Winter 2-1-2024

Lebanon needs food, water, medicine and social media

Elisabeth Croese

ilsecroese@aucegypt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds

Recommended Citation

APA Citation
Croese, E. (2024).*Lebanon needs food, water, medicine and social media* [Master's Thesis, the American University in Cairo]. AUC Knowledge Fountain.
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/2142

MLA Citation
Croese, Elisabeth. *Lebanon needs food, water, medicine and social media*. 2024. American University in Cairo, Master's Thesis. *AUC Knowledge Fountain*.
https://fount.aucegypt.edu/etds/2142

Lebanon needs food, water, medicine and social media

How Lebanese relief organizations navigated basic needs shortages through social media after the 2020 port explosion

A Thesis Submitted by
Elisabeth Croese

to the
Middle East Studies
Graduate Program

8 June 2023

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Lebanon needs food, water, medicine and social media

How Lebanese relief organizations navigated basic needs shortages through social media after the 2020 port explosion

A Thesis Submitted by

Elisabeth Croese

to the

Middle East Studies

Graduate Program

Has been approved by

Dr. Sarah El-Richani (Supervisor)
Assistant Professor
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
The American University in Cairo

    _____

Ambassador Karim Haggag (First Reader/Internal Examiner)
Professor of Practice
Department of Public Policy and Administration
The American University in Cairo

    _____

Dr. Nadine El Sayed (Second Reader/External Examiner)
Associate Professor
Department of Journalism and Mass Communication
The American University in Cairo

    _____

Graduate Program Director   **Date**   **School Dean**   **Date**

_____   _____   _____   _____

Acknowledgments

Abstract

Lebanon has a history of instability, weak governance, and a strong civil society. The country has been in a state of crisis for decades and currently, the state is experiencing multiple crises at once. Political tensions, an economic crisis, and plummeting of the Lebanese Lira, together with the COVID-19 crisis have amounted to the instability of the state. All these tensions escalated even further when Beirut experienced a huge explosion in the port on 4 August 2020, killing over two hundred people and injuring thousands.

Civil society organizations play a crucial role in the development and survival of Lebanon. In a crisis, the civil society organizations in Lebanon are required to constantly change their nature and adapt to the political, social, and economic situation of the state. The weak state creates a strong civil society but one that is never able to develop further than providing basic needs. When there is an absence of the state, civil society organizations fill the role that the state leaves. In a state like Lebanon, the sectarian divide offers another challenge. The sustained instability opens the door for organizations that affiliate with a certain sectarian identity to be established, therefore dividing the population and creating unfair access to the services of those organizations.

Social media is becoming a great source of information, especially in times of crisis. Billions of people have some sort of access to the Internet and social media, therefore making it highly accessible and used worldwide. Civil society organizations, relief organizations, and non-governmental organizations are active users of social media for informal communication and information sharing, and civil society organizations use social media during times of crisis to

create awareness, raise donations and communicate with the audience. When the explosion in Beirut happened, relief organizations turned to social media in an effort to create the awareness that was needed to establish funds and donations. By actively using specific social media strategies, such as using photos and videos, the Lebanese relief organizations generated donations to assist the Lebanese population with basic necessities such as food, water, medical care, and shelter.

The aim of this study is to research how Lebanese relief organizations navigated basic need shortages through Instagram and Facebook in the immediate aftermath of the blast in the Beirut port. This study presents a case study that focuses on the Lebanese Red Cross, the Lebanese Food Bank, Beit El Baraka, and the International Committee of the Red Cross's use of Instagram and Facebook to deliver basic needs to the affected Lebanese population after the explosion on 4 August 2020. It will delve deeper into the analysis of social media strategy, crisis management, and the importance of social media utilization. The research will also highlight how civil society operates in a state that is going through multiple crises, and how relief aid is organized when faced with the biggest non-nuclear explosion that affected the local civil society personally.

Table of contents

List of figures and tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

'For sure social media played a great role in getting funds.' - Lebanese Food Bank.

'Social media is such a powerful tool.' - Beit El Baraka

'We were posting on social media what we were doing and that raised awareness.' - ICRC Lebanon

On 4 August 2020, the city of Beirut in Lebanon experienced an explosion and a shockwave that would eventually be classified as one of the biggest non-nuclear explosions in history. Killing over two hundred people and injuring thousands, it left the city in ruins and many Lebanese without shelter, food, or water and in dire need of medical attention and medicines. After the explosion, relief organizations mobilized to help the affected population. Within minutes of the disaster, the first photos and videos were being uploaded on social media revealing the magnitude of the explosion where all the windows in its proximity shattered and people were swept off their feet. It could all be seen on social media. In the aftermath of the explosion, relief organizations used social media as a tool to raise awareness of the situation and connect with the audience to raise donations.

Prior to the explosion, a build-up of political dissatisfaction erupted into mass demonstrations. In October 2019, demonstrations in Lebanon erupted when hundreds of thousands of people took to the streets to protest against plans to impose taxes on Whatsapp calls, a normally free service. The protests, which continued for months, presented unprecedented unity among the Lebanese

population. In addition to the usual political instability, a grave economic crisis, which saw the currency lose over 90% of its value, and inflation skyrocket over 100%, brought people to the streets until the COVID-19 lockdown; which exacerbated the crisis, calmed the streets due to the strict lockdown measures. In 2020, COVID-19 created a new reality. The virus had nations quarantined, causing political instability because governments were inexperienced in dealing with the situation. Recessions were faced and some economies were left on the brink of collapsing. Lebanon was no exception to the COVID crisis, and this further exacerbated the economic problems. Then came the accumulation of mismanagement of explosive materials resulting in the tragedy of the explosion.

This study focuses on the utilization of social media by relief organizations in Lebanon and the discourse of the relief organizations that were active in providing aid to the Lebanese people in the aftermath of the explosion. In addition, this research will explore how Lebanese civil society organizations navigate themselves and their envisioned mission in a state that is experiencing a multifold crisis. The main research question will involve the role of social media in civil society in Lebanon and how they use it as a tool in realizing their mission, particularly in regard to basic needs distribution after the 2020 Beirut port blast.

Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

The state of Lebanon is a complex and constantly moving state with a rich history that dates back centuries. Demonstrations, civil war, and weak governance are at the forefront of the country's history. The establishment of the state in itself has been a difficult process. This, in turn, had a huge impact on the civil society in the country and on the progress of the nation that seems to always resort back to the same issues and problems.

In order to conduct this research it is important to understand the history of the country, the role of sectarianism, the construction of civil society in Lebanon and how they operate, and the role of social media in mobilization in Lebanon. The literature review is therefore divided into three parts. First, is the historical background of Lebanon from the Ottoman Empire until the post-civil war period. Second, the literature review will touch upon civil society in Lebanon and the power and struggles they face. Lastly, the literature review will discuss past events in Lebanon that were mobilized through social media.

Historical background

Lebanon in the Ottoman Empire and under the French Mandate

Lebanon struggled for independence from foreign powers for centuries and was part of the Ottoman Empire for 400 years, until the fall of the empire in 1918. The area that is now called Lebanon did enjoy a certain amount of autonomy, especially in the rural areas as taxes were mainly collected in the cities (Traboulsi, 2007). The fall of the Ottoman Empire created the opportunity for other foreign colonial powers to take over. In 1918, Britain and France signed the

Sykes-Picot agreement that divided the former provinces of the fallen Ottoman Empire between the two powers (Hakim, 2019). France would obtain power over Syria and Lebanon and issued a mandate over these previous Ottoman provinces starting in 1920 (Fragonese, 2019). When the mandate was announced, the actual definition of Lebanon was not yet determined by the French (Traboulsi, 2007). Eventually, they would combine these plots of land into one state; starting from Mount Lebanon, which has a Christian majority, to the Bekaa Valley and Beirut, which contained a Muslim majority. This newly drawn state would become Greater Lebanon (Hakim, 2019). The borders created by the French at the time did not change, remaining as they are until this day.

The French were initially welcomed as liberators by the Christian community. The group and France had maintained close ties for years as part of the French mission as a Catholic protectorate (Salibi, 1965). The Maronite Christians saw a safe haven in the French mandate since they were offered protection and were comfortable with having a religious majority in Mount Lebanon. However, when the French drew the borders of Greater Lebanon (Salibi, 1965), the Maronites were not the majority anymore (Traboulsi, 2007). The establishment of Greater Lebanon, therefore, forced ethnically and religiously different groups into a new state (Cleveland and Bunton, 2016), which from the onset was deeply divided (Traboulsi, 2007). France faced difficulties in establishing a consistent policy in their newly mandated territories (Hakim, 2019). However, three years after the mandate in 1926, the French were able to establish a constitution (Traboulsi, 2007). In this constitution the basis of the Lebanese political system was drawn, effectively making a formal transition from direct French rule to indirect and limited control (Salibi, 1965). The constitution created the foundation for what is still the system in modern-day

Lebanon (Traboulsi, 2007). A system that is based on the different sectarian demographics of the country, and one that grants all the different groups representation in the parliament.

In this regard, institutions including civil society were highly based on the sectarian divide. There was a strong connection with religious families and ties to the village associations (Haddad, 2016). This changed with the independence of Lebanon and the formal withdrawal of the French powers from the country (Salibi, 1965). The National Pact of 1943 was supposed to be a system that was uniquely Lebanese and would highlight an identity that was not Western but also not Eastern (Fragonese, 2019). The political system is based on power sharing between the different beliefs and sects that Lebanon represents. Public institutions and governmental positions were divided and the political environment thus becomes a 'consociational democracy' (Vertes et al, 2021). This system allowed for the different sectarian groups to coexist, yet this also created division between them by legitimizing their sectarian identities. The differences between them are legally solidified, therefore hindering the notion of 'one nation'. The Pact ensured that the president would always be a Maronite Christian, with a limit of a six-year term in office (Fragonese, 2019). A Sunni Muslim would act as the prime minister and a Shiite Muslim would serve as speaker of parliament (Cleveland and Bunton, 2016).

Independent Lebanon

In the years after independence, the National Pact was challenged on multiple occasions. In 1958, political and religious tensions caused a crisis in the country (Haddad, 2016). President Chamille Chamoun was finishing his term in office; however, he had the desire to run for an additional term which was not allowed in the Constitution (Fragonese, 2019). As a result, demonstrations erupted. When the demonstrations started escalating in the Bekaa Valley,

Chamoun requested military intervention (Salibi, 1965). The US played a big role in resolving the issue, influencing the regime and the demonstrators to reach a compromise where Chamoun would be allowed to serve until the end of his term, but would not be allowed to run for an additional term. Additionally, they elected the moderate Christian Fouad Chehab as the following president (Cleveland and Bunton, 2016).

Until 1958, the state of Lebanon had a weak government and was reliant on associations to respond to the basic needs of the society. These issues were instead left to private initiatives (Harik, 1994). When President Chehab started his term as president, a new type of relationship was formed between the civil society organizations and the government (Yaghi, 2012). The importance of civil society organizations was recognized and the two sectors started to work together (Aboultaif, 2016). Chehab had vastly different ideas from his predecessors and desired to modernize Lebanon, which meant that the central government's power would increase at the expense of the political bosses. The addition of a social welfare system and the improvement in public work projects such as road buildings and the extension of the water supply to rural areas increased the power of the local government (Haddad, 2016). During his term, his approach 'Chehabism' challenged the transformation of the country's economy, social system, and political structure. Nevertheless, Chehab never considered the role of political sectarianism and never abolished it. Rather he wanted to correct the failures of the sectarian system through economic and political reforms (Traboulsi, 2007). Therefore sectarian politics and members of the different sectarian groups would always have a primary loyalty to their confessional community (Yaghi, 2012).

Lebanese Civil War

Another instance in which the National Pact was challenged was in 1975, with the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War (Haddad, 2016). The political changes within and between the regional powers in the Middle East threatened the already fragile sectarian balance in Lebanon, triggering a conflict that morphed into a fifteen-year-long civil war. Under the presidency of Suleiman Frangieh nepotism and corruption started to rise rapidly (Haddad, 2016). In addition, the inherent favoritism towards Christians contributed to the Muslim's grievances in regard to social and economic circumstances even though Muslims outnumbered the Christians (Khattab, 2022). However, the Christian population was not inclined to give up their majority in the political environment and insisted on the previous agreements of a parliamentary ratio of six Christian deputies against every five Muslim deputies. Both the Shia and the Sunni communities felt underprivileged and underrepresented even though they represented the demographic majority. They should therefore be represented as such since the size of a sect should be reflected in the Chamber of Deputies (Chamie, 1976). In return, the Muslim community and the Palestinians were forming loose alliances with the Druze population. Together they formed the opposition which aligned against the Christian Maronite political leaders (Cleveland and Bunton, 2016). By the spring of 1975, the situation was bound to escalate at any given moment.

The civil war officially ended in 1989 with the Taif Accords, after fifteen years of violence. One of the essential reasons why the conflict could endure for this many years was due to the failed reform attempts that were needed (Cleveland and Bunton, 2016). The current demography of the state was not reflected in the political scene. The Christian Maronite population was smaller than the Muslim population but they held a majority in parliament. In this instance, the National Pact

of 1943 and the Constitution were in desperate need of reconstruction (Traboulsi, 2007). During the Taif negotiations, the delegation managed to come to national reconciliation which granted Muslims a greater role in the political system (Khneisser, 2019). The biggest change was the transfer of some of the power from the Maronite president to the Muslim prime minister and the cabinet (Vertes et al, 2021). By shifting the power composition, there was recognition of the change in the demographics (Kiwan, 2018). In addition, the religious representation in the parliament was changed from the existing six-to-five ratio, where Maronites have the majority over Muslims, to an equal number of seats for both Muslims and Christians. Nine new seats were added to the parliament, three of which were for Shia representation (Traboulsi, 2007). The Taif Accords 'solved' the unequal sectarian divide in the country by appointing all the sectarian groups equal powers. However, in doing so this also legalized the sectarian divide within the country (Kiwan, 2018). The possibility of eliminating the sectarian divide of the political atmosphere was reduced significantly with the Taif Accords. In other words, while the Taif Accords resulted in peace for Lebanon, it further divided the country.

Post-civil war

Attempting to put the civil war behind it, Lebanon focused on rehabilitation. This was also the case for the civil society organizations. During the war, civil society organizations were unable to focus on other matters that go beyond emergency relief and providing basic needs such as food, water, and medicine (Haddad, 2016). Most organizations did not have the opportunity in fifteen years to focus on secondary civil needs such as democratization or human rights.

Under the definition of basic needs fall access to clean water, food, clothing, and shelter. The first official definition of basic needs was named at the World Employment Conference in 1976

where basic needs were described as: *'the minimum standard of living which a society should set for the poorest groups of its people'* (ILO,1976). These are the basic necessities that a person needs in order to survive. An early definition of basic needs is the pyramid of Maslow, a model that describes the hierarchy of needs through a tiered model (Chiappero-Martinetti, 2014). Maslow describes two notions of basic needs. Those that were mentioned earlier such as access to clean water and food, which would be the first tier in Maslow's pyramid and are defined under 'physical needs'. Without these necessities, human life would be seriously impacted. In modern contemporary society, there are certain additions that are now contributing to the definition of basic needs. Basic health care and access to education are seen as part of a basic need (UN, 2019). In Maslow's pyramid, the additional needs are defined under 'safety needs' and make up the second tier in the pyramid model (Chiappero-Martinetti, 2014).

Post-civil war, the Lebanese state could focus on economic rehabilitation. The greatest challenge that Lebanon was facing was ensuring the success of the reconstruction of the economy (IMG, 1999). The civil war destroyed the most basic infrastructure and without it, the economy would not function. In addition, high inflation all contributed to a declining economy rendering the situation dire. The government of PM Rafik Hariri spearheaded the reconstruction of the economy by contracting a series of loans, which although jump started the economy amassed a massive debt (Kubursi, 1999).

At the turn of the century in the early 2000s, Lebanon began to see increased cooperation between government agencies, civil society organizations, and international organizations focusing on human rights, democracy, and transparency (Khneisser, 2019). With these

collaborations, civil society in Lebanon began to flourish (Haddad, 2016). It was especially after

the assassination of former prime minister Rafik Hariri, that civil society expanded, where the

government changed its approach towards civil society and reverted to a soft power approach.

Defining civil society and NGOs: are they different?

There are many definitions of civil society, and these definitions are bound to change history. Civil society had a different role, and therefore meaning, in the first half of the twentieth century than it did in the second half, especially after the end of the Cold War (Kaldor, 2003). According to Mary Kaldor, the different definitions all have a level of basic agreement. Civil society is a society that is based on the social contract between individuals (Kaldor, 2003). It is often seen as a collection of communal groups each with its own associations and structures of mobilization. A recent study by Jonas Schoenefeld in 2020 defined the difference between civil society and NGOs by describing the characteristics of each actor. The study defines civil society as organizations that work with the state and focuses on strengthening the relationship between the state and the individual (Schoenefeld, 2020). Tania Haddad describes it as the 'third sector' (Haddad, 2016), and specifies that the civil society organizations are separate from the government or businesses. Petr Kopecky and Cas Mudde define civil society as a set of organizations that operate between the state and the individual, and they should influence each other (Kopecky and Mudde, 2003). Civil society should include personal lives since it starts with the individual (O'Connell, 1999). Originally civil society started when a person became a public figure and would eventually be able to mediate between the individual and the state, creating a layer between the two. Essentially, civil society fills the role between the civil individual and the government body (Kaldor, 2003). While civil society stands apart from the government, the state does play a role within civil society since the government is usually the first line in ensuring the safety of its citizens. Lorenzo Fioramonti and Antonio Fiori describe civil society as an 'arena' where multiple groups and organizations as well as individuals share the same ideas and values. The result of this approach came by not analyzing civil society in a hierarchical manner but

rather in a circle (Fioramonti and Fiori, 2010), hence the description of the 'arena'. Within this theory lies the additional theory that civil society shaped in an arena could also resemble a sphere which symbolizes that civil society is not set in stone and always moving. Civil society could be described as 'a collection of communal groups each with their own association and their own way of mobilization' (Yaghi, 2012).

The definition of an NGO is a group of organizations that is not aiming to earn a profit, but they could receive funding from the government. NGOs could be any size in regard to organization and take up different tasks within a society (Lewis, 2009). Non-profit organizations, non-governmental organizations, relief organizations, and other organizations that operate independently from the government arguably fall under the same umbrella in terms of mission and organization. Nonetheless, as with defining civil society, accurately defining NGOs is a challenging task. NGOs strengthen civil society by creating more organizations that mediate between the state and the individual. According to Claire Mercer, if NGOs are funded, civil society is built (Mercer, 2002). A recent study by Jonas Schoenefeld in 2020 defined the difference between civil society and NGOs by describing the characteristics of each actor. NGOs are defined as an organization separate from the state and government with a positive connotation. NGOs are often put in the environmental frame with a social aspect (Schoenefeld, 2020). On a side note, there are organizations that are categorized by definition within civil society but are more preoccupied with self-gain than benefiting the public (O'Connell,1999). These organizations could be non-governmental and even non-profit where the goal at the end has little to do with benefiting the public and more to do with economic benefit and growth. The United Nations (UN, 2022) defines aid actors under the terminology of civil society

organizations and distinguishes non-governmental organizations as a subset of the broader civil society.

The power of Lebanese civil society

The literature review has already briefly discussed how the civil society in Lebanon behaved over the last century. From independence to the absence of the state and through a long civil war. The civil society in the state of Lebanon has a prominent role. There lies great power in this and civil society has always been the backbone of the population and an institution that the Lebanese people could rely upon. It is important to clarify how civil society acts and operates within a state.

Historically each organization was affiliated with one of the sectarian groups and would mainly, often even exclusively, serve only the direct affiliates of that sectarian group. Each sectarian group would have its own associations and institutions (Haddad, 2016). Lebanon is said to have the most diverse and active civil society in the region (Yaghi et al, 2019). One of the reasons for that is that the Lebanese Constitution contains articles related to public freedoms, with the most relevant to civil society being Article 13. This article states: *'the freedom to express one's opinion orally or in writing, the freedom of the press, the freedom of assembly, and the freedom of association within the limits established by law'* (Yaghi et al, 2019). This law is inherited from the Ottoman Empire period when civil society played a major role in the population. While this law is seen as highly liberal, it is also highly scrutinized by the government.

During the civil war, civil society organizations took over many tasks from the essentially paralyzed government (Kraidy, 1998). As mentioned earlier, civil society organizations took over

medical care, and education and provided basic needs and some would even argue that it was the resilience of the civil society that secured a future for the state of Lebanon (Haugbolle, 2011). In addition, they would also provide the population with secondary needs such as information (Harik, 1994). During the civil war, non-governmental organizations started hundreds of private broadcasting services, which was a public affair before the conflict. After the civil war, the networks could face new media laws in 1994 when privately owned networks were prohibited from broadcasting news and political programs but after intense debate, the imposed law was voted against (Kraidy, 1998).

In recent years, civil society, non-profit organizations, and non-governmental organizations have been distancing themselves from any sectarian identity. This was present in the grapple of Laure Moghaizel who advocated for women's rights and participation in politics. After half a century, the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women* was signed in 1996 (Stephan, 2010). Ten years after the civil war in 1999, Lebanon counted over 1100 civil society organizations. While part of these organizations was affiliated with a sectarian party, albeit not officially, other civil society organizations were attempting to overcome the sectarian divide and working towards democratic accountability (Cavatora and Durac, 2010).

In the early 2000s, Lebanon's economy started to grow exponentially. This attracted foreign investors from the Gulf and Lebanon was eligible for funds from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the European Union (Vertes et al, 2021). Civil society organizations began to rally against the government and especially against the confessional system. This notion was contradictory in a sense because civil society has been filling the role of an absent government

for decades but on the other hand, they protest against the government (Khneisser, 2019). An organization that is non-political filled the political gap only to eventually protest against the political discourse. It is confusing and creates space for conflict. The state has a very young population where almost half of the state's residents are under the age of 25 (Amer et al, 2015). For this particular part of the population, civil society offers natural employment that matches graduate students with community-oriented university degrees (Amer et al, 2015). In Lebanon, these organizations have a long history of recognized societal changes resulting from the knowledge that the students bring in regard to poverty, political violence, and conflict. The students turned workers offer much-needed insight into possible interventions. There have been instances in Lebanon where protests that started as a national collective and had an 'anti-government' stance broke out and would cross the sectarian border (Carnegie, 2022). This trend started to gain traction in the 2010s with anti-sectarian protests in 2011 and 2015 (Geha, 2019) and with the demonstrations in 2019. These events will be discussed further below.

The power of the strong civil society in Lebanon mainly has a correlation with the weak state and government. The definition of a weak state in regard to Lebanon comes down to the failure of the state and the lack of state institutions. The penetration of state institutions is so weak to the extent that there is no sufficient state influence on civil society (Atzili, 2010). Furthermore, the sovereignty of Lebanon is weak due to domestic tensions and tension with non-state actors (Fragonese, 2011).

