The Effects of Social Media in UAE Emergency Management

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Abstract— In this paper we propose the importance and effects of social media in the United Arab Emirates emergency management. Social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter can be of great use in the situation of emergency. Many examples have been quoted in the paper to clarify the topic. However, the emergency situation and its cure with social media have also been mentioned.

Keywords— Social Media, United Arab Emirates, Emergency Situations

I. Introduction

The exceeding number of hurricanes, earthquakes, and other disasters makes us realize that we are far from being prepared for emergencies. Due to such disasters, society faces direct damage concerning injuries, deaths, or property loss. Though modern technologies such as remote sensing and GIS are used to observe such events and to assess how severe they are, they still have not been completely realized in emergency situations. Moreover, the geospatial information that the government provides is inappropriate due to higher costs and a long cycle of production. In such situations, social media has a great impact on emergency management. For instance, a storm occurred on the island of Dominica on 27 August 2015. [1] It caused immense damage to the island as it washed out all the roads and villages. The prime minister of Dominica used Facebook to stay tuned for the welfare of people and on the wellbeing of the status of the relief efforts. Without social media, it would have been difficult for the prime minister to provide such information. In 2005,[2] Hurricane Katrina damaged the Gulf Coast. In that critical situation, Facebook was the only platform that provided up-to-date information to people. Social media applications help people locate their loved ones and stay informed of current situations. Hence, the old ways of getting informed about emergency updates have been connected with social media in this era in every country. For example, the White House took over Twitter to inform everyone that the president was getting continuous updates on the Sandy Hurricane.

II. Body of the Paper

A. Emergency Management

When there are emergencies, it is difficult to locate affected people, gather relevant information, provide it to the related parties, and deliver resources to the affected ones in a timely manner. All such data is insufficient to decide where and how to focus. Hence, it is always a challenge for government agencies to decide how many people should be sent to the damaged area to collect data. When Hurricane Katrina occurred, the Secretary of Homeland Security reported that there was a lack of information from the government agencies. This is another challenge when it comes to handling emergencies. [3] It is essential to share appropriate information at an accurate time and place. When there is a lack of updated information about the disasters, it creates negative emotions such as stress. The existing channels formed by the government are neither enough nor appropriately used in response to emergency situations. Hurricane Katrina's major cause of failure was said to be the lack of up-to-date information and recovery efforts.

B. Effects of Social Media in UAE

As mentioned earlier, government agencies have limited resources to collect and share spatial information during emergencies. Therefore, focusing specifically on the UAE, social media plays an important role in emergency management in two ways. The information produced and distributed through social media is extremely valued in response to disasters. Secondly, the interaction and behavior of people on social media give understanding for collecting information and planning rescue efforts accordingly. Due to the lack of resources and capability of government agencies in the UAE, the official sources are inappropriate or insufficient for covering the disasters. Moreover, gathering all the information related to the disaster situation can be time-consuming.[4] On the other hand, social media users are more instantaneous in generating and distributing information. Mostly, government officials censor the information, making it hard to obtain information. Therefore, social media helps people achieve relevant information and challenge censored information sources. Social media platforms are helpful in studying the behavior and patterns of the data generated. When abnormal patterns are distinguished in social media, it automatically enables the locations where attention is required. For instance, in the UAE, geo-tagged tweets help identify unusual events by contrasting the normal patterns of Twitter users.

Apart from this, three social groups are involved in responding to emergencies in the UAE. The affected people can instantly get involved in conversations on social media, such as taking pictures and quickly providing information to others about what is happening at their place. On the other hand, people actively volunteer for various humanitarian purposes. Though they are not directly linked to the affected ones, they have the right to use computational resources to generate data. [3] Lastly, the officials allocate emergency workers capable of performing on a large scale in the affected area. Social media helps collect and disseminate information, and different social networking tools can be helpful in creating a strong relationship between the volunteers.

Challenge Analysis

Along with the many benefits of social media, it also faces challenges in the UAE. It is hard to check whether data quality relates to its format. Due to information gathered from different sources, there are different levels of uncertainty.[5] When the personal information of the affected is revealed, it can cause a disadvantage to them regarding future crimes. Moreover, it is also complicated to decide what type of data will be most suitable to support reasoning and decisions.

Conclusion

In this era, information technology is enhancing rapidly, allowing people to get the advantage of such opportunities and to share valuable information easily. The data collected through social media is becoming valuable with time in the UAE, such as geospatial data creation. The collaboration of people and government agencies, a blend of data from different resources, and a good understanding of social networks make up a good computational system for emergencies. It is assumed that research on social networks concerning emergency management will result in efficient responses to emergency situations. This research will also help in finding appropriate solutions to secure private information of the people during emergency situations and take the help of social networking without revealing any private information of the people.

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