

# Role of new media in reporting emergencies in nigeria



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The Role of New Media in Reporting Emergencies in Nigeria. (A Case Study of Ebola Virus)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### 1. 1BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Emergency communication is known for its immediate communication with stakeholders and its ability to change at a moment's notice. Social media is also an evolving field. The use of social media is growing at an exponential rate. Since their introduction, Social Network Sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, MySpace, Cyworld, Twitter and Bebo have attracted millions of users, many of whom have integrated these sites into their daily practices, (Goldfine, 2011). We[E1]define social network sites as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

There are many ideas about the first occurrence of social media. “

Throughout much of human history, we've developed technologies that make it easier for us to communicate with each other” (Carton, 2009). The earliest information encountered by the writers of this article referred to 1792 and the use of the telegraph to transmit and receive messages over long distances (Ritholz, 2010). Emile Durkheim, a French sociologist known by many as the father of sociology, and Ferdinand Tonnies, a German

sociologist, are considered pioneers of social networks during the late 1800s. Tonnies believed that social groups could exist because members shared values and beliefs or because shared conflict. His theory dealt with the social contract conceptions of society. Durkheim combined empirical research with sociological theory. Also, in the late 1800s, the radio and telephone were used for social interaction, albeit one-way with the radio (Rimskii, 2011, Wren, 2004).

Since the late 1990's, the new social media have not only changed the perception of risk and crises, but also citizens' expectations towards emergency response officials, the private sector, volunteer organizations, etc[E2]. Twitter, Facebook and Ushahidi among others have been widely used to communicate about risks and crisis situations (e. g. 2010 Haiti earthquake, 2011 Fukushima nuclear accident, etc.[E3]). This change is linked to the rapid development of the Web 2. 0 and its applications. While Internet traffic is expected to grow 25-30% between 2011 and 2015 in North America, Western Europe and Japan, and to reach or surpass 50% in Latin America, the Middle East and Africa according to *the UN global pulse white book* , the use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter is growing even more rapidly.

Social media is user-generated content distributed through the Internet with the intent to be shared and facilitate conversation between users (Wright & Hinson, 2009). Social media is one of the major methods of social interaction around the world today (Wright & Hinson, 2009).

In general, the following are considered social media tools and platforms: message boards, photo sharing, podcasts, Really Simple Syndication (RSS), video sharing, Wikis, blogs, social networks and micro-blogging sites (Wright & Hinson, 2009).

Social Media can be called a strategy and an outlet for broadcasting, while Social Networking is a tool and a utility for connecting with others (Cohen, 2009; Stelzner, 2009). Furthermore, Cohen (2009) reports that “the difference is not just semantics but in the features and functions put into these websites by their creators which dictates the way they are to be used”.

[E4]

Facebook is a social networking website launched in February 2004, and it is privately operated by Facebook, Inc. (Facebook, 2004). Facebook was founded by Mark Zuckerberg and others when he was a student at Harvard; though when the site was initially launched, it was restricted to Harvard students only. Later the privilege was extended to high school students and later to everyone that is 13 years or older (Boyd, 2007). As of July 2010, Facebook has more than 500 million active users. In January 2009, Facebook was ranked as the most used social network worldwide. Also, in May 2010, Google announced that more people visited Facebook than any other website in the world. It declares that this was discovered from findings on 1,000 sites across the world, (TIMES, 2010). Users may create a personal profile; add other users as friends, and exchange messages, including automatic notifications, photos and comments when they update their profile. Additionally, Facebook users may join common interest user groups, organized by workplace, school, college, or other characteristics.

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Ebola virus was discovered in 1976 and since then 2, 265 reported cases of Ebola fever in humans around the world of these victims, 1, 531 resulted in death killed. Centres for Disease Control and Prevention, (CDC, 2012). The first known case of Ebola in Nigeria was a traveller exposed in Liberia. On July 17, 2014, while under observation in a Monrovia, Liberia, hospital for possible Ebola, the patient developed a fever and, while symptomatic, left the hospital against medical advice. Despite advice against travel, on July 20 he flew by commercial airline from Monrovia via Accra, Ghana, to Lomé, Togo, then changed aircraft, and flew to Lagos.

