Dima Sadek and the Shrinking Space
As Large as a Prison Cell

Author: Jad Safwan
September 2023
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentiment Analysis</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter Statistics</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

On July 10, 2023, Judge Rosine Hojeili handed journalist Dima Sadek a one-year prison sentence in response to a lawsuit filed against her by the Free Patriotic Movement (FPM), represented by its president, MP Gebran Bassil. The charges against her include incitement of strife, libel, and defamation. This development – a prison sentence for a tweet – raises grave concerns and poses a threat to journalistic freedom.

The lawsuit stems from a tweet posted by Sadek on February 7, 2020, in which she referred to the FPM as “Nazi.” This came after an alleged violent incident involving FPM supporters and a young man named Zakaria al-Masry under the Fouad Chehab bridge in Jounieh. Sadek’s tweet read, “A new attack by the Nazi movement. They hit him on the head and threw him into the sewers, telling him that Aoun is a crown on top of your head and of Tripoli’s.” Less than an hour after tweeting this message, Sadek deleted the post, expressing doubts as to the authenticity of the incident.

This occurred amid divisive sectarian and regional tensions, pitting the FPM against participants in the October 17, 2019 uprising.

It is worth noting that the Press Law prohibits the imprisonment of journalists on such grounds. However, the plaintiff bypassed this protection by resorting to the Criminal Court. The FPM argued that the offense was not published in a printed medium and that the electronic publication – in this case a tweet – does not fall under Sadek’s journalistic work. Sadek intends to appeal the ruling with the assistance of her attorney, Diala Shehadeh.

SKF monitored the social media reactions in Lebanon regarding this matter. The goal is to assess the stance of Lebanese public opinion on key freedom of expression debates. To ensure accuracy and efficiency in the monitoring process, SKF has partnered with a data service provider, Reputell, which has access to large amounts of data and the software to sort through it for relevant content. This approach ensures a safer understanding of whether the online discourse around the case study was accurately captured and how it played out. It is important to clarify that this study does not aim to comprehensively cover the entire digital landscape. Instead, it focuses on highlighting prominent participants, the platforms used, and potential patterns in a true-to-life manner. This report is the fifth in a series that employs such technology to provide a clearer understanding of discussions within the Lebanese online sphere about controversial freedom of expression topics.
Moniroring Period: July 11 – July 24, 2023

The keywords fed into the machine learning monitoring software are as follows:

Dima Sadek  
Judge Rosine Hojeij  
Diala Shehadeh  
Gebran Bassil  
FPM  
Free Patriotic Movement  
Nazi  
Zakaria al-Masry  
Walid Raad
Figure 1 presents a gender distribution among Male, Female, and unidentified accounts, revealing a significant predominance of male contributors (72%). In contrast, accounts identifiable as Female constituted a mere 13% of authors. Finally, only 15% of the posting accounts did not exhibit an identifiable gender.

In Figure 2, it is evident that a little more than half of the monitored accounts posted tweets in support of Dima Sadek, while 28% of the accounts expressed opposition to her. The remaining 18% consisted of neutral tweets from accounts that either reported on the events or sought further details about the situation.
وتفق دنيا صادق كابوس جيران ناسيل والثاني من بري أن هذه السيدة تستحق الإعتراف والتقدير بضع لها قلب❤️
@DimaSadik

من قلب الجنوب، نغف وتنضمنك مع شجاعتك وجرجنك، وكلمتك وقلبيك الحريص،
الصادقة #غيار_صادق

@NemerAssaf11

Dani Sadik 😍 @DimaSadik - Jul 11
Figure 3: Lebanese Forces and Kataeb supporters standing by Dima Sadek in their posts
In Figure 3, it is evident that Kataeb and the Lebanese Forces (LF) emerged as key supporters of Dima Sadek. These parties focused their tweets on criticizing the FPM, particularly its leader Gebran Bassil, who initiated the legal action against Sadek. Additionally, Hezbollah and the Amal Movement, significant political opponents of Sadek, faced criticism for enabling such encroachments on freedom of expression. While Kataeb and LF are aligning themselves with Sadek on the grounds of human rights, it is important to acknowledge the role of political expediency in this context.

Figure 4 illustrates a convergence of both traditional and alternative media outlets, uniting in solidarity over this incident. They expressed profound concern for the state of freedom of expression in the country. This stance is anticipated to influence the subsequent section of the report concerning “Neutral” tweets, which frequently originate from media outlets and professionals.
Negative tweets predominantly focus on portraying Dima Sadek as profoundly guilty, often exaggerating the gravity of her alleged “offenses” to align with a pro-Hezbollah/Amal/FPM political narrative. This trend is visibly evident in the tweets depicted in Figure 5 below. Furthermore, FPM supporters are celebrating the verdict as a triumph. They rationalize the decision as being a favor for others and the common good, as shown in Figure 6. Overall, the strategy employed is relatively straightforward: to keep labeling Dima Sadek’s critique as “hate speech” and incitement to violence, thereby seeking to legitimize the accusations against her through repetitive rhetoric. Ad hominem attacks remain ever present too, as illustrated in Figure 7. One tweet alleges that Sadek is emotionally unaffected by the verdict due to her being “mentally ill” and “immoral,” and that she relishes the attention. Another tweet features a propagated hashtag “#دي_ما_صادق_فيها_شي” (nothing truthful about Dima). The hashtag plays on words, leveraging Dima’s last name, “Sadek,” which means “truthful” in Arabic.
سنة سجنية هي عبارة عن 9 أشهر... كثيرة قليلة على #ديما_صادق!
مفرود بالقليلة 10 سنين مع أشغال شاقة!!
- قذف وذم
- إزدراء أدبيان
- افتراض واتهام جرائم
- تحريض على العنف والقتل
- تهرب عن الطابعية ومناطقية
- تحرير الفضاء
- تحقيق موقع رئيس الجمهورية
- التخلي عن اللبنانيين في الخارج.

