THE LEBANESE CONTEXT
In Lebanon, the COVID-19 pandemic is happening alongside many other crises.
50% INTO POVERTY
50% INTO POVERTY | HYPER-INFLATION
50% INTO POVERTY

HYPER-INFLATION

CAPITAL CONTROL
First confirmed COVID-19 case
Feb 21
First confirmed COVID-19 case  
Feb 21

Strict measures by government
First confirmed COVID-19 case: Feb 21
Strict measures by government
Back to protesting
First confirmed COVID-19 case: Feb 21
Strict measures by government
Back to protesting
Reopening
First confirmed COVID-19 case: Feb 21
Strict measures by government
Back to protesting
Reopening
Blast
1500-2000 COVID-19 cases/day
1500-2000 COVID-19 cases/day

Population: 6.8 million
FAITH IN GOVERNMENT DECLINING
Faith in Government Declining  

Fatigue Rising
FAITH IN GOVERNMENT DECLINING

FATIGUE RISING

ANXIETIES GROWING
How are people accessing and making sense of information related to COVID?
The media landscape in Lebanon is muddied with misinformation, misleading information, and the willful lack of information.
Traditional Media Outlets
Traditional Media Outlets ↔ Political Parties
Social media also contribute to an ecosystem of information pollution.
What does the information landscape look like and how does it inform people’s behaviors?
1. How Lebanese citizens access information about COVID-19

2. Perceptions and behaviors of Lebanese citizens towards COVID-19
DESK REVIEW

385 PHONE SURVEYS

20 INTERVIEWS

ONLINE SURVEY (ongoing)
There is a significant reliance on TV and social media to get information.

- The use of an information channel is not a reflection of trust in the information.
- There is a general acknowledgement that much of the information shared by social media groups can be categorized as misinformation and fake news.
Conspiracy, incomplete information, false information, and no fact-checking.

More than half of survey participants see COVID-19 as “just another flu” and a hoax.

“[...] People have been living in a conspiracy mindset for a very long time and have mixed the political issues with economic and health issues. They (people) accuse the Government of increasing numbers so that they isolate the villages and stop the people from participating in the demonstrations. They (people) have also been saying that the Government is giving money to each reported positive case.”

“The awareness that we are talking about is not related to information. The information now is known from A to Z, but people are not convinced. They think this is a conspiracy, an imperialist Zionist conspiracy.”
Trust in information sources is built based on personal judgment; not fact-checking.

➔ If a source of information confirms people’s bias, then they trust it.
➔ Most respondents rely on their “common sense” or their self-constructed reality.

90% of people do not fact-check. For example, if someone did a test in a public hospital and it turns out to be positive, they don’t believe it. Then they will do a test in a private hospital and it turns out to be negative. They don’t ask why this happened. They directly say that the results from the public hospital are wrong and they start with the conspiracy theory.

I don’t always fact check. I use my common sense to see whether this information is true or not. For example, if the information is posted by someone I know and trust and think highly of, then the information should be true. So who sends the information makes a difference to me.
Factors for a self-constructed reality

- Lack of fact-checking capacity and tools
- Need for a sense of control
- Ambiguity of COVID-19
- Inconsistency and low-quality of COVID-19 information*
- Inconsistency of the decisions of the Lebanese Government
- Need to find solutions for day-to-day problems

People want to live. They create their own reality based on the level of information they have and based on what makes sense to them. This is why science is not really the most important thing to the people. They will not get the science, they need something that makes them feel that they can understand and something that they based their day-to-day functions on.

* Only 17% of participants described the information as of high quality, and 20% described it as highly consistent.
The lack of trust in the Lebanese Government is one of the main factors that shapes the perceptions and behaviors of survey participants.

Lack of trust in the severity of the COVID-19 situation in Lebanon

→ Only 38% of participants believe that statistics reported by the MoPH are accurate, while most believe they are either over- or underreported with major geographic difference.

→ In Beirut, 42% perceive the statistics to be underreported, while participants in Bekaa, Nabatieh, and North Lebanon state that it is overreported (68%, 64%, 55%).

Counts reported by the Ministry on TV do not make sense to me. I don’t believe that we have over a thousand cases every day. I don’t know anyone who has COVID. People around me don’t know anyone.
The lack of trust in the Lebanese Government is one of the main factors that shapes the perceptions and behaviors of survey participants.

