Introduction

In May 2016, 90,000 residents of Fort McMurray, Alberta fled their homes, as a wildfire burned out of control. The Fort McMurray wildfire activated the largest charitable response in Canadian Red Cross post-war history. What role did social media play?

In disaster management and relief, social media differs in its use and impact, compared to traditional media. Social media can be used to identify victims from one’s social network, acquire news directly from victims, circulate requests for help, express care and recognize help.

Methods

• Most popular tweets demonstrate themes of care, concern and helping, i.e., Canadian Red Cross thanking Selena Gomez for donating concert proceeds.

• Using social media correlates with levels of care and concern for those affected and likelihood of helping, controlling for demographics and other factors.

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<th>Care</th>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Help</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow wildfire on social media</td>
<td>$B = 0.13$</td>
<td>$B = 0.16$</td>
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Findings

• Mixed method approach: 1) An analysis of tweets using one of four hashtags: #FortMac, #ymm, #AlbertaStrong, and #FortMcMurray.

2) A random digit dialing survey of Albertans gathered two months after the 2016 wildfire. 29% of respondents (n=1208) participated in some effort to help (volunteering or donating) those displaced by or fighting the wildfire.

Discussion

Our research demonstrates how people express caring through social media and how social media use affects caring and helping behavior. When a tweet goes viral, it has the power to create real caring acts - which is vital and impactful in times of disaster. As the global climate changes, our vulnerabilities to such disasters increase. Social media will be important for disaster management and recovery.

Does Compassion Go Viral? Social Media, Caring, and the Fort McMurray Wildfire

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