

**CRISIS INFORMATION CURATORS & DIGITAL RELIEF COORDINATORS
VIA SOCIAL MEDIA:
JAPAN TSUNAMI CATASTROPHE BRIEF REPORT 2011**

Overview

On March 11, 2011, an earthquake hit about 80 miles off the east coast of Japan and initiated a chain of events transforming the natural disaster to become the biggest earthquake and tsunami event in the country's history. News travelled at rapid speed not only through the traditional media, but also through social media. Social Media has been a dynamic channel of communication for global dialogue and digital storytelling during disaster and relief efforts for victims, government agencies, media, and non-profit organizations. The Japan Tsunami ranks #3 the top foreign disasters that people were following, following the Haiti Earthquake in 2010 and the tsunami that hit in the Indian Ocean in 2005 ("Strong Public Interest in Japan Disaster," 2011).



The role of social media has increased significantly following the recent disasters around the world, including those that happened in Louisiana with Hurricane Katrina, Haiti, Chile, New Zealand, and of course the recent events in Japan. Videos, updates, social gaming, pictures, and sharing links via social networking sites all came together during the horrific earthquake and tsunami events in Japan, which allowed a front row seat for the rest of the world to witness and react to.

Role of Social Media in Japan Tsunami

Social media served as a key tool to create and curate information with the media, crisis communication professionals, and affected audiences during the earthquake and tsunami events. From the emergence of citizen journalism reporting on the ground in multiple languages (Twitter) to sharing information on how to donate to relief efforts (Facebook and Social Games like Farmville and CityVille) to the real-time impact of crowdsourcing capabilities about food and water shortages along with updates on radiation (RDTN.org). These were the major social media tools that were implemented and used in this global natural disaster.

Twitter

Twitter served as one of the primary channels of information during the Japan earthquake and tsunami events. Pew Research Center reported that the Japanese Quake and Tsunami events that took place during the week of March 7 – 11th, 2011 counted for **20%** of the top links shared among international stories on Twitter ("Twitter Responds to Japan's Disaster," 2011).

What was unique about the integration and use of the microblog site is the proactive organization and dissemination of information on which hashtags and users to follow for the current information. Several of the hashtags that were used include: [#Japan](#), [#JPQuake](#), [#JapanQuake](#), [#PrayForJapan](#), [#Tsunami](#) to name a few. Twitter was used to disseminate information about crisis, key trends about food, and info for donations to causes. Twitter's Hope 140 blog was a source of information listing specific hashtags for information and updates about the crisis (both in Japanese and English) as well as provide Twitter users who were reporting on the ground.

Organizations, government officials, and government agencies were all actively present on Twitter in providing their followers and others updates and links / videos / or photos of the crisis, which included the American Red Cross, the Department of Defense, the US Army in Hawaii, and President Barack Obama. The American Red Cross was active in their Twitter accounts to provide users with information about how to donate to the relief efforts via text or SMS – similar to what they did for the Haiti Earthquake in January 2010: "*Text REDCROSS to 90999 to donate \$10 to Japan's emergency relief.*"

In addition, Twitter also provided helpful hashtags in English, including: medical information for victims: #311 care. Other languages that were used in communicating about the crisis with others via social media include Korean and Chinese on the Google Crisis Response site.

Social Networking – Facebook & Mixi

Facebook posts, photos, videos, and blog updates were happening at the same time after the earthquake hit Japan. Facebook allowed users to share links and updates on the crisis with friends and followers as well as information on how to donate to specific causes. While Facebook was focused on sharing the information with people that they knew, Mixi was focused on connecting individuals based on specific topics of conversation that were being discussed.

YouTube

The video sharing website was used to show clips of the tsunami and earthquake events from an eye-witness point of view that was shared via the traditional news outlets around the world. In addition, YouTube launched a video person finder for families of those impacted by the tsunami to see if they could find their missing relatives or friends that were appearing in the videos (“YouTube People Finder,” 2011, March 21).

Google (who owns YouTube) launched the People Finder site where it allowed users to type in names of survivors into a database accessible to family members, media, and other global audience members. Below is a screen shot taken of the YouTube Visual People site in Japanese, courtesy of Social Times.



Social Games

Social Games allowed non-profit organizations like the American Red Cross and Save the Children to integrate their relief efforts through virtual goods to either the American Red Cross or Save the Children’s relief efforts through Facebook.

Geolocation & Crowdsourcing

Sharing information and geolocation tagging the comments, updates, and sharing links with specific locations were one of the major trends that emerged during this crisis in Japan. Whether it is sharing updates on food and water supply information to updates specifically on radiation within Japan. The role of the crowdsourcing in this crisis shifted the control of the updates and information from one or two major organizations (ex. government agencies, officials, and non-profit organizations) to allowing the power of multiple voices emerging. Source and message credibility are two current issues to be addressed and be aware of in emerging crisis communication practices with social media.

Implications of Japanese Tsunami on Social Media & Crisis Communications

There are several key implications from this particular crisis that crisis communication and emergency management professionals need to take away from as well as acknowledge future emerging new media tools and how to apply these strategically in the future in a crisis situation.

