

Chapter 19

Analysis and Comparison of the Role of Local Governments with Other Policy Actors in Disaster Relief via Social Media: The Case of Turkey

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the social media use by local governments, and other policy actors (government agencies, non-governmental organizations and citizens) after the 2011 Van Earthquake in Turkey. This study is different from others examining social media use of just one policy actor after a disaster; as it compares and contrasts the performance of different policy actors with that of local governments. To this end, contents of the messages posted on selected Facebook pages after the earthquake are analyzed. The findings include examples of effective social media use for disaster relief and recovery, as well as detailed information about the nature and functioning of “multiple/parallel systems of public service/information delivery”, more than one electronic channel of communication and coordination simultaneously connecting people and organizations. The findings suggest that, if institutional arrangements conducive to collaborations are present, social media platforms can be effective means of disaster relief and recovery, especially for communication among citizens after a disaster.

INTRODUCTION

In 23 October, 2011 at 13:41, a devastating earthquake, with a magnitude of 7.2 in Richter Scale occurred in Van, located in far Eastern Turkey. As a result, there were 644 deaths, 1.966 injuries and more than 40.000 destroyed buildings (AFAD, 2014). After the earthquake, more than 1.500 aftershocks occurred

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-0317-0.ch019

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in the region. Schools remained closed for more than three months. Almost 30.000 citizens were transferred from the disaster region to public buildings in other cities. Thirteen tent cities housing more than 100.000 people were established in the area. However these tents were not enough under harsh winter conditions. Therefore, more than 25.000 container-houses were set up (AFAD, 2014). Immediately after the earthquake, government agencies, domestic and international civil society organizations and many citizen groups mobilized to help the victims. In this process, many aid campaigns were arranged by various organizations and citizens.

This study focuses on the potential operational advantages and logistic problems of social media use in the betterment of communication, collaboration and coordination in emergency situations among different policy actors, using the 2011 Van Earthquake as a case in point. As such, there are important roles to be played by social media in rescuing victims, organizing material aids, increasing connections and developing common values among responders. This study discusses the use of social media tools by local governments, government agencies, domestic and international non-governmental organizations and citizens for disaster relief and recovery. The method of this study consists of the content analysis of communication process after the disaster by means of pre-determined activity indicators. These indicators provide opportunity to evaluate the social media usage capacity of policy actors.

SOCIAL MEDIA USE IN DISASTERS AND GOVERNANCE

Social media is one of the innovations in information and communication technologies. Social media platforms have the similar characteristics of Web 2.0 technologies such as online encyclopedias, social networking sites, weblogs, and platforms to share movies, pictures and music. Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube are among popular social media platforms. Social media is defined as the "...collaborative, decentralized and community-driven... forms of information and communication technology disseminated through social interaction" (Keim & Noji, 2011: 47). Social media platforms have important functions for communication, interaction and information dissemination in the fields of politics, public administration, law, finance, public relations, health, sport, trade and so on. Social media platforms are also becoming one of the important parts of e-government. It is an essential element of government reform efforts all around the world. Davidson (2011), in his study of the US Open Government Initiatives of the Obama Administration, argues that social media is a part of this initiative that would create a small impact on how the government is run in the short-run; but a huge impact in the long-run.

The functions of social media in information and communication processes provide many opportunities in social and political events. Social media makes the communication and information processes much easier, faster and cheaper than earlier forms of content transformation such as text, photos, videos, sharing personal experiences; and organizing online and offline meetings and fundraisers for any awareness raising campaigns, political campaigns or disaster reliefs. Social media is also important for political development. It provides opportunities for enriching, widening and deepening the interactions within the political and administrative systems. It contributes to struggles against the corruption promoting transparency and accountability (Bertot, Jaeger, Munson & Glaisyer, 2009; Bertot, Jaeger & Grimes, 2010). Social media is also seen as a new public sphere open to more active participation in the policy making process.

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