

Digital media for young people in Myanmar –

breaking taboos and discussing reproductive health

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Project background

The vast majority (89%) of young people in Myanmar are now using social media, making it one of the best ways to reach and engage this audience with information which is important to them.¹ With funding from Access to Health ², BBC Media Action has been delivering an innovative sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) digital project called *Ma Shet Ne* (Don't Be Shy). Phase 1 ran from July 2019 to mid-March 2022 and it was aimed at young people aged 15 to 24, living in Yangon, Myanmar.

Project aims

- ▶ Increase awareness and knowledge of key SRHR issues;
- ▶ Promote discussion to challenge norms and behaviours that are barriers to SRHR;
- ▶ Provide a platform for SRHR service providers, policy makers, and youth audiences to engage in discussion.

Digital outputs

Videos, photos and Facebook Live³ content published on *Ma Shet Ne* Facebook page and a chatbot for young people to ask questions and receive information.

The audience

- ▶ Over the course of the project, *Ma Shet Ne* established itself as a recognizable, trusted youth brand – gaining over 1.3 million followers in less than a year. To date, there are now over 2.6 million followers of *Ma Shet Ne*.
- ▶ *Ma Shet Ne* Facebook page followers were mostly Yangon youth, and the page attracted an almost equal split of men and women (45% female and 55% male), which is a notable achievement given there are fewer women on social media in Myanmar.⁴
- ▶ Pockets of *Ma Shet Ne* audiences are also found in ethnic states such as Shan, Kachin and Mon.