Struggles of the civil society in Lebanon

While the Lebanese civil society certainly has certain powers, the struggles that the organizations encounter are much greater than the benefits. This is especially in regard to the relationship

between civil society organizations and the government, or in many cases, lack thereof (Kingston, 2003). Only in two instances has civil society been able to develop beyond the means of emergency relief and basic need provision. The first instance was the reformist changes implemented by then-president Chehab in the 1960s (Haddad, 2016). The state stepped into the role that civil society had been filling for decades, such as providing healthcare, education, and reforms of the economy (Kingston, 2003). As a result of this development, civil society was finally able to develop beyond this and focus on themes such as human rights and democratization. The civil war period altered the nature and the activity of the Lebanese civil society. The war led to the complete incapacitation of the state and the paralysis of the institutions (Altan-Olcay and Icduygu, 2012). When the civil war broke out, state institutions were already fragile, to begin with. They had only been operating since the reformist projects initiated by former president Chehab in the 1960s. As a result, civil society organizations were forced to fill the gaps that the 'failing'/'vulnerable state left (Atzili, 2010). This included the provision of food and offering emergency medical attention (Amer et al, 2015). During the entirety of the civil war, civil society organizations were unable to seize any opportunity to grow beyond their mission of providing immediate welfare provision and emergency relief (Haddad, 2016). However, because of the absence of the state and its institutions, civil society organizations were able to operate on their own accord. At the same time, this initiated the sectarian divide again and the different religious groups were once again depending on the organizations that identified with their sect (Ziad, 2007). The Lebanese Civil War would last for fifteen years in which sectarian violence was rampant but this instance did not fail to move the Lebanese politicians to abandon the confessional system at any point.

The year 2005 proved to be a turning point for the slightly prosperous civil society in Lebanon, however, this was in a negative way. The assassination of former prime minister Hariri has deemed the point where the Lebanese society was yet again split (Khatib, 2022). Because of the assassination, the Maronite Christians and the Sunni Muslims demanded the retreat of Syria from Lebanon, suspecting Syria was involved in the assassination (Cleveland and Bunton, 2016). This demand split the political landscape in two because on the other hand were the Shia Muslims along with some Christian allies who supported the Syrian presence. However, this support was mainly in the backing of Hezbollah, a Shia-affiliated group, an important asset for protection for Shia Muslims in the civil war and later in politics. The latter group turned to the street on 8 March 2005 (March 8 demonstrations) and triggered a counter-protest, which would come to be known as the Cedar Revolution. As a counter-demonstration, the Sunni Muslims and Christians took to the streets a couple of days later on 14 March (March 14 demonstrations), (Vertes et al, 2021) supporting the Future Movement and the Lebanese Forces. The movement was notable for its peaceful approach and the absence of violence. At the start of the demonstrations, there were 14.000 Syrian soldiers present in Lebanon but by the end of April 2005, the Syrian troops officially left the country.

This constant shift in stability also means that the Lebanese civil society had to keep changing its nature and adapt to the differences in not only politics but also in terms of social and economic change. This was mainly with regard to providing basic needs. When a government starts providing for the basic necessities, civil society that would normally do this could then focus on increasing human rights and promoting democratization (Mitri, 2015). However, when the government retreated back into a 'weak' state and was unable to provide the basic needs, the

civil society had to provide once again (Haddad, 2016). Therefore civil society was unable to operate beyond the provision of basic needs (Mitri, 2015). This 'in and out' approach of the government and civil society initiated dependency on the population. And since civil society organizations have managed to maintain a constant presence, the Lebanese population got very dependent on these organizations (Vertes et al, 2021). In return, they became a very strong player in society, masking the importance and role of the state. Another concept of the relationship that civil society has is the socio-economic development or in this case the underdevelopment of the state (Haddad, 2016). When a state is fragmented and civil society organizations are based on non-voluntary natures such as religion, ethnicity, or tribe it will come at the expense of voluntary associations. All these factors combined create a greater distance between the confessional groups and drastically increase the sectarian divide.

Social media and mobilization

Each social media platform has different features that make them unique. Their innovation has generated a shift in communication that was not possible in the past (Li et al, 2020). The definition of social media is often disputed and scholars face issues in defining it. The simplest explanation is an online platform that facilitates communication and collaboration (Russo et al, 2008). A new definition was defined by Calab Carr and Rebecca Hayes offers a new definition: *'Social media are Internet-based channels that allow users to opportunistically interact and selectively self-present, either in real-time or asynchronously, with both broad and narrow audience who derive value from user-generated content and the perception of interaction with others'* (Carr and Hayes, 2015). Facebook is the most popular platform in the world which is reflected as being the most popular platform in the Middle East (DataReportal, 2023). It was launched for the general public in 2006 and offered an option for Arabic in 2009. Northern Africa has 107 million active Facebook users and there are 110 million active Facebook users in Western Asia (DataReportal, 2023).

The role of social media in mobilization

Social media is a difficult phenomenon to place in the political environment. It is not an organization that could represent civil society or any of the organizations affiliated with that, but it is a tool that is utilized by civil society (Dunu and Uzochukwu, 2015). However, social media does offer a space for participation and hence has a legitimate place in civil society (Della Porta, 2019). It can be placed in a 'Third Place Concept' (Naryan, 2013) where a space can become a place and social media is highly suitable to become a Third Place. Spaces like these are important to civil society and contribute to democracy and engagement, especially when the

public sphere is sealed by an authoritarian regime (Sayre and Youssef, 2016). One of the shortcomings of social media becoming a 'Third Place' is that informal information sharing is a daily occurrence in social media. Small talk on platforms is not designed for communicative information and is primarily a social event (Maamari and Zein, 2014) but even shallow communications could develop into building communities. A trait that is an important element for mobilization.

The impact of social media is also contested and difficult to measure. However, there are some theories about the impact of social media. The platforms have different tools that overlap and all contribute to whether or not they have an impact on society. According to Norris (Norris, 2012) the impact of social media can be placed within four theories: informational, networking, cultural, and behavioral. The informational aspect of social media is where social media functions as a source of news about contemporary issues. This could be local, regional, or global. Since social media is free of charge in many cases, it is an excellent tool for networking and reducing the costs of coordinating collective action. Culturally, social media has the capacity to reinforce democratic aspirations and voice public opinion with regime performances. And the last aspect of the impact of social media is it can affect behavioral components and strengthen engagement in public protests. The actual impact of social media is different in certain societies. It is less vital in societies that have strong and plural social networks such as independent newspapers and a more liberal journalistic environment. A side note, however, is that this does not guarantee that more democratic governments will be exempted from these threats (Norris, 2012).

Because social media is a relatively new phenomenon, opinions about it are still conflicted. One of these conflicted opinions is on whether social media is able to incite political mobilization. Political mobilization and social movements through technology are dependent on certain factors. According to Manuel Castells, social movements through contemporary technology are characterized by two fundamentals. First of all, it is information based, meaning that the information is formed by a series of technologies that are based on information, and second of all it is process-oriented and not product oriented. Meaning that technologies concern the process of consumption and social interaction (Castells, 1989). There are two consequences of these fundamentals, on the information-based spectrum, culture is what drives these kinds of social movements and on the process-oriented side, it is driven by a pervasive effect that spreads through the entirety of human activity (Castells, 1989). Pre-social media, Castells already claimed that socio-political movements organized by the Internet and mobile communications show that they can achieve mobilization of the citizens and at the same time call for awareness in the world (Castells, 2008).

On one hand, it is argued that social media lacks certain tools for effective political mobilization (Moshrafa, 2012). This is due to the restrictions on outreach, and a low entry barrier for platforms which can result in an abundance of participants who are non-representative of the actual participation. Another mobilization issue is that social media-motivated movements are often about cultural causes rather than political ones (Moshrafa, 2012). Mobilization through social media contains a discriminatory factor. It is about who has and who doesn't have. In Lebanon, the country is 100% covered by at least 3G network infrastructure (ITU, 2021), and around 99% is covered by the 4G network infrastructure (ITU, 2021) While the infrastructure is

there, the internet penetration, where individuals use the internet, is estimated to be 87%. Social media in Lebanon is popular. The biggest platform is Youtube and the second biggest is Facebook and there are 3.15 million Facebook users in Lebanon. The third most active platform is Instagram with 2.2 million users in Lebanon. The digital divide remains largely due to the rising cost of living leaving many citizens from lower socio-economic classes without access to the internet and digital social and political mobilization. On the other hand, social media has proven that it can be a valuable asset for political mobilization and that it can participate in creating a network where people interact (Moshrafa, 2012). There are also arguments to be made in regard to the benefits of social media and political mobilization. Social media platforms could have an encouraging factor that would move citizens from spectators to active participants in the political environment. They offer an accessible alternative to reaching audiences that would not mobilize through traditional channels.

However, this is only possible when online participation does not result in 'slacktivism' (Glenn, 2015). This term is a combination of 'activism' and 'slacking' and relates to the disconnect between action and awareness caused by the use of social media (Howard et al, 2016). The term nowadays has a negative connotation as it describes activities that are performed with minimal effort therefore making the participant have a satisfactory feeling but they are not actively engaging in political debate (Skoric, 2012). Originally the term was used to describe the activities of young activists to influence their direct personal society, which relates to a positive connotation in regard to political participation (Christensen, 2011). Critics argue that slacktivism leads to no political change and that it decreases physical participation. Participation is passive,

and some argue that political engagement on social media is always an addition and not a replacement for political participation (Howard et al, 2016).

Social media challenges the role that traditional media had in the production of news (Maamari and Zein, 2014). Consumers of media are no longer dependent on the framing of traditional media and in recent disasters, social media proved more capable of uncovering true events than the traditional media (Della Porta, 2019). One example of this phenomenon is the MH17 disaster where an airplane was shot down in Ukraine in 2014 (Golovchenko, 2018). Social media coverage of the crash proved that the Russians were behind the shooting of the airplane, something that the traditional media was incapable of doing. On the other end of the spectrum, however, is the risk of disinformation or 'fake news'. It could be difficult for users to distinguish between correct and incorrect news. Disinformation campaigns have been used by governments as a political tool to achieve political goals. It is the strategic use of information and disinformation and is described as information warfare (Golovchenko et al, 2018). The issue of framing also plays a role in information gathering. Framing theory draws on the thinking process where people draw a particular conclusion based on an issue or could rethink their conceptualization of that issue (Chong and Druckman, 2007). In regard to social media, people share the news that they receive on their feeds. Social media is made to be shared, albeit because content makers design their content so it is attractive to share, or through the interfaces that social media platforms offer such as share buttons and chat functions (Valenzuela et al, 2017). The emergence of social media widened the choices in media offers but also in personal communication that often happens on social media (Guran and Ozarslan, 2022).

Use of social media by charitable organizations and NGOs

Since social media is so versatile in its usage, charitable organizations have also used it to raise awareness for the mission. The increasing role that social media has played in the last few decades, especially in regard to marketing strategies, has been recognized by charitable organizations. In addition to raising awareness for the mission and marketing strategies, social media is also used to recruit volunteers and hire new employees, and generate donations. From 2007 onwards, social media usage by charities was increasing rapidly. This year, 75 percent of the US charities reported to be using at least one social media platform (Barnes, 2020). The usage of social media rose rapidly after 2007 with 89 percent usage in 2008 and 97 percent in 2009. Among the most popular platforms are Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, and blogging. Facebook and Twitter were used by 97 and 96 percent of the interviewed charities (Barnes, 2020). Communicating through social media becomes more beneficial and important for a charity when the organization has a public relations department that is able to adopt social media strategies and reach its goals (Curtis et al, 2010).

Charitable organizations also use social media in the event of a disaster, it could even be seen as inevitable since the global usage of social media is so widespread (Alexander, 2013). It offers communication with the public and over time, social media can evolve in portraying the key elements in a disaster. A study by Cheryll Ruth Soriano about civic disaster response after a typhoon shows that social media engagement changes as the stages of relief aid change. In the first months after the disaster the data reflect that there is an immediate need for relief aid whereas a couple of months later, the data changes its tone and focuses more on rehabilitation (Soriano, 2016).

As mentioned above, charity organizations use social media after a disaster so naturally they utilize it to gather donations. Social media changed the way people donate and give money to relief organizations and this in turn changed the way charity organizations gain these donations (Saxton and Wang, 2014). After a disaster, interaction with the audience is an important feature to generate donations. During the wildfires in Australia in 2019 and 2020, more than one million people donated through social media to support the firefighters and other respondents to the fires (Shaw et al, 2021). But generating funds through social media has proven to be difficult because organizations had to adjust their strategy in order to create funds. According to Yan and Pedraza-Martinez, actionable information support is the least attractive during disaster response, which means having the necessary information in order to deal with a situation. A solution to this would be in the form of active communication between organizations and individuals and therefore increase donations (Yan and Pedraza-Martinez, 2019).

During the 2006 war in Lebanon, the population suffered food and water shortages, therefore, having to depend on aid suppliers. Bombings disrupted the water supply and blockades for fisher boats affected thousands of families who rely on fishery. The blockade caused an increase in prices of 10-15% and eventually destroyed the food supply making Lebanon the most dependent country on aid and foreign food supply (Ladki et al, 2008). Local relief aid intensified as the war progressed and volunteers increased. The local organizations provided food assistance, and medical aid and organized a media unit. The media unit launched a blog on relief and sent out calls for donations and fund-collecting (Mognieh, 2015). Organizations from other countries

such as Qatar worked directly with the local Lebanese organizations, contracted suppliers, and paid them directly (Hamieh, 2009).

Social media and mobilization in the Middle East

Social media has gained a great role in daily life in the last decades. According to the Arab Youth Survey of 2022, 72 percent of Arab youth between the ages of 18-24 visits Facebook on a daily basis. And 61 percent spend time daily on Instagram (Arab Youth Survey, 2022). Social media has emerged as a tool for mobilization, communication, and coordination (Smidi and Shahin, 2017). Among young adults, it has become a place to express political opinions and views and access information (Yamamoto, Kushin, and Dalisay, 2015). Access to social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter has been facilitating political contention in the Middle East region. The biggest one was the Arab Spring in 2011, where social media caused momentum and an opportunity to mobilize (Blagojevic, 2021). After the death of a street vendor who set himself on fire in desperation and out of protest against a fine, the news spread fast among Tunisian media and online. Through digital media, there were calls for action and using the internet and sms services to navigate demonstrations. When the Ben Ali regime fell, the demonstrations in Tunisia and the fall of the regime as a consequence sparked civil unrest in a number of other Arab countries, including Egypt (Howard and Hussein, 2011). Prior to the spillover of the Arab Spring to Egypt, the death of a young man in Alexandria by the police sparked outrage online when photos of his beaten body were posted in June 2010. A Facebook group under his name became extremely popular and gained thousands of likes (Korany, 2012). And just as in Tunisia, the protests in Egypt were facilitated through social media, and communal solidarity spread through online channels Howard and Hussein, 2011). While the Arab Spring did not escalate to Lebanon, years later, in 2019, demonstrators did find their way to the streets in Lebanon. The mobilization

33

was partly facilitated by social media and coordinated through online channels such as Whatsapp groups and live streams on Facebook (Blagojevic, 2021).

Lebanon and social media in mobilization

With the rise of social media, the institutions of the state were no longer able to control the information output. Because of social media, the power lies with the social media networks, which are often not local networks or institutions, therefore shifting the power dynamic. In the case of Lebanon, the media is not monopolized by the state and some argue that the press is free but this is due to the weakness of the state (Kairouz and Dagher, 2020). Especially in the early 2010s, social media was a platform that states were unable to control. Laws in Lebanon regarding media are the press law that dates back to 1962 and the addition of the audio-visual media law that was implemented in 1994 (El-Richani, 2021). However, this did come with restrictions in regard to the government. One was not allowed to simply publish anything in regard to criticizing the government (Yaghi et al, 2019). Paradoxically, the freedom of the press is also regarded as having a role in the 1952 resignation of President El-Khuri (El-Richani, 2021). From 2013 onwards governments found entries into cyberspace and they found themselves able to control the narrative again (Naryan, 2013). In this instance, social media has the capacity to move from the cyber sphere into the public sphere. After the Lebanese independence in 1943, the media and press would enjoy more freedom (El-Richani, 2021). While Lebanon always had a great role and influence in broadcasting and media, the popularity of social media was a slow progression. It wasn't until 2017 that the internet speed was increased therefore keeping access to it low prior to this year. And even to this day, 99 percent of the population watches television, deeming it the primary source of information (El-Richani, 2021).

In 2011, revolutions and demonstrations took hold in multiple countries in the Middle East: the Arab Spring. What started as a localized protest in Tunisia resulted in the ousting of President Ben Ali. Soon after, the Egyptians, Libyans, and Syrians, inspired by the successful revolution in Tunisia took to the streets to demand the fall of their regime (Blagojevic, 2021). The revolutions ended with different results, with Egypt succeeding with the fall of President Mubarak, Libyan rebels killing Qadaffi which resulted in a civil war, and Syria finding itself in an ongoing bloody civil conflict with the same president as before the revolution. With the history of instability and conflict, many feared that the Arab Spring would spread to Lebanon (Geha, 2021). However, the desire to avoid another civil war in Lebanon has been able to prevent a spillover. Especially when the Syrian civil war started escalating, the seriously divided factions in Lebanon managed to keep Syria's political influence in Lebanon to a minimum. The exception to this shared consensus was Hezbollah. The organization became less concerned with the national leadership in Lebanon and if the institutions were working properly. This resulted in political paralysis and delay of elections. It also affected the sectarian management of basic services (Geha, 2021). This festered for years and was bound to escalate at any given moment. Eventually, it did escalate in 2015.

In the most recent years, Lebanon has experienced regular demonstrations. One of the instances that led to widespread demonstrations was the collection of garbage in and around Beirut. The leading up to the crisis had been developing for years prior. Elections were postponed in 2013 and activists were actively trying to mobilize the population (Geha, 2019). When this was not fruitful, the activists were stunned that the absence of garbage collecting would eventually be the trigger that would mobilize the Lebanese population. The start of mobilization started when the

residents of Naameh started protesting against the landfill in their area blocking the entry for garbage trucks. The landfill was supposed to be a temporary solution but after more than two decades, there was no permanent solution suggested and the residents wanted a solution. The demonstration of the residents of Naameh occurred in the summer of 2015 and while the garbage started accumulating and piling up around the city of Beirut, the country was suffering from a heatwave (Geha, 2019). There were frequent power cuts and water shortages, and in 2015 Lebanon suffered heavily from the Syrian refugee crisis. Over 1.5 million Syrian refugees sought refuge in Lebanon (UNHCR, 2014) hosting the largest number of Syrian refugees, adding to the problems that the state was already facing. In addition to the occupation of the landfill in Naameh, the contract with the private waste treatment company expired. A new contract was not signed nor were there any negotiations with another company (Geha, 2019).

With all these factors combined, a group started forming both offline and online under the translated name 'You Stink' (Geha, 2019). The first demonstrators mobilized on 25 July 2015 and are seen as a reaction to the failure of the sectarian regime. The slogan 'You Stink' (Vertes et al, 2021) was not only a reference to the garbage problem but also became a symbol of a dirty government. Notable about the protests in 2015 was the anti-sectarian tone (Khneisser, 2019). It is one of the first instances where demonstrations were actively going against the sectarian divide (Kraidy, 2016). With mottos such as: 'all of them, means all of them' it held the politicians of all sects accountable. The demonstrators managed to keep the protests active until the middle of October of 2015. Activists experienced difficulties in maintaining momentum and the protests eventually gradually decreased. Out of the protests came multiple initiatives that were mainly organized by the local population. Lebanon has a garbage problem that the government does not

feel obliged to solve. The Lebanese people took it upon themselves to clean the country, sweep the streets and recycle as many products as they can.

October protests of 2019 and the Beirut port explosion

Lebanon has been in a state of multiple crises for years now. In 2019, the economy collapsed and the currency plummeted, losing ninety percent of its value. The exchange rate between the US Dollar and the Lebanese Pound has been a fixed rate since the 1990s due to the dependency on imports. Thus, when the Lebanese pound started losing its value, combined with a reliance on foreign exchange reserves, this resulted in the Lebanese government having a persistent budget deficit (World Bank, 2022). Furthermore, with a shortage of US dollars in 2019, and the sustained fixed rate between the US dollar and the Lebanese pound, businesses and citizens became unable to acquire dollars and a black market emerged. This negatively impacted the economy even more and caused skyrocketing inflation. This resulted in the coalition of Saad Hariri responding with a program of general tax increases with the aim of reducing the government's budget deficit and maintaining the fixed currency conversion on the US dollar (Khattab, 2022).

In addition to the economic crisis, Lebanon has also been facing a political crisis for years. The Whatsapp tax (El-Richani, 2021) imposed on calls by the government was the last straw for the Lebanese population, who claimed it was yet another burden that was supposed to be carried by the working class, the rural population, and the poorer urban population (Cavatora, 2022). In addition, other factors such as rising fuel prices, increased prices for essential items, and large unemployment, especially among the youth, were integral factors in the dissatisfaction (Issaev and Korotayev, 2022). The Lebanese population took to the streets and this started the 2019

October protests. The protestors represented the spectrum of religious and socio-economic groups in Lebanon and included the different religious identities, poor and social classes, and the rural and urban populations. As the massive protests continued, Prime Minister Saad Hariri resigned in late October 2019 amidst calls for the fall of the regime (Khatib, 2022).

The new Prime Minister Hassan Diab formed a new government in January 2020 and promised reforms in the debt-stricken country (Vertes, 2020). Unfortunately, these reforms were never implemented due to not only the short governance of the Hassan Diab government but also because of the sectarian divide within the Lebanese government, which makes it difficult to act upon initiated reforms (Khattab, 2022).

In 2020, at the height of the still ongoing protests, the COVID-19 pandemic severely paralyzed the country even further. The pandemic halted the demonstrations as lockdowns were announced. For the Lebanese government, the COVID pandemic offered the opportunity to wipe the streets from the protestors who have been occupying squares in Beirut under the umbrella of COVID regulations (Della Porta, 2022). However, the demonstrations would not subside for long as in March 2020 the demonstrations were once again in progress after the government announced that, due to the debt of Lebanon, they were unable to protect the population anymore (Jasper et al, 2020). The Lebanese authorities were able to control the COVID-19 outbreak in the first couple of months of the pandemic. The number of cases was increasing rapidly due to the lack of access to medical assistance and medicine (Lebanese Red Cross, 2020). With the explosion in the port, the pressure on the medical field became even more pressing.

On the evening of 4 August 2020, a series of smaller explosions triggered by fireworks followed by a major explosion erupted in the port of Beirut (Haddad and Sakr, 2022). The explosions sent shockwaves across the city, shattering countless windows, killing hundreds, and injuring even more. It left over 300.000 Lebanese homeless (ICRC, 2020). In one of the storage cellars, a large amount of unsafely stored ammonium nitrate exploded (Khattab, 2022). The explosion was yet another crisis that struck a country that was already experiencing three major crises. The explosions in the port are also a portrayal of the failure of the government in keeping the population safe and actually governing the country (Rufolo et al, 2021). After the explosion in the port, mass demonstrations against the government were again very persistent, and yet again the protestors were demanding the fall of the regime after the explosions. On 10 August 2020, in the midst of tragedy, Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned.

The explosion happened at a time when the civil society in Lebanon was already stretched thin with all the ongoing crises. Political instability, medical shortages needed for COVID, and the financial distress had already drained human and financial resources. However, when the explosion occurred, the first responders to the scene were independent civil society organizations. Within hours they were searching for missing people and setting up funds for the affected Lebanese (Haddad and Sakr, 2022). While the civil society was actively responding to the crisis in cooperation with the Lebanese army, the government would not respond until a week after the explosion (Haddad and Sakr, 2022). When they did, the imposed policy only hindered the civil society organizations when the government's policy was supposed to manage the relief organizations but in reality, the government added extra bureaucratic work by demanding the organizations to register their papers and permits. In contrast, the Lebanese Army was a trusted

entity for the Lebanese people, forming incident command structures overseeing the response activities and securing a parameter for the investigation (El Sayed, 2022). The army gained the trust of the Lebanese population because it is seen as apolitical (Haddad and Sakr, 2022). The first priority was organizing search and rescue which was done by the Lebanese Army and other responding agencies. The army was also in charge of managing donations and distributing resources (El Sayed, 2022).

