



DRC: Downing of a UN Helicopter

Social Media Monitoring

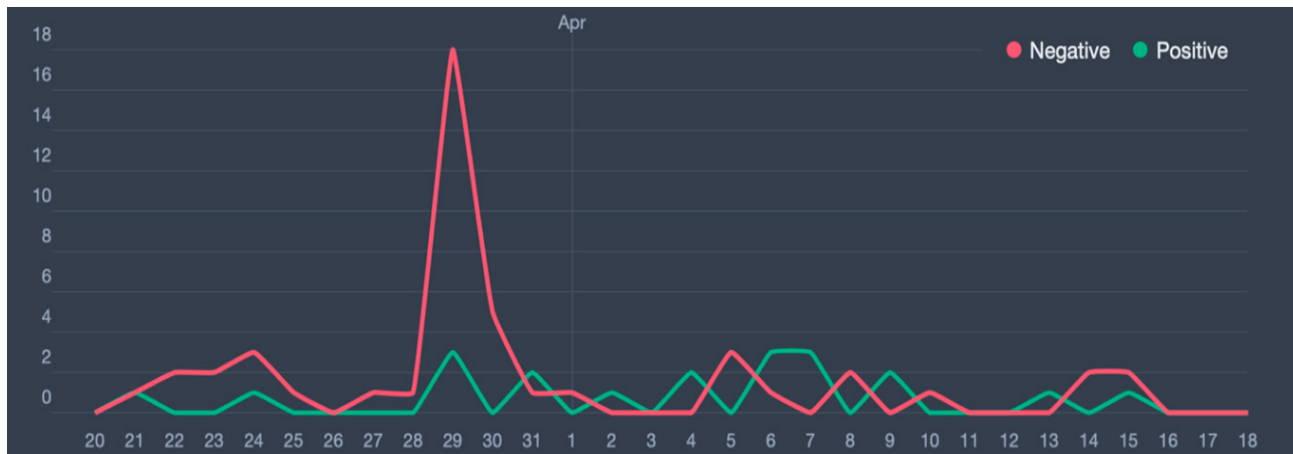
06 May 2022

On 29 March 2022, a PUMA helicopter operated by the United Nations' MONUSCO peace-keeping mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) crashed during a reconnaissance operation in Tshanzu area, located in the northeastern province of North Kivu. Bordering with Uganda and Rwanda, the Tshanzu area had in recent days been the site of clashes between resurgent M23 rebels and the Congolese armed forces (FARDC). This report discusses sentiments towards the UN peace-keeping operation as expressed in social media posts with IP addresses in the DRC.

Social Media Sentiment Analysis

On the day the MONUSCO helicopter was shot down, social media activity containing the word 'MONUSCO' in combination with negative sentiments towards the UN mission spiked. On the 29th of March, 101 000 people in the DRC were estimated to have been reached by negative posts in relation to MONUSCO.

Number of social media posts expressing negative or positive sentiment with IP addresses in the DRC that contained the word 'MONUSCO' between 20 March to 18 April 2022. The graph excludes posts with neutral sentiment that simply reported the event.



A high number of commentators reacted to the event by calling for the UN peace-keeping mission in the DRC to be stopped. Others, in particular those who believe that the M23 group was behind the incident, even praised the rebels for attacking MONUSCO. Posts that expressed support for MONUSCO were rare.

Negative Sentiments Expressed Two Broad Opinions:

- 1. Frustration at perceived lack of results achieved by the mission.** Many social media users in the DRC felt that the peace-keeping mission has been ineffective in policing the increasingly insecure Northeastern regions of the DRC. This included anger that the mission limits its role to 'observing' and 'condemning' warring actors rather than taking action. Many comments referred to MONUSCO personnel as 'adventurers'.
- 2. MONUSCO as being on the side of rebels and linked to Rwanda.** Several social media users equated the perceived inaction on the part of MONUSCO to complicity with the rebels and in effect preventing the Congolese army from acting against Rwanda. This often included the belief that MONUSCO is allied to Rwanda, which is publicly perceived to be close to the M23 rebels. News reports of public affirmations made by the peace-keeping mission to aid the Congolese armed forces in their armed struggle against the rebels was met with allegations of 'masquerading' and 'distracting'.