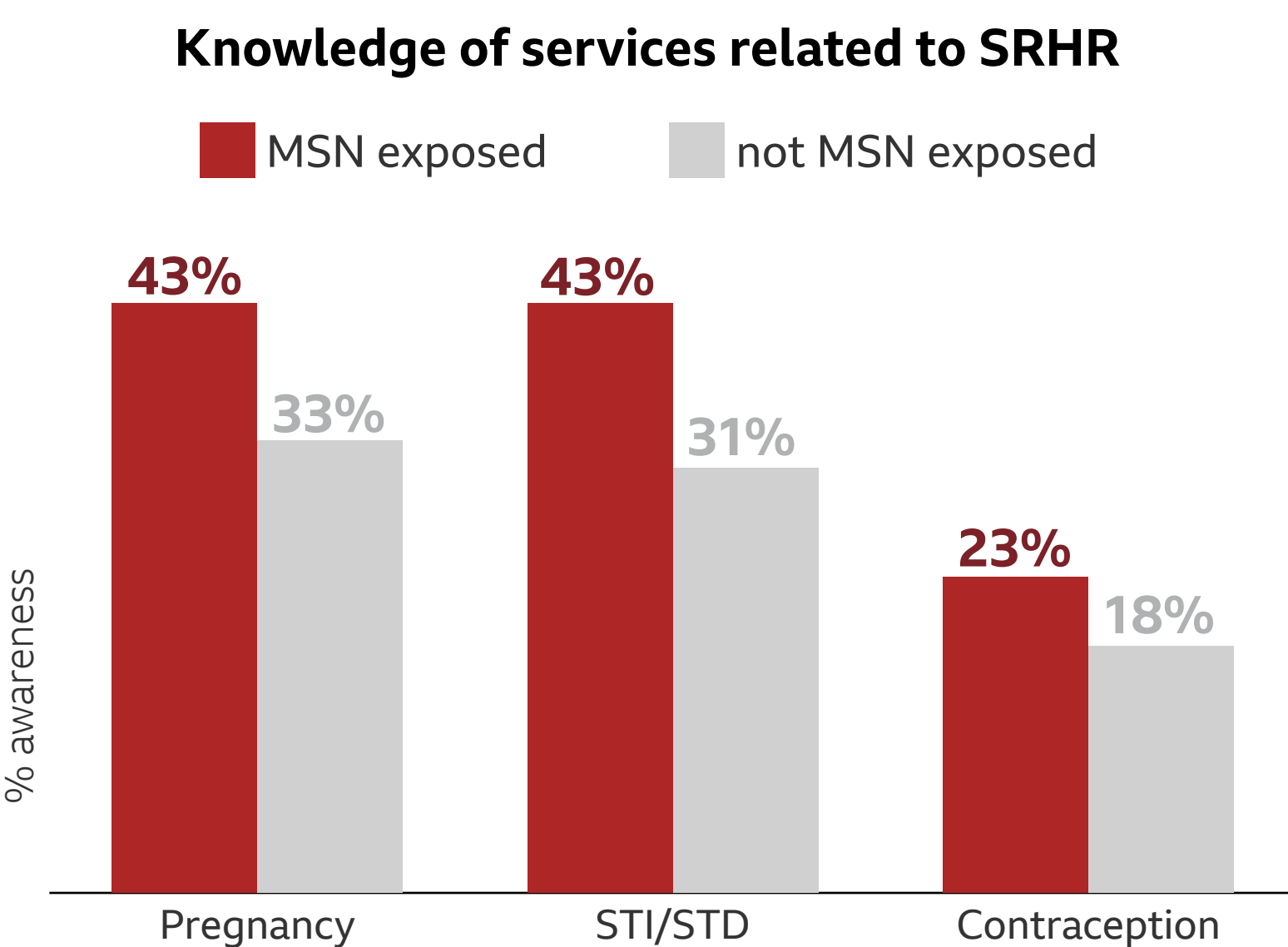
The impact

Knowledge

Ma Shet Ne audiences were 1.5 times more likely to report knowledge of where to access free SHRH services, compared with non-audiences.

“ I share when a post might be useful and educational for others.