Theoretical framework

In essence, the literature review brought forward one theme which is the role of Lebanese civil society, and two theories: social movement theory, and framing theory in social media. These two theories are the main theories that guided this research.

Social movement theory

This study draws on the theory of social movement. McCauley describes social movements as groups of people who collectively interact with government or opponents and who are driven by specific purposes (McCauley, 2011). In social movement theory, three theoretical approaches can be defined. The 'resource mobilization', 'political opportunity structures', and 'cultural cognitive' approaches (Gahan and Pekarek, 2013). Social movement theory studies under which conditions collective action emerges for the promotion of social change (Trembley et al, 2017).

Framing theory

Framing theory draws on the thinking process where people draw a particular conclusion based on an issue or could rethink their conceptualization of that issue. A particular frame has an impact on a person's point of view, opinion, and beliefs and this is reflected in their daily lives (Chong and Druckman, 2007). Framing an opinion from a different perspective could alter someone's perspective on that particular matter. Journalists and media play a significant role in this when they determine how a frame is presented to the audience (Vreese, 2005). The concept of frame theory is also linked and has overlapping features with the social movement since a frame could spark a social movement (Gahan and Pekarek, 2013).

Chapter 3: Research Question and Methodology

Problem statement

The literature review delineated the landscape and challenges faced by Lebanon's civil society organizations and the relationship of the government with the civil society, the rise of social media, and the use of social media in mobilization. The problem that the Lebanese population is facing is that the government often fails to adequately respond in crisis times, whether this is a political crisis, financial crisis, or a disaster such as the Beirut Port explosion. With regard to the COVID-19 global pandemic, the Lebanese government was uncharacteristically one of the leading countries in containing the pandemic with swift quarantine and a lockdown in addition to systematic testing (Mjaess et. all, 2021). However, this persistent approach to the pandemic was short-lived as the borders opened in July of that year. Another reason for the rise in cases was the explosion in the port where there was a sudden rise in patients needing medical care. All the patients needing care after the explosion were not wearing masks and could not be separated from each other thus destroying all the progress that Lebanon made in the initial months of the pandemic.

The population is therefore highly dependent on civil society during crises. The most recent instance of this was the explosion where civil society organizations were prompt in their response and relief aid whereas it took the government a week to respond to the crisis (Haddad and Sakr, 2022). The government was slow in providing humanitarian aid to help the affected population mainly because the state was on the verge of bankruptcy and didn't have the financial means to provide support (World Bank, 2022). While the relief organizations had been present

on site, the government eventually implemented a policy that would hinder relief organizations (Haddad and Sakr, 2022).

Meanwhile, social media has become a tool to mobilize, not only politically but also in terms of social movements and humanitarian interventions. In addition, charities use social media as a tool to raise awareness for their cause, gather donations and connect with the audience. It is important to understand how social media is utilized in order to provide basic needs, especially since social media is still relatively novel, and access to the platforms is easy. Therefore, social media lacks clear boundaries and is open for interpretation and use by anyone. While this could be problematic in certain situations such as fake news and spreading misinformation, the absence of a set of boundaries is also what could make social media such an asset in spreading the right information (Moshrafa, 2012).

Research question and significance

With the problem established, the research question of this thesis is the following:

'How have Lebanese relief organizations navigated basic needs shortages through social media following the 2020 port explosion?'.

Chapter 2 presented the definitions of civil society organizations and non-governmental organizations/relief organizations, making it clear that while the terms are slightly different, they overlap in terms of their organizational structure. All assist the public and are not affiliated with the government. As mentioned in Chapter 2, the United Nations (UN, 2022) defines aid actors

under the terminology of civil society organizations and distinguishes non-governmental organizations as a subset of the broader civil society. Therefore, this study will utilize the aforementioned definition offered by the UN to define civil society organizations.

Research significance

Within academia, social media content analysis has become more and more prevalent. With the ever-growing presence and influence of social media, it has become a growing topic among researchers. Social media analysis has been conducted on many different topics and through all the platforms of social media from Facebook to Twitter and Youtube. Relief organizations have been utilizing social media in an effort to create awareness, collect donations and mobilize their operations. It is therefore of growing importance to understand how relief organizations can utilize social media to provide needs after a crisis. Within academia, there is scant research on how relief organizations in Lebanon utilized social media after the explosion in the port to distribute basic needs such as food, water, and medicine and provide or repair shelter. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there have been studies about how charity organizations utilize social media in disaster management. In addition, there are studies that researched how local Lebanese organizations mobilized in the 2006 Lebanese war. Therefore this study will combine the missing elements mentioned above and fill a gap in the academic literature by providing in-depth insight into how relief organizations utilize social media for fund-raising and to distribute basic needs.

Methodology

The literature review reveals that most social media analysis studies have used a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods. The gathering and analysis of social media data such as posts, as well as interviews and surveys have often been used methods. Research in social media offers a wide range of possibilities in which the researcher can choose which method is the most suitable for the research. The study by Chareen Snelson on social media technologies used a mixed method of both qualitative and quantitative research (Snelson, 2016) and this study has adopted a similar approach. A study conducted by DiStaso and Bortree used interviews in addition to surveys and content analysis of social media data (DiStaso and Bortree, 2012). Therefore this study will conduct social media content analysis of four Lebanese organizations, namely: Lebanese Red Cross, Lebanese Food Bank, Beit El Baraka, and the International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon. In addition, interviews were conducted with the Lebanese Food Bank, Beit El Baraka, and the International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon.

Qualitative research

Qualitative research through interviews is often done through one of the following methods: the structured, semi-structured, and unstructured method of questioning (Jamshed, 2014). For this study, the interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format and consisted of a list of questions that were conducted in the same manner for all interviewed organizations (Bloom, 2006). The choice for this method of research is because the intended questions are open-ended questions, however, there is a construction to the list of imposed questions. In essence, the body of the interview is the same in the interviews, yet by allowing a margin for follow-up questions,

the collected data would therefore be more consistent and in-depth. In addition, it would allow for the opportunity to clarify and address issues (DiCiccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The responses to the questions were analyzed against each other to determine how the interviewed organizations utilized social media to provide basic needs shortages to the Lebanese population through social media.

The interviews conducted also fall under the individual in-depth interview. This method of qualitative research is used to reconstruct events and the perception of an experience (DiCiccio-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This individual in-depth interview offers the interviewee to share their narrative and offers insight into their recollection. The interviews were conducted through an online connection rather than face-to-face due to the financial incapacity to conduct the interviews in person.

Within the content analysis of social media, interviews are often used to provide in-depth information about social media from a personal or professional perspective. Interviews offer insight into strategic choices and answer questions that static data is unable to provide.

Quantitative research

Text analysis is among the most used methods to analyze data. Anatoliy Gruzd, Drew Paulin and Caroline Haythornthwaite (Gruzd et al, 2016) conducted research into learning through social media and conducted the study through a text-based analysis where they identified the most frequently used words and network analysis. Using keywords is a method that is widely used in social media content analysis. Typing in a specific keyword would automatically generate data that is related to the researched topic. Within most social media platforms, a search engine or a

search option would automatically sort the content. This method was used in the content analysis of Ainat Koren, Mohammad Arif Ul Alam, Sravani Koneru, Alexa DeVito, Lisa Abdallah, and Benyuan Liu about the nurses' perspective on the impact of COVID-19 (Koren et al, 2021). In this study, keywords were used to offer insights and research into diabetes used the keyword 'diabetes' on Facebook to examine the content a user would be exposed to through this keyword (Stellefson et al, 2019).

A recent study was done by Laila Abbas, Shahira S. Fahmy, Sherry Ayad, Mirna Ibrahim, and Abdelmoneim Hany Ali in 2022 about youth activism on the Palestinians who were evicted from their homes. The methodology of this research consisted of the analysis of over two hundred videos from TikTok. The tool for data selection was based on the most popular hashtags. The researchers set up three criteria that the data collected should fall within. The date of the incident, the language should either be in English or Arabic and views that is the average number of a viral video (Abbas et al, 2022).

The majority of the social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram possess a feature that allows users to share visuals like photos and videos. Visuals are subjected to framing and angles, which makes their analysis of them interesting. A study conducted by Steven Stemler on trends in social behavior showed that linguistic analysis was the focus when the study was conducted in 2015 (Stemler, 2015). The research argues that researching visuals in social media content analysis provides human-driven data and exposes human interaction.

Research methodology for this study

In order to answer the research question, this study adopted qualitative and quantitative research methods and specifically expert interviews and content analysis of the social media pages of the sample studied. The qualitative method used, interviews, allows for the interpretation of the interviewee and therefore falls under the qualitative method (Brennen, 2017). Meanwhile, the content analysis of data is not interpretable as it will go through multiple rounds of analysis which will result in static data. It is therefore classified as quantitative research. Eventually, the combination of both qualitative and quantitative research will answer the research question. In this chapter, the two different components are explained further.

The topic of the study is interpretable in different ways and explained via experiences rather than data collection. For the qualitative part of the research, every interviewed expert of the organizations has experienced the role of social media differently and would therefore have different answers to the posed questions. The questions asked in the expert interviews focused on the structure of the organizations within Lebanon and how they operate. The interview also questioned any possible issues the organization is facing in realizing its mission in regard to the political difficulties and instabilities and the role of COVID-19. And finally, the interview delved deeper into how the explosion in the port affected their mission and how the organizations mobilized to offer relief aid. In the second part, the interview questions were directed toward the social media strategy of the organizations. Questions involved their general social media strategy and the strategy in the immediate aftermath of the explosion. Topics within the social media strategy discussed the use of visual media such as photos and videos and the adaptation of language in relation to the different platforms Instagram and Facebook. There is a logical way of

asking questions to the experts (Hennik et al, 2020). As mentioned, it is important to first establish a basis and provide the proper background on the organization, its mission and obstacles, and how the explosion affected this. After the base ground has been established, the questions will go further into how social media is integrated. Not only after the explosion but also in a general sense.

The study analyzed the social media posts of the Lebanese Red Cross, Lebanese Food Bank, Beit El Baraka, and the ICRC in Lebanon both on Instagram and Facebook. The choices of the organizations and the social media platforms will be explained below. The time frame of the data analysis includes the data of one month after the explosion i.e. from 4 August 2020 until 4 September 2020. Within this initial month immediately after the explosion, the most affected population would have received the most urgent care in regard to basic needs.

For this study, a quantitative research model was conducted consisting of six different phases of analysis. Each phase analyzes the social media data through a different feature of the social media platform. Social media strategies, social media frequencies, and the use of keywords and hashtags were compared with each other. By drawing links between the content variables and describing the content, the researcher can derive meaning and explanation (Riffe et. al., 2019). For this method, different phases of analysis were conducted since it consists of a sample of one month after the explosion in the Beirut port. All the data is collected and presented in a coding sheet. Keywords were used to analyze the data that are related to basic needs and broad keywords. In addition, strategies such as the use of photos, videos, and hashtags in the content were analyzed. This method is an example of data-driven content analysis with a manual

dictionary (Schwartz & Ungar, 2015) by using specific words that are associated with the given categories. This research employed specific keywords in relation to the place of disaster and donations and to relate to basic needs such as food and shelter. These dictionaries would be derived from great bulks of texts such as social media posts and are then categorized manually using the chosen keywords (Schwartz & Ungar, 2015).

The method also falls under the linguistic approach that is best defined in a study by Zhongdang Pan and Gerald Kosicki conducted in 1993 (Pan and Kosicki, 1993). Research is done by, among other things, theme, and rhetoric. In addition, it will also consider the frequencies of frames and what frames are used. While this study is focused on analyzing frames, this approach offers a thorough analysis of smaller texts (Matthes & Kohring, 2008). In this case, this would be related to social media posts that are shorter bodies of text, for example, social media posts on Facebook and Instagram. Framing theory is an important factor to consider when analyzing media content. The definition of framing theory is that an issue can be viewed from different perspectives (Entman, 2007). A specific frame can alter the opinion of an issue and the effects of framing concur when small changes in the presentation of an issue result in a large change of opinion (Chong and Druckman, 2007).

Consumers of social media often look towards an image first before reading a supportive article (Fahmy, 2010). This research also shows that graphic imagery captures the audience even more especially when the image is taken up close instead of from a distance. In addition, humanizing the situation in regard to the audience is also highly effective. A study by Shahira Fahmy, which compared Arab and American audiences, concluded that the cultural differences are apparent;

50

while Arab media was more human-interest driven, American media focussed on technical frames of war and terrorism (2010). This is also seen in the data gathered from the organizations. All four of the organizations choose to communicate through visual media and show the faces of people and focus on the human interest aspect. Therefore one of the phases of the content analysis conducted for this study analyzed the social media strategy in regard to posting choices, whether those were photos, videos, or just written posts.

Working and analyzing social media data in a study raises a couple of questions such as misinformation and the risk of lack of depth in the layer of the data collection (Gangneux, 2019). In order to minimize these risks, the social media data that was analyzed came exclusively from the chosen relief organizations. And to minimize the lack of in-depth data collected it went through multiple rounds of analysis. Another issue that might arise in the content analysis is that of spelling mistakes, especially in regards to Phase 5 and Phase 6 of the content analysis where the keywords are used to analyze the data. In this research, misspelled words are excluded from the keyword content analysis. In order to maintain unity and consistency in the data collection, only correctly spelled words are considered (Schwartz & Ungar, 2015). This is in order to maintain consistency in the outreach. Misspelled keywords would not reach the audience if the audience would use those keywords without any spelling mistakes.

As mentioned above, the sampling of the research consisted of the one-month period after the Port explosion - 4 August 2020 until 4 September 2020. Within this time period, the acute need for aid of the Lebanese population would have subsided and the immediate basic needs would have been met. The aftermath of the disaster would have been in a stage of secondary surge. This

phase can last until 3 weeks after the disaster, but in vulnerable societies, it could be significantly longer (Runkle et all., 2012). The sampling time also provided the study with enough content to properly research the topic.

Sample

The sampling for the chosen civil society organizations is based on the following. The organization should be a Lebanese organization or a Lebanese branch of an international organization with an independent mission. The organization should have a minimum following of at least 10.000 on either Instagram or Facebook but preferably a large following on both platforms. There has to be activity on both platforms during the sample time frame. In addition, the organization should be independent and not identify within a sect. The role of sectarianism is explained further in this chapter.

Lebanese Red Cross

Established in July 1945 as an independent national society and recognized by the Lebanese state a year later as a non-profit organization. A year later, in 1947, the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) became a member of the 'International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies'. The Lebanese Red Cross is also a founding member of the Secretariat General of the Organization of the Arab Red Crescent and Red Cross Societies.

The mission of LRC is to spread and promote peace. They also serve society and provide humanitarian help without discrimination based on political views, sectarian identity, or social class. In Lebanon, the Red Cross has a leading role in providing ambulance services and first aid. In addition, it organizes nationwide blood donations and provides primary health services. In the

aftermath of the Lebanese civil war between 1975 and 1990, the LRC offered itself and its services towards postwar requirements such as rebuilding and establishing first-line health care.

After the explosion in the port of Beirut on 4 August 2020, the LRC was one of the first responders on the scene and provided 75 ambulances to immediately assist in the aid (Red Cross, 2020). Providing immediate ambulance services, tending to thousands of wounded, and facilitating blood donation stations to provide enough blood transfusions for the victims of the blast. The LRC provided four primary health centers and three mobile clinics in the immediately affected area around the blast and offered free medical consultation and medication. LRC also provided psychosocial help and offered referrals.

In addition to relief assistance, it was important to provide the immediate affected households with cash flow in the form of financial grants. This went to a minimum of 10.000 families and was supposed to be used for immediate repairs for the apartment or house to create a shelter and to supply themselves with the utmost necessities such as food and healthcare. Cash assistance was the main form of assistance that the LRC was providing in the weeks after the blast. The cash distribution was provided by volunteers and funded by outside resources. A remarkable decision was made by the LRC to distribute the cash relief in United States Dollars and not in the local currency, therefore avoiding the unstable currency and the risk that the money distributed would lose its value rapidly and suddenly. A sum of 300 US Dollars was distributed to each family on a monthly basis for the basic necessities. This service will continue to be provided by the LRC as long as it is deemed necessary and the LRC is able to provide the funds. In addition, a single donation of 600 US Dollars was provided to families who experienced damages to their

properties and required urgent repairs. This fund was provided only in September 2020, directly after the disaster struck.

The Lebanese Red Cross has a social media presence on Facebook with 296.000 followers and on Instagram where they have 134.000 followers.

Lebanese Food Bank

The Lebanese Food Bank was established in 2011 by a group of entrepreneurs who recognized that there was a dire need to fight hunger and at the same time minimize food waste. The mission of the Lebanese Food Bank (LFB) is to feed those in need in Lebanon without discrimination and regardless of religion, nationality, political affiliation, or sexual orientation. They strive to alleviate hunger and at the same time help the environment by collecting wasted food that is still of good quality, which is redistributed to charities and individual people. The LFB is part of the Food Banking Regional Network is based in Dubai and has been audited since 2016. They work together with reputable donor partners to guard and guarantee safety and hygiene.

The vision of LFB is to create a Lebanon where no one would go to sleep hungry and provide this basic need regardless of race, religion, or nationality (Jarrouje, Interview ICRC, 2023).

In the aftermath of the Beirut blast in the port, the Lebanese Food Bank expanded its operations to accommodate the sudden rise in poverty. The explosion was not the only cause behind this rise. As mentioned, Lebanon had been facing multiple overlapping crises since 2020 with the financial crisis as well as with the COVID crisis. With the blast, which killed 220 people and left over 350,000 people homeless, the LFB immediately mobilized to provide food to people in the

four worst-affected areas. The organization was present for two weeks and provided over 32.000 meals.

The Lebanese Food Bank has a social media presence on Facebook with 31.000 followers and an Instagram presence with 17.000 followers.

Beit El Baraka

This non-profit organization was established in 2018 and their mission is to provide a safety net for the Lebanese population who are in financial distress. The focus group of Beit El Baraka (BEB) is the vulnerable group of retirees of 65 years and older and children under the age of 18. They support the vision of a dignified life for every Lebanese and provide access to food, education, housing, and healthcare. Beit El Baraka created a free supermarket in an effort to not make these people feel like they are a 'charity case'. The option of choice gives dignity. In addition, they also provide hot meals and provide healthcare through a healthcare center and by supporting hospitals (Gideon, Interview ICRC, 2023).

After the blast in the Beirut port on 4 August 2020, Beit El Baraka mobilized to map the immediately affected areas to offer relief. The focus was aimed at restoring houses and properties and securing damaged buildings. An emergency relief center was established next to the supermarket where a team of volunteers was working on a rehabilitation program. Second, the organization started to secure donations in order to be able to repair the damaged buildings and properties. The immediate repair was needed on windows and their frames, which they offered, all while maintaining the old structure of the buildings (Gideon, Interview ICRC, 2023).

The organization has a Facebook following of 10.000 followers. And their largest platform is Instagram with 44.000 followers.

International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been active in Lebanon since 1948. The ICRC is an organization that responds to armed conflict and was established in 1863. They are also the custodian of international humanitarian law through the Geneva Convention. The main mission is to protect and assist victims of armed conflict around the world. The ICRC is present in more than 90 countries (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023).

The role of the ICRC in Lebanon is a complex one since Lebanon does not qualify as a country in war. However, Lebanon is facing the consequences of the protracted crisis in Syria. The spillover of the Syrian conflict into Lebanon, where over 1 million refugees sought safety, prompted the ICRC's intervention. Furthermore, with the current economic crisis and the strain that it has on everything from healthcare to places of detention, where the organization also works, the ICRC also works. The challenge is trying to meet those needs while balancing the purely conflict-related mission and mandate (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023).

When the explosion happened, the ICRC had to assess where they were able to help in the disaster. As mentioned, the explosion is not a cause of armed conflict but the organization did have the resources and capacities to respond with its specialist knowledge. Their immediate response consisted of providing medical kits to remove weapons such as bullets, normally used by surgeons in armed conflict to treat wounds, and distributing those kits to 18 local hospitals that received the wounded. In addition to providing medical equipment, the ICRC assisted in the

management of the dead. The management of the death of over two hundred people that were unrecognizable and trying to identify the bodies (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023).

The ICRC has a large Facebook following of 89.000 followers, and a smaller platform on Instagram with 9.500 followers.

Facebook and Instagram

Social media is popular in Lebanon. With a population of 6.7 million people in January 2022, the large majority of this population are Internet users. Around 87 percent of the Lebanese are active and have a connection to the Internet and are using it (DataReportal, 2022). In 2022, there were 5 million social media users in Lebanon which is the equivalent of 75 percent of the population. This does not, however, mean that social media users present individual unique users. As a result, in order to estimate how many users certain social media platforms have, Meta (formerly known as Facebook) analyzes the advertisement statistics. These advertisements can roughly analyze the number of accounts.

Facebook

Facebook was launched in 2003, then under the name Facemash, as a platform for Harvard students to share photos of other students in an online competition based on appearance. A year later, the platform rebranded to Facebook and was only accessible to Harvard students. Eventually, it would progress further into other American universities and would always work on an invitation base (Britannica, 2023). In 2006, the platform was made available for the general public and no longer wired on an invitation basis only. A user would only have to be over 13 years and have a valid email address (Britannica, 2023). The features of the platform include

posting written statuses that other users can interact with. In addition, photos and in more recent years, videos have become more popular. In addition, the use of hashtags gives users the opportunity to explore this specific content. The popularity of Facebook grew rapidly over the years and by 2022, the platform has almost 3 billion monthly active users.

In Lebanon, Facebook is the second biggest social media platform after YouTube. There are 3.15 million Facebook users according to Meta's advertising resources (DataReportal, 2022). This is the equivalent of almost sixty percent of the internet users. It has to be stated that these statistics do not include certain groups that are excluded from the use of Facebook. Children under the age of 13 are not allowed to use the platform so this is a representation of the eligible group of Facebook users. If age was not a consideration, 52 percent of the local internet users are active on Facebook. In addition, in January 2022 it was established that of this group the female audience made up 43 percent and the male audience was 57 percent.

Instagram

The platform Instagram started as a 'check-in' application in 2010. However, after realizing that it was similar to another application, the makers rebranded it to 'Instagram' in October 2010. Instagram developed into a photo and video-sharing app and later that year, in December, Instagram had already reached 1 million registrations. The use of hashtags was introduced to help users discover and engage with other creators on the application. Facebook took over Instagram in 2012 for a sum of approximately 1 billion US Dollars in cash and stock (Investopedia, 2022). By then, the platform had reached over 50 million active monthly users, which was doubled in the next year. Over the recent years, the platform has been expanding its

features and one of which has become a staple within Instagram. The 'stories' feature on the application created the option for users to share photos, videos, or just plain text in a separate space other than the main feed. These stories would be available for twenty-four hours only and would disappear after that. It was estimated that in 2022, the platform attracted 1.4 billion monthly users.

Instagram is the third most popular social media platform in Lebanon. Meta's advertising tool measures that there are 2.2 million accounts on Instagram in Lebanon (DataReportal, 2022). This would mean that around 33 percent of the entire population has an account on Instagram. However, as was the case with Facebook, Instagram also excludes users under the age of 13. This would mean that 41 percent of the eligible population is a user of Instagram. The gender divide on Instagram is equally split with 50 percent female and 50 percent male.

For this study, it has been determined that Facebook and Instagram would be the greater option. They are the second and third most popular social media platforms in the country. The first is Youtube, this platform has been excluded on the fact that the usage of this platform is inherently different from Facebook or Instagram. Youtube is merely focused on video content that is long in nature and the platform is not designed for quick communication.

