Section 2: The Networks for Messages

Topic 12

Social Media and Emergency Communications

Objectives

Welcome to Topic 12.

After reading this topic, you will have a better idea of what the term "social media" refers to. This is only an introduction to various social media sites, not an exhaustive study of the topic. Keep in mind that while this topic discusses a variety of communication options that do not depend on Amateur Radio, some examples might be useful as a form of communications during emergencies.

Student Preparation required:

None.

What Social Media Is

Social media refers to a means of interacting with other people by sharing information, such as text, photos, and videos, and receiving information from them using a variety of web-based communications tools.

The word "media" has long been used to refer to the technologies people use to communicate. Since the internet is making communication technologies more interactive and social, the term "social media" was coined to refer to the highly interactive qualities of newer forms of electronic media, which allow for ways of communicating and sharing information that differ from traditional mass media such as TV, newspapers, and radio.

Most early forms of internet media were highly social, including bulletin boards, forums, packet radio, and popular online networks such as CompuServe and America Online. But the term "social media" didn't become popular until after 2000, when the rapid rise of social networks such as Myspace, Facebook, and YouTube brought greater attention to online media sharing.

Social media takes many forms and includes social networks, a subset of the larger social media

universe. Social networking specifically refers to services such as Twitter and LinkedIn, which provide online tools for making, organizing, and managing connections between individuals and groups. The definition of social media is broad enough to include file-sharing technologies such as SoundCloud, video-sharing services such as YouTube, and photo-sharing services such as Instagram and Flickr. There are literally thousands of other more specialized services such as Facebook Events or Meetup for events and Retail Me Not or Groupon for social shopping; they qualify as social media, too. One of the great aspects of social media is the ability to have two-way or many-to-many dynamic information exchanges during an emergency.

Some Popular Social Media Sites

Founded in 2004, **Facebook** is the most popular social network site in the world for staying in touch with friends and family. Facebook's mission "is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected." People use Facebook to stay connected with friends and family, to discover what's going on in the world, and to share and express what matters to them. Amateur Radio, ARES, and emergency communications are represented on Facebook, as are many other topics. Just type a keyword in the "search" box and find hundreds of sites of Amateur Radio interest. ARRL has a Facebook page, too; check it out at https://www.facebook.com/ARRL.org.

Twitter (https://twitter.com)is a microblogging site. It provides users with a platform for short text messages that may include web links, pictures, audio, and video content. The term "micro" is used as Twitter restricts users to posting short messages or "tweets," which consist of no more than 140 characters. Tweets are similar to text messages (SMS or Short Message Service), except that they are shared publicly to anyone with access to Twitter. Twitter users typically orient their activity toward the interests of a specific audience or group of followers; for instance, one can

search for “ham radio” from the Twitter home page to see related posts. Users can subscribe to other users’ posts (which are called “tweets”), send direct messages, or reply publicly. Users often share comments about related subjects through the use of hashtags. A common hashtag for social media in emergency management is #SMEM. The hashtag for ARES is #ARES.

Ham radio operators who are involved in emergency communications find that having a Twitter account gives them the potential to reach out to other users to share information. What is special about tweets or Twitter posts is that when the account holder enables the location feature, the geodata it contains can help provide a more accurate common operating picture. This is true particularly when the posts include a picture or video.

LinkedIn® is another example of a social networking site. These sites allow individuals, companies, organizations, and associations to post text, video, pictures, links to other web content, or combinations of all of these electronic media. This posted media, with some permanent and some constantly changing sections, comprises the profile of an individual or organization. Increasingly, more information about the individual can be shared, such as location-based information and media preferences (music, pictures, video, etc.). These sites are used more widely by organizations and the public to keep others up to date on their statuses and activities or to advertise events.

Sites such as **Flickr**, **Picasa**, **YouTube**, **Vimeo**, **Instagram**, **Snapchat**, **Tumblr,** and others offer hosting for pictures and videos. Users can include text commentary, group photos, or video. Editing can be performed directly on the site, including embedding certain graphics, links, or metadata such as the GPS coordinates, date, and time an image was recorded in their content files. This media can then be embedded in a blog or on a Facebook page, or linked in a tweet.

Using Social Media in Emergency Communications

As emergency managers and their agencies become more actively engaged with their communities using social media, they usually find it necessary to modify their approach to using traditional media. Social media has already affected the way journalists do their jobs; many of them are already well positioned to interact with emergency managers through social media rather than through conventional press releases. Social media also allows anyone to become a journalist. Many media outlets encourage citizens to make use of social media outlets to report news as it happens. The National Weather Service has taken advantage of this as it allows meteorologists to see near real-time photos and videos of weather events.

Public Information Officers (PIOs) often find social media helps them stay current with the continuous news cycle. Because the operational tempo increases quickly in emergencies and disasters, **Joint Information Systems (JIS)** need to address the use of social media in disseminating information and monitoring the message in the media before an event unfolds. Whether we like it or not, the disaster-affected public and many responders already have a social media presence.

Successful communication depends upon PIOs and incident commanders establishing and

aligning communication priorities to incident objectives early, and updating them often during the response phase. Defining hashtag conventions and key messages for each hazard will help PIOs and others hit the ground running when disaster strikes.

Virtual Operations Support Teams (VOST), as applied to emergency management and disaster recovery, are an effort to make use of new communication technologies and social media tools so that a team of trusted agents can lend support via the internet to those on-site who may otherwise be overwhelmed by the volume of data generated during a disaster. VOSTs are activated to perform specific functions in support of affected organizations and jurisdictions. Each VOST has a Team Leader that reports directly to the affected organization/jurisdiction. As additional VOSTs are established, a VOS Group (VOSG) may be established to coordinate the work of the VOSTs to maintain an effective span of control. The VOSG has a Group Supervisor that reports to the affected organization/jurisdiction. The VOST Leaders report to the Group Supervisor. For more information, refer to the following resources:

https://eena.org/vost-teams/

https://tox.nlm.nih.gov/dimrc/vostbasics.pdf

How Social Media Is Being Used in Emergency and Disaster Communications

- Saving lives through rapid communication
- Communicating (more) effectively and directly with partners
- Reaching a larger group of people
- Building situational awareness
- Responding quickly and effectively to new, incorrect, or conflicting information
- Participating in government and building mutual trust in the community
- Fostering transparency and accountability
- Crowdsourcing communication during a disaster
- Measuring reach and continuously improving

Situational Awareness

Knowing and understanding what is happening around you is called *situational awareness*. Using technology to gather and collect data we can have a better understanding of current conditions and how changes over time can have an impact on our decision-making process. Integrated with traditional data, social media has made it possible to request, share, and provide content-rich information in real time using various forms of text, video, and photo imagery. For more information, see this publication, which explains social media and situational awareness: "Using Social Media for Enhanced Situational Awareness and Decisional Support," by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS): http://www.iaem.com/documents/Using-Social-Media-for-Enhanced-Situational-Awareness-and-Decision-Support.pdf.

Reference Links

Facebook
www.facebook.com

Flickr
https://www.flickr.com/

Google Photos
https://photos.google.com/

Instagram
https://www.instagram.com

LinkedIn
https://www.linkedin.com/uas/login

Situational Awareness
http://www.iaem.com/documents/Using-Social-Media-for-Enhanced-Situational-Awareness-and-Decision-Support.pdf

Snapchat
https://www.snapchat.com/

Tumblr
https://www.tumblr.com/

Twitter
https://twitter.com

Vimeo
https://vimeo.com/

Virtual Operations Support Group
https://vosg.us/

YouTube
https://www.youtube.com/