

Social Media Toolkit for Humanitarian Crises

APRIL 2026

The Visibility Gap

From satellite imagery to on-the-ground footage, evidence of humanitarian crises litters the Internet, but is rarely accessible to the public.

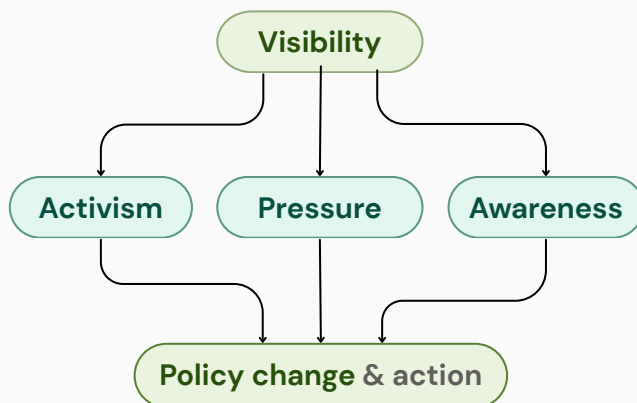
Open source investigators work to verify and publish this information through a practice known as open-source intelligence (OSINT). At the same time, communities and aid organisations hold first-hand testimony and footage from the ground.

The majority of these materials are released as technical reports and investigations, inaccessible to the average person. STORINT's toolkit acts as a template for reaching the public where they are increasingly getting their news: **social media**.

GOAL

Visibility, not fundraising

While most social media strategies focus on fundraising, STORINT is about content for **visibility**:



51%

of adults in the UK use social media for news – rising to **75%** among 18–24 year-olds.

Ofcom, 2025

Content not designed for these platforms won't reach them.

FRAMEWORK

A four-pillar approach

COMMUNITY

How well does your content reflect and involve affected communities?

OSINT

How strong is your verification and use of trust-building tools?

ATTENTION ECONOMY

How effectively does your content compete in crowded feeds?

STORYTELLING

How compelling and contextualised are your narratives?

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How to use this toolkit

1

Use the scorecard on the next page to evaluate your current outputs - it's designed around STORINT's four-pillar framework

2

Circle 1-4 for each question. **1 = Never/Not at all** **4 = Always/Fully**

3

Add up your values for each pillar and plot the totals on the radar chart on the following page

4

Turn to the corresponding section of the toolkit for practical advice on your lowest-scoring pillar

Scorecard

Rate each statement 1–4. Total each pillar’s three scores and plot on the radar chart.

COMMUNITY

- Do your outputs include first-person narratives or human-centred framing? 1 2 3 4
- Do you have ethical protocols for sourcing and representing community stories? 1 2 3 4
- Do you have access to ground-level testimony, footage, or community voices? 1 2 3 4

OSINT

- Do your outputs include evidence of verification? 1 2 3 4
- Can you access and process satellite imagery, social media footage, or open data? 1 2 3 4
- Do you have documented verification workflows your team follows consistently? 1 2 3 4