Instagram and Facebook are similar in nature and content and are therefore the logical choice to use in this study. While the initial intentions of the two platforms are different, over years of development and change both Facebook and Instagram now have similar features. The initial purpose of Facebook and Instagram is communication. Over the years they also developed

similar features such as the use of photos and videos, however, the main similarity is the use of hashtags. The hashtags organize content and help users navigate through the platform. This has been deemed especially useful in the case of major events, natural disasters, and other developments that need structured communication. Through the use of hashtags, users are able to quickly get the latest information.

Role of sectarianism in the case study examples

As mentioned in the literature review, Lebanon has a long history of sectarianism. As a highly sectarian divided nation, naturally, the civil society has also mirrored these divisions. Through many phases of Lebanese history, the population has been reliant on their sectarian identity in order to survive (Ziad, 2007). A weak state and shortage of state institutions increased the reliance of the government on civil society organizations as demonstrated in the countless crises that civil society aided in, such as assistance in solving the garbage crisis in 2017 (Karam, 2018). Only in recent years has the civil society been able to flourish and separate themselves from sectarian identities. This means that nowadays there are organizations that go beyond sectarian identities, offering help to all regardless of sect. This research is focused on civil society organizations that have no sectarian identity. While the sectarian identity in NGOs is decreasing, there are still organizations that are influenced by sectarian elites. NGOs that are susceptible to sectarian influence are those that are interest-based (Clark & Salloukh, 2013). Interest-based NGOs were regrowing after the end of the civil war and often deal with fields that are neglected during the civil conflict. Human rights, democracy, and freedom are among those neglected topics. As an example, women and feminist NGOs are among those who are affected by sectarian influence. Oftentimes, in order to gain any progress in their mission, concessions need

to be made with sectarian leaders. These concessions are also needed in order to receive funding, gain publicity and increase political interest (Khattab, 2010).

The pool of organizations without a sectarian identity is not scarce, and the civil society organizations chosen for this study have been screened in order to guarantee that they meet the requirements sought in this research. One of the requirements is that the organization has to be community-based, such as the Lebanese Food Bank and Beit El Baraka that transcend sectarian identity. These organizations work together with donors from either abroad or local initiatives such as community kitchens. Another requirement, which applies to international organizations, is that the organization has to have a Lebanese branch such as the International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon and the Lebanese Red Cross. Reasoning for choosing non-sectarian organizations lies in the fact that the victims represented the diversity of Lebanon and that these organizations were also among the most active.

Interview questions

Three in-depth interviews were conducted with Beit El Baraka, the International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon, and the Lebanese Food Bank about their experiences with social media. All three organizations were asked the same set of questions so the answers can be properly compared. Despite several attempts to secure an interview with the Lebanese Red Cross, the request was declined. However, due to their participation in the relief aid, their contribution to this research would be solely in the content analysis. The International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon was interviewed to shed light on the general social media strategy of the Red Cross. The two organizations also worked closely together in providing relief aid after the explosion.

The questions in the first part focused on the organizational structure and the challenges that they face in Lebanon. The second part covered their strategies and experience in using social media during crises, specifically towards their relief response after the blast in the port.

Below is the list of questions composed of two parts.

The interview questions part 1: the organization and the explosion

- What is the mission of the organization?

- Are there challenges in realizing that mission?

- What are the challenges that the organization is experiencing in Lebanon?

- How was the situation before the blast in the Beirut port?

- What was the situation right after the blast in the Beirut port?

- How was the situation the first month after the explosion?

- Did the situation change in the months after the port blast?

- What challenges does the Lebanese population face?

    - What would be the largest challenge the population in Lebanon faces? Politically, economically or the health and COVID crisis?

    - How does the blast in the Beirut port affect the political, economic, or COVID crisis?

- Is there a shortage of basic needs in Lebanon?

- What are the greatest shortages?

    - How many people experience these shortages?

- Are there any challenges in regards to the political, economic, or COVID situation that affects the access to basic needs such as water, food, shelter, or access medical intervention?

- Are any of these challenges daily problems that the population experiences?

- Are the shortages affecting the organization?

- How important are donations for the organizations?

    - Where do donations come from?

The interview questions part 2: social media engagement and usage

- How important is social media for the organization?

- What are the top three preferred platforms of social media?

- Why are these the preferred platforms?

    - Is this because of social engagement, best outreach, or best interference?

- What is the main use for them?

- Information access for the population?

- Navigation to provide basic needs for the population?

- Is it used for crisis management control?

- Was social media a useful tool for crisis management after the explosion in the port?

- How valuable was social media in the aftermath of the blast in the Beirut port?

    - Were donations acquired via social media or through other means?

- How did the organization use social media to interact with the affected audience after the blast?

    - Is it through hashtags or keywords or other forms of engagement?

- Did the affected victims find the organization or did the organization find the victims?

- What were the limitations that the organization was facing with using social media?

- How did you solve these issues?

- What other tools in addition to social media are utilized?

Content analysis

In addition to interviewing communication strategists at the organizations, the social media data of the interviewed relief organizations were collected and analyzed. For this analysis, a system was developed specifically for this study, which divided the data into different categories. Instead of having one big sample, the different aspects that were mentioned in the methodology were analyzed separately. The data collected covered the month after the disaster: from 4 August 2020 to 4 September 2020. The intended collected information included all the social media posts on Facebook and Instagram including photos, written statements, and videos. It also included Instagram stories that are still available on the social media platforms. The social media posts were then analyzed through the different phases that are further described below. The collected data was imported into Microsoft Excel to generate the graphs that are shown in the next chapter (Chapter 4: Findings). Important to note is that the content analysis included both English and Arabic posts, however since the author of this research is not sufficiently fluent in Arabic, the automatic translation feature in both Facebook and Instagram was utilized to gather the data in addition to assistance from native Arabic speakers

- Phase 1: Comparative platform analysis
  The first division of the content analysis analyzed the different interfaces and usages of Facebook and Instagram. This separate analysis determined the different impacts of the separate social media platforms. It focussed on the distinct features of the platforms and what makes them work or not work.
- Phase 2: Social media frequencies

In the second phase of the analysis, the content analysis of the social media data of the relief organizations focussed on the frequency of posting in the month after the explosion. How often did the relief organizations post on their social media and what is the difference in frequency between Instagram and Facebook? Is there a preferred platform that the relief organizations lean towards?

- Phase 3: Social media strategies

In this phase, the analysis zoomed in even further and analyzed the social media content, and identified what the different strategies are in the posted content. Which method did the relief organizations choose to communicate with their audience? Was this mainly through written posts, or was the preferred communication through photos or videos combined with a written statement? In this phase of the analysis, the data was divided between the different types of posting. One of the defining features of Instagram and Facebook is the use of hashtags. Often a hashtag is used in a disaster or crisis to generate attention and would be used constantly in social media posts. The findings of this phase were combined with the findings of phase 2 and showed the different choices that the organizations made.

- Phase 4: Social media outreach

This phase of the analysis analyzed the outreach of the social media posts. This was conducted by analyzing the number of likes, comments, and shares one particular post has. The number of likes or comments indicates the outreach of the social media and how many users react to it. This demonstrated what kind of posts reached the most users and where the most interaction with the population and the organization is.

- Phase 5: Broad keyword social media analysis

This phase is where the content analysis took place on a deeper spectrum and focussed on the aspects of basic needs. This part of the analysis focussed on specific keywords to indicate how certain words are used in the communication. In order to have a representative result it is important to apply the same analyzing method to both platforms. To analyze the data, specific keywords are placed in order to isolate the targeted social media content.

The terms that would be isolated in this phase are: *'Beirut', 'explosion/blast', 'port',* and *'donations'.*

- Phase 6: Specific keyword social media analysis

  In this second keyword phase, the data analysis consisted of further analyzing the social media data and categorizing it further to contain the basic needs of the population. Within the already analyzed data, further analysis is necessary to determine the different basic needs. Manually, the different data would be categorized into five different categories that all fall under basic needs.

  The categories are: *'food', 'shelter', 'health', medical',* and *'blood'.*

Combining the data from all the phases demonstrated how social media usage helped in navigating the basic needs of the Lebanese population by relief organizations.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

With the research question established: *'How have Lebanese relief organizations navigated basic needs shortages through social media following the 2020 port explosion?',* this chapter will discuss the findings of the interviews conducted with the Lebanese Food Bank, Beit El Baraka, and the International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon as part of the qualitative research as well as the findings of the content analysis of the Lebanese Red Cross, Lebanese Food Bank, Beit El Baraka, and the International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon as part of the quantitative research.

Background perspective of the sample organizations

Firstly, the interviewed members of the separate organizations will be introduced and then they will discuss the place of their organization in Lebanese society, what the challenges are for the organization, and what the explosion in 2020 added to those challenges as was discussed in the first part of the interview questions. In Chapter 3, the mission of the organizations has been briefly introduced but in the next section, this will go further in depth. In addition, it is important to analyze their perspective on the situation in Lebanon so they will present their insight into what factors contributed to the explosion.

Lebanese Food Bank

'For sure social media played a great role in getting funds. Because we were showing our operation and explaining our procedures on a daily basis. People found us on social media and started donating money, food, and medicine.' - Patsy Jarrouje, Lebanese Food Bank.

This interview was conducted with Patsy Jarrouje and Cyabelle Asmar. Jarrouje is the operations manager at the Lebanese Food Bank and is in charge of all the operations that take place within the Lebanese Food Bank. From project management to on-the-ground operations, Jarrouje is also highly involved in the social media accounts which fall under the responsibility of Cyabelle Asmar who is the art director. She works for the external company Digital Echoes, which works together with the Lebanese Food Bank. They take on projects, study them, create new strategies, and share them with Jarrouje and Lebanese Food Bank, employees and volunteers. The two also collaborate together to present and share new and better experiences in regard to social media.

The organization faced multiple problems in providing relief assistance on the. The issues were not solely a consequence of the explosion, but a series of events that had taken place in the country prior to the explosion.

Firstly there was a lack of facilities. Before the explosion, the LFB worked together with restaurants and bakeries. Excess food and nearly expired food were collected and distributed to needy families in collaboration with other non-profit organizations. However, with the recession and the devaluation of the currency, restaurants and bakeries cut production leaving the LFB with less aid. They would simply produce what they would sell and nothing more. So while the quality of the leftover food is not different from before the recession, there is not enough to provide for everyone.

With the recession, Lebanon also experienced massive inflation so people are not able to afford their daily necessities anymore. Their purchasing power has severely decreased. A currency comparison between 2019 and 2022 shows how much the purchasing power has diminished for everyone. According to the LFB, three years ago, one American Dollar was worth 1500 Lebanese Lira and in 2023, one American Dollar was the equivalent of 15.000 Lebanese Lira. Cultural habituation also plays a small role in the purchasing habits of Lebanese consumers. '*For many Lebanese, it is a habit to purchase large quantities of food but it is becoming increasingly clear that the purchasing power simply does not allow that anymore. Another cultural aspect is that the Lebanese are very generous. They share with their friends, family, community, and neighbors and are not used to providing for themselves first before sharing with others'* (Jarrouje, Interview LFB, 2023).

In addition to the economic and financial crisis ,the COVID-19 pandemic presented another problem. During the global pandemic, many restaurants, bakeries, and other food suppliers did not survive the mandatory closing period during lockdown, due to lack of customers and lack of tourism. *'COVID-19 also created a food shortage due to the fluctuation of availability and certain brands that were previously available ceased to exist. So there definitely was a shortage of food during the first stages of COVID-19 but right now that is not the case anymore. If there will be shortages of food again, this is due to the political situation'* (Jarrouje, Interview LFB, 2023).

International Committee of the Red Cross in Lebanon

'The role of social media stops with fake news.' - Basma Taraja, ICRC Lebanon

Basma Taraja is the deputy head of delegation for the ICRC in Lebanon, overseeing programs that relate to protection, prevention, communication, and donor relations.

According to Taraja, the crisis is multi-folded, so when it comes to health, there is a recent cholera outbreak, which is intricately tied to the overcrowding in some refugee camps and the lack of steady flow of safe uncontaminated water. The ICRC tackles the public infrastructure and the challenges that come with a rapidly collapsing essential service provision, be it water or be it healthcare. Because of this multitude of crises, the organization is also facing multiple challenges in regard to that. Lebanon is going through severe humanitarian consequences either linked to the protracted crisis in Syria and the spill-over into Lebanon with the influx of over 1 million refugees. Or with the current economic crisis and the strain that it has on everything from healthcare to places of detention.

Certainly, COVID contributed to the economic crisis, exacerbating the issue. COVID is also linked to global inflation and the economic recession, which certainly for a country like Lebanon, is disastrous since it can't keep up with the inflation which coincided with the severe devaluation of the Lebanese currency. COVID also put an additional strain on the public health system which already had to function with very few resources (Taraja, Interview ICRC, 2023). In addition, they had to be the lead hospitals in terms of treatments but also provide vaccinations using very few resources. That caused a situation where hospitals had to rely a lot on international funding.

The ICRC provides assistance and essential services to strengthen the system that already exists instead of creating parallel systems. So in regards to health care, they support the two largest

public hospitals in Beirut and Tripoli and support various aspects, through capacity building, personnel, and financial infrastructure. Anything from enforced water treatment in the hospital to redesigning the patient pathways. They work on systemic support for the water infrastructure so these are medium to large-scale water projects, offering maintenance and repair to the networks and the stations that already exist. In terms of economic security, the organization tries to provide less inclined assistance and focus more on the livelihood that is sustainable. Helping refugees or vulnerable communities cope through creating micro-economic initiatives for them. Everything from small-scale agriculture projects, livestock or even supporting people with disabilities to open small businesses that can provide them with economic independence. In the field of protection, ICRC works with the authorities on visiting places of detention and prisons. Be it to ensure that the minimum standards are met in terms of humane conditions but also in terms of treatment and preventing ill-treatment. This also comes with its own set of challenges, especially in terms of the provision of essential services and detention. Providing water and healthcare, especially with the last cholera scare, the ICRC had to ensure that vaccination for detainees was available. Furthermore, during COVID, one of the wards was turned into a COVID treatment isolation center, specifically for prisoners.

Beit El Baraka

'What we did online, worked out well.' - Natascha Gideon, Beit El Baraka

Natascha Gideon is the operations manager at Beit El Baraka.

Beit El Baraka was created in 2018 with the mission to assess the most vulnerable segment of the society, which is children and the elderly, and provide them with access to food, proper

education, healthcare, and decent livelihood. These are the four pillars of Beit El Baraka. Under food security, they have created a free supermarket next to the headquarters where beneficiaries can come and shop and decide whatever items they need based on a points system. A beneficiary has 50 points per month and they need to manage and budget these points themselves. In this manner, people still retain dignity and most importantly they still possess control over this aspect of their lives. They have access to fruits and vegetables, bread, milk, cans, and hygiene products.

Beit El Baraka also provides assistance in repairing shelters. This first started when there were homes for the elderly that needed repairs. The organization upgraded their shelter, if they have either infrastructure repair, it is fixed, or provide them with basic appliances, such as stoves and other household items.

The healthcare department, meanwhile, started in collaboration with an outside organization that provided medications. In collaboration, Beit El Baraka was distributing medications to people based on their prescription and were assisted by doctors because they don't have any license to medicate people. Until recently when they hired their own doctors and received the license to be able to distribute medications. In addition to that, they cover hospital bills and emergency hospital bills. In cases when someone has an operation or in smaller cases if someone has physiotherapy.

Content analysis and interviews

In this part of the data analysis, the research will analyze the social media data of the two platforms of all four relief organizations. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the content analysis will consist of six different phases, each analyzing a different part of the content. In addition to discussing the findings of the content analysis, the second part of the questions is discussed in relation to the content analysis.

In this comparative analysis, an important side note that has to be mentioned is the difference in the size of the organizations. In Chapter 3 the number of followers of the social media platforms was mentioned. From these numbers, it is clear that the outreach of the organizations is different. The Lebanese Red Cross has twice the number of followers as the Lebanese Food Bank and Beit El Baraka. These differences will affect the number of posts, the amount of outreach in terms of followers or comments, and the difference in data. The data that was collected represent these differences but will be analyzed in relation to the number of followers and outreach.

Phase 1: Comparative platform analysis

All four of the relief organizations were active on both platforms in the month following the disaster. Facebook and Instagram have similar features in their interface that help in reaching audiences. Facebook as well as Instagram have photo and video features that could be accompanied by a written statement or post. One of the main differences between the two platforms is that Instagram is solely a photo and video-sharing platform that does not allow written posts, whereas Facebook has the option to only post a written statement. This is an important notion in the data analysis in phase 3 since Instagram does not have the option to publish a solely written statement. Another difference between the two platforms is that Instagram possesses a feature that is highly popular on the platform and that is posting *'stories'*. These are temporary posts that disappear after 24 hours and will not be present on the profile anymore after that time frame. The stories are used to share something that the user does not want to be permanently on their platform. However, the user has the ability to have the stories visible again in a separate feature on the profile called a '*highlight*'. The stories posed a problem in the content analysis since there is no guarantee that the data that is available is complete. The possible analysis of this data is also highly dependent on the fact that the user made them public and viewable under the highlight feature because there is an option to pick and choose the viewable content. Therefore, the amount of available stories from the organizations will be mentioned but will not be analyzed further in the content analysis.

An additional feature that both platforms have is the 'hashtag'. A hashtag is an automatic sorting feature that allows users to quickly access the information that they need. Especially in times of chaos and panic when communication should be fast and efficient, a universally used hashtag

allows users to get the information they need. Hashtags are not generated automatically but are rather organically created by popularity as was mentioned in the study by Abbas (Abbas et al, 2021). In essence, when a large group of users actively uses a hashtag it gains momentum and would therefore become more popular. Oftentimes, in terms of crisis and crisis management, simple and effective hashtags would be used. The name of the country or city, what the actual crisis is, for example, a shooting or a hurricane, and therefore the hashtag would gather more information than with intricate hashtag words.

To reach people, the Lebanese Food Bank focused on two social media platforms: Instagram and Facebook. For the organization, these platforms are the most important ones to communicate on because they can reach a variety of people in different age groups and social classes. *'Facebook is used by all age groups and generations while Instagram is mainly used by the younger generation.'* (Asmar, Interview LFB, 2023). The communication sent on both platforms, therefore, differed from each other with the communication adjusted accordingly. *'The diaspora for example was mainly contacted through Facebook since they encompass the older generation. On Instagram, the messages would be directed towards volunteers and to the young diaspora that is able to help with donations or any other way.'* (Asmar, Interview LFB, 2023).

For Beit El Baraka, the focus lies on Instagram rather than on Facebook. While they did post on Facebook, the majority of the focus was on Instagram. *'There is also a Twitter account but we think that the most effective platform is Instagram. We can reach a lot of people from different backgrounds and different areas. There is no specific reason why we are not using Facebook, it's just easier because people nowadays tend to log in to Instagram more.'* (Gideon, Interview BEB,

2023) However, one of Beit El Baraka's main beneficiaries is the elderly, who are more active on Facebook, which is more age-inclusive than Instagram. But it is the simple notion that the elderly whom Beit El Baraka serves are not on social media. *'They don't even have phones so we reach out by simply going to their houses. Most of them live in the area where the headquarters is, which is a very vulnerable area.'* (Gideon, Interview BEB, 2023). The organization possesses a tuk tuk and the volunteers use it to distribute food to the elderly and to chat with them to make sure they are okay. But the younger generation can be reached through Instagram and they don't need house visits.

In line with the Lebanese Food Bank and Beit El Baraka, Facebook, and Instagram were important for the ICRC. *'A recent survey showed that Facebook is still a pivotal platform because it has the most diverse audience in terms of age group. Youth, their parents and sometimes even their grandparents are active on Facebook. Instagram targets a more specific age group.'* (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023) The organization receives more views on Facebook because of the more diverse presence but also because of the algorithms and how Meta changed the policy after it purchased Instagram (New York Times, 2022). *'They force you sometimes to firstly go through Facebook to post content before a user is allowed to share them on Instagram.'* (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023).

Phase 2: Social media frequencies

In this phase of the social media content analysis, the study will analyze the frequency of posting by the relief organizations on both platforms on a monthly and weekly basis..
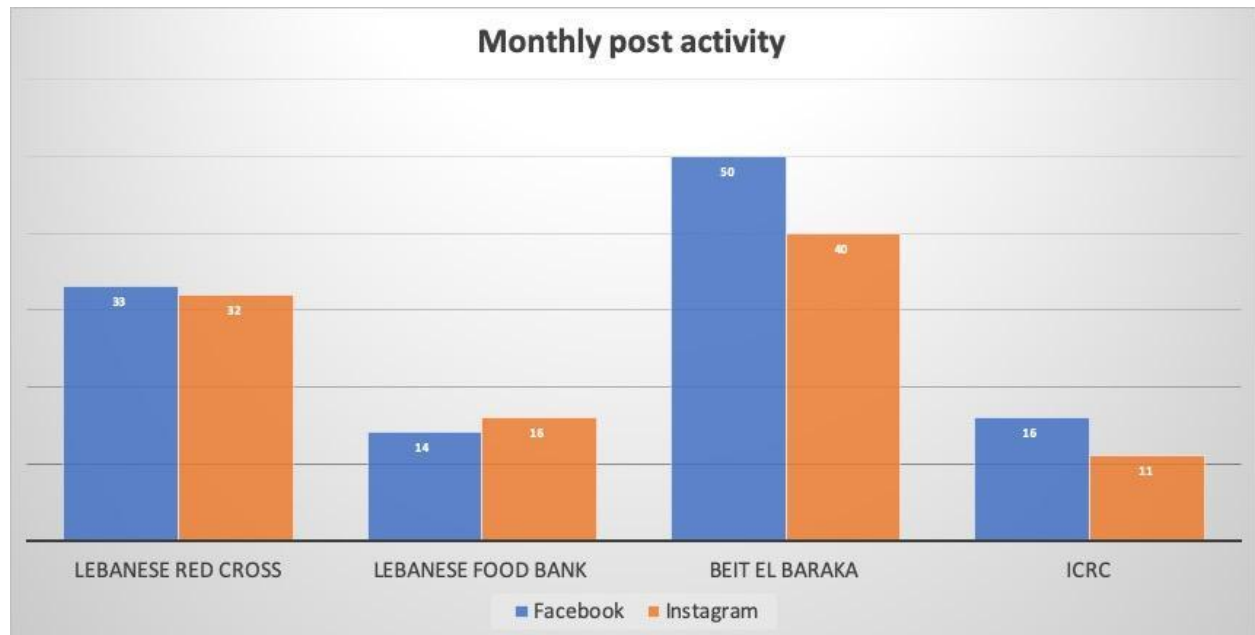

Figure 1: Monthly social media activity

In the month after the explosion in the port of Beirut, all organizations utilized social media to connect with the affected population. When compared to each other, the Lebanese Red Cross was almost twice as active on both social media platforms as the Lebanese Food Bank was. However, Beit El Baraka posted the most content out of the four organizations. Furthermore, the activity of the ICRC is comparable with the Lebanese Food Bank.

Where the Lebanese Red Cross posted 32 times on Facebook, the Lebanese Food Bank posted 14 times on Facebook, Beit El Baraka 50 times, and the ICRC 16 times. On Instagram, the activity

is almost identical with 32 posts from the Lebanese Red Cross, 16 from the Lebanese Food Bank, 40 from Beit El Baraka, and 11 posts from the ICRC. This is a total of 65 posts by the Lebanese Red Cross and 30 posts by the Lebanese Food Bank in comparison to 90 total posts by Beit El Baraka and 27 from the ICRC.