Typical Examples

- *Il nous faut nous débarrasser de la monusco !* (We need to get rid of monusco!)
- *Merci au groupe M23 pour cc cette action menée contre la monusco.* (Thank you Group M23 for this action taken against monusco).
- *Non m23 non maintien de la monusco en rdc.chaque année on renouvelle le mandat et voilà 20ans sont là. Avec quel bilan?* (No M23 ensures that monusco in the DRC gets its mandate renewed every year and 20 years have past and what has it achieved?).
- *Distraction, depuis que vous êtes ici , quel est vôtre Bilan ? Vous connaissez des aventures qui se passe a l'Est de la RDC. Quel est vôtre missions dans la République démocratique du Congo ?* (Distraction, since you are here, what have you achieved ? You know the adventures that happened in the Eastern DRC. What is your mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo?).
- *La mauvaise politique de la MONUSCO se retourne contre elle-meme ... Qu'elle continue à observer.* (MONUSCO's bad politics are backfiring against the mission...which they continue to observe).
- *Ya-t-il dans le jargon de la @MONUSCO et l'@ONU_fr un autre terme à part "condamne"? Pendant que nos frères meurent à l'Est et en Ituri, cette mission ne fait que faire les déclarations de condamnations sans vraiment nous aider à épargner les vies de nos compatriotes.* (Don't MONSUCO and the UN not have any other words than 'condem'? While our brothers in the East and in Ituri are dying, this mission does nothing but declarations and condemnations without really helping us to save the lives our compatriots).
- *La monusco un acolyte de l armée rwandaise.* (MONUSCO is a henchman for the Rwandan army).

Another example, featuring the head of the MONUSCO mission, is the following,

- *Bintu keita est complice avec leur monusco.* (Bintu Keita is complicit with MONUSCO).

Exception

- *Ceux qui militent pour la paix sont nos héros peu importe qui ils sont. @MONUSCO @LukondeSama.* (Those who are for peace are our heros, no matter who they are).

Conclusion

Opinions on social media are the reflection of a segment of the population that actively uses such platforms. While it remains unclear to what extent the views expressed here reflect the opinions within the wider Congolese public, posts with negative content will reinforce shared sentiments. A single event can lead to a spike in negative to hostile content. Such perceptions need to be acknowledged within the wider aid sector.

Recommendations For Aid Agencies

- Clear communication to the Congolese public on how the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence are translated into practice in general and in relation to the UN peace-keeping mission remain important.
- Be aware of how events outside aid agency programming and implementation can influence sentiments on social media that may reflect on the aid sector as a whole.

Mission de l'organisation des Nations Unies pour la Stabilisation de RD Congo (MONUSCO)

The UN Security Council established the UN peace-keeping mission in 2000. MONUSCO has been operating under its current name since 2010.

Under its [present mandate](#), MONUSCO has a maximum authorised troop strength of 13,500 military personnel, 660 military observers and staff officers, 591 police and 1,050 members of formed police units.

MONUSCO's main mandate are the protection of civilians and support for stabilisation and strengthening of state institutions through governance and security reforms in the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

In [2018](#), a phased, progressive and comprehensive exit strategy for an orderly MONUSCO withdrawal was decided upon by the UN Security Council. Since then, MONUSCO's presence has been reduced every year.

MONUSCO is [under the leadership](#) of a Special Representative of the UN Secretary General. MONUSCO's mandate does not authorise support to any national military forces except the Forces armées de la République démocratique du Congo (FARDC).

The current mandate authorised "joint operations by the Congolese security forces and MONUSCO" and instructs the Mission to "carry out targeted offensive operations in the DRC to neutralise armed groups...either unilaterally or jointly with the Congolese security forces." But the mandate additionally requires that support to the FARDC is in compliance with the Human Rights Due Diligence Policy ([HRDDP](#)), which prohibits support to state security actors when "substantial grounds [exist] for believing there is a real risk of the receiving entities committing grave violations of international humanitarian, human rights or refugee law."

Offensives against rebel forces, some conducted with MONUSCO support, have led to cycles of [revenge massacres](#) against civilians.

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