- *Power of citizen journalists in crisis in reporting to the world via Twitter.* The death of Osama Bin Laden announcement on May 1, 2011 compared to the number of tweets disseminated during the Japanese tsunami. It transformed to be the highest sustain tweets ever and had at least 3,000 tweets per minute. The evolution of citizen real-time reporting also needs to be taken into consideration to get immediate information on the ground – similar to what happened on the ground in Pakistan and in Japan. Twitter organized protests, updates from citizen journalists around the world including Egypt and other global crises around the world.
- *Power of community and sharing information through user-generated sources.* What is compelling and important to remember in a crisis situation is to understand that metrics are just a portion of the conversation happening. Sentiment of the message and dialogue is key in formulating a community and allowing others to create and share the information.
- *Engaging dialogue and storytelling through multimedia and social media.* Microblogs (Twitter), social networking sites (Facebook and Mixi), mobile technology integration (QR Codes), social games (Zynga games) and geolocation crowdsourcing sites are just a few of the social media tools that were used in the Japan Tsunami, but all of these channels were used to engage with a dialogue with others by providing information on these multiple platforms.
- *Social media transforming audience to community in crisis:* The creation of cause-related crisis and emergency communication was initiated through this crisis that heavily involved traditional and emerging social media channels. Instead of communicating to the audience, it is key to communicate with the audience to form a long-standing community built on trust and transparency. There are many technologies that are personalized to specific needs, however there are cases like the Japanese tsunami where social media has created the bridge to form a global, dynamic, and unified virtual community. Instead of pushing information, the role of the social media was to initiate discussion, commentary, and call to action to respond (donate, share, and act) in regards to the crisis.
- *Importance of listening and engaging with global and domestic social media channels.* While Facebook and Twitter are just a couple of social media channels to communicate during a crisis, the Japanese Tsunami showed how Mixi, a popular social networking site used in Japan, served as a resource for sharing and redistributing immediate information about food and water supplies, radiation updates, and news updates on the crisis.
- *Future Trends & Possibilities for integration of augmented reality for crisis communication message strategies and plans.* While there is discussion where mobile is the latest trend with using mobile applications, mobile websites, and QR Codes. However, the role of the mobile devices as the virtual lens to show individuals the power of visual search for users not only in every day activities, but the strategies and integration into disaster and crisis communication practices is limitless. Integrating embedded links, videos, updates, and other emerging media tools as a resource for first responders is key and could be integrated into augmented reality training and implementation during a crisis. In addition, using augmented reality technologies via mobile devices to check for even more information than QR codes about recalled or contaminated food products, receive updated warnings, and

additional resources and information on some of the threats to certain products that can be implemented in future crisis simulations and training exercises.

Conclusion

The Japanese tsunami event was a horrific natural disaster that impacted the world globally. While traditional media and crisis communications practices were implemented, the impact of social media with this particular event was strong. The integration of the latest emerging communication technologies as an extension of a crisis communication plan was evident within the organizations and government agencies involved in this crisis.

References

“Strong Public Interest in Japan Disaster.” (2011, March 15). Retrieved from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1930/news-interest-japan-earthquake-libya-wisconsin-nfl>

“Twitter Responds to Japan's Disaster.” (2011, March 17). Retrieved from <http://pewresearch.org/pubs/1933/twitter-response-japan-earthquake-breaking-news-eyewitness-bulletin-board-fund-raising>

“YouTube People Finder.” (2011, March 21). Retrieved from http://socialtimes.com/youtube-person-finder_b42651

Additional Resources

Social Media Resources

- Google: [Crisis Response](#) and [Japan Person Finder](#) (*Mashable's coverage of these tools*)
- [Japan Tsunami & Earthquake – Use of Twitter, Facebook, Skype & other Social Networks](#) (bubblecube.wordpress.com)
- YouTube: [Japan Tsunami](#) and [CitizenTube](#) videos
- Flickr: [Japan Earthquake](#) photos and [blog post](#)

Social Media & Tsunami Articles

- [HOW TO: Follow the Japan Earthquake Online](#) (mashable.com)
- [Tsunami Devastates Japan: How Social Media Reacted](#) (progressivemediaconcepts.com)
- [Social Media Response to Japan Earthquake](#) (mediabistro.com)
- [Social Media Spreads Quake, Tsunami News](#) (abcnews.go.com)
- [Twitter Reacts To Massive Quake, Tsunami In Japan](#) (mashable.com)
- [Social media eases quake donations, communication](#) (sfgate.com)
- [Japan's Disaster Proves Social Media Is Vital](#) (hudsonhorizons.com)
- [Twitter Reacts To Massive Quake, Tsunami In Japan](#) (mashable.com)
- [Japan's Disaster Proves Social Media Is Vital](#) (hudsonhorizons.com)
- Zynga Raises \$1 million for Tsunami: <http://techcrunch.com/2011/03/14/zynga-gamers-raise-1-million-for-tsunami-relief/>