— Male youth

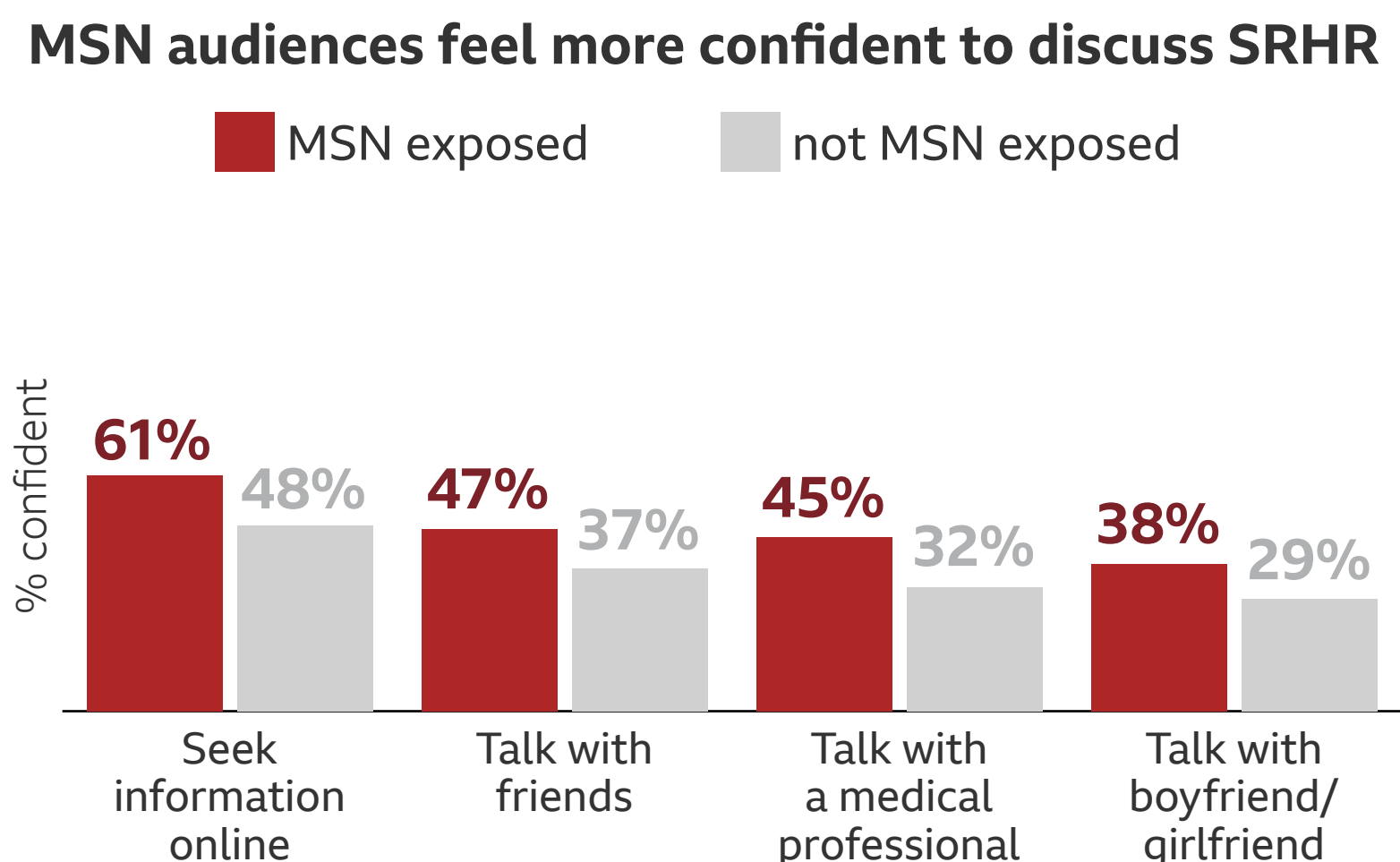


Discussion

Ma Shet Ne audiences were significantly more confident than non-audiences to talk about SHRH topics offline -with medical professionals, friends and partners, even when controlling for other confounding variables. Young women were still more shy discussing topics and seeking information compared to young men.

“ Because people asked openly in the Q&A, I started talking about sex and reproductive health.

