

RiT2.0 LEBANON RUMOR BULLETIN

1 to 30 NOVEMBER 2021

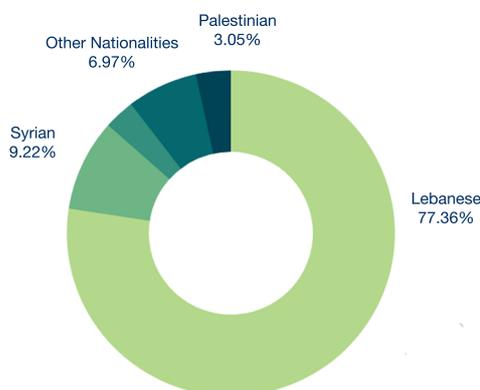
INTRODUCTION TO ROOTED IN TRUST

Rooted in Trust (RiT) is a USAID Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs (BHA)-funded project run by Internews to support humanitarian and public health agencies combat and manage the spread of rumors and misinformation about COVID-19. The first chapter (RiT1) ran from October 2020 to February 2021 with more than 2774 rumors collected in Lebanon. (1) The project was recently renewed in September 2021 with its second chapter (RiT2.0) expected to run until end of 2022.

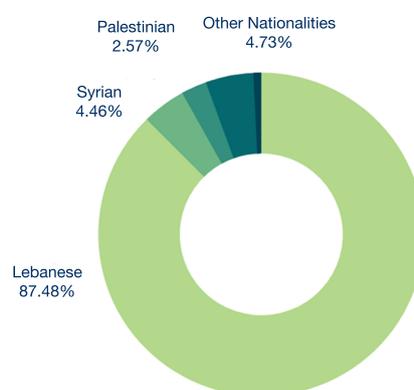
In this bulletin, Internews profiles commonly occurring rumors across social media sites in Lebanon between 1 and 30 November 2021. Featured rumors focus on the spread of COVID-19, prevention methods, vaccine development and manufacturing, in addition to religious beliefs surrounding COVID-19. Data was collected from Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram pages, groups, and accounts that have a relatively high user engagement.

COVID-19 SITUATION & SOCIO-ECONOMIC CONTEXT IN LEBANON

Since January 2020, there have been 668,605 positive cases of COVID-19 in Lebanon in addition to 8,716 deaths. (2) The number of vaccinated has reached 372,063, assuming every person needs 2 doses, that's enough to have vaccinated about 27% of the country's population. (3) The Ministry of Public Health (MOPH)'s target is to reach 40% of the population by end of 2021. Meanwhile, Syrian refugees represent only 4.46% of those who received at least one vaccine dose, while other non-Lebanese – including migrant workers and Palestinian refugees – represent only 7.3%. (4) The MOPH recently introduced a third booster shot for health workers and those above 60 years of age.



Vaccine Doses Registration per Nationality
IMPACT Open Data for Lebanon



Vaccine Doses Administered by Nationality
IMPACT Open Data for Lebanon

According to UN figures, the poverty rate in Lebanon has nearly doubled from 42% in 2019, to 82% in 2021 with 9 out of 10 refugees living in poverty. (5) Due to the absence of any formal refugee camps, Syrians are scattered throughout urban and rural communities in overcrowded and often unsanitary conditions. Migrant workers are also bearing the brunt of the economic crisis and COVID-19 pandemic which have rendered them much more vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. Amid growing socio-economic hardship, COVID-19 is no longer in the headlines, even though the virus continues to spread rapidly while vaccine acceptance remains low.

WHAT ARE PEOPLE SAYING

COVID-19 Spread & Prevention:



“Black tea slows down COVID-19’s progress in the body. Japanese scientists claim that slowly drinking black tea can stop the virus from functioning for 2 minutes in the saliva. The more saturated the tea the better it is to combat the virus.”

Facebook, Arabic, 36 likes
5 November 2021



“A certain local school is harboring a large number of infected students.”