ATTENTION ECONOMY

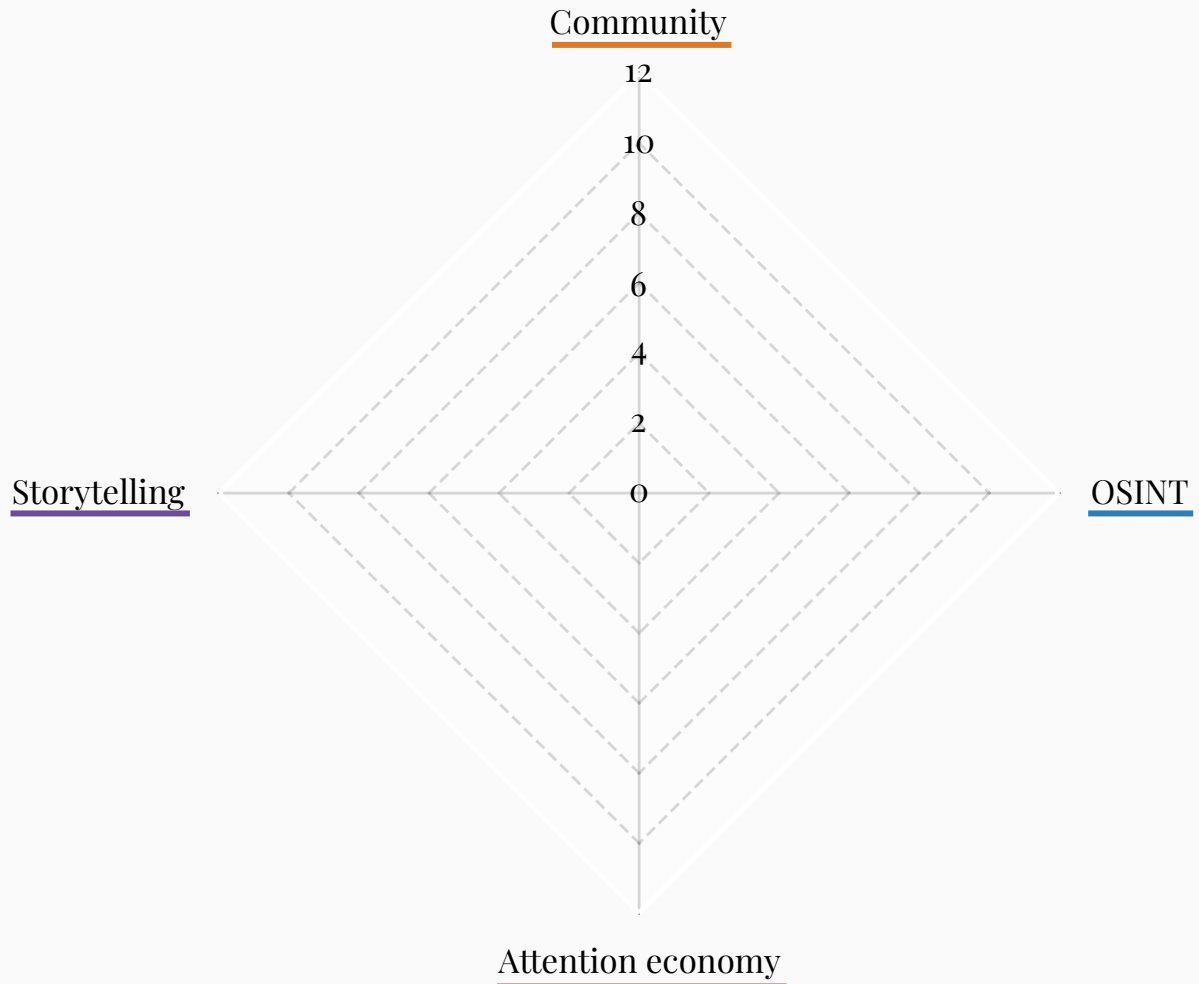
- Is your content tailored for social media (short-form, hook in first 3 seconds, captions)? 1 2 3 4
- Do you publish while a crisis is still in the news cycle? 1 2 3 4
- Do you consistently put out content (3+ a week) and review what performs well? 1 2 3 4

STORYTELLING

- Do your outputs tell a story with structure (beginning, middle, end)? 1 2 3 4
- Do you use narrative techniques (character, tension, resolution) to make information relatable? 1 2 3 4
- Could someone with no prior knowledge understand your content? 1 2 3 4

Plot your results

Add each pillar's three scores (max 12 per pillar). Mark your totals on the radar to see where to focus first.



● Community – p.6

● OSINT – p.7

● Attention Economy – p.8

● Storytelling – p.9

Prioritise improving your lowest-scoring pillar first for the most impact

Community

A megaphone, not a microphone

The most important ethical principle in humanitarian storytelling is also the simplest: **your role is to amplify existing voices, not to write a narrative on someone else's behalf.** This distinction, between amplification and extraction, separates storytelling which serves affected communities from storytelling that exploits them.

Content that portrays people with agency and dignity is both more ethical and more compelling than content that abstracts their suffering. The following principles are drawn from established humanitarian communication standards and STORINT's primary research:

✓ DO	✗ DON'T
✓ Seek consent before filming or photographing individuals in vulnerable situations	✗ Use graphic imagery of suffering as a hook; it desensitises rather than engages
✓ Name people where they have given consent; anonymity can diminish dignity as much as overexposure	✗ Present a community as homogenous; crises affect individuals rather than collectives
✓ Involve community representatives and diaspora networks in shaping how a story is framed	✗ Speak for affected people when they are available to speak out for themselves
✓ Direct your audience toward community-identified support channels at the end of content	✗ Use language that frames people primarily as victims: "starving masses", "refugees flooding"
✓ Distinguish clearly between urgency and alarm; panic causes people to scroll away	✗ Prioritise the emotional impact of content over the safety of those depicted
✓ Show people in active roles, not just receiving aid	✗ Overrepresent certain geographies in crises (victim framing)
✓ Build relationships with on-the-ground networks or organisations with established networks	✗ Publish content that could identify individuals who face risk of retaliation

OSINT

What to trust

Have you stumbled upon a video or image online and wondered if it was real? Here are three tools to verify content in **under five minutes**. Use them on footage you plan to share, repost, or build into your content. For deeper verification, rely on the published outputs of professional OSINT organisations.