— Female youth

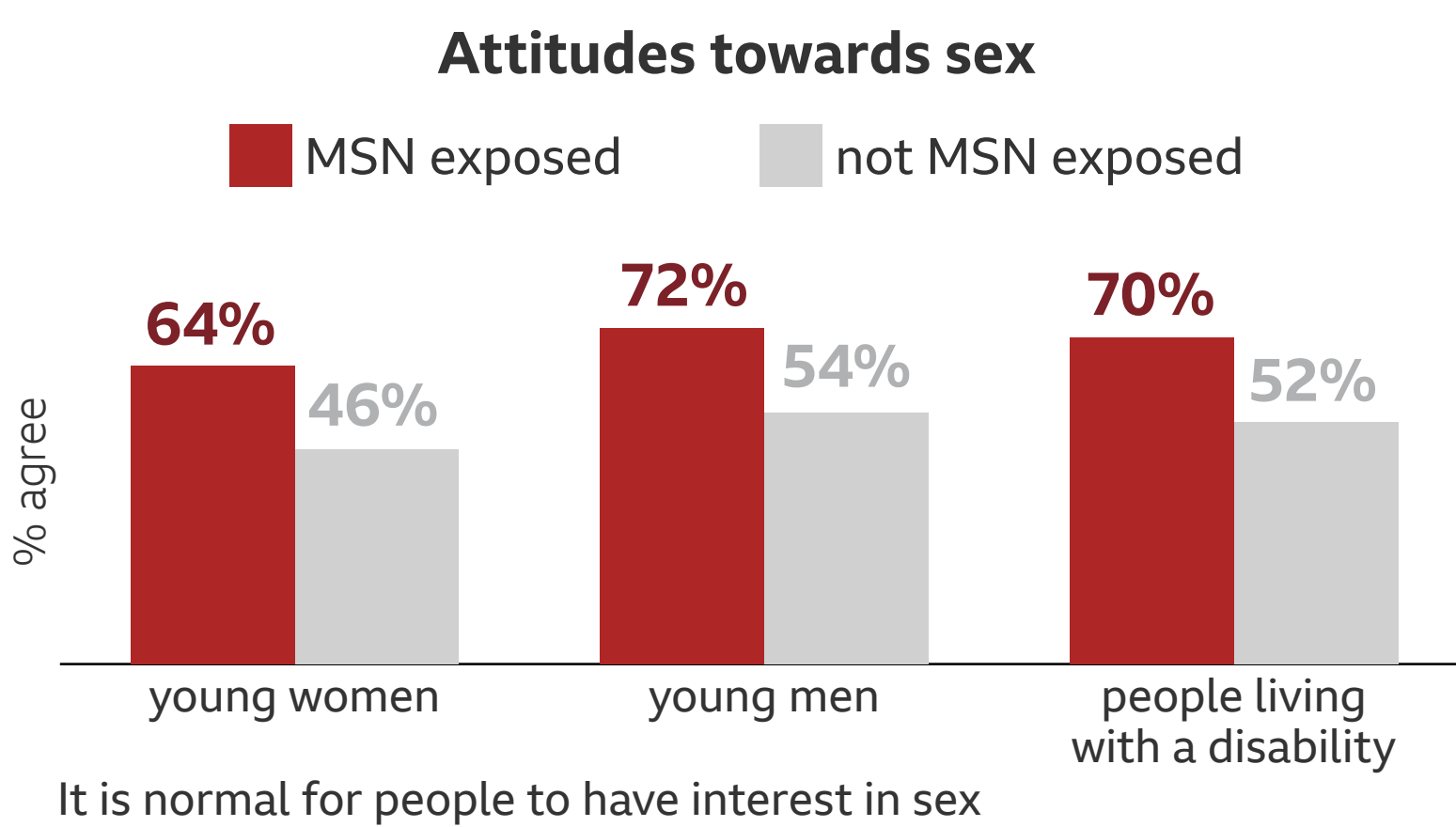


Attitudes

Logistic regression found that *Ma Shet Ne* audiences were twice as likely than non-exposed youth to agree it was normal for young men and women to be interested in sex and 2.1 times more likely to agree it was normal for young people living with a disability to be interested in sex.

“ I used to be a conservative who believed that premarital sex was bad for women. My views changed as I thought thoroughly. It is better to tell them to be safe rather than to stop. There's no need to be shy.

— Female youth



Implications

- ▶ The successes to date of the *Ma Shet Ne* brand shows the gap it fills in providing young people in Yangon and social media users in the country, including young people in ethnic states, with accessible informative entertaining information on SRHR.
- ▶ The content worked well when it engaged young people on taboo topics such as menstruation and contraception.
- ▶ Using engaging creative devices relevant for the digital world such as the chatbot and engaging social media influencers and celebrities also worked well.



- ▶ The project was able to achieve its outcomes in supporting young people's knowledge of SRHR and services, encouraging discussion and challenging negative attitudes.
- ▶ However, shame remains a barrier for many young people and there is scope to improve the ability to have open, balanced discussion online about SRHR topics – particularly for women.
- ▶ The second phase of the project is currently running until 2023 and aims to continue tackling the deep-rooted shame and stigma in discussing SRHR. It also aims to reach young people across Myanmar – especially those in ethnic states and regions, and young people living with a disability.

1) BBC Media Action (2021) Myanmar Media Landscape Study – nationally representative of the population aged 15+ years
2) Access to Health is a multi-donor fund that began operation in January 2019 to support health in Myanmar between 2019 and 2023.
3) <https://www.facebook.com/BBCMediaActionMSN/>
4) 67% of women reported using social media compared to 82% of men in a nationally representative survey of population ages 18+ in Myanmar (BBC Media Action, 2021)