

# Influencers and Influencing for Better Accountability in the DRC

Sources and circulation of information in the DRC - the  
case of North Kivu

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# CONTENTS

- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY ..... 3
- DETAILED RECOMMENDATIONS ..... 5
- 1. INTRODUCTION ..... 10
  - 1.1. CONTEXT..... 10
  - 1.2. OBJECTIVES..... 10
- 2. METHODOLOGY..... 10
  - 2.1. CASE STUDIES ..... 10
  - 2.1. LAYERS OF ANALYSIS ..... 11
    - Population of North Kivu* ..... 11
    - Local radios in North Kivu* ..... 12
    - Social media*..... 12
- 3. RESULTS ..... 14
  - 3.1. LOCAL POPULATION IN NORTH KIVU ..... 14
    - Public access to media sources (offline and online)* ..... 14
    - Main sources of information used by the population* ..... 14
    - Trust in information sources*..... 17
    - Misinformation* ..... 17
    - Gender differentiation* ..... 19
    - Territorial differences* ..... 20
  - 3.2. LOCAL RADIOS IN NORTH KIVU ..... 21
    - Most used media and geographical reach* ..... 21
    - Social media as a source of information for local radio stations* ..... 22
    - Non-media influences*..... 24
  - 3.3. SOCIAL MEDIA ..... 24
    - Most influential users on Twitter*..... 24
    - Most shared websites and articles* ..... 26
    - Content of shared opinions*..... 29
    - Disinformation and rumours* ..... 31
    - Distrust of the government* ..... 31
    - Variations in online activity*..... 31
    - Surprising and emerging voices*..... 33
- 4. CONCLUSION ..... 33
  - Lessons learned and recommendations on the research approach ..... 33

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The information ecosystem in DRC is fragmented and fragile. It is characterised by a great number of media outlets, however their level of professionalism is low and their vulnerability to partisan capture is high. This fragility is replicated in the online space. The Congolese population rely heavily on informal sources of information such as word of mouth, interpersonal communication with family and friends. The scarcity of reliable information open avenues for the rumours and misinformation to spread. This context presents serious challenges for the promotion of good governance and accountability that requires well informed citizens.

To better address those challenges, it is necessary to understand the main sources and dynamics of information flows both offline and online, and through media and non-media channels. A consortium composed of Fondation Hironnelle (FH), Demos, Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (HHI) and the Institut Congolais de Recherche en Développement et Etudes Stratégiques (ICREDES) was created in order to provide a more holistic view of the Congolese information ecosystem and to identify opportunities for entry.

### METHODOLOGY

Due to the limited time and resources of the study, and because of the pre-existing networks and capacities of the consortium in this region, its focus is on North Kivu. To identify the voices, networks and themes that dominated this information ecosystem in this region, three levels of analysis were chosen:

1. The sources and level of information of the local populations. This analysis was provided by HHI that implemented household surveys of large samples of populations in Eastern DRC;
2. The sources of information of local journalists. This analysis was provided by FH that surveyed a network of 18 local radios in North Kivu;
3. The network and content analysis of digital and social media provided by DEMOS.

Each level of analysis was studied through three case studies referring to distinct contexts:

- two covering a political theme (Kabila's announcement on August 8, 2018 and presidential elections on December 30, 2018); and,
- the third on the Ebola epidemic declared on August 1, 2018.

The results are based on nearly 14'000 interviews conducted in the field by HHI teams, 50 in-depths online interviews of 18 local radio stations representatives across North Kivu, and on more than 650,000 tweets and 80'00 messages on WhatsApp analysed by Demos. ICREDES contributed in better contextualizing the findings.

### FINDINGS

#### *Population:*

- **Radio is the primary media source of information for the population of Eastern DRC** (78% of the sample listens to it occasionally and 43% daily), followed by TV (31% occasionally) and written press (19% occasionally). Access to online resources is limited (26% occasionally and 8% daily).
- **The main sources of information depend on the context and the nature of the information people are seeking.** For national politically-oriented topics, national and local radios are the most used. For Ebola, participants rely more on close family and friends.
- **Trust issues and misinformation are widespread.** The level of belief in Ebola speculation is higher where knowledge of the epidemic is also highest. The results highlight the lack of reliability of information sources (46% of respondents expressed a moderate to high level of confidence in local radio, and 39% for national radio).
- **There is significant gender differentiation in the access to information.** Access to media resources and the level of trust in the media is characterized by gender inequality. Women are

less likely than men to rely on radio as a source of information, reflecting their less frequent use of this medium. Women are also more likely to believe Ebola speculation than men.

*Local radios:*

- **Local radio stations are mainly informed through local, national and international radio stations**, followed by social media.
- **The source of information selected by local journalists depends on the scope of the issue.** For Ebola (local issue), the most widely used media were local radio stations, while for the presidential elections (national issue) they were firstly national radio stations.
- **Respondent local journalists agree on reference radios at the national and international level** (Radio Okapi, Top Congo, RFI). Our data did not allow for identification of major reference radios at the local level.
- **Social networks are largely used by local journalists as sources of information** (much more than the rest of the local population that has limited access to social media). The most used social network is Facebook, followed by Twitter. The use of social networks is characterized by a great diversity in the pages or profiles consulted, all subjects combined.

*Social media:*

- **Facebook is the most widely used social network by the population of the DRC**, followed by Twitter to a lesser extent. WhatsApp is the most widely used online messaging service.
- **The nature and scope of online activity vary according to the social media used.** The most shared sites and opinion on WhatsApp are more local in scope than the ones shared via Twitter. Data also indicate that WhatsApp is rather used by the community at the local level for information about daily processes.
- **Social media plays an important role in spreading false rumours.** A significant proportion of the twitter posts analysed mentioned rumours, conspiracy theories or misinformation. On WhatsApp groups, the mixture of information, opinions, rumours and misinformation makes it difficult to distinguish between facts and fiction.

## GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- At the local level: invest further resources in the mapping and monitoring of local radios to identify a core group of influential and reliable local radios to a) communicate directly with the local population including through dedicated messages and programs on governance and accountability issues, and b) to strengthen the general capacity of local journalists to seek, verify and share – offline and online - reliable news and programs of balanced dialogue around root causes of rumours and core grievances.
- At the national level: Radio Okapi stands out as a major source of information - both online and offline - for local journalists. In the context of the strategic review of the MONUSCO, advocate for and support the design of an adequate transition strategy to maintain Radio Okapi's function as national public service broadcaster beyond the MONUSCO mandate.
- Support the capacity of local civil society organisations and journalists to map and monitor influential digital personalities - political tweeters, journalists, bloggers, and other users likely to be useful to engage with on governance and accountability issues – and support a core group of CSOs and journalists with trainings and tools to help them recognise and counter misinformation that circulates through social media platforms.
- Support the integration of media and information literacy in education programs for the wider population.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### A. About the off-line sources of information in North Kivu

The data collected show that **radio** remains the main media source of information of the local population. This is certainly due to the fact that it is the most accessible media (78% listen to the radio at least occasionally and 43% daily in Eastern DRC, cf. p. 14).

All the local radios surveyed declared producing regular news bulletin and debate programs on the electoral process. Their accessibility and their interest for governance issues make them natural channels for efforts to reach out, inform and influence the local population on those issues.

However, radios largely suffer from a lack of professionalism and credibility vis-à-vis their audiences. 46% of respondents expressed a moderate to high level of confidence in local radio, and 39% in national radio. Therefore, regarding the radio, the specific recommendations are:

#### Local radios:

1. Mapping of local radios, including their ownership and sources of funding, to better assess their autonomy vs. vulnerability to partial editorial influence. UNICEF has recently undertaken a mapping of around 700 community radios in around 300 emergency areas in DRC that could provide a useful database; Fondation Hironnelle also has a detailed mapping and an operational network of around 150 local radios over the country.
2. Survey and monitor most influential local radios to better understand how they contribute to local debates on governance and accountability, and what capacities need to be strengthened.
3. Select a core group of local radios to a) broadcast dedicated messages and programs on governance and accountability issues, and b) to strengthen them with:
  - Support to technical capacities: access to electricity, production and broadcasting equipment, connection to internet.
  - Support to training in basic journalism ethics and thematic training (e.g. on governance and accountability, Ebola and other health issues, etc.), training in information and media literacy to better detect and immediately address misinformation online and offline; training in the production of interactive and balanced programs addressing the root causes of rumours and grievances.
  - Support the capacity of those local radios, and other CSOs, to hold local debates within the communities in order to promote the participation of local communities in the information flows and improve the level of information of community members.
  - Support the progressive migration of local radios to digital media spaces, including their capacity to seek, verify and share information online, and to push their contents to the audiences e.g. through messaging apps.
2. Support capacity to access reliable information. For example, by:
  - Creating and/or feeding existing dedicated Whatsapp group(s) widely used by local journalists; train and support administrators and key members of those groups to push reliable contents and to promote the capacity of trusted sources to share reliable and timely information and contacts within these groups.
  - Supporting the purchase of subscriptions to verified/reliable information sources (from press agencies, local, regional and international media, etc.)

3. Support local “maisons de la presse” where journalists can meet, share experiences and have access to internet.

#### **National radio:**

4. Radio Okapi (RO) is the main source of national information for local journalists (cf. p.24) and an important source of information for the overall population, both offline and online. In the context of the foreseeable phasing out of the MONUSCO and the ongoing closure of RO’s local antennas (including in Matadi, Mbandaka, Bandundu, Dungu, Kisangani, Lubumbashi et Kamina), it would be important to support the continuation of a network of local correspondents that could feed RO’s national programs with news from those regions and to ensure the continuous broadcasting of key RO programs (such as news bulletins and Dialogue entre Congolais) in those regions through local partner radios.
5. Advocating for and supporting the design of an adequate transition strategy to maintain RO’s function as national public service broadcaster beyond the MONUSCO mandate. The UN Security Council Resolution 2463 (2019) calls for a strategic review and articulation of a comprehensive exit strategy of MONUSCO by 20 October 2019.

#### **Cell phone:**

After the radio, the second media channel to access information is the **cell phone** with 55% of the population in Eastern DRC using a cell phone at least occasionally (but only 26% have access to internet). In this context, a practical recommendation would be:

6. Support the capacity of trusted sources of information to feed a cell phone messaging information system that is accessible to the wider population. To this aim, an interesting option is the dissemination of information through Interactive Voice Response (IVR) channel over the phone, orally, in local languages and without requiring internet connection. Fondation Hirondelle has successful experiences with such IVR service in Mali. This solution can be particularly effective in landscapes where cell phone use is widespread but access to internet and literacy remains low, or in the event of internet shut down.

#### **B. About the on-line sources of information**

The use and misuse of social media during elections by both governments and voters during election periods both come through strongly in this report. On the one hand, we found many voters turning to digital platforms to spread political news, to campaign and to work on getting out the vote and encouraging democratic participation. On the other, government shutdowns, the circulation of media sources with uncertain quality, and the spread of conspiracy theories showed a more troubling side to this new information environment.

We believe concrete steps could be taken to improve the state of play, split broadly between recommendations pertinent to electoral activities and broader recommendations focusing on the role of digital communications in Congolese media and politics more broadly.

Social media channels now play an important role in the circulation of news and political media during an election, and provide a useful window into the narratives, arguments, news and views that are rising to prominence during a campaign. Although we would not go as far as to suggest that the outcome or shape of an election can be determined from the contents of communications during an election period, there is a clear requirement to include digital channels in media monitoring efforts.

A major challenge in the DRC facing electoral media monitoring is the nature of the platforms used by Congolese citizens – primarily Facebook and WhatsApp. These services do not allow for computational

observation in any meaningful way, despite acting as public fora for large parts of the population. As such, governments and election observers must look for alternative ways to understand these spaces. Most obviously, close cooperation with local civil society organisations who are readily available to enter and monitor these spaces is necessary: we believe this is already taking place. However, we would also suggest that:

7. Citizens should be empowered with the skills and support required to build on the informal networks of untrained citizen journalists and electoral observers. Support should be provided in training these citizens to recognise examples of malicious, dangerous or false information as it circulates through closed platforms, and to share that content with electoral observers or civil society organisations.

It is worth noting that this runs contrary to previous recommendations made in Demos reports (such as a previous study that took place in Nigeria in 2015) which placed a greater emphasis on computational analysis of open social media platforms. Unfortunately, changes made by Facebook to its policies and the growth of closed networks make this kind of work highly challenging, and there may be greater value in building a network of human interfaces to the communications environment. We believe active and supported citizen involvement in election monitoring could counteract some of the loss of transparency resulting from major platform changes.

