

Social media as the primary information source of rescue operations during Kerala floods

R. Venkatesh Aravindh¹, S. Thirupathi²,

^{1,2}Doctoral Research Scholar, Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Periyar University,
Salem, Tamil Nadu

Email - rvenkatesharavindh@gmail.com¹, thirupathi.vellore@gmail.com²

Abstract: Social media is indispensable in everyday lives of people. The positive aspects of social media are a plenty and they also play a vital role in information dissemination process. The process is mostly instantaneous as well as spontaneous. Despite flaws at various places they also help in rescue operations. There are umpteen instances wherein social media outlets have helped in rescue operations across the globe and the country. The state of Kerala faced unprecedented rainfalls in almost a century and lakhs of people were affected across districts and towns. The current research study focusses on the how the social media outlets served as a platform in helping out people stranded during the floods in Kerala for rescue operations. The study will employ qualitative research approaches through content analysis and iconography, by analysing the pictures and videos shared in social media platforms.

Key Words: Social media, Information, Rescue operations, Kerala, Floods, Iconography,

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 Social media and information dissemination:

Research shows that on-site and on-line crisis response activities are becoming increasingly ‘simultaneous and intertwined’ (Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, & Hughes, 2007). Information as disseminated through mainstream news media may seem less personal and useful. There is a wide range of censorship techniques and levels of censorship. Kuzma, J. (2010)

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1 Rescue operations:

Disasters have been defined as a state in which the social fabric is disrupted and becomes dysfunctional to a greater or lesser extent causing “maximum community disruption and dislocation” (Britton, 1988, Fritz, 1961). In social context, the functional needs of disaster management agencies and communities are segregated into three dimensions including agency to agency interaction, agency to community interaction and community to community interaction. Ahmed A. (2011)

3. METHODOLOGY :

The research study adopts qualitative research methodology in the form of iconography and content analysis to analyse the pictures and videos shared during the Kerala floods.

4. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

- To explore how social media served as a primary source for rescue operations during the Kerala floods.

5. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS:

PICTURE ANALYSIS



ICON 1 & 2 Courtesy: Whatsapp

One of the easy and heavily utilized bridge has collapsed amidst the floods. Roads are very much inaccessible as water levels are upto the knees.



ICON 3 & 4 Courtesy: Whatsapp

People stranded in homes are rescued using goats even in narrow roads and places. The Army personnel are helping in rebuilding a bridge that has collapsed along with National Disaster Response Force (NDRF) teams.



ICON 5 & 6 Courtesy: Whatsapp

People are taking any of the food or relief materials to be distributed to the needy. Boatmen are rescuing people across flood affected areas.



ICON 7 & 8 Courtesy: Whatsapp

Politicians cutting across party lines are distributing food and other essential supplies to the needy. Relief and food supplies are being brought by the boatmen.



ICON 9 & 10 Courtesy: Whatsapp

A very critical patient is being carried on a stretcher by volunteers to safety. Boatmen swim through a paddy field which is drowned in water.



ICON 11 & 12 Courtesy: Whatsapp

Boatmen supply essential commodities to a people who are stranded.



ICON 13 & 14 Courtesy: Whatsapp

Boatmen rescue people from heavily flooded areas to safety. People from various NGO's and SHG's distribute essential and food supplies to the people.

VIDEO ANALYSIS

Video analysis has been conducted by taking snippets from Twitter videos which highlight the gravity of the situation during Kerala floods.



ICON 15 & 16 Courtesy: Twitter

The initial images from the videos are taken at the Cochin Airport where the water seems to be running all across the place and forcing the authorities to shut all operations for a prolonged period of time.



ICON 17 & 18 Courtesy: Twitter

The above pictures reveal the situation in the Munnar district. The 2nd picture show sthe water gushing out from malampuzha Dam.



ICON 19 & 20 Courtesy: Twitter

The above pictures shows the situtation in one of the State Highways in Thrissur district and Ranni town in Pathanamthitta district where one of the busiest roads is ssen literally submerged in water.



ICON 21 & 22 Courtesy: Twitter

The above pictures are from Edamalayar Dam. The 2nd picture shows the flow of water released.



ICON 23 & 24 Courtesy: Twitter

The above two pictures are from Athirapally falls and MBM hospital in Malappuram respectively .



ICON 25 & 26 Courtesy: Twitter

The above pictures show the grave situation present during the floods in Malappuram district.



ICON 27 & 28 Courtesy: Twitter

The above picture shows the grim situation that prevailed in Idukki district.



ICON 29 & 30 Courtesy: Twitter

The above pictures show the situation in Palakkad district. One of the people moving around the bus stand in Palakkad is seen holding a fish that came gushing through the water in the bus stand.

6. CONCLUSION:

Kerala is one of the coastal states present in our country. Kerala also boasts of being one of the states that is surrounded predominantly by water bodies like Odisha. Kerala is also home to many of tourist places, hill stations like Munnar and Idukki. This year Kerala saw unprecedented floods that ravaged the state during the monsoon season. The people as well as the government were unprepared for such a rainfall this year that saw millions displaced and 329 people killed. Many people lost all their belongings as their houses were washed away in the floods. The current research study was undertaken to look into how the social media outlets served as a primary source of news during the Kerala floods. The study revealed chilling images of water running across places and people having nowhere to go as water

levels reached even the topmost floors of houses and buildings. Thanks to the tireless efforts of the boatmen and umpteen volunteers and the teams from NDRF and Army, normalcy returned to the state in a month's time. The study revealed that almost all the situations with regards to people being trapped including elderly people, children, and animals were tracked and rescued through the inputs from social media outlets like Whatsapp and Twitter.

REFERENCES:

1. Ahmed, A. (2011). Use of social media in disaster management.
2. Britton, N. (1988). Organized behavior in disaster: a review essay. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters*, 6(3), 363-395.
3. Fritz, C. E. (1961). Disaster.
4. Kuzma, J. (2010). Asian government usage of Web 2.0 social media. *European Journal of ePractice*, (9), 1-13.
5. Palen, L., Vieweg, S., Sutton, J., Liu, S. B., & Hughes, A. (2007, October). Crisis informatics: Studying crisis in a networked world.

Disclaimer: All the images used in this research paper work have been taken from Author's Whatsapp and Twitter.