



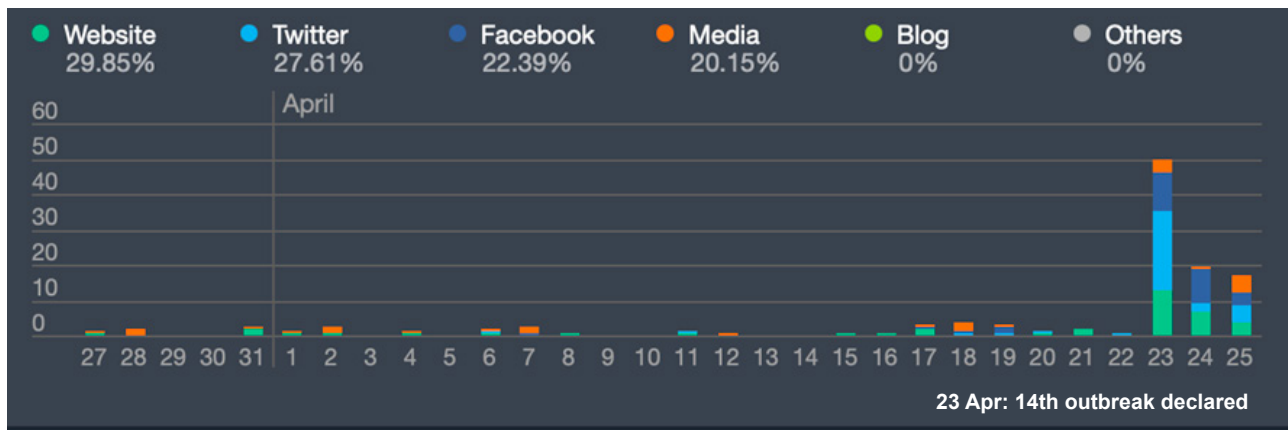
Ebola in Équateur Province

Social Media Monitoring

April 2022

On the 23rd of April 2022, the health ministry of the Democratic Republic of the Congo declared an outbreak of Ebola after a case was confirmed in Mbandaka city in Équateur province. The epidemic is the fourteenth Ebola outbreak in the sub-Saharan African country since 1976, and the third in Équateur province since 2018. The announcement by the health authorities generated a significant spike in online discussions about the event in the DRC, including on social media platforms Twitter and Facebook. **In this brief report we summarise the main takeaways from our long-term monitoring of these social media discussions.**

Number of social media posts originating in the DRC that contained the word 'Ebola' between 27 March to 25 April 2022



First Reactions on Social Media: Disbelief and Widespread Suspicions of Foul Play

Analysis suggests that many Congolese citizens reacted in disbelief at the news of yet another Ebola outbreak in the DRC. Amidst this sense of incredulity, the majority of those posting on social media expressed suspicions that foul play may have been behind it. Several possibilities in this regard tended to be evoked by commentators.¹

Most expressed views that the renewed presence of Ebola in Équateur was either invented or deliberately brought to the region for economic purposes. In this vein, the phrase Ebola business was regularly evoked by commentators as was the case in previous outbreaks in previous years. A commentator, for example, argued that it is:

- *un montage pour se créer encore une fois des financements* ([The new case] is a set-up intended to make money once again).

Another said:

- *Vous cherchez toujours l'argent des l'état congolais il n'y a pas un cas des virus ebola à l'équateur parce que moi même je suis surplace ici* (You are still seeking money from the Congolese state, there's no a single Ebola case in the Équateur because myself I'm here on-site').

A minority also voiced opinions that the outbreak was engineered to prevent elections from being held in Mbandaka, [scheduled to take place in 2023](#). A commentator, for example, posted the following:

- *Opération mbandaka sans élections* (Operation Mbandaka without elections).

Another commented:

- *Arretez de politiser les choses, tout ça c'est pour empêcher les élections dans d'autres entités du pays* (Stop politicising things, all this is to prevent elections from being held in other entities in the country).

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Sentiment towards public health responders

Opinionated commentators tended to mention national Congolese authorities, in particular the Minister of Health as having engineered the outbreak. For example, one social media user said:

- *Ebola business, chaque ministre de la santé en fait toujours son gagne pain* (Ebola business, every Health Minister makes his livelihood from it).

Another argued that:

- *chaque Ministre de la Sante a son Ebola dans son programme* (Every Health Minister has his Ebola in his programme).

Public health authorities were also considered behind the 'Ebola business', such as in this comment, for example:

- *Quel Ebola encore? le Ministre vient de lancer la semaine passée un projet post Ebola et aujourd'hui on parle encore d,Ebola ? Sa devient alors un job pour les spécialistes de santé* (Ebola once more? The Minister has just launched last week a post-Ebola project and today we talk once more about Ebola ? This is thus becoming a job for health specialists).

Searches using the key word 'Ebola' identified very few comments that mentioned the work of non-state health providers. This could indicate that non-state health providers are less associated with the 'Ebola business' and could signal that the trust in the work of health NGOs is somewhat higher than the trust in the Ministry of Health. It is worth noting that one Ebola-related death during the outbreak and the way it appears to have been handled by the Red Cross, contributed to the absence of negative sentiments directed against non-state health providers. In one post, a social media users wrote:

- *Nous confirmons vraiment la presence de l'ebola dans notre province parceque cette fois si nous avons vue une personne morte suite a cette maladie. Et nous remercions la croix rouge pour le travail dans nos differents menanges* (We truly confirm the presence of Ebola in our province because this time we have seen a dead person following this disease. And we thank the Red Cross for the work there are carrying out in our different homes).

Social media users extended suspicions about 'Ebola business' motives to the World Health Organisation:

- *Que du business! No Ebola no job selon les experts de l'OMS...* (Simply business ! No Ebola no job according to the WHO experts).

Recommendations

- The sentiments expressed by social media users in response to the latest Ebola outbreak in the DRC suggests that reputation management remains of high importance for all Ebola responders.
- Communicating an impartial, neutral and independent approach is important in a context where some observers suspect political motives driving a public health programme.
- Being transparent about resources remains crucial in a context where social media users suspect corruption.

¹ All citations below are precise citations. Grammatical errors and spelling mistakes are part of the original posts.