

Socially resilient: social media in times of natural disasters.

Helen Partridge & Christine Yates

Queensland University of Technology

April 2014

Key preliminary themes

Lens	Theme	Description	Participant Quotes
Tool	Characteristics	The nature of information and the way in which it flows within social media provides great benefits during a natural disaster: (i) it is localized and specific in nature; (ii) it occurs instantly and in real time; (iii) it places the user in control able to chose and filter content; and (iv) it is convenient.	<p>“Twitter brought it down to that even more local and personal level...someone posting a picture of “here’s my backyard.” <i>Participant 3</i></p> <p>“Facebook was a bit different, because you were able to actively keep up to date on that minute, not that delay that the radio has.” <i>Participant 21</i></p>
	Supplementary	This theme depicts how information in social media is a supplementary world to other information media during a time of natural disaster. It refers to participant’s use of multiple channels to obtain information, whereby information in social media formed an added component within a potential information landscape.	<p>“That night, listening to the radio and going on Facebook and going on Twitter and I remember my computer being on and having multiple tabs of the live stream on YouTube, what QPS was doing.” <i>Participant 11</i></p>
Individual	Connected	This theme represents an aspect of participant’s information experience that referred to the sense of ‘connectedness’ that was engendered through the sharing, exchange and communication of information between citizens in social media. The continued flow of content that transpired through social media helped to create and heighten feelings of ‘togetherness’ or ‘closeness’ with other citizens on an individual level, as well as to the broader community or city in which the natural disaster had occurred.	<p>“I remember at the time thinking I don’t feel alone...I ‘ve got...you know I can sit here and I’m collectively going through this experience with all these other people.” <i>Participant 15</i></p> <p>“We’ve always used the radio [during a cyclone]...but it is isolating...whereas if you’ve got social media, you’ve got that instant feedback. If you put something up there, somebody ‘likes it’”. <i>Participant 14</i></p>
	Wellbeing	The theme of wellbeing portrays a facet of participants’ information experiences that referred to communicating information about their own personal wellbeing through social media, or using information available in social	<p>“I was able to sit on Facebook and say ‘okay everybody, this is the deal...this is how we’re going, we’re all safe, we’re downstairs, and the power’s still on as you can tell cause I’m still on the Internet’.</p>

Lens	Theme	Description	Participant Quotes
		media to monitor the wellbeing of others.	
	Coping	Coping portrays an affective aspect of people's information experience that related to particular emotions which information in social media generated for people that assisted them to manage or better handles the natural disaster event.	"To get things of my chest and probably put a few things up there, basically just to get it out there that okay I'm panicked...I'm worried these are my concerns. And to have other people put that sort of thing up...I felt a hell of a lot better after that". <i>Participant 18</i>
Community	Brokerage	This theme depicts an aspect of participants' information experiences in social media that was associated with taking on or playing the role of an 'information broker' during a time of natural disasters. By taking on or playing this role participants recognized that they became a 'conduit' or 'gatekeeper' of information for others, and as such were 'providing an information service'.	"I was texting everybody. So you know, everybody's racing around doing stuff...even to be in radio earshot I think was hard for people at various stages. So I was watching Queensland Police Services Media [on Twitter] and anytime that I felt there was anything relevant, as opposed to the standard stuff. You know there's no point telling them there's a bloody big cyclone coming, everybody knows that". <i>Participant 9</i>
	Help	Help describes a part of participants' information experiences that referred to disclosure or imparting details through social media for the purpose of offering or requesting assistance or advice to the broader community, along with using information communicated through social media platforms as a way of 'trawling' for opportunities or ways to assist.	"The house next door to us was completely neglected...it had all this rubbish in the backyard, like shopping trolleys and old swings, things that would have been potential missiles [in a cyclone]. I put this up on the [Townsville Disaster Information] Facebook page, saying 'I don't know what to do about this' and people were posting back 'Contact Council'". <i>Participant 10</i>
	Journalism	Journalism denotes an aspect of participants' information experiences in social media that referred to performing the role of 'citizen reporter' during a time of natural disaster. In carrying out this role, participants recognized that social media platforms provided a means by which they could broadcast information without the need of a media agency in the form of personal commentary, photos or stories and to share these with the world.	"We were driving around taking photos and posting them on Facebook straight away so that other people who are still in their homes, or people overseas or my family interstate were seeing the damage...."this happened an hour ago" or "this happened two hours ago" and " here are the photos so you can see what it looks like here now". <i>Participant 11</i>