

» Earthquake in Ecuador. The importance of information during catastrophes

Quito / Madrid » 06 » 2016

According to UNDRP theorist Enrico Quarantelli, there are three pillars to managing catastrophes: coordination, cooperation and communication. Four pillars if we add the NATO doctrine and include monitoring and control. These are strategic values that help reorganize the chaos as soon as possible. When the earth mercilessly shakes vulnerable areas such as Ecuador, chaos takes over. Uncertainty and panic flood the streets, generating high demand for information in the early hours following the catastrophe, when there is little information and even less capacity to spread it. Businesses should take it upon themselves to be involved in the restoration of normality.

It is evident that Ecuador is not Japan (referring to the earthquake in 2011), but in both cases communication via cell phones collapsed. In situations like these, mobile phones stop working and communicating through the Internet is very complicated. Nevertheless, re-establishing communication in this situation is critical in order to gauge the response derived from the initial evaluations. The task of having relatives being able to contact one another is urgent.

Once again, Twitter and Skype have demonstrated their usefulness in this situation. Within a few minutes we received synchronized information of what was occurring in the different areas affected by the earthquake (videos, photos...). Twitter offers additional advantages, such as that it uses little bandwidth, which makes it ideal in these circumstances. As seen in Japan, fixed lines and ADSL have held up better. During the period in which the Internet worked it was an ideal way of not saturating communications. Furthermore, Twitter became a mural of social cries where one could ask for help.

Twitter was also used to post photos of disappeared relatives and organize solidarity campaigns such as #DesaparecidosEc and #EcuadorListoYSolidario, respectively.

A number of trends were initiated on Twitter, trends that were consolidated in a span of several hours and days, generating millions of impressions.

Coraline @la_otra_Dianis Seguir

@ECU911_ favor ayuda para las personas en Canoa #Manabi hay varios desaparecidos #sismo @Riesgos_Ec @Presidencia_Ec

Ciudadanía Informada @ciudadaniainfo Follow

#TerremotoEcuador | Reporte
#DesaparecidosEc 58, rescatadas 113
#LutoNacional #Colombia #AyudaEcuador

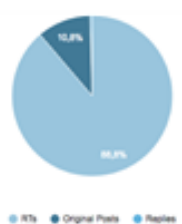
Presidencia Ecuador @Presidencia_Ec Seguir

¿Con qué podemos contribuir para ayudar a nuestros hermanos? #EcuadorListoYSolidario

Inclusión Ecuador @InclusionEc
#EcuadorListoYSolidario, conoce puntos de donaciones a nivel nacional: inclusion.gob.ec/campana-solida... #SismoEcuador

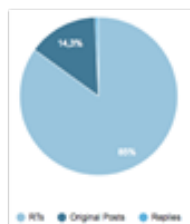
RETWEETS 423 ME GUSTA 201

#SismoEcuador



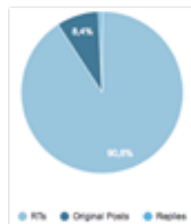
Prints: 13,388,887

#TerremotoEcuador



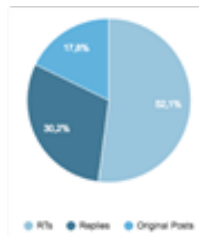
Prints: 17,229,626

#EcuadorListoYSolidario



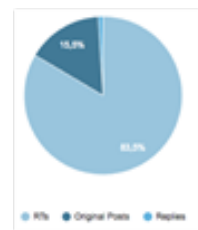
Prints: 575,106,386

#FuerzaEcuador



Prints: 10,346,740

#EcuadorALevantarse



Prints: 9,749,430

Facebook was also used to ask for help. One man used it to request help for his injured daughters. The girls, along with his wife, were rescued by a helicopter 8 hours later. Another woman was grateful because, as a result of Twitter messages, she was able to contact her father after posting a picture of him. He was at a Red Cross center.

Additionally, social networks assisted in asking for humanitarian aid and displaying professional psychological telephone support lines. They also served as a window for citizens to report infrastructural damages.

In a sea of requests for assistance, some more experienced Tweeters resent petitions to the Minister of Interior, José Serrano. For example, on behalf of a hospital that needed helicopters to transport the wounded.

Skype is another ideal way of announcing that we are safe, but, in solidarity, we should minimize its use given its large data consumption. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that the company enabled a free calling service. Other tools of great value in these situations used to locate missing family were:

“Communication is a strategic value. Authorities should guarantee a constant supply of data with certain information”

Google crisis response (through person finder, already used in Japan), Twitter alerts, Red Cross' Family Links and the International Red Cross' search engine for missing people.

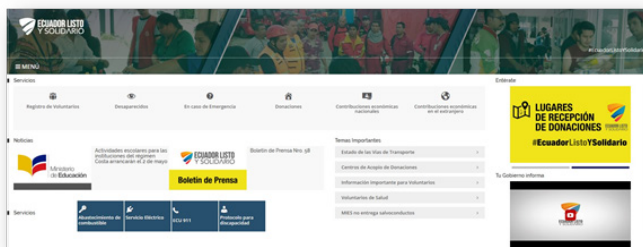
We should also highlight the safety check tool that Facebook has installed to let our friends know we are safe. Also, AT&T facilitated the communication between users in the U.S. and their family and friends in Ecuador. Through Twitter, the Ecuadorian government used another platform to help locate those missing. More than 1,800 people registered on the site.

The Government also used social networks to enable citizens to participate as volunteers on the account @VoluntarioEC and register through a website.

There is no doubt that in situations like these, technological companies are usually the first to help, a solidarity that should permeate the CSR actions of those companies in the affected areas in order to give back to society part of what they get through operating licenses. In this regard, a proper use of communication by companies in this situation can be summarized as follows:

- Align themselves with public policies of civil protection.
- Assist in spreading administrations' aid messages and point out reliable sources.
- Make their digital communication assets available to the administration in order to help spread civil protection messages.
- Help disseminate assistance and solidarity campaigns.
- Define actions of solidarity and aid that are related to the "core" activity of the company (it is better to design these in times of peace).
- Employee involvement in solidarity actions.
- It is necessary to articulate internal communication channels for these situations.
- Design a strategy to support those employees and family members who have been affected by a natural phenomenon of these characteristics.
- Support in recovery actions of social character.
- Show and prove that solidarity and moral values are part of the mission statement of the company.

There are several companies that reacted like this on their social network accounts and collaborated directly, through the municipality of Quito and the national government, in both the recollection of food and supplies, and in releasing messages about how to stay safe and what to donate.



In summary, here is our advice in catastrophe situations:

- Provide assistance at established locations.
- Avoid saturating communications with voice calls or video conferences.
- If mobile phones or ADSL work, communicate through SMS, Twitter or Facebook.
- Do not saturate communication channels by sending photos and videos.
- A battery powered radio continues to be the best method to obtain information.
- Authorities should quickly release an information number.

- Given communication problems, the authorities must place posters and distribute flyers with basic information.
- It is recommended to install different information stands in strategic places to assist those who have been affected.
- Communication is a strategic value. Authorities should guarantee a constant supply of data with certain information.
- Fakes should not be shared on the networks. Cite and verify official sources. If you have doubts consult with them or with VOST teams of emergency digital volunteers. In Ecuador the account @VOSTecador began operating after the earthquake. Like in many other catastrophes, this one was also full of rumors.

All of this shows that Ecuadorian society is completely involved in social media, which in this case has been of great help to deal with the catastrophe that took place in our country.





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