 يعني شو بعد نافقد تعمل أكثر من هيك؟!

Figure 5: Negative tweets attacking Dima Sadek
Figure 6: FPM's take on the verdict against Dima Sadek
The proportion of neutral tweets was notably limited in comparison to the other categories. This outcome is unsurprising given the polarized nature of the topic, which has even local media outlets taking distinct positions. With most of the major traditional and alternative outlets holding specific political stances, only a handful of media sources and figures were identified as contributing neutral tweets. A sample of this category is depicted in Figure 8 below.
Prominent Lebanese journalist Dima Sadek was sentenced to one year in prison following a lawsuit by the leader of the Free Patriotic Movement party.

Sadek was accused of "defamation and libel" after she denounced the party for "incitement" and "racism"
A total of 13,989 tweets were monitored. Among those, 2,410 were identified as original content created by the accounts themselves, while 11,579 were retweets – content shared from the original sources. The presence of an average of 4.8 retweets for each tweet underscores both the substantial influence and trust commanded by the authors. It also points to a high level of homogeneity within the networks.

Alternatively, an examination of Figure 10 reveals that out of the overall 1,636 accounts participating in the online discussions, 1,197 were categorized as “Original” creators, while 376 were categorized as “Retweeters.” A third category labeled “Common” encompasses 63 accounts that engaged in both original tweeting and retweeting. On average, each original account posted approximately 2 tweets, while each account designated as a retweeter shared a remarkable 30 tweets. This observation surpasses patterns observed in previous reports. In the context of the broader findings in this study, there is a rationale for interpreting these high retweet volumes as indicative of a coordinated online campaign against Sadek.

This interpretation gains further plausibility upon comparing Figure 9 and Figure 10. It might come as a surprise that in Figure 9, the number of retweets exceeds that of original tweets, whereas in Figure 10, the number of original contributors is greater than that of retweeters. This incongruity suggests a scenario where a relatively limited number individual accounts are frequently retweeting specific posts, potentially contributing to the amplification of certain messages.
Word Cloud and Hashtags

Table 1: Top keywords used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Keyword</th>
<th>Word Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#دي_ما_صادق_فيها_شي</td>
<td>917</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ديماء صادق</td>
<td>883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>صادق</td>
<td>737</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ديماء</td>
<td>680</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DimaSadek</td>
<td>598</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 11: Top keywords used

Table 2: Top hashtags used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hashtag</th>
<th>Number of posts</th>
<th>Contributors (authors)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>#ديما_صادق</td>
<td>810</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#دي_ما_صادق_فيها_شي</td>
<td>696</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#لبنان</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#جبانر</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>#ديما_الوطني</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12: Top hashtags used
In spite of the sentiment analysis charts indicating significant support for Dima Sadek, a noteworthy hashtag – also the top keyword – has been generated by those critical of her. “شيـفـهـاـلـصادـقـفـهـاـشـي” (nothing truthful about Dima), as elucidated in the earlier section of this report, is used to discredit Sadek in a manner that employs ad hominem tactics while supporting the judicial decision against her. Notably, the hashtag table conveys more meaningful insights. The emergence of “الواطـيـهـديـما” (Dima the unethical/immoral) hashtag once again reinforces this negative stance. Cyberarmies, particularly those in Lebanon, have displayed a propensity for employing various hashtags in a highly coordinated and clever manner. Consequently, even hashtags that appear neutral could plausibly align with negative tweets, with the aim of proliferating the campaign across a wider audience. Nonetheless, this concerted effort has not managed to significantly shift the sentiment analysis chart, as depicted in Figure 2 above.
Despite the evident groundswell of support for Dima Sadek, this support remains entwined with specific political factions, often framed through a sectarian lens. Concurrently, the deepening polarization within the country is an alarming concern. Sadek’s opponents are directing their focus on celebrating what they perceive as a collective triumph, not just for themselves but for the entire nation. Amidst the abundance of hashtags, repetitive tweets, and social media statistics, there are discernible indications of a meticulously orchestrated social media campaign. The objective seems clear: to solidify the verdict within the public consciousness as extensively as possible. Furthermore, an enduring undercurrent of animosity persists, guiding public discourse and policies, blatantly disregarding both the legal aspects and the implications for the state of freedom of expression in Lebanon. Collectively, these factors contribute to the rapid erosion of the human rights culture and serve as impediments to any endeavors towards effective nation-building, if such efforts even exist.
With the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands

The contents of this report are the sole responsibility of the Samir Kassir Foundation and can in no way be taken to reflect the views of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.