Social Media Monitoring and Aid in the Context of the Libyan Flooding Disaster

Reactions on Social Media

December 2023

To support the response to the floods in Libya in September 2023, Insecurity Insight is conducting ongoing social media monitoring to understand perceptions and key concerns around the aid response in Libya in the aftermath of Storm Daniel with the aim of contributing to the development of aid agencies' communication strategies in response to community sentiment.

Summary

This brief presents quantitative findings regarding the extent to which social media was used to discuss aid-related topics in Libya between 10 August and 10 October 2023 in the context of the humanitarian crisis in Derna and surrounding areas.

Online public attention towards such topics increased dramatically in the weeks following the humanitarian disaster caused by Storm Daniel. Online conversations regarding aid mainly took place on social media platforms rather than sites connected with edited media. Local aid organisations were much more visible on social media than international organisations, which were largely absent, with the exception of the United Nations.

Insecurity Insight's social media monitoring in Libya

On 10 September 2023 Storm Daniel devastated the eastern Libyan coastal region, resulting in significant damage to a number of towns and cities, including Al Bayda, Al Marj and Derna, where two dams collapsed. Thousands of people died as a result of the subsequent flooding, while many others were left without homes and livelihoods.

To support the aid response to the crisis in Libya, starting from November 2023 Insecurity Insight conducted social media monitoring to understand public perceptions and key concerns around the aid response in Libya in the aftermath of Storm Daniel and to signal possible misinformation and disinformation targeting aid organisations. By doing so for this and other aid-related activities in Libya, Insecurity Insights aims to contribute to the development of aid agencies' communication strategies in response to community sentiment in that country.

To this effect, in November 2023 Insecurity Insight published findings on **sentiments towards the initial aid efforts after** Storm Daniel and **sentiments towards aid organisations** operating in Libya, with a particular focus on international actors.

This brief presents quantitative findings on the role played by social media in facilitating online discussions on the aid sector, and the characteristics of these online discussions. Online public attention to aid-related activities increased dramatically in the weeks following the humanitarian disaster caused by Storm Daniel, with most of these conversations taking place on social media. Moreover, local aid organisations were significantly more visible on social media than international organisations, which were largely absent, with the exception of the United Nations (UN).

Such findings can be used to improve our understanding of the dynamics of civilian engagement in online discussions related to aid during humanitarian disasters.

Mailing List

Findings

- **The volume of online content related to aid or aid organisations increased in the aftermath of the disaster in Derna, with most of the increase in aid-related content appearing on social media platforms.**
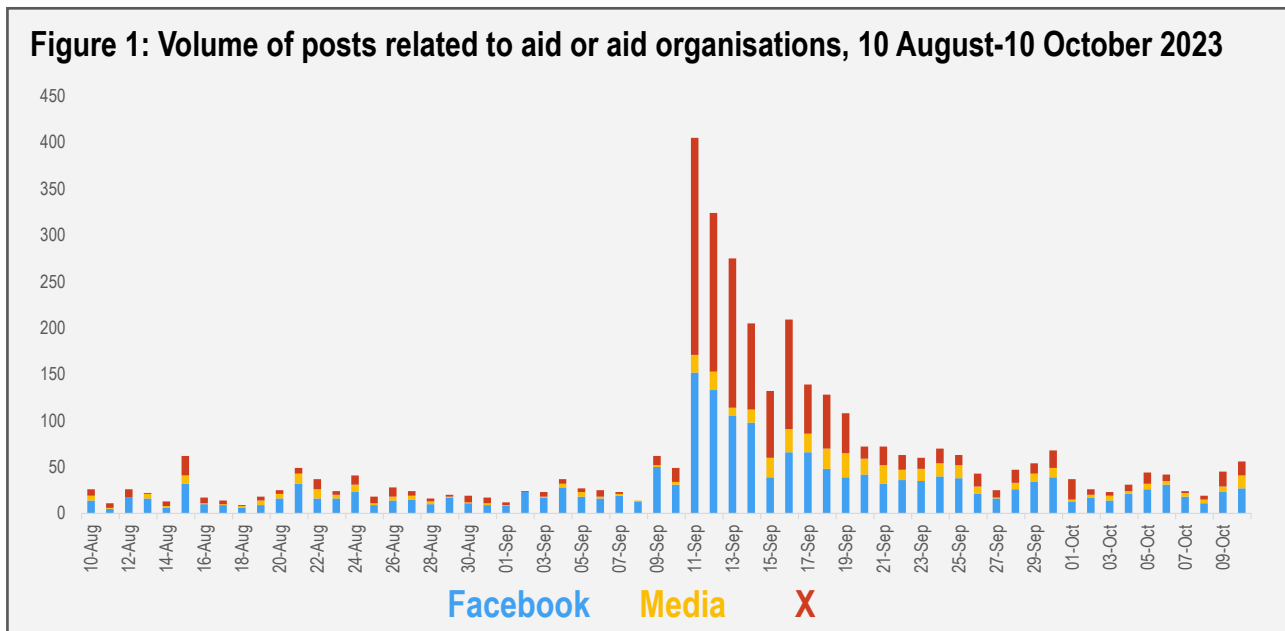
Figure 1: Volume of posts related to aid or aid organisations, 10 August-10 October 2023