8. A pilot program connecting the observations of ordinary citizens in the DRC to international bodies should be established using a local civil society organisation as a conduit. A technology implementation allowing user reports to be collected, classified, aggregated and reported is the most feasible means of gaining an insight into closed communication channels.

Nevertheless, there may be alternative methodologies worth exploring, and it is clear that the internet will be a growing force in shaping electoral politics worldwide, not a shrinking one. The use of a web crawler, for instance, could pull together a picture of the ecosystem of smaller sites and media outlets reporting on politics in a country and being utilised by citizens. As such:

9. Funding should be allocated to organisations or individuals fighting to stay ahead of changes in the online information environment and building new ways to carry out digital media monitoring.

The web continues to provide platforms to new voices who can quickly achieve influence in both politics and society. The emergence and disappearance of new voices happens more quickly than in previous media ecosystems, which should be reflected in communications strategies. As such:

10. Ongoing monitoring of influential digital personalities should be encouraged by civil society organisations in country, and should form a key strand in overall media landscape reporting. Where required, training could be provided to allow civil society actors to make use of freely available software to do this work computationally: using 'R' or Python to collect data from Twitter's free API and using Gephi to produce the network maps. This could result in maps that identify key users in clusters that could build a valuable picture of political tweeters, citizen-journalists, bloggers, and other users likely to be useful to engage with.

At its most concerning, our analysis showed a wide prevalence of conspiracy theories circulating on platforms and worrying levels of conspiracy belief among those surveyed. Digital media will continue to support poor-quality information and will, at least for the foreseeable future, encourage its sharing without providing opportunity for intervention. Alongside electoral disruption, we believe the spread of digitally-driven conspiracy thinking will likely have an impact on the safety and efficacy of other

humanitarian efforts, aid distribution and public policy exercises. In this way, they mirror concerns shared by governments around the world around the growth in conspiracy theories surrounding vaccinations, technology rollouts and climate-change policy. As such:

11. Future education projects, humanitarian projects and public policy drives must evaluate the level of mistrust and conspiratorial thinking they may be subject to and put in place a means of mitigating this, either through education or through public communications and messaging.

Finally, in what is now becoming an increasingly frequent occurrence, we observed an internet outage as the government shut down access for a period over the election itself. The evidence we have points to social media being used as a tool in getting out the vote, and was a driver in encouraging Congolese voters to go to the polls. Governmental obstruction to internet access during election periods is illiberal and runs counter to promises of free and open elections. As such:

12. The UK government and election monitors should continue to apply pressure to governments choosing to restrict internet access as a result of political motivations.
13. Domestic and civil society organisations operating in the DRC should prepare for logistical interference, and ensure that there are plans in place for electoral monitoring and media observation in the event of a governmental restriction on web access.

### C. Cross-cutting issues

Across the different information channels, a particularly concerning issue in DRC is the level of **misinformation and rumours**, and the correlated issue of a lack of trust in media and institutions. The data e.g. revealed that between 25% and 26% of respondents in Beni and Butembo believe that Ebola is either not real or made for financial reasons or to destabilize the region. (p.17-18)

While the scope and the rapidity of misinformation and rumours might be growing, they are not new phenomena in DRC and they are driven by a variety of factors. In relationship to media consumption, Frère and Fiedler<sup>1</sup> showed that “audience members use a range of criteria in order to assess the credibility of the source of information they get access to: the coincidence between media narratives and the information they get from other channels (word of mouth, social media, interpersonal communication); the degree of internal pluralism of the radio stations and their independence from the public authorities; the working conditions and constraints under which journalists practice their job (poor salaries, “coupage”, no protection regarding personal safety, submission to media owners’ political line)” (p.281). Raising the question of “why in situation of insecurity and conflict, does the audience remain attached to (and even dependent of) an information provider to which they grant little trust?”, they show that “the simple fact of accessing to information would be comforting in itself, independently from the fact that the information is reliable or not, because that information can provide a sense of control, and maybe the illusion that the future can be overcome.” (p.280) It suggests that “media consumption is a part of that strategy to reduce uncertainty (even though not to reach certainty)”. And it might explain why rumours and misinformation can spread so easily in DRC. The scarcity of professional media and reliable information creates a void that is filled by rumours and misinformation to avoid feeling uncertain.

This also suggest that an effective way to counter misinformation is to strengthen the capacity of Congolese media to address core grievances in a timely, professional and balanced manner, and to reach out to the variety of Congolese audiences –even the most remote ones - through various channels (online and offline). To this aim, the key factors are:

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<sup>1</sup> Marie-Soleil Frère and Anke Fiedler, *Balancing Plausible Lies and False Truths, Perception and evaluation of the local and Global News Coverage of Conflicts in the DRC*, in Romy Fröhlich, (Ed.), *Media in war and armed conflict: The dynamics of conflict news production and dissemination* (2018) London, New York: Routledge.



- journalism ethics,
- the working conditions of journalists,
- the internal pluralism and balance of the Congolese media,
- their independence from the government and other partial interests,
- their social responsibility, and their capacity to give a voice to trusted and reliable sources of information (such as health professional) and to allow for two-way communication with affected local communities.

As (human) nature abhors a vacuum and rumours rapidly fills the lack of reliable information, it is important to rapidly identify the sources and nature of rumours. In order to keep an updated and relevant understanding of the dynamics of the (mis)information flows in DRC:

14. Keep on supporting capacity of information flows monitoring and analysis. Focus on specific regions (possibly with a comparative approach between different provinces) and/or on specific issues that are topics of misinformation (such as Ebola currently).
15. Allow for dedicated coordination capacity and close collaboration between offline and online information flow analysts, thematic and local experts.
16. Support the development of a dash board for real time information sharing between analysts, media actors, social media platforms and donors on the sources and trends of misinformation.

Such real time analysis and information sharing capacity could serve as a basis for:

17. Identification of the sources of misinformation
18. More targeted production and distribution of reliable information debunking misinformation and addressing core grievances
19. Training and supporting the capacity of local journalists to counter misinformation offline and online. Three main challenges were identified by local journalists to unleash their capacity to do so: internet connectivity, equipment, training on information and media literacy
20. Liaise with social media platforms (such as Facebook, Twitter) and messaging app (such as Whatsapp) to explore how the social intelligence produced could serve to take more adequate and timely measure against misinformation flows and to push reliable sources and contents.

#### **Gender:**

The data in Eastern DRC reveal a gender gap with women consuming media significantly less frequently than men. The belief that Ebola does not exist was also slightly more prevalent among women than men. This suggest the need of a gender sensitive approach to information flows. This could notably include:

21. Promoting the integration of women in media staff both at the editorial and management level.
22. Supporting the production of gender sensitive multimedia contents, taking to and featuring both women and men on an equal basis
23. Supporting the broadcasting of those contents through technologies that are most accessible to women (radio, Interactive Voice Response (IVR) channel over the phone, social media particularly for younger and more urban audiences)
24. Investing in information and media literacy programs that are accessible to women

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. CONTEXT

The information ecosystem in DRC is fragmented, fragile and changing fast. The OIF counts more than 200 newspapers and radio stations and about hundred TV stations. Internet connectivity is accelerating and a weak media economy and scarcity of advertising revenue has produced a country that is both ripe for rapid media change and vulnerable to interference. Political pressure, lack of resources and a lack of editorial independence are forces keenly felt in the region. This fragility is replicated in the online space. Congolese authorities have frequently clamped down on freedom of expression online, and have repeatedly ordered telecommunications providers to cut internet and SMS services across the country ahead of planned anti-government demonstrations. Nevertheless, social media is playing an increasingly important role particularly among urban populations. By large, the Congolese population rely heavily on informal sources of information such as word of mouth, interpersonal communication with family and friends. The scarcity of reliable information open avenues for the rumours and misinformation to spread.

## 1.2. OBJECTIVES

The objective of this study is to analyse the functioning of the main media and non-media information channels within a part of the Congolese population, and more particularly:

- To provide a holistic vision of the functioning of the media, the organization of information channels and the dynamics of the dissemination and influence of this information within the Congolese social fabric.
- To analyse the dynamics and influences between the "offline" and the "online", their respective weights within the population, and the specific dynamics that characterise their use.
- To highlight strategic entry points at different levels of the process in terms of information flow and understanding, depending on the target population and the themes addressed.

# 2. METHODOLOGY

Due to the limited time and resources of the study, and because of the pre-existing networks and capacities of the consortium in this region, its focus is on North Kivu and both the online and offline analysis focussed on three case studies.

## 2.1. CASE STUDIES

The three case studies selected referred to distinct contexts: two covering a political theme and the third on health. The choice of these case studies was determined by their ability to generate a critical and significant mass of online and offline data. The cases selected are as follows:

- 1) **The electoral process in the DRC and President Kabila's announcement:** On 8 August 2018, the day of the deadline for the registration of candidates for the elections, President Kabila announced that he would not be a candidate in the elections and appointed Emmanuel Ramazani Shadary - Permanent Secretary of the Popular Party for Reconstruction and Democracy - as candidate of the Common Front of Congo (FCC), his political coalition.
- 2) **The Ebola virus epidemic:** On 1 August 2018, the DRC Ministry of Health declared a new outbreak of Ebola in North Kivu province in the eastern part of the country. This statement follows the announcement by the North Kivu health authorities on 28 July 2018 of 26 cases of acute haemorrhagic fever, including 20 deaths in mid-July in the Mabaloko health zone. As of October

2, 2018, 162 cases of Ebola have been confirmed in North Kivu and Ituru provinces and 106 deaths<sup>2</sup>.

- 3) **Presidential elections:** On 30 December 2018, Congolese voters turned out at the polls after several postponed since 2016. The result of this vote, in which the candidate for the presidency of the UDPS, Felix Tshisekedi, was announced as the winner, was marred by allegations of electoral fraud and continues to be challenged today.

Each of these case studies were examined through three level of analysis, chosen in order to broaden the perspective from local to global, and to take into account three potential sources and consumers of information, each level influencing and feeding each other: the population of North Kivu, local radios representatives in North Kivu, and social media.

## 2.1. LAYERS OF ANALYSIS

### *Population of North Kivu*

The population was taken as the reference point in order to explore the following aspects:

- Main sources of information used by the population, media and non-media, online and offline
- Level of trust in these sources
- Gender and territorial differences in access to the media

To this end, we used a series of large-scale surveys conducted by HHI in North Kivu that provided reliable data and analysis on the level and sources of information of the local population in relation to the chosen themes. We relied in particular on four reports covering each of the distinct periods:

- A first report ("Report 15")<sup>3</sup> based on a survey conducted in June and July 2018, just before the official announcement of the Ebola virus outbreak. 5,951 interviews with randomly selected adults were conducted for this report in three provinces: North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. 2158 interviews come directly from the province of North Kivu, the geographical area chosen for our study.
- A second report ("Ebola Rapid Survey")<sup>4</sup> based on a survey conducted during the month of September 2018, specifically on the Ebola virus epidemic and on communications and behaviour among the population surveyed. 961 adult interviews with randomly selected adults were conducted for this report in the cities of Beni and Butembo, in North Kivu province.
- A third report ("Report 16")<sup>5</sup> based on a survey conducted in October 2018, two months after the government officially announced the tenth outbreak of haemorrhagic fever in 40 years. 1,112 interviews with randomly selected adults were conducted for this report around urban centres in three provinces: North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. 221 maintenance comes directly from the province of North Kivu, more precisely from the surroundings of the city of Goma.
- A fourth report ("Report 17")<sup>6</sup> based on a survey conducted during the month of December 2018, addressing both issues related to the Ebola virus epidemic and issues more directly

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<sup>2</sup> Statistics as of 2 October 2018. Since then, the epidemic has spread. As of 7 July 2019, a total of 2418 Ebola Virus Disease cases were reported with 1630 deaths were reported (overall case fatality ratio 67%). See <http://newsletters.afro.who.int/outbreak-dashboards/b92ds9rt6n92t76waqjn65?a=6&p=55297263&t=29558416>.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/sites/m/pdf/DRC\\_Poll15\\_FinalEnglish\\_2.pdf](http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/sites/m/pdf/DRC_Poll15_FinalEnglish_2.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/sites/m/pdf/DRC\\_EbolaPoll1\\_English\\_FINAL201810.pdf](http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/sites/m/pdf/DRC_EbolaPoll1_English_FINAL201810.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/sites/m/pdf/DRC\\_Poll16\\_FinalEnglish.pdf](http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/sites/m/pdf/DRC_Poll16_FinalEnglish.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/sites/m/pdf/DRC\\_Poll17\\_FinalEnglish.pdf](http://www.peacebuildingdata.org/sites/m/pdf/DRC_Poll17_FinalEnglish.pdf)

related to the security context in the regions studied. 5,951 interviews with randomly selected adults were conducted for this report in three provinces: North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri. 2,128 interviews were conducted directly from North Kivu province.

