of others posting anti-hate messages in the comments of hate speech posts, informing others about peace agreements and campaigns, or directing them to leaders that encourage others not to fight.

## Online harassment

Most female participants (and a few urban male participants) revealed that they had experienced online harassment. Examples included misusing a partner’s image online (e.g., photoshop), outing what someone did online, sending inappropriate images and videos (sometimes labelled/disguised as something else). These examples were said to harm someone’s dignity or reputation, ‘destroy someone’s dream’, psychologically hurt someone, or cause embarrassment. An urban participant also noted that perpetrators of harassment do not always realise that what they are doing is considered harassment.

*“They took couple pics and after they broke up the boy photoshopped the girl’s pics and posted online.” Female, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“A girl was standing and without her consent, a stranger took her picture and posted it on Facebook. They [had] bad intentions. Some of the guys...photoshopped their photos and uploaded or open a new account [with them].” Female, 18 years, Thet Kel Pyin, (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“I also had an experience. I posted my pictures and a group of gays were interested in me and they came to add me [as a friend]. At first, I talked to them but later on, they attacked me personally saying offending [sexual] words. It got worse when I didn’t respond. I decided to block them in the end.” Male, 28 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Sometimes a person harasses someone but he/she doesn’t know that is harassment.” Female, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Much of the discussion of harassment among girls raised focused on experiences offline also, such as in the form of unsolicited phone calls, being cursed at or teased as they walked along the street, or being bullied based on appearance (i.e., told they look like a certain race or ethnicity that is not accepted, for example Maramagyi young people being told they ‘look like a Muslim’). One group of urban participants debated whether boys teasing girls is

considered harassment, as boys felt it was natural for this to happen whereas girls expressed a loss of confidence and dignity when this happens to them. Some boys noted that groups of girls sometimes tease lone boys also.

*“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)*

*“We lose our confidence when being teased like this. When we wear short skirts, boys will shout and say how much is for one night? It degrades our dignity.” Female, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Some female participants from the Muslim IDP camps shared their experiences of males physically harassing them (e.g., pulling their umbrella, throwing stones, pulling on their shirt collar), which made them very angry and want retribution. According to the facilitators, when Muslim IDP girls told their experiences of harassment, they were laughing. When asked why they were laughing, they replied that it was an embarrassing experience.

*“I think I will tell my parents to kill those boys who pulled my shirt collar.” Female, 16 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin, (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“I think I will inform the village leaders and take action on them.” Female, 16-17 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin (Rakhine State IDP)*

## Sharing behaviours

Participants were shown examples of ‘inspirational’ Facebook posts commonly shared in Myanmar. Participants who looked at Aung La Asan’s picture (successful Burmese martial artist) said that it made them feel inspired and proud of ethnic people. However, there was an overall negative response to a post of Thin Zar Wint Kyaw (controversial Burmese model/actress). While one urban participant said that she liked her personality and art, the majority of participants noted her ‘sexy’ fashion taste degraded the dignity of their country and leads to the harassment of women.

*“[She] makes the culture of Myanmar ugly because of the way she wears [her clothes].” Male, 21 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“When I see Thin Zar Wint Kyaw post, I will write angry comments because it is harassment for the women.” Female, 18 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin (Rakhine State IDP)*

Participants from both locations revealed several different types of pro-social content they share on social media, including news, education and information posts, religious posts and posts about peace. They also share posts for recreation, including pictures and videos they find funny, music posts, celebrity posts, and movies. Some said that some content they share only with close friends and family, such as about their own points of view, emotional posts and personal pictures. Some participants spoke about expecting to receive likes from their friends. One noted that some people click ‘like’ on everything online and don’t think about whether they actually like it.

There was consensus among the Muslim IDP participants that government and current events are not discussed online as this can lead to conflict and hate speech. Instead, they leave these discussions for offline conversations. However, urban participants said that a few of their friends did post about the government and politics. Only one participant recalled an example of doing so themselves, saying that they were cursed in the comments after posting

a story about Aung San Suu Kyi. The main reason others did not post about politics was what they had heard about people going to jail for doing so (for breaching Section 66 (d) of the Telecommunication Law, which states that “anyone found guilty of extorting, coercing, restraining wrongfully, defaming, disturbing, causing undue influence or threatening any person by using any telecommunications network shall be punished with a maximum three years in prison, a fine or both”; Burma Campaign UK, 2019). One participant had a friend who was jailed for 10 days for what he expressed on Facebook about the government. He said that he tried to stay away from him even though they were classmates, because he didn’t want to get into trouble for associating with him.

## **Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing**

In spite of the negative impacts of hate speech on the psychological wellbeing of Rohingya young people discussed above, the majority of participants from Muslim IDP camps said that social media had a more positive than negative impact on their daily lives overall, with most of the focus on the ability to communicate with family and friends overseas more affordably, obtain information and learn new things (including English). Most urban participants, however, thought that social media had both a positive and negative impact. In one urban group, the girls said that there were more negative impacts while the boys said there were more positive impacts. The most common negative impacts across all locations were hate speech, and the impact on quality of their family and other offline relationships due to spending too much time online.

*“Relationships become weaker as talking on social media is not the same as talking face to face.” Female, 19 years, Maramagyi Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Few participants talked about how social media affected their thoughts, feelings or attitudes. However, when asked about using social media to cope with difficult emotions, a number of participants across all locations discussed how connecting with friends and viewing funny and inspirational posts helped reduce stress, improve their mood and reduce boredom.

There were some gender and location differences observed in how they felt about their posting behaviour. In the urban groups, female participants said that they never post about their feelings, while some urban males said that they did. In contrast, Muslim IDP females did sometimes share their feelings on Facebook.

*“I share my feeling on the Facebook status. If I feel too much, I share my feelings on Facebook.” Female, 18 years, Rohingya Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin, (Rakhine State IDP)*

Most participants reported enjoying getting ‘likes’ on their posts, however some urban boys said that it was only girls who cared about this.

*“Boys don’t wait for likes, this is girls’ business.” Male, 19 years, Maramagyi Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

When asked about online identities, several participants commented that there is a difference in the way people act online versus the way they behave offline. A common theme was that people are more out there or ‘flirtatious’ online, but more reserved offline. One comment indicated that there may be a lack of empathy for how online interactions may affect others’ emotions.

*“You can say jokes or tease someone online, but offline you don’t dare to do this because she might get angry” Male, 18-23 years, Maramagyi Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

## Impact on society

There is a mix of participant responses regarding the overall impact of social media on Myanmar society. Positive impacts focused on the opportunity social media provides people to gain knowledge and learn new skills (e.g., self-management, vocational skills), and connect with both the outside world and their local community (e.g., being alerted to potential dangers). Participants provided several examples of ways they use social media to navigate through challenges they experience. These included learning English (e.g., using an online dictionary to help them interpret what they are reading online), learning about different topics and skills (e.g., business advice, learning about computers etc.), and searching for health information to help them with health problems. Muslim IDP participants noted that social media helped them stay in touch with family members they have been separated from due to the Rohingya crisis.

*“Because of the conflict, some family members got separated and we do not have communication before, but due to the social media, we are able to communicate.” Female, 18-22 years, Muslim, Thet Kel Pyin camp (Rakhine State IDP)*

As in the previous section, urban participants discussed more negative impacts compared to Muslim IDP participants. These mainly focused on the impact that spending so much time online had on their offline relationships.

*“It is not good for family. For some children when their parents tried to teach them, they will reply they already read about this or know about this from online. They won’t listen to what their parents say.” Female, 26 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Within friends, we don’t talk about jokes like before when gather with each other, as some use phones and some play games.” Male, 21 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Other negative impacts included hostile interactions that can result in offline conflicts, and the availability of inappropriate adult videos that were said to lead to early marriage.

Urban participants discussed the several different online groups available to them, including social groups, work related groups, religious groups, and interest groups (e.g., online shopping). However, they reported that they hadn’t been part of or exposed to many political groups online. When asked if social media was used to for advocacy or to mobilise young people, participants in the Muslim IDP camps said they mostly use phone calls for this instead. Some urban participants mentioned Facebook and Viber groups being used to communicate with young people in their community, however there were no specific examples of what they communicated about.

The connections young people have made online have opened them up to several opportunities, including making friends from other countries (including romantic relationships) and practicing English with native English speakers. Social media had also been beneficial for creating a sense of cultural identity and learning about the cultures of others.

*“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)*

*“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)*

Participants shared various ways on how social media could be used to increase empathy and understanding. These included sharing information and videos that will be beneficial to others and sharing more positive news and posts that will encourage people to unite, rather than negative things that will incite conflict. Other suggestions included anti-hate speech campaigns. Participants from both locations reported that more awareness programs were needed in schools to teach young people about digital literacy, online safety, technical skills, and how to check the validity of news online. It was suggested that online videos would be a good way to educate young people about digital literacy, as 'most young people are students'. Other suggestions for dissemination were workshops by youth organisations or religious leaders.

## KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS: RESULTS

This section presents a summary of the qualitative analysis of the 38 one-on-one KIIs conducted in Kayah and Rakhine State with young people and adults ranging in age from 18-55 years, including representation from teachers, parents and community leaders. The KII data from both states were analysed together due to the smaller overall sample size and more consistent interview format compared to the FGDs. There was 19 KIIs conducted in Kayah State (8 urban-based and 11 rural-based) and 19 in Rakhine State (8 urban-based and 11 IDP camp-based). Rural villages in Rakhine State were not sampled due to resource constraints, with priority given to urban Muslim IDP camps. The urban and rural Kayah State sample were religiously and ethnically diverse backgrounds (see Methodology Section for full details of KII demographics). The Rakhine urban sample was skewed towards Rakhine Buddhist young people (only two Chin Christians were recruited and no Maramagyi Buddhists). The Rakhine IDP sample were all Rohingya Muslims, with the exception of one Kaman Muslim. All KIIs followed the same general outline, covering the seven areas of interest detailed in the Methodology Section (the full KII guide is available in Appendix C). The area of interest ‘hate speech and harassment’ is separated here into two separate areas due to the high volume of responses and divergent themes that emerged.

### General usage

Facebook was unanimously identified by interviewees as the most popular social media platform among young people, except for a few younger Muslim IDP respondents who suggested that Facebook is not popular among their peers. Reasons given for Facebook’s popularity were consistent with those mentioned in the FGDs and survey, i.e., used by everyone, easy access to news and information. Other platforms mentioned included Messenger, Viber, YouTube, WeChat and TikTok. IMO was mentioned by Rakhine IDP interviewees only.

While adults perceived that young people spend more time on their phones (8 hours on average, range 2-18 hours) than young people perceived they do themselves (6 hours on average, range 1-12 hours), a common theme among both was that they tend to use their phones ‘all day’ or at least whenever they are not working or studying, distracting them from other more active tasks. Young people using phones late into the night was another common theme among all demographics, with some adults noting that this negatively impacts on the amount and quality of sleep that many young people are getting.

*“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)*

*“Some young people use all night and hardly sleep.” Male, 55 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

When asked how much of young people’s phone time is spent online, the most common response among all demographics was ‘most’ or ‘nearly all’ of their time. Some respondents differentiated between time spent on social media, browsing the web and playing games (the latter was popular with boys but girls). Some adults considered playing games to be ‘offline’ use, while most young people considered this an ‘online’ activity.

### Online safety

The vast majority of both adults and young people believed that young people are not safe online. However, many noted that whether young people are safe or not depends on their online behaviour and if their activities are risky (e.g., oversharing, connecting with strangers, commenting on political posts). A common theme was that young people generally do not think about their online safety.

*“Most young people are not interested in online safety. They just ignore this and use their phone. They just post anything and give any comments that they want. And sometimes it can offend others or make others angry.” Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“Posting funny posts, daily information is safe. However, not with the political news; which means if they comment about the President and Political parties, there were some cases some of them got arrested by [authorities]. If we are only posting not-opposing posts but only using educational and technical posts, they are safe.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

The risk of having their account ‘hacked’ was raised by both adults and young people, and examples of sexual harassment or extortion were raised by a number of female participants.

*“Some young people can encounter sexual harassment and can be sued from what they post in Facebook as there is still no freedom of expression. Also, they have to worry about hackers. A friend’s account was hacked some weeks ago. The hackers can steal information from her and can use her profile information.” Female, 30 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“It is not safe for girls. Some boys/men disturb the girls by calling them through phone, WeChat and Viber. The calls are from both known and unknown people. Sometimes the girls receive dirty pictures from unknown contacts.” Female, 22 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

None of the respondents revealed any specific incidents of online danger they had experienced themselves, but many spoke of incidents involving others that they had heard about (though few of them actually knew the people involved). The majority of responses from adults were about financial scams, while most responses from young people (both boys and girls) were about online sexual harassment of young girls, by both people they know and online predators who tried to form relationships with them or extort them for money or sexual images. This was consistent with the FDGs, in which harassment was one of the most resounding themes identified.

*“My friend...posted her picture in Facebook and a man from Malaysia threatened her by saying that she has to give him answer (love him back). If not, he will photoshop her picture with him and post it on Facebook. This would harm our girl’s dignity.” Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“Some predators download and use girls’ picture in bad way.” Male, 22 years, Kayah Buddhist, Ve Seh Ku village (Kayah State rural)*

*“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)*

*“A longtime friend offended me... he asked me a bad question: “Have you ever done it?” I just answered “No”. He later threatened [to share] screenshots of what we have chatted [about] before and send to other people. I was so angry, I thought “why is he doing this?” He also asked me to show my upper body part. I said no... The lucky thing is I have a friend who is cousins with him, I asked [my friend] to delete those pics and messages while he is out. Now I have blocked*



*him. He apologized to me and said he won't do it again... I did not tell anything to my mother, only a friend. I do not trust anyone anymore."* Female, 18 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)

A couple of respondents had heard about stories of young girls being raped when meeting up with strangers who contacted them online. Some thought that these reports of rape were linked to watching pornographic content.

*"Not in this region but in the province or other place, I have seen it. Usually, the girl will contact through online and get raped."* Male, 18 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)

*"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)

Other online dangers discussed by young people included defamation from other users, and online shopping, both as a buyer and seller.

*"A boy always asked her girlfriend to send him phone credit, and the girl got angry and blocked him. As a consequence, the boy posted on his Facebook saying that the girl had cheated a lot of money from him."* Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)

*"Once a company contacted me and said they have a promotion and offered me to buy a phone together with a watch. When they spoke to me, they spoke very sweet and also quick, which made it hard for me to understand. In the end, I agreed to buy the phone and when it arrived the quality was really bad. Although they said it has one-year guarantee, as we lived in the restricted areas, it is hard to contact them back and fix the product when it is broken."* Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)

*"Some of my friends sell clothes online. They got order from some people but after they sent the clothes, they didn't receive the payment back from those who ordered."* Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)

When asked if parents and teachers were able to help young people navigate dangers online, the majority of respondents (across all ages and demographics) believed that adults were generally not knowledgeable enough to be able to do so (some made an exception for educated adults). A common theme was that rather than teach young people how to stay safe online, parents sought to restrict the amount of time they spent online or warned of the physical and educational consequences of overuse.

*"They don't teach their children as they don't know about internet. Their generation is like us, we just started using phones now."* Male, 35 years, Kayah Buddhist, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Teh Kaloe Villages (Kayah State rural)

*"Do not use phone too much because it is not good. Your eyes will hurt, it will affect your work."* Female, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Kyun Taw Village (Kayah State rural)

*"Most parents who are 40+ don't have much knowledge about online. They limit their children not to use phone and online for too long as it can affect their study and their health, but they don't teach them about online safety and what they should read or watch on Facebook. Only 5% of parents in this camp who have high education might teach their children about online safety."* Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)

Some young people (both male and female) identified a gender difference in restrictions placed on them by parents, with a focus on the vulnerability of young girls online.

*“Yes, 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)*

*“One thing is [some] Muslim women are not allowed to use phones.” Female, 22 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Parents and teachers who did teach young people about online dangers tended to focus on the kinds of posts and activities that could compromise their offline safety (e.g., commenting on political stories, posting personal pictures or details about their offline activities).

*“Yes, both parents and teachers are okay with young people using social media – they will remind them to be careful on online, especially regards with political news and posts not to offend anyone... They are mainly worried that young people will use social media to express their opinion about the government.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“Some parents warn their daughters not to post many pictures on Facebook because there are many men out there and if something happens, it will harm girls’ dignity.” Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“Our teachers told us we shouldn’t share our location or pictures of where we are going on social media because people who dislike us can use this information to put us in danger.” Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

## **Fake news and propaganda**

Perceptions of the kinds of online news and information that young people are most interested in varied greatly between interviewees. The most common responses from female participants (both adult and young people) related to local and national news events, while the most common responses from male participants were sport and entertainment. The next most common topics across members of all demographic groups were politics and education (particularly around learning English). There were some respondents from all groups who believed that young people were not really interested in news and current affairs and preferred to follow the activities of their friends or celebrities.

*“Mainly about the current political issues and update information of Rakhine State or conflicts.” Female, 36 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“It depends on the young people and their gender. The majority of young males are interested in sports like football and mixed martial arts. For girls, many of them are interested in watching movies. Some are interested in the current news as well.” Male, 46 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“I am not sure what kinds of content they share but I think most young people use social media for finding entertainment and fun.” Female, 36 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“They share posts like English learning as they believe it can help them progress in their life.” Male, 55 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“The young people are more interested in each other's personal relationships information rather than other news.” Male, 19 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Most young people don't read news that they see on their newsfeed. They don't purposely search for news to read.” Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Adults were more likely to think that most young people trust the news they see on social media (especially those living in rural areas), with some stating that young people do not have the required critical thinking skills.

*“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)*

*“Many believe in what they see on the news, because only 5% out of 100% of the news [is] not accurate.” Male, 35 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

While a number of young male participants agreed that young people do tend to trust the news they see on social media, most young people thought that trust in news on social media was generally low among their peers.

*“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)*

*“There is [a lot of] fake news on social media so I don't trust most of the news. I think 25% of young people trust what they see on social media.” Male, 31 years, Kayah Buddhist, Ve Seh Ku Village (Kayah State rural)*

Contradicting the views of most older interviewees, some young people said that it was actually parents and the elderly who are most to blame for the proliferation of fake news.

*“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)*

Some remarked that trust in news on social media has gone down in recent years due to the proliferation of fake news.

*“As there is more fake news, people trust less in what they see in Facebook. I started using Facebook only in 2017 when I finished my high school. Now I am using more Facebook and I can also differentiate between fake news and real news.” Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“I do not think the young people nowadays may believe what they see from online these days. When we arrived to this camp at first, we usually trust whatever we see and hear from social media...There is another Facebook page call ‘Rvision (R stands for Rohingya)’ that many people use to search for information about current Rohingya affairs or updates from Rakhine State. But 50% of the news from that page are not true. Most of them are just fake news.” Male, 46 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“They don’t trust that much. Before when I was younger, I trusted most of the things I see on social media. If I read something online, my feeling would follow how it was written. If I read a sad post, I also felt sad. When I read a post that condemned someone, I also hate that person. But when I started going to university, I became less sensitive. Our teachers told us like a novelist, who wrote a novel to play with their readers feeling, Facebook is the easiest way to spread news. So now when I read news, I verify the news and determine whether this is true or not.” Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

When asked how young people react to fake news, two clear but contrasting themes emerged: young people would either ignore fake news stories or post a comment on them. Male participants were more likely than others to say that young people mostly ignore fake news (especially those from Kayah) while responses saying that young people post comments were received from all demographics. Examples of the types of comments posted included questioning the accuracy of news posts, alerting others that it is not to be trusted, or simply curse/offensive words or emoji reactions. Only a small number of respondents said that young people report fake news, as most did not know about this Facebook feature.

*“Mostly they just ignore or skip fake news. They hardly take action like giving comments or reporting on it. But on the [real] news... they will post comments that mostly are offensive words.” Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“When they know it is fake news, they give comments that this news if not real or they stop sharing.” Female, 36 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“When they see fake news, they mostly post comments that are offensive [or curse words].” Female, 22 years, Kayah Christian, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Teh Kaloe Village (Kayah State rural)*

*“Click angry icon and give comment that this is fake.” Male, 18 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“If they are educated, they would analyse and even explain in the comments what is the real news and why in detail, not only for the person who posted online but as well as others who use it.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Estimates of the proportion of young people who can differentiate between real and fake news varied greatly (from 1% to 75%), however there were no patterns in the responses observed across demographic groups. The majority thought that less than half of young people could differentiate between real and fake news, with many stating that educated and urban young people were more likely to have the skills and knowledge to do so.

*“Young people who have little knowledge can’t differentiate between fake news and real news. Only those who are educated can.” Female, 52 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“We have many young people who come from remote areas who are uneducated, I think only about 30% from urban areas can differentiate.” Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“They can differentiate news that happened in local but not the international news. They can’t differentiate the news release from the Army. They release many fake news.” Male, 55 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Most young people from villages are not interested in news and don’t widely use social media. They just read the news but think this is not relevant to them. Urban young people feel more connected with social media.” Female, 35 years, Kayaw Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“Urban young people don’t easily trust what they see because they know a lot of information, while young people from villages have limited access to news information.” Female, 27 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Most interviewees thought that most young people do not understand the concepts of bias or propaganda. Again, some qualified their response by saying that those who are educated or who read the news regularly were more aware of bias in news found on social media. There were some interviewees (both adults and young people) who didn’t understand the question about the concept of bias or propaganda themselves, particularly those from Kayah as there is no direct translation for the word ‘propaganda’ into the Kayah and Kayan languages. It is possible that they do understand that news reported on social media is biased, but just don’t have the vocabulary to discuss it eloquently (responses to other questions about fake news support this).

When asked what strategies young people use to verify the accuracy of the news they read on social media, the most common responses were to discuss the story with their peers (particularly those who are educated), check with people they know ‘on the ground’ (i.e., in the area affected), or seek out a second news source. Checking with peers was regarded by some as not being very effective, as many base their judgement of the truth of a story on how well known it is, rather than whether it had been verified. Other responses included checking the comments below a news post to see whether others had identified it as fake news or investigating the credibility of the source posting the news.