[TinEye](#)

Reverse image search — checks if an image has appeared online before and catches recycled footage.

[Forensically](#)

Metadata checker — reveals when an image was taken or modified, and can expose the GPS location where it was taken.

[InVID](#)

Video frame verification — a plugin that breaks videos into frames and runs verification searches to spot edits or verify stills.

For more tools see the [Bellingcat Toolkit](#)

Minimum sourcing standards

Social media audiences are more sceptical than traditional media audiences. Minimum sourcing standards build trust with your viewers.

SOURCE TYPE	MUST INCLUDE ON SCREEN	BEFORE PUBLISHING, VERIFY
Satellite imagery	Platform name, date, analysing organisation	Confirm platform is a recognised provider
Witness footage	Credited correctly (or anonymised if safety requires), date, location	Reverse image search
Statistics / data	Named source organisation, date, specific report title if possible	Check original source
News reports	Outlet name and date	Verify at alternative outlets; note discrepancies
OSINT outputs	Organisation name, investigation title or database link, date	Check official channels for any corrections
Community testimony	Speaker identified by name (with consent) or anonymised if safety requires, date, location	Obtained through trusted source; consent confirmed; cross reference any factual claims

Attention Economy

Making your content visible

The best story means nothing if nobody sees it. **Video outperforms posts on every platform.** If you're not making videos, start!

Four key social media principles:

SHORT-FORM VIDEO

Optimise for vertical, mobile-first formats. Under 90 seconds performs consistently across TikTok, Instagram reels, and Youtube shorts.

1

HOOK WITHIN FIRST 3 SECONDS

Lead with the most compelling element- a question, a striking visual, or a counterintuitive statement. You have 3 seconds before the scroll.

2

OPTIMISATION

Three or more posts per week signals credibility to both algorithms and audiences. Track performance to build a feedback loop.

3

CAPTIONS

Include captions and focus on visual storytelling. The majority of social media videos are played without sound.

4

Timing matters

When verified content is slow, misinformation fills the vacuum.

Publish as close to the news cycle as possible.

- Algorithms prioritise content that provokes a strong emotional response — and items in the news cycle already do this inherently.
- When content feels current, audiences engage more deeply, making timely publishing more effective than polished-but-late videos.
- Verified content published promptly directly competes with misinformation — delay cedes that space.

A timely, well-sourced video will outperform a more polished one published after attention has moved on.

Storytelling

How to tell the story

Your evidence needs a narrative. The three formats below derive from analyses of current social media crises content and storytelling principles. Pick the format that fits your resources:

Whichever format you choose: lead with a hook, assume no prior knowledge, educate don't alarm.

Talking Head

ENGAGING . CONTEXTUAL

The quickest way to explain a developing story. Get a trusted face, strong visuals, and a clear narrative. Put your trusted face in front of your footage, clearly explaining the unfolding events.

TEMPLATE FLOW

- Hook
- Context
- Current events**
- Evidence
- So what

YOU NEED

- Presenter on camera
- Crisis imagery
- Trusted information

BEST FOR

Breaking or developing situations

▶ [Watch example](#)

Forensic

RELIABLE . TRUSTWORTHY

Shows viewers how footage is verified, turning the analysis process itself into the story. Focus your narrative around how you have done this, instilling trust in your audience.

TEMPLATE FLOW

- Hook
- Context
- Analysis**
- Evidence
- So what

YOU NEED

- Footage
- Verification process
- Voice-over

BEST FOR

Trust and combatting misinformation

▶ [Watch example](#)

Reflective

IN-DEPTH . REFINED

For when the story deserves more than a headline. Use reflective format videos to create a more detailed narrative of current events, explaining clearly and visually.

TEMPLATE FLOW

- Hook
- Historical Context
- Recent footage**
- Expert / Evidence
- So what

YOU NEED

- Extensive research
- High-quality footage
- Narrator

BEST FOR

Providing the full picture

▶ [Watch example](#)

How it all fits together

STORINT's hybrid workflow develops script and footage in parallel — here's the process:

STORY TRACK

- 1 Research the event – from OSINT reports and news cycle context
- 2 Choose format and draft structure (p.9)
- 3 Write script or talking points
- 4 Film presenter, if using talking head format

FOOTAGE TRACK

- 1 Compile raw footage – social media, OSINT databases, satellite imagery
- 2 Verify each clip (p.7)
- 3 Match footage to script structure
- 4 Add on-screen attribution

Edit → Final checks → Publish within news cycle → Track performance

Systems map

That's how a single piece of content gets made. The systems map below shows how this process fits into the bigger picture, from raw information through to visibility and policy change:

