

Fall 9-18-2019

Social media social network clusters during a #festivalemergency

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Gabrielle, Courtney; Van Winkle, Christine; and Huynhk, Kevin, "Social media social network clusters during a #festivalemergency" (2019). *TTRA Canada 2019 Conference*. 5.

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Introduction

World-wide, life threatening, human-made and natural disasters are increasing (AccuWeather, 2013; UNEP, 2005; UNISDR, 2016). Within tourism studies, disaster planning and management are necessary as tourism is highly sensitive to the effect of disasters (Ritchie, 2004). Events and festivals are important visitor attractions and make up a key component of the recreation industry, within the tourism sector (Getz, 2012). Festival events and their visitors are particularly vulnerable during an emergency because of the event's impermanence, irregularity, and location; as well as the visitor's lack of familiarity with surroundings, distance from existing support networks and, on occasion, a lack of knowledge of the local language and culture (Sonmez, 1999). Crisis communication is an established field of study. It contributes to reducing injury and loss-of-life during a disaster by ensuring the public has the necessary information to make good choices during an emergency. The rise of social media necessitates its integration into crisis communication (Liu, Fraustino, Jin, 2016; Schultz, Utz, & Goritz, 2011).

The proposed line of research seeks to understand how people communicate about an emergency on-line before, during and after a disaster to develop a model of crisis communication for this context and provide recommendations for practitioners. Understanding what information is posted on-line during an emergency and how this information travels through social networks will allow for the creation of realistic emergency training exercises. The Social Mediated Crisis Communication Model (SMCC) (Jin, Liu & Austin, 2014) is used as a framework to explore how festival organizations and their stakeholders communicate on social media before, during, and after an emergency. This abstract addresses the following research question: who are the key social media influencers at a festival, and how do these change during a festival emergency? A social media influencer is someone with a dedicated and engaged group of followers (Hootsuite, 2019) that could be leveraged by an organization to reach out to a broader audience.

Methods

Data collection first occurred by identifying festivals and then twitter data was collected. Festivals were selected based on the criteria that they occurred within the past 5 years, experienced an emergency that shut down operations, and were present on twitter. Also, festivals were chosen to represent a range of emergencies including human induced, natural, and technical.

Zombicon was a horror-themed festival that allowed people to gather and celebrate their passion and enjoyment for zombies. On October 17, 2015 the day of the ninth annual Zombicon event, there was a shooting that left one man dead and five people injured. (Mullen & Sutton, 2015).

DetonateUK Halloween was an underground music event that was halted at around 8 p.m. on Saturday night (October 29th, 2016), three hours early. Staff and police closed off the main stage and moved out the crowd before many of the headline acts could appear, due to issues with a tent and overcrowding.

Shambhala Music Festival in 2017 was selected because during the event there were wildfires present in the region. The risk presented by the fires led to an evacuation alert which resulted in the festival cancelling the final evening of the festival.

Netlytics is a community-supported text and social network analyzer that has the ability to summarize and visualize public online conversations on social media sites (Gruzd, Paulin, & Haythornthwaite, 2016). SNA (social network analyzer) displays how individuals interact with

each other through online conversations on their social media platforms. SNA can analyze text that focuses on the content of conversations.

A “name network” looks at the content in the tweets and what has been repeated and tweeted among the Twitter users. Netlytics highlights the top node clusters (groupings of posts) within a name network. These nodes show the most connected individuals within the network.

Results

At the festivals, the following were the top node clusters before, during, and after the festival emergency.

Festival	Before	During	After
Detonate	@Detonate - Festival @Therealkano - Artist @mynuleng - Artist	@Detonate - Festival @Therealkano - Artist @ladyleshurr - Artist	@Detonate - Festival @sasasasdnb - Artist @kruptfm - Radio station
Shambhala	@shambhala_mf - Festival @billykennymusic -producer @Martta_martic - author	@shambhala_mf Festival @emergencyinfobc Emergency management org @herobus Producer	@shambhala_mf Festival @billykennymusic Producer @herobus - Producer
Zombicon	@zombicon festival @cityftmyers -City @zinamariee - Attendee	@zombicon Festival @rt_com News @perezhilton – Celebrity blogger	@zombicon - Festival @foxnews - News @maryannbatlle - News

Discussion

Netlytics provides effective visualizations to help understand social connections on social media. The findings demonstrate that the node clusters change over the course of an emergency situation. At all events across all time periods, the festivals themselves represented the top node cluster. This is consistent with the SMCC model which places the organization at the centre of crisis communication. This indicates that timely and accurate information shared by the festival, on social media, can be an effective way to communicate through online social networks.

The address the research question key social media influencers were described during across time. The data demonstrates that the second and third largest node clusters shifted throughout the time periods. At Detonate, @TheRealKano was a top cluster before the emergency and once the emergency took place. This suggests this person is a social media influencer. By identifying key influencers early during the festival can help spread a message once a crisis communication strategy is in place. It is notable that new agencies were not part of the node clusters before the emergencies but became top node clusters during and after the emergency. This indicates that traditional media is still a key element of an emergency communication strategy, despite the shift to social media. The second largest node clusters shifted across time periods for all festivals. Note that artists and producers are also important nodes that create clusters. Ensuring that the artists are using the festival handle in advance of the event can enhance the spread of information during an emergency. Interestingly, @Martta_Matin who was a top node cluster before the Shambhala festival emergency was not at all related to the event. This demonstrates the importance of a unique festival handle so that those who search for, follow, and post tweets about your event are accessing the correct network.

Further analysis will examine the structure of the networks in greater detail to help identify the types of communication taking place before, during, and after a festival emergency.

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