*“I think some of the young people will approach the most educated ones to verify. The educated are considered as the ones who finished at least 10th Standard (High School).” Male, 46 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“They normally check with the person who upload the news. They also ask the person from the ground level, for example if there is a news about the certain village, they will ask someone from that village directly to see whether it is fake or real.” Male, 46 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“It also depends on how many media posted on the same information as well. For example, when they first hear of the recent death of one celebrity, they have observed several social media groups that are well known in Facebooks to see if they posted the same information or not.” Male, 19 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Many of the young people will ask each other, and if so, many people talk about the same information, they will believe it as a real news. Only some will cross check from another media news, source or page.” Male, 19 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Many adults and young people thought that trust in news on social media was largely dependent on the source from which it came. International news agencies such as RFA (Radio Free Asia), BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) and VOA (Voice of America) were identified as examples of trustworthy sources. The quality of writing and inclusion of photos and/or video were also identified as factors that made a new story appear more trustworthy (though some participants were aware of the potential for ‘photoshopped’ images).

*“I trust the news websites or agencies that are broadcast [internationally] like RFA, BBC, VOA.” Male, 24 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“The news is trustworthy if it has a video clip or image as evidence, and the big [international] news agencies like VOA and BBC are more trustworthy.” Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Seh Kaloe village (Kayah State rural)*

One young urban female from Rakhine mentioned ‘reverse image search’, which can be used to check whether an image has been altered or reused from a different new story or context (in this case it was mentioned in the context of checking the clothes worn by a Burmese model).

*“If the news is about clothes that Tin Zar Win Kyaw wear, we can use a software (Reverse Image Search) to verify whether her picture is real or not.” Female, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Most respondents thought that fake news can affect young people’s understanding of their political context, however some adults from rural Kayah thought that this was not a problem for the young people in their villages. The responses from young people in rural Kayah themselves however were evenly split between agreeing that fake news did affect their peers’ understanding of politics, and ‘I don’t know’.

*“We don’t have such problem here.” Female, 34 years, Kayah Christian, Lo Bar Kho village (Kayah State rural)*

*“Yes, there are [misunderstandings]. The religious news like the Muslim issue in Rakhine. Some people accept this, and some don’t accept this.” Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Kyun Taw village (Kayah State rural)*

One Muslim IDP respondent explained how the government and other armed groups used social media to spread fake news about political conflict in order to manipulate public sentiment for political gain.

*“Relating to war or armed conflict, it is mostly caused by propaganda and the young people can’t understand much about this. The actors behind this conflict can be the government, the Army, AA and other armed groups. I saw many news related to this on Facebook. Sometimes, there is no fighting in that area, but the army spread propaganda saying there is fighting. They also spread propaganda after fighting. It is hard to understand what is really going on in that area [because] we can only read news about it. Some groups use propaganda for political gain. Sometimes, they use young people for propaganda.”*



*An army personal can create a fake account and can add young people in his account. It is very effective to use online for mobilizing, propagating, and to create a problem.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Issues around race and religion were also identified as being particularly contentious and open to misunderstandings on social media, resulting in confusion, fear, prejudice against certain ethnic or religious groups, and both online and offline conflict. This is consistent with the FGDs in which fake news was identified as spurring on ‘us versus them’ dichotomies that perpetuate interracial and interreligious conflict.

*“Yes, because of fake news that are biased, they have negative attitudes towards other groups and can insult or offend them with words.” Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Seh Kaloe Village (Kayah State rural)*

*“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, Kayah Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“Fake news tends to spread quickly from the sensitive issues like race... Sensitive and complicated issues like politics, race and religion easily cause misunderstandings. The religion problem is between Christians and Buddhists. Buddhists are a minority in this state.” Male, 34 years, Kayah Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“In relating to religious conflict, one Islamist and one Buddhist posted negative comments against each other’s religion. This started with two people but spread to many people. It started from online, but it has affected offline as they attacked each other when meet outside.” Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“When they heard a rumour about a fight, they will say bad words about the leaders even if the news is still unconfirmed.” Male, 20 years, Kayah Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Most interviewees thought that young people have behaviours that unintentionally spread fake news. By far the most common such behaviour was sharing posts without checking for accuracy (especially if it was about their ethnicity or a group they ‘hate’). Others included arguing with others online, making fun of the person depicted in the news story, and not being able to use Facebook probably.

*“Yes, I think so. Because we love our ethnicity so much. So when someone starts to attack our ethnicity, many of us do not think but respond with hatred first. Some will simply share those fake news stories just because it is shared by one of us. They do not think anymore.” Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“I shared a post that said a village person (Taw Thar) is not allowed to sit on a YBS bus. When my friends who are teachers saw this, they told me that this is fake information and only photoshopped.” Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

When asked if there are individuals or influencers that young people seem to trust, the most common responses were friends, relatives, religious leaders or youth leaders.

*“They trust their parents and follow what their parents tell them. Before we lived together with Rakhine people and we trusted each other. I went to them and they also came to me and we could work together. Now the young people trust only their parents. There are no leaders they trust.” Female, 52 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*



*“There are youth leaders in this village and young people trust in them.” Female, 32 years, Kayah Buddhist, Ve Seh Ku village (Kayah State rural)*

Of the few specific individuals mentioned, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi was identified as a trustworthy person by young people and adults from every location except for Muslim IDPs. Pro-Rakhine activists such as Aye Maung and Nyo Htun Aung (Arakan Army Vice-Chief of Staff) were considered trustworthy by Rakhine Urban interviewees, while Rohingya activists Maung Zarni and Ro Nay San Lwin were identified as trusted sources for Muslim IDP interviewees, along with The Daily News reporter Ko Thein Shwe.

*“Depends on the news and its ethnicity. For example, with regards to the nation’s media news, many of the young people may trust what Daw Aung San Su Kyi said. If it is about Rakhine news, young people will believe Col. Nyo Htun Aung (Vice-Chief of Staff, The Arakan Army). They have their own page and many of the Rakhine people will believe them.” Male, 19 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“There are some young people who are interested in the issue of conflict and they will follow the individuals who talked about conflict resolution. The young people from this community will read follow posts by figures like Maung Zarni and Ro Nay San Lwin. They also follow former MPs and read what they posted and shared. Also, in relating to the current conflict, some young people are interested in conflict resolution that are being discussed by UN and UNSC, so they will watch live video of their meetings.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

## Hate speech

There was variation in the experiences of hate speech on social media between regions. Most Urban and IDP respondents had come across hate speech on social media, while many Kayah Rural respondents had not. Across all demographics, almost all hate speech was regarding issues of religion and/or race, with anti-Muslim hate speech the most commonly identified. Some respondents claimed that third parties are trying to ignite tensions between different ethnic groups.

*“Most of the time, the type of hate speech is Anti-Muslim or Rohingya. We have been living together peacefully for many years, but they do not accept us.” Female, 36 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“Most hate speech is based on religion and race. The racial hate speech is between ethnic people and Bamar, and between Muslims and Bamar. The religion is mixed with the racial issue.” Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Kyun Taw Village (Kayah State rural)*

*“Someone who is not local hates Kayah and tried to ignite conflict between Kayah and Kayan people. He posted that Kayan will kill Kayah people. The account owner was spreading propaganda. Although the two ethnicities haven’t had a real problem offline, they post offending comments against each other on Facebook. Those who understood the situation posted their comments saying that this is propaganda and those who didn’t know challenge the other ethnic group were like ‘come to Loikaw, we will kill you’.” Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Seh Kaloe Village (Kayah State rural)*

*“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)*

There were also examples of political hate speech (e.g., NLD versus USDP, anti-Arakan Army) and urban versus rural hate speech (identified by both rural and urban respondents).

*“I saw hate speech between NLD and USDP. The NLD supporters said USDP members are thieves.” Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Seh Kaloe Villages (Kayah State rural)*

*“In this state, [hate speech is] mainly about ‘Anti-AA’. For example, when someone posts some information about AA, some people will write rude comments or cursing comments against Rakhine people. Mostly they are Burmese.” Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“[There is] hate speech between urban and rural people. For example, the people from cities look down on rural people or villagers like us.” Male, 35 years, Kayah Buddhist, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Seh Kaloe Villages (Kayah State rural)*

Political hate speech often overlaps with racial hate speech, with differing support given to the Rakhine and Rohingya ethnic groups fuelling tensions between these communities.

*“The support that goes to the Rakhine region is often not equal, more is given to the Muslim community than Rakhine. When that happens, we usually have opposition to this posted on Facebook. Other examples that I usually see on Facebook are ‘Kalar are not citizens, only Rakhine should receive more opportunities.’” Male, 19 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

When asked about the impact of online hate speech on young people, most Muslim IDP young people said that it leaves them and their peers feeling frustrated, depressed and hopeless (in all cases they spoke as the victims of hate speech). These responses are consistent with the Muslim IDP FGDs and reflect the ongoing discrimination and threat of violence that the Rohingya community are subjected to in Myanmar. While there were no reported cases of self-harm, there were some concerning comments from young people saying that hate speech makes them feel like they don't want to live, consistent with some comments from the Muslim IDP FGDs.

*“It can change their attitude. Some young people don't have ID and they feel caged living in this camp. So when they hear hate speech against them, they lose their hope.” Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“[The impact is] negative – more stress, more pressure, I don't want to eat or live...Why are they saying this? Why are they accusing [us] like this?” Male, 24 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

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

*“For those who understand hate speech, it makes them feel hopeless or diminishes their hope. In the beginning, they ignored when they see hate speech but when they repeatedly see these kind of posts, they feel depressed. They think we don't have any rights in this country, we don't have right to study or any freedom of movement. They lose their social life and communication with other young people. There are some good young people who want to build good communication and relationship with young people from other religions and ethnicities. Hate speech destroys their hope. They will think it is*

*impossible to make friends with Rakhine because they hate us even though we didn't do anything to them." Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

One adult Muslim IDP respondent believed that in the context of the situation they are facing that online hate speech did not have much impact on their young people.

*"I do not think so. Because there are no changes whether they hear the hate speech or not." Female, 36 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Responses from Kayah and Rakhine Urban were inconsistent, with almost half saying that they thought hate speech did not have much impact on young people (especially if it is not relevant to them). Those who thought that hate speech did have an impact said that it encouraged young people to exhibit discrimination towards other religions and ethnicities (most hate speech examples discussed from these regions were perpetrated against groups other than their own).

*"There is negative impact. They cling onto hatred and denounce other religions. For example, in relationship to Kalar – they don't want to buy products sold by Kalar. Also, they don't want to buy Chinese products." Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Kyun Taw Village (Kayah State rural)*

*"The people here don't care much about issues that are not relevant to them, like the Muslim issue. They just skip posts related to that. If it is about KNPP news, most Kayan people don't care as they think it is not relevant to them." Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

When asked what kinds of hate speech and rumours were most likely to be believed and/or shared by young people, the most common responses were posts about religion or ethnicity (as opposed to politics per se), particularly posts about other groups or from other states. Rumours and hate speech related to the 'Rakhine versus Muslim' conflict was specifically identified by some Rakhine urban respondents as being widely believed by young people. This is worrying given the reported link between hate speech on social media and violence against Muslim communities (McKirdy, 2018).

*"News like a Kalar killed a Rakhinese who was searching for food in the jungle...They [young people] believe both real news and rumour." Male, 55 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"Mainly on the current Rakhine and Muslim conflicts. Because of the extreme love for their ethnicity." Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"They tend to easily believe in news from other states like Kachin, Chin and Shan as they don't know about the situation in those states and they don't have any connection from there." Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Some thought that young people from rural villages were more likely to believe and share rumours.

*"In my view, most young people don't believe in rumours. They verify the rumours. This is related to education. Those who are educated understand what a rumour is...Urban young people don't easily trust what they see because they know a lot of information while young people from villages have limited access to news information." Female, 27 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

It was also reported that victims of hate speech also share fake news and hate speech posts among themselves, to share the resentment they feel. Unfortunately, this would result in only increasing the visibility of these posts to the wider public due to Facebook's algorithms related to post sharing.

*"News related to race. For example, the post that said Kayan people in Moby will kill all Kayah people and will found their new nation. This made Kayah people resentful, so they shared this post among themselves." Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Seh Kaloe (Kayah State rural)*

Few interviewees were aware of any influential figures working to counter hate speech online. A couple of young adult Kayah residents mentioned that a certain (unnamed) civil society organization (CSO) provided training around hate speech and made attempts to address misunderstandings on social media. Most of the few young people who were aware of influential figures working to counter hate speech were from urban Rakhine, but they were vague about who they were and what they were saying. Those who were identified, for example Wai Han Aung (a writer), were said to be countering hate speech by 'promoting peace'. Other responses referred to friends, rather than influential figures.

*"There are some individuals who post things on social media trying to explain misunderstandings. CSO [Civil Society Organization] also intervenes to solve misunderstandings. There are some ethnic youth leaders like Khun Bedu who are influential among young people." Female, 30 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*"Some influential figures can counter fake news immediately after it was spread. Without social media, it will be difficult to find a way to counter fake news." Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*"I have seen some by Dr. Aye Maung but not so sure about what they said." Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"A writer, Wai Han Aung, who is promoting peace. Many young people like him as well." Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"I saw people who post about peace and 'Stop War' on their pages. Some of these people are interested in politics and they try to counter hate speech." Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Few Muslim IDP respondents were aware of influential people working against hate speech, but they were vocal about the need for this. One participant believed that the Government should be playing a bigger role in countering hate speech, rather than focusing only on addressing criticisms of the government itself.

*"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. I think ordinary citizens can't address hate speech, but government should manage this. Government have formed many committees. It should form another committee made up of technical experts to take action on those who spread hate speech and propaganda on social media. It should think about the type of action needed, whether they will prosecute the wrong doers or educate them. The Myanmar government doesn't have any plan for this. They only think about taking legal action against people who criticize or denounce their government department. I am not sure how they find out about those who criticized them." Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

## Online harassment

Experiences regarding online harassment on social media varied between regions. The vast majority of Kayah respondents (particularly those rural based) said they had not come across or heard about online harassment in their region. However, given the number of examples that came out of the Kayah focus group participants, it is likely that the Kayah interviewees either did not consider these examples to be harassment, or they were too embarrassed to discuss them (a theme that also came out of the FGDs).

In contrast, nearly every respondent from Rakhine (especially Muslim IDP respondents) had heard a story of online harassment, although none disclosed any personal stories involving themselves. Most stories involved young girls as the victim, and in many cases the perpetrator was an ex-boyfriend. The most common types of harassment were defamation, blackmail, and image-based abuse, often involving photoshopped images of young girls' faces on the bodies of others, all of which are considered online sexual harassment. There was also an example of so-called 'revenge porn'. Several respondents referred to the use of fake accounts, used to either post a harassing message, or to pose as a young girl using a stolen or photoshopped image.

*"I think there is, but it is a very little percentage in this state. There are cases like people using your picture in an inappropriate way that harms your dignity." Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*"Many girls encounter online harassment. For example, someone photoshopped a girl's picture and then created a fake account with her sexy picture. When people saw this, they misunderstood and thought bad things about this girl." Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*"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 black mailed and harassed online by their pictures being photoshopped and posted on Facebook by their ex. There are so many cases like this here. Most of the online users are male and most probably only 30% out of 100% girls are allowed to use Facebook. They were limited by their parents and family members because there are so many inappropriate contents on Facebook." Female, 36 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*"There were some cases when couples have arguments or break up, one partner will post their sex videos online to embarrass or harass another person. There were some cases about posting photoshopped pics or nude pics of the girls they want to harass when they broke up." Male, 19 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"Among girlfriends, when we want to post our picture, we will check with each other if the pictures are okay to post or if they look too sexy. We don't want our pictures to look too sexy. There was a time I posted my picture, and a boy commented on it saying, 'I want to suck on this girl's lip'. As soon as my friend saw the comment, she suggested I delete that picture as other people might look down on me because of his words." Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

These examples are consistent with those given in the FGDs and expand on issues above when discussing perceptions of online safety. Many young people, girls in particular, regularly experience online sexual harassment and therefore do not feel safe online, and they generally do not have the skills or knowledge to address this with the reporting, blocking and privacy features of the social media platforms they use.

## Sharing behaviours

When asked what kinds of online content young people are sharing on social media, responses were largely similar to the earlier question regarding online interests. Accordingly, 'news' was the most common response, followed by sport, entertainment (including celebrity news), and educational content (particularly around learning English). Some mentioned the sharing of personal photos (especially 'selfies') but only one respondent mentioned the sharing of personal information or feelings. Few mentioned the sharing of political stories. There were no notable differences across different demographics.

*"Crime news like murder cases. Most young people will post their selfie pictures." Male, 31 years, Kayah Buddhist, Ve Seh Ku village (Kayah State rural)*

*"Sports, movies, and feelings – those who have a happy family will post about their happy lifestyle and those who are from a problematic family will post about their difficult situation." Female, 30 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*"I think there are two different groups of users. The first group is young people who are involved in social movement and interested in politics. These young people use social media for fun and also for sharing information and reading news. The other group of users are young people who are not interested in social and political issues. They use social media mainly for fun. For example, flirting and posting rude comments instead of using it for educational purposes." Female, 36 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

When asked if young people use social media to express their own or others' opinions about the government or other divisive issues (e.g., religion, race), responses were evenly split between 'yes' and 'no', and inconsistent across age and gender. However, urban-based respondents were more likely to have seen examples of these kind of posts from young people (mostly in comments on news stories), while Muslim IDP respondents were least likely.

*"Mainly on the political and armed conflict related posts. Young people will give comments about discrimination or hate speech in the comments from one ethnicity to another (e.g., Rakhine vs Burmese)." Male, 19 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"Yes, I saw many young people express their opinion against the government. For example, they criticized the government for selling teak [timber that is currently illegal to export]. Female, 27 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"I think those who share news about the government are mostly young people and most of them are politically active." Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*"I do not think so in this region, because they are scared. They are scared that if they do this, will the government accuse or persecute us." Male, 24 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*"I don't post such things and neither do my friends. But I saw some adults post these." Male, 18 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*



Most urban-based respondents thought that young people generally do not consider possible offline consequences of their social media activity. However, there was mention of child protection and monitoring programs that aimed to educate young people about the possible negative impacts of their posting activity.

*“I don’t think they consider possible offline consequences. Many people post what they want to post. They are not really interested in the issue, but they post to make fun of someone or the situation.” Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“We do a lot of child protection programs in the community. We also have monitoring groups. There was a girl who posted a lot of her pictures in social media. She is still very young. So we have ask our monitoring team to go and talk to her, and told her about the negative impacts of posting lots of pictures. After that she posted less pictures. These are some cases that we can monitor.” Female, 35 years, Kayaw Christian (Kayah State urban)*

In contrast, Muslim IDP adults thought that their young people were now much warier of their social media activity, as there had been examples of online criticisms of the government on Facebook being followed up by police. As a result, it was suggested by one Muslim IDP adult that their young people now use less public WeChat or IMO groups to discuss such issues.

*“Some people are courageous to use their real account and criticize the government. As they use their true profile, it is easy for the government to find out about that. There was a time that police came to threaten people here because of what they posted online. Some elderly from our community were called by police. The police showed them a post from Facebook and asked them who posted this. The elders said they didn’t know and told the police it couldn’t be someone from this camp. After the police search, the young people who posted the information was warned by the elderly not to do that again. After that they didn’t dare to post anything like that again... Young people will now share the news information through WeChat and IMO.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“The young people here don’t use Facebook to form groups. They mainly use WeChat and IMO. They don’t have big mobilization activities. Unlike the other sides, Rakhine young people, who use social media for mobilization and propagating. Our young people here they use social media more for entertainment, like gathering people for soccer games. Also, when an accident happened in the camp, like the case of a young person who was shot dead by the police, young people will share the news information through WeChat and IMO. But for sure, they don’t use social media for criticizing the government, and for causing religious and inter-communal conflict. They are not interested in these things as they don’t want to experience more losses.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

However, this view was not shared by the Muslim IDP young people interviewed.

*“No, they share what they want to share without considering the consequences.” Female, 22 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“I’m not worried about the offline consequences when I post things related to government or politics. I don’t post one-sided words, I say only the truth, so I do not fear anything.” Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*



## Impact on daily lives and psychological well-being

When asked if social media has a positive or negative overall impact on young people's daily lives and/or psychological wellbeing, responses were evenly split between 'mostly positive', 'mostly negative' and 'both' across all demographics. 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, keep up to date with news and current affairs (particularly related to events outside their region), and further their education by learning English and other skills to benefit their careers and employability. A couple of respondents also mentioned that using social media has taught young people the ability to identify and investigate fake news.

*"If they can use it in good ways, there is benefit. I feel grateful that I can read news from other regions while I live in Kayah State." Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Kyun Taw village (Kayah State rural)*

*"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)*

*"Positives are young people can learn knowledge online in a situation where it is difficult to access education. Also, they can differentiate between fake news and real news and know what is harassment and hate speech after they use social media for so long." Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*"The positive side is if they want to know whether the news is real or not, they can find out from Facebook." Female, 31 years, Kayah Buddhist, Ve Thae Ku village (Kayah State rural)*

A number of adults from the Muslim IDP camp thought that social media was playing 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.

*"In Facebook there are some educational short videos that promotes moral standards, what we should do or how we should react, how to be respectful, how to talk politely to others etc. So some young people learnt good things from those videos and were able to change their attitude. They also find positive feelings to overcome their current stressful situation in the camp." Male, 46 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*"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)*

Social media also played a positive role in promoting tolerance by raising awareness about people from other religions outside of their camp 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)*

Some other young Muslim IDP respondents said that social media gives them a sense of hope or escape from their current situation.

*"There are more positive impacts. The blog like Dee Dee Burmese motivates young people. It gives encouragement to young people not to give up in their life". Female, 18 years, Kaman Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

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

However, some Muslim IDP respondents said that contact with the world outside of their camp on social media made their young people upset.