Lack of trust in the severity of the COVID-19 situation in Lebanon

- Participants believe that government actions are meant to hinder people from mobilizing and demonstrating against the other economic and political priorities.

“...

The government is bombarding people with restrictions and messages of what they need to do without explaining what is behind these measures. This is happening at a time when the people already have low trust in the Government. In this situation, people will turn to their natural state of doubt and go to the easy option of not adhering and not listening.

“...

A lot of people don’t take this seriously. They say this is a made-up game so that people don’t demonstrate and go to the streets. They say they don’t know anyone who got sick.”
The lack of trust in the Lebanese Government is one of the main factors that shapes the perceptions and behaviors of survey participants.

Lack of trust in the crisis management decisions and implementation

➔ Only 28% of survey respondents understand the strategy of the Government, with participants in Akkar (23-29 y-o) showing the lowest level of understanding.

➔ Only 9% of survey respondents state that they trust the politicians to handle COVID-19.

➔ Only 52% state that they fully agree that medical practitioners understand COVID-19.

“The two-week shutdown that was imposed after the explosion was very different for me. I did not trust the need for this measure and I did not abide by it, I thought it was not necessary and it was not well studied before being imposed. We were already in a very bad situation after the explosion. The evidence is that the cases didn’t decrease after the two-week shut down. What I know is that the explosion made a huge difference in my decisions and my behavior.”

“[...] the decisions of the Government were not clear. Moreover, the changes in the decisions, and lack of enforcement of the measures made people question the ability to exercise their authority. We as citizens, we like to defy authority. Based on this people stopped complying with the measures.”
The lack of trust in the Lebanese Government is one of the main factors that shapes the perceptions and behaviors of survey participants.

*Lack of trust in the enforcement measures*

➔ Participants believe that the Government's enforcement approaches are inadequate.

➔ Factors related to favoritism, political agenda, or lack of accountability are reported as main reasons of mistrust.

➔ Respondents report inconsistency in the treatment of individuals and communities in Lebanon, and the perception of unfairness appears to impact the behavior of people.

“If people see that the municipal police is allowing a shop to open but not the others, how will they trust the Government? People have lost trust in the Government, and it is very hard to regain trust. They also have low trust in Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), because each CSO is related to someone in the government.”

“There were many situations when we notified the security forces about weddings that are happening. They, however, often do nothing.”

“I (Head of Union of Municipalities) have authority. I can punish people who are organizing wedding and such things, I can issue a “Mahdar” with a 6 million L.L fee and 6 months in jail, but I don’t do this. The maximum I can do it to issue a warning. You know our region.”
The economic situation in the country is the top priority.

- High levels of unemployment, hyperinflation, and depreciation of the Lebanese Pound significantly shape perceptions and behaviors towards COVID-19.

- Respondents report that they are having to choose between protecting themselves from COVID-19 and generate income for their families.

“I prefer to die from COVID-19 and not let my family die from hunger.”
Perceptions and behaviors of individuals are influenced by several factors at the individual, environmental, and policy levels.
The perceptions and practices of respondents towards COVID-19 and its information landscape are not influenced only by health considerations.

COVID-19 seems to be strongly linked to political and economic considerations that respondents believe have a direct impact on their daily life.
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COVID-19 seems to be strongly linked to political and economic considerations that respondents believe have a direct impact on their daily life.

Our research showed major differences in the results across different Governorates and age groups.

A one-size-fits-all approach will not work for any behavioral interventions in Lebanon.
GUIDING FRAMEWORK

ECONOMIC SITUATION

REGION/SPECIFIC CONTEXT

PERCEPTION + TRUST IN THE GOVERNMENT

THE INFORMATION LANDSCAPE

PERCEPTIONS OF COVID-19

BEHAVIORS AROUND COVID-19
MOVING FORWARD
Open up survey to larger public to validate and have a better understanding
Open up survey to larger public to validate and have a better understanding

Experiment with a chatbot as source of information
Hi
10:14 AM

Members of your household do you come in contact with every week? Please reply using numerals (0, 1, 2, 3...)