Facebook, Arabic, 100 likes
16 November 2021

Why does it matter

COVID-19 cases continue to rise at an alarming rate in Lebanon despite the ongoing vaccination campaign and the introduction of the third booster shot for health workers and those above 60 years of age. This has resulted in the continuous circulation of rumors on social media (particularly through Facebook and WhatsApp) about prevention methods and remedies such as the consumption of black tea, sugary and hot drinks.

Why does it matter?



Growing concerns have also been noticed when it comes to the spread of COVID-19 in schools as children recently returned to their classrooms this fall following a whole year of online learning. This has increased the local communities' fears regarding a potential third wave of the virus, particularly as the Delta variant was rumored to affect children's health. Meanwhile, the MOPH has launched mobile vaccination campaigns in schools across the country which has also triggered new waves of rumors that are being shared among parents' groups on social media who are known to hold anti-vaccine views.

COVID-19 Vaccine Development & Manufacturing:



"A new COVID-19 vaccine has been discovered in South Lebanon which is 100% effective."

Facebook, Arabic, 100 likes

15 November 2021

Why does it matter?



Local COVID-19 development and manufacturing was also a prominent theme of the recent rumor collection. Rumors stated that the Lebanese government had started locally producing vaccines, and that residents of al Zahrani in South Lebanon had found a cure for COVID-19, while other rumors also stated that the government would be charging 100 USD for every

administered vaccine. This is likely linked to the fact that many residents of Lebanon have been very skeptical about the vaccine's overall efficiency, often noting the risk of side effects and death, while also questioning its origins and authenticity since all available vaccines in the country are imported from various companies and countries across the world.

COVID-19 Treatment and Cure:



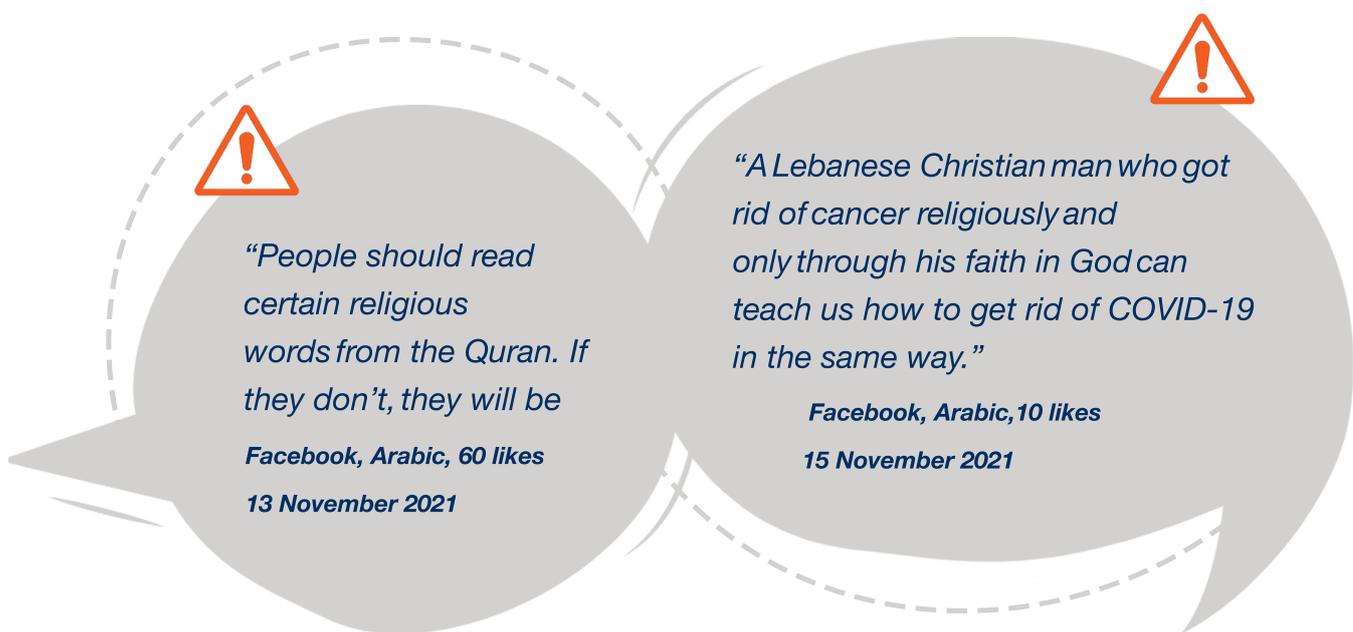
In an interview with Sky News, a US medical doctor praises the drug "Ivermectin" which he described as a "miracle drug" to treat Coronavirus in front of the US Congress. Youtube video, Arabic, 15 likes, 8 shares

23 November 2021

Why does it matter?