Figure 1 shows the evolution of the volume of posts that referenced aid organisations on the two main social media platforms (Facebook and X[1]) and in edited media available online (i.e. newspapers) from 10 August to 10 October 2023. A comparison between the period before the floods (10 August to 10 September) with the months that followed the storm indicates that online content related to aid increased by nearly 250% after the disaster. Social media content was responsible for nearly 210% of this increase in volume, suggesting that conversations related to humanitarian action predominantly occurred on these platforms.

Of 3,741 relevant individual online items of content, around 49% consisted of Facebook posts, 39% consisted of X posts and comments, and 12% consisted of content produced by the edited media.[2]

As shown in Figure 1, the dramatic increase in aid-related content immediately after the Storm Daniel disaster had subsequently slowly declined, until by the end of September it had reached levels comparable to the period prior to the floods. This suggests that public attention shifted away from specifically aid-related conversations by the beginning of October, possibly due to attention slowly moving away from the need for urgent aid to discussions about reconstruction. However, it also shows that aid agencies were not able to maintain the attention given to their work outside of their response to the sudden emergency of 10 September.

Furthermore, aid-related content uploaded on Facebook had by far the highest reach online (see Figure 2). In the month following the floods (i.e. between 11 September and 10 October), an average of 718,000 people were exposed to aid-related content on Facebook. On X, for the same period, 85,000 people were on average exposed to aid-related content, although the number varied between days. For example, on 11 September nearly 500,000 people were estimated to have been reached by such posts on X. Nevertheless, it is clear that exposure to aid-related content on X declined quickly after the first few days of the humanitarian disaster, while exposure on Facebook persisted for weeks, even if at a less sustained rate than in the immediate aftermath of the crisis.

Figure 2: Number of people estimated to have been reached by posts related to aid or aid organisations, 10 August-10 October 2023 (in thousands)
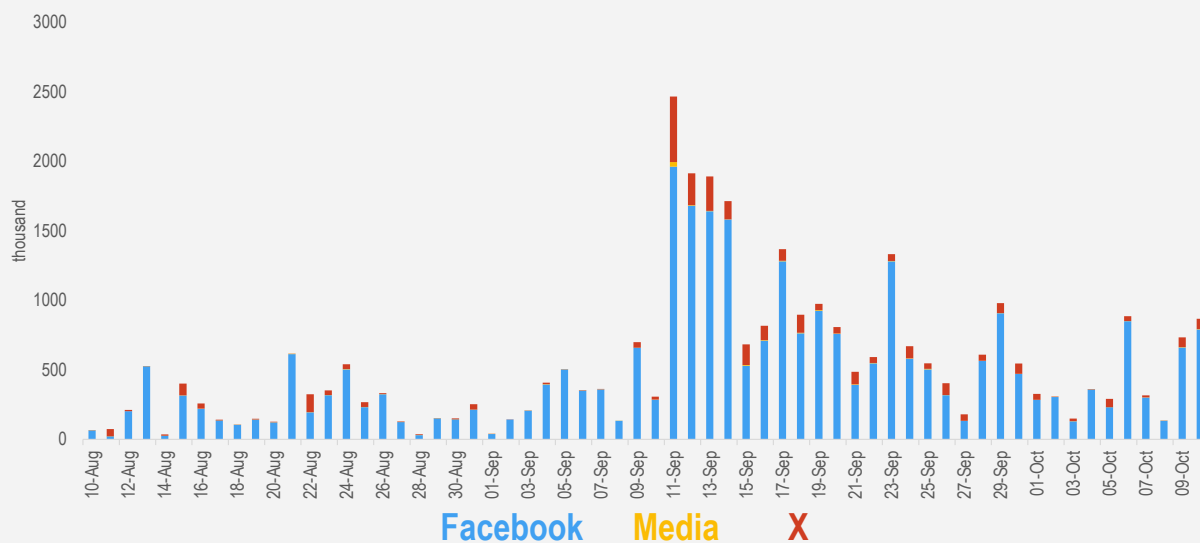
This points to the fact that, at least in terms of aid-related content, social media in general and Facebook in particular are the preferred platforms to engage with aid-related content online. Indeed, the highest number of people estimated to have been reached by online accessible edited media on a single day was 34,000 on 11 September. By contrast, on that day nearly two million people were reached on Facebook and nearly half a million on X.

