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By Karen Freberg, WVU [Integrated Marketing Communications program](#) Instructor

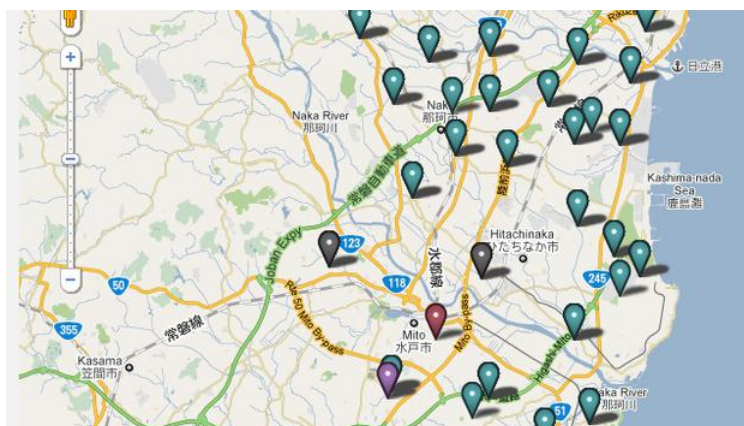
Abstract:

WVU Integrated Marketing Communications instructor Karen Freberg addresses the integration of crowdsourcing with social media and how that can be used by PR professionals in crisis communications situations. From the Haiti Earthquake back in 2010 to the latest incident in Japan with the tsunami and earthquake, crowdsourcing geolocation applications and sites are a current tool that is being used to share information in real-time and based on location.

Geolocation & Crisis Communication: Integration of Crowdsourcing with Social Media

Understanding in real-time the impact of health crises and potential pandemics are a growing concern not only for health professionals, but also for crisis communicators in order to make sure that they are on top with not only what to state in their key messages to the affected audiences, but also how to best be transparent with the information. New emerging technologies and platforms like social media have created a dynamic, energetic, and evolving environment where information is expected to be accessed immediately as well as in any location on the move.

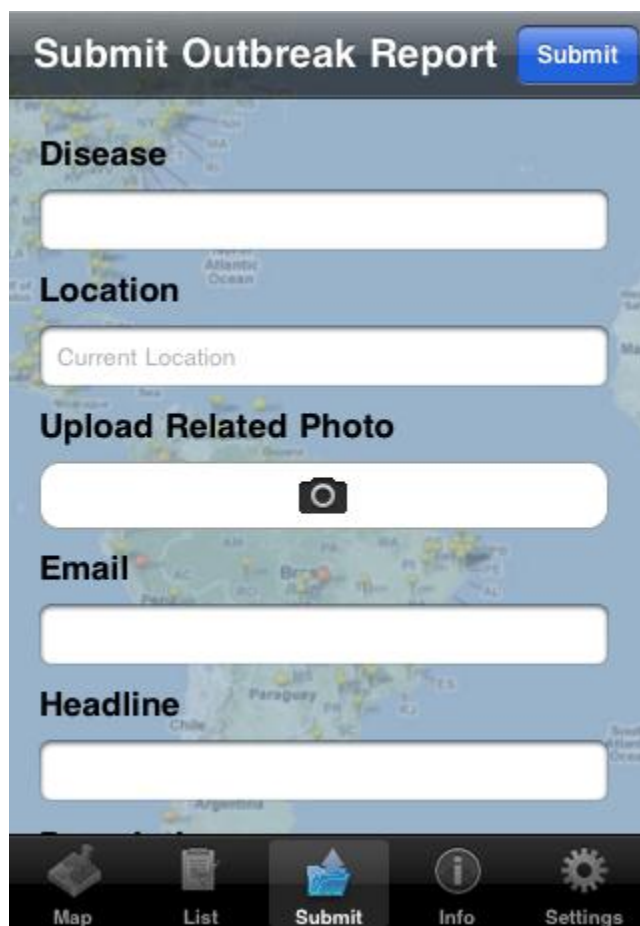
Information is also expected to come in various forms like updates via Twitter, visuals such as YouTube videos and pictures from Flickr, to in-depth commentary and analysis of scientific information via blogs. The expectation to be present on multiple platforms with consistent, reliable, trustworthy, and confirmed information is as great as it has ever been before. However, this is just the beginning. Crowdsourcing information where it is not only based on location and time, but having people have the opportunity to share this information with others in one centralized location is becoming an expectation and current practice in social media and crisis communication circles. From the Haiti Earthquake back in 2010 to the latest incident in Japan with the tsunami and earthquake, crowdsourcing geolocation applications and sites are a current tool that is being used to share information in real-time and based on location.



Crowdsourcing Map from RDTN.org of Japan & Radiation

There are of course many risks and challenges to this new technology. First, the question arises if these individuals on the ground have the training in communicating effectively during a crisis? This question can have many answers – however, one benefit to this is that many hands make light work – and the issue of having a voice heard during a crisis is easier to come through with this new technology and creating this perception of transparency. However, the risk of having multiple voices that generates “noise” that is not relevant to the crisis is a concern as well – in addition to the risks of reputation terrorists trying to spread false rumors and unconfirmed information should definitely be noted.

One of the benefits of implementing crowdsourcing technology into social media and crisis communication practices is that it is a way to communicate to a global audience about potential issues and situations that professionals and agencies can take a note of as early warning signs in order to make the necessary precautions. One site that is getting a lot of attention is HealthMap, where it is a real-time, crowdsourcing map sharing information about current and potential health issues that are happening around the world. It is not only a site that people can use, but it is also available in an app format – which allows another benefit of having access to this information through your mobile devices such as tablets and smartphones. It allows you to search for alerts and even contribute to an outbreak in a particular location.



The image shows a mobile application interface for submitting an outbreak report. The form is titled "Submit Outbreak Report" and includes a blue "Submit" button in the top right corner. The form fields are as follows:

- Disease:** A text input field.
- Location:** A text input field with the placeholder text "Current Location".
- Upload Related Photo:** A text input field with a camera icon in the center.
- Email:** A text input field.
- Headline:** A text input field.

At the bottom of the screen is a navigation bar with five icons and labels: "Map", "List", "Submit" (highlighted with a blue background), "Info", and "Settings". The background of the form is a map of the world.

Again, what we are seeing in terms of current trends is that social media and other forms of technology continue to adapt and evolve. What crisis communication professionals and researchers need to do is to continue educating themselves with the technology, figure out what are the benefits and challenges of the technology for their current practices in their industry and profession, and determine what would be the best strategies in implementing it effectively immediately and in the future.