

Digital volunteers use social media, come together during Jammu floods

oneindia.com/india/digital-volunteers-use-social-media-for-rescue-efforts-during-jammu-floods-1524180.html

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9/18/2014



In times of natural calamities, relief operations often are hampered due to lack of communication on the ground and between the organisations working engaged in relief operations. Chaos follows and also there happens to be so much of information on the cyberspace that it becomes difficult to filter the necessary information.

It is where the significance of [social media](#) comes to relevance. The new media not only connects people from across the borders but also plays a vital role at times of natural disasters. One such example is the role of social media during the recent [Jammu and Kashmir](#) floods.

Social Media volunteers come to rescue during Jammu floods

When people of Jammu and Kashmir were helpless and were completely dependent on the state government and the Centre for relief materials, a team of eight digital volunteers came forward to help. Some of them even worked during Cyclone Phailin last year in crisis mapping and response.

These volunteers, present across different time zones, have been making use of the social media and working round the clock to map all the necessary information for the volunteers who are on the ground in Jammu and Kashmir. This time they have used social media more aggressively and effectively to communicate between various organisations and volunteers.

These individuals used Twitter and introduced #JKFloodRelief, now the most widely used hashtag to communicate about the relief aspect of the floods on social media, as well as the twitter account [@JKFloodRelief](#). They also started [JKFloodRelief.org](#) which has managed to be a channel of communication for relief ops.

What is Twitris?

The team has been using one key technology called Twitris, which has helped to establish communication across various channels. Twitris came from a US National Science Foundation funded project on use of social media for emergency response headed by Prof [Amit Sheth](#) at the Ohio Center of Excellence in Knowledge-enabled Computing ([Kno.e.sis](#)) at Wright State University.

By using Twitris, the team used social media, filtered out necessary information, which in turn helped the volunteers to keep a track where people needed to be rescued and where relief materials were supposed to reach. The curated information on the [JKFloodRelief](#) blog also managed to create awareness not just among volunteers but people all around.

Hemant Purohit, a key member of this research team and one of the eight initial coordinators of [JKFloodRelief.org](#) team, informed that within a week, relief supply comprising 15 tons of food, medicines and several other essentials were delivered due to efficient supply chain established by the team.

Twitris is a comprehensive system which analyses exact details like time, location, people and content and filters this information for further assistance.

How do volunteers benefit in rescue operations in Jammu?

The team then, put together some actionable tools, which could be which would be more accurate and would give exact real-time information, accessed on mobile devices. This was used by volunteers to identify those who needed to be rescued and those who were already rescued. It also enabled the volunteers to identify important people or organisations, who could respond to specific needs on ground.

For example the volunteers can mark the tweets with #SoS and indicates ADGPI as the recipient.

Even when telecom towers are down, relatives in other locations are able to tweet the exact location of the person stuck which is picked up by Twitris. Families tweet about the last known details of the relative stuck, such as the hotel name and these are then picked up by Twitris who alert the Army or other officials to rescue the person.

Prof. [Amit Sheth](#), PI of the NSF project on leveraging social media for crisis response at [Kno.e.sis](#), told that by using such tools and technology, JK Flood Relief team have shown how social media can play a crucial role in times of natural calamities.

JK Flood Relief have also received support from many MNCs and well known organisations like Indigo Air, Cipla, Biocon, SpiceJet, Air Asia, Goonj, Uday Foundation and more. They are supported by Twitter, Google, Facebook, Kno.e.sis Center (Wright State University) and Army's public information directorate (ADGPI) for coordination of data efforts.

The team by filtering relevant Twitter data on the Jammu floods made rescue operations easier for the volunteers who were able to locate exactly where people needed to be rescued or needed supplies.

[Click here](#) to track information on Need-to-Rescue

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