On arrival the afternoon of July 20, he was acutely ill and immediately transported to a private hospital where he was noted to have fever, vomiting, and diarrhoea. During hospital admission, the patient was queried about Ebola and said he had no known exposure; he was initially treated for presumed malaria. Based on the patient's failure to respond to malaria treatment and his travel from an Ebola-affected country in the region, treating physicians suspected Ebola.

The patient was isolated and tested for Ebola virus infection while local public health authorities were alerted about a suspected case of Ebola. A blood specimen sent to Lagos University Teaching Hospital was confirmed positive for acute Ebola virus infection. The patient died on July 25. Port Health Services conducted early contact tracing at the airport and worked with airlines and partners to ensure notification of the outbreak through International Health Regulations mechanisms

During the 2009 influenza pandemic, tweets and SMS were used to indicate where vaccination against H1N1 influenza was available. Social media were used to encourage the population to vaccinate and to indicate where the nearest place was to do so. In Kenya, which has 33 million people there are 11.3 million mobile phone subscribers but only 264000 landline and 3 million internet users. An opt-in system for blood donors enables them to receive text messages or email reminders stating when they are eligible to donate again but also messages calling for donors of specific blood types during shortages or crises.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) uses social media in its Strategic Health Operations Centre (SHOC) which operate 24-7. Thanks to TweetDeck, they conduct search by selected keywords on Twitter. WHO now has two full-time social media staff and receives nearly 6,000 new followers on Twitter per week and about the same number on Facebook per month. These numbers are growing, which helps WHO both to monitor health crisis and provide good advices to the followers. During the Fukushima events, the TweetDeck observed that some people were telling their friends to drink wound cleaners, which contain iodine, because they thought this would help their body be prepared for the nuclear radiation coming up. Via Twitter and Facebook, the WHO social media team warned people not to drink it because it could be harmful. The same day, WHO noticed people rushing to take iodine pills and tweeted: "Consult your doctor before taking iodine pills. Do not self-medicate!"

As communication technology diversifies and proliferates, social media (Facebook, Twitter, etc.) are increasingly used to convey information during <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-new-media-in-reporting-emergencies-in-nigeria/>

crises to send warnings, to conduct situational awareness, and even to catalyse action and sustain dialogs and feedback loops among public authorities, volunteer groups, the business sector and citizens. Despite their usefulness, governments view social media with some caution due to the cost that could be incurred by trying to keep pace with growing citizen expectations. The reliability of social media content is sometimes questioned, though filtering tools have been developed that may be used to reduce time spent reading irrelevant messages and untrustworthy sources.

The social media can be used to enhance risk and crisis communication in several ways. First, they are collaborative and participatory. Online discussions can improve situation awareness. Second, they are decentralised. The information can circulate very quickly among actors, thanks to RSS feeds or Tweets, which are immediately available online to multiple organisations. Third, social media are popular and accessible. Emergency services can extend their reach when sending information or warning. Finally, social media can provide data that are geographically or temporally traceable. It becomes possible to monitor the geographical and time development of a crisis thanks to digitally generated content.

The evolution of social media has led to faster spread of messages and the ability to minimize harm done to an organization in a crisis scenario. Social media is starting to change the way we do business, and I think if we don't realize what's happening in emergency management then people are going to look up, and they're going to go- " What just happened?" (Richard, 2011).

But Social media also has the potential to ruin a company's reputation or expedite the spread of harmful corporate rumors (Semple, 2009). This is <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-new-media-in-reporting-emergencies-in-nigeria/>

evident in the spread of the water salt solution (Salty Friday) by a tertiary institution student via the Facebook that led to the death of many people all over the country including Plateau state after many drank the salt water and bath with it (Salty Friday).

For Iqaluit's mayor, Madeleine Redfern in (Canadian Red Cross, 2012), Facebook is often the best way to reach members of her community, especially in emergencies. Many Iqaluit residents use Facebook, which can provide timely updates and allow for two-way communication more effectively than mainstream media. By sharing timely information with her community through social media, Mayor Redfern can help dispel rumors before they spread. " If misinformation is not corrected and it spreads like wildfire, then suddenly people are angry and scared and act in ways not in their best interest," she added. " It's the difference between an informed public and a panicked one."

