



Social media for emergency risk communication

Monika Al-Mufti Nadig and **Joanne Maddams** look at how communicating disaster risk reduction by bringing positive psychology to emergency risk communication and making it into an easy and fun game that anyone can participate in, share and talk about, bridges online social media and offline on the ground reality

Emergency risk communication on social media is not new. Almost exactly two years after Chris Messina invented the twitter hashtag in 2007, #NPM was first used in the US in 2009. Interestingly, unlike the meaning National Preparedness Month that most people associate it with every year during September, it actually started life as National Poetry Month in April that same year and the same hashtag has seen many varied uses since. What was new back then, was that FEMA changed its standard operating procedure to incorporate communication via social media.

Using #NPM to identify messages on a specific topic was the first effort not only to talk about emergency preparedness but to issue practical tips and provide links to resources. With space for just 160 characters, no images, gifs, videos or emojis, it was a rather simple affair. Yet it was an effective outreach, getting people and organisations involved and networking, from government and NGOs to business and individuals.

The following year Canada created dedicated twitter feeds in both English @Get_Prepared and French @Preparez-vous and ran #EPW Emergency Preparedness in May, as well as tuning into other local events, such National Home Fire Safety Week and issuing tips throughout the year. Today, @Get_Prepared has over 18,000 followers, while the French language channel has less than 4,000. What is much more important, is the capability of these accounts to function as an authoritative voice to drive many different

types of emergency preparedness conversations.

The year 2010 was pivotal in another respect: the very first interactive emergency preparedness games were created by the Clark Regional Emergency Services Agency in Vancouver, Washington. Initially it ran over email, joining Twitter in 2011 as @30days30ways to promote its blog-based method. The idea is simple, to create engagement via an interactive game in the form of a daily fun and empowering challenge towards better personal preparedness during September is Preparedness Month. The first preparedness games started with just 86 subscribers earning points for completing daily tasks towards a chance to win crowdsourced prizes. It quickly gained popularity and this has been repeated with even greater success in the UK: uptake growth 2015 – 2017 was 450 per cent and a staggering 1028 per cent in 2018.

#30days30waysUK first appeared in 2015 when Joanne Maddams, Northamptonshire Emergency Planning Officer, ran the preparedness games via the @NorthantsEPTeam feed during September. Like Washington State in the USA, this was very much a local effort initially. However, being strongly focused on Twitter as well as email (starting with just over 100 subscribers), soon 17 other Twitter accounts joined, ranging from health (clinical commissioning group, ambulance), local government, civil society groups, business and professionals. An early adopter and contributor was the London Resilience Forum, which addressed the public from the capital with a positive, empowering, gamified approach to inspire proactive



personal preparedness for a variety of hazards.

Early UK examples for using emergency preparedness hashtags hark back to #RfW2012. Rather than being a fully-fledged social media campaign that we are familiar with today, it was used to promote Scotland's ReadyforWinter2012 roadshows. The following year, Business Continuity Awareness Week #BCAW2013 ran in March, one of the UK's earliest examples of a 'tweet-athon' on this topic, during which the then recently joined @NorfolkPrepared blazed a trail, directly sharing practical tips for small and micro business.

Unfortunately #BCAW2013 also denotes Breast Cancer Awareness Week and thus is non-unique. In contrast, the UK unique #floodaware became operational through the Environment Agency's Flood Awareness Month in November 2013, having started life rather quietly in June 2012. This early incarnation of #floodaware is perhaps best described as a wide ranging, open conversation, rather than a practically focussed campaign. Encouragingly, it involved a good number of Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) from the start, along with many other partners and has been growing.

Thus, efforts are being made in the UK to raise awareness and inform, but they are fragmented and tend to focus on single hazards.

Raising awareness is all very well, in real life as well as on social media. The question is, how do we inspire action and can we measure it? How do we spark behaviour change? Fear is not a good motivator to take positive action towards better personal preparedness, which starts at home and diffuses right through to travel and work.

One approach is by bringing positive psychology to emergency risk communication and making it into an easy and fun game that anyone can participate in, share and talk about, bridging online social media and offline on the ground reality. That is exactly what the dedicated account @30days30waysUK and hashtag #30days30waysUK shared among hundreds of partners does during September is Preparedness Month, taking an all-hazard approach. Its methodology is evidence-based, entirely open source – including analytics – and run by professional volunteers grounded in disaster risk reduction thinking. The central aim is to further preparedness capacities and capabilities from the ground up, on a national and international basis, using social media.

Collaboration among stakeholders starts early in the year and is co-ordinated through the secure Resilience

Direct platform, as well as open source Google documents producing a themes schedule shared among partners.

In the UK, themes tap already existing campaigns – for example #RoadSafetyWeek, @Brakecharity and #RunHideTell @TerrorismPolice, while emphasising personal preparedness aspects – or new themes are created. This is perhaps best illustrated by the hashtags #prep2017day1, #prep2017day2 and #30days30waysUK, which aimed for people to better #understandRisk, discussing #WhatEmergency while introducing a cartoon explainer and linked resources on community risk registers and household preparedness. These cartoons, as well as all other resources utilised or produced by the campaign, are available via the website and linked social media channels, including YouTube playlists.

Additional relevant hashtags are used on various days to create and also to join other campaigns (such as #GiveBlood, #WorldFirstAidDay and #WorldPeaceDay) or topics in popular discourse (ie #petPreparedness) in order to network and spread emergency preparedness awareness far and wide.

This creates quite a buzz on social media which, while fun, diverse and wide ranging, can also be tricky to keep up with. That is why 30days30waysUK continues to offer a much quieter free email version with streamlined content and resources. The concept remains the same irrespective of platform, which, in 2019 include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Wakelet, LinkedIn and email, all trackable for monitoring and evaluation.

As to gameification, each of the 30 daily themes is represented via a game icon, the overall game concept being to cross these off via a downloadable bingo sheet as the participant progresses over the 30 days in 30 ways, boosting their personal preparedness. In addition, every day there is a challenge or activity, such as a mini drill, quiz, poll or caption contest, where participants take action by liking, sharing, clicking on links, commenting and posting their content.

This year is turning out to be the most exciting year yet for #30days30waysUK as it has joined GNDR, the largest network of civil society organisations to promote DRR. It continues to enjoy a surge of national and international interest, following the publication of its Google slides, and one of its co-founders is attending the UNISDR Global Platform #GP2017Geneva.

As this article goes to press, this year's schedule and guidance is being finalised and all resources updated

Authors



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■ [30days30waysUK.org.uk](https://www.30days30waysUK.org.uk)

so why not find out more and get in touch? Explore our website join us or create your own local campaigns using this tested and proven approach of social media emergency risk communication.