*"Yes, both positive and negative. The 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)*

*"For me, more negative. Some [posts make me] sad, stressed and angry." Male, 24 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*"Also, there are some young people from here who use Rakhine and Bamar account names to add friends from other sides to get news and information and know what the other side is doing. When they read what other sides say this makes them depressed." Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Across all demographics, the most common negative impacts of social media on young people's daily lives and wellbeing were those associated with fake news, online romantic relationships, and exposure to hate speech and offensive language.

*"I think there are more negative impacts. Some post/share news or criticize without knowing the truth." Male, 35 years, Kayah Buddhist, Daw Lyar Ku & Hte Seh Kaloe villages (Kayah State rural)*

*"Some young girls, they have contact with boys though their phone and go and meet the boys. Their parents are worried and angry at them." Female, 22 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“The negative impact is...some young people can get married without seeing each other in person before.” Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Lo Bar Kho village (Kayah State rural)*

Another common theme among urban-based respondents in particular was the addictive nature of social media, which was suggested to impact on young people’s mood, sleep and education. One respondent even suggested that too much time on phones can cause ‘eye cancer’.

*“Because many young people are addicted to Facebook, some use it for the whole day, even the whole night. Some use it for more than 10 hours a day. They do not pursue their education anymore but rather spend too much time on Facebook to follow more news and information.” Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Social media can be worse than a drug in its influences the young people...They become less interested in their study because of Facebook.” Male, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“Because they look at their phone and play games for too long, it can harm their eye and can also cause eye cancer.” Female, 22 years, Kayan Christian, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Seh Kaloe villages (Kayah State rural)*

While not always related to social media use directly, pornographic and sexualised online content was identified as having negative impacts on the wellbeing of young boys and girls. In addition to the online sexual harassment discussed earlier, sexual content was suggested to be responsible for the ways some young boys related to them in offline relationships.

*“Some people watch dirty pictures or videos and imitate [in their relationships].” Male, 24 years, Kayan Christian, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Seh Kaloe villages (Kayah State rural)*

*“Adolescents between 15-16 are in the age that they want to experience things. Boys can watch porn from online and can be a problem when they have sexual desires.” Male, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Sexualised content also impacted on the psychological wellbeing of young girls, for example the shame and ‘loss of dignity’ experienced as a result of sexually suggestive images or videos being shared on social media (either by themselves or others).

*“An example of a negative impact is the two girls who posted their Korean song cover dance in sexy dress. Most people would give negative comments, and this could degrade their parents’ dignity. Their parents scolded them. So we asked them to delete their post.” Female, 35 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“I think there is emotional impact and also it shapes their belief and understanding...The worst is the ‘18+ issue [pornography]’ but this content is less on Facebook. Privacy also has an impact on their psychological wellbeing, like the case of the model [whose sex tape was leaked on social media].” Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

There was also an example of a young male celebrity whose mental health was impacted by the leaking of a 'sex tape'.

*"I read a news [story] about a celebrity who attempted to commit suicide after his account was hacked and his sex tape was leaked. Because of negative and offensive comments that people posted, it can make someone traumatised and hurt his feelings." Female, 36 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

When asked whether social media affects young people's relationships with others, the most common response across all demographics was that social media was to blame for young people spending less face-to-face time with their families (and in many cases also their friends).

*"Not so much impact on the relationship with friends. But many effects on the relationship with family members, because they spend too much time on their phone, rather than not having a relationship with their family members." Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"It also has impacts on family relationships. They ignore their family and waste time on YouTube." Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*"Friends talk less to each other when meet as they are busy with their own phone. Also, in the family, they don't eat together anymore as the children want to use phone." Female, 22 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Some young people were very self-aware of the trade-off that being able to communicate across distances via social media had on their close relationships. The cost associated with using phones was identified as a cause of conflict within some families.

*"It can have both positive and negative impact. 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)*

*"By using Facebook, I was not able to give time for my friends around my house, although I could keep the relationship with the friends from distant locations. But relationships with family can also deteriorate – my mother does not like me when I am using too much Facebook because it consumes a lot of bills." Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*"It can cause financial problems and conflict in families, as children don't listen to their parents anymore and respond to their parents with a short-temper. The siblings ask for money from their parents for using the internet and if one gets it and the other doesn't, they will fight with each other." Male, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Despite there not being consensus on whether social media has had an overall positive or negative influence on their daily lives, most young people did agree that social media had made their lives easier. Reasons given for this mostly focused on the education and employment opportunities that social media and the internet more broadly provided them.

*“It makes their lives easier because they can search any information. For example, they can search information about universities around the world and can apply through online.” Female, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“It makes lives easier because now when we want to apply for job, we can just send our CV and application form through email.” Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“When I passed 10th standard at 2010, I did not know how to speak English, although I tried to attend in the class, they do not accept the Muslim community in town. So I have learned myself how to speak and communicate with English from online as well as from social media, now I can communicate fluently with the foreigners as well.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Other reasons included better access to news and entertainment, and broader exposure to fashion and pop-culture.

*“Easier, because by using Facebook, we can learn about up to date daily news, what is happening elsewhere. I can also watch new Indian movies. I can go and search the new movies, download and watch.” Male, 24 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“I believe it is easier for young people’s lives, for example the young people who do not know how to dress well or how to maintain on his/her appearance can learn how to dress well by learning from Facebook.” Female, 19 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Their living standards can be raised after watching movies of their favourite actors and actresses. They imitate the way they dress and they can order things online such as clothes and shoes.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

## Impacts on society

When asked what they thought were the biggest differences between online and offline youth behaviour, responses were highly variable with no clear patterns between different demographics. Some thought that young people are more polite to each other online compared to offline.

*“Some people talk nicely to one another online but offline they don’t get along together.” Female, 30 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“They speak gently online but the opposite offline. Some expressed themselves well online but don’t know how to talk when meeting outside.” Male, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

While others thought that young people were ruder and more outspoken online.

*“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)*

*“Some they post whatever they like on Facebook but it’s different offline.” Male, 52 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“You can write whatever you want online but not offline.” Male, 31 years, Kayah Buddhist, Ve Thae Ku village (Kayah State rural)*

One common theme was that some young people were very active and outspoken online, but quiet and reserved offline. This is consistent with the FGDs that suggested young people were more comfortable expressing themselves online rather than offline.

*“I have a friend who likes to talk to everyone online, but she doesn’t talk to people offline except her close friends.” Female, 19 years, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Some of the young people are very active online, usually posting their status and posting their own pictures, but they may be not that active in the community.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“Some are very good at talking outside but not on Facebook, [while] some are very funny [online] but very quiet outside. Some only show their true selves online.” Female, 18 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Some respondents spoke of people who post false information about themselves online (including about their marital status).

*“There are some people who act differently on Facebook. They will create fake information about themselves on Facebook. Not sure why.” Female, 36 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“Some people are acting like they are single online when they are already married in real life.” Female, 27 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

While others noticed that some only post things online that presented them in a positive light.

*“Some people don’t listen to their parents and do what they want. They often get drunk. But when looking at their Facebook wall, they pretend like they are a saint.” Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Some youths act like they are carefree and only post pics about what they eat, where they visit or travel, but in reality they may be working in big organizations with high positions. So, we cannot determine who they are based on their post.” Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Some girls are not that beautiful outside but on Facebook they use the camera that can make them beautiful.” Female, 19 years, Kayan Christian, Kyun Taw village (Kayah State rural)*

Interviewees were also asked whether there were any differences between young people who are active online and those who are not. The vast majority of respondents said that those who are active online are more knowledgeable and up to date about news and current events compared to those who are not online (though many pointed out that most young people they knew were active online).

*“Most who use [online] are more sociable and have more confidence.” Female, 32 years, Kayah Buddhist, Ve Seh Ku village (Kayah State rural)*

*“Young people who have used social media are exposed to more information and have broader knowledge. While young people who don’t use social media doesn’t know much about what is happening.” Female, 36 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Some thought that those who were active online are more sociable and confident, while others thought that those who are not active online have better relationships with their families.

*“Those who use online know more information. But those who don’t use online can spend more time with their family and have closer relationships.” Female, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Respondents were asked whether they thought marginalised groups (such as people with disabilities, in poverty, or minority ethnic groups) used social media to express themselves. Most responses related to people with disabilities, which the facilitators believed reflected their higher visibility on social media compared to minority ethnic groups or those in poverty. Some commented that that people in poverty cannot afford smartphones.

*“I have seen some disable persons express their challenges from Facebook, but they are from other countries. I have not seen anything like that here yet.” Male, 46 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

*“I do not think so because the poor people cannot afford to use a phone.” Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban).*

Some respondents (mostly from Rakhine State) had seen people with disabilities post on social media about the challenges they face.



*“Yes, I saw them sharing about their lives and capacity. They demand for their right to be recognized.” Female, 27 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Yes, I have seen someone with disability express their problems and daily challenges. I have learned that even some simple activity like eating or drinking can be a challenge for some of them.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

One Muslim IDP respondent suggested that social media had helped change attitudes towards not only people with disabilities, but women and children, who he said were previously marginalised in his community.

*“Before people in Myanmar used to believe people with disabilities can’t do things like other people, women can’t do what men do and children/young people shouldn’t do anything like adults. Through social media, we can learn about developments that educate us about the needs of disabled persons, women and children. I usually share these kinds of posts or pages that I see in social media, a post like a disabled person has capacity and they can do things...I got many likes when I shared this kind of post.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Some mentioned that social media was sometimes used to collect donations for marginalised people such as those affected by poverty, land mines or land confiscation.

*“People post and share posts of poor children or sick children to ask for donations. Young people from Paletwa shared a post of a sick child and news of a woman who stepped on a landmine.” Male, 55 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Yes, for example the recent case of people whose land was confiscated. They took a video clip and shared it on social media. Some people shared about their difficulty when their crops were destroyed by mice.” Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“Some disabled people post about themselves to do fund raising.” Male, 24 years, Kayan Christian, Kyun Taw village (Kayah State rural)*

Interviewees were asked if young people use social media to mobilize and advocate for social change. Several urban-based responses referred to social media being used to mobilize people for protests regarding issues such as land confiscation, gender equality, and the need for political change.

*“Yes, the recent demonstration against the land confiscation (Pyaung Pu Ta Bin). They mobilize people through social media.” Male, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“Mobilize for event day. Slogan such as ‘time to change’, ‘peace can prevail’, ‘when will there be gender equality’”. Female, 30 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“I think social media can be one of the most effective ways to mobilize young people for causes because almost everyone uses social media.” Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

There were only three examples of advocacy from rural respondents – one about the land confiscation issue and the other two about promoting charities rather than protests.

*“They mobilize people through online to join the demonstration when the Army confiscated land from the farmers.” Male, 24 years, Kayah Christian, Daw Lyar Ku & Htee Seh Kaloe villages (Kayah State rural)*

*“Some charity groups advocate for cleaning the environment.” Female, 19 years, Kayan Christian, Kyun Taw village (Kayah State rural)*

None of the Muslim IDP respondents had seen social media being used by their young people for advocacy, though one Muslim IDP adult suggested that this was something that ‘other sides’ (i.e., Rakhine young people) did.

*“The young people here don’t use Facebook to form groups. They mainly use WeChat and IMO. They don’t have big mobilization activities. Unlike the other sides, Rakhine young people, who use social media for mobilization and propagating. Our young people here they use social media more for entertainment, like gathering people for soccer games.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Consistent with this view, there was an example of social media being used by a young Buddhist in urban Rakhine to mobilize a protest against the Rohingya community.

*“Yes, if we want to mobilise protests, we use Facebook to do that. We have protested about the Kalar in Rathe Taung Township area once. We have also protested in Sittwe when Kofi Annan [Former Secretary General of UN, Chaired the Advisory Commission on Rakhine Issue 2016-2017] arrived.” Male, 20 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

When asked if social media can be used to increase empathy and understanding among people in society, the majority of respondents said ‘yes’. The ways in which this was done this included sharing feelings, moral knowledge, and anti-hate speech information, or simply promoting communication and general ‘awareness’ of others.

*“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)*

*“I think they can because social media is widely used among people and it is influential. It can create change by initiating positive causes like anti-hate speech.” Female, 36 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“We can increase our understanding by communicating with each other.” Female, 32 years, Kayah Buddhist, Ve Seh Ku village (Kayah State rural)*

Others said that the potential for social media to be a positive social force had not yet been realised and pointed to the need for more education for young people around social media and ‘awareness raising’ sessions.

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

*“It would be good if there was training to educate young people how to use social media in good ways.” Male, 34 years, Kayan Christian, Lo Bar Kho village (Kayah State rural)*

*“We need to organize campaigns, awareness raising sessions and training among the young people.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Interviewees were asked if they had heard of any activities or programmes in their community aiming to help improve digital literacy, and almost all respondents said ‘no’. The exceptions hearing a talk about social media by Save The Children, attended a training event in Yangon organised by the Centre for Diversity and National Harmony (CDNH), being taught some news verification skills and how to use Google for searching rather than Facebook.

*“A literature talk [that] included the topic of social media by your organization [Save the Children].” Male, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“There is no activity like this in Kayah State. That’s why young people don’t know how to use social media in positive ways. There is no limitation for them in using social media and the parents also don’t know how to teach their children.” Female, 36 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“I told young people that I know to use Google to search for information, but they said it is complicated. They think Facebook is easier to get information.” Female, 36 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

Although few participants had heard about digital literacy programmes in Myanmar, most believed that such programs would be the best way to address the issues raised throughout the interviews. Suggested topics included verifying news, critical thinking, and general technology skills. Teaching of English skills was also considered important as it opens the opportunity for online education.

*“Providing digital literacy training to young people from villages.” Female, 27 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Want to see programs that teach young people how to differentiate between fake and real news.” Male, 20 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“There should be many activities and educational programmes that encourage young people to become confident and to develop their critical thinking skills.” Female, 22 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

Some thought that the Myanmar Government should be playing a role in educating young people about digital literacy, and possibly intervening to address issues such as fake news and hate speech.

*“Government should create programs to educate young people.” Male, 52 years, Rakhine Buddhist, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Should form a committee in each state to verify fake news and real news.” Male, 55 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

*“Government should plan for digital literacy programme. Firstly, it should create a committee made up of technical expert to tackle those who post fake news, propaganda and hate speech. It should come up with a policy – whether they will hack those accounts, take legal action against them or educate them. Government should provide digital literacy training both online and offline. It should not focus only on young people but also on adults. It should educate the adults how to verify and analyse news.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

One Muslim IDP respondent thought that Facebook should be responsible for training young people to use their platform in a positive and ethical way.

*“Group and admins on Facebook should conduct awareness training online and positive behaviour training online.” Male, 29 years, Rohingya Muslim, Basara (Rakhine State IDP)*

Others thought that there needed to be tighter limitations around social media use but did not specify who would be responsible for enacting these limits.

*“To educate people on the side-effects of social media. There should be a control on what is disseminated or shared on online.” Female, 30 years, Kayan Christian, Loikaw (Kayah State urban)*

*“They should use online with limitation. There should be awareness raising programme for them to be considerate of what they post or share on social media and how it can affect other people.” Female, 19 years, Chin Christian, Sittwe (Rakhine State urban)*

In summary, while it was unclear who should be responsible for providing digital and media literacy training, most participants believed that such programs would be the best way to ensure young people not only stay safe online, but develop the critical thinking skills needed to be effective and informed digital citizens in the future.

## SOCIAL MEDIA USE SURVEY: RESULTS

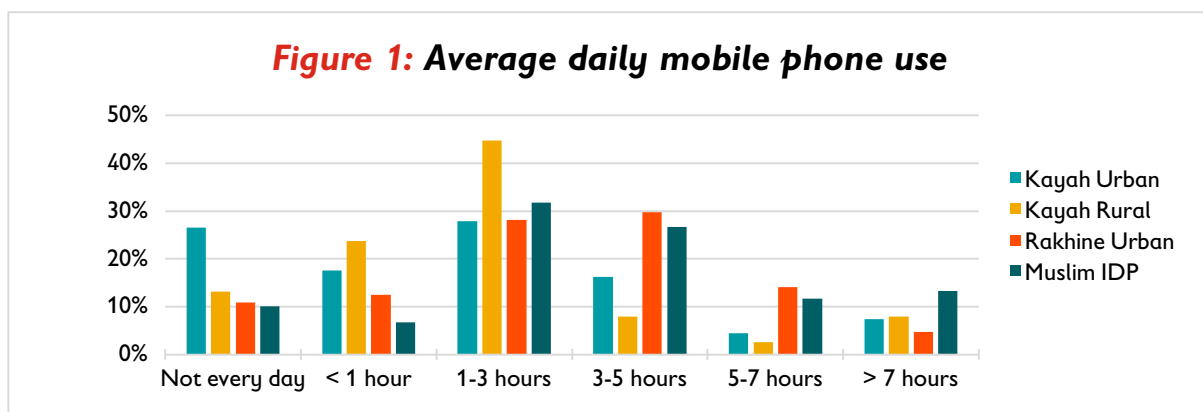
A brief social media use survey was administered to all FGD participants and a convenience sample of participants recruited from public spaces in each of the selected research sites, such as youth centres, tea shops, high schools and universities. A summary of survey results and comparisons between different demographics are presented here. Full survey results by gender, state and sub-sample are available in Appendix D.

### Demographics

The overall sample size for the survey was 256. Twenty-four participants were excluded as they were outside the target age range for the study (13–35 years). The sample available for analysis was therefore 232, with 107 responses from Kayah State (39 rural and 68 urban) and 125 from Rakhine State (61 IDP and 64 urban). The gender split of the overall sample was very even, with 48.7% females and 47.8% males (0.4% selected transgender, and 3.0% did not answer or selected ‘I prefer not to say’). However, there were more female respondents in the Kayah Rural sample (64.7%) and more male respondents in the Muslim IDP sample (63.9%). The mean overall age was 21.84 years (SD = 3.94, range 14–35 years). While there were with no significant differences in age between genders or states, the Rakhine Urban subsample was significantly older (M = 23.08, SD = 3.66) than the Kayah Urban (M = 21.04, SD = 4.67;  $p = .003$ ) and Muslim IDP subsamples (M = 21.15, SD = 2.94;  $p = .006$ ).

### Phone use

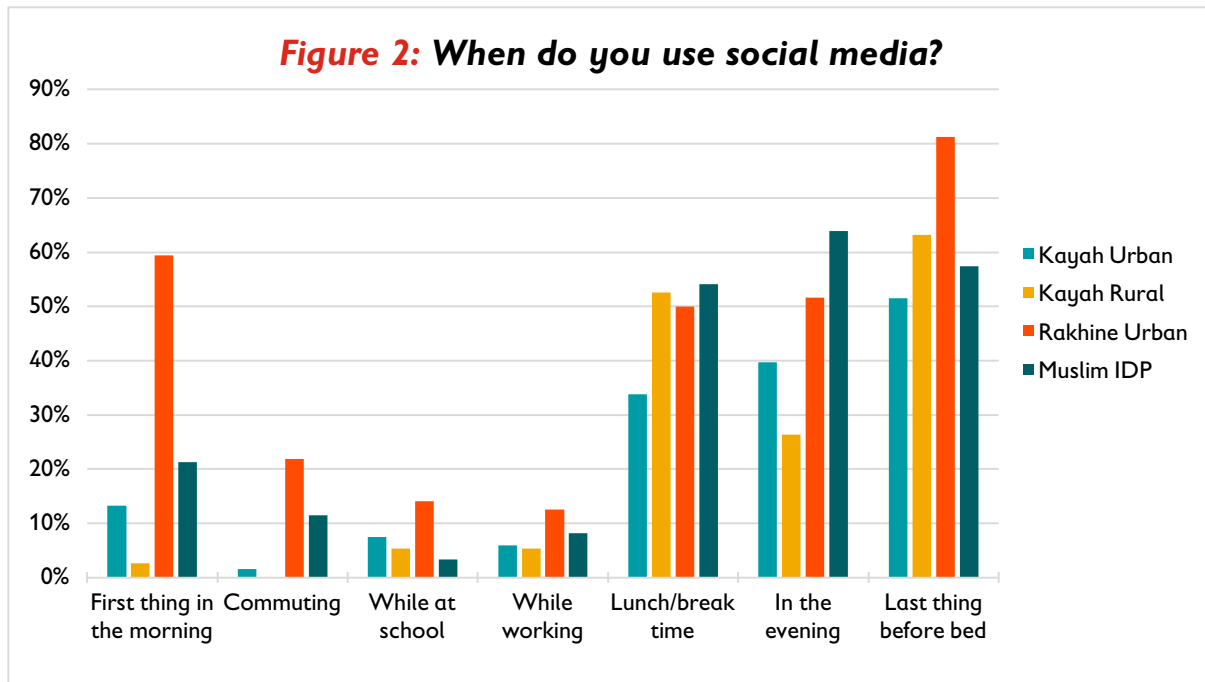
Just over half of the sample report spending between 1 and 5 hours a day on their phone (53.0%), and 17.0% spent more than 5 hours a day. Approximately one third of the sample either did not use their phone every day (15.7%) or did so for less than one hour a day (14.3%). The distribution of responses by sub-sample are shown in Figure 1. When responses were converted to an ordinal 1-6 point scale, Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed that on average, the Rakhine State sub-samples used their phone significantly more than the Kayah State sub-samples ( $p < .001$ ) and IDP respondents significantly more than urban or rural respondents ( $p < .01$ ). Males respondents used their phone more than female respondents, however this difference did not reach significance ( $p = .051$ ).



### Social media use

Most respondents spent less than 50% of their phone time on social media (78.4%), and only 5.8% reported spending more than 75% of their time. There were no significant differences in the distribution of proportion of time on social media across demographics, however young people in Kayah State were the only ones to say that they spent 100% of their phone time on social media.

