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

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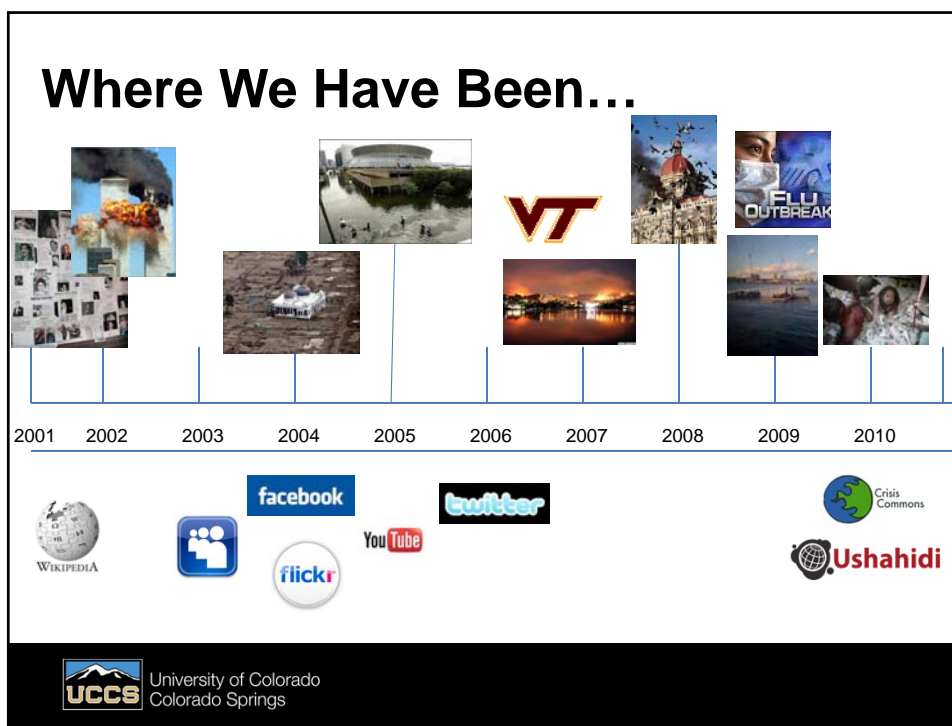
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Four Arenas

1. **Back Channel Communications**

2. **Convergence**

3. **Rumoring**

4. **Resiliency**

Plus one prediction…

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Where We Have Been…

| 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 |

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- Organizations must be a part of social media communications or risk becoming outdated and/or irrelevant

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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

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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

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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

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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?

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Public Information Sources

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

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

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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

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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

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Where We Are Going…

Social media is changing the communication landscape for

ALERTS and WARNINGS.

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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.

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Thank you!

Questions? Comments?

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