These reports gave us important indication about media use, main sources of information and the level of information of the population on issues like security, governance, services, social cohesion and humanitarian response, but also more specifically on the sources of information of the population on the Ebola epidemic, the level of information and misinformation of the population about the epidemic, as well as the spread of rumours among the population.

### *Local radios in North Kivu*

The local radios in North Kivu were taken as the reference point in order to explore the following aspects:

- The media most used by local radio stations to get information
- Their use of social media
- Non-media information sources used by local radio stations
- Their production of news and dialogue programs
- Practical measures that could help them perform their tasks

Three questionnaires on our three selected case studies were distributed online to a panel of 18 local radio representatives (community and private) in North Kivu. These questionnaires were developed by Fondation Hirondelle, and sent to the panel via a survey application (“SurveyMonkey”). The results were then compiled and cross-checked by Fondation Hirondelle.

### *Social media*

Regarding online activities around the three case studies, we aimed at identifying:

- The most widely relayed types of messages, the most influential users and the most shared sources on Twitter and WhatsApp
- The prevalence of misinformation and false rumours spread via these two online platforms

More than 650,000 tweets and 80,000 messages on WhatsApp, through the analysis of 8 WhatsApp groups totalling 1183 users, were compiled and analysed by Demos during three distinct periods corresponding to our three case studies. The results obtained allowed us to better understand the practices of using these two social media, the most influential voices and the sources most relayed on these exchange platforms. Despite its importance in the DRC, Facebook programmatic data analysis could not be integrated into the research due to recent developments in data privacy policies on this platform. Over the period of the research, Twitter was used by only 1.42% of the population in the DRC according to Globalstats<sup>7</sup>. WhatsApp is the leading messaging application in the country<sup>8</sup>.

A first list of influencers established as a starting point to expand the network was drawn up by all consortium members. This list included 1004 Twitter accounts, 51 hashtags, 74 Facebook accounts and 14 WhatsApp groups. Demos researchers then refined the selection and analysed the activity on Twitter and WhatsApp.

### *Details for each case studies:*

- **First case study (no representation of J. Kabila in the presidential election):** From 5 to 10 August 2018, Demos collected 16,027 tweets from 1,867 unique users in the DRC. Demos performed different types of analyses on this data set: identification of the most frequently mentioned users, the most used hashtags, the most shared links and the most active users for the data set.

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<sup>7</sup> <http://gs.statcounter.com/social-media-stats/all/congo-democratic-republic-of-the>

<sup>8</sup> <https://wearesocial.com/blog/2018/01/global-digitalreport-2018>.

In order to get an overview of the population's perception of the outgoing president's announcement, Demos used the keyword search to identify Tweets containing the word "Kabila" - 6168 tweets in total and 3130 after deduplication (elimination of redundant data in a data set and storage only a copy of the same data). Subsequently, Demos separated the tweets into two sets of data, those issued before and those issued after 8 August (the day of President Kabila's announcement) - containing 886 and 2245 tweets respectively. After deduplicating the data, they manually analysed the topics discussed in a random sample of 100 tweets from each data set.

- **Second case study (Ebola):** During the period from August 28 to October 1, 2018, Demos researchers collected data on Twitter and WhatsApp published by users in the DRC. For both data sets, they undertook a series of automated and manual analyses of the volume and content of conversations and external news sources.

They collected data from 8 WhatsApp groups used as forums to discuss DRC policy in North Kivu province. Initially, 14 WhatsApp groups were identified, but the researchers were finally allowed to analyse the activity of only 8 of them by the administrators of these groups. They collected a total of 18,036 messages from 1183 users and identified 519 (out of 128 users) containing the word "Ebola" using a keyword search. They also collected all tweets containing the keyword Ebola issued by users between August 29 and October 1, 2018 - a total of 958 tweets from 234 users contained the word Ebola.

In order to understand the nature and source of the news shared on WhatsApp and Twitter, the researchers extracted the links in messages containing the keyword Ebola, analysed the content of most of the shared links and the most frequently shared websites. In addition, they manually analysed the discussion topics of a random sample of 100 WhatsApp messages containing the keyword "Ebola" to gain a thorough understanding of the conversation topics related to Ebola. Finally, they identified the most frequently mentioned Twitter users in relation to Ebola in order to get an overview of the people who influence the conversation.

- **Third case study (presidential election):** Demos researchers analysed the online activity to measure the spread of the Twitter conversation during the election, and supplemented this analysis with observations from 8 WhatsApp groups. Twitter conversations were identified by associating the tweets with a keyword dictionary. Between December 25, 2018 and January 23, 2019, this method analysed 635,000 tweets sent by 130,000 users. During the same period, 70,145 messages were distributed by WhatsApp users in seven observed groups.

In total, we therefore base our observations on nearly 14'000 interviews conducted with the population in the field, 18 in-depths online interviews of local radio stations representatives across North Kivu, and on more than 650,000 tweets and 80'00 messages on WhatsApp analysed by Demos.

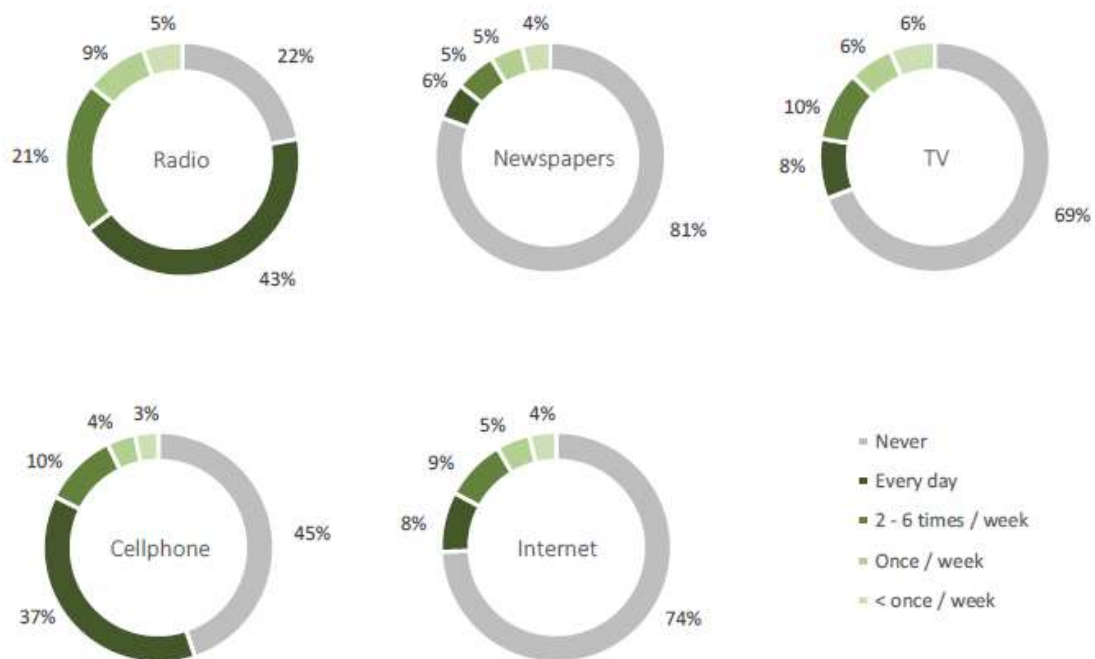
### 3. RESULTS

#### 3.1. LOCAL POPULATION IN NORTH KIVU

##### *Public access to media sources (offline and online)*

The media to which the population of Eastern DRC has the most access is the radio. 78% of the population interviewed listens to the radio at least occasionally and 43% daily. Access to television (only 31% of the sample watches television at least occasionally) and to the written press (only 19% of the sample reads the newspaper at least occasionally) is much more limited.

*Media consumption and connectivity in Eastern DRC (% of respondents)*



Access to a mobile phone is also relatively limited. Just over half of the population uses a cell phone at least occasionally (55%), while just over one-third (37%) uses a cell phone daily.

The results show that the use of a mobile phone does not guarantee Internet access. The percentage of Internet use on a cell phone or elsewhere is lower, with 26% of respondents connecting at least occasionally, and only 8% using the Internet daily. These results on Internet access have surprised some consortium members, for whom these figures seemed too high, and they wondered whether it reflected rather the reality in more urban areas. HHI nevertheless specifies that its surveys are done across 25 strata which include urban and rural areas and results are weighted.

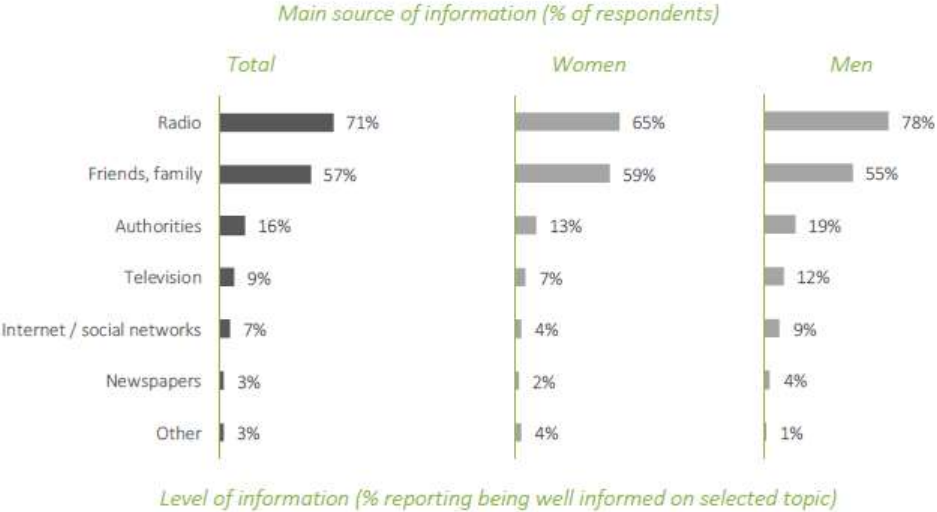
The data also show significant gender differentiation with women consuming the media much less than men (cf. p. 19) and significant differences between territories with much higher media consumption in urban areas than rural areas (cf. p. 20).

##### *Main sources of information used by the population*

Overall, frequent access to radio probably explains why it is the most frequent source of information for a majority of respondents in Eastern DRC (71%).

Many respondents also rely on their friends and family as their main source of information (57%), either as the only source of information or alongside radio or other sources. This makes friends and family the second most important source of information in the first case study. The authorities (16%) and television (9%) come next. Social networks and websites are in fifth place, with barely 7% of the population using them (see table below).

*Report 15 (July):*



The first study carried out before the official government announcement of a new outbreak of haemorrhagic fever on the population of Eastern DRC gives us an overview of the population's information source practices in the "pre-Ebola" context. These are therefore the results outlined above.

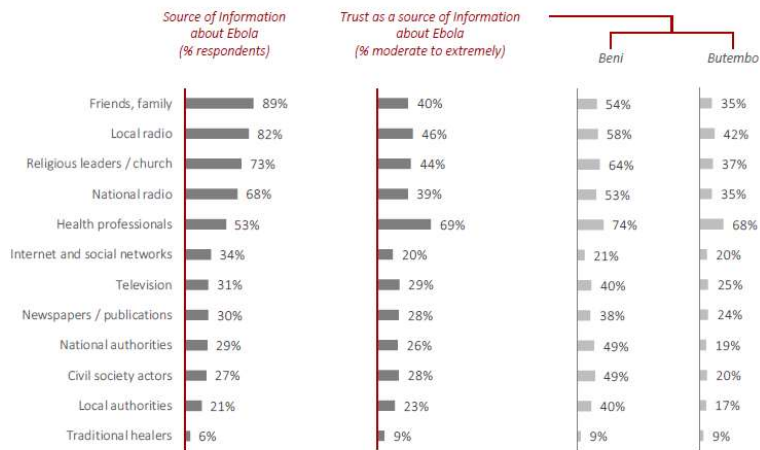
The next three reports (September, October, December), based on surveys conducted after the government's announcement of the new outbreak of haemorrhagic fever, and conducted among the population of Eastern DRC and among the population of the cities of Beni and Butembo (in the case of the Ebola report), show different practices on the part of the population.