Overall, the most common times for using social media were last thing before bed (63.4%), in the evening (47.0%) and at lunch/break time (46.6%). Figure 2 shows the distribution of responses by sub-sample. At all times surveyed, the Rakhine State sub-samples reported higher social media use compared to the Kayah State sub-samples, especially first thing in the morning (40.8% Rakhine State vs 9.4% Kayah State), commuting (16.8% vs 0.9%), and in the evening (57.6% vs 34.9%). Rural respondents reported very low social media first thing in the morning (2.6%) and not surprisingly while commuting (0.0%), given most do not commute. Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to use social media first thing in the morning (31.8% male vs 22.1% female), last thing before bed (72.5% vs 54.0%) and in the evening (52.7% vs 42.5%).



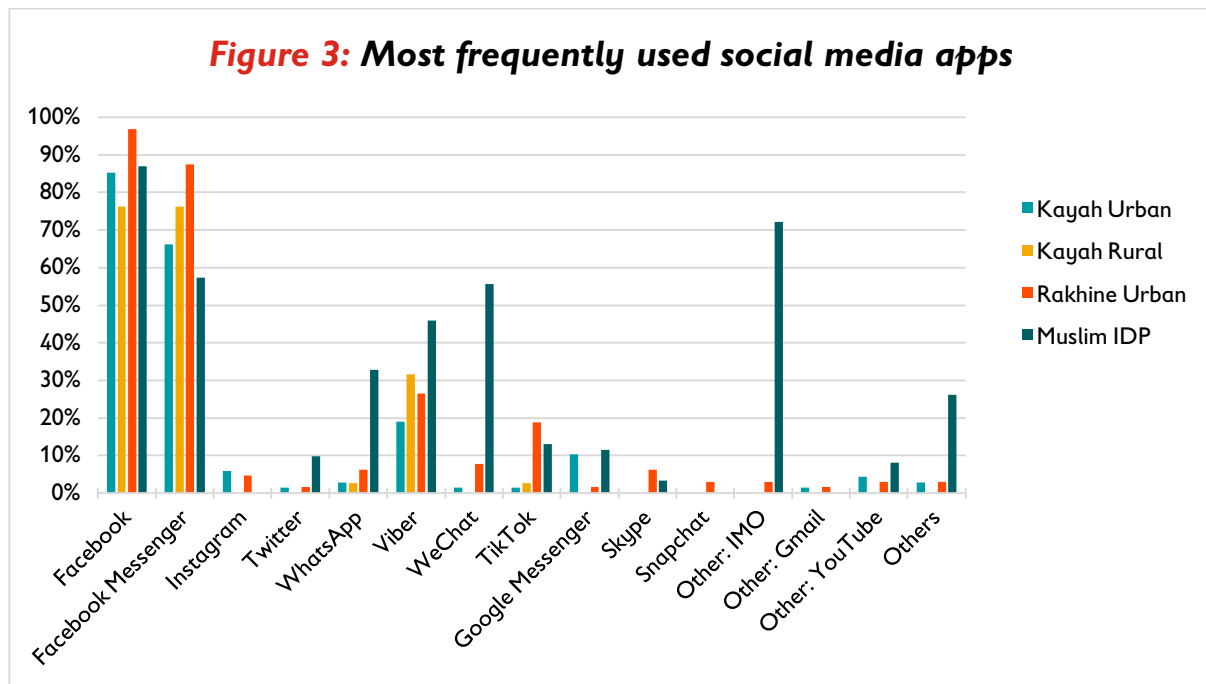
Most respondents thought that they spent ‘the right amount of time’ on social media (59.7%), with only 10.6% thinking that they spent too much time (and 20.8% thinking they didn’t spend enough time). Responses were mostly similar across demographics, however surprisingly, the Rakhine State sub-samples, who spent more time on their phone and on social media as a proportion of time on their phone, were more likely to say they spent too little time on social media than the Kayah State sub-samples (24.4% Rakhine State vs 16.5% Kayah State). Rural respondents were least likely to say than they spent too little time (13.2%).

## Social media apps

The vast majority of respondents have the Facebook app (94.8%) and Facebook Messenger app (84.9%) installed on their phone. Viber was the next most commonly installed app overall (62.9%), but only identified as being commonly used by 30.2%. The Rakhine State sample reported higher installation rates for Viber (75.2% vs 49.1%), WeChat (42.4% vs 7.5%), IMO (34.4% vs 0.0%), WhatsApp (33.6% vs 4.7%), and Instagram (27.2% vs 9.4%). Most of these differences between the Rakhine State and Kayah State samples can be attributed to the IDP sub-sample, with the exception of Instagram, which was more highly used by urban residents. YouTube was not listed among the choices for this question as some do not consider it a social media app per se. It was however identified using the ‘other’ option by 7.4% of the overall sample, but focus group discussions indicated that overall use among Myanmar young people is likely much higher than this.

Facebook and Facebook Messenger were by far the most frequently used apps among all demographics (identified by 87.4% and 71.4% respectively overall), followed by Viber (30.3%). App use seemed to be very homogenous among Kayah State and Rakhine urban respondents, with these three apps the only ones identified as frequently used by

more than 10% of these sub-samples (see Figure 3). However, IDP respondents were also frequent users of IMO (72.1%) and WeChat (55.7%). Group chat-based platforms such as IMO, WeChat and Viber are less public than Facebook, which is attractive for IDP communities. The popularity of IMO is likely due to its much larger group size limit (up to 100,000 users, compared to 500 for WeChat).



The most common reasons identified for making a social media app popular in the overall sample were the ability to chat with friends (71.4%), keep up on news/information (68.4%), and share photos and videos (55.0%). Other common reasons included access to educational content (48.5%), ability to meet new people (42.9%), ‘everyone has it’ (37.2%), and ability to follow celebrities or personalities (34.2%).

Each suggested reason was identified by males more frequently than females, with the biggest differentials for ability to follow friends (40.9% of males vs 17.7% of females), it’s entertaining (43.6% vs 21.2%), ability to play online games (39.1% vs 10.6%), everyone has it (47.3% vs 28.3%), and ability to flirt, find romantic partners or date (19.1% vs 7.1%).

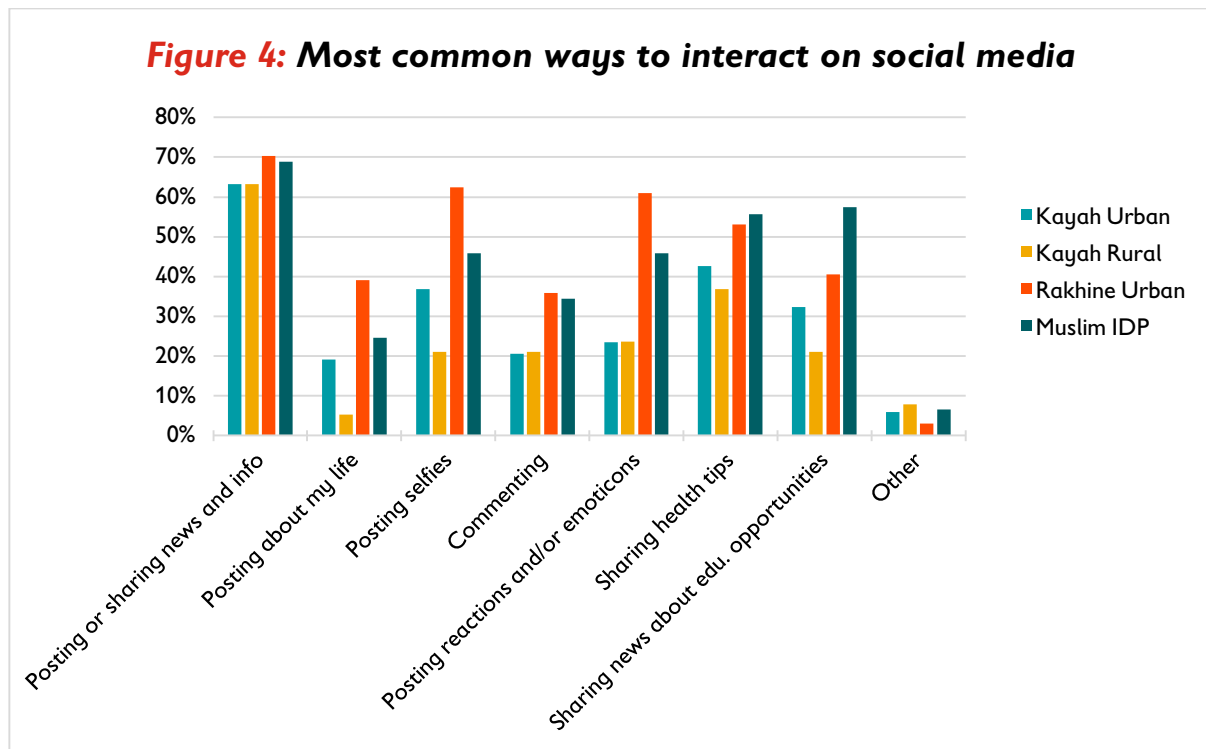
Similarly, each suggested reason was identified more frequently by respondents in the Rakhine State sample compared to the Kayah State sample, with the biggest differentials for ability to learn more about my religion (49.6% of Rakhine State sample vs 5.7% of Kayah State sample), follow friends (42.4% vs 13.2%), it’s entertaining (45.6% vs 16.0%), everyone has it (49.6% vs 22.6%), ability to play online games (32.0% vs 16.0%), and ability to flirt, find romantic partners or date (17.6% vs 6.6%). IDP respondents were more likely than others to consider entertainment value, and ability to follow friends and learn more about religion and educational opportunities as reasons for an app’s popularity.

These demographic differences reflect the higher overall social media use of males compared to females, and the Rakhine State sample compared to the Kayah State sample. This suggests that heavier social media use may lead to a greater diversity in use and expectations of social media app functions. Alternatively, they may simply reflect differing approaches to answering this question, as respondents in the Kayah State sample were four times more likely to select only one reason (or none) from the suggested list provided. Similarly, female respondents were more than twice as likely to select one or no reason compared to male respondents.



## Social media activities

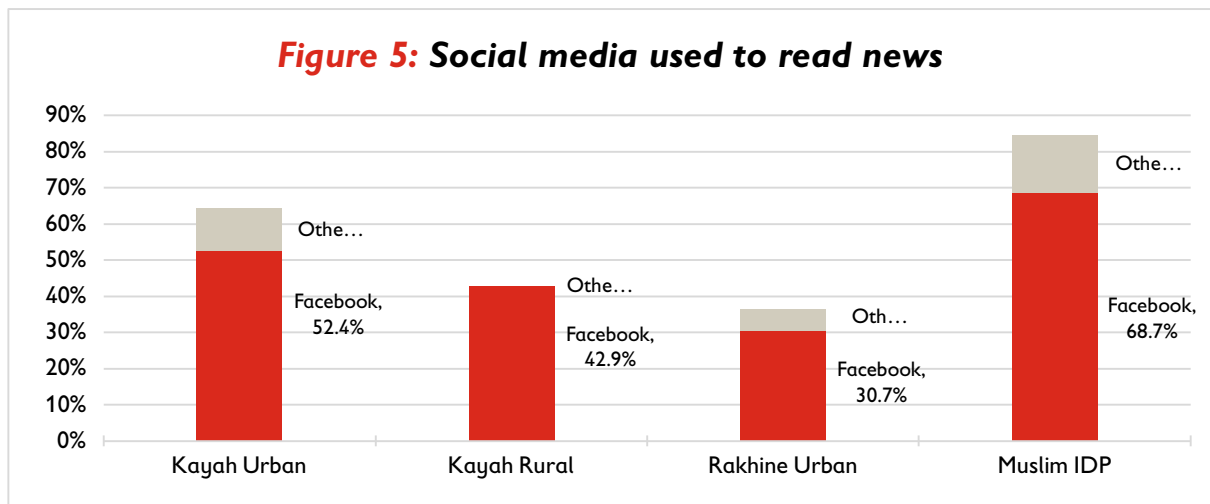
The most common ways in which respondents said they interact on social media included posting or sharing news and information (66.4%), sharing health tips (48.3%), posting selfies (43.5%), posting reactions and/or emojis (39.7%) and sharing news about educational opportunities (39.2%). The distribution of responses by sub-sample is shown in Figure 4.



Like the previous question about reasons an app is considered popular, each suggested social media activity was identified by males and the Rakhine State sample more frequently than females and the Kayah State sample respectively (with similar differing approaches to answering this question noted). The biggest gender differentials were for posting or sharing news (76.4% of males vs 56.6% of females) and posting selfies (53.6% vs 36.3%). The biggest differentials by state were sharing news about scholarships and educational opportunities (48.8% Rakhine State vs 28.3% Kayah State), posting about my life (32.0% vs 14.2%), posting reactions and/or emojis (53.6% vs 23.6%) and posting selfies (54.4% vs 31.1%). Rural respondents were less likely to share news about educational or post selfies, reactions/emojis, or about their life.

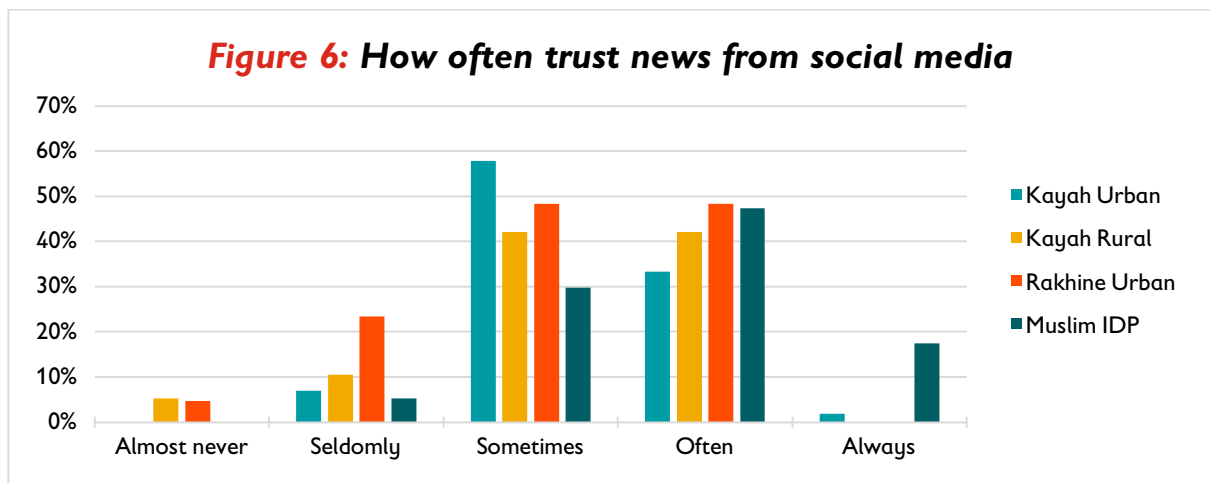
## News on social media

Overall, 58.0% of respondents indicated that they use social media to read about current events news. Gender differences were minimal, however IDP respondents were significantly more likely to use social media to read news (84.5%), compared to rural (42.9%) and urban respondents (49.6%). Facebook was by far the most common app identified for reading news by those who use social media for news (83.5% overall and 100% among Kayah Rural respondents). The proportion of participants who read news on social media for each sub-sample is shown in Figure 5 (broken down by Facebook and 'other').



Around one third of the overall sample (34.2%) indicated that they get more news from using social media apps compared to traditional media (newspapers, TV, radio), with the proportion highest for IDP respondents (45.3%). Just over half of the overall sample indicated that they get about the same amount of news from social media and traditional media (53.4%), with the proportion highest for urban respondents (61.3%). Rural respondents had a much higher proportion report that they got most of their news from traditional media (31.0%), compared to IDP (13.2%) and urban respondents (7.2%).

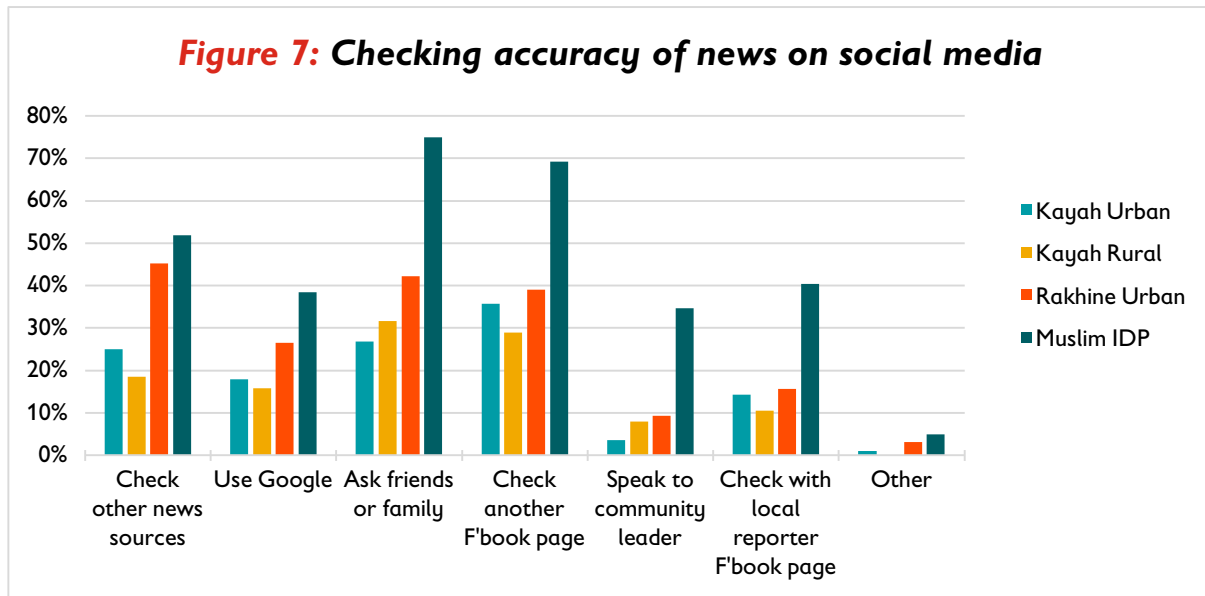
When asked if they trust in news seen on social media, the most common response was ‘sometimes’ (42.2%), followed by often/usually (33.2%). The distribution of responses by sub-sample is shown in Figure 6. When responses were converted to an ordinal 1-5 point scale, Kruskal-Wallis tests revealed that on average, IDP respondents had a significantly higher level of trust in news seen on social media compared to urban and rural respondents ( $p < .001$ ), and males a significantly higher level of trust compared to females ( $p < .05$ ).



Most of the overall sample indicated that they check the accuracy of news read on social media (65.1% overall), with rates of checking highest among the IDP (89.5%) and male (77.4%) sub-samples.

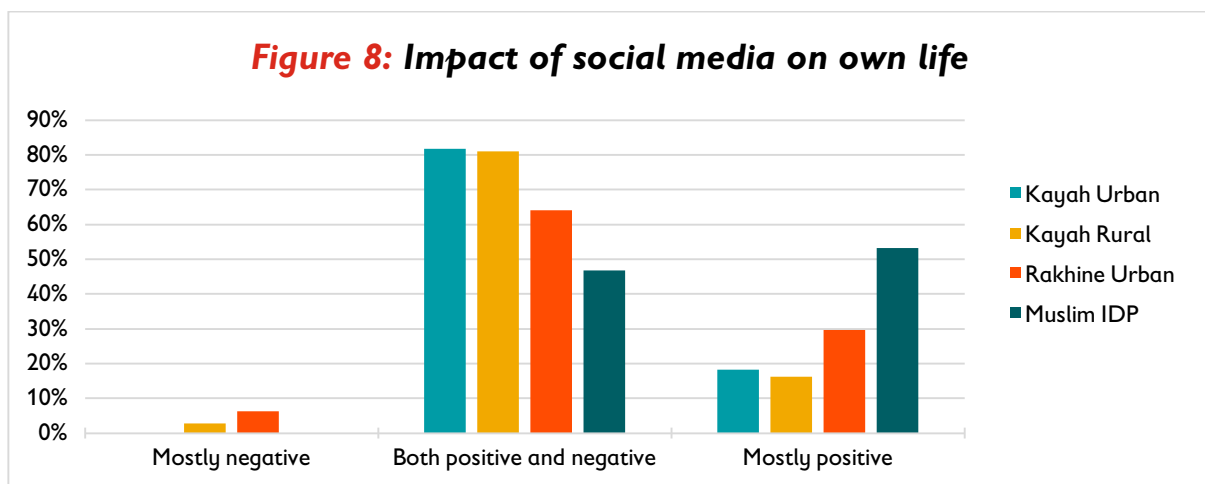
Of those who did check the accuracy of news read on social media, the most common methods overall were to ask friends or family (60.4%), check other Facebook pages (59.7%), and check other news sources (50.0%). These three were the top-ranked methods across all demographics and sub-samples (see Figure 7). However, males and the Rakhine State sub-samples were much more likely to select more than one method, and so as per previous ‘select all that apply’ questions, had higher rates for each option compared to females and the Kayah State sub-samples

respectively. Differences worth noting were that IDP respondents were most likely speak to community leaders or check the Facebook page of local reporters, while rural respondents were least likely to check other news sources.