The choices for the most used platforms are different between the four. Overall, Facebook is the most used platform for three of the organizations. The Lebanese Red Cross, Beit El Baraka, and the ICRC were the most active on this platform. The preference for Facebook is not remarkable considering the popularity of the platform with 110 million users in East Asia (DataReportal, 2023). In 2020, the year of the explosion, Lebanon had over 4 million Facebook users (Statista, 2021). The only organization that was more active on Instagram was the Lebanese Food Bank. Yet, the differences are quite small where the difference would be one or two posts, only in the case of Beit El Baraka is the difference significant with a difference of 10 posts.

However, it is worth noting that while the Lebanese Food Bank and the ICRC may have been less active in posting, they were active and present within a separate feature on Instagram. The previously mentioned Instagram stories were a major asset in information sharing and communication. Over the course of the four weeks following the explosion, the Lebanese Food Bank posted 194 stories. Beit El Baraka posted a total of 27 stories and the ICRC posted 18. These stories are either saved in the 'highlight' function of the platform or would otherwise disappear after twenty-four hours. Because of the disappearance feature, this study can not guarantee that the Lebanese Red Cross was not active via their stories or that the other three organizations who did publish their stories, provided access to all of them because the data is

simply not available. The Lebanese Red Cross does have a saved highlight on their profile about the Beirut explosion but this data falls outside of the research parameter of the one-month time frame post-explosion.

To further develop the insight in frequencies of media activity, the monthly activity is further divided into weekly activities. The month is divided into four weeks each containing the following seven days and the platform would be divided into graphs, which give a further detailed record of the strategies.
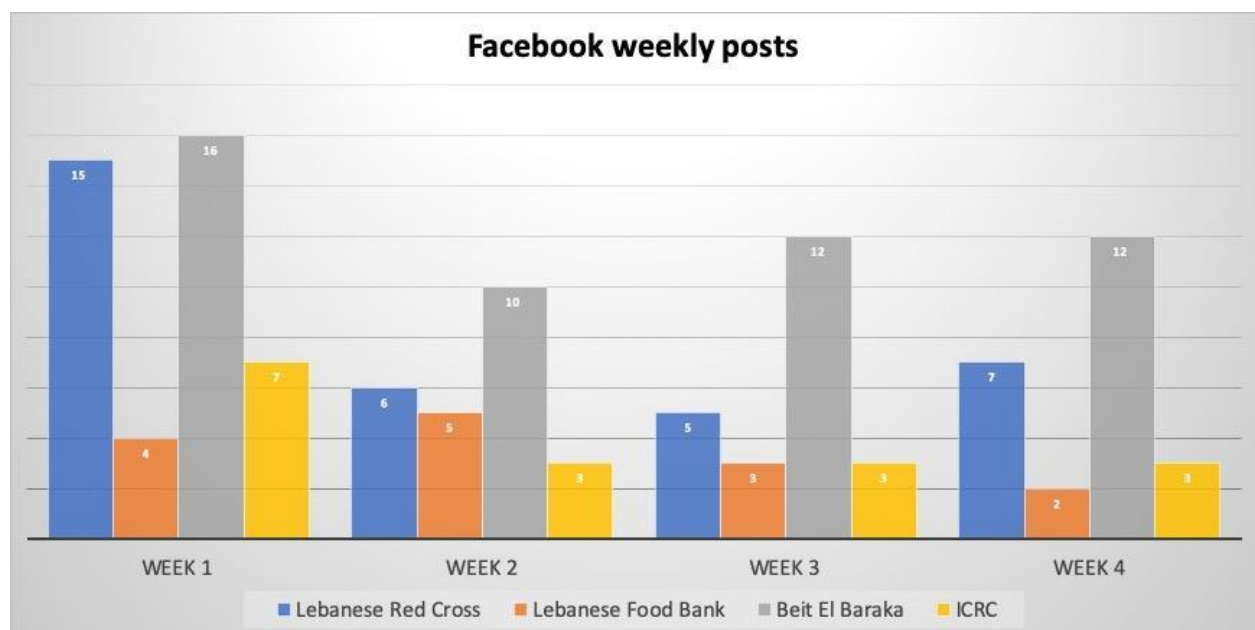
Figure 2: Weekly Facebook activity

In the week (04-08-2020 - 11-08-2020) after the explosion, the Lebanese Red Cross was the second most active in their posting on Facebook with 15 active posts. In week two (12-08-2020 - 19-08-2020) and three (20-08-2020 - 27-08-2020), this gradually decreased to 6 posts in week two and 5 in week 3. In week 4 (28-08-2020 - 04-09-2020) activity increased slightly with 7

active posts. On the other hand, the Lebanese Food Bank was the most active on Facebook in the second week with 5 total posts. In the third and fourth week, they were significantly less active with 2 posts each week. In the immediate week after the explosion, the LFB posted 4 posts. Beit El Baraka published the most content out of the four organizations. With 16 posts in week 1 and 10 in week 2. In weeks 3 and 4, they posted 12 times, which makes Beit El Baraka on average the most active on Facebook. The ICRC posted the most content in the first week after the explosion with 7 posts, which then decrease to 3 posts in the remainder of the weeks.
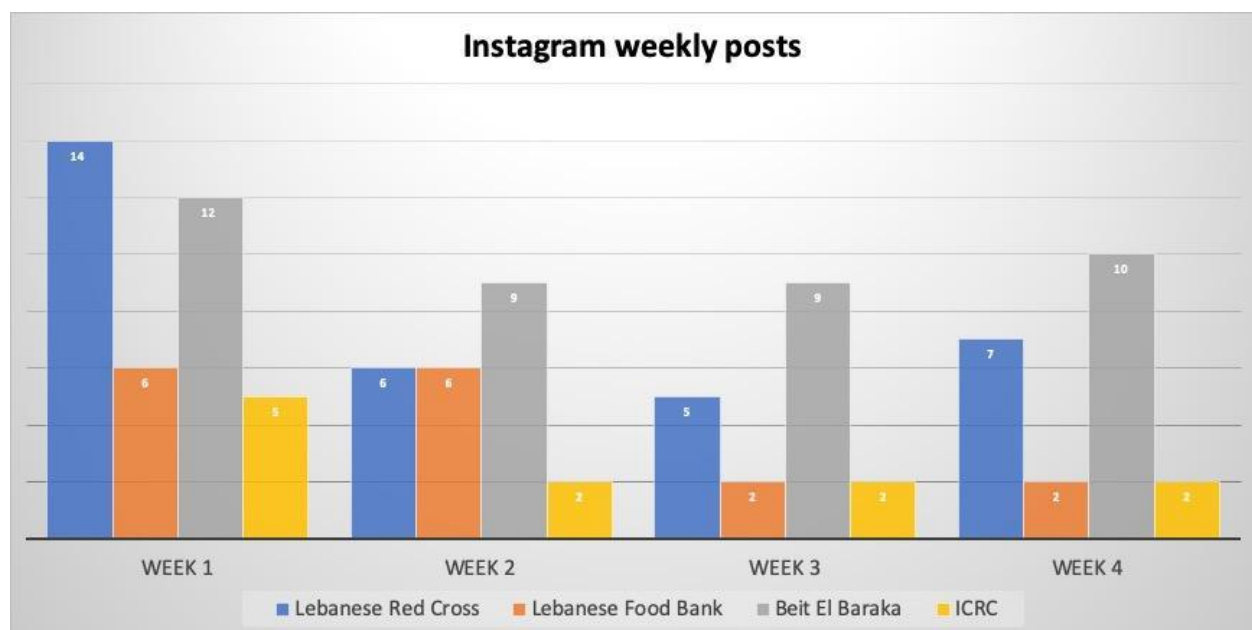

Figure 3: Weekly Instagram activity

With regards to the Lebanese Red Cross, they were very consistent in comparison with Facebook. In week 1, the Lebanese Red Cross posted 14 posts on Instagram. This would then reduce to 6 posts in week 2, 5 in week 3, and 7 in week 4. As with Facebook, the Lebanese Food Bank was less active than the Lebanese Red Cross on Instagram. In week 1 and 2, they posted 6 times each week. For the following two weeks, they would post two times each week.

The Instagram data from Beit El Baraka reflects the same trend as it did in regard to Facebook. They were quite active in the first week and published 12 times, then gradually decreased to a respective 9 times in week 2 and week 3. In week 4 they posted 10 times. The ICRC posted the least out of all the organizations. In week 1, there were 5 posts, in weeks 2, 3, and 4 they posted 2 times each week.

Phase 3: Social media strategies

In this phase of the social media data analysis, the study will discuss the different strategies that the LRC, Beit el Baraka, and the LFB conducted. This analysis differentiated between the styles of posts. The data were categorized into six different categories to measure the style of posts as the preferred format.

The categories of data contained the following:

- *'Photo with text inside'*: this style of post consists of a photo with text written inside the photo.

- *'Post and photo with text inside'*: this style of post is the same as the previous one, however, it is accompanied by a written statement/post apart from the text inside the photo.

- *'Post with video'*: a video accompanied by a written statement/post.

- *'Post with photo'*: strategy is the same as the previous one, however, instead of a video it is a post with a photo.

- *'Post with video and photo'*: a combination of the previous two where a written statement/post is accompanied by a photo as well as a video.

- *'Video'*: a posted video without being accompanied by a written post.

While analyzing the data, this study also included a category under the name *'Post'* which referred to only written post or statement. However, after analyzing the data, it became clear that only one of the organizations used this particular style of social media strategy on either Facebook or Instagram. Therefore it was removed from the graphs in this phase but the post is included in the rest of the analysis.
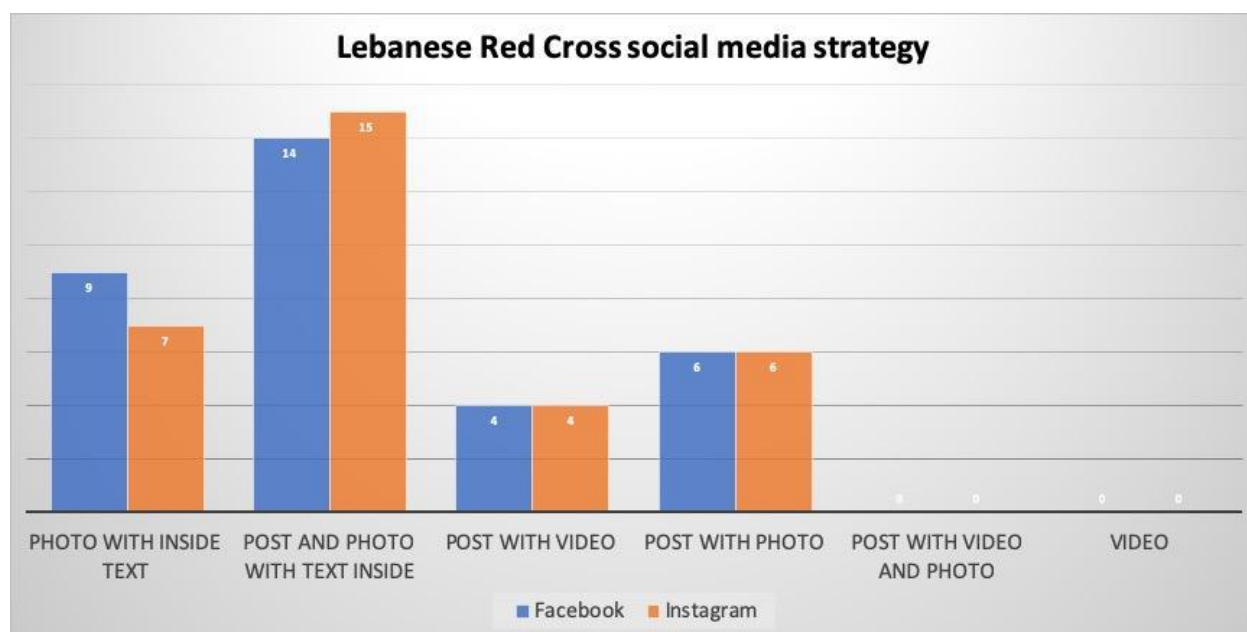
Figure 4: Lebanese Red Cross social media strategy

The data reveals that the Lebanese Red Cross has a preference for photos. Whether these are photos containing text or accompanied by a post. The majority of the posts and content of the Lebanese Red Cross was via 'post and photo with text inside'. On Facebook, there were 14 posts and on Instagram 15 were within this category. A 'photo with the inside text' was posted 9 times on Facebook and 7 on Instagram. A 'post with photo' post was used 6 times on both Facebook and Instagram and a 'post with video' was posted 4 times on each platform. On neither of the platforms did the LRC publish a 'post with video and photo' or 'video'.

It is clear that the LRC preferred to communicate visually, which allowed them to showcase what was happening on the ground accompanied by some text.
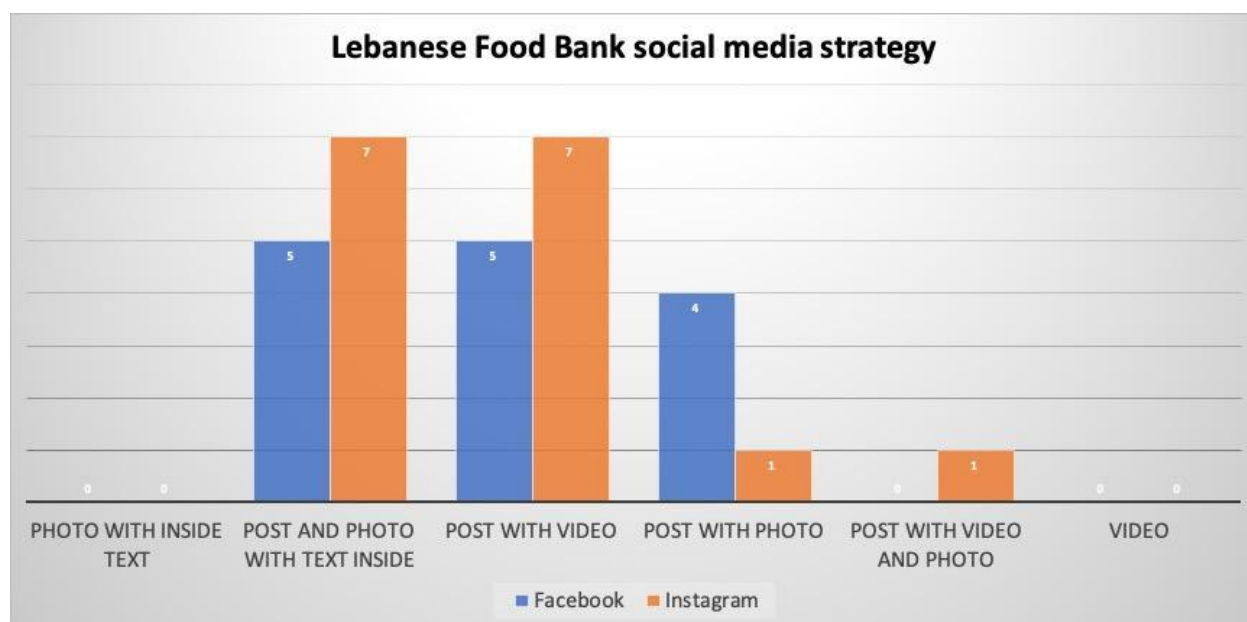
Figure 5: Lebanese Food Bank social media strategy

The Lebanese Food Bank chose a different strategy in their communication whereby they communicated mainly through photos, however, in the majority of the cases this was accompanied by a post. A 'post and photo with text inside' was used 7 times on Instagram and 5 on Facebook. Secondly comes the 'post with video', which showed the devastation of Beirut as well as their efforts to assist the population and was used 7 times on Instagram and 5 times on Facebook. Less used as the method of using 'post with photo' with 4 posts on Facebook and 1 on Instagram. Other than the Lebanese Red Cross did the LFB use the method of a 'post with video and photo', however, they only used that strategy once.

The language used in social media posts for the different platforms also differed. As mentioned, Instagram and Facebook have different audiences. Therefore the language used should be adapted in social media posts. *'Instagram, for example, would be used by the younger generation and therefore the language would be less formal, more direct, and easier to understand.*

Facebook on the other hand is used by all generations, but mainly the older generation. On this platform, language would be the opposite of Instagram and would be more formal.' (Asmar, Interview LFB, 2023). In addition to using a different vocabulary, the organization also communicated in two different languages: English and Arabic. Many of the posts were in English rather than Arabic because the outreach outside of Lebanon would be larger with English posts than with Arabic posts.

Social media was a great asset in the mission of the Lebanese Food Bank in the aftermath of the explosion in Beirut. Through social media, the Lebanese Food Bank could show the struggles that the Lebanese population was facing. *'By showing how we operate and therefore letting users know what is happening on the ground in real life. People could see that we were delivering cooked meals to the affected population and that we were working non-stop.'* (Asmar, Interview LFB, 2023). The Lebanese Food Bank immediately scaled up its operations after the explosion. *'5 August was the starting point of working around the clock to help the people in Beirut that were affected by the explosion'* (Jarrouje, Interview LFB, 2023). Where they would previously have work days from 8 am until 5 pm, after the explosion they were working 24 hours. Especially in the first 15 days after the disaster they were working around the clock. After the initial 15 days, they downscaled the operations hours from 6 am until 6 pm.

When posting in the aftermath of the explosion, the Lebanese Food Bank resorted to a social media strategy based on four pillars. *'First and foremost is showing faces on social media. Showing the 'real pain' and therefore gaining the trust of the audience. An important factor is communicating what the explosion caused and how this affected the population of Beirut. By*

giving a face to the victims and humanizing them. Up until this day, we show what the donations do and how they have been helping the victims.' (Asmar, Interview LFB, 2023). The second pillar of the organization is reaching out to the Lebanese people in the country but most importantly outside of the country. As mentioned before, reaching out to the diaspora has been an important part of fund-raising but in addition to that, Lebanese people who are still in Lebanon also help each other. *'With the right use of social media, we can access them and have them help on the ground as volunteers. The third pillar is information sharing and sharing strategic studies of the organization. We transparently share the trajectory of the organization and where we were years ago and where we are in the present. The fourth and final pillar is presenting the intervening missions by the Lebanese Food Bank on social media.'* (Asmar, Interview LFB, 2023).
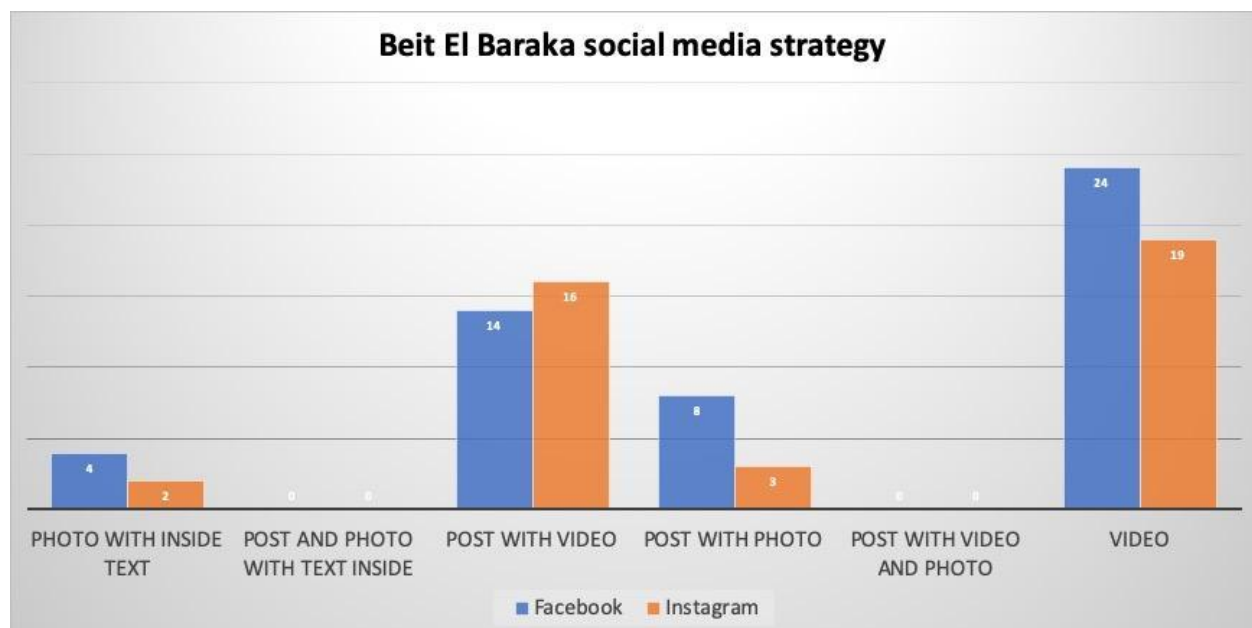

Figure 6: Beit El Baraka social media strategy

When looking at the data from Beit El Baraka, it is clear that their preferred method of strategy is through videos. The majority of the content on Facebook and Instagram is through 'video', which is not accompanied by a written post or statement. On Facebook, this was used in 24 posts, and on Instagram in 19. Then there is also the category of the 'post with video', which Beit El Baraka chooses to use extensively as well with a combined total of 30 posts. Less popular is the use of imagery and written content. A 'post with photo' was used 8 times on Facebook and 3 times on Instagram.

Beit El Baraka was more active than the Lebanese Food Bank, Lebanese Red Cross, and the ICRC on the two platforms. The activity of the smaller organization Beit El Baraka was due to the importance that the CEO placed on being active on social media. *'The CEO was taking photos and videos the whole day, just to show the audience how we are dealing with the situation. It was very important to her to be as active as possible'* (Gideon, Interview BEB, 2023). However, for all four organizations, their weekly activity on both platforms is around the same in comparison to Facebook and Instagram. The number of posts is almost identical, meaning that neither of the organizations preferred one platform over the other.

'The founder is the person who takes care of the social media accounts and is very hands-on and very connected with the audience. At the end of the day, she is the face of Beit El Baraka and the audience relate to her. And she wanted to show videos because she knows that they will touch people more than a standard picture. It will showcase the reality of what is happening in a dynamic way. And until today it is clear that Beit El Baraka posts videos more than pictures' (Gideon, Interview BEB, 2023).
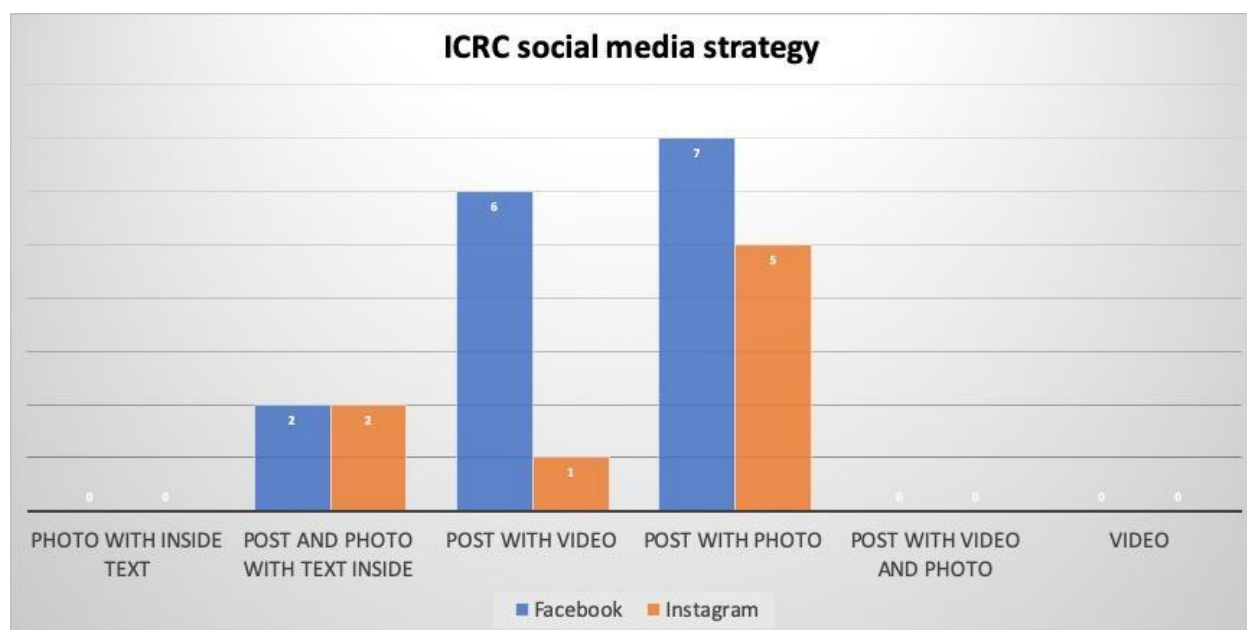
Figure 7: ICRC social media strategy

As for the ICRC, the majority of the content was communicated in Arabic. Based on the data, the clear preference for video and visuals is also seen within the strategy of the ICRC. They relied on photos accompanied by posts and videos. Within the category 'post with photo' they posted 7 times on Facebook and 5 times on Instagram. ICRC also used 'post with video' extensively with 6 posts on Facebook. Important to note is that there is one Facebook post that was excluded from this phase. Due to the post being a written post and not fitting in any of the categories, it was therefore removed from Phase 3 but is included in all the other phases.

