

C4D IN EMERGENCY RESPONSE

CASE STUDIES: GOOD PRACTICES IN RISK COMMUNICATION

CASE STUDIES

HURRICANE SANDY AND USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

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COMMUNICATION IN DISASTERS AND EMERGENCIES THEN THINGS TO DO

ABOUT HURRICANE SANDY

Hurricane Sandy made landfall in the United States on the night of October 29, 2012, after first striking Jamaica, Hispaniola, the Bahamas, Cuba, and Bermuda. Sandy caused 72 deaths in the United States (and about 233 deaths in the path of the storm along 8 countries). Sandy's major impacts in the United States occurred in New York, New Jersey, and New York City. It has been ranked as the third costliest hurricane with estimated damages exceeding \$70 billion, after Katrina (August 29, 2005) with property damage alone exceeding \$100 billion and Harvey (August 25-29, 2017) with estimated damages exceeding \$200 billion and some estimates at \$300 billion.

USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Hurricane Sandy marked a shift in patterns of communication between responders or authorities and the public. It demonstrated a greater use of and dependence on social media by government agencies — an acknowledgement and embrace of social media's critical role in disasters in disseminating information, connecting people, and controlling rumours. In Sandy, more than ever before, government agencies turned to mobile and online technologies to communicate with the public and response partners.

On October 29, the day Sandy made landfall, the U.S Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) reached more than 300,000 people on Facebook (as compared to an average of 12,000 per day) and reached 6 million Twitter users with one message. FEMA set up a Hurricane Sandy landing web page that provided all of the specific relief, response, and recovery information related to Sandy. Information for disaster survivors included how to get immediate help, how to locate a shelter, how to locate a FEMA Disaster Recovery Center, and access to the state-

specific disaster declarations. This information was also ultimately provided in 18 languages aside from English. Links were provided to all applicable state and local websites, and information was provided for those who wanted to help (donations and volunteering). FEMA administrator Craig Fugate tweeted regularly before, during, and after the storm—at one point providing more than 30,000 people with tips and links to help people sift through all the news about Sandy. FEMA produced and uploaded over 130 short videos on Hurricane Sandy on the web and YouTube.

Some of the key lessons learned from social media use in New York city

PREPAREDNESS: The Friday before Sandy made landfall, New York City government sent the Emergency Protocol out to all social media managers and reminded everyone to maintain a singular voice, originating from the Mayor's office, across all City agencies and departments. Even before Sandy, New York City had 3 million followers across more than 300 city accounts on Facebook, Twitter (in both English and Spanish), Google+, Tumblr, YouTube, and more. Throughout response and recovery, these channels made it easy for the city to share information in various formats, and enabled people to find and consume information in ways they preferred and were used to.

SOCIAL MEDIA TASKFORCE: Following Hurricane Irene, the City developed SMART, the Social Media Advisory and Research Taskforce, a group of 15 people from various agencies across New York City who are considered to be social media experts. This group has met once a month to review best practices and guidance documents like the Emergency Protocol. Once a document is reviewed, it is placed on the City Intranet so that it is accessible to all City employees.

PROMOTION OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY LEADERS: Mayor Michael Bloomberg promoted the New York City's social media profiles, mentioning them at press conferences and across other channels. Between Hurricanes Irene and Sandy, the City's social media presence grew, attracting nearly 5 million followers across all of New York City's accounts.

ORGANIZED SYSTEM: In addition to managing NYC.gov, the City maintains numerous channels, including, Facebook pages, Flickr, Google+, Tumblr, Twitter (in both English and Spanish), and YouTube. These channels are each owned and operated by various city agencies and departments and maintained independently by nearly 200 social media managers, with support from the Mayor's office, from which guidance and best practices are provided to encourage continued use.

ALL IN ONE PLACE: In Hurricane Katrina, separate websites were used to share information for evacuees, friends, and families and to publish lists of names; blogs were used for posting location, status. So many websites sprang up that it became difficult to find the specific website for the information, resources, or reconnection one needed. However, in the case of Sandy, social media made it possible for many agencies, non-profits, and volunteers to aggregate information and resources and publish them in one place.

REAL-TIME INFORMATION: Social media gave people real-time information and a sense that someone was paying attention to them. Sandy was the top phrase on Facebook, where users speculated about the storm's damage and provided updated information about their location and safety. More than 800,000 Instagram photos featured a #Sandy hashtag. Some 20 million tweets included storm-related terms. Emergency information from government officials and news sources was disseminated as quickly as people could retweet it. Real images and videos posted on Twitter, Flickr and Facebook were picked up by television channels and then widely broadcast. Social media became the go-to source for people looking for gasoline, shelter, food, water, and immediate assistance after Sandy made landfall.

QUICK ONLINE RESPONSE BY GOVERNMENT TEAMS: Throughout the storm, NYC Digital, a subsidiary of the Mayor's Office, monitored social media for

public reactions to the storm, sending daily reports to City Hall, which functioned as the hub for all City departments and agencies, filtering information back and forth across the City. The City also used Facebook to post summaries and critical points from each press conference. Each press conference was live-tweeted, and a summary blog with a relevant photo was posted to Tumblr as well. In response to long wait times on the City's information line (311), many individuals tweeted the City instead. Many of their questions were answered directly on Twitter.

TEXT ALERTS AS AN ALTERNATIVE TO INTERNET BASED MESSAGING: The public could also sign up to receive text alerts from the Mayor's Office Twitter account, @nycmayorsoffice, which served as a great alternative digital resource to the city's website once people lost power and Internet access.

SOCIAL MEDIA MONITORING: Throughout the storm, NYC Digital, a part of the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment, monitored social media for public reactions to the storm, sending daily reports to City Hall. Questions asked on Twitter were responded to directly, and the City's Tumblr account and Facebook page published information from each press conference. The public could sign up to receive text alerts from the Mayor's Office Twitter account, @NYCMayorsOffice, which served as an alternative digital resource to the City's website, once people lost power and Internet access.

ONLINE APPLICATIONS USED DURING RECOVERY: To highlight recovery efforts across the City, the Press Office and NYC Service worked with NYC Digital to create a citywide Flickr album to host photos relating to Sandy relief work. City employees in the field could email photos directly from a smartphone to a single email account that would automatically upload the photo to the Flickr album. More than 500 photos were uploaded in one week. The City directed the media to the album for information and photographs from the ground.

REFERENCES

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