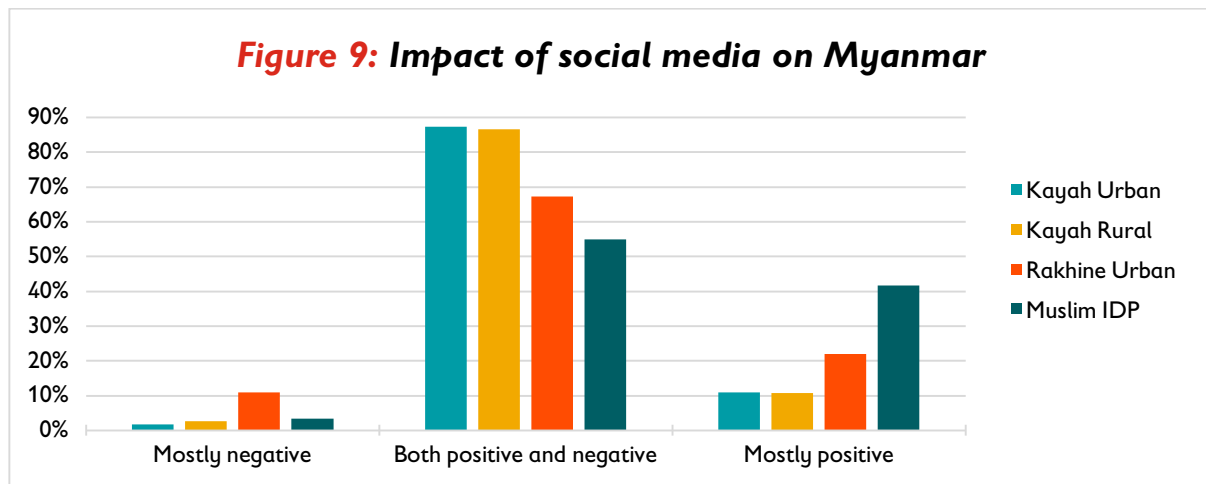


### Impacts of social media

Overall, most respondents thought that social media has both a positive and negative impact on their lives (66.7%). Thirty-one percent thought that it has a mostly positive impact on their lives, and only 2.3% though it had a mostly negative impact. Figure 8 shows responses by sub-sample. IDP respondents were much more likely to think that social media has a mostly positive impact on their lives (53.3% compared to only 17.4% of Kayah State and 29.7% of Rakhine urban respondents).



Most respondents thought that social media has both a positive and negative impact on Myanmar society (72.2%), with 22.7% thinking it has a mostly positive impact, and only 4.7% though it has a mostly negative impact. Location and state differentials were similar to the previous question (see Figure 9), with IDP respondents more likely to think that social media has a positive impact on Myanmar society (41.7% compared to only 10.9% of Kayah State and 21.9% of Rakhine urban respondents).



When asked how issues happening on Facebook could be addressed, the most common responses overall were to have online campaigns or awareness raising (59.7%) and digital/media literacy training/workshops (46.3%). As per previous 'select all that apply' questions, females and the Kayah State sample were more likely to select one or none, leading to higher rates for males and the Rakhine State sample for all suggested choices, with the exception of digital/media literacy training/workshops, which was a slightly more common response for the Kayah State sample (48.1%) compared to the Rakhine State sample (44.8%). This difference largely reflects Rakhine State's Muslim IDP respondents being much less likely to favour digital/media literacy training/workshops (27.9%) compared to rural (60.5%) or urban (50.8%) respondents. Muslim IDP respondents were more in favour of more direct solutions such as advocating to Facebook to fix issues with their platform and changing policies around social media usage.

## DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### Summary of findings and key analysis points

This research project has developed our understanding of the social media experiences of Myanmar young people living in Rakhine State and Kayah State, and the impact social media has on their daily lives. The FGDs, KIs and survey have identified several common themes in the eight areas of interest for this study, which will be discussed here in turn.

#### General usage

More than half of the young people sampled in this study were heavy smartphone users, typically self-reporting between 1 and 5 hours use a day (about half of which was spent using social media). However, they perceived the amount of time that the average young person spends on their phone to be around 6 hours a day (adults perceived this to be higher at around 8 hours a day). Young Muslim IDP participants were the highest users of social media, likely due to their lack of education and vocational opportunities. Rural participants in Kayah state were the lowest users of social media, likely due to their longer work hours and lower disposal income to pay for phone credit. 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. Self-reported data from the survey supports this perception, however most young people did not think they spent too much time on social media themselves.

Facebook was identified by the majority of participants as the most popular social media platform among young people. The main reasons for its popularity were accessibility to news and information and to connect with peers, most of whom use Facebook regularly. Notable exceptions were young Muslim girls living in IDP camps (who were restricted in their use of Facebook by religious and cultural norms), and some girls from rural Kayah villages, who preferred closed chat-based platforms such as Viber and WeChat. These less public platforms were popular among IDP respondents also. The platform IMO was used exclusively in IDP camps, where it was a popular app for communicating with relatives living overseas (as were WeChat and WhatsApp). IMO has similar functionality to other popular group chat-based platforms like Viber and WeChat, but with the ability for much larger group sizes (up to 100,000, compared to 500 for WeChat).

Posting and sharing news and information was the most common reason for using social media. An interesting finding was that almost half of all respondents said that they share health tips online. The sharing of news about educational opportunities was also popular, particularly among urban and IDP respondents. Urban and Muslim IDP social media users were more likely to post about their life compared to rural users. Playing online games (especially with friends) was a popular social media function among boys, particularly in Rakhine State.

#### 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) and a belief that young people typically do not think about their online safety or have the skills to protect themselves online. Accepting Facebook friend requests from strangers was a common occurrence.

A common theme was that 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 online dangers, nor have the knowledge to teach their children digital safety tools and practices (some noted that educated adults were an exception to this). Instead, parents mostly tried to limit the amount of time their children (especially daughters) spend online as a safety measure. Some parents delayed their children's access to smartphones and social media until after they had completed their studies, both as a safety measure and because they thought having a phone would interfere with

their education. Parents in Muslim IDP camps were more aware and wary of the dangers of social media than in other areas, and often advised young people not to use images of themselves online or comment on posts related to political or religious conflict. There were a few examples of young people receiving similar online safety tips from 'educated' adults (including teachers).

The most common online threats to young people identified in the adult KIIs were financial scams and forming online relationships that put them in danger or resulted in them getting married too young (particularly Kayah young people). Being 'hacked' was another common online safety concern, with reports of hackers demanding money from victims in order to get their accounts back.

The blocking and reporting functions of platforms like Facebook were known by most young people, but only a few knew how to actually use them. Those who had used the blocking and the reporting functions (mostly girls), had investigated how to do so as a result of being hacked or harassed. However, the vast majority of young people did not know how to adjust the privacy settings on their social media accounts in order to help prevent hacking and harassment in the first place.

## **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 said that they still get just as much news from traditional media, such as television, radio and newspapers. Rural participants reported getting more of their news from traditional media than urban participants, while Muslim IDP participants reported the heaviest reliance on social media for their news (due to the lack of access to traditional news sources in Rohingya language from their camps).

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. New Facebook users were thought to be most susceptible to believing fake news. A recurring theme was that trust in news on social media has gone down in recent years due to the increased proliferation of fake news (or perhaps due to the apparent better understanding of fake news that comes more Facebook experience). Muslim IDP participants in Rakhine State reported the highest level of trust in news on social media, despite also being most likely to check the validity of news. This might be explained by their heightened awareness of fake news, and hence greater trust in the news they do read and rely on for information from outside of their camp.

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. Some teachers reported teaching young people how to check the validity of news using Google, which was identified by only 34% of survey respondents as a method they currently used. Google was avoided by many young people who considered it 'harder to use' than Facebook, likely due to its inability to properly reconcile Myanmar's Zawgyi font encoding which is not Unicode compliant). Trust in news was largely dependent on the reputation of the source, with participants from all regions suggesting large international news broadcasters such as VOA (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. Examples of fake news ranged from inaccurate reports of celebrity deaths to hate speech containing doctored or repurposed images and videos depicting terrorism and racist violence from other countries. Some young people said that adults were mostly responsible for the spread of fake news, as they share it uncritically (both online and offline) due to low media literacy.

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). Minority groups that saw fake news targeting them often reported feeling angry towards those who spread these stories, questioning why they would do this (more detailed discussion of the psychological impact of fake news and hate speech in section 7 below). Few participants admitted to sharing fake news, but those who did said that they did not realise it was fake at the time. Some urban participants thought that fake news affected young people's understanding of political and ethnic conflicts in Myanmar, and that it promoted prejudice against Muslims in particular. However, some urban participants from Kayah State said that

although their views of Muslims had been negatively influenced by fake news in the past, realising that the news was fake and meeting Muslim people in person had changed their perceptions of them for the better.

## **Hate speech**

There was some confusion among young people about the difference between hate speech and harassment, particularly in Kayah State, where some rural participants reported having not come across examples of either. However, this may have been because young people were often reluctant to talk about examples of hate speech they had seen. Facilitators observed that young people living in urban areas of Rakhine State were selective in the kinds of hate speech they spoke about (e.g., often avoiding talking about conflict between Rakhine and Muslims). In addition, 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.

While there were examples of political hate speech, (e.g., NLD versus USDP, anti-Arakan Army), and urban versus rural hate speech (identified by both rural and urban respondents), most examples of hate speech were related to religion and/or ethnicity. The most common targets of hate speech were Rohingya Muslims, who often saw posts saying they do not belong in Myanmar, calling them 'Kalar' and discussing and inciting hatred and violence against them. As such, Muslim IDP young people were the most impacted by hate speech, saying that it had been largely responsible for them having to live in IDP camps. Christians also mentioned being the victims of hate speech and fake news perpetrated by Buddhists who believe that Christians, like Rohingya, don't belong in Myanmar. Maramagyi young people were also racially discriminated against, and often called 'Kalar' by the Rakhine community due to their perceived similar appearance to Rohingya and other South Asian ethnicities. Many Chin young people also feel marginalised and discriminated against by the Rakhine community, who in turn feel 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 (e.g., Kayah and Kayan). Young people were aware that besides making minority ethnic groups feel marginalised, online hate speech can lead to offline conflict. Hate speech and propaganda (e.g., ISIS beheading videos) had also been used to stir a fear of Muslims, with reports of hysterical panic whenever it was suggested that Muslims may be nearby.

It seemed that a fear of potential offline consequences was the reason some young people and adults actively denied seeing hate speech against them, particularly Muslim IDP participants. Very few participants had come across anti-hate speech campaigns (e.g., Panzagar) 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 (e.g., Wai Han Aung).

## **Online harassment**

One of the most concerning themes to arise from the current study was the prevalence of sexual harassment of girls (and some boys), which was the most common online threat identified by young people. Perpetrators of harassment were usually male strangers who tried to form relationships with young girls, send inappropriate sexual content, or extort them for money, naked photos, or declarations of reciprocal love (usually by threatening to misuse or photoshop their images and post on social media). There were also many examples of blackmail, defamation and image-based abuse by ex-boyfriends following a break-up. A few Rakhine boys reported similar harassment from male predators from the Rakhine community. In addition to harassment on social media, some girls (particularly from IDP camps) reported receiving harassing phone calls from strangers trying to form romantic or sexual relationships with them. They would then change their sim cards because they did not know how to use the block feature on their phone.

Victims of harassment reported being scared of offending their perpetrator and escalating the situation. As a result, they were wary of accepting friend requests from males they did not know on Facebook (something that it seemed many young people do). A number of adults were concerned about young people forming romantic relationships



online, 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. There were also reports of hearing stories about girls who had been raped after meeting up with men they had first met online.

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. In addition to its role in online sexual harassment, sexual content (i.e., pornography) was suggested to be responsible for the ways some boys related to girls in offline relationships.

## **Sharing behaviours**

Sharing behaviours reflected the things young people were interested in, including news, sport, entertainment (including celebrity news), health tips, and educational content. Urban-based young people were generally more engaged with national news and politics, while rural-based young people were more interested in local news and events. 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. Around half of survey respondents reported posting selfies on social media. Girls (particularly from rural villages) were less likely to do so, reflecting reports that parents had encouraged their daughters not to post images of themselves on social media (due to the risk of image-based abuse). Some young people said that their teachers had advised them not to post their locations (i.e., check-ins, location tags) on social media.

Responses were mixed when young people were asked whether they posted their opinions about the government or other divisive issues. No participants admitted to doing this themselves (many saying that they 'wouldn't dare') but reported seeing such opinions posted by others, mainly in the comments of news story posts. 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. In contrast, Muslim IDP adults believed that their young people were very wary of their social media activity, and instead discussed controversial topics and stories in more private channels such as WeChat and IMO.

## **Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing**

Some Muslim IDP young people spoke of the psychological impact of seeing hate speech on social media targeted at them. They said seeing such hate speech made them feel sad, stressed, angry and hopeless. Others were confused as to why they were being told they did not belong in the country in which they and their parents were born. Other Muslim IDP 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. Several Muslim IDP 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. It also gave them a sense of hope by connecting them to people from other ethnicities who are working towards equality.

Overall, most young people thought that social media has both a positive and negative impact on their lives. Despite the negative impact of hate speech, Muslim IDP young people were much more likely to think that social media has a mostly positive impact on their lives, reflecting the importance that social media has for connecting them to the world outside of their camp. 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, both related to their education (e.g., learning English), practical skills (e.g., how to repair broken equipment, health tips) and to news and current affairs (particularly events outside their region). The most common negative impacts were associated with fake news, harassment, hate speech, and other offensive content.

Few participants spoke directly about the impact of social media on their thoughts, feelings and attitudes. Those who did said that social media was useful for dealing with stress and difficult emotions (e.g., 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.

## **Impact on society**

A common theme in relation to social media's impact on how young people in Myanmar society interacted was the observation that some young people were active and outspoken online, but quiet and reserved offline. This reflects cultural offline norms in Myanmar where feelings are seldom discussed in social conversation, so it seems that social media may give young people an outlet to be more outspoken with their opinions and feelings. Another common theme was that young people who were active online were more educated, knowledgeable, sociable and confident than those who are not online. This likely also reflects data suggesting that rural-based young people (who are generally less educated and have less disposable income than urban-based young people) are less likely to spend time online.

Both young people and adults spoke of the addictive nature of social media (especially 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. In regard to peer relationships, some said people don't spend as much time communicating face-to-face anymore, and when they do, they often focus on discussing what they have seen online.

There were some examples from urban-based young people of social media being used for advocacy and mobilization around issues such as land confiscation, natural disaster relief, the environment, gender equality, and fund raising for those affected by poverty or disability. Muslim IDP young people said they did not use social media for advocacy, likely due to the stories of past police investigations into controversial posts and regulations against Rohingya assembling in groups. Muslim IDP participants were however aware of social media being used by Rakhine young people to protest against Rohingyas' right to live in Rakhine State.

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. While few had heard of digital or media literacy programmes in Myanmar, the vast majority of respondents believed that such programs would be the best way to address the issues raised in this study, by teaching skills such as how to verify news, foster critical thinking, and promote general technology skills. The teaching of English skills was also suggested to open up opportunities for online education.

## **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 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.

Phandeeyar’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, Phandeeyar found that harassment often stemmed from a lack of understanding regarding privacy controls. In particular, Phandeeyar 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 US, 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 e-Safety 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, 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, 2017). 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 concerns 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 Myanmar 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 (2019), which provides counsellor-lead mental health support and psychoeducation for young Australians (aged 13–25) in a safe, closed and anonymous online social network (Campbell, Ridout, Amon, Collyer, & Dalglish, 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 relatively timely way to roll out a basic mental health service. It presents a grassroots opportunity in lieu of no current national service. However, for a similar approach to be established for Myanmar young people, it would require a lead service body and regulatory body to ensure quality of evidence-based practice delivery via e-mental health tools. With neither currently in place, the recommendations in this report focus on suggested first steps to provide online triage support for Myanmar young people requiring emotional support.





## Key issues and recommendations

This study has collected a vast amount of data and insights regarding the experience and impact of social media among Myanmar young people. From the analysis conducted, the most urgent areas of concern that need to be addressed 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 deradicalized 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: 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. Encouraging telecommunications providers to make online education platforms free to access (i.e., not require data costs) could maximise their accessibility. 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.

## REFERENCES

- Aall, P. (2011). *Peace terms: Glossary of terms for conflict management and peacebuilding*. Washington, DC: Academy for International Conflict Management and Peacebuilding.
- Alava, S., Frau-Meigs, D., & Hassan, G. (2017). *Youth and violent extremism on social media: Mapping the research*. Retrieved from UNESCO website: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000260382>
- Ali, K., Farrer, L., Gulliver, A., & Griffiths, K. M. (2015). Online peer-to-peer support for young people with mental health problems: A systematic review. *JMIR Mental Health*, 2(2), e19. <https://doi.org/10.2196/mental.4418>
- Australian Communications and Media Authority (2013). *Like, post, share: Young Australians' experience of social media*. Retrieved from: <https://www.acma.gov.au/-/media/mediacomms/Report/pdf/Like-post-share-Young-Australians-experience-of-social-media-Quantitative-research-report.pdf?la=en>
- Anderson, M., & Jiang, J. (2018). *Teens, Social Media and Technology 2018*. Retrieved from Pew Research Centre website: [https://www.pewinternet.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2018/05/PI\\_2018.05.31\\_TeensTech\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.pewinternet.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2018/05/PI_2018.05.31_TeensTech_FINAL.pdf)
- Aung, N. (2016). *Project monitors social media hate speech*. Retrieved from <https://www.mmtimes.com/lifestyle/19874-project-monitors-social-media-hate-speech.html>
- Badawy, A., Ferrara, E., & Lerman, K. (2018). Analyzing the digital traces of political manipulation: The 2016 Russian interference twitter campaign. In *IEEE/ACM International Conference on Advances in Social Networks Analysis and Mining (ASONAM)* (pp. 258-265). Piscataway, NJ: Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers. Retrieved from <https://ieeexplore.ieee.org/document/8508646>
- Badjatiya, P., Gupta, S., Gupta, M., & Varma, V. (2017). Deep learning for hate speech detection in tweets. In *Proceedings of the 26th International Conference on World Wide Web Companion* (pp. 759-760). Geneva, Switzerland: International World Wide Web Conferences Steering Committee. Retrieved from <https://dl.acm.org/citation.cfm?doid=3041021.3054223>
- Bescoby, A. (2017). *Rapid context brief: Kayin* (Unpublished report). Yangon, Myanmar: MyJustice Myanmar.
- Brewer, J. (2019). *Digital nutrition by Jocelyn Brewer*. Retrieved from <https://www.digitalnutrition.com.au/>
- Burma Campaign UK (2019). *Section 66 (D) of the telecommunications law*. Retrieved from <https://burmacampaign.org.uk/take-action/free-political-prisoners/section-66-d-of-the-telecommunications-law/>
- Campbell, A., Ridout, B., Amon, K., Collyer, B., & Dalgleish, J. (2018, June). *Kids Helpline Circles: Findings from participant action research in the development of a secure national mental health social network*. Paper presented at the Cyberpsychology, Cybertherapy & Social Networking Conference, Gatineau, Canada.
- Campbell, A., & Robards, F. (2013). *Using technologies safely and effectively to promote young people's wellbeing: A better practice guide for services*. Abbotsford, Victoria, Australia: Young and Well Cooperative Research Centre. Retrieved from <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/kidsfamilies/youth/Documents/better-practice-guide.pdf>
- Carter, B., Rees, P., Hale, L., Bhattacharjee, D., & Paradkar, M. S. (2016). Association between portable screen-based media device access or use and sleep outcomes: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *JAMA Pediatrics*, 170(12), 1202-1208. <https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapediatrics.2016.2341>



- Christensen, H. (2014). Social media: The new e-mental health tool. *InPsych: The Bulletin of the Australian Psychological Society Ltd*, 36(3), 12. Retrieved from <https://www.psychology.org.au/inpsych/2014/june/christensen>
- Clarke, A. M., Kuosmanen, T., & Barry, M. M. (2015). A systematic review of online youth mental health promotion and prevention interventions. *Journal of Youth and Adolescence*, 44(1), 90-113. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-014-0165-0>
- Cook, S. (2019) *Cyberbullying facts and statistics 2016-2019*. Retrieved from: <https://www.comparitech.com/internet-providers/cyberbullying-statistics/>
- Davidson, T., Warmsley, D., Macy, M., & Weber, I. (2017, May). *Automated hate speech detection and the problem of offensive language*. In *Proceedings of the Eleventh International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media* (pp. 512-515). Palo Alto, CA: AAAI Publications. Retrieved from <https://www.aaai.org/ocs/index.php/ICWSM/ICWSM17/paper/viewPaper/15665>
- Davis, B. (2017). *Religion, hate speech and social media in Myanmar: Analysing methods of intervention*. Winchester, UK: University of Winchester.
- Del Vigna, F., Cimino, A., Dell'Orletta, F., Petrocchi, M., & Tesconi, M. (2017). Hate me, hate me not: Hate speech detection on Facebook. In *Proceedings of the First Italian Conference on Cybersecurity* (pp. 86-95). Venice, Italy: CEUR Workshop Proceedings. Retrieved from <http://ceur-ws.org/Vol-1816/paper-09.pdf>
- Donovan, P. (2007). How idle is idle talk? One hundred years of rumor research. *Diogenes*, 54(1), 59-82. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0392192107073434>
- Facebook (2019). *Audience insight*. Retrieved August 1, 2019, from <https://www.facebook.com/ads/audience-insights/geography?act=615671958956517&age=18-&country=MM>
- Freedom on the Net. (2018). *Myanmar country report*. Retrieved from <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-net/2018/myanmar>
- Gebremariam, M. K., Bergh, I. H., Andersen, L. F., Ommundsen, Y., Totland, T. H., Bjelland, M., Grydeland, M., & Lien, N. (2013). Are screen-based sedentary behaviors longitudinally associated with dietary behaviors and leisure-time physical activity in the transition into adolescence?. *International Journal Of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 10(1), 9. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1479-5868-10-9>
- Graafland, J. H. (2019). *New technologies and 21st century children: Recent trends and outcomes*. Retrieved from Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) website: [https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/new-technologies-and-21st-century-children\\_e071a505-en](https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/new-technologies-and-21st-century-children_e071a505-en)
- Gravers, M. (2015). Anti-Muslim Buddhist Nationalism in Burma and Sri Lanka. *Contemporary Buddhism*, 16(1), 1-27.
- Grizelj, I. (2017). *The youth space of dialogue and mediation in Myanmar*. Retrieved from Berghof Foundation website: [https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other\\_Resources/YouthSpaceofDialogueMediation\\_\\_Myanmar.pdf](https://www.berghof-foundation.org/fileadmin/redaktion/Publications/Other_Resources/YouthSpaceofDialogueMediation__Myanmar.pdf)
- Grizelj, I. (2018). *Youth-led participatory research on social cohesion in urban areas*. Retrieved from Search for Common Ground: [https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SFCG\\_Youth-led\\_Research\\_Myanmar\\_3mk.pdf](https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/SFCG_Youth-led_Research_Myanmar_3mk.pdf)
- Guess, A., Nagler, J., & Tucker, J. (2019). Less than you think: Prevalence and predictors of fake news dissemination on Facebook. *Science Advances*, 5(1), eaau4586. <https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.aau4586>