The preference for visuals is also what the organization confirmed and reiterated: *'Attention spans are getting shorter, so even with video, you can see how long people watch the video for. Posted videos are usually one minute long and very few people will watch them until the end. So if there is a key message that needs to reach the audience such as actions, the posts, and the*

videos need to be short so that the audience watches it till the end.' (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023).

As mentioned, most of the official posts published from the ICRC account are in Arabic but, for example, when managers post they do it in English because it was important for the ICRC Lebanon to reach international media and diplomatic missions. *'The donors are still mostly Western donors so sometimes we would share a post from the account that was in Arabic but with an English caption and an English description. The Arabic language itself also poses a problem since it is a very formal language so when the organization posts they use colloquial Lebanese Arabic. On this topic, there are two schools of thought. Some social media managers are of the opinion that they want to keep the formal Arabic language alive and others are of the opinion that if you want to reach out to younger audiences you have to speak their language and not the formal, rigid Arabic.'* (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023).

One important feature of social media platforms is the use and option of hashtags. Three of the organizations have used hashtags extensively in their communication. Oftentimes they would use the same hashtags in the majority of their posts. The Lebanese Red Cross initially didn't utilize hashtags in their content but as the days after the explosion passed, the hashtags #LebaneseRedCross and #SupportLRC was seen in the majority of the content on both Facebook and Instagram. The importance of hashtags was mentioned previously in the study by Abbas (Abbas et al, 2022) which showed that the unity of hashtags automatically organizes the content.

The Lebanese Food Bank used hashtags even more extensively. From the beginning of the disaster, the hashtags #Beirut, #Beirutexplosion, and #Lebanon is seen in the content. Eventually, the organization would also use the hashtag #LebaneseFoodBank and #CareForBeirut in the majority of the content. The Lebanese Food Bank also used hashtags in their content and would always redirect to links on their profile if people wanted to donate. Therefore the majority of the users that wanted to help in the crisis found the organization themselves and the Lebanese Food Bank did not expend much energy to mobilize volunteers. '*Certain posts would be boosted so people could find the organization and working together with high-profile individuals such as ambassadors increased the reach. Especially when ambassadors would actively share the mission of the organization and therefore generate more attention.*' (Asmar, Interview LFB, 2023). The last tool that the Lebanese Food Bank used was Search Engine Optimization. Working with specific keywords helped the diaspora but also other people to find the organization while searching for relief organizations to donate to. The organization would always come up as one of the first suggestions when the right keywords were used such as 'food', 'Beirut', 'donation', and the name of the organization.

While the LRC and LFB were very strategic in their hashtag use, Beit El Baraka steered away from using hashtags. Only in one post, a hashtag was found which was the general hashtag of #Beirut and #Beirutexplosion. '*For some reason, it wasn't important to use hashtags since we gained the outreach that we needed. It is impressive how the followers find us and how the reach and growth were so organic*' (Gideon, Interview BEB, 2023). Algorithms and the constant change in strategy are not something that they keep up with. '*I want to do it my way and it's working.*' (Gideon, Interview BEB, 2023).

Unlike Beit el Baraka, the ICRC employed the use of hashtags but did so in line with their own strategy. *'There were some donor agencies trying to get all the organizations that they support to use the same hashtag. So there were synchronized efforts among organizations to use the same hashtags.'* (Interview ICRC, 2023). The ICRC eventually didn't use the suggested communal hashtag because they wanted to maintain their independence and adhere to their own communicative strategy. The most used hashtags were in line with those used by the Lebanese Red Cross and the Lebanese Food Bank. The hashtags #Beirut, #Beirutexplosion, and #healthcare, both posted in Arabic and English were among the most frequently used.

Phase 4: Social media outreach

Several key aspects of social media platforms are the functions of liking, commenting, and sharing social media posts. It is a tool to determine the outreach and how popular a post is because the more likes, the more popular and the more people have seen it. Especially in regards to comments and shares, a post can be measured in popularity. A like is one simple click whereas placing a comment or sharing the post requires more action from the user. The following graphs contain an overview of all the different social media platforms and all the posts. They are analyzed via chronological order of posting and categorized between 'comments', 'likes', and in the case of Facebook also in the category 'shares'. The exact amount of likes, comments, and shares are provided in the graphs.

As mentioned previously in Chapter 4, when the organizations were introduced, the number of followers between all the organizations did not show comparable numbers, so the outreach and the number of likes, comments, and shares are going to differ vastly when compared in set amounts. In this phase, the study primarily focused on the average number of likes and comments in addition to researching if there were any sudden peaks for reasons that could be identified.
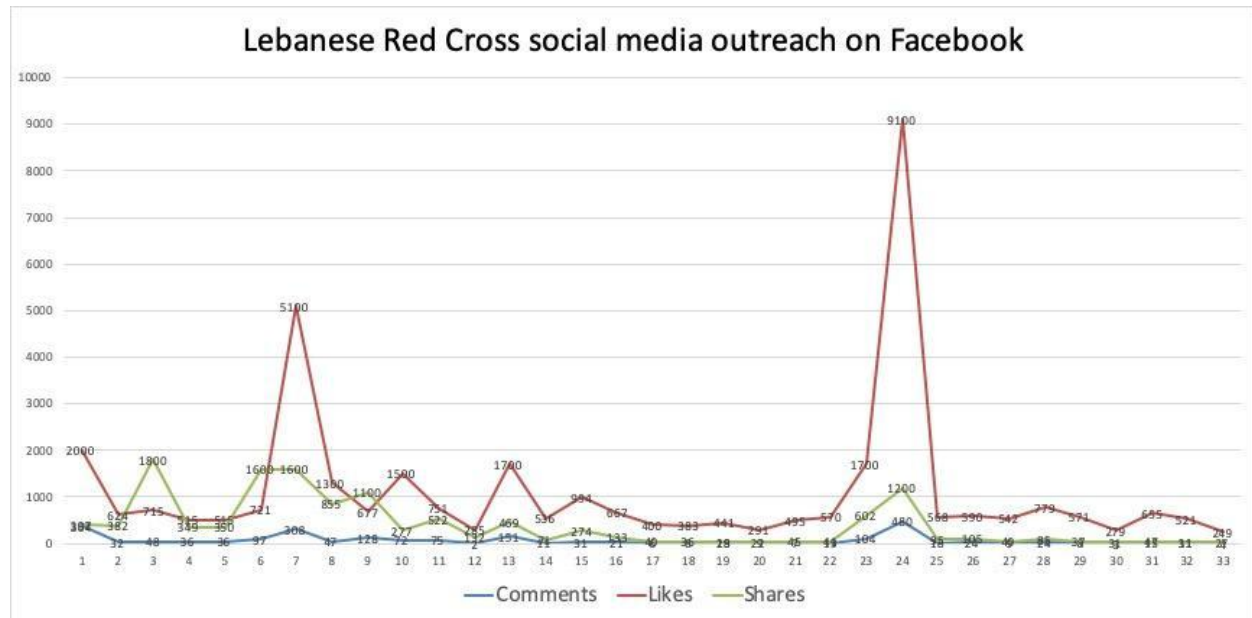
Lebanese Red Cross - Facebook

Figure 8: Lebanese Red Cross social media outreach on Facebook

The outreach of the Facebook posts of the Lebanese Red Cross is relatively consistent. The

average amount of likes on a post is around 1000 in addition to a stable amount of comments that

average around 65 per post. Several peaks could be detected in the data where all of a sudden

certain posts receive a great number of likes. The most obvious one is the post from 24-08-2020

that received 9100 likes. This post is a video where the clear devastation of the city is seen. It

shows the demolished houses and the chaos left by the explosion. Videos gain great attention

from users and indeed another video shared by the organization gained over 1700 likes. In

addition, there is a distinct observation to be made about which posts work better than others.

Oftentimes posts with a link to donate received a great number of shares. One day after the

explosion on 05-08-2020, the Lebanese Red Cross posted twice with a donation link and both

posts received over 1000 shares thereby reaching a greater audience. In fact, in the first couple of

days after the explosion the number of shared posts was rather high, Meanwhile, the number of comments remained consistent and did not exceed the average of 60 comments per post.
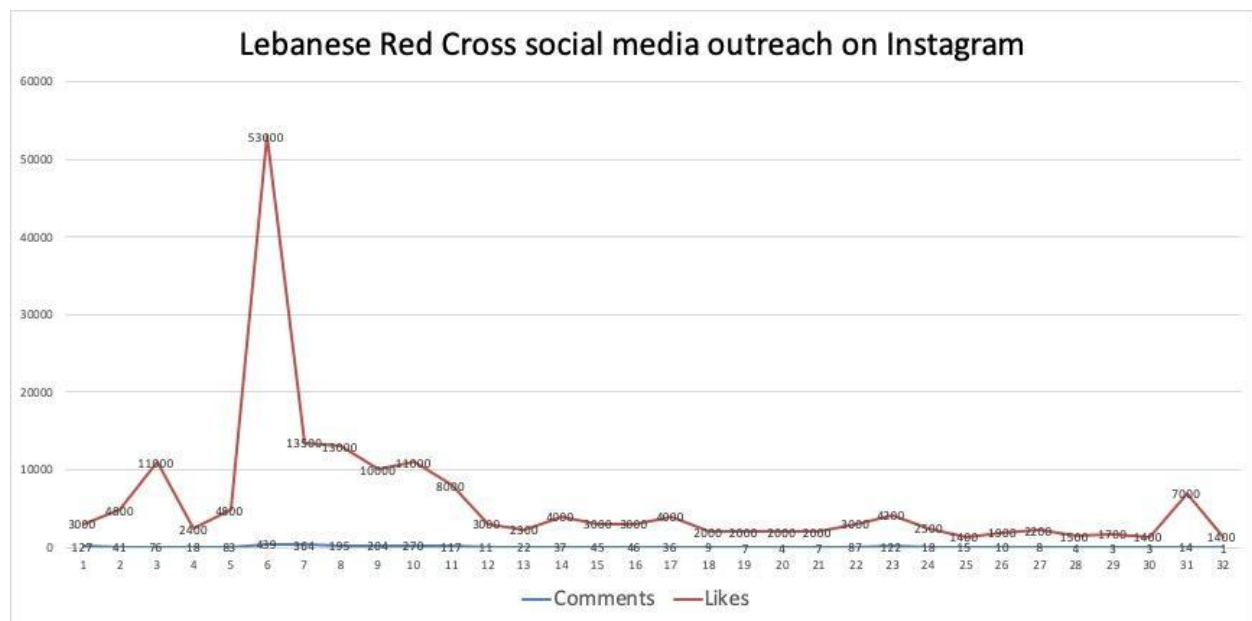
Lebanese Red Cross - Instagram

Figure 9: Lebanese Red Cross social media outreach on Instagram

For Instagram, the outreach of the posts has a similar trajectory as the Facebook posts. However, one big difference is the number of likes that the Instagram posts receive. On average a post would receive around 2000 likes. Peaks are seen at the beginning of the month and especially the big peak seen in the graph above. This is a post with a link to donate to the Lebanese Red Cross posted a day after the explosion, which reached 53000 likes. Other posts with a call for donations have experienced the same trajectory where a simple donation link accompanied by a small message generated respective 10000 and 11000 likes. Similar to Facebook, the initial days after the explosion is where the majority of the momentum on social media is seen. Afterward, it settles to a stable amount of likes per post. The peaks that are seen later in the month are posts

that contain videos. The videos show the devastation of Beirut as well as showed the Lebanese

Red Cross ´carrying out its mission and explaining its strategy. They would also share statistics

on how many people were helped by providing food parcels or how many persons received

medical assistance. As with Facebook, the number of comments is low. There are small peaks of

a couple hundred comments with particular popular posts but that would be accompanied by a

large amount of likes as well. On average a post would receive around 70 comments.
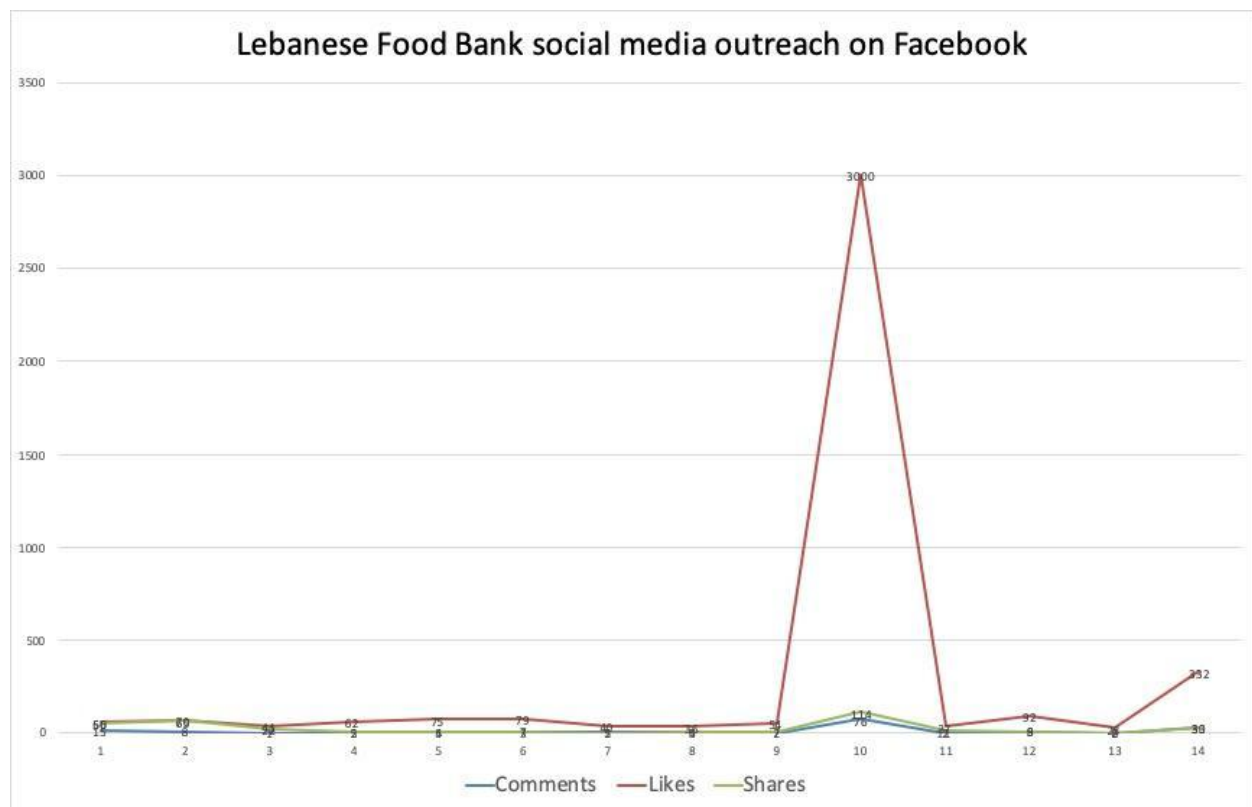

Lebanese Food Bank - Facebook

Figure 10: Lebanese Food Bank social media outreach on Facebook

In this graph of the Facebook activity by the Lebanese Food Bank, there is a very obvious

sudden peak. While the number of likes, comments, and shares had been adequately consistent

over the month, there is a sharp increase visible. This post in particular is actually a collaboration of the Lebanese Food Bank, together with another non-profit organization. The post calls for donations and is an initiative to distribute food boxes. This post received 3000 likes and therefore gained a lot of momentum. Other posts that were quite successful include a video. Videos showing the operation of the organization would gain an average of 300 likes. In regards to the comments that the Lebanese Food Bank received, it is around the same amount as the LRC. The number is consistently low with an average of 11 comments per post. The organization did however gain a lot of shares in comparison to the amount of comments. An average of 27 shares per post.

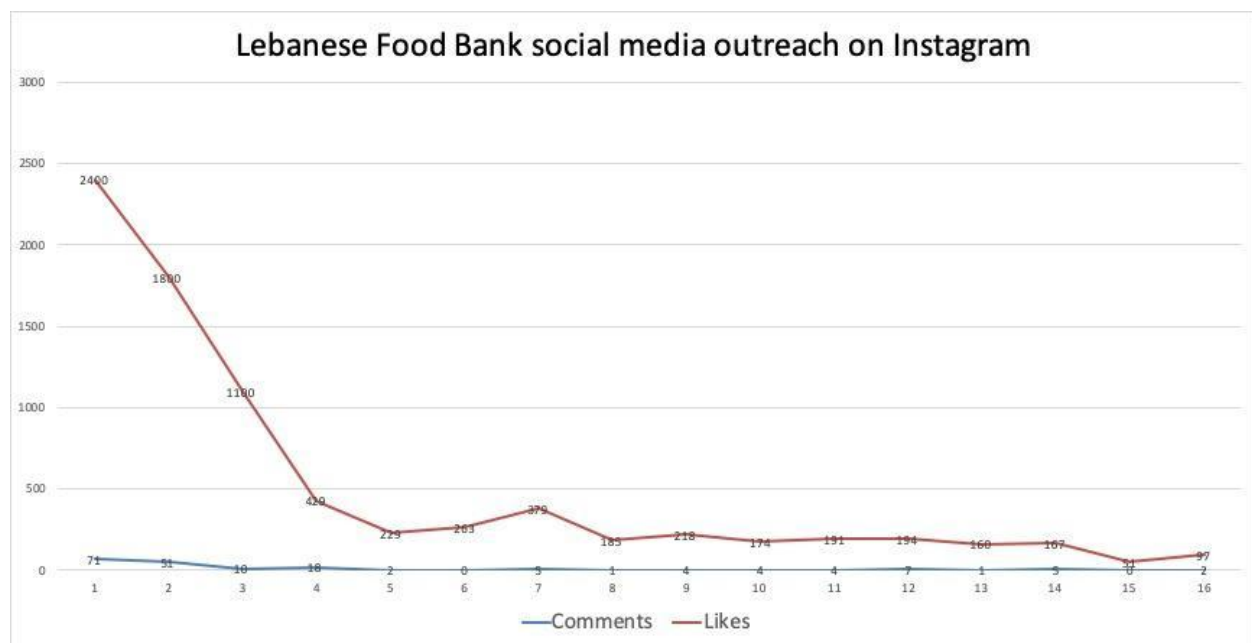Lebanese Food Bank - Instagram

Figure 11: Lebanese Food Bank social media outreach on Instagram

For the Lebanese Food Bank, the number of followers and user interaction on Instagram is significantly higher in comparison to Facebook. Especially when it comes to the number of likes. While there is a high peak right after the explosion in terms of likes, this gradually goes down in the days after the explosion to eventually settle on a consistent amount of likes. On average, each post would receive 500 likes which is considerably more than on Facebook. As with the other data from this phase, posts with donation links or calls to donate gain a lot of momentum and attraction which is seen in the first peak. Also following the trend that has been showing in this phase is the lack of comments. On average a post would receive 13 comments and in one instance a post had not received a comment at all.
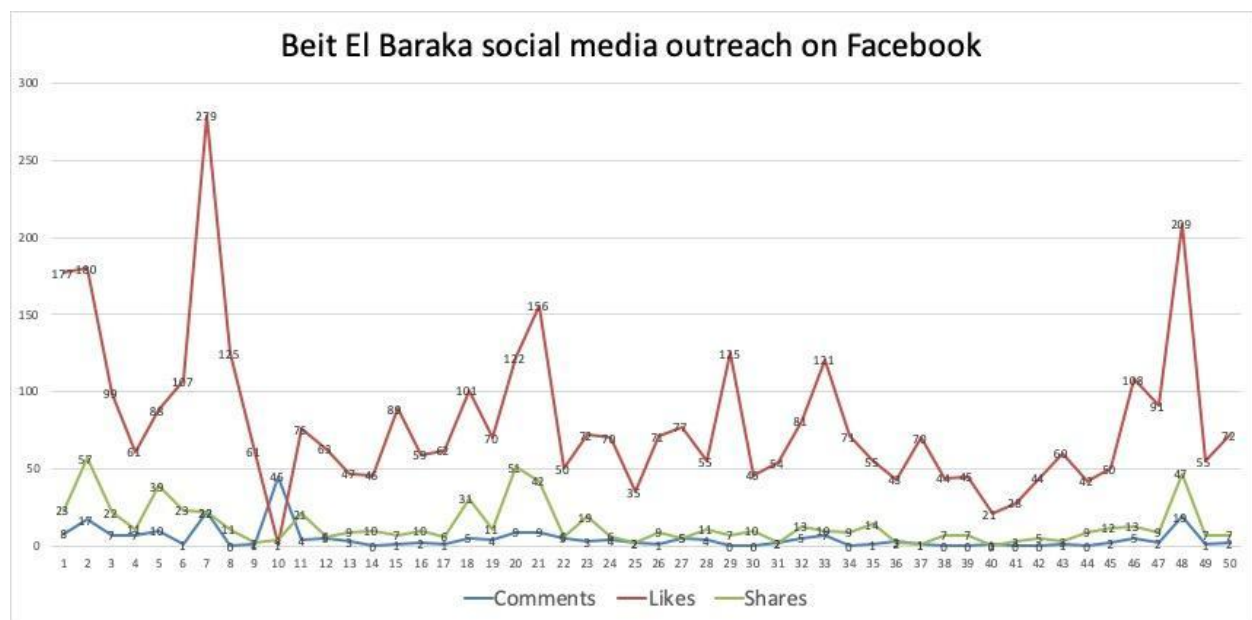
Beit El Baraka - Facebook

Figure 12: Beit El Baraka social media outreach on Facebook

The social media outreach of Beit El Baraka on Facebook is fairly consistent in regard to the number of likes, comments, and shares. What is apparent is that the lines don't spike in

exorbitant amounts. Beit El Baraka has managed to maintain a consistent outreach to users on

Facebook. With an average of 80 likes and 5 comments. What could be seen from the data in

which posts were gaining more outreach. These were primarily videos showing the destruction of

the city and how Beit El Baraka helped in relieving the affected population. Often personal and

up close, these are the posts that would gain the majority of the likes. There is also a significant

amount of sharing on the Facebook page which stays consistent.
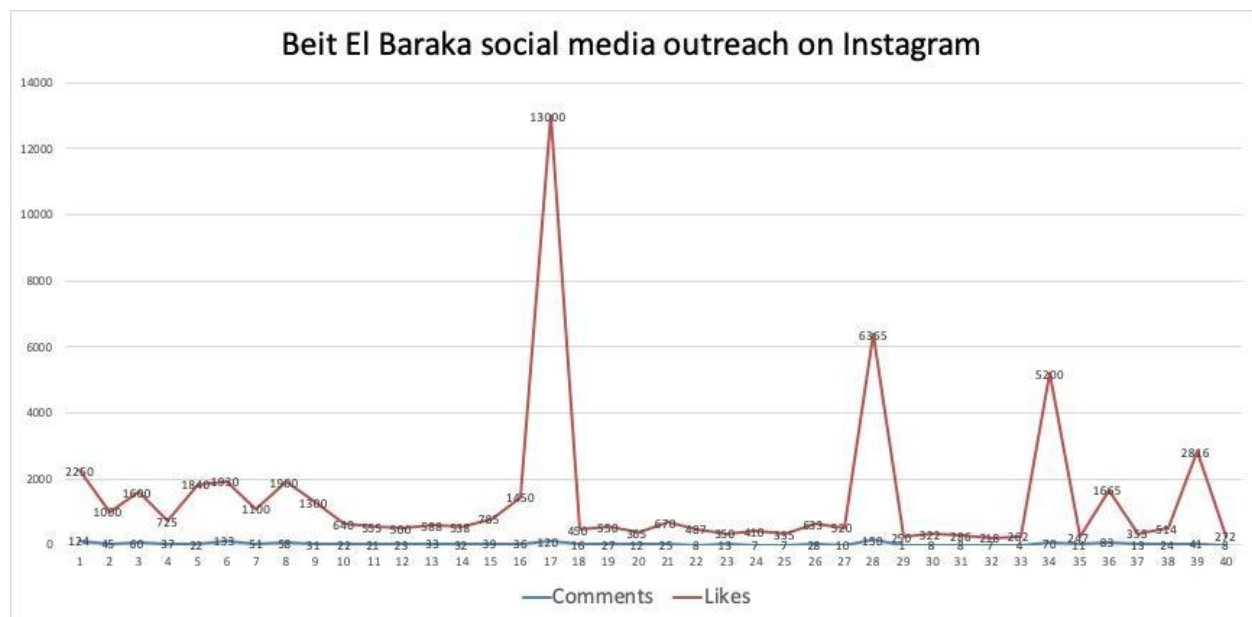
Beit El Baraka - Instagram

Figure 13: Beit El Baraka social media outreach on Instagram

Unlike Facebook, the Instagram page of Beit El Baraka is less consistent in the number of likes

and interactions. The data shows certain spikes in likes for certain posts with the highest spike at

13.000 likes. And two other instances where a post would gain 6.400 likes and 5.200 likes.