Indeed, respondents rely much more on their friends and family (the primary source of information in 83% of cases on average over the 3 studies) than on local radio stations (69% on average) when it comes to learning about the epidemic. Health professionals (43% on average), as well as religious leaders (47% on average) rank on average between third and fourth in the ranking of population information sources. Social networks also seem to play a more important role (used by an average of 26% of respondents over the 3 studies).

*Main sources of information for the population by subject*

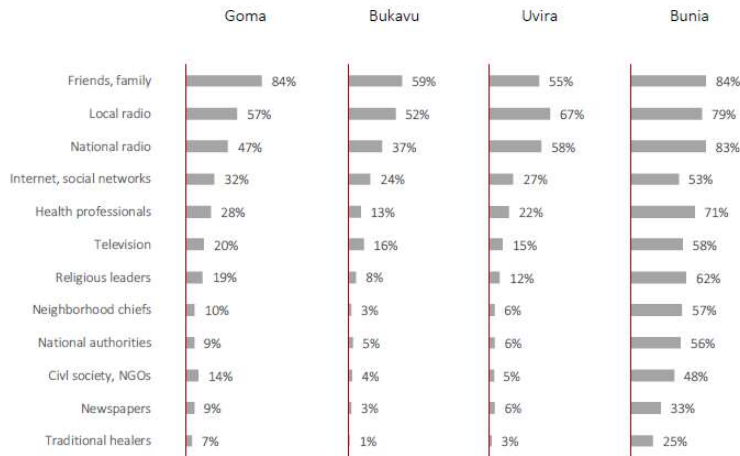
<p><b>Electoral process context</b> (based on report 15):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Radios (71%)</li> <li>2. Family and friends (57%)</li> <li>3. Authorities (16%)</li> <li>4. Television (9%)</li> <li>5. Social networks (7%)</li> </ol>	<p><b>Ebola context</b> (based on Ebola report and reports 16 and 17, on average):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Family and friends (83%)</li> <li>2. Local radios (69%)</li> <li>3. National radios (56%)</li> <li>4. Religious leaders (47%)</li> <li>5. Health professionals (43%)</li> <li>6. Social network (26%)</li> </ol>
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*Ebola report (September):*



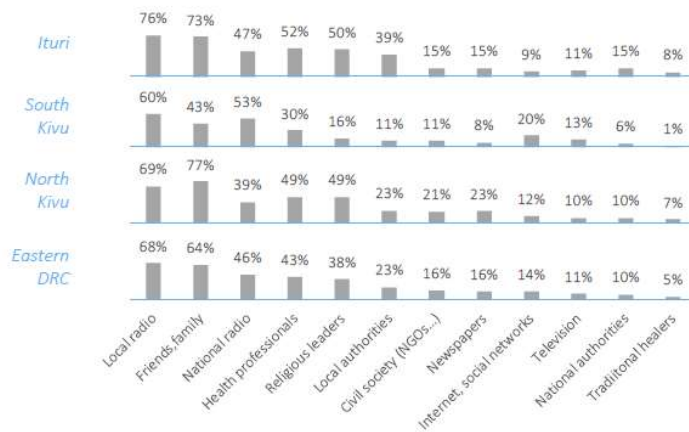
*Report 16 (October):*

*Information sources for Ebola in the last week (% among respondents that heard of Ebola)*



*Report 17 (December)*

*Source of Information about Ebola – Provincial level (% respondents)*





### Trust in information sources

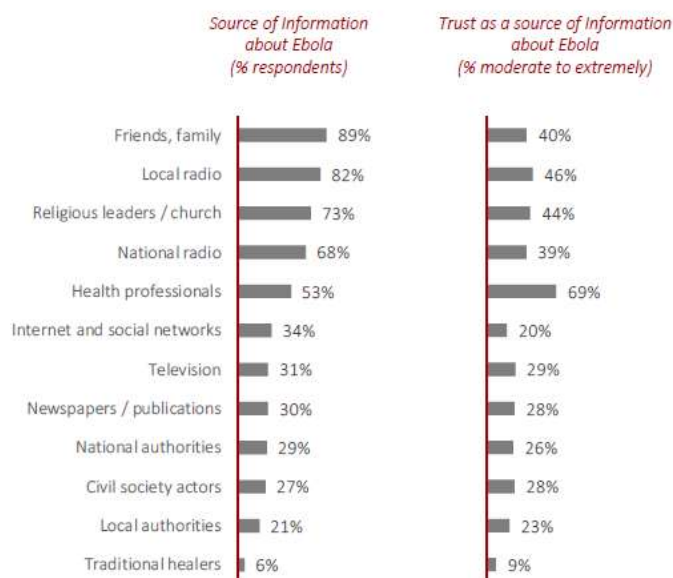
Several elements of the responses to the HHI reports of October and December conducted among the population of Eastern RDC and among the population of the cities of Beni and Butembo (in the case of the Ebola report) highlight the sometimes weak relationship of trust between the media and the population. Nevertheless, it should be borne in mind that respondents spoke specifically about the Ebola epidemic, and that this is a particularly sensitive issue in the region. The results obtained have shown us that this is an issue that crystallizes passions in the DRC and is particularly sensitive to false rumours and misinformation.

Overall, confidence in Ebola information sources is low. Health professionals are the preferred source of information on the subject (69% of respondents had moderate to high self-confidence), but as the percentage shows, just 53% of the population are exposed to information from health professionals.

The percentage of people who trust the official media on the subject is rather low. 46% of respondents expressed a moderate to high level of confidence in local radio, and 39% in national radio. Despite this rather low level of confidence, this still makes local radio stations the second most plausible source of information for the population surveyed.

Local radios are followed by religious leaders (44% of the respondents had moderate to high self-confidence) which makes them the third most reliable source of information for respondents.

Only 40% of respondents trust their friends and family as a source of information about Ebola "moderately, very much or extremely" whereas this category represents the source of information to which the population surveyed is most exposed (89%). Trust in authorities and NGOs is also low (23% moderately - extremely for neighbourhood leaders, 28% for NGOs).

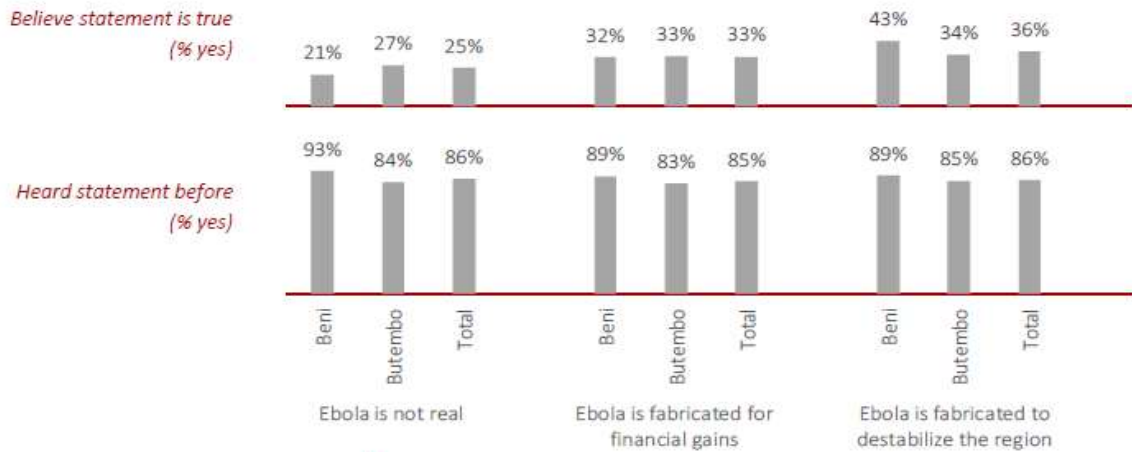


### Misinformation

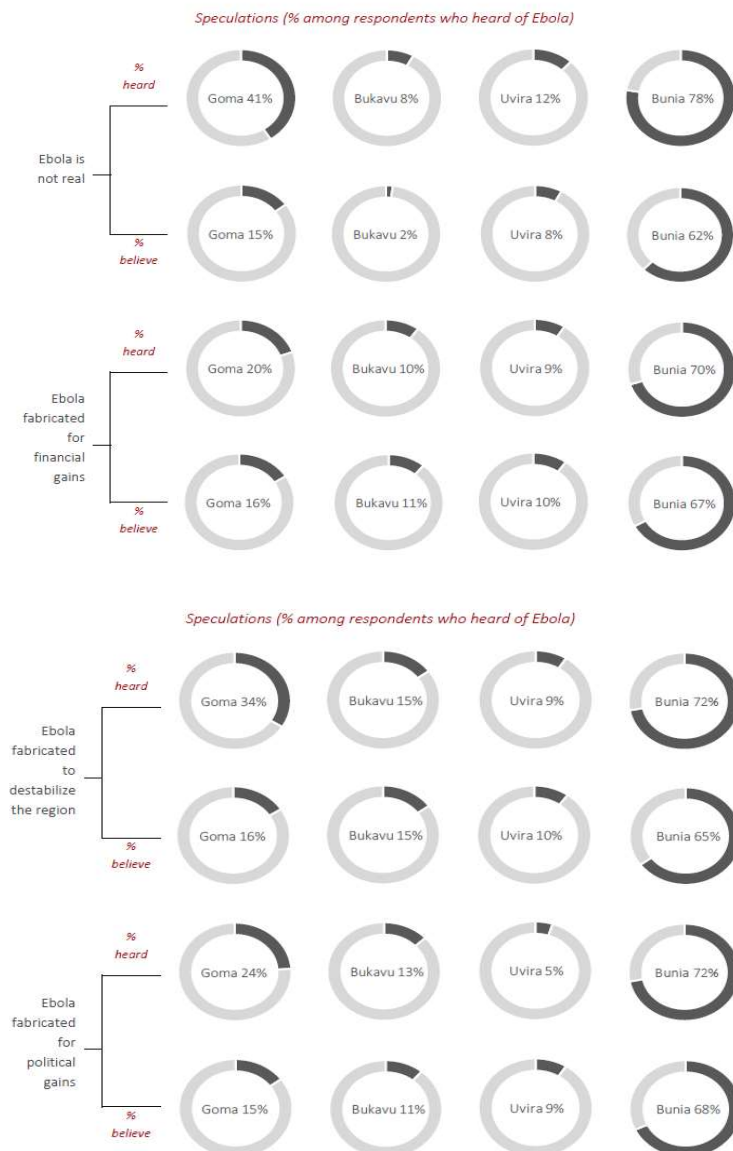
Misinformation is a major challenge for efforts to respond to the Ebola crisis in the DRC. The three reports based on investigations conducted after the official announcement of the epidemic by the government highlighted this issue.

Most respondents heard that the epidemic was not real (86%), or that it was fabricated for financial gain (85%) or to destabilize the region (86%). Even if only a significantly lower percentage were likely to believe these speculations, one in four respondents in Beni and Butembo believe that Ebola is not real (25%) and one in three believe it was made for financial reasons (33%) or to destabilize the region (36%).

These figures are based on the second survey exclusively on the Ebola epidemic and interviews conducted in September 2018 in the cities of Beni and Butembo.



The October report shows that 41% of the population surveyed in the city of Goma (North Kivu) was exposed to false rumours that the epidemic was not real. Of these 41%, 15% of the population actually think it is an invention. In the same vein, 16% of respondents believe that the virus was manufactured by some individuals for financial gain. 16% of respondents believe that the epidemic was manufactured to destabilize the region, and 15% believe that the virus was invented for political gain.



These data also show that information and misinformation travel together. The level of belief in Ebola speculation is higher where knowledge of the epidemic is also the highest.

The December report also supports the observations mentioned above. Among respondents who have heard of Ebola, 20% believe that the epidemic is not real. In the same vein, several respondents believe that the crisis was fabricated from scratch for financial gains (21%), political gains (21%) or to destabilize the region (22%).