- Hale, L., & Guan, S. (2015). *Screen time and sleep among school-aged children and adolescents: A systematic literature review*. *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 21, 50-58. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2014.07.007>
- Han, N. B. (2018, July 24). *Kayah people decry chief minister's stand on protest*. Retrieved from Myanmar Times website: <https://www.mmmtimes.com/news/kayah-people-decry-chief-ministers-stand-protest.html>
- Hawdon, J., Oksanen, A., Räsänen, P. (2014). Victims of online hate groups: American youth's exposure to online hate speech. In Hawdon, J., Ryan, J., Lucht, M. (Eds.), *The causes and consequences of group violence: From bullies to terrorists* (pp. 165–182). New York, NY: Lexington Books.
- Hodal, K. (2014, March 1). *Burma tells Médecins Sans Frontières to leave state hit by sectarian violence*. Retrieved from The Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/feb/28/burma-medecins-sans-frontieres-rakhine-state>
- Huang, G. C., Unger, J. B., Soto, D., Fujimoto, K., Pentz, M. A., Jordan-Marsh, M., & Valente, T. W. (2014). Peer influences: the impact of online and offline friendship networks on adolescent smoking and alcohol use. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 54(5), 508-514. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2013.07.001>
- Jones, N. M., Thompson, R. R., Schetter, C. D., & Silver, R. C. (2017). Distress and rumor exposure on social media during a campus lockdown. In *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 114(44), 11663-11668. Retrieved from <https://www.pnas.org/content/114/44/11663.short>
- Kats, R. (2018). *In the UK, younger users flock to Snapchat*. Retrieved from <https://www.emarketer.com/content/in-the-uk-younger-users-flock-to-snapchat>
- Khaing, H., & Aung, P. T. (2018). *Aung San in Kayah State: Inside the political storm*. Retrieved from <http://www.myanmar-now.org/news/i/?id=85125d4f-546e-4d65-8645-89508903662a>
- Kids Helpline. (2019). *KHL Circles*. Retrieved from: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/khl-circles-research-project>
- Kim, H. H. S. (2016). The impact of online social networking on adolescent psychological well-being (VWB): A population-level analysis of Korean school-aged children. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth*, 22(3), 364-376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2016.1197135>
- Kirkham, A. (2015). *This is not who we are: Listening to communities affected by communal violence in Myanmar*. Retrieved from The Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies website: <http://www.centrepeaceconflictstudies.org/publications/browse/8288-2/>
- Kramer, T., Russell, O., & Smith, M. (2018). *From war to peace in Kayah (Karenni) state: A land at the crossroads in Myanmar*. Retrieved from The Transnational Institute website: <https://www.tni.org/en/publication/from-war-to-peace-in-kayah-karenni-state>
- MacGregor, F. (2013, August 13). *Rakhine aid workers resigning over social media threats*. Retrieved from Myanmar Times website: <https://www.mmmtimes.com/national-news/7896-rakhine-aid-workers-resigning-over-social-media-threats.html>
- Martin, F., Wang, C., Petty, T., Wang, W., & Wilkins, P. (2018). Middle school students' social media use. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 21(1), 213-224. <https://doi.org/10.2307/26273881>
- McCarthy, G. (2017). *Cyber-Spaces*. In A. Simpson, N. Farrelly, & I. Holliday (Eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Myanmar* (pp. 92-105). London, UK: Routledge.





- McCarthy, G., & Menager, J. (2017). Gendered rumours and the Muslim scapegoat in Myanmar's transition. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 47(3), 396-412. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00472336.2017.1304563>
- McKay, M. (2016). *Kayah State: Baseline evaluation - PROSPER*. Yangon, Myanmar: Mercy Corps. Retrieved from <http://dmeformerpeace.org/sites/default/files/Mercy%20Corps%20Baseline%20Report%20April%202020%202016%20FINAL.pdf>
- McKay, M. (2017a). *Research into Myanmar Facebook use* (Unpublished report). Yangon, Myanmar: Phandeeyar.
- McKay, M. (2017b). *Social Media Fellowship Program Cohort: Endline*. Yangon, Myanmar: Phandeeyar.
- McKay, M. (2018a). *Communities of faith: Religion and social works in Rakhine* (Unpublished report). Yangon, Myanmar: United States Institute of Peace.
- McKay, M. (2018b). *ACESM Baseline*. SOCHA.
- McKirdy, E. (2018, April 7). *When Facebook becomes 'the beast': Myanmar activists say social media aids genocide*. Retrieved from CNN website: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/04/06/asia/myanmar-facebook-social-media-genocide-intl/index.html>
- Meers, E. S. (2015). *Community information flows to reduce inter-communal violence in Burma*. Retrieved from Search For Common Ground website: <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Myanmar-Community-Information-Management-Report.-SFSG.-March-2016.pdf>
- Mozur, P. (2018, October 15). *A genocide incited on Facebook, with posts from Myanmar's military*. Retrieved from The New York Times website: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/15/technology/myanmar-facebook-genocide.html>
- Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. (2015). *2014 Myanmar population and housing census: Kayin state, census report, Volume 3-C*. Yangon, Myanmar: Myanmar Ministry of Immigration and Population. Retrieved from <https://reliefweb.int/report/myanmar/2014-myanmar-population-and-housing-census-kayin-state-census-report-volume-3-c-enmy>
- Netsafe. (2018). *Online hate speech: A survey on personal experiences and exposure among adult New Zealanders*. Retrieved from <https://www.netsafe.org.nz/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/onlinehatespeechsurvey-2018.pdf>
- Nguyen, A. J., Lee, C., Schojan, M., & Bolton, P. (2018). Mental health interventions in Myanmar: A review of the academic and gray literature. *Global Mental Health*, 5, E8. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gmh.2017.30>
- Nyunt, A. K. (2016, July 19). *Ministry puts mobile penetration at 90 percent*. Retrieved from Myanmar Times: <https://www.mmmtimes.com/business/technology/21466-ministry-puts-mobile-penetration-at-90-percent.html>
- O'Connor, T. (2017). *Stakeholder mapping of countering hate speech in Myanmar – External Report*. Retrieved from Search for Common Ground website: <https://www.sfcg.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/SFCG-Stakeholder-Mapping-Report-external-20Nov2017-FINAL-for-printing.pdf>
- Office of the eSafety Commissioner. (2017). *Image-based abuse national survey: Summary report*. Retrieved from <https://www.esafety.gov.au/-/media/15469f65e05e4d02b994010def7af3bb.pdf>
- Oo, T. S., & Thant, Y. M. (2019). *Exploring digital and mobile cultures in Myanmar 2019*. Retrieved from Phandeeyar: <https://www.digitalculturesmm.com/>

- Oksanen, A., Hawdon, J., Holkeri, E., Näsi, M., & Räsänen, P. (2014). Exposure to online hate among young social media users. *Sociological Studies Of Children & Youth*, 18, 253-273. <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1537-466120140000018021>
- Orben, A., & Przybylski, A. K. (2019). The association between adolescent well-being and digital technology use. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 3(2), 173-182. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-018-0506-1>
- Oudot, C., & Baudey, M. (2015, November 24). *Kayah State students find their voices*. Retrieved from Myanmar Times website: <https://www.mmtimes.com/national-news/17777-kayah-state-students-find-their-voice.html>
- Panzagar. (2018). In Facebook [Group page]. Retrieved October 23, 2018, from: <https://www.facebook.com/panzagar/>
- Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). (2017a). *New project to study social media, armed conflict and gender in Myanmar*. Retrieved from <https://www.prio.org/News/Item/?x=2240>
- Peace Research Institute Oslo (PRIO). (2017b). *Social media in armed conflict: The case of Myanmar*. Retrieved from <https://www.prio.org/Projects/Project/?x=1777>
- Poushter, J., Bishop, C., & Chwe, J. (2018). *Social Media Use Continues to Rise in Developing Countries but Plateaus Across Developed Ones*. Retrieved from Pew Research Centre website: <https://www.pewresearch.org/global/2018/06/19/3-social-network-adoption-varies-widely-by-country/>
- Qian, J., ElSherief, M., Belding, E., & Wang, W. Y. (2018). Hierarchical CVAE for fine-grained hate speech classification. *Computing Research Repository*. Retrieved from <https://arxiv.org/abs/1809.00088>
- Qiu, J. L. (2014). "Power to the people!" Mobiles, migrants, and social movements in Asia. *International Journal of Communication*, 8, 376-91. Retrieved from <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/viewFile/2076/1075>
- Rickwood, D. J., Mazzer, K. R., & Telford, N. R. (2015). Social influences on seeking help from mental health services, in-person and online, during adolescence and young adulthood. *BMC Psychiatry*, 15(1), 40. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12888-015-0429-6>
- Ridout, B., & Campbell, A. (2014). Using Facebook to deliver a social norm intervention to reduce problem drinking at university. *Drug and Alcohol Review*, 33(6), 667-673. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dar.12141>
- Ridout, B. & Campbell, A. (2018). The use of social networking sites in mental health interventions for young people: A systematic review. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 20(12), e12244. <https://doi.org/10.2196/12244>
- Sandford, S. (2018). *Conflict resumes in Karen state after Myanmar army returns*. Retrieved from <https://www.voanews.com/a/conflict-resumes-in-karen-state-after-myanmar-army-returns/4417421.html>
- Search for Common Ground. (2018). *The impact of freedom of expression, religion and belief: Measuring results through online initiatives*. Yangon, Myanmar: Search For Common Ground. Retrieved from <https://www.sfcg.org/the-impact-of-freedom-of-expression-religion-and-belief-measuring-results-through-online-initiatives/>
- SELMA. (2018). *The SELMA approach*. Retrieved from <http://www.hackinghate.eu/news/detail?articleId=1812815>
- SELMA. (2019). *The SELMA toolkit*. Retrieved from <https://hackinghate.eu/toolkit/>
- Silverman, C. (2018). *Can positive messaging on social media promote peacebuilding in Myanmar?* Retrieved from Malmö University website: <http://muep.mau.se/handle/2043/25017>

- Smith, A., & Anderson, M. (2018). *Social media use in 2018*. Retrieved from Pew Research Centre website: <https://www.pewinternet.org/2018/03/01/social-media-use-in-2018/>
- Spijkerman, M. P. J., Pots, W. T. M., & Bohlmeijer, E. T. (2016). Effectiveness of online mindfulness-based interventions in improving mental health: A review and meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 45, 102-114. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cpr.2016.03.009>
- StatCounter Global Stats. (2018). *Social media stats Myanmar Sept 2017 – Sept 2018*. Retrieved from <http://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/myanmar/#monthly-201709-201809-bar>
- Statista. (2019). *Number of Facebook users in Southeast Asia as of January 2019, by country (in millions)*. Retrieved from <https://www.statista.com/statistics/193056/facebook-user-numbers-in-asian-countries/>
- Telenor. (2018). *Realising digital Myanmar: Leapfrogging to an inclusive digital economy*. Retrieved from: <https://www.telenor.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Telenor-Realising-Digital-Myanmar-Report-06-February.pdf>
- Thu, J. M. (2016). *Rakhine State news and information eco-system: An Internews rapid assessment report*. Yangon, Myanmar: Internews.
- Thuzar, M. (2019). Human security and development in Myanmar: Issues and implications. In Y. Mine, O. A. Gómez & A. Muto (Eds.), *Human security norms in East Asia* (pp. 135-158). London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tun, N. M. (2016, July 19). *Myanmar calls for rural mobile coverage*. Retrieved from The Nation Thailand website: <http://www.nationmultimedia.com/technology/Myanmar-calls-for-rural-mobile-coverage-30290975.html>
- The Seagull Foundation. (2018). In *Facebook* [Group page]. Retrieved October 23, 2018, from: <https://www.facebook.com/theseagullmandalay/>
- Think Before You Trust. (2018). In *Facebook* [Group page]. Retrieved May 1, 2019, from <https://www.facebook.com/pg/ThinkBeforeYouTrust/>
- UNICEF. (2017). *The state of the world's children 2017: Children in a digital world*. Retrieved from UNICEF website: <https://www.unicef.org/reports/state-worlds-children-2017>
- United Nations. (2019). *United Nations Strategy and Plan of Action on Hate Speech Synopsis, June 18, 2019*: <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/documents/UN%20Strategy%20and%20Plan%20of%20Action%20on%20Hate%20Speech%2018%20June%20SYNOPSIS.pdf>
- Vosoughi, S., Roy, D., & Aral, S. (2018). The spread of true and false news online. *Science*, 359(6380), 1146-1151. <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.aap9559>
- Walton, M. (2018). *Myanmar media and society (M.MAS) project*. Retrieved from Oxford University website: <https://www.sant.ox.ac.uk/research-centres/programme-modern-burmese-studies/myanmar-media-and-society-mmas-project>
- Walton, M., Schissler, M., & Thi, P. P. (2017, April 21). *“Peace memories” in Myanmar*. Retrieved from Tea Circle Oxford website: <https://teacircleoxford.com/2017/04/21/peace-memories-in-myanmar/>
- Waseem, Z., & Hovy, D. (2016, June). *Hateful symbols or hateful people? Predictive features for hate speech detection on twitter*. In *Proceedings of the NAACL student research workshop* (pp. 88–93). San Diego, CA: Association for Computational Linguistics. Retrieved from <https://www.aclweb.org/anthology/N16-2013>



World Bank. (2018). *Myanmar living conditions survey: Key indicators report*. Retrieved from <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/739461530021973802/Myanmar-living-conditions-survey-2017-key-indicators-report>

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Social Media Use Survey

Read each question and follow the instructions to select an answer:

1. **What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- Transgender
- Non-binary
- I prefer not to say
- I don't know

2. **What is your age?**

3. **How much time do you spend on your phone each day?** (general usage, i.e., games, communicating, work-related, etc.)

Select one answer only:

- I don't use it every day
- <1 hour
- 1–3 hours
- 3–5 hours
- 5–7 hours
- More than 7 hours

4. **How much of your phone time is spent on social media?**

Make your best estimate and select one answer only:

- I don't have the internet / data on my phone
- <25%
- 25–50%
- 50–75%
- >75%
- All of my time on my phone is spent on social media



5. **When do you usually spend time on social media sites?**

Select as many as needed:

- First thing in the morning
- Commuting
- While at school
- While working
- Lunch/break time
- In the evening
- Last thing before bed

6. **Do you think you spend too much or too little time on social media?**

Select one answer only:

- Too much
- The right amount
- Too little
- Not sure

7. **Which Social Apps/Platforms do you currently access from your phone?**

Select as many as needed:

- Facebook
- Facebook messenger
- Instagram
- Twitter
- WhatsApp
- Viber
- WeChat
- TikTok
- Google messenger
- Skype
- Snapchat
- Other [please write]



**8. Which of these Apps/Platforms do you use most often?**

Select as many as needed:

- Facebook
- Facebook messenger
- Instagram
- Twitter
- WhatsApp
- Viber
- WeChat
- TikTok
- Google messenger
- Skype
- Snapchat
- Other [please write]

**9. What do you think makes a Social App/Platform popular?**

Select as many as needed:

- Everyone has it
- Ability to chat with friends
- Ability to follow friends
- Ability to share photos and videos
- Ability to keep up on news / information
- Access to educational content
- Ability to learn more about my religion
- It's entertaining
- Ability to play online games
- Ability to meet new people
- Ability to flirt, find romantic partners, or date
- Ability to organise/find out about events
- Ability to follow celebrities or personalities
- I don't know / I'm not sure
- Google messenger
- Other [please write]

10. **How do you like to interact on social media?**

Select as many as needed:

- Posting or sharing news and information
- Posting about my life
- Posting selfies
- Commenting
- Posting reactions and/or emoticons
- Sharing health tips
- Sharing news about scholarships and educational opportunities
- Other [please write]

11. **Do you use any Apps / Platforms to read current events news?**

Circle one:      Yes                      No

If you circled 'Yes', Which Apps / Platforms do you use for reading current events/news?

12. **Do you get more news from Social Apps/Platforms or traditional media?**

Select one answer only:

- Social Apps / Platforms
- Traditional Media (i.e., newspapers, radio, TV)
- I use bot, equally

13. **How often do you trust information that you see on social media?**

Select one answer only:

- Always
- Often/Usually
- Sometimes
- Seldomly
- Almost never

14. **Do you ever check the accuracy of the news you read on social media?**

Circle one:      Yes                  No

*If you circled 'Yes', what methods do you use to check accuracy of news from social media?*

*Select as many as needed:*

- Check other news sources
- Use Google
- Ask friends or family
- Check another Facebook page
- Speak to Village Administrator or other community leader
- Speak to local reporter or check their Facebook page
- Other [please write]

15. **Do you think that social media has a positive or negative impact on your life?**

*Select one answer only:*

- Mostly positive
- Mostly negative
- Both positive and negative

16. **Do you think that social media has a positive or negative impact on Myanmar society?**

*Select one answer only:*

- Mostly positive
- Mostly negative
- Both positive and negative

17. **In what ways can we address issues happening on Facebook?**

*Select as many as needed:*

- Online campaign/awareness-raising online
- Provide digital/media literacy trainings/workshops
- Create or change policies around social media usage
- Advocate to Facebook

- Limit Facebook usage
- Other [please write]

**[End of survey]**

## Appendix B: Focus Group Discussion Guide

[Confirm that all participants have read and signed full consent agreement during mobilisation. If any participants have not, a Research Partner must take them outside to obtain full consent.]

Thank you for taking time to meet with us today. My name is (NAME) and I'm here working with Save the Children Myanmar on a project called Peace and Tolerance through Social Media Initiative: Study of Youth Social Media and Technology Usage.

As we discussed earlier, we are going to be talking about how young people in Myanmar use Facebook. We will work through activities related to things like what apps you use and what you know about online safety, and then later we will have a discussion about some of the things you see on Facebook, what you like and don't like, as well as how you feel about certain kinds of content.

The total length of our discussion today will be about 2.5 hours, but that's including lots of activities and a tea break. We know it's a bit long, but hopefully it will be interesting and fun and the time will go pretty quickly.

We want to just refresh a couple of key things before we get started:

- *If at any time you prefer not to answer a question, or to stop participating, you are welcome to do so – we really mean it. Your being here is entirely voluntary, and you can decide to leave or take a break at any point. We do ask that if you so feel you want to leave, you do so quietly, so as not to disturb the group.*
- *Everything will be confidential, so no one outside of this group will ever know that you participated. We won't ever use your name or anything that could identify you in our notes or our final report on this research. We will share the data we gather with some of our partners in Australia, so they can help us to understand what we've learned – they'll store that data safely in a secure server, but we just want you to know that they will be involved.*
- *If you want to discuss some of the things you learned today with your friends or family later that's absolutely fine! Just please remember not to share any of the other participant's names, or specific things they said.*
- *We want to encourage you to speak in turn and to create space for everyone to participate, so please be respectful and polite, particularly of those who may feel especially shy. We know that sometimes we expect our older friends to speak on our behalf because we want to give the 'right' answers – but there are no right answers today, we are just having a discussion.*

We're almost ready to start but before we begin, we just need to confirm a few details:

First, is everyone still comfortable for us to record this conversation? We won't publish or make this recording available to anyone but our team – it's just to help us remember what was said

Consent Given: Yes/No. If yes, turn on the recorder.

Second, does everyone understand why they are here today, and more or less what we're going to be talking about?  
Yes/No

Third, is everyone here voluntarily? Yes/No

Great! Finally, we will be using phones from time to time but please refrain from taking calls during the Focus Group unless they are truly urgent. While we're talking about it, can everyone please now switch their phones on to silent? (wait until all phones have been silenced)

## **Section 1: General usage**

### Activity - Survey

[Do introductions and energizers first. We're going to start today with a short survey. It should take you about 5 minutes to complete. When you're finished, raise your hand and I'll come collect your survey.]

[Hand out survey]

### Follow up Discussion:

1. *Show youth a collection of visual examples of different social platforms and apps. (i.e. Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Youtube, etc.)*
2. *Ask the youth to categorize these as: Chat, News, Photos, Music, and Entertainment. (Note: Apps/platforms can appear in multiple categories).*
3. *Go through each with the youth and ask them for an adjective that describes that particular app/platform. (i.e. fun, interesting, educational, useful, anger-inducing, annoying, etc.)*
4. *Ask the youth, "What makes an app or platform popular?"*

## **Section 2: Online safety**

### Activity - Quiz

I want everyone to get their phones out. I'm going to give you a little quiz to see how well you know your apps. I want everyone to open their Facebook. If you don't have Facebook, raise your hand. (If participants have another social app, have them open this, if not, tell them to pair up with a neighbour.) If participants don't have phones, use the visual hand-outs. Now, I want everyone to locate the 'block' feature, raise your hand when you've got it.

1. *Did you already know where the block feature was?*
  - a. *If 'yes': how did you learn about it?*
2. *Do you know what the block feature does?*
3. *Have you ever used it?*
  - a. *If 'yes': why?*

Ok, this time I want everyone to show me how to report offensive, abusive, or dangerous content. Chose a post in your timeline to demonstrate on, and when you're ready to show me how to report something, raise your hand.

4. *Did you already know how to report something?*

a. *If 'yes': how did you learn about it?*

5. *What can you use this feature to report?*

6. *Have you ever used the report feature?*

a. *If 'yes': why?*

Good work everyone!