Tracing this back to the data, it shows that these posts are all short documentaries that are up

close and personal. These short videos show the personal circumstances of the people of Beirut

after the blast. An older man whose business is completely destroyed or an older lady whose family store needs significant repairs. It was these short and personal stories that would triple the number of likes in a post. In general, the Instagram of Beit El Baraka gained a lot more traction and attention than Facebook among their followers. While they posted less on Instagram, it is apparent in the number of likes that Instagram reached more users. It is not uncommon for a post to receive 2.000 likes, something that Facebook did not achieve.

ICRC - Facebook
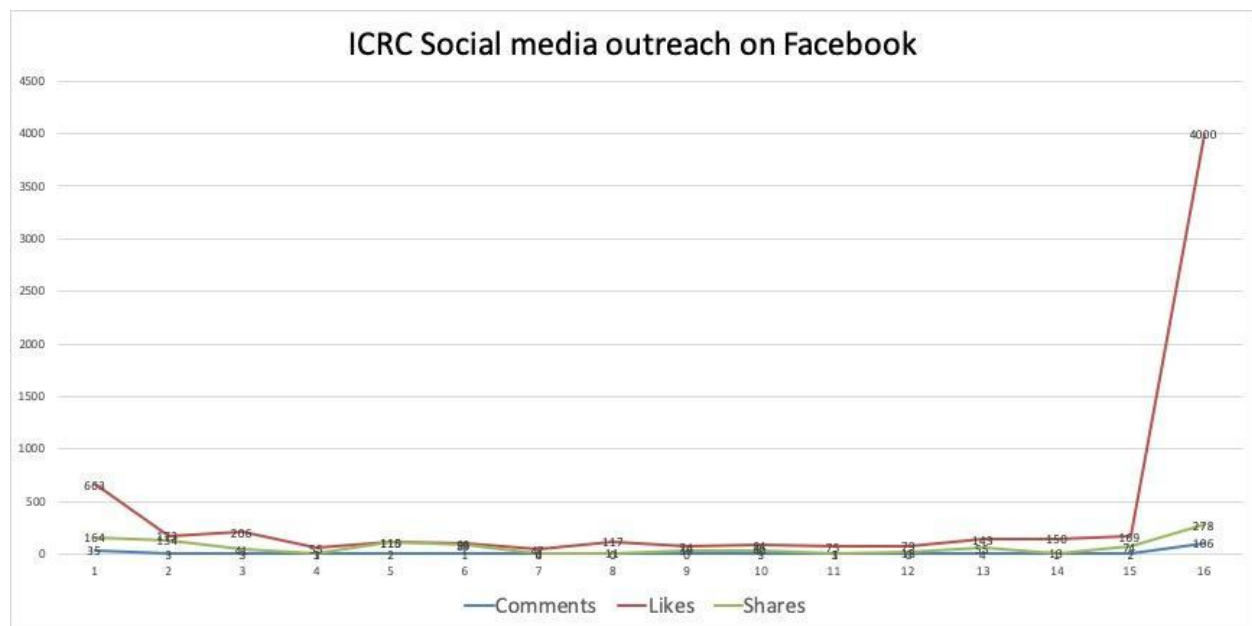
Figure 14: ICRC social media outreach on Facebook

The data for the ICRC in regard to their Facebook account shows that their outreach is fairly consistent. The day after the explosion there is a small peak in likes and exactly one month after the explosion, there is a bigger peak in terms of likes. This post is a video exactly one month after the explosion and is a recap of the events of the explosion. The average number of likes a post would receive is 400 and around 70 comments per post.

100
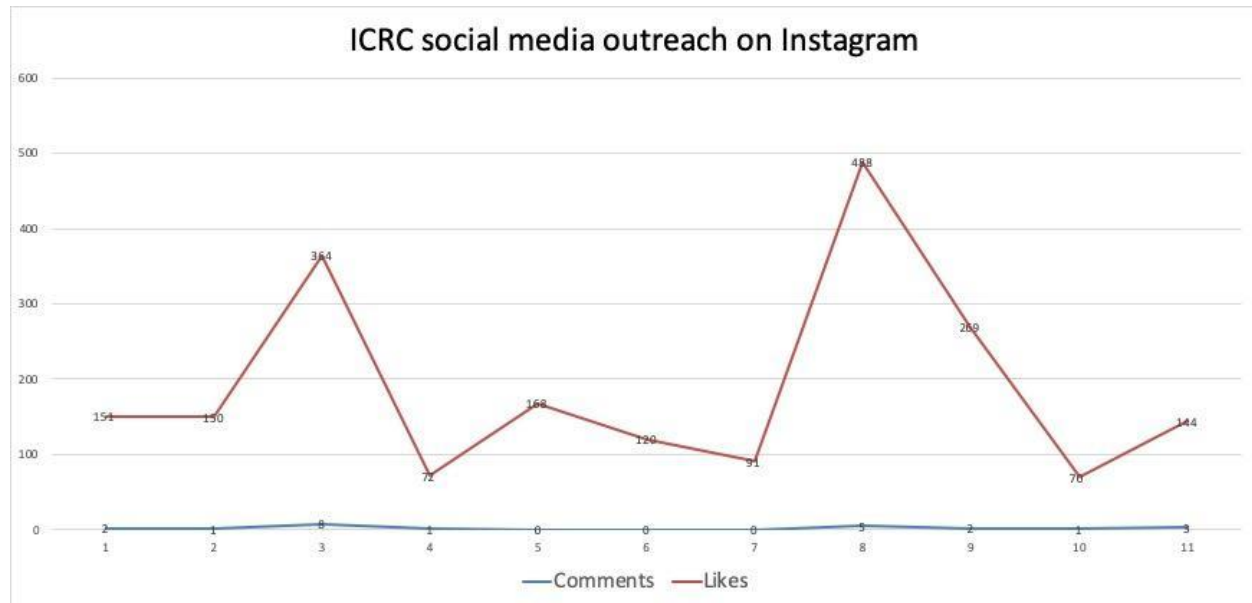
ICRC - Instagram

Figure 15: ICRC social media outreach on Instagram

The content on Instagram would receive a steady amount of likes in comparison to each other. On average, 200 likes but just a few comments. There are two spikes in the data that are related to two posts. On 10-08-2020, the organization posted an overview of the services they offer to the public, and on 25-08-2020 they posted a photo of a wounded man. The post reiterates the services that the ICRC is offering such as physical and mental health services.

Phase 5: Broad keyword social media analysis

Keyword usage and targeting is a tool that is very important and helpful in social media communication. In the same way that hashtags automatically sort different events, by using specific keywords constantly, a social media user would be able to find information quickly and efficiently (Koren et al, 2021). The keywords that were placed in the data analysis were: *'Beirut', 'explosion/blast', 'port',* and *'donation/donate'*. A single hit of one of these keywords or a combination of two or multiple could be used by a user in the immediate aftermath of the explosion.
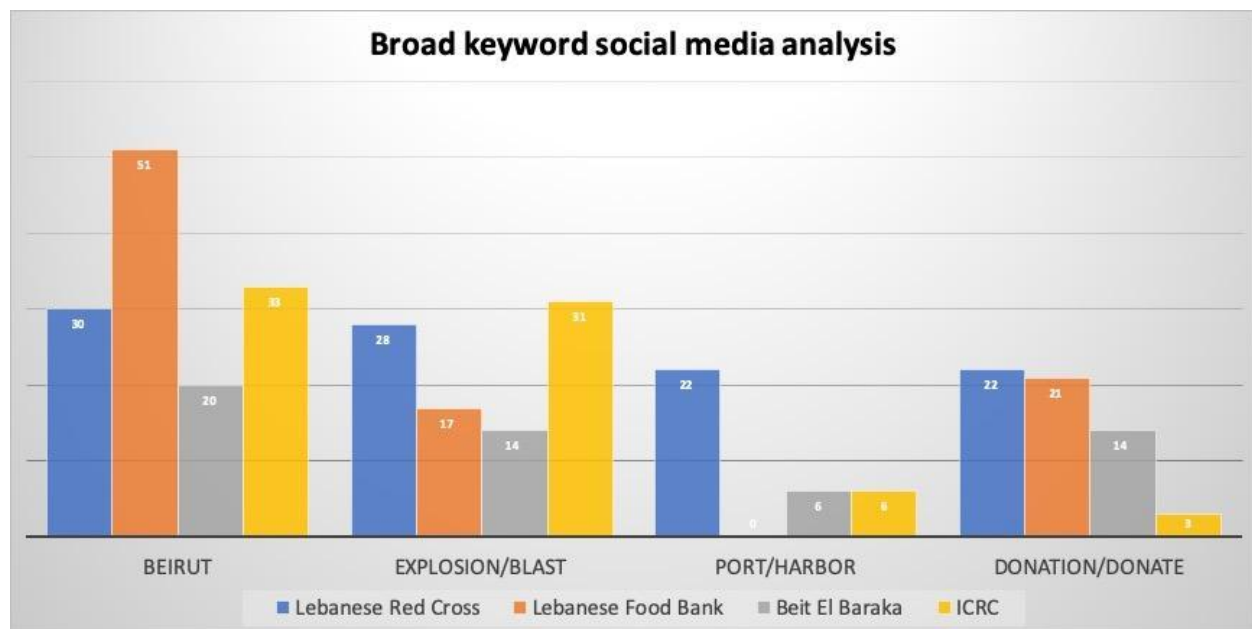

Figure 16: Broad keyword social media analysis

One of the first keywords that would be used in the case of the explosion is the name of the city, *'Beirut'*. Because the event was very localized in one city, the study opted out to use the country's name Lebanon. The keyword Beirut was used extensively by the ICRC and the LFB,

especially the Lebanese Food Bank used the keyword often, with a total of 51 times. The

Lebanese Red Cross on the other hand used it 30 times while Beit El Baraka used it 20 times.

The ICRC mentioned the keyword 33 times.

The second keyword that was chosen for this study was that of the event itself which was

'explosion/blast'. Because these words were used synonymously with each other they are all

combined under this keyword. Combined, the keyword *'explosion/blast'* was used 28 times by

the LRC. The LFB used it 17 times. Beit El Baraka mentioned the keyword 14 times and the

ICRC 31 times. The word *'explosion'* was used more extensively than the word *'blast'*. Only a

handful of times was the word *'blast'* used. This keyword and the first keyword *'Beirut'* were

often used together. In posts, the event would be referred to as the 'Beirut explosion' or the

'Beirut blast'.

The third keyword that would be combined with the previous two keywords *'Beirut'* and

'explosion/blast' is the keyword *'port/harbor'*. As in the previous keyword, the word 'port' and

'harbor' are used synonymously and interchangeably. However, the keyword *'port/harbor'* is not

used extensively in the first month after the explosion. The data analysis shows that the Lebanese

Red Cross, Beit El Baraka, and the ICRC used the keyword in the content. A total of 22 times by

the Lebanese Red Cross and Beit El Baraka and the ICRC used the keyword 6 times. The

Lebanese Food Bank didn't mention the keyword in their content.

And lastly, the fourth keyword that was analyzed was that of *'donations/donate'*. All of the

organizations are dependent on donations. And with a disaster like the explosion in the port,

there is a sudden increase in the necessity for aid, which is provided through donations. All four organizations have included the ask for donations in their posts and overall it was mentioned 60 times. The Lebanese Red Cross used the keyword *'donations/donate'* 22 times. The Lebanese Food Bank mentioned *'donations/donate'* a total of 21 times and Beit El Baraka 14 times. The ICRC only used the keyword 3 times.

The Lebanese Food Bank instantly had to upscale its operation to help the affected people. *'There were monetary donations but some companies also provided the Lebanese Food Bank with dry items such as rice in order to be distributed. Funds were provided from all over the world. France, the UK, Dubai, and other countries in the Arab world.'* (Jarrouje, Interview LFB, 2023). All together it brought in a good amount of money that the organization is still using to this day. Because of this monetary budget, the organization is not bound to one project anymore where they would receive funds for that particular project. Donations were made so the Lebanese Food Bank could sustain itself and continue to help people where they needed it. Because it was not only the explosion in the port, the economic crisis is also a huge issue that comes with solving the issues.

In order to receive these donations, social media was incredibly important. The Lebanese Food Bank used social media to show the operation and how they were helping the people. *'By explaining the procedures on a daily basis and actually showing that they were active on the ground helping people from morning to night.'* (Jarrouje, Interview LFB, 2023) Due to the activity on social media and the website, the organization started receiving calls offering food, bed sheets, and even medicine. The transparency of the organization on social media had a great

impact on the amount of donations. *'In addition to that, Lebanon has a great diaspora that is living abroad. This group of people was desperate to help and was contacted directly by the organization. Especially ambassadors and people who were able to invest in aid relief.'* (Asmar, Interview LFB, 2023).

This is also what the ICRC noticed. They received a lot of requests from the diaspora abroad who wanted to help. *'Normally they would contact the ICRC headquarters in Geneva because they would find that contact on the website but they would then be referred to the ICRC in Lebanon.'* (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023).

Phase 6: Specific keyword social media analysis based on basic needs

This part of the social media content analysis goes further in depth in analyzing keywords than in the previous phase. Basic needs will be analyzed within this phase and categorized to create an image of how much emphasis is put on the basic needs shortages. In return, this would then create the image of what basic necessity is focused on by the organizations.
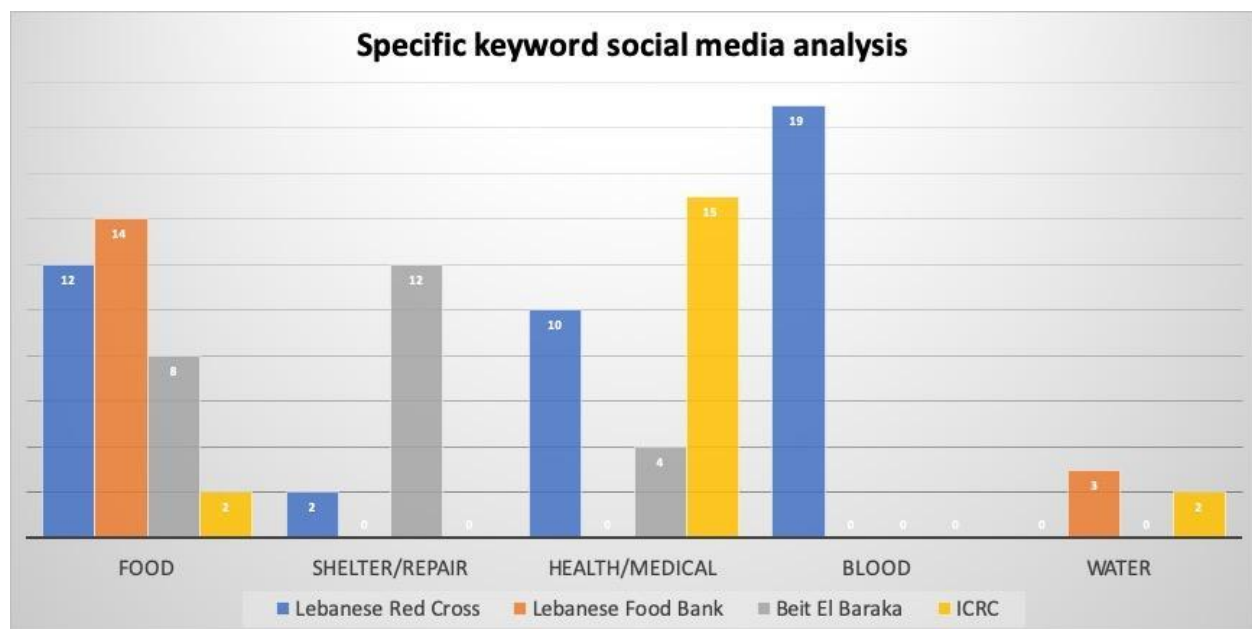
Figure 17: Specific keyword social media analysis

Food is one of the most basic needs that people need. Especially after a disaster where access to food is limited. This is also shown in the collected data from the organizations. In total, the keyword *'food'* is mentioned 36 times among all organizations. The Lebanese Red Cross mentioned it a total of 12 times. The focus of the Lebanese Food Bank is in the name. Their mission is to distribute food parcels to people in need and who cannot afford it. The organization mentions *'food'* 14 times. Beit El Baraka mentions the keyword 8 times in their content and the

ICRC 2 times. The mention of *'food'* shows that for all four organizations, food distribution was important after the explosion.

The Lebanese Food Bank was working 24 hours a day and was delivering food parcels, bread, and cooked meals to the affected people from 6 in the morning until 6 in the evening delivering bread and cooked meals. *'We collaborated with community kitchens to produce these cooked meals. Why did we have to do that? Because people had damaged houses, so no appliances, and nothing to do. They had to clean their houses so we had to provide them with cooked meals.'* (Jarrouje, Interview ICRC, 2023).

Beit El Baraka started their operation by opening a free supermarket for their beneficiaries. So when the explosion happened, they could use this to help the affected Lebanese. *'We have a free supermarket that is dedicated to our beneficiaries that are registered. However, through this supermarket, we also distribute food boxes and food parcels. So also after the blast, we had a huge campaign where we distributed food because food was also not available. Basically, nothing was available.'* (Gideon, Interview ICRC, 2023). The organization is also very independently sustainable, by growing their own vegetables and having their own cattle that provide milk and other dairy products.

With the explosion, many Lebanese lost their houses or their property suffered significant damage. For many, this meant that all of a sudden they lost their belongings or it was severely damaged. It was, therefore, important to offer shelter to people who lost their homes and repair the houses as soon as possible. The words *'shelter'* and *'repair'* are not synonymous but in this

instance, they have a correlation with each other. Therefore, a distinction will be made between the two keywords. Because shelter is one of the basic necessities that a person needs in order to survive, the Lebanese Red Cross mentioned the keyword *'shelter'* 2 in their content. This was mainly in the first few days where they set up emergency shelters for the immediately affected people. Because shelter is not one of the first relief priorities of the Lebanese Food Bank, they did not use the keyword *'shelter'*. This is also the case for the ICRC. Beit El Baraka is an organization that does focus on housing and mainly on repairs of those houses and businesses. The keyword *'repair'* is therefore mentioned 12 times by the organization.

Beit El Baraka has been involved with property repair for their beneficiaries. So when the explosion happened, repairing houses was one of their first priorities. *'First was repairing the shelter. Phase 1 was repairing windows and doors. Phase 2 was the interior, so what damage was inside of the house, whether it was paint, plaster, or flooring? And phase 3 was the shell so if there were cracks in the exterior or leaking problems because of the cracks in the ceiling we had to do some waterproofing.'* (Gideon, Interview ICRC, 2023). Eventually, Beit El Baraka repaired and rebuilt 3072 units.

The explosion left hundreds of people injured and in need of medical assistance in an area where the blast also wiped out many medical facilities such as hospitals and clinics. For this analysis, two keywords have been combined into this category. The two keywords have separate meanings but can often be used in the same context with ultimately the same goal. The next keyword is *'health/medical'*, where health is directed towards maintaining and improving the general health of the population. And medical care for providing medical assistance to those who needed it after

the explosion such as blood donations. The Lebanese Red Cross put the emphasis on the keyword *'health/medical'* and mentioned it 10 times. The Lebanese Food Bank did not mention the keyword *'health/medical'*. Beit El Baraka mentions *'health/medical'* 4 times in their content. The ICRC used the two keywords the most, 15 times in the data analysis. The ICRC also relates to the mental health of the affected people. While they emphasized physical health, they acknowledged and advocated for the importance of mental health.

The same day of the explosion the ICRC was already distributing medical kits to remove weapons such as bullets or other debris. *'This is something that we usually have in our contingency stock in case of a conflict eruption. It's a medical kit that helps surgeons treat wounds and trauma so we could distribute that to all the hospitals that were receiving the wounded. In total, 18 hospitals were supported through our aid. In addition, we also flew in a plane, two days after the explosion, with more than 4 tons of medical equipment that were needed in terms of consumable supplies and drugs to be distributed to all the hospitals. We also worked on the management of the dead, which is something the ICRC also has expertise in, the forensics aspect. In essence, you save lives with the support of ambulances but then you also have the whole issue of identification of human remains with such a large-scale explosion. You can imagine that there were more than two hundred dead and the bodies were unrecognizable. We were supporting local authorities in terms of managing that and making sure they are dispatched to the right wards. And then making sure that the identification is accurate and according to international standards.'* (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023).

As mentioned previously, there was a lack of blood and an immediate need for blood donors. The Lebanese Red Cross posted an extensive campaign on social media to call for the donation of blood. Because of this large operation to find more blood donors, the next keyword is *'blood'*. Within the data, *'blood'* was mentioned 19 times by the LRC. Because neither the Lebanese Food Bank, Beit El Baraka nor the ICRC focussed on gaining blood donations, there is no data for this.

Lastly is the keyword *'water'* which, alongside food is one of the most basic necessities for a human. The Lebanese Food Bank mentioned water 3 times in the course of the month and the ICRC 2 times. The Lebanese Red Cross and Beit El Baraka did not specifically mention *'water'* in their social media.

