

Verifying social media in a crisis

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Social media, and Facebook and Twitter in particular, are increasingly being turned to in times of crisis.

They provide an up-to-date stream of [information](#) from authorities, such as police or councils, as well as eyewitness accounts from members of the public.

But how is that information verified? How do individuals following a Twitter hashtag for a crisis know that the information is true? How can they tell an accurate report from someone on the ground from rumour or misinformation? And how can misinformation be corrected?

These are some of the issues being dealt with at a free forum in Brisbane tonight (Tuesday 15 Oct) night.

The forum, '[Trust, but Verify: Social Media in Crisis Communication](#)' is being hosted by the new Centre for Emergency and Disaster Management at QUT.

Speakers include top researchers in the field including social media expert Associate Professor Axel Bruns and Dr Amisha Mehta from QUT's Business School and Assistant Commissioner Paul Stewart from the Queensland Police Service.

Associate Professor Bruns said there was a lot of exploration going on in relation to automated detection.

"We are really trying to build systems that pick up on the early signs of crisis-related social media and verify them so they can be fed to emergency services.

"We have a specific research project underway to work out how to evaluate individual tweets for their importance during a crisis.

"Twitter is incredibly powerful in times of crisis. For example, a tweet about an earthquake tremor can travel more quickly than the tremor itself."

Dr Mehta said she was looking at how organisations including councils could communicate to build trust in times of crisis and following such events.

"While social media has become the go-to channel during disasters, the very nature of the event is uncertain, which can challenge people's expectations of the quality of information being provided," Dr Mehta said.

"For example when the Burnett River at Bundaberg was rising, the predicted flood levels changed a number of times in one day, making it difficult for the local council to provide an accurate list of streets expected to be inundated.

"During disasters, organisations should view [social media](#) posts organically and incorporate messages about potential changes to instructions or impact areas. They need to set expectations about the uncertainty of the event."

Provided by Queensland University of Technology

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