[Confirm that all participants now know how to use the block and report functions. Give all youth participants a copy of the pamphlet outlining the process]

Follow up Discussion:

7. *What are some of the golden rules for using social media responsibly?*

a. *What shouldn't you do?*

i. *(prompt: should you spread lies and rumours?)*

ii. *(prompt: should you share graphic photos and adult/18+ content?)*

b. *What should you do?*

i. *(prompt: should you give credit for photos you post that are taken by other people?)*

ii. *(prompt: should you write nice messages for people's birthdays?)*

8. *Do you ever feel obligated to respond or behave a certain way on social media?*

9. *Have your parents/elders/teachers taught you anything about how to stay safe online?*

10. *Do your parents/teachers try to limit/control your social media use? If so, how?*

### **Section 3: Fake News and Propaganda**

Activity: Find the Fake



For our next activity, we're going to talk about fake news and propaganda.

1. *Who can tell me what fake news is?*
  - a. *Have you learned about fake news before? (Definition: intentionally fabricated information, deceptive content, or grossly distorted actual news).*
    - i. *If 'yes': where?*
2. *Who can tell me what propaganda is? (Definition: Information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view).*
  - a. *Have you learned about propaganda before?*
    - i. *If 'yes': where?*

[Confirm that all participants understand the terms]

Now that we know the definitions of these terms, I'm going to show you a few different news posts from around Myanmar Social Media and I want you to circle the posts that you think are propaganda, and put an 'x' through the posts that you think are fake news.

[Distribute print outs and wait until all participants have completed the activity.]

Follow up Discussion:

3. *Who can tell me which of these posts you thought were fake news?*
  - a. *How do you know if something is fake news?*
4. *Do you ever check things you see online to make sure their real?*
  - a. *If 'yes', Where could you go to check?*
5. *If you thought something was fake news, what would you do?*
  - a. *(prompt: Would you report it? Mock it, share it to debunk it, etc.?)*
6. *Do you trust what you see and read on social media?*
  - a. *Why or why not?*
    - i. *What makes something or someone trustworthy?*

- b. *Are there individuals/influencers that you trust more than the digital versions of traditional the media (e.g. newspapers)?*
7. *Do any of you use other social media spaces to share information and news?*
- a. *(prompt: for instance, are you part of any special Facebook groups or group texts used to share information/memes/etc.?)*
8. *How do you think fake news impact on your behaviour and attitudes?*

*(Probing):*

- a. *How have you reacted to fake news in the past?*
- b. *Have you ever realised that a piece of fake news influenced your perceptions and relationships with people from other groups?*
- c. *Does it change how you feel about people who share fake news?*
- d. *Has fake news ever affected your understanding of conflicts in your community and elsewhere in the country?*
- e. *Does it strengthen or diminish your trust in media, on the whole?*
- f. *How does it feel to realise something you thought was real is actually fake news?*

#### **Section 4: Hate Speech & Harassment**

Now I want to talk about some of the less-fun parts of social media. I want to ask you some questions about harassment and hate speech.

[Write the two words on the board]

- 1. *Can anyone help me define what 'harassment' is? (Definition: Cyber harassment or bullying is the use of email, instant messaging, and derogatory websites to bully or otherwise harass an individual or group through personal attacks).*
- 2. *How about 'hate speech'? (Definition: Speech that is intended to foster hatred against groups based on race, religion, gender, sexual preference, national origin, or other traits. At the least it fosters hatred and discrimination, and at its worst it promotes violence and killing).*
- 3. *Is there a difference between them?*
  - a. *If 'yes': where?*



Activity: Responding to Hate Speech

I'd like to have you look at a few images, and then I'm going to ask you some questions about them

- *On the whole, how does it make you feel to look at these kinds of posts?  
(prompt: annoyed? entertained? angry? don't feel anything?)*
- *Which of these, if any, do you think are examples of hate speech? How about harassment?*
- *Have you seen things like this on social media before?*

If 'yes':

- a. *Can you please share some examples?*
- b. *What do you think of it?*
- c. *How does it make you feel?*
- d. *What did you do when you saw it / How did you react?*
- e. *Did it affect how you felt about the target of the hate speech?*

Follow up Discussion:

- 4. *What are the most common types of hate speech that you see in Myanmar?*
  - a. *What do these types of posts normally say? What kinds of stories or rumours do they spread?*
  - b. *(prompt: is it mostly targeting people from different religions, ethnicities? Does it target people who are gay, people who might have injuries or illnesses? Does it target the government or the Tatmadaw?)*
- 5. *What do you think people are trying to do when they post or share these types of things?*
  - a. *Who is usually the target audience?*
- 6. *How do you think hate speech and harassment impact on your behaviour and attitudes?*

(Probing):

- a. *Does it influence your perceptions and relationships with people from other groups?*
- b. *Does it change how you feel about people who share it?*

- c. *Does it affect your understanding of conflicts at home and elsewhere in the country?*
- d. *Does it strengthen or diminish your trust in media, on the whole?*

7. *What about people who comment on posts just to make people angry or just to argue?*

- a. *What do you call that in Myanmar? (prompt: have you heard the English word 'trolling?')*

(if participants don't know the word, give the definition: Trolling is deliberately trying to upset/provoke someone by posting inflammatory material/text/opinions. Trolls enjoy seeing people have emotional reactions to their posts.)

- b. *What kinds of things would you include in trolling?*
  - i. *Why do you think someone would troll?*
  - ii. *How does it make you feel when you see someone trolling you or someone else?*
- c. *Do you sometimes post/comment in mean, angry, or aggressive ways?*

*If 'yes':*

- i. *Why?*
- ii. *How do you feel after posting?*

8. *Have any of you seen or heard about anti-hate speech campaigns?*

- a. *(prompt: how about 'Pan Zagar' (flower speech) or 'Respect' on Facebook?)*
- b. *Are there any individuals / influencers that you think do a good job of making social media better, safer, or nicer place for people?*
  - i. *(prompt: maybe an actor, a politician, a religious leader?)*
  - ii.

## **Section 5: Sharing Behaviours**

Activity: 'Inspo' Images

Time for another activity. I'm going to have you look at a few images, and then I'm going to ask you some questions about them.

1. *On the whole, how does it make you feel to look at these kinds of posts?*
  - a. *(prompt: annoyed? entertained? angry? don't feel anything?)*
2. *Do you see posts like this from friends and celebrities?*
  - a. *If 'yes': How does it make you feel?*
3. *Do you post things like this?*
  - a. *Why or why not?*
  - b. *What do you expect to feel when you share these things?*
  - c. *What reaction (if any) do you expect from others?*
4. *In general, what kinds of online content and social media messages are young people like yourselves sharing, and why?*
5. *Which platforms do they use to share?*
  - a. *(prompt: mostly Facebook? Or also Instagram?)*
  - b. *Is there a difference in what people post on different platforms?*
6. *Do you or your friends use social media to express opinions about the government, current events? (prompt in Rakhine: 'like the conflict on the border? / prompt in Kayah: 'like the conflict over the General Aung San Statue?')*

*If 'yes':*

- a. *Where do you voice these views?*
  - i. *(prompt: on your Facebook profile? In stories? In private groups or messages?)*
- b. *Do you consider possible offline consequences?*

*If 'no':*

- c. *What influences your decision to not voice your views?*
  - i. *(prompt: Worried what your friends/family/community will think? Think the government could be monitoring what you post? Could put you in danger?)*

## **Section 6: Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing**

We're in the final two sections of the focus group now. Thank you so much for your attention and participation so far. Let's all quickly stand up and have a quick stretch before we finish up.

[Stand up and get the participants to hop up and down and do a few stretches to wake up - energizers.]

1. *What would you say is your overall experience of social media – positive or negative?*
2. *Do you think social media affects your thoughts, feelings, and/or attitudes? How about your relationships with your friends and family?*
  - a. *If 'yes': How? Can you give me specific examples?*
3. *Do you think that life has been made easier or more complicated by social media?*
  - b. *In what ways?*
4. *Do you use social media to cope with difficult or unpleasant emotions?*
  - c. *If 'yes': How?*
5. *In general, how do you feel after using social media? (i.e. happy, sad, angry, satisfied, isolated, lonely, depressed?) What makes you feel this way?*
6. *How do you feel after posting something on social media? Do you feel pressure to get 'likes' and other reactions from others about your posts? What expectations do you have when you post?*
7. *Do you see yourself as having different identities on and offline?*

*If 'yes':*

- a. *Is that something you've done on purpose? (why?)*
- b. *Does it ever cause you any discomfort?*

## **Section 7: Impact on society**

1. *Do you feel that what you do on social media has an impact off-line in your daily life?*

*If 'yes':*



- a. *What kinds of impacts?*
- b. *Are they mostly positive or negative?*
2. *What do you think the biggest difference (if any) between on-line and off-line community behaviour?*
  - a. *Is this the same for differences in individual behaviour?*
3. *Does social media change how you interact with people from different ethnic groups or different religious communities?*

If 'yes':

- a. *how? (prompt: are there things you do online that you wouldn't do in real life?)*
4. *Do you use social media to navigate challenges in your life?*

(Probing):

- a. *For instance, do you ever use social media to access education or jobs that you couldn't access otherwise?*
- b. *Do you use social media to mobilise around civil society?*
- c. *Do you use social media to campaign and advocate on issues that matter to you?*
- d. *Do you think social media has helped you to create a sense of political, religious, or ethnic identity? (prompt: for instance, by connecting you with people like you who live in different parts of Myanmar or even in different countries?)*
5. *Do you think that social media is beneficial for your society or culture offline?*
  - a. *In what ways is it negative?*
  - b. *In what ways is it positive?*
6. *How can youth use social media to increase empathy and understanding among people in society?*
  - a. *In what ways do you use social media for positive change?*
7. *What do you think we should do to address these social media issues?*

That's it for our conversation today, thank you again for sharing all of your insight! We are going to go home and analyse what we've heard and then come up with some findings. As part of that, we'll be coming back to your local

mobile phone shops to distribute handouts on social media skills that we think are important, based on our conversation today. Make sure you keep an eye out for that. We'll also be creating some tools and tutorials online, so if you want to keep up with announcements you can 'like' Save the Children Myanmar's Facebook page and you can then see regular updates. Are there any last questions before we say goodbye?

## Appendix C: Key Informant Interview Guide

[Confirm that all participants have read and signed full consent agreement during mobilisation. If any participants have not, a Research Partner must take them outside to obtain full consent.]

Thank you for taking time to meet with us today. I know we've met before but just as a reminder, my name is (NAME) and I'm here working with Save the Children Myanmar on a project called Peace and Tolerance through Social Media Initiative: Study of Youth Social Media and Technology Usage.

So, as discussed, we are going to be talking about how young people in Myanmar use Facebook. Again, we'll try not to take more than an hour of your time today – we know you're busy!

We want to just refresh a couple of key things before we get started:

- *If at any time you prefer not to answer a question, or to stop participating, you are welcome to do so – we really mean it. This is entirely voluntary, and you can decide to end the interview at any time – though of course we hope you won't!*
- *Everything will be confidential. We won't ever use your name or anything that could identify you in our notes or our final report on this research. We will share the data we gather with some of our partners in Australia, so they can help us to understand what we've learned – they'll store that data safely in a secure server, but we just want you to know that they will be involved.*

Now, just to confirm a few details:

First, is everyone still comfortable for us to record this conversation? We won't publish or make this recording available to anyone but our team – it's just to help us remember what was said

Consent Given: Yes/No. If yes, turn on the recorder.

Second, does everyone understand why they are here today, and more or less what we're going to be talking about? Yes/No

Third, is everyone here voluntarily? Yes/No

Great! Do you have any questions before we get started?

### Section 1: General Usage

1. *What do you think are the most popular social media platforms for young people, and why?*
2. *How much time do youth spend on their phones each day?*
3. *How much of that time is spent online?*



## **Section 2: Online safety**

4. *Do you think young people are safe online?*
  - a. *Have you or someone you know experienced any online dangers? (i.e. scams, online predators, etc.?)*
5. *Are parents, teachers or other responsible adults, able to help young people to navigate dangers online?*
  - a. *For example: teach them how to block a harassing account or report 18+ content?*
  - b. *For example: stay away from dangers including targeting from online predators for sex, recruitment, and trafficking.*

## **Section 3: Fake news and propaganda**

6. *What kinds of news and information are youth most interested in, or do searches online for? Follow-up: What kinds of news sources do youth use most often?*
7. *To what extent do young people seem to trust what they see and read on social media?*
8. *What do you think makes information on social media trustworthy for youth? (i.e. news source, number of shares/likes, types of content, fancy graphics?)*
9. *Do you think seeing fake news affects young people's understanding of the political or conflict context in which they live? In what ways?*
10. *What do young people do when they see fake news?*
11. *What strategies do you think youth use to verify information that they see online?*
12. *Do you think youth are able to differentiate between fake news and real news? To what extent?*
13. *Do youth understand the concept of "bias" in news? Or propaganda?*
14. *Do young people have any behaviours that promote fake news unintentionally?*
15. *Are there individuals/influencers that they seem to trust?*

## **Section 4: Hate Speech & Harassment**

16. *What are the experiences of youth regarding harassment on social media?*

a. *Have you ever been asked to intervene in cases of cyber bullying?*

If 'yes':

- i. *What kinds of cyber-bullying did you encounter?*
- ii. *Was the bullying happening offline as well?*

17. *What are the experiences of youth regarding hate speech on social media? (i.e. What are the most common types of hate speech youth are most likely to encounter online? What kinds of hate speech narratives are youth exposed to?)*

18. *What kinds of impact do you think hate speech has on youth? (On their beliefs, perspectives, views of other people, attitudes, behaviours, and relationships with others – please provide examples)*

19. *From your perspective, what are the types of hate speech and rumours that young people are most likely to believe?*

a. *What about repeat and spread?*

20. *Have you seen any incidents where online hate speech narratives have been repeated and shared by youth?*

a. *What about acted on?*

21. *Are there any influential figures popular with young people (on or offline) working to counter hate speech?*

## **Section 5: Sharing Behaviours**

22. *What kinds of online content and social media messages are youth sharing?*

23. *Do young people use social media to express their own or others' opinions about the government, other groups of people (i.e. by gender, ethnicity, nationality, or religion), or other general thoughts about how society should operate?*

24. *Do you think they consider possible offline consequences to that sharing? (i.e. loss of privacy, possible retaliation, potential legal consequences, etc.?)*

## **Section 6: Impact on daily lives and psychological wellbeing**

25. *Do you think social media has – on the whole – a positive or negative impact on young people's mental and emotional wellbeing?*

26. *Do youth think social media affects their thoughts, feelings, and/or attitudes?*

a. *If so, how?*

27. Do you think social media affects their relationship with others, including their friends and family?

a. If so, how?

28. Do you think young people's lives have been made easier or more complicated by social media?

a. In what ways?

## **Section 7: Impact on society**

29. Do you think that what youth do on social media has an impact off-line in their daily lives?

a. If so, what kinds of impacts?

b. Are they mostly positive or negative? In what ways?

30. Do marginalized youth use social media to express themselves?

a. If so, how? (probing: do they counteract negative stereotypes, connect with others like themselves from around the country, access education or job opportunities that are unavailable to them offline?)

31. What do you see as the biggest difference (if any) between on-line and off-line youth behaviour?

32. Do young people engage with social media to mobilize and advocate for change? (i.e. important issues, causes, policies, etc.)

33. How can youth use social media to increase empathy and understanding among people in society?

34. Do you know of any programmes/activities in the community designed to improve digital literacy?

If 'yes':

a. Who runs them?

b. Are they popular / well received?

35. What do you think we should do about these social media issues?

That's it for our conversation today, thank you again for sharing all of your insight! Are there any last questions before we say goodbye?



## Appendix D: Social Media Use Survey Full Results

Question/Responses	Overall	Male	Female	Kayah State	Rakhine State	Kayah Urban	Kayah Rural	Rakhine Urban	Muslim IDP	Rural	Urban
<b>Mean age</b>	21.84 (3.94)	21.75 (3.51)	21.78 (4.19)	21.50 (4.44)	22.14 (3.46)	21.04 (4.67)	22.32 (3.93)	23.08 (3.66)	21.15 (2.94)	22.32 (3.92)	22.03 (4.32)
<b>How much time do you spend on your phone each day?</b>											
Not every day	36 (15.7%)	15 (13.6%)	21 (18.8%)	23 (21.7%)	13 (10.5%)	18 (26.5%)	5 (13.2%)	7 (10.9%)	6 (10.0%)	5 (13.2%)	25 (18.9%)
< 1 hour	33 (14.3%)	12 (10.9%)	19 (17.0%)	21 (19.8%)	12 (9.7%)	12 (17.6%)	9 (23.7%)	8 (12.5%)	4 (6.7%)	9 (23.7%)	20 (15.2%)
1-3 hours	73 (31.7%)	33 (30.0%)	37 (33.0%)	36 (34.0%)	37 (29.8%)	19 (27.9%)	17 (44.7%)	18 (28.1%)	19 (31.7%)	17 (44.7%)	37 (28.0%)
3-5 hours	49 (21.3%)	27 (24.5%)	20 (17.9%)	14 (13.2%)	35 (28.2%)	11 (16.2%)	3 (7.9%)	19 (29.7%)	16 (26.7%)	3 (7.9%)	30 (22.7%)
5-7 hours	20 (8.7%)	14 (12.7%)	6 (5.4%)	4 (3.8%)	16 (12.9%)	3 (4.4%)	1 (2.6%)	9 (14.1%)	7 (11.7%)	1 (2.6%)	12 (9.1%)
> 7 hours	19 (8.3%)	9 (8.2%)	9 (8.0%)	8 (7.5%)	11 (8.9%)	5 (7.4%)	3 (7.9%)	3 (4.7%)	8 (13.3%)	3 (7.9%)	8 (6.1%)
<b>How much of your phone time is spent on social media?</b>											
< 25%	70 (30.8%)	33 (30.3%)	35 (31.8%)	32 (31.1%)	38 (30.6%)	19 (28.8%)	13 (35.1%)	15 (23.8%)	23 (37.7%)	13 (35.1%)	34 (26.4%)
25-50%	108 (47.6%)	55 (50.5%)	48 (43.6%)	51 (49.5%)	57 (46.0%)	31 (47.0%)	20 (54.1%)	30 (47.6%)	27 (44.3%)	20 (54.1%)	61 (47.3%)
50-75%	36 (15.9%)	16 (14.7%)	19 (17.3%)	9 (8.7%)	27 (21.8%)	8 (12.1%)	1 (2.7%)	16 (25.4%)	11 (18.0%)	1 (2.7%)	24 (18.6%)
> 75%	4 (1.8%)	2 (1.8%)	2 (1.8%)	2 (1.9%)	2 (1.6%)	2 (3.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.2%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (3.1%)
100%	9 (4.0%)	3 (2.8%)	6 (5.5%)	9 (8.7%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (9.1%)	3 (8.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (8.1%)	6 (4.7%)
<b>When do you usually spend time on social media sites?*</b>											
First thing in the morning	61 (26.4%)	35 (31.8%)	25 (22.1%)	10 (9.4%)	51 (40.8%)	9 (13.2%)	1 (2.6%)	38 (59.4%)	13 (21.3%)	1 (2.6%)	47 (35.6%)
Commuting	22 (9.5%)	16 (14.5%)	6 (5.3%)	1 (0.9%)	21 (16.8%)	1 (1.5%)	0 (0.0%)	14 (21.9%)	7 (11.5%)	0 (0.0%)	15 (11.4%)
While at school	18 (7.8%)	7 (6.4%)	11 (9.7%)	7 (6.6%)	11 (8.8%)	5 (7.4%)	2 (5.3%)	9 (14.1%)	2 (3.3%)	2 (5.3%)	14 (10.6%)
While working	19 (8.2%)	11 (10.0%)	7 (6.2%)	6 (5.7%)	13 (10.4%)	4 (5.9%)	2 (5.3%)	8 (12.5%)	5 (8.2%)	2 (5.3%)	12 (9.1%)
Lunch/break time	108 (46.8%)	52 (47.3%)	52 (46.9%)	43 (40.6%)	65 (52.0%)	23 (33.8%)	20 (52.6%)	32 (50.0%)	33 (54.1%)	20 (52.6%)	55 (41.7%)
In the evening	109 (47.2%)	58 (52.7%)	48 (42.5%)	37 (34.9%)	72 (57.6%)	27 (39.7%)	10 (26.3%)	33 (51.6%)	39 (63.9%)	10 (26.3%)	60 (45.5%)
Last thing before bed	146 (63.2%)	80 (72.5%)	61 (54.0%)	59 (55.7%)	87 (69.6%)	35 (51.5%)	24 (63.2%)	52 (81.3%)	35 (57.4%)	24 (63.2%)	87 (65.9%)
<b>Do you think you spend too much or too little time on social media?</b>											
Too little time	47 (20.8%)	25 (23.4%)	22 (19.8%)	17 (16.5%)	30 (24.4%)	12 (18.5%)	5 (13.2%)	14 (22.2%)	16 (26.7%)	5 (13.2%)	26 (20.3%)
The right amount of time	135 (59.7%)	61 (57.0%)	68 (61.3%)	65 (63.1%)	70 (56.9%)	41 (63.1%)	24 (63.2%)	36 (57.1%)	34 (56.7%)	24 (63.2%)	77 (60.2%)
Too much time	24 (10.6%)	16 (15.0%)	7 (6.3%)	11 (10.7%)	13 (10.6%)	8 (12.3%)	3 (7.9%)	7 (11.1%)	6 (10.0%)	3 (7.9%)	15 (11.7%)