To conclude this chapter, all three interviewed organizations were asked the question of whether social media stops being helpful and might even become a problem for them.

The Lebanese Food Bank did not experience many issues in using social media and stated: *'that the value added by social media was tremendous. Other than duplicating posts and trying to reach out to the diaspora abroad and within different niches, the importance of social media has been tremendous.'* (Asmar, Interview ICRC, 2023).

For the ICRC, social media did present a point where it stopped being helpful and that is when rumors started spreading. *'Twenty days after the blast another fire, a fresh fire, caught on to the warehouses in the port. This was a result of things not being properly handled in terms of fire*

hazard so there were these lingering small fires twenty days after the blast and there was a fire in

one of our warehouses and it completely burnt down. There were so many rumors flying around

on social media to the extent that we had to put out a statement explaining where the fire came

from and that it was an accidental remnant of the blast. The warehouse that was affected is one

that our supplier uses to store our incoming assistant that goes from Beirut directly to Syria so it

wasn't even meant for Lebanon.' (Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023). The ICRC had to emphasize

that it was an accident and that there wasn't any sabotage. Nonetheless, rumors started and then

the media started reaching out. *'So that is where it stops helping when it becomes fake news.'*

(Tabaja, Interview ICRC, 2023).

Beit El Baraka reiterated the statement that was made by the ICRC about fake news but also

stated that the sheer overflow of information is a hurdle. *'Fake news is a big problem. But not*

only fake news, the overflow of information is sometimes overwhelming and it makes people

confused. Questions like: what should we take into consideration, who do we listen to? And that

can be paralyzing at the same time.' (Gideon, Interview ICRC, 2023).

Discussion of findings

Restating the research question: '*How have Lebanese relief organizations navigated basic needs shortages through social media following the 2020 port explosion?'*. The findings show that social media was helpful for all the interviewed organizations in the aftermath of the explosion. Through targeted social media strategy, using photos and videos, and keywords, they used the features of social media to their advantage. In addition, contact with the Lebanese diaspora and receiving donations through social media was an asset for the relief organizations. Although social media was a great addition to relief aid, all the interviewed organizations were active on the ground and would utilize social media as an addition to relief efforts and not a substitute.

The data of Phase 2 showed that for all four organizations, their weekly activity on both platforms is around the same in comparison to Facebook and Instagram. The number of posts is almost identical, meaning that neither of the organizations preferred one platform over the other. In addition, Phase 3 shows that all four organizations chose to work exclusively with visual social media when the social media strategies were compared. There was only one post in the whole data that an organization used solely written statements and that was the ICRC on Facebook. This concludes that the use of visual stimulation is highly valued by all organizations for both social media platforms as also noted in Chapter 3 of the study done by Fahmy (Fahmy, 2010). Even with a platform such as Facebook, where a large amount of communication is through written statements, the choice to accompany those posts with imagery and video is telling and clearly states the intent behind the strategy. It is clear from the data that all organizations extensively used visuals in their social media strategy, acknowledging the importance of images in capturing the attention of the audience. In addition, the use of hashtags

is not always as important but what is important to adapt is the use of language to the platform and the audience as was reiterated by the study of Abbas et al (2022). Knowing the users of each specific platform, especially with regard to age, and adjusting this language to gain more engagement is critical. Even when a post is posted on multiple platforms, adjusting tone and formality boosts engagement. In this regard, outreach is broader and relief organizations are therefore found more easily by people who need them because simply put, they speak their language and engage.

Phase 4 shows where the priorities of the users lie. The lack of comments is the most telling and shows that in social media crisis response, commenting is not seen as a valuable tool. On the other hand, liking and sharing are deemed as important features of social media which shows in the data. The amount of likes also shows what type of content speaks to the population. Videos showing the devastation of the city and therefore making the disaster graspable gained a lot of traction, especially in combination with a very personal story. Alongside showing the devastation, showing the organizations at work also caused peaks in activity. The other form of content that caused spikes in activity was posts that contained a donation link. These links were shared on a great basis and liked by many users.

The use of consistent keywords was also mentioned in the previously mentioned study about text analysis and the use of keywords by Koren et al (2021) and the data from Phases 5 and 6 shows that all four of the organizations use keywords differently. A key notion is an emphasis on donations since they mention it often in their content. For every organization, it was important to receive donations where possible, whether small or large. The Lebanese Red Cross initially

started a campaign in providing cash relief, they would receive bigger donations from international donors, something the Lebanese Food Bank did not mention. In terms of mentioning donations, in regards to the Lebanese Red Cross, the term was also often mentioned towards blood donations. In the days following the explosion, the organization campaigned extensively to receive blood donations for the injured.

The above-mentioned aspects are also in line with the chosen theoretical framework in regard to framing theory. The particular frames chosen by the organizations impacted the awareness in regard to receiving donations and raising awareness on the disaster. The relief organizations deliberately chose to show the destruction of the city and how it affected people. This was clearly seen in Phase 4 which was analyzing social media outreach. The most personal stories gained the most outreach and interaction online. This extends into social movement theory because the explosion mobilized the organizations which ties together with the definition by McCauley where groups of people operate between the individual and the government.

It is important to note that the utilization of social media by the interviewed organizations was in combination with on-the-ground work. While social media was an asset in creating awareness and above all in generating donations, it was not used to locate needs.

In the previously mentioned theoretical discussion, the importance of social media in disaster management is growing exponentially. And it shows that civil society organizations utilize them more and more. In addition, in line with the trend that civil society takes over in crisis in Lebanon due to the weak state, was also the situation in the aftermath of the explosion in 2020.

While the Lebanese army was quick in responding and working together with the relief

organizations, the Lebanese government did not react in an adequate way in offering relief.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Based on the research, the following conclusions could be drawn. First and foremost, it is important to note that the explosion in Beirut in August 2020, was an immense disaster that completely destroyed the harbor and parts of the city, killed 200 people, and left hundreds of others injured. The Lebanese relief organizations mentioned above provided the Lebanese population with the necessary means after the explosion.

In order to achieve this, social media was a tremendous help for the organizations. Through social media, attention to the disaster and the aftermath could be generated and awareness could be spread to Lebanese citizens and the world. This in return would generate donations, which is one of the only ways in which relief organizations are able to provide aid. Without donations, there would not be any assistance. The Lebanese diaspora in particular was reached through social media to donate, who in return took action to gather funds, donated to provide basic needs, or simply spread more awareness. This includes Lebanese ambassadors abroad and other influential figures within the Lebanese diaspora who provided the needed awareness and therefore donations for the organizations.

A multitude of different factors such as strategy, language, and keyword use all impact the reach of social media. Prevalent in the social media strategies of the organizations was the importance of 'showing faces' and 'showing real pain'. This notion was mentioned by all the interviewees and could be detected in the researched data. Videos and photos reach a wider audience especially when the stories are personal and impactful. The research shows that this increases the outreach of a post and increases the number of likes and shares.

Social media is an additional tool and it could not replace actual communication and most importantly, people on the ground. As this crisis revealed, social media was a vital tool for Lebanese relief organizations in navigating basic needs after the explosion. But all of the organizations stated that social media was a great tool that added a lot of value in the aftermath of the explosion.

All in all, utilizing social media in order to distribute basic needs is a complex process. It creates awareness, raises donations and monetary support and it allows affected individuals to find information on what resources are available. The ICRC and the Lebanese Red Cross communicated on multiple occasions about where wounded can find medical assistance and where people could seek assistance in finding missing loved ones. Social media also bridges the gap between the diaspora[1] and the population residing in Lebanon and offers a direct link. As stated by the Lebanese Food Bank: '*The value added by social media was tremendous.'*

Limitations and future research

In this research, one key limitation was the researcher's Arabic proficiency To ensure the reliability of the data, the automatic translation feature of Facebook and Instagram was used in addition to input from native Arabic speakers.

For future research, the methodology for the content analysis could be applied to other research in regard to relief organizations and the utilization of social media after a disaster. It examines in depth the different interfaces of social media separately. In addition, future research should analyze the impact that comments have to assess whether or not they mobilize even further. In

---

[1] The Lebanese diaspora is estimated at 14 million (Haddad, 2018).

addition, the research could be compared to if the funds that are raised through social media have an impact on the ground as well as their own resources as organizations to see the impact different strategies have. The time frame of the research would ideally be expanded to months after the blast. While the majority of the crisis and shortages would have been resolved, Lebanon is still suffering from the complications of the explosion. Expanding the research would allow for a bigger pool of data. Social media has proven to become a great mobilization tool and should be further researched on how to utilize it in relation to disasters and the, therefore, following relief aid.

References

Kraidy, M. (1998). *Broadcasting Regulation and Civil Society in Postwar Lebanon*. Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media.

Abi Yaghi, M. (2012). *Civil mobilisation and peace in Lebanon Beyond the reach of the 'Arab Spring'?*.

Abi Yaghi, M., Yammine, L. & Jagarnathsingh, A. (2019). *Civil Society in Lebanon: the Implementation Trap*.

Haddad, T. (2016). *Analysing State–Civil Society Associations Relationship: The Case of Lebanon.*

Amer, M., El-Sayeh, S., Fayad, Y., & Khoury, B. (2015). *Community Psychology and civil society: opportunities for growth in Egypt and Lebanon.*

Kiwan, D. (2018). *Constructions of "Youth" and "Activism" in Lebanon.*

Altan-Olcay, O. & Icduygu, A. (2012). *Mapping Civil Society in the Middle East: The Cases of Egypt, Lebanon and Turkey.*

Vértes, S., van der Borgh, C. & Buyse, A. (2021). *Negotiating civic space in Lebanon: The potential of non-sectarian movements.*

Khneisser, M. (2019). *The Specter of 'Politics' and Ghosts of 'Alternatives' Past: Lebanese 'Civil Society' and the Antinomies of Contemporary Politics.*

Tanielian, M. (2017). *The Charity of War : Famine, Humanitarian Aid, and World War I in the Middle East, Chapter 2.*

Tanielian, M. (2017). *The Charity of War : Famine, Humanitarian Aid, and World War I in the Middle East, Chapter 3.*

Kurtulus, E. (2012). *Exploring the Paradoxical Consequences of State Collapse: the cases of Somalia 1991–2006 and Lebanon 1975–82.*

Culbertson, S., Oliker, O., Baruch, B. & Ilana Blum. (2016). *Rethinking Coordination of Services to Refugees in Urban Areas: Evolving Models of Urban Refugee Responses, Chapter 2.*

Culbertson, S., Oliker, O., Baruch, B. & Ilana Blum. (2016). *Rethinking Coordination of Services to Refugees in Urban Areas: Evolving Models of Urban Refugee Responses, Chapter 3.*

Geha, C., Kanaan, F. & Aoun Salib, N. (2020). *Breaking the Cycle: Existential Politics and the Beirut Explosion.*

Geha, C. (2021). *From Revolt to Community-Driven Resistance: Beirut's Year of Hell.*
Abi Yaghi, M., Catusse, M. & Younes, M. (2017). *Lebanon Facing The Arab Spring: From isqat an-nizam at-ta'i to the Garbage Crisis Movement: Political Identities and Antisectarian Movements,*

Cleveland, W. L. & Bunton, M. (2016). *A History of the Modern Middle East.*

Haddad, T. & Sakr, T. (2022). *Inter-organizational Relation in Disaster Response in Developing Context: Assessing Response to Beirut Explosion.*

Rigby, S. E. (2020). *Preliminary yield estimation of the 2020 Beirut explosion using video footage from social media.*

Hamilton, S., Martill, B. & Millar, K. (2013). *Power, the State, and the Social Media Network.*

Narayan, B. (2013). *From Everyday Information Behaviours to Clickable Solidarity in a Place Called Social Media.*

Golovchenko, Y., Hartmann, M., & Adler-Nissen, R. (2018). *State, media and civil society in the information warfare over Ukraine: citizen curators of digital disinformation.*

Runkle, J. D., Brock-Martin, A., Karmaus, W., & Svendsen, E. R. (2012). *Secondary surge capacity: a framework for understanding long-term access to primary care for medically vulnerable populations in disaster recovery.* American journal of public health.

El-Richani, S. (2021). *Arab Media System: Lebanon: A Faltering Mesh of Political and Commercial Interests.*

Norris, P. (2012). *Electronic democracy: Political mobilization and social networks, the example of the Arab Spring.*

Mosharafa, E. (2012). *Can Social Media Incite Political Mobilization?.*

Geha, C. (2019). *Politics of a garbage crisis: social networks, narratives, and frames of Lebanon's 2015 protests and their aftermath.*

Storck, M. (2011). *The Role of Social Media in Political Mobilisation: a Case Study of the January 2011 Egyptian Uprising.*

Bridwell, J.M. (2015). *Cascades of Protest and the Rise of Social Media: Managing Opposition in the Information Age.*

Della Porta, D. (2019). *Deconstructing Generations in Movements: Introduction.*

Li, F., & Larimo, J., & Leonidou, L.C. (2020). *Social media marketing strategy: definition, conceptualization, taxonomy, validation, and future agenda.*

Chiappero-Martinetti, E. (2014). *Basic Needs. In: Michalos, A.C. (eds) Encyclopedia of Quality of Life and Well-Being Research.*

Fahmy, S. (2010). *Contrasting visual frames of our times: A framing analysis of English- and Arabic-language press coverage of war and terrorism.*

DiCicco-Bloom, B. & Crabtree, B.F. (2006). *The qualitative research interview.* Medical Education, 40: 314-321.

Schwartz, H. A. & Ungar, L. H. (2015). *Data-Driven Content Analysis of Social Media: A Systematic Overview of Automated Methods.* The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science.

Matthes, J. & Matthias Kohring, M. (2008). *The Content Analysis of Media Frames: Toward Improving Reliability and Validity.*

Khattab, L. (2010). *Civil society in a sectarian context.*

Karam, J. G. (2018). *Lebanon's Civil Society as an Anchor of Stability.*

Riffe, D., Lacy, S., Fico, F. & Watson, B. (2019). *Analyzing Media Messages: Using Quantitative Content Analysis in Research.*

Christensen, H. S. (2011). *Political Activities on the Internet: Slacktivism or Political Participation by Other Means?*

El Sayed, M.J. (2022). *Beirut ammonium nitrate explosion: a man-made disaster in times of the COVID-19 pandemic.* Disaster Med Public Health Prep 16.

Hennink, M., Hutter, I. & Ajay Bailey. (2020). *Qualitative Research Methods.*

Howard, P.N., Savage, S., Flores Saviaga, C., Toxtli C., & Monroy-Hernández, A. (2016). *Social Media, Civic Engagement, and the Slacktivism Hypothesis: Lessons from Mexico's "El Bronco".*

Glenn, C. L. (2015). *Activism or "Slacktivism?": Digital Media and Organizing for Social Change.* Communication Teacher.

Z. Pan & Kosick, G. M. (1993). *Framing Analysis: An Approach to News Discourse.*

Chong, D. & Druckman, J. N. (2007). *Framing Theory.*

Russo, A., Watkins, J., Kelly, L., & Chan, S. (2008). *Participatory communication with social media.*

Carr, C. T. & Hayes, R. A. (2015). *Social Media: Defining, Developing, and Divining.* Atlantic Journal of Communication.

Khatib, D.K. (2022). *17 October (2019) Revolution in Lebanon: A Preliminary Analysis. In: Issaev, L., Korotayev, A. (eds) New Wave of Revolutions in the MENA Region. Perspectives on Development in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Region.*

Skoric, M. M. (2012). *What is slack about slacktivism?*

Geha, C. (2019). *Co-optation, Counter-Narratives, and Repression: Protesting Lebanon's Sectarian Power-Sharing Regime.*

Castells, M. (1989). *Social Movements and the Informational City.*

Castells, M. (2008). *The New Public Sphere: Global Civil Society, Communication Networks, and Global Governance.*

Issaev, L & Korotayev, A. (2022). *Introduction. New Wave of Revolutions in the MENA Region in the Global Perspective.*

Salibi, K. (1965). *The modern history of Lebanon.*

Salibi, K. (1966). *Lebanon under Fuad Chehab 1958-1964.*

Aboultaif, E. W. (2016) *The Lebanese Army: Saviour of the Republic?*

Samad, Z. (2007). *Civil society in the Arab region: its necessary role and the obstacles to fulfillment.*

Chamie, J. (1976). *The Lebanese civil war: an investigation into the causes.*

Kaldor, M. (2003). *The idea of global civil society.*

Mitri, D. (2015). *From Public Space to Office Space: the professionalization/NGO-ization of the feminist movement associations in Lebanon and its impact on mobilization and achieving social change.*

Haugbolle, S. (2011). *The historiography and the memory of the Lebanese civil war.*

Carnegie (2022). *Endowment for international peace Sectarian Political Settlements in Lebanon 2022.* https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/87979

Kingston, P. (2001). *Patrons, Clients and Civil Society: A Case Study of Environmental Politics in Postwar Lebanon.*

Gruzd, A., Paulin, D. & Haythornthwaite, C. (2016). *Analyzing Social Media And Learning Through Content And Social Network Analysis: A Faceted Methodological Approach. Journal of Learning Analytics.*

Scott, R. & Kosslyn, S. (2015). *Emerging Trends in the Social and Behavioral Sciences.*

DiStaso, M. W. & Sevick Bortree, D. (2012). *Multi-method analysis of transparency in social media practices: Survey, interviews and content analysis.*

Koren, A., Alam, M. A. U., Koneru, S., DeVito, A., Abdallah, L. & Liu, B. (2021). *Nursing Perspectives on the Impacts of COVID-19: Social Media Content Analysis.*

Stellefson, M., Paige S., Apperson, A. & Spratt, S. (2016). *Social Media Content Analysis of Public Diabetes Facebook Groups.*

Sorianoa, C. R., Roldana, D. C., Chengb, C. & Oco, N. (2016). *Social media and civic engagement during calamities: the case of Twitter use during typhoon Yolanda.*

Ganim Barnes, N. (2020). *Social Media Usage Now Ubiquitous Among US Top Charities, Ahead of All Other Sectors.*

Curtis, L., Edwards, C., Fraser, K. L., Gudelsky, S., Holmquist, J., Thornton, K. & Sweetser, K. D. (2010). *Adoption of social media for public relations by nonprofit organizations.*

Alexander, D. E. (2013). *Social Media in Disaster Risk Reduction and Crisis Management.*

Khattab, L. W. (2022). *The genealogy of social and political mobilization in Lebanon under a neoliberal sectarian regime (2009–2019).*

Lorenzo Fioramonti & Antonio Fiori (2010) Civil Society after Democracy: The Evolution of Civic Activism in South Africa and Korea

Arab youth panel, 2022. https://arabyouthsurvey.com/en/findings/#my-lifestyle-1

United Nations. (2009). *Raising Living Standards Boosts Overall Well-Being of Societies, Speakers Say, as Commission for Social Development Continues Session.*

Lewis, D. (2009). *Nongovernmental Organizations, Definition and History.*

Schoenefeld, J. J. (2020). *Interest Groups, NGOs or Civil Society Organisations? The Framing of Non-State Actors in the EU.*

Mercer, C. (2002). *NGOs, civil society and democratization: a critical review of the literature.*

Kaldor, M. (2003). *Civil Society and Accountability, Journal of Human Development.*

Kopecký, P. & Mudde, C. (2003). *Rethinking civil society, Democratization,*

Kraidy, M. M. (2016). *Trashing the sectarian system? Lebanon's "You Stink" movement and the making of affective publics*

Datareportal. (2023). *Facebook users, stats, data & trends*.
https://datareportal.com/essential-facebook-stats

Datareportal. (2022). *Digital 2022: Lebanon.*
https://datareportal.com/reports/digital-2022-lebanon

Maamari B. E. & El Zein, H. (2013). *The Impact of Social Media on the Political Interests of the Youth in Lebanon at the Wake of the Arab Spring.*

Harik, I. (1994). *Rethinking Civil Society: Pluralism in the Arab World.*

Dunu, I. V., Uzochukwu, C. E. (2015). *Social Media: An Effective Tool for Social Mobilization in Nigeria.*

Sayre, E. & Yousef, T. (2016). *Young Generation Awakening: Economics, Society, and Policy on the Eve of the Arab Spring.*

Kairouzi, A., & Dagher, Walid. (2020). *The Impact of Social Media Upon The Lebanese Revolution of October 17, 2019.*

Moghnieh, L. (2015). *Local forms of relief during the July war in 2006 and international humanitarian interventions: Implications on community preparedness for war and conflict.* Civil Society Knowledge Center, Lebanon Support.

A very political reconstruction: governance and reconstruction in Lebanon after the 2006 war Christine Sylva Hamieh 2009

The Summer 2006 Lebanese Food Crisis: A Quality of Life Perspective Said M. Ladki Hala Atallah Farah Hamam Mohamad El Hariri 2008

Yan, L. and Pedraza-Martinez, A.J. (2019), Social Media for Disaster Management: Operational Value of the Social Conversation.

Saxton, G. D. & Wang, L. (2014). *The Social Network Effect: The Determinants of Giving Through Social Media.*

Shaw, R., Kakuchi, S. & Yamaji, M. (2021). *Media and Disaster Risk Reduction Advances, Challenges and Potentials.*

De Vreese, C. H. (2005). *News framing: Theory and typology.*

Chong, D. & Druckman, J. N. (2007). *Framing Theory.*

Valenzuela, S., Piña, M. & Ramírez, J. (2017). *Behavioral Effects of Framing on Social Media Users: How Conflict, Economic, Human Interest, and Morality Frames Drive News Sharing.*

Güran, S. M. & Özarslan, H. (2022). *Framing Theory in the Age of Social Media.*

Tremblay, M.C., Martin, D. H., Macaulay, A. C. & Pluye, P. (2017). *Can we Build on Social Movement Theories to Develop and Improve Community-Based Participatory Research? A Framework Synthesis Review.*

Gahan, P. & Pekarek, A. (2013). *Social Movement Theory, Collective Action Frames and Union Theory: A Critique and Extension.*

McCauley, D. (2011). *Bottom-Up Europeanization Exposed: Social Movement Theory and Non-state Actors in France.*

Stephan, R. (2010). *Couple's activism in Lebanon: The Legacy of Laure Moghaizel.*

Cavatorta, F. & Durac, V. (2010). *Civil Society and Democratization in the Arab World: The Dynamics of Activism.*

Atzili, B. (2010). *State Weakness and "Vacuum of Power" in Lebanon.* Studies in Conflict & Terrorism.

Fregonese, S. (2019). *War and the City: Urban Geopolitics in Lebanon. Chapter 3: Lebanon Salvaged: Sovereignty and Urban Space in the Republic of Lebanon (1943–1975).*

Fregonese, S. (2019). *War and the City: Urban Geopolitics in Lebanon. Chapter 5: Lebanon Lost: The Urban Impact of Non-Intervention.*

Fregonese, S. (2011). *Beyond the 'weak state': hybrid sovereignties in Beirut.*

United Nations. (2022). *NGOs and CSOs: A note on terminology.* https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/migration/cn/UNDP-CH03-Annexes.pdf

Statista. (2021). *Ranking of the number of Facebook users in MENA by country 2020.*

New York Time. (2022). *Food Businesses Lose Faith in Instagram After Algorithm Changes.* https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/22/dining/instagram-algorithm-reels.html

Entman, R. M. (2007). *Framing bias: Media in the distribution of power.*

International Monetary Fund. (1999). *Back to the Future: Postwar Reconstruction and Stabilization in Lebanon.*

Kubursi, A. A. (1999). *Reconstructing The Economy Of Lebanon.*