



Lessons learned from nimble adaptations to organisations' responses to the sexual and reproductive health (SRH) needs of adolescents in the context of the COVID-19 crisis

Country: Myanmar

BBC Media Action

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Were you delivering services to young people before the COVID-19 crisis?

The MSN project began in July 2019 and launched the project's Facebook page in December 2019. Since then, we have been delivering factually accurate information on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) packaged in an engaging way to appeal to a young audience in the 15-24 age group.

A substantial component of the project is outreach activities. These activities are an integral part of the MSN project as they help us reach out to audiences that cannot be reached digitally due to network and internet connectivity constraints. Pre-COVID-19, these activities were conducted amongst youth audiences at places of their interest such as parks, shopping malls, schools, and universities. These outreach activities contributed significantly to the creative content posted on the MSN page—highlighting the SRHR needs and the voice of the youth.

What new approaches did you use to respond to the barriers created by the COVID-19 pandemic to reach young people?

The restrictions on mobility and on gathering of people due to the COVID-19 pandemic adversely affected the MSN project activities. Since March 2020, most outreach activities were put on hold as most of them involved gathering young people in person. Production activities for MSN programs also needed to be curtailed severely, with planned production activities

postponed or canceled to avoid putting the MSN team members and contributors at risk. We also had to do a complete rethink of the design and fieldwork component of research activities that had been planned. We also made efforts to reach out to certain audience groups who could not be easily reached by digital mode of MSN outreach activities such as catering to People with Disabilities (PwD).

The team conducted training for staff of Myanmar Independent Living Initiative (MILI) –an organization that works for PwD– on developing radio and digital content specific to their needs. The initial theory-based training was accompanied by hands-on practical sessions conducted remotely and supervised by creative experts from BBC Media Action. Outputs from this approach were radio and digital content developed by the MILI team for PwD and related organizations.

Outreach activities: The COVID-19 related restrictions put an immediate halt to all the in-person outreach activities. After a brief lull, the MSN team came up with alternative ways to reach out to and interact with the target audience with minimal or no in-person exposure. The team began with piloting different methods with small batches of youth volunteers. Simultaneously the team also invested in engaging with MSN audiences through social media such as assigning outreach staff to interact with audiences through Facebook comments, increasing time for Facebook page message reply to audience questions and queries, conducting interactive training with youth audiences online.

Content production activities: COVID-19 restrictions adversely affected the creation of content, especially with contributors such as vox pops^[1], which requires engaging with and filming audiences at public in-person events. In the face of this adversity, the MSN team innovated and came up with alternate ways of creating digital content with minimal exposure to a large audience. For instance, contributors were interviewed remotely, vox pops with contributors were recorded remotely and content that required human interaction was produced using motion graphics and animations.

Research Activities: Audience consultations and research are used throughout a project lifecycle for all BBC Media Action projects to ensure content is effectively reaching, engaging, and informing the target audience. To assess the impact of the MSN Facebook page, an experimental study was designed and set up by BBC Media Action in 2020 which will continue into 2021. Youth will be randomly assigned to one of two groups and asked to either follow the MSN Facebook page, or a “control” Facebook page. Comparisons will be made between results captured at baseline and endline; after 2 months of exposure, as well as between “exposed” and “unexposed” groups. The study will provide valuable insights into the impact a digital intervention can have on health knowledge and attitudes.

Why did you decide to use these approaches?

The MSN project audience is young people who are already using Facebook and other social media which means they are already used to internet-based tools and platforms. Even though we changed our content formats, we kept the same communication objectives. We delivered messages to our audiences while ensuring that changing content formats did not have a negative impact on their engagement and interaction with the MSN content and page. Another reason we used these approaches is that due to COVID-19 restrictions on youth movement, they were more likely to rely on social media and internet-based activities for their communication, learning, and entertainment activities. Hence, focusing more on social media activities is more helpful to reach and interact with the youth audience.

How are you working to find out if these approaches are having the desired impact?

We have a monitoring and evaluation framework against which we tracked all outputs and outcomes of the project activities. The project has managed to deliver on all targets despite the COVID-19 restrictions that seriously impacted the project implementation. Preliminary creative content engagement statistics on our MSN Facebook page indicate that the pivots by the team were well received. The success of outreach activities could be measured by the training reports, monitoring and follow-up reports, such as trainings conducted by those who were in turn trained by the MSN outreach and training teams e.g. Myanmar Girl Guides.

I. Vox pop refers to a short video made of clips of interviews made with the public on a certain topic.

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