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ABSTRACT

Many disaster incidents have been documented where virtual communities reduce victim uncertainty about the situation and support victim recovery. Virtual communities of victims can facilitate orderly crisis management and support the building of a sense of community (SoC). A SoC is a feeling of belonging and being attached to a community. Once established, communities exhibit community-like behaviors and social processes such as exchanging support, maintaining norms, rules etc. This research project looks at how SoC can be quickly developed in virtual communities during times of crisis. While substantial research has established the beneficial effects of SoC, little research has identified systematic ways to foster it in virtual communities where actions and interactions are mostly self-governed.

PROBLEM

- ❖ SoC is a recognized critical dimension of resilient communities (Norris et al., 2008). Higher SoC makes a community as credible and trusted sources of information (Paton, 2015, p. 317). If SoC is absent, victim uncertainty about the situation increases and victim recovery weakens.
- ❖ Trustworthiness and veracity of community-generated information remains a barrier in effective Emergency Management (Plotnick & Hiltz, 2016; Palen & Hughes, 2018, p. 504).

MOTIVATION

- ❖ Virtual Communities offer new and promising opportunities for Information Systems and Emergency Management research.
- ❖ There is much that is yet to be understood on how virtual communities impact society and emergency management at large.
- ❖ Majority of the exiting studies lack theoretical grounding.
- ❖ There is a research call to explore governance related concept as well as member's action-interaction in self-organized virtual community in times of crisis (Nan & Lu, 2014).

RESEARCH QUESTION

Under what conditions does a self-governed virtual community develop and maintain sense of community to support disaster recovery?

METHODOLOGY

- ❖ A **cross-case analysis** of two virtual self-help communities focused on disaster response during **Hurricane Harvey (2017)**
- ❖ **Interpretive** approach
- ❖ Data will be collected from **Reddit** – a social news aggregation, web content rating, and discussion platform of self-governed virtual communities
- ❖ **Content Analysis** will be performed.



THEORETICAL LENS

- ❖ Uncertainty reduction theory (Berger & Calabrese, 1975)
- ❖ Sense of Community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986)
- ❖ Online Actions and Interactions (Micro-level orderly crisis management dynamics) (Nan & Lu, 2014).

Online Actions and Interactions (Nan & Lu, 2014)

- Message content dynamics
- Feedback loop dynamics
- Actualized IT affordance dynamics

Sense of Community McMillan and Chavis (1986)

- Membership- sense of personal relatedness
- Influence
- Integration and fulfillment of needs
- Shared emotional connection

CONTRIBUTION

- ❖ This study is expected to expand our knowledge of how ICT (i.e., social media) can be used to solve social problems such as emergency management by virtual community moderators.
- ❖ This knowledge also will enhance formal responder's trustworthiness of social media data as well as guide Information systems designers to provide better structures and features for creating SoC.

CONTACT INFORMATION

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