Which Platform Can Best Connect AMEL's Activist Network?

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Key Questions

As The AMEL Project grows its activist network across Africa and the Middle East, they are seeking a social networking platform that can keep everyone connected. This platform must be social enough to generate relationships for people who can't meet in person, but secure enough to keep these activists safe.

- What are the activists' needs and expectations for a social network?
- Which networks provide a social experience that is also secure?
- What are the factors that motivate activists to continue to engage on a social network?
- Which network or strategy should AMEL employ to keep their activists connected and safe?

Three Key Methods Used to Assess Best Network

Surveys

- We conducted a pre-survey of the AMEL activists to understand their pre-existing preferences and needs for a social network
- We conducted a post-experiment survey to learn if any of the networks tested are viable for the future

Vetting Various Networks

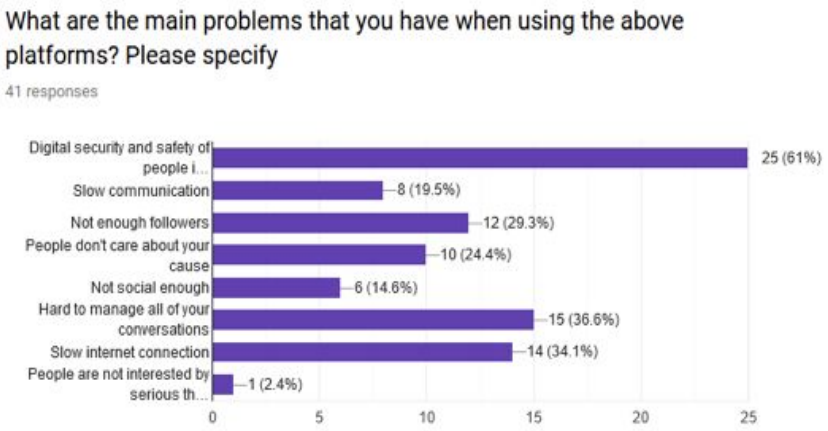
- We vetted 11 different social networks in order to determine which networks to use for our experiment
- 8 of these networks were deemed unusable
- We ran an experiment with the remaining 3 networks

Controlled Experiment

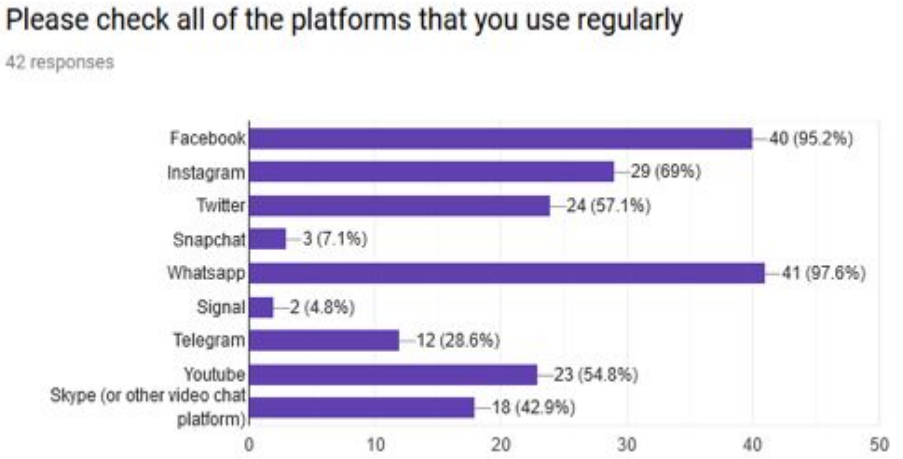
- For two weeks, we divided 100 AMEL activists into three different social networks and observed their interactions
- Each social network was moderated, with the same questions being posed to each group to encourage engagement