0
10:14 AM

How many times do you go to a store or the supermarket every week?
2
10:14 AM

How many times do you go to a coffee shop or a restaurant every week?
2
10:14 AM

How many times do you hang out with small groups (1 to 5) of friends every week?
2
10:14 AM

How many times do you hang out with larger groups (6 to 10) of friends every week?

The total number of people you come in contact with every week and can contract the Coronavirus from is 566.

Breakdown:
Direct contact with 36
Indirect contact with 530

Do you want to know more?
Yes
10:14 AM

Tips to stay free:

- Wear your mask correctly (over nose + mouth) and consistently
- Wash your hands with soap or sanitize them regularly
- Shorten the length of your gatherings to less than one hour
- Make sure the spaces you frequent are well ventilated: without ventilation, droplets remain suspended in the air for hours, becoming increasingly concentrated as time goes by
- Speak quietly: shouting and singing in indoor, poorly ventilated spaces over a prolonged period of time also increases the risk of infection.
Open up survey to larger public to validate and have a better understanding.

Experiment with a chatbot as source of information.

Make results accessible.
COVID-19 in Lebanon: Perceptions and Behaviors

What do people think about COVID-19?

- 81% of people believe COVID-19 is a serious disease.
- 74% of people believe COVID-19 will not influence their daily activities.
- 55% of people believe COVID-19 is just another type of cold or flu.

What do people know about COVID-19?

- 72% know COVID-19 is caused by the new coronavirus, SARS-CoV-2.
- 60% know that COVID-19 is a disease that spreads between people.
- 54% know that prevention methods include wearing a mask, washing hands, keeping a distance, and avoiding gatherings.

COVID-19 is just another type of cold or flu.

- Know that COVID-19 is here and I know it will always stay. Maybe I got used to the fact that it exists or maybe my priorities are different. Now the fear that used to prevent me from seeing my parents is no longer there. So, now I am going out, I am working from the office, and I am going to see my parents.

57% of people believe COVID-19 is a hoax or conspiracy intended to control people.

- People have been living in a conspiracy mindset for a very long time and have mixed the political issues with economic and health issues.

Do people trust the Lebanese government to handle COVID-19?

- Trust in politicians to handle COVID-19: 9%, 32%, 59% in different governorates.
- Understanding of the government’s response plan for COVID-19: 30%, 41%, 29% in different governorates.

The government is bombarding people with restrictions and messages of what they need to do without explaining the reasoning behind these measures. This is happening at a time when the people already have low trust in the Government. In this situation, people will turn to their natural state of doubt and go to the easy option of not adhering and not listening.
### What do people know about COVID-19?

#### Cited Ways in which COVID-19 Spreads

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Way</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Droplets of affected person</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surfaces touched by affected person</td>
<td>58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close contact with people</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bad hygiene</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Touching coins and banknotes</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stool (e.g. in public toilets)</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goods imported from China</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot name any</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air conditioning (AC)</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Cited COVID-19 Symptoms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symptom</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fever</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dry cough</td>
<td>60%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Difficulty in breathing</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of appetite</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Body aches</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sneezing</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of taste and smell</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loss of appetite</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stuffy nose</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Runny nose</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cannot name any</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vomiting</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Cited COVID-19 Prevention Methods

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Masks</td>
<td>81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Handwashing</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical distance</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social distancing</td>
<td>39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of crowded places</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of touching face</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of food and drink</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of use of sharing</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of contact</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of practice</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of lifestyle</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avoidance of travel</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Are government COVID-19 infection statistics accurate?

- Accurate: 38%
- Overreported: 38%
- Underreported: 24%

### What channels people received their COVID-19 information from?

#### Channels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Channel</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instagram</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MoPH Website</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Channels people trust for information on COVID-19

#### Channels Cited as Trustworthy

- MoPH Website: 72%
- Local TV: 60%
- International TV: 36%
- Conversations: 22%
- Public Billboards: 22%
- COVID Websites: 19%

### What do people think of the quantity, quality, and consistency of COVID-19 information?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantity in Media</th>
<th>Quantity w/ Friends/Family</th>
<th>Quality</th>
<th>Consistency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>Too much</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>Enough</td>
<td>Acceptable</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>Not enough</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Too much: 44%
- Enough: 41%
- Not enough: 13%
THANK YOU!

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