In Nigeria, 56 Ebola cases have been reported of which 6 has been killed by the disease. It is against this background the researcher is willing to examine the attitude of social media users towards the awareness of Ebola virus on Facebook.

## 1. 2STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Social networking sites can serve many uses throughout emergencies and disaster relief. Social networking sites can gather information in a central location as well as serve as a resource to understand the magnitude of a disaster during the disaster or emergency (Palen et al., 2009). However, the major problem is that Facebook users post, comment, sharing information on <https://assignbuster.com/role-of-new-media-in-reporting-emergencies-in-nigeria/>



Ebola virus which they know little or nothing about the credibility of its source as to add salt to bathwater which also killed some hypertensive patients in Borno state.

Social media users know little or nothing about the rule or law guiding post, comment, sharing information and so on. Another problem is that many of the users on social media expressed their opinion with little or no proper editing of the contents they are sharing.

The source of major information, idea, concept being discussed through social media lack credibility and authority. Opinion and attitudes are only formed based on the information posted on social networking sites since there is not an established gatekeepers unlike traditional mass media where the reporters, proof-readers and editors make corrections and filter before disseminated to the citizen, as citizens are now part of information gathering and dissemination.

### 1. 3RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The distinctiveness of this research is to be based on the following research questions.

1. To what extent has Nigeria explored facebook in reporting the Ebola virus?
2. What are emergency managers' attitudes toward facebook and other social media?
3. To what extent has the use of facebook resulted to falsified/speculative report of critical issues in Nigeria?

4. What benefits are gained from the use of facebook and other social media use during emergencies?

#### 1. 4AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study is geared to achieve these aims and objectives

1. To ascertain how the internet Web technology has affected the practice of journalism in Nigeria.
2. To ascertain how the use of social media in plateau state has impacted the system in terms of reporting emergency cases.
3. To find out how the use of facebook has aided human interaction in plateau state.
4. To find out and examine the pitfalls of facebook in the report of the Ebola Virus outbreak.

#### 1. 5SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study is to understand how social media is being used in emergency situations. It attempts to understand communication throughout a disease outbreak and the various ways social media can be used to supplement disaster relief efforts. The study will go a long way to bridge the gap of knowledge existing about the use of the social media platform for ordinary chats among friends and set a paradigm for human cooperation and interaction through the sharing of vital information during emergency periods and when other urgent issues of national relevance come into play or relevant.

By exploring current social media practices of emergency relief and government organizations, and their successes and failures during emergencies best practices will be established, so as to help add to the bank of knowledge already existent in the field.

## 1. 6SCOPE OF STUDY

Facebook. com according to Alexa website ranking on 4th, January 2014 was regarded as the most visited website with statistic of 900, 000, 000 per month followed by google. com, while Twitter is ranked as one of the ten-most-visited websites worldwide by Alexa's Web Traffic Analysis. It is recorded that at least 5 million and seven hundred and fifty thousand Nigerians are on facebook with a good number of them being young or students. (facebook statistics, 2014). This has prompted me to use facebook as a social media platform for this study. More so, this study is limited to Jos South local government, Plateau state.

## 1. 7DEFINITION OF TERMS

The researcher intends to define ambiguous terms in this study with the operational meaning as it will be used in the study and not the dictionary meanings.

**New media:** This is a new platform/provision that came with the turn of the millennium and ushered in immediacy and interaction in the art and science of communication and also makes possible/faster the unification of the world into a global village.

Emergency: This is an impromptu call or situation that may be caused by a disease outbreak, natural disaster, etc., for which human attention/help is needed immediately.

Facebook: This is a social media platform that allows users to share comments, pictures, videos and other forms of communication and bridges the gap created by distance.

Ebola Virus: This is a viral disease that infected 56 people in Nigeria and killed 6. It is characterized by cough, fever, acute headache, and bleeding before death.

Salty Friday: This is the day a group of students used the facebook and falsely reported that people should drink and bath with salt water to remedy the Ebola Virus. This day was evident with phone calls, text messages and chats in the middle of the night and in the early hours of the day.

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[E1]Who is the we? Cite properly

[E2]Avoid the use of etc. instead use words like ' and others'

[E3]Same as above

[E4]Plagiarism