Pre-Survey

They said digital security was crucial



But few used Signal, the most secure platform



Vetting Various Networks

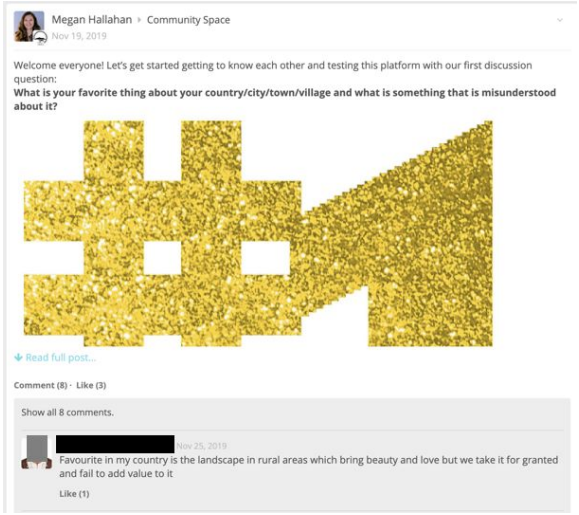
- Within a 6-person team of MIT and AMEL participants, we tested and vetted 11 different prospective platforms for the AMEL activists
- 8 of those platforms were ruled unusable or uninteresting to the activists
- We then ran an experiement with the other 3 platforms

	HumHub	Mattermost	Nextcloud		Diaspora	Friendica	Hubzilla	Movim	Pleroma		Keybase	Retroshare	Facebook
File management	✓		✓				✓				✓	✓	✓
Collaborative editing	✓		✓										
Calendaring	✓		✓			✓	✓						✓
Chat	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Mapping			✓										✓
Boards/posts	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓
Public access	✓				✓	✓	✓	✓	✓				✓
Audio/video calling		✓	✓					✓				✓	✓
Discovery					✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓
Plugins	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓					✓	✓
		Dedicated					Federated					Other	

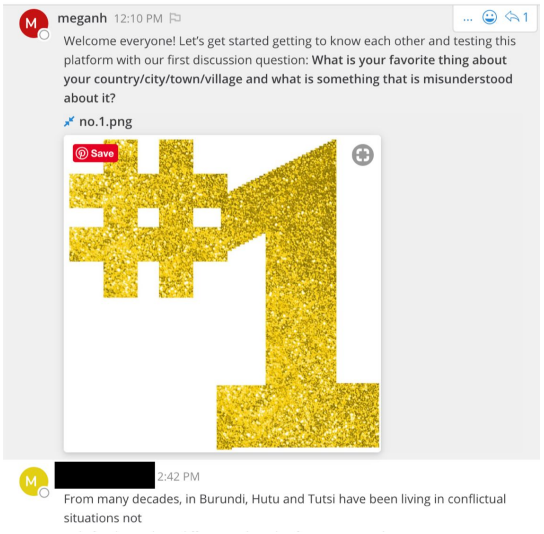
Controlled Experiment

Facebook

AMEL Hub



Mattermost



Controlled Experiment

Facebook	AMEL Hub	Mattermost
20 Participants	**21** Participants	**20** Participants
31 Comments from **13** participants	**29** Comments from 10 participants	**10** comments from **8** participants
34 likes on posts/comments	**16** likes on posts/comments	**2** likes on posts/comments
0 original posts after the moderation period	**0 original posts** after the moderation period	**0 original posts** after the moderation period
Posts seen by almost all participants	**1** Original post (asking for help downloading the app)	**15** welcome posts from 15 people

Post-Survey Results

Facebook	AMEL Hub	Mattermost
- **87%** (⅞) Would Use This Platform	- **100%** (6/6) Would Use This Platform	- **50%** (2/4) Would Use This Platform
- **75%** (6/8) Connected Privately with a fellow activist on the network	- **16%** (⅛) Connected Privately with a fellow activist on the network	- **25%** (1/4) Connected Privately with a fellow activist on the network
- Biggest Issue: **Security**	- Biggest Issue: **Log-in Issues**	- Biggest Issue: **UI/Style**
- Biggest Pro: **Ease of access**	- Biggest pro: **Simple, Private & Less “noise” than Facebook**	- Biggest pro: **Easy to use**

Conclusion & Next Steps

- **Security** is a goal, but not a deal-breaker for AMEL's activists
- **Moderation** is necessary to maintain engagement regardless of which platform AMEL chooses
- **AmelHub is exciting**, but will need improvements in order to work for everyone (e.g., easier login, iOS, group chat functionality, better sharing/liking options)
- **Facebook** allows for the greatest amount of **1-on-1 engagement** outside of the social network, which may be important for AMEL
- **Next Steps:** AMEL should continue to test these platforms moderated vs. unmoderated for a few more weeks before making its final decision