Speculations over the use of home remedies and certain medications continue to circulate over social media. Some of these rumors are even spread by doctors and healthcare professionals themselves. Ivermectin is a medication used to treat parasite infestations such as head lice. A study done in vitro showed that this medication might have the ability to inhibit the replication of the COVID-19 virus. However, this has not yet been proven nor approved and its side effects remain unknown. These rumors provide people with a false sense of security, especially if they choose to self-medicate or opt for home remedies instead of seeking hospital treatment for COVID-19 or even getting vaccinated. (6)

■ Religious Beliefs Linked to COVID-19



Why does it matter?

Rumors stemming from religious actors also continued to be prevalent on social media, characterizing COVID-19 as a non-scientific virus sent from God to punish people for their sins. The rumors also claim that strong religious beliefs and practices can cure the virus. This could be linked to the fact that the local population is increasingly turning to religious practices and prayers to find some relief during the tough economic period that Lebanon is enduring.

What are the Facts



For fact checked information about the COVID-19 vaccine please read the official FAQ published by the MOPH, MOI, WHO and UNICEF. (7)

Social media platforms – such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp – allow anyone to publish their thoughts or share their stories with the world. This has led to a flood of fake news and the spread of rumors and misinformation, which is why one should always take into consideration the below when reading news or any type of information on social media:

- ✓ Identify the news outlet
- ✓ Check if other official local or international news outlets are reporting on the same story
- ✓ Double check if the WHO or MOPH have corroborated the information
- ✓ Compare the information presented across different sources to ensure the story is based on scientific facts
- ✓ Do not rely solely on Facebook groups, Twitter accounts or WhatsApp groups for news on COVID-19. Instead, make sure any news you hear on social media is confirmed by trusted sources such as the WHO
- ✓ Keep in mind that videos and photos can be manipulated
- ✓ Check the date and origin of the story to identify whether it is still valid

How Do We Define Risk at Internews



Risk is measured by Rooted In Trust (RiT) data analysts, information managers, and social media monitors based on a range of factors including:

- a) Cultural relevancy
- b) Timing
- c)  Community engagement
- d) The believability of a rumor, and most importantly
- e) The potential negative impact a rumor may have on the health, well-being, and safety of local communities or service providers.

High Risk

A rumor that is very likely to be believed among the larger community with potentially severe impacts resulting in serious harm to an individual or group such as inciting violence or creating widespread fear or panic. High risk rumors may encourage avoidance of testing and treatment or harm towards health workers and other service providers.

Medium Risk

A rumor that has the potential to be believed among the larger community which poses moderate negative impacts to a community or an individual's health, well-being, or safety. Medium risk rumors may have a moderate impact on health-seeking behaviors.

Low Risk

A rumor that is either unlikely to be believed among the community or which would cause minimal negative repercussions.

CONTACT US



For more information, or to submit rumors, please contact Internews' Lebanon RiT Project Manager (emouawad@internews.org) and/or Program Officer (rajami@internews.org).

SOURCES

- (1) <https://internews.org/resource/rooted-trust-rumor-bulletins-lebanon/>
- (2) <https://covid19.who.int/region/emro/country/lb>
- (3) <https://impact.gov.lb/home?dashboardName=vaccine>
- (4) <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2021/05/01/lebanon-sinking-into-one-of-the-most-severe-global-crises-episodes>
- (5) <https://news.un.org/en/story/2021/09/1099102>
- (6) <https://www.pharmaceutical-technology.com/comment/ivermectin-covid-19-treatment-fda/>
- (7) <https://www.moph.gov.lb/userfiles/files/Prevention/COVID-19%20Vaccine/COVID-19VaccineFAQ-EN.pdf>