Similarly, in terms of public online content, people in Libya tend to actively interact with aid-related content mostly on Facebook, including liking, sharing or commenting (see Figure 3). For example, in the period following the floods (11 September to 10 October), around 96% of estimated interactions on aid-related content occurred on Facebook, while the remaining 4% occurred on X.[3]
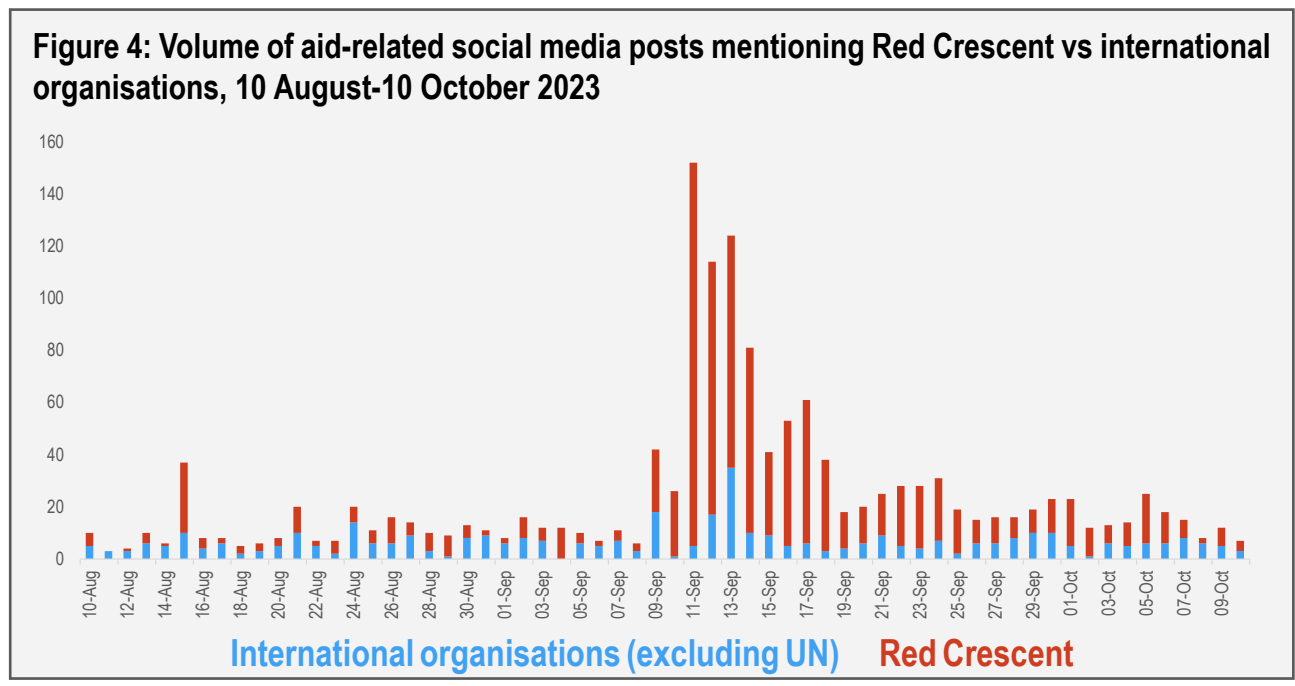
Figure 3: Number of people estimated to have actively interacted with posts related to aid or aid organisations, 10 August-10 October 2023 (in thousands)

