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The use of social media for promoting nutrition in a conflict-affected country: Facebook Insights

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In Myanmar, exclusive breastfeeding amongst infants under six months is only 51%, although overall breastfeeding rate is almost universal at 98%. Only 16% of children aged 6–23 months meet the minimum acceptable dietary standards. In addition, 58% of children aged 6–59 months and 47% of women aged 15–45 years are anaemic⁽¹⁾. A Facebook page named “Dohmeetharsulay” was launched by a team of Burmese nutritionists and nurses (who also served as page administrators), in June 2019, aiming to contribute to closing the maternal and child nutrition promotion gap. A military coup happened on 1st February 2021 during the COVID-19 pandemic⁽²⁾ causing unrest, armed conflicts, and increasing the strain on the country’s health system. The military junta then imposed internet and media restrictions, including banning the use of Facebook⁽³⁾. The aim of this study is to explore the important role of using social media in nutrition education in a challenging context by measuring engagement with the programme.

Meta, previously known as Facebook, provides automatically calculated social media insight data on indicators such as page’s reach, audience demography and posts performance. Data for a three-year period, from 1 March 2021 (which is one month after the coup) to 29 February 2024, was reviewed and analysed numerically by the administrator team led by the main author (who is a nutritionist), to understand the page’s reach and overall performance in achieving its objective of promoting nutrition.

The Dohmeetharsulay page had 2.6 million reaches, during the study period; with only 121,171 from paid promotion. The page had 45,300 lifetime followers (82.6% women and 17.4% men). Myanmar was the top country represented by 86.5% of total followers followed by Thailand (5.8%), Malaysia (1.7%), Singapore (1.1%), United States (0.7%), India (0.5%), Japan (0.4%), China (0.3%), Indonesia (0.3%) and Nigeria (0.3%). The contents received 172,500 engagements including reactions, comments, shares and clicks on the posts.

Several authors have suggested that the use of social media has potential to improve positive health and nutrition behaviours, especially in hard-to-reach groups⁽⁴⁾. Dohmeetharsulay is the only social media page dedicated to promoting evidence-based nutrition knowledge in the Burmese language, without any commercial influence. Despite the challenges and restrictions under the dictatorship, the data indicated that the page continued to communicate nutrition messages to the intended audience. Although further investigations are needed, it can be assumed that educational messages from the page have been benefiting families who have migrated or are displaced from Myanmar, in addition to the families inside Myanmar. Thus, the use of social media has an important role in providing nutrition education for families especially in places like Myanmar where reach of traditional health communication is limited due to conflict.

References

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