Question/Responses	Overall	Male	Female	Kayah State	Rakhine State	Kayah Urban	Kayah Rural	Rakhine Urban	Muslim IDP	Rural	Urban
Not sure	20 (8.8%)	5 (4.7%)	14 (12.6%)	10 (9.7%)	10 (8.1%)	4 (6.2%)	6 (15.8%)	6 (9.5%)	4 (6.7%)	6 (15.8%)	10 (7.8%)
<b>Which social apps/platforms do you currently access from your phone?*</b>											
Facebook	220 (95.2%)	107 (97.3%)	106 (93.8%)	100 (94.3%)	120 (96.0%)	64 (97.1%)	36 (94.7%)	64 (100.0%)	56 (91.8%)	36 (94.7%)	128 (97.0%)
Facebook Messenger	197 (85.3%)	99 (90.0%)	93 (82.3%)	90 (84.9%)	107 (85.6%)	56 (82.4%)	34 (89.5%)	60 (93.8%)	47 (77.0%)	34 (89.5%)	116 (87.9%)
Instagram	44 (19.0%)	25 (22.7%)	19 (16.8%)	10 (9.4%)	34 (27.2%)	9 (13.2%)	1 (2.6%)	27 (42.2%)	7 (11.5%)	1 (2.6%)	36 (27.3%)
Twitter	28 (12.1%)	21 (19.1%)	7 (6.2%)	9 (8.5%)	19 (15.2%)	7 (10.3%)	2 (5.3%)	6 (9.4%)	13 (21.3%)	2 (5.3%)	13 (9.8%)
WhatsApp	47 (20.3%)	35 (31.8%)	11 (9.7%)	5 (4.7%)	42 (33.6%)	5 (7.4%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (12.5%)	34 (55.7%)	0 (0.0%)	13 (9.8%)
Viber	146 (63.2%)	74 (67.3%)	68 (60.2%)	52 (49.1%)	94 (75.2%)	31 (45.6%)	21 (55.3%)	45 (70.3%)	49 (80.3%)	21 (55.3%)	76 (57.6%)
WeChat	61 (26.4%)	42 (38.2%)	17 (15.0%)	8 (7.5%)	53 (42.4%)	7 (10.3%)	1 (2.6%)	8 (12.5%)	45 (73.8%)	1 (2.6%)	15 (11.4%)
TikTok	43 (18.6%)	22 (20.0%)	20 (17.7%)	8 (7.5%)	35 (28.0%)	8 (11.8%)	0 (0.0%)	17 (26.6%)	18 (29.5%)	0 (0.0%)	25 (18.9%)
Google Messenger	33 (14.3%)	17 (15.5%)	16 (14.2%)	16 (15.1%)	17 (13.6%)	13 (19.1%)	3 (7.9%)	5 (7.8%)	12 (19.7%)	3 (7.9%)	18 (13.6%)
Skype	16 (6.9%)	10 (9.1%)	5 (4.4%)	3 (2.8%)	13 (10.4%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (7.9%)	8 (12.5%)	5 (8.2%)	3 (7.9%)	8 (6.1%)
Snapchat	2 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.5%)
Other: IMO	43 (18.6%)	32 (29.1%)	11 (9.7%)	0 (0.0%)	43 (34.4%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.1%)	43 (70.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.8%)
Other: Gmail	9 (3.9%)	6 (5.5%)	3 (2.7%)	3 (2.8%)	6 (4.8%)	3 (4.4%)	1 (2.6%)	1 (1.6%)	5 (8.2%)	1 (2.6%)	3 (2.3%)
Other: YouTube	17 (7.4%)	14 (12.7%)	3 (2.7%)	2 (1.9%)	15 (12.0%)	5 (7.4%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (6.3%)	11 (18.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (4.5%)
Others	29 (12.6%)	21 (19.1%)	8 (7.1%)	5 (4.7%)	24 (19.2%)	3 (4.4%)	2 (5.3%)	4 (6.3%)	20 (32.8%)	2 (5.3%)	7 (5.3%)
<b>Which of these apps/platforms do you use most often?*</b>											
Facebook	202 (87.4%)	98 (89.1%)	96 (85.0%)	87 (82.1%)	115 (92.0%)	58 (85.3%)	29 (76.3%)	62 (96.9%)	53 (86.9%)	29 (76.3%)	120 (90.9%)
Facebook Messenger	165 (71.4%)	82 (74.5%)	79 (69.9%)	74 (69.8%)	91 (72.8%)	45 (66.2%)	29 (76.3%)	56 (87.5%)	35 (57.4%)	29 (76.3%)	101 (76.5%)
Instagram	7 (3.0%)	5 (4.5%)	2 (1.8%)	4 (3.8%)	3 (2.4%)	4 (5.9%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (5.3%)
Twitter	8 (3.5%)	7 (6.4%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	7 (5.6%)	1 (1.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.6%)	6 (9.8%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.5%)
WhatsApp	27 (11.7%)	21 (19.1%)	6 (5.3%)	3 (2.8%)	24 (19.2%)	2 (2.9%)	1 (2.6%)	4 (6.3%)	20 (32.8%)	1 (2.6%)	6 (4.5%)
Viber	70 (30.3%)	35 (31.8%)	32 (28.3%)	25 (23.6%)	45 (36.0%)	13 (19.1%)	12 (31.6%)	17 (26.6%)	28 (45.9%)	12 (31.6%)	30 (22.7%)
WeChat	40 (17.3%)	28 (25.5%)	10 (8.8%)	1 (0.9%)	39 (31.2%)	1 (1.5%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (7.8%)	34 (55.7%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (4.5%)
TikTok	22 (9.5%)	15 (13.6%)	6 (5.3%)	2 (1.9%)	20 (16.0%)	1 (1.5%)	1 (2.6%)	12 (18.8%)	8 (13.1%)	1 (2.6%)	13 (9.8%)

Question/Responses	Overall	Male	Female	Kayah State	Rakhine State	Kayah Urban	Kayah Rural	Rakhine Urban	Muslim IDP	Rural	Urban
<b>Which of these apps/platforms do you use most often?*</b> (cont'd)											
Google Messenger	15 (6.5%)	7 (6.4%)	8 (7.1%)	7 (6.6%)	8 (6.4%)	7 (10.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.6%)	7 (11.5%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (6.1%)
Skype	6 (2.6%)	4 (3.6%)	1 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)	6 (4.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (6.3%)	2 (3.3%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (3.0%)
Snapchat	2 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.5%)
Other: IMO	46 (19.9%)	33 (30.0%)	13 (11.5%)	0 (0.0%)	46 (36.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.1%)	44 (72.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.5%)
Other: Gmail	2 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.9%)	1 (0.8%)	1 (1.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.6%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (1.5%)
Other: YouTube	10 (4.3%)	9 (8.2%)	1 (0.9%)	3 (2.8%)	7 (5.6%)	3 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.1%)	5 (8.2%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (3.8%)
Others	20 (8.7%)	12 (10.9%)	8 (7.1%)	2 (1.9%)	18 (14.4%)	2 (2.9%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (3.1%)	16 (26.2%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (3.0%)
<b>What do you think makes a social media app/platform popular?*</b>											
Everyone has it	86 (37.2%)	52 (47.3%)	32 (28.3%)	24 (22.6%)	62 (49.6%)	18 (26.5%)	6 (15.8%)	31 (48.4%)	31 (50.8%)	6 (15.8%)	49 (37.1%)
Ability to chat with friends	165 (71.4%)	86 (78.2%)	73 (64.6%)	62 (58.5%)	103 (82.4%)	40 (58.8%)	22 (57.9%)	51 (79.7%)	52 (85.2%)	22 (57.9%)	91 (68.9%)
Ability to follow friends	67 (29.0%)	45 (40.9%)	20 (17.7%)	14 (13.2%)	53 (42.4%)	10 (14.7%)	4 (10.5%)	23 (35.9%)	30 (49.2%)	4 (10.5%)	33 (25.0%)
Ability to share photos and videos	127 (55.0%)	70 (63.6%)	54 (47.8%)	43 (40.6%)	84 (67.2%)	34 (50.0%)	9 (23.7%)	42 (65.6%)	42 (68.9%)	9 (23.7%)	76 (57.6%)
Ability to keep up on the news/information	158 (68.4%)	78 (70.9%)	73 (64.6%)	72 (67.9%)	86 (68.8%)	50 (73.5%)	22 (57.9%)	43 (67.2%)	43 (70.5%)	22 (57.9%)	93 (70.5%)
Access to educational content	112 (48.5%)	59 (53.6%)	48 (42.5%)	41 (38.7%)	71 (56.8%)	26 (38.2%)	15 (39.5%)	34 (53.1%)	37 (60.7%)	15 (39.5%)	60 (45.5%)
Ability to learn more about my religion	68 (29.4%)	37 (33.6%)	30 (26.5%)	6 (5.7%)	62 (49.6%)	3 (4.4%)	3 (7.9%)	25 (39.1%)	37 (60.7%)	3 (7.9%)	28 (21.2%)
It's entertaining	74 (32.0%)	48 (43.6%)	24 (21.2%)	17 (16.0%)	57 (45.6%)	13 (19.1%)	4 (10.5%)	34 (53.1%)	23 (37.7%)	4 (10.5%)	47 (35.6%)
Ability to play online games	57 (24.7%)	43 (39.1%)	12 (10.6%)	17 (16.0%)	40 (32.0%)	14 (20.6%)	3 (7.9%)	22 (34.4%)	18 (29.5%)	3 (7.9%)	36 (27.3%)
Ability to meet new people	99 (42.9%)	57 (51.8%)	39 (34.5%)	32 (30.2%)	67 (53.6%)	22 (32.4%)	10 (26.3%)	37 (57.8%)	30 (49.2%)	10 (26.3%)	59 (44.7%)
Ability to flirt, find romantic partners or date	29 (12.6%)	21 (19.1%)	8 (7.1%)	7 (6.6%)	22 (17.6%)	4 (5.9%)	3 (7.9%)	13 (20.3%)	9 (14.8%)	3 (7.9%)	17 (12.9%)
Ability to organise/ find out about events	34 (14.7%)	23 (20.9%)	11 (9.7%)	8 (7.5%)	26 (20.8%)	5 (7.4%)	3 (7.9%)	19 (29.7%)	7 (11.5%)	3 (7.9%)	24 (18.2%)
Ability to follow celebrities or personalities	79 (34.2%)	39 (35.5%)	37 (32.7%)	30 (28.3%)	49 (39.2%)	23 (33.8%)	7 (18.4%)	25 (39.1%)	24 (39.3%)	7 (18.4%)	48 (36.4%)
I don't know/I'm not sure	7 (3.0%)	5 (4.5%)	2 (1.8%)	3 (2.8%)	4 (3.2%)	2 (2.9%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (6.6%)	1 (2.6%)	2 (1.5%)
Other	13 (5.6%)	8 (7.3%)	5 (4.4%)	8 (7.5%)	5 (4.0%)	5 (7.4%)	3 (7.9%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (8.2%)	3 (7.9%)	5 (3.8%)

Question/Responses	Overall	Male	Female	Kayah State	Rakhine State	Kayah Urban	Kayah Rural	Rakhine Urban	Muslim IDP	Rural	Urban
<b>How do you like to interact on social media?*</b>											
Posting or sharing news and information	154 (66.7%)	84 (76.4%)	64 (56.6%)	67 (63.2%)	87 (69.6%)	43 (63.2%)	24 (63.2%)	45 (70.3%)	42 (68.9%)	24 (63.2%)	88 (66.7%)
Posting about my life	55 (23.8%)	27 (24.5%)	27 (23.9%)	15 (14.2%)	40 (32.0%)	13 (19.1%)	2 (5.3%)	25 (39.1%)	15 (24.6%)	2 (5.3%)	38 (28.8%)
Posting selfies	101 (43.7%)	59 (53.6%)	41 (36.3%)	33 (31.1%)	68 (54.4%)	25 (36.8%)	8 (21.1%)	40 (62.5%)	28 (45.9%)	8 (21.1%)	65 (49.2%)
Commenting	66 (28.6%)	38 (34.5%)	27 (23.9%)	22 (20.8%)	44 (35.2%)	14 (20.6%)	8 (21.1%)	23 (35.9%)	21 (34.4%)	8 (21.1%)	37 (28.2%)
Posting reactions and/or emoticons	92 (39.8%)	49 (44.5%)	40 (35.4%)	25 (23.6%)	67 (53.6%)	16 (23.5%)	9 (23.7%)	39 (60.9%)	28 (45.9%)	9 (23.7%)	55 (41.7%)
Sharing health tips	111 (48.1%)	53 (48.2%)	53 (46.9%)	43 (40.6%)	68 (54.4%)	29 (42.6%)	14 (36.8%)	34 (53.1%)	34 (55.7%)	14 (36.8%)	63 (47.7%)
Sharing news about scholarships and educational opportunities	91 (39.4%)	52 (47.3%)	36 (31.9%)	30 (28.3%)	61 (48.8%)	22 (32.4%)	8 (21.1%)	26 (40.6%)	35 (57.4%)	8 (21.1%)	48 (36.4%)
Other	13 (5.6%)	4 (3.6%)	9 (8.0%)	7 (6.6%)	6 (4.8%)	4 (5.9%)	3 (7.9%)	2 (3.1%)	4 (6.6%)	3 (7.9%)	6 (4.5%)
<b>Do you use any apps/platforms to read current events/news?</b>											
Yes	123 (58.0%)	67 (62.6%)	50 (51.5%)	51 (56.0%)	72 (59.5%)	36 (64.3%)	15 (42.9%)	23 (36.5%)	49 (84.5%)	15 (42.9%)	59 (49.6%)
No	89 (42.0%)	40 (37.4%)	47 (48.5%)	40 (44.0%)	49 (40.5%)	20 (35.7%)	20 (57.1%)	40 (63.5%)	9 (15.5%)	20 (57.1%)	60 (50.4%)
<b>If yes, which apps/platforms do you use for reading current events/news?* (% of those who read current/events news)</b>											
Facebook	86 (83.5%)	53 (86.9%)	29 (76.3%)	31 (86.1%)	55 (82.1%)	22 (81.5%)	9 (100.0%)	15 (84.2%)	39 (81.3%)	9 (100.0%)	38 (82.6%)
Others	17 (16.5%)	8 (13.1%)	9 (23.7%)	5 (13.9%)	12 (17.9%)	5 (18.5%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (15.8%)	9 (18.8%)	0 (0.0%)	8 (17.4%)
<b>Do you get more news from social apps/platforms or traditional media?</b>											
Traditional media	24 (12.4%)	10 (10.0%)	12 (13.8%)	12 (15.4%)	12 (10.4%)	3 (6.1%)	9 (31.0%)	5 (8.1%)	7 (13.2%)	9 (31.0%)	8 (7.2%)
Social media	66 (34.2%)	37 (37.0%)	27 (31.0%)	22 (28.2%)	44 (38.3%)	15 (30.6%)	7 (24.1%)	20 (32.3%)	24 (45.3%)	7 (24.1%)	35 (31.5%)
Both equally	103 (53.4%)	53 (53.0%)	48 (55.2%)	44 (56.4%)	59 (51.3%)	31 (63.3%)	13 (44.8%)	37 (59.7%)	22 (41.5%)	13 (44.8%)	68 (61.3%)
<b>How often do you trust information that you see on social media?</b>											
Almost never	5 (2.3%)	3 (2.9%)	1 (1.0%)	2 (2.1%)	3 (2.5%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.3%)	3 (4.7%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.3%)	3 (2.5%)
Seldomly	26 (12.0%)	10 (9.5%)	16 (15.5%)	8 (8.4%)	18 (14.9%)	4 (7.0%)	4 (10.5%)	15 (23.4%)	3 (5.3%)	4 (10.5%)	19 (15.7%)
Sometimes	97 (44.9%)	41 (39.0%)	51 (49.5%)	49 (51.6%)	48 (39.7%)	33 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	31 (48.4%)	17 (29.8%)	16 (42.1%)	64 (52.9%)
Often/usually	77 (35.6%)	41 (39.0%)	34 (33.0%)	35 (36.8%)	42 (34.7%)	19 (33.3%)	16 (42.1%)	31 (48.4%)	27 (47.4%)	16 (42.1%)	34 (28.1%)
Always	11 (5.1%)	10 (9.5%)	1 (1.0%)	1 (1.1%)	10 (8.3%)	1 (1.8%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	10 (17.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.8%)
<b>Do you ever check the accuracy of the news you read on social media?</b>											
Yes	154 (71.6%)	82 (77.4%)	67 (66.3%)	60 (63.8%)	94 (77.7%)	36 (64.3%)	24 (63.2%)	42 (65.6%)	52 (91.2%)	24 (63.2%)	78 (65.0%)

No	61 (28.4%)	24 (22.6%)	34 (33.7%)	34 (36.2%)	27 (22.3%)	20 (35.7%)	14 (36.8%)	22 (34.4%)	5 (8.8%)	14 (36.8%)	42 (35.0%)
Question/Responses	Overall	Male	Female	Kayah State	Rakhine State	Kayah Urban	Kayah Rural	Rakhine Urban	Muslim IDP	Rural	Urban
<b>If yes, what methods do you use to check accuracy of news from social media?*</b> (% of those who check)											
Check other news sources	77 (50.0%)	47 (57.3%)	28 (41.8%)	21 (35.0%)	56 (59.6%)	14 (38.9%)	7 (29.2%)	29 (69.0%)	27 (51.9%)	7 (29.2%)	43 (55.1%)
Use Google	53 (34.4%)	33 (40.2%)	19 (28.4%)	16 (26.7%)	37 (39.4%)	10 (27.8%)	6 (25.0%)	17 (40.5%)	20 (38.5%)	6 (25.0%)	27 (34.6%)
Ask friends or family	93 (60.4%)	52 (63.4%)	38 (56.7%)	27 (45.0%)	66 (70.2%)	15 (41.7%)	12 (50.0%)	27 (64.3%)	39 (75.0%)	12 (50.0%)	42 (53.8%)
Check another Facebook page	92 (59.7%)	53 (64.6%)	35 (52.2%)	31 (51.7%)	61 (64.9%)	20 (55.6%)	11 (45.8%)	25 (59.5%)	36 (69.2%)	11 (45.8%)	45 (57.7%)
Speak to Village Administrator or other community leader	29 (18.8%)	20 (24.4%)	8 (11.9%)	5 (8.3%)	24 (25.5%)	2 (5.6%)	3 (12.5%)	6 (14.3%)	18 (34.6%)	3 (12.5%)	8 (10.3%)
Speak to local reporter or check their Facebook page	43 (27.9%)	29 (35.4%)	13 (19.4%)	12 (20.0%)	31 (33.0%)	8 (22.2%)	4 (16.7%)	10 (23.8%)	21 (40.4%)	4 (16.7%)	18 (23.1%)
Other	7 (3.0%)	5 (4.5%)	2 (1.8%)	1 (0.9%)	6 (4.8%)	1 (1.5%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (4.7%)	3 (4.9%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (3.0%)
<b>Do you think that social media has a positive or negative impact on your life?</b>											
Mostly negative	5 (2.3%)	3 (2.9%)	2 (1.9%)	1 (1.1%)	4 (3.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.7%)	4 (6.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (2.7%)	4 (3.4%)
Both positive and negative	144 (66.7%)	68 (66.0%)	72 (68.6%)	75 (81.5%)	69 (55.6%)	45 (81.8%)	30 (81.1%)	41 (64.1%)	28 (46.7%)	30 (81.1%)	86 (72.3%)
Mostly positive	67 (31.0%)	32 (31.1%)	31 (29.5%)	16 (17.4%)	51 (41.1%)	10 (18.2%)	6 (16.2%)	19 (29.7%)	32 (53.3%)	6 (16.2%)	29 (24.4%)
<b>Do you think that social media has a positive or negative impact on Myanmar society?</b>											
Mostly negative	11 (5.1%)	7 (6.8%)	4 (3.8%)	2 (2.2%)	9 (7.3%)	1 (1.8%)	1 (2.7%)	7 (10.9%)	2 (3.3%)	1 (2.7%)	8 (6.7%)
Both positive and negative	156 (72.2%)	69 (67.0%)	81 (77.1%)	80 (87.0%)	76 (61.3%)	48 (87.3%)	32 (86.5%)	43 (67.2%)	33 (55.0%)	32 (86.5%)	91 (76.5%)
Mostly positive	49 (22.7%)	27 (26.2%)	20 (19.0%)	10 (10.9%)	39 (31.5%)	6 (10.9%)	4 (10.8%)	14 (21.9%)	25 (41.7%)	4 (10.8%)	20 (16.8%)
<b>In what ways can we address issues happening on Facebook?</b>											
Online campaign/awareness-raising online	138 (59.7%)	74 (67.3%)	61 (54.0%)	52 (49.1%)	86 (68.8%)	36 (52.9%)	16 (42.1%)	45 (70.3%)	41 (67.2%)	16 (42.1%)	81 (61.4%)
Provide digital/media literacy trainings/workshops	107 (46.3%)	60 (54.5%)	44 (38.9%)	51 (48.1%)	56 (44.8%)	28 (41.2%)	23 (60.5%)	39 (60.9%)	17 (27.9%)	23 (60.5%)	67 (50.8%)
Create or change policies around social media usage	50 (21.6%)	31 (28.3%)	18 (15.9%)	14 (13.2%)	36 (28.8%)	9 (13.2%)	5 (13.2%)	16 (25.4%)	20 (32.8%)	5 (13.2%)	25 (18.9%)
Advocate to Facebook	74 (32.0%)	47 (42.7%)	23 (20.4%)	20 (18.9%)	54 (43.2%)	11 (16.2%)	9 (23.7%)	23 (35.9%)	31 (50.8%)	9 (23.7%)	34 (25.8%)
Limit Facebook usage	68 (29.4%)	38 (34.5%)	29 (25.7%)	19 (17.9%)	49 (39.2%)	14 (20.6%)	5 (13.2%)	28 (43.8%)	21 (34.4%)	5 (13.2%)	42 (31.8%)
Other	8 (3.5%)	2 (1.8%)	6 (5.3%)	1 (0.9%)	7 (5.6%)	1 (1.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	7 (11.5%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.8%)

Note. \*Proportions sum to more than 100% due to "select all that apply" option.