

Emergency management, Twitter, and social media evangelism.

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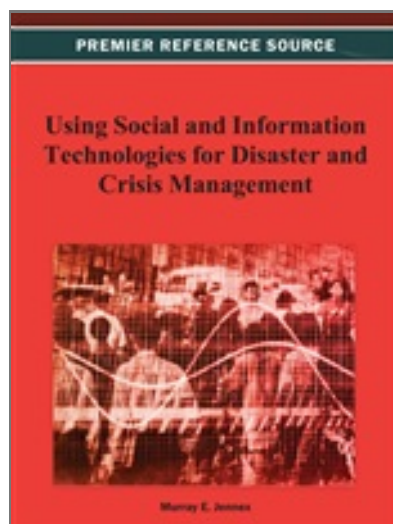


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## Emergency Management, Twitter, and Social Media Evangelism

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Source Title: [Using Social and Information Technologies for Disaster and Crisis Management](#)

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## Abstract

This paper considers how emergency response organizations utilize available social media technologies to communicate with the public in emergencies and to potentially collect valuable information using the public as sources of information on the ground. The authors discuss the use of public social media tools from the emergency management professional's viewpoint with a particular focus on the use of Twitter. Limited research has investigated Twitter usage in crisis situations from an organizational perspective. This paper contributes to the understanding of organizational innovation, risk communication, and technology adoption by emergency management. An in-depth longitudinal case study of Public Information Officers (PIO) of the Los Angeles Fire Department highlights the importance of the information evangelist within emergency management organizations and details the challenges those organizations face engaging with social media and Twitter. This article provides insights into practices and challenges of new media implementation for crisis and risk management organizations.

## Chapter Preview

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## Introduction

And the same way I worry most about new media, people will not embrace it. People see it in a monocular focus, they think it's about distribution, it's about talking, it's about yelling. It really is about listening. People see this as one dimensional, and they don't see their need to be part of that community." Brian Humphrey, PIO, Los Angeles Fire Department

The use of computer-mediated communication in times of emergency is gaining momentum and is the focus

of much existing research. Social media allow users to generate content and to exchange information with groups of individuals and their social networks. First gaining attention in the aftermath of large-scale disasters such as the Banda Aceh Tsunami, networked, online conversations among the affected publics and onlookers offering help have been especially in focus during extreme events (Palen, Vieweg, Liu, & Hughes, 2009; Scaffidi, Myers, & Shaw, 2007; Majchrzak, Jarvenpaa, & Holingshead, 2007; Liu, Iacucci, & Meier, 2010; White, 2011). Twitter, the popular micro-blogging site, has gained particular attention due to its increasingly widespread adoption. A recent study by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that 19% of all Internet users share updates about themselves on Twitter or another similar service (Fox, Zickuhr, & Smith, 2009). While there is much media hype and excitement over the use of Twitter during times of emergency, researchers are just beginning to examine the value and logic behind its usage (Starbird, Palen, Hughes, & Vieweg, 2010).

There are two primary streams of research investigating the use of social media in emergency response. One stream is concerned with how emergency management organizations use such technologies to coordinate in response to disaster as they conduct rescue activities (White, Plotnick, Kushman, Hiltz, & Turoff, 2009; Bharosa, Appelman, & de Bruin, 2007; van de Ven, van Rijk, Essens, & Frinking, 2008). The other stream is concerned with how those affected by disaster and those who volunteer to help utilize social media to locate information and to seek or provide support (Liu, Iacucci, & Meier, 2010; Hughes & Palen, 2009; Starbird & Palen, 2011; Sutton, Palen, & Shklovski, 2008). Few studies have considered how emergency response organizations utilize currently available technologies both to communicate with the public in emergencies and to potentially collect valuable information using the public as sources on the ground. In this paper we describe the use of social media from the emergency management professional's viewpoint with a particular focus on the use of Twitter.

As emergency management professionals add social media to the range of tools they use to communicate with the public in times of crisis, a critical investigation of how and why these tools are adopted is crucial: Adoption and implementation of technology requires allocation of precious time and resources. We argue that the public's usage of Twitter differs from its usage by emergency management professionals in significant ways. We discuss these differences and focus on how and why officials in emergency response organizations responsible for communication with the public implement social media at the organizational level. We rely on conversations with emergency management professionals in New York City and Los Angeles and elaborate on an in-depth case study of the PIOs at the Los Angeles Fire Department and their use of Twitter and other social media.

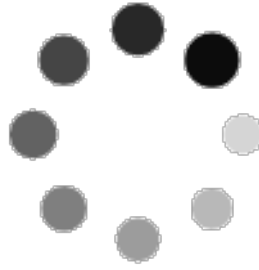
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## Background

Micro-blogging is a form of lightweight, mediated communication where users can broadcast short messages to their networks and direct these messages to specific people within networks. Users of Twitter send short (up to 140 characters) messages or "tweets" to their networks of "followers" – people who chose to be updated when the person they "follow" adds a new message to the stream. Twitter users send "tweets" to their followers, and users can also "retweet" or pass along messages originating from others. Twitter includes search functions so users can search the site for prevalence of keywords, phrases, topics, trends, or individuals. Other features of Twitter include options to add website links and geo-location information to tweets.

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