Informal Online Communication: Uses and Abuses of Social Media in Disaster

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Four Arenas

1. Back Channel Communications
2. Convergence
3. Rumoring
4. Resiliency

Plus one prediction...
Where We Have Been…

Back Channel Communications

The public is no longer reliant on official communications for accurate information.

RESEARCH RECORD
- Computer mediated communication enables first hand reporting, information creation, information correction

DISASTER RESPONSE
- Organizations must be a part of social media communications or risk becoming outdated and/or irrelevant
Convergence

The movement of people, supplies, resources to a disaster setting. Convergence behavior occurs both online and off.

RESEARCH RECORD
- Collective intelligence, problem solving
- Digital volunteers and collaborative organizing, content curation, mapping, situational awareness

DISASTER RESPONSE
- Recognize that the public is a resource, not a problem

Rumoring

RESEARCH RECORD
- Collective problem solving occurs within the activities commonly known as rumoring
- Intentional spread of malicious information, inciting violence and panic

DISASTER RESPONSE
- Monitor e-milling activities, or miss key observations and part of the conversation
Resiliency

RESEARCH RECORD
• Networked people/resources/information across all phases of disaster
• Individual, familial, and community efficacy

DISASTER RESPONSE
• Encourage use of online communication tools for rapid information sharing, observing response, relaying recovery information, reducing isolation, providing social support

Christchurch, NZ

“When Online is Off” (NSF - RAPID research)
• Reconnaissance field research
• Focus groups, interviews, survey
  – With Massey University and GNS Science

Where do people go for information when they are directly affected by a disaster?
Public Information Sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SOURCE</th>
<th>% useful (N)</th>
<th>Reasons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Radio</td>
<td>98% (73)</td>
<td>Only source of info, battery powered</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>90% (72)</td>
<td>Could see the effects, up to date information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>81% (44)</td>
<td>Regular updates, fast information. (GeoNET)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>News Agency website</td>
<td>80% (31)</td>
<td>Regular updates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facebook</td>
<td>73% (23)</td>
<td>Checked on friends/family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Twitter</td>
<td>28% (7)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FtF (friends/family)</td>
<td>96% (66)</td>
<td>Comfort, support, sharing information, reassuring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Q: Indicate what sources of information were most necessary and useful for you after the earthquake.

Official Strategies

No social media strategies in place prior to the February 22 earthquake

Developed a series of sites, usernames, policies within first 24 hours

Main Tasks: tweet/post, respond, monitor
Questions raised…

• How do those who are directly affected by disaster use online communications differently from those who are not directly affected?
  – For information gathering / decision making
  – For collective problem solving
  – For information sharing
  – For social support / coping

Where We Are Going…

Social media is changing the communication landscape for alerts and warnings.
Alerts and Warnings

RESEARCH RECORD
• Protective action decision making is always mediated by informal communication

DISASTER RESPONSE
• Use social media as an additional channel to observe and monitor what is taking place on the ground
• Adapt messaging based upon confirmatory activities that are taking place on line.

Thank you!

Questions? Comments?

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