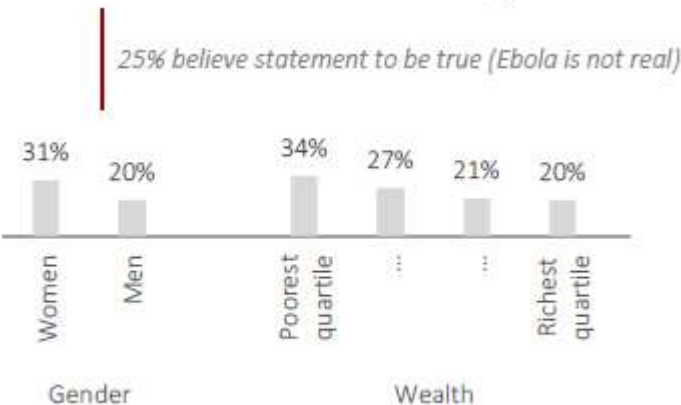
The perception of Ebola haemorrhagic fever, the response to this epidemic and how information about it is received in the region are greatly influenced by the political, psychological and socio-cultural context in which the affected population lives, particularly in its relations with the authorities. The decision to cancel election in this region due to the Ebola crisis certainly played a strong role in the perception the Ebola crisis was manipulated for political gains. Furthermore, the daily experience and management of the epidemic has given people a sense of what some call the "Ebola business". Indeed, with significant financial resources stemming from the international community, a huge business has developed in which the population sees the game of all those who benefit from it. The population has therefore developed a great mistrust of international actors, because they suspect that they want to keep the epidemic going in order to feed their own economic interests.

*Gender differentiation*

The results revealed gender differentiation in several areas. First, in access to information. Indeed, women consume the media much less often than men. For example, only 69% of women listen to radio at least occasionally compared to 87% of men; 44% of women use a cell phone occasionally compared to 67% of men, and 35% of men connect to the Internet at least occasionally, compared to 17% of women.

There is also a difference in the level of trust in the media. Women are less likely than men to rely on radio as a source of information, reflecting their less frequent use of this medium. Qualitative information suggests that when a radio is available in the household, it is usually controlled by the male head of household.

Finally, in the area of misinformation, there are also significant variations between women and men. For example, the belief that Ebola does not exist was slightly more prevalent among women than men. The report devoted exclusively to Ebola shows, for example, that 31% of women did not believe in the importance of the virus compared to 20% of men, with an average of 25% for all sexes combined.



In the same vein, the report 17 (December) showed that 23% of the women interviewed did not believe in the epidemic, compared to 17% of men.

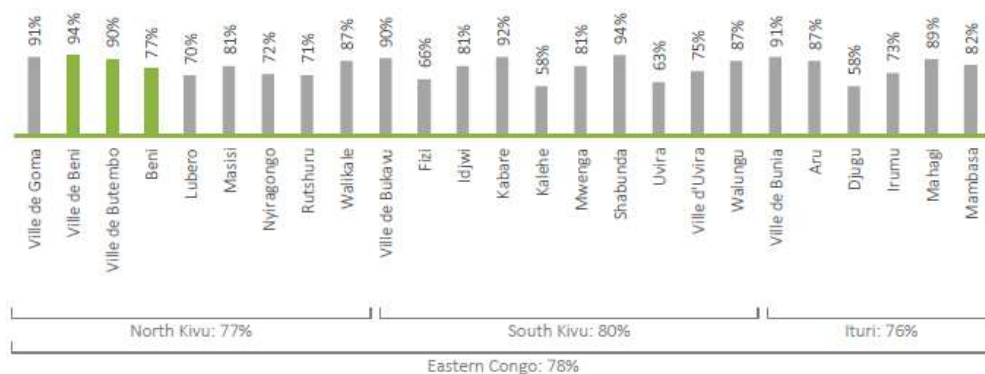
These statistics might be linked to parameters such as:

- The average level of education of the women interviewed compared to that of the man interviewed
- The social situation and/or the standard of living of the family, which also influences the availability of the media and the nature and degree of information thirst
- The socio-professional situation which also influences interaction with the media
- The "natural", "social" or "ethno cultural" division of labour between men and women in North Kivu society, which encourages "male" discussions after work while women are responsible for multiple household chores. As a result of the division of labour, men are in a better position and more familiar with the media than women. Women learn more from their husbands, friends and other family members than directly through interaction with the media.

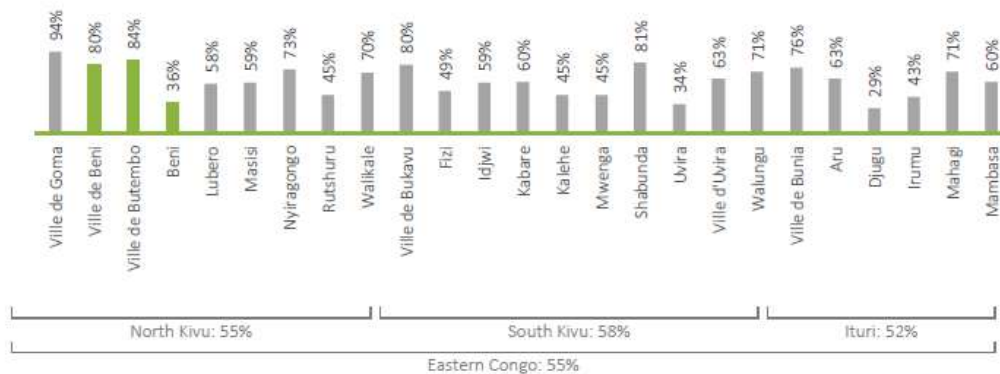
### Territorial differences

There are also significant differences between the territories. Media consumption is particularly high in urban areas. More than 90% of respondents in Goma, Beni or Butembo, for example, report listening to the radio at least occasionally. On the other hand, radio consumption was significantly lower in remote areas. Inequalities in access to media and communication are even more marked when considering the use of mobile phones or access to the Internet.

Radio consumption (% listening to radio at least occasionally)



Cellphone usage (% using a cellphone at least occasionally)



Data from July 2018

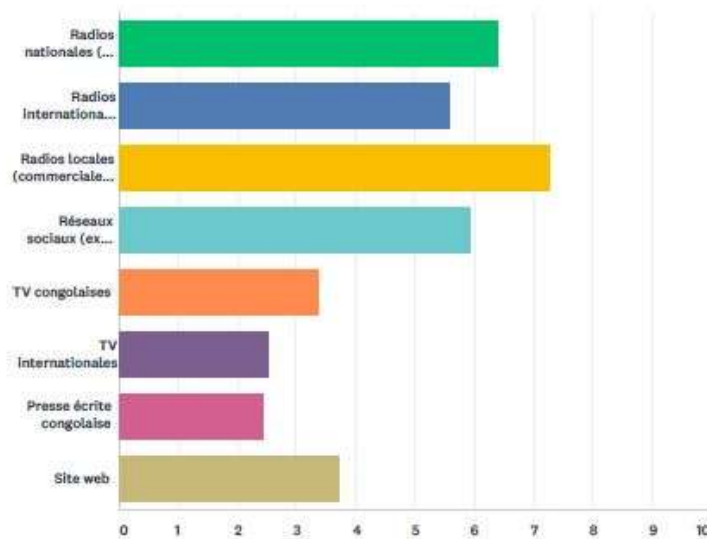
### 3.2. LOCAL RADIOS IN NORTH KIVU

#### *Most used media and geographical reach*

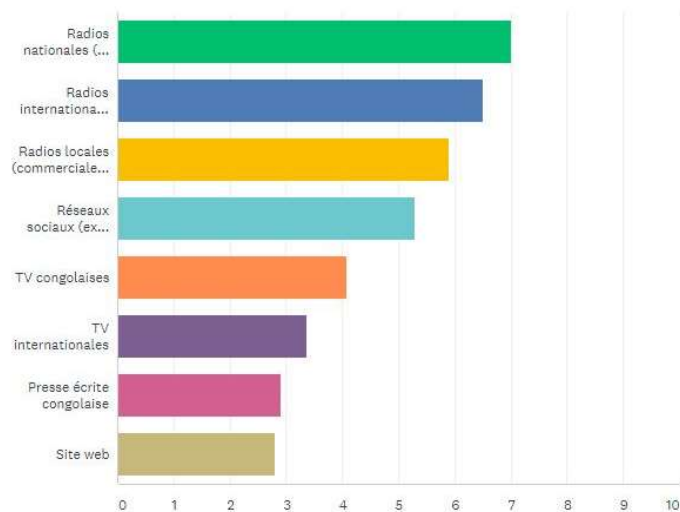
Local, national and international radio stations, as well as social networks, are the most frequently used sources of information by the journalists of the local radios surveyed.

Among this top four, the order of importance seems to change according to the geographical scope of the issue in question. Concerning Ebola, a more local issue, the most used media were local radio stations, while for the presidential elections, a more national issue, the most used media were first national radio stations, followed by international radio stations. Thus, the journalists interviewed logically adapt their sources of supply according to the geographical scope of the issues they are covering.

*Media preferred by respondents to obtain information on the Ebola epidemic:*



*Media preferred by respondents to obtain information on presidential elections:*



Social networks are also an important means of information in all three case studies. On the contrary, Congolese and international television, the Congolese written press and websites are much less used by respondents in all three cases.

At the national and international levels, some radios are used significantly more by the majority of respondents than others. This makes it possible to identify clear trends on which radios can be considered as "reference" radios.

- At the national level, Radio Okapi is the most widely used medium, far surpassing Top Congo FM and the Radio Television Nationale Congolaise (RTNC).
- Internationally, Radio France International (RFI) is the most widely used medium, far surpassing Voice of America (VOA). Other radio stations mentioned also include Deutsche Welle (DW) and the BBC.

On the contrary, the use of local radio stations is characterized by a great diversity, any political or religious tendency combined. It is much more difficult to identify a clear trend among the majority of respondents to regular use of a particular radio. Only a few are mentioned several times, but in small proportions (Radio Moto, Radio Muungano Benu or Radio Graben Beni). In order to identify a core group of local radios presenting the greatest potential to promote good governance and accountability locally, the data of these report should therefore be crossed with additional data of audiences surveys and mapping of local radios.<sup>9</sup> The analysis of the ownership and sources of funding of those radios, as well as the monitoring of their broadcasting would help to assess the viability and the reliability of those local radios.

#### *Social media as a source of information for local radio stations*

The surveys have shown that social media is an important source of information for local journalists, despite the high cost of Internet access and the poor connection that often prevails in the region.

The vast majority of respondents say they regularly search for information on social networks. This trend is slightly more pronounced for subjects of national scope (electoral process and presidential elections) with all respondents using social networks, than for the more local subject (Ebola virus), with 15 respondents out of 18 using social networks to learn about the subject. These rates of use of social networks are much higher than in the population (only 7% of the panel surveyed by HHI in Report 15 (see p.10) said they get their information through social networks, making them the fifth largest source of information for the population).

The most used social network is Facebook, followed by Twitter to a lesser extent. In terms of frequency, most respondents report using social networks on a daily basis.

In general, the use of social networks is characterized by a very great diversity in the pages or profiles consulted, all subjects combined. However, some pages are quoted more than others:

- On Facebook, the most frequently cited pages are those of Radio Okapi and News.congo. This trend is slightly less pronounced for the specific case of the Ebola virus, although in this case too, these two pages remain the most frequent, along with that of the Ministry of Health.
- On Twitter, two accounts are particularly consulted on the national subject of the elections: that of Provincial Governor Julia Paluku, and that of Radio France International journalist Sonia Rolley. On the Ebola virus premises, the accounts of Julien Paluku, Radio Okapi, the Ministry of

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<sup>9</sup> UNICEF has recently undertaken a mapping of around 700 community radios in around 300 emergency areas in DRC that could provide a useful database; Fondation Hirondelle also has a detailed mapping and an operational network of around 150 local radios over the country.

Health and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) are those that were mentioned several times by respondents, but to a lesser extent.

This diversity of sources used, which characterizes the use of Facebook and Twitter, is even more important when considering the WhatsApp groups used by respondents. For this social "network", operating on the model of an instant messaging system, it is even more difficult to identify a particular trend. Our results also do not show any particular geographical overlap, so each respondent seems to use their "own" WhatsApp groups.

In addition, the results also raised three interesting points:

- 1) In the third case study on the presidential election, respondents were asked the following question: "*Would a WhatsApp group bringing together, for example, journalists from partner radio stations, journalists from Kinshasa and international cooperation actors to share verified information on governance issues in the DRC be useful to you?*" The answers reflect a great enthusiasm for this idea. Among the benefits cited by respondents, the following points can be mentioned:
  - a. Would make it possible to be better informed, and in a more secure and verified manner.
  - b. Would provide a territorial framework that is currently lacking.
  - c. Would allow some rumours to be verified before spreading them.
  - d. Would allow a valuable exchange between colleagues on new ideas and to share their respective experiences, and finally to forge links between journalists.
  - e. This project would only be useful if significant resources are put in place in terms of connection facilities, equipment and training for journalists.

This enthusiasm seems to be in line with our observations. Indeed, the great diversity of the groups used by respondents clearly shows that there is no reference group on which respondents can draw verified information.

- 2) In the third case study, respondents were asked the following question: "*During Internet outages, would you be interested in obtaining verified information on good governance by SMS or telephone number?* ». Again, the proposal was enthusiastically received. This reaction must be seen in the context of the Internet blackout (decided by the government) that occurred during the results announcement period and that prevented the majority of respondents from working.
- 3) In the third case study, the following question was asked of respondents: "*What would be useful to you to better share and rectify information on social networks?* ». The following answers were provided, in order of importance:
  - a. Connection to a permanent Internet network.
  - b. Lack of computer equipment.
  - c. Need for techniques to verify information sources, related to lack of training, accuracy of journalistic work and critical thinking.
  - d. Need for legislation to regulate social networks.
  - e. Need to develop a more efficient system of correspondence between journalists in the DRC.
  - f. Need to develop social interactions within regions.

### *Non-media influences*

In general, the main sources of non-media information used by respondents are political actors. We include in this category national authorities, national and local representatives and representatives of political parties. Civil society actors are also called upon on several occasions. Some special cases:

- When it comes to the Ebola virus, politicians are preceded by doctors, nurses and representatives of health authorities. Family and friends also seem to be particularly solicited (3rd place after health authorities and national authorities).
- In the context of elections, CENI members are also very often cited as an important source of information by respondents.
- In the context of elections, religious authorities come in fourth place. Their importance as an information channel is thus significant. This trend has already been observed when analysing the main sources of information for the population, especially in the context of Ebola, where religious authorities are on average the third or fourth source of information.
- In the context of the Ebola virus, NGO representatives are also mentioned a few times, mainly from MSF.

These trends can also be observed when examining the categories of people most solicited by respondents for interviews or debates on their radio. Politicians of all types and CENI members represent the majority in the context of elections, while in the context of Ebola, interventions by doctors, nurses and health authorities were the most frequent, while remaining closely followed by those of politicians.

In the context of the elections as well as for the Ebola virus, the vast majority of respondents produced programs and debates. On average, respondents reported having held at least two debates per week, to which an average audience of 20 people was able to respond live.

## 3.3. SOCIAL MEDIA

### *Most influential users on Twitter*

In order to identify the most influential users on Twitter, Demos researchers analysed which accounts were the most frequently mentioned on social media. The results of this analysis conducted for the three case studies show that the most influential users on Twitter vary according to the context and issues analysed:

- In the context of Kabila's announcement, the most widely reported accounts were those of politicians, news websites (actualite.cd and topcongo), journalists (Stanis Bujakera, Congolese journalist working for the.cd news website and Sonia Rolley of RFI), as well as the Electoral Commission's account. By far the most widely reported account was that of Moïse Katumbi, an opposition candidate banned from entering the DRC by President Kabila. Other opposition leaders and candidates for election were among the 12 most frequently mentioned users, such as Felix Tshisekedi or Vital Kamerehe.
- In the context of Ebola, the most widely reported accounts were those of the DRC Ministry of Health, Stanis Bujakera (Congolese journalist working for the site actualite.cd) and LuchaRDC (North Kivu youth political movement). The rest of the ranking included news sites (actualite.cd), politicians (including Olly Illunga, Minister of Health of the DRC, as well as accounts of international NGOs (UNICEF, WHO, AfricaCDC).

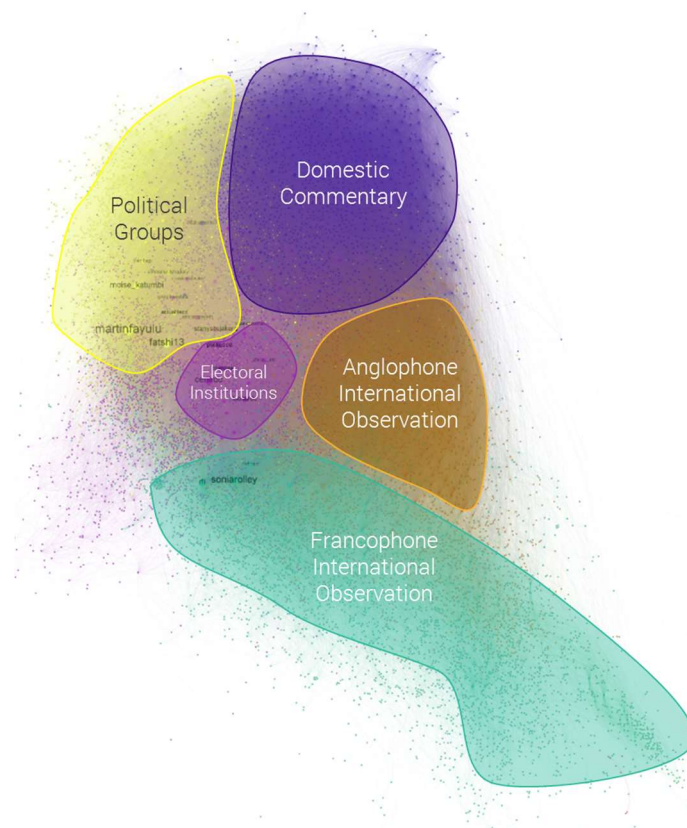


- In the context of the presidential election, the ten most mentioned accounts can be divided into two categories: those of politicians involved in the election (Martin Fayulu, Félix Tshisekedi, Moïse Katumbi), and those of French-speaking media and journalists covering the election. The top ten also highlights the importance of three major French-language media inside and outside the DRC: RFI, Politico and Actualite.cd.

Overall, the most influential Twitter accounts in public conversations surrounding elections can be represented using a network map, on which 5 main groups are represented.

- 1) Political groups: Many of the high-profile Twitter accounts that participated in the election conversations were managed by politicians involved in the elections. This community included the main candidates for the presidential election, including the final winner, Felix Tshisekedi.
- 2) Electoral institutions: This community was mainly focused on the DRC Electoral Commission and its president, Corneille Nanga.
- 3) Comment from the interior of the country: This group was mainly composed of users based in the DRC, who used Twitter to share reports on the counting of ballots and to raise public awareness of electoral irregularities.
- 4) International observations in English: The most widely reported tweets mainly referred to media reports on election coverage (reports by the Financial Times and journalists such as Thomas Wilson), as well as reports from English-speaking NGOs, such as Ida Sawyer, Deputy Director of the Africa Division of Human Rights Watch.
- 5) International Observations in French: This group was composed of the accounts of the largest international media in French language, and French-speaking "international" commentators or spectators. Within this group, leading voices were heard, including those of Radio France Internationale (RFI) and its subsidiary RFI Afrique, as well as by RFI journalists such as Sonia Rolley.

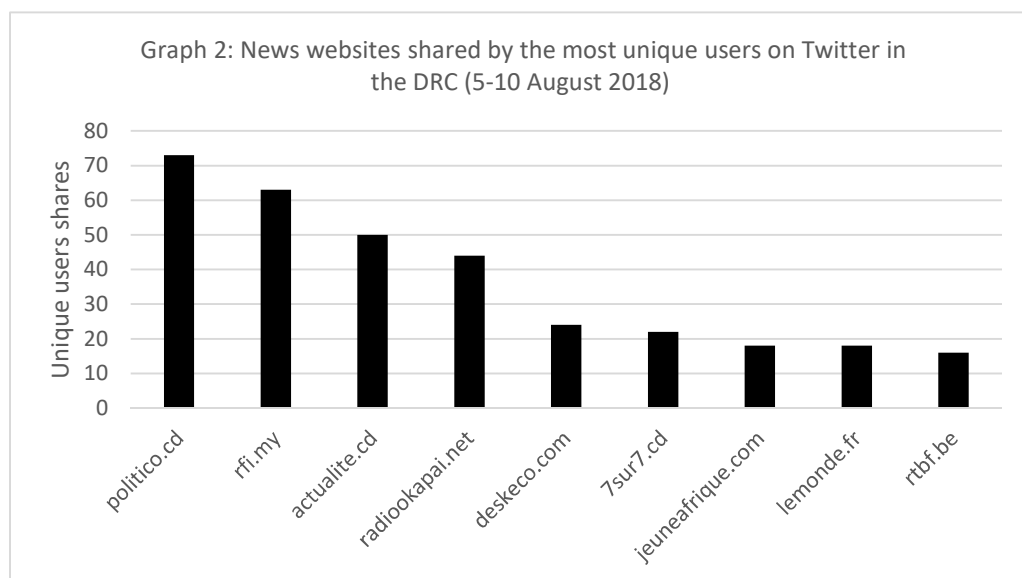
This network map was built with the data from the third case study:



### Most shared websites and articles

On Twitter, the most shared websites and the content of the most shared articles vary according to the context:

- In the context of Kabila's announcement, the most shared links on Twitter were referring to national news websites. The sites of Actualite.cd, Politico.cd and Radio France Internationale (RFI) were the most frequent ones. 9 out of 10 of the most widely shared articles were reports on the upcoming elections in the DRC. Topics covered included Kabila's announcement, the international community's reaction to the announcement, opposition politicians' candidatures, or LUCHA's call to protest if Kabila was a candidate in the elections. The most common link was to an article published on Actualite.cd on 8 August 2018 reporting a press release from the (at the time) US Ambassador to the United Nations, Nikki Haley, welcoming Kabila's decision not to run for a third term and stressing the need to continue to guarantee free and fair elections.



- In the context of Ebola, Demos researchers identified 441 links from 168 different websites in the analysed sample. The five most shared links containing the word "Ebola" were articles on the Actualite.cd website containing information on the status of the Ebola epidemic and the policy response to it. The other most frequently cited news sites were cas-info.ca, and 7sur7.cd.

The most frequently shared websites on Twitter in the Ebola context:

Domain name	Count
actualite.cd	61
cas-info.ca	23
7sur7.cd	14
mailchi.mp	12
mediacongo.net	10

- In the context of the presidential election, only 5 of the 20 most shared websites were national news sites (actualite.cd, politico.cd, 7sur7.cd, radiookapi and desteco.com. The other most shared sites are international news sites (RFI, Jeune Afrique, RTBF, Financial Times, etc.) or links to other social media (YouTube, Facebook, etc.).

Website	Description	# Times Linked
twitter.com	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	26895
bit.ly	Link Shortening Service	6126
actualite.cd	Domestic Media	5263
rfi.my	International Media	5107
youtu.be	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	4106
www.politico.cd	Domestic Media	4058
dlvr.it	Link Shortening Service	3283
www.facebook.com	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	2395
www.jeuneafrique.com	International Media	1312
7sur7.cd	Domestic Media	1286
www.rtf.be	International Media	1239
www.radiokapi.net	Domestic Media	1198
www.rfi.fr	International Media	1101
buff.ly	Link Shortening Service	1041
www.ft.com	International Media	1012
www.youtube.com	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	980
www.theguardian.com	International Media	927
ow.ly	Link Shortening Service	830
f24.my	International Media	811
afrique.lalibre.be	International Media	804
www.instagram.com	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	736
deskeco.com	Domestic Media	723
goo.gl	Link Shortening Service	661
www.lemonde.fr	International Media	659
www.lalibre.be	International Media	590

#### On WhatsApp:

In general, the most shared links on WhatsApp during the study period refer to local and national news websites. Radio Moto (radiomotofm.info), 7sur7.cd and Actualite.cd sites are the most frequent ones.

- In the context of Ebola, Demos identified 175 links to 25 different sites out of the 8 WhatsApp groups observed during the period. The most shared sites were the local Radio Moto Butembo-Beni news site, national news sites (actualite.cd, Journal des Nations, 7sur7.cd, cas-info.ca, mediacongo.net) and a health newsletter published on Mailchimp. Although there have been some links to international information sites, users therefore seem to prefer local and national sources of information to learn about the epidemic.

It should be borne in mind that the articles published on the Radio Butembo-Beni news website are not signed, and often offer little evidence to support their claims. This indicates that particular attention should be paid to the reliability of shared information on these types of news sites on social media platforms.

*The most frequently shared websites on WhatsApp in the Ebola context:*

Domain name	Count
radiomotofm.info	32
actualite.cd	31
journaldesnations.net	27
mailchi.mp	24
7sur7.cd	12

- In the context of the presidential election, the total number of shared links on WhatsApp to national media is 15. This is in stark contrast to Twitter, where only 5 of the 20 most shared links are to national media. On the other hand, international media are much less represented on WhatsApp (3 international sites out of the 20 most shared) than on Twitter (10 international sites out of the 20 most shared). This seems to indicate that the most shared sites on WhatsApp are more local in scope than the sites shared via Twitter.

Of these many links to national media, a number appear to be simple blogs or news sharing websites, probably managed by one or two administrators. These results therefore highlight the importance of local media in the dissemination of news, on the one hand, and the use of WhatsApp as a means of accessing local information, on the other.

URL	Description	# Shares
radiomotofm.info	Domestic Media	1299
7sur7.cd	Domestic Media	1209
actualite.cd	Domestic Media	737
youtu.be	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	584
jambordc.info	Domestic Media	507
journaldesnations.net	Domestic Media	413
twitter.com	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	363
lesvolcansnews.net	Domestic Media	300
e36he.app.goo.gl	Unknown	288
actu30.info	Domestic Media	277
afriqueinfomagazine.net	Domestic Media	272
lessentielrdc.info	Domestic Media	257
chat.whatsapp.com	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	224
lesvolcannews.wordpress.com	Domestic Media	214
m.facebook.com	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	190
t.co	Social Media/Content Sharing Platform	187
opr.news	Unknown	140
www.objectif-infos.cd	Domestic Media	116
www.laprunellerdc.info	Domestic Media	115
www.mediacongo.net	Domestic Media	109

scooprdc.net	Domestic Media	93
www.politico.cd	Domestic Media	75
afrique.lalibre.be	International Media	72
www.jeuneafrique.com	International Media	66
news-af.op-mobile.opera.com	International Media	65

### *Content of shared opinions*

#### On Twitter:

- In the context of Kabila's announcement, Demos researchers conducted a review of what DRC residents talked about on Twitter when they used the word "Kabila". A distinction was also made between before and after the announcement.

The tweets analysed before Kabila's announcement (between August 5 and 7) expressed a climate of uncertainty about the upcoming elections. 27% of the tweets analysed expressed opinions (personal or reported) on Kabila, often critical (25 out of 27 tweets), 23% concerned the expectation of Kabila's announcement of Front Commun pour le Congo (FCC) candidate for the election, 20% concerned the opposition or a particular opposition candidate and 18% concerned speculation that Kabila would stand for election or not. It should be noted that some tweets criticized opposition candidates or asked the opposition to do more.

The tweets analysed after the outgoing president's announcement (between August 8 and 10) expressed a great deal of mistrust on the part of the population regarding Kabila's intentions. Indeed, several tweets argued that Joseph Kabila's appointment of a favourite candidate was a political manoeuvre to rig the elections and that he would eventually remain in power. Other tweets expressed concern that even if Kabila was not formally president, he would continue to influence Congolese politics behind the scenes.

39% of tweets containing the word "Kabila" expressed personal opinions about his decision not to run. 25% of the tweets relayed the news of the announcement, 12% relayed personal opinions on the candidate nominated by Kabila, and 7% relayed opinions on the opposition or on opposition candidates.

- In the context of the presidential election, Demos researchers analysed the Twitter activity on election day. Social media was used mainly as a means of disseminating reports and warnings about electoral malfunctions and professional misconduct during the vote. Of the tweets analysed by the researchers, 63% focused on election mismanagement, corruption and fraud.

#### On WhatsApp:

- In the context of the announcement of the Ebola outbreak, Demos researchers conducted a review of what DRC residents talked about in 8 WhatsApp groups when they used the word "Ebola".

One of the most frequently discussed topics on Ebola was the evolution of the epidemic. 22% of the messages in the sample shared information about new cases of Ebola contamination or death in various forms (some messages were weekly newsletters sharing government agency updates, others seemed to share local information from "directly from the field"). 17% of the messages contained information on the government's response to the disease, 8% contained general health information and recommendations (hygiene tips, symptom descriptions, hotline

phone numbers). Finally, it is interesting to note that 13% of the messages in the sample mentioned rumours, conspiracy theories or misinformation. As indicated above, these results must be seen in the political, psychological and socio-cultural context in which the population affected by the epidemic lives, and in particular in its highly tense relations with the authorities and international organizations on this subject.

The most shared message (shared 5 times) among WhatsApp groups was a Ministry of Health newsletter published on Mailchimp on 17 September 2018. The bulletin describes the evolution of the Ebola epidemic in North Kivu and contains a summary of the number of Ebola cases, suspected cases, deaths and recoveries in the region. It also contains news on the government's response to the epidemic, including surveillance and vaccination activities.

- In the context of the presidential election, Demos researchers analysed the activity on WhatsApp on election day. The volume of messages reached a peak during the election day, with 1014 messages sent. The researchers compiled these messages and categorized them by theme to understand how WhatsApp was used on polling day. Several message categories could be identified:
  - “Electoral difficulties”: the most important category in terms of number, comprising more than a third of the sample. These tweets consisted mainly of testimonies about problems during the elections.
  - “Electoral news”: this category consisted mainly of general and positive coverage of the election as it unfolded.
  - Encouragement to vote: a small proportion of the messages sampled (8%) encouraged Congolese voters to participate in the elections.
  - Instructions to avoid fraudulent practices: small but important category (analysts identified 14 messages in this category). These were mainly tweets containing specific instructions on how to identify, report and avoid fraudulent practices or voting problems. These tweets included instructions on how to verify that the vote has been cast and how to address the challenges associated with voting.

Category	# Messages	% Messages
Electoral Difficulties	65	33%
Voting Reportage	37	19%
Election News	24	12%
Get out the Vote	15	8%
Anti-Corruption	14	7%
Other	45	23%

Several differences can be identified between the two platforms analysed, but also several similarities. Both were most often used to warn of problems in the electoral process: this trend was regularly observed on both Twitter posts and conversations with Congolese WhatsApp groups. WhatsApp conversations, however, focused more often on the day-to-day processes of electoral participation: going to the polls and ensuring that your vote is valid, for example. Little of this type of content has appeared on Twitter. This finding that the transmission of information about the daily processes of the

local community is more pronounced on WhatsApp suggests that WhatsApp is more used locally than Twitter.

### *Disinformation and rumours*

Social media analysis in the context of the Ebola crisis has highlighted content sharing misinformation and false rumours on WhatsApp and Twitter.

On WhatsApp, news from established (and less established) websites was mixed with information and rumours from local communities that did not mention a specific source of information. WhatsApp users have also often used the platform to share long opinion articles or articles they have written - although the allegations often lacked supporting evidence. This mixture of information, opinions, rumours and misinformation about WhatsApp groups made it difficult to distinguish between fact and fiction.

More than 13% of the messages in the sample analysed on WhatsApp mentioned or spread rumours circulating in North Kivu about Ebola or the government's response to it.

On Twitter, on the other hand, the word limit prevents users from writing long opinion articles or copying and pasting articles without sharing a link. Although rumours and misinformation also circulate on Twitter, it is easier to distinguish tweets that express personal opinions or unverified information from news from credible sources.

The rumours circulating on Twitter and WhatsApp do not all originate from social media. In some cases, it seems that politicians are behind a particular rumour that is then relayed by the local and national press and shared and discussed on social media. In these cases, social platforms act as rumour mills by spreading existing rumours to a wider audience.

### *Distrust of the government*

The analysis of social media in the context of the Ebola crisis has highlighted content that reflects mistrust of the government on WhatsApp.

DRC residents also use Twitter and WhatsApp to express their opinions on the political response to the epidemic. In fact, discussions on the Ebola epidemic on social media are highly politicized: various WhatsApp messages included rumours about the origin of the Ebola virus and there was a high level of mistrust and scepticism towards the government and its response to the epidemic.

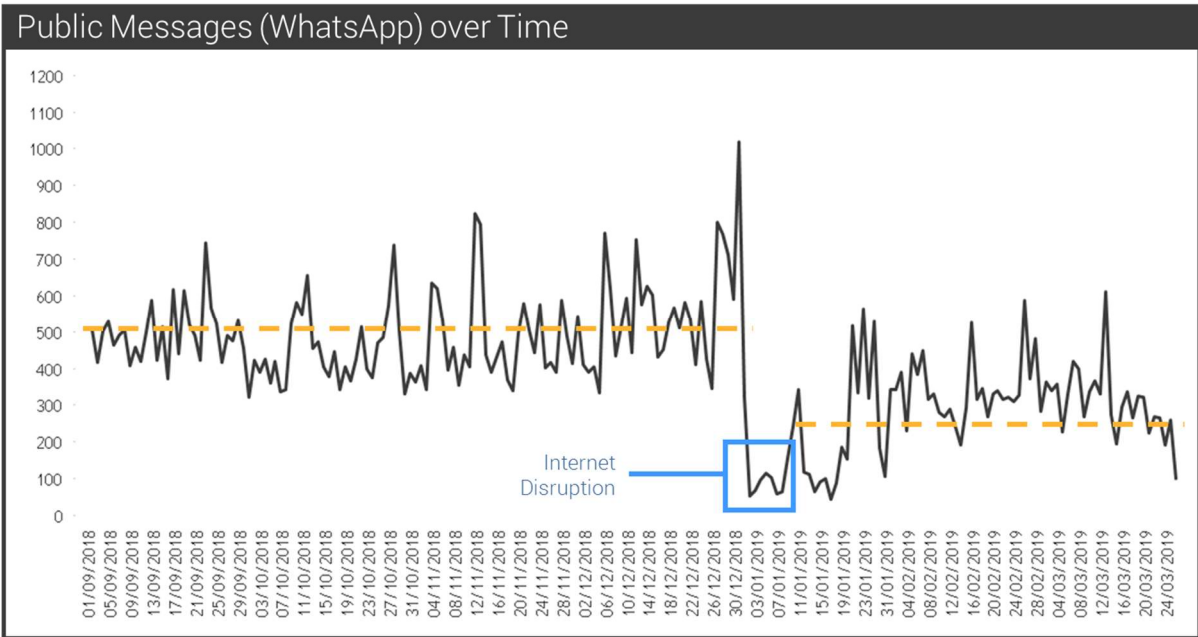
The content of more than one in ten messages in the sample (11%) mentioned user reactions to the government's response to the epidemic, each time negative. A particularly controversial issue was the government's decision not to postpone the first week of school. Some members of civil society, including some teachers and health workers, seemed to be of the opinion that the school should not resume its activities until after the Ebola epidemic ended.

Several messages from WhatsApp reported incidents of violence against health workers during vaccination campaigns. Some of the messages sampled also mentioned disputes related to wage discrimination that would have affected nurses.

### *Variations in online activity*

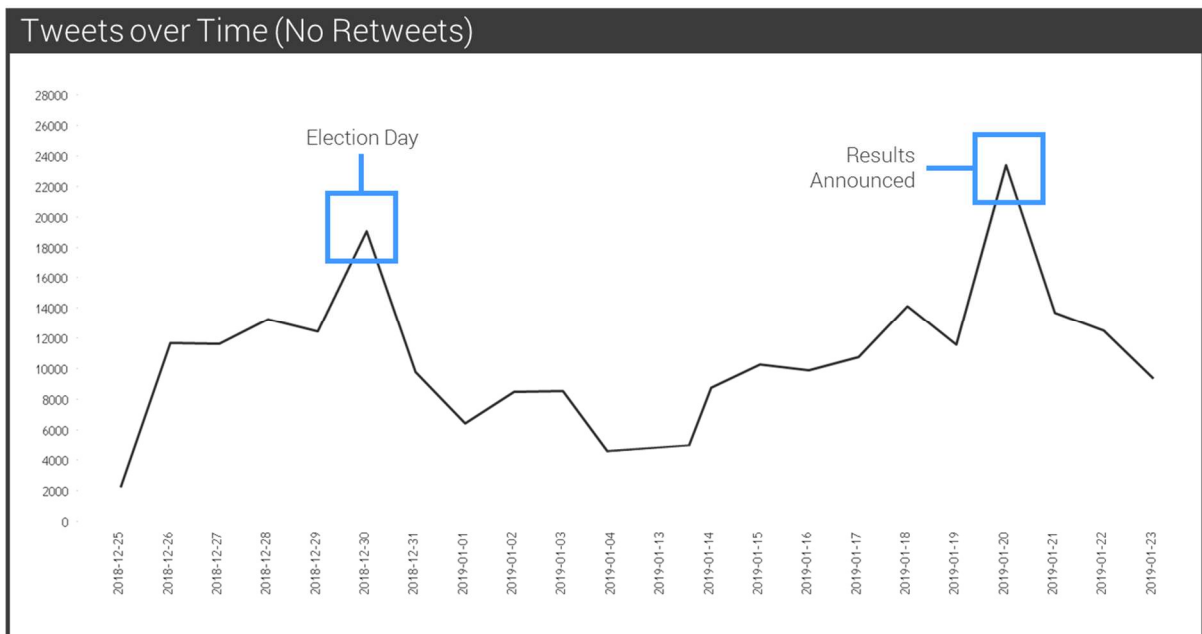
Demos' observations on the third case study (presidential elections) indicated that online activity on the platforms analysed (Twitter and WhatsApp) during the election period experienced two main variations.

On WhatsApp, the analysis showed a significant decrease in the number of messages sent following the Internet outage in the country on 31 December. So, it was mainly users outside the country who were able to share social media news, because national communications were hampered, as shown in the graph below.



In the months leading up to the election, an average of 490 messages were shared in the WhatsApp groups each day, reaching a high of 1,019 on election day. This figure dropped to an average of 280 messages per day from 1 January, a period that therefore directly followed the disruptions in the Internet network. This suggests that network interference has had a lasting impact on the conversations that take place on WhatsApp groups. This decrease was less pronounced on Twitter, probably because of the more "global" nature of its users and the protection surrounding this social media against domestic interference attacking the network.

Two major peaks in message sharing are indicated in the Twitter timeline: the very day of the election and the day the election results were first announced.



Twitter users sent 19,000 tweets on election day. The conversations culminated on January 20 when Tshisekedi was announced as its winner, with 23,000 tweets sent.



### *Surprising and emerging voices*

In addition to detecting and analysing the most influential voices, the researchers developed and implemented two additional methodologies to capture Twitter account activity that did not belong to the most important or influential users. They then applied this methodology to the third case study (presidential elections).

In doing so, the researchers were able to identify users who received a disproportionate share of the conversation compared to the expected share (see for example table below).

User	Description	Minimum* Follower Count	Maximum* Follower Count	% Change
a*****	Automated News Sharing Bot	66	1233	1,768%
e*****	Domestic Citizen Commentator	26	253	873%
g*****	Citizen Political Campaigner	12	103	758%
n*****	Domestic Citizen Commentator	100	765	665%

\*over the period of the case study

Of the twenty accounts emerging from this analysis, fifteen appeared to belong to ordinary Congolese citizens discussing the election. This is an interesting indication that even in a country where Twitter is rarely used, it can still allow ordinary citizens to make their voices heard and provide them with significant public exposure.

## 4. CONCLUSION

In addition to the key takeaways and recommendations presented at the beginning of the report (cf. supra Executive Summary and Recommendations), we conclude by drawing lessons learned on the research approach and possible next steps.

### *Lessons learned and recommendations on the research approach*

The consortium members agree on the very strong potential of the approach adopted. In order to better understand the complex and dynamic information flows in DRC, it is necessary to combine the capacities to look at online and offline information flows, media and non-media channels, expertise on the overall Congolese contexts and the specific topics analysed.

In the case of this consortium, those conditions were met thanks to:

- a. The analyse the sources of information and perceptions of the local population, granted by HHI;
- b. The survey of local radios as a main source of information for the local population, granted by FH;
- c. The analysis of online and social media spaces (Whatsapp and Twitter), granted by DEMOS;
- d. The further contextualization of the findings, granted by ICREDES.

However, combining and coordinating those different tasks is complex. Further resources and time need to be devoted in order to fully tap into the potential of such a study. A consolidated and improved approach should notably:

1. Work towards better coordination between the actors involved: The preparation of case study between all the partners need to start early to allow for better coordination and synergies between the different levels of analysis (e.g. household survey of local population needs a long

time to prepare, while online analysis can be pretty reactive); on the other hand, the partners also need to remain flexible and adapt to the evolution of the volatile local context. The partners need to continuously share the findings at their respective level of analysis as they will influence the questions investigated at the other levels of analysis (e.g. trends observed online might inspire questions for survey of local radios and vice-versa). A consolidated approach should develop a platform for real time information sharing, a dash board that would allow the analysts, media actors, social media platforms and donors to follow the sources and trends of (mis)information. The coordination also requires translation of documents and exchanges between French (for the Congolese partners) and English for international experts and donors.

2. Integrate Facebook data analysis: despite its importance in the DRC, Facebook data analysis could not be integrated into the research due to recent developments in access and data collection policies on this platform. It would however be very useful to include an analysis of Facebook activity in a next study. This might require manual analysis of Facebook pages and contents, which would be significantly more time and resource consuming. The most effective way would be to train Congolese investigators that could do the analysis in the local languages.
3. To the possible extent, the approach should better include offline, non-media and non-institutionalized channels of information such as e.g. “parlementaires debouts”, “radios trottoirs”, taxi drivers, and more structured channels such as religious leaders and schools in the analysis.

Possible next steps could include

- A consolidated approach on the specific topic of the Ebola crisis. As previously exposed, this crisis is characterised by a high level of misinformation. A consolidated approach - including a better mapping and a monitoring of local radios, a wider analysis of non-media channels of information, and a more inclusive analysis of social media – could help better identify the sources and dynamics of misinformation and help to adapt and target the response.
- A comparative approach including another province of interest, such as the Kasai and Kasai Central regions. Such a comparative approach would allow for better understanding of which findings are specific to a certain region and what could potentially be generalised to the wider Congolese context.

## ANNEX 1: LIST OF SOCIAL INFLUENCERS / CHANNELS OF INFORMATION

*NB. The list only reflects the findings around three case studies during the period of the research (cf. supra chapter 2. Methodology). It should be noted that who might or might not be a “social influencer” is highly contextual and depends on the specific topics and period considered. Therefore, continuous mapping is recommended for better targeting.*

*This being said and based on the finding of the study, this annex presents some major sources and channels of information to be considered offline and online.*

To reach **POPULATION IN NORTH KIVU:**

### Electoral process and election context:

1. Radios (71%)
2. Family and friends (57%)
3. Authorities (16%)
4. Television (9%)
5. Social networks (7%)

### Ebola context:

1. Family and friends (83%)
2. Local radios (69%)
3. National radios (56%)
4. Religious leaders (47%)
5. Health professionals (43%)
6. Social networks (26%)

To reach **LOCAL RADIOS IN NORTH KIVU:**

### *Other local radios:*

1. Radio Moto (local radio channel covering the cities of Butembo and Beni in North Kivu. Its website published daily news content on local and national politics, society religion and sport. Articles are not signed and there is little information on the editorial team on the editorial team on the website).
2. Radio Muungano
3. Radio Kivu One
4. Radio Soleil, Radio Butembo, Radio Alliance, Radio Pôle FM

### *National radio:*

1. Radio Okapi
2. Top Congo FM
3. RTNC

### *International radio:*

1. Radio France Internationale (RFI) (1)
2. Voice of America (VOA) (2)
3. Deutsche Welle / BBC (3)

*Social media:*

- On Facebook:
  1. Radio Okapi (<https://www.facebook.com/radiookapi/>)
  2. Congo News (<https://www.facebook.com/CONGO-NEWS-1618608088363297/>)
  3. Ministry of Health (in the case of Ebola) (<https://www.facebook.com/minsanterdc/>)
- On Twitter :
  1. Julien Paluku (<https://twitter.com/julienpalukucom?lang=fr>)
  2. Sonia Rolley (<https://twitter.com/soniarolley?lang=fr>)
  3. Radio Okapi (<https://twitter.com/radiookapi?lang=fr>)
  4. MSF Congo (in the case of Ebola) (<https://twitter.com/MSFcongo?lang=fr>)

To communicate through **SOCIAL MEDIA:**

*Electoral process and elections context:*

*Most influential users on Twitter:*

- Politicians/political parties:
  - Moïse Katumbi (leader of the opposition to Kabila and former governor of Katanga, who has been barred from entering the country by the regim and unable to file his candidacy).
  - Felix Tshisekedi (candidate of the opposition party Union for Democracy and Social Progress elected President of DRC).
  - Martin Fayulu (candidate of the Lamuka coalition who came in second place, and still contests the results of the elections to this day).
  - Vital Kamerhe (candidate of the Union for the Congolese Nation (UNC), an opposition political party)
  - Olivier Kamitatu (spokesman of opposition leader Moïse Katumbi)
  - Ensemble pour le changement (official account of the party supporting Moïse Katumbi's candidacy in the elections)
- Journalists:
  - Stanis Bujakera (DRC journalist for the news website acutalite.cd).
  - Sonia Rolley (French journalist covering the DRC, Burundi and Rwanda for RFI).
- News website:
  - Actualite.CD (DRC news website created in 2016 with offices in Kinshasa and a central editorial team of 11 people. They describe themselves as specialists in news about politics, economics and security and have a national coverage).
  - Politico CD
  - RFI
  - Kinshasa Web
- DRC Electoral Commission (CENI)

- NGOs:
  - Lucha
- Radio channel:
  - Top Congo
- Activists:
  - Boib Vanderhoeve (political activist militating against Kabila)

*Most shared news websites on Twitter (in order of importance):*

- Politico.cd
- RFI
- Actualite.cd
- Radio Okapi
- Jeunes Afrique
- 7sur7.cd (DRC national news website with a 12 people large editorial team. They boast that their website receives more than 100,000 visits every day and have a following of more than 240,000 people on Facebook. They publish about politics, the economy, education, health, culture and sport)
- RTBF
- Financial Times
- Le Monde
- Deskeco / The Guardian / France 24

*Most shared news websites on WhatsApp (in order of importance):*

- Radio Moto FM (local radio channel covering the cities of Butembo and Beni in North Kivu. Its website published daily news content on local and national politics, society religion and sport. Articles are not signed and there is little information on the editorial team on the editorial team on the website)
- 7sur7.cd
- Actualite.cd
- Jambo rdc (local media)
- Journal des Nations (DRC national news website with offices in Kinshasa and a central editorial team of 9 people. It publishes regional, national and international news content on a wide range of issues including politics, society, economy, sports and culture)
- Les volcans news (local media)
- Actu30.info (local media)
- Afrique Info Magazine (national media)
- Les Essentiels RDC (national media)
- Les Volcan News (local Media), Objectif-infos.cd (local media), La Prunelle RDC (local media), Media Congo.net (local media)

*Ebola context:*

*Most influential users on Twitter:*

- Public health institutions:
  - DRC Health Ministry (Official Twitter account of the DRC Health Ministry)
  - Africa CDC (African Center for Disease Control and Prevention; African Union Agency specialized in supporting African countries to improve surveillance, emergency response and prevention of infectious diseases)
  - Pete Salama (World Health Organisation Deputy Director General for Emergency Preparedness and Response)
  - WHO (World Health Organisation)
- Journalists:
  - Stanis Bujakera (Congolese journalist working at Actualite.cd)
- NGO / international organisations:
  - Lucha (Lutte pour le changement; DRC youth political movement started in 2012 in North Kivu, which opposes Kabila and demands social justice against the wider corruption of the political system in DRC).
  - UNICEF DRC (Official page of UNICEF in DRC)
- News websites:
  - Actualite CD
- Politicians:
  - Mbindule Crispin (Deputy of the city of Butembo who was quoted in the media in August as saying he believed Ebola was created in laboratories and moved from Equateur province to Beni to exterminate the population, and who had pushed his supporters to resist vaccination)
  - Julien Paluku (governor of the province of North Kivu since 2007)

*Most shared news websites on Twitter:*

1. Actualite.cd
2. Cas-info.ca (DRC news website based both in Kinshasa and Canada, it published news, polls and investigation pieces on the DRC and the Great Lake region).
3. 7sur7.cd
4. Mailchi.mp
5. Mediacongo.net (DRC news website with offices in Kinshasa and Lubumashi. They publish news on a variety of topics including politics, economics, health, culture, sports, international news, job offers and real estate offers.

*Most influential users on the WhatsApp groups monitored:*

1. Radiomotofm.info
2. Actualite.cd
3. Journaldesnations.net (DRC national news website with offices in Kinshasa and a central editorial team of 9 people. It publishes regional, national and international news content on a wide range of issues including politics, society, economy, sports and culture).
4. Mailchi.mp
5. 7sur7.cd

