

Cross-disciplinary collaborations enhance security and safety

August 21 2015, by David Bradley

Security and safety could be improved if researchers from very disparate disciplines – humanities, computer science and politics – were to work together, according to research described in the International Journal of Emergency Management. Moreover, such coordinated efforts online would improve crisis management during natural disasters, terrorist attack or cyber warfare.

Jean-Luc Wybo and colleagues explain how social media and online [social networking](#) technologies have emerged as powerful tools to exchange information among a large variety of players, including the public, authorities, companies and journalists. They suggest that both security and safety involve detection of problems, and the employment of efficient procedures and plans to reduce or remove threats and to protect people and assets at risk.

The team has reviewed examples of how online social networking is used during emergencies and crises and investigated how relevant and useful information is extracted in an effort to support the response. They suggest that the security forces, the [emergency services](#) and those fighting cybercrime could all benefit more from the integration of social media into their organisations. In their paper, the researchers also reveal the technical limitations of social media and how it can be abused.

Whether earthquake, tsunami, rail disaster or suicide bombing. From Haiti to Mumbai, from the Brooklyn River to Boston, through the Arab Spring and most recently the Erawan Shrine in Bangkok, social media

sites such as Twitter and Facebook have revealed the first images and video footage of events. They can offer a way for people to communicate when conventional channels are blocked either deliberately or through infrastructure collapse. The researchers describe how the use of social media during emergencies and disasters can be classified broadly into two categories: a passive use for the dissemination of information and to receive feedback from users and a systematic usage through which emergency communications can be carried out, warnings issued, activity monitored and damage assessed.

With more than 3 billion people estimated to now have internet access, around 1.5 billion active Facebook users and more than 300 million Twitter users, there is great potential for improving communications and responses during crises. "Providing threatened populations with early warnings is a government's mission for which [social media](#) should provide a strong support," the team reports. Social media can act as both the monitoring tools and the alert system during crises. The skills and techniques of computer, social, and political science, should now be brought together to policymakers, governments, emergency responders and the public improved knowledge of how these tools might best be used for all our benefit.

More information: "Impact of social media in security and crisis management: a review." *International Journal of Emergency Management (IJEM)*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2015 [DOI: 10.1504/IJEM.2015.071045](https://doi.org/10.1504/IJEM.2015.071045)

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