Eastern Libya Situation Report
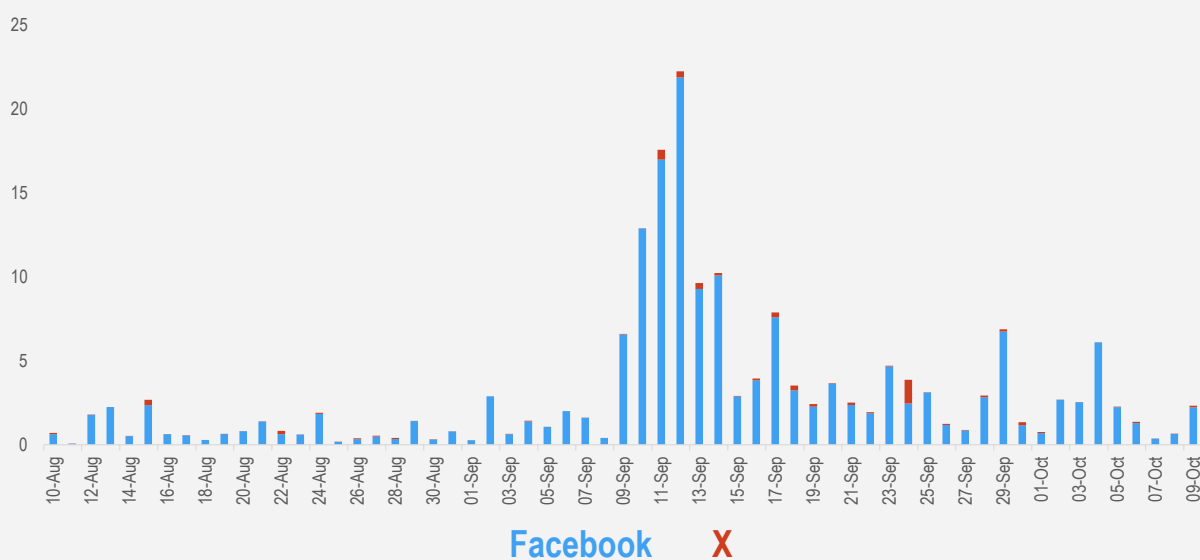
As Figure 4 indicates, local organisations are more visible than international organisations on social media.

The Libyan Red Crescent was referred to in 72.4% of all posts in the period under review, while international organisations operating directly or indirectly in Libya were referred to in only 27.6% of social media coverage.[4]

This was particularly the case after the floods: indeed, while references to local and international organisations appear to be similar in the period prior to the humanitarian crisis caused by Storm Daniel, in the aftermath of the floods it appears that references to local organisations were much more prominent on social media platforms.

Figure 4: Volume of aid-related social media posts mentioning Red Crescent vs international organisations, 10 August-10 October 2023

International organisations (excluding UN)   **Red Crescent**

Conclusions

- Facebook is by far the most important platform for sharing and accessing information in Libya. Private channels such as WhatsApp could also be important, but their content is not available to public scrutiny.

- Local aid providers feature more than international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) in aid-related content and discussions on social media platforms.

- International aid agencies appear to use social media very little to engage with affected populations.

- On social media the UN is seen as representing the international aid sector and there is little awareness among the wider public of the specific expertise or contribution of particular INGOs.

Recommendations

- There are opportunities for aid agencies to expand their reputation-building efforts on social media, to highlight their work in local communities and to collect feedback through social media monitoring.

Social Media Monitoring

Methodology

Publicly available social media data was first collected in Libya for the period 10 August to 10 October 2023 using key words linked to or referring to aid, and also to international and local aid organisations. Whenever possible, the key words were employed in Arabic, including the Arabic equivalent of the names of international organisations. However, in the case of some international organisations, we retained the original names or abbreviations/acronyms due to the lack of an equivalent in the Arabic language. These key words permitted the gathering of pertinent online public data from both social media platforms (notably Facebook and X) and online media outlets. Only public social data features for which users had given their consent for public viewing were included. This analysis therefore excludes possibly pertinent data from encrypted platforms such as WhatsApp.

Should you wish to provide us with any feedback or to get in touch, kindly write to: info@insecurityinsight.org

1 X was formerly called Twitter.
2 While strongly indicative of trends, these figures do not include Facebook comments (i.e. comments in reaction to posts) and retweets on X. Data from other platforms such as TikTok and Instagram was not included due to negligible volumes on these platforms.
3 Data for edited media is insignificant, partly because newspaper websites tend to offer very limited ways in which readers can actively engage with their content.
4 Data on the UN does not feature in Figure 4, since the organisation tends to be referred to in a non-aid context.