



## Medicine, Nursing and Health Sciences

### Community empowerment and trust: Social media use during the Hazelwood coalmine fire

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# In an emergency, social media are used:

- To seek, share, gather and integrate information
- To criticise governments and individuals
- To propose and coordinate action
- To express emotion and provide emotional support
- To try to make sense of or interpret the event



Kulemeka (2014)











# All three sites - combined themes



# Information and trust

- Creating and sustaining trust between official organisations, the news media and the public is crucial for developing effective partnerships during an emergency.
- While communities expect emergency communications to come from the appropriate authorities, that information is undermined, along with trust in the organisation, if the information received is contradictory.
- During a crisis, social media occupy an important space in communities by filling the gap between face-to-face communication and mass media.
- Yet information provided via social media is not subject to the forms of gatekeeping which exist in professional mainstream media and can therefore be inaccurate. This can further complicate an already confusing information space.

# Community empowerment and engagement

- Social media sites can have positive and negative impacts on a community's relations with one another and with the authorities responding to the crisis.
- The relative intimacy of social media means individuals may feel more comfortable speaking in that forum rather than in the mainstream media.
- However, disagreements did occur over who could speak for the community, and whose experiences were 'real', 'true' and representative.
- Nonetheless, social media can enable communities to take on important roles themselves during and after a disaster, such as advocacy and information sharing.



# Summary of findings

- Social media can enable a community to express their perceptions of a disaster and how effectively it is being managed.
- Social media can fill an information gap, but can confuse rather than inform.
- Social media can empower communities.
- Positive impacts depend on:
  - the development of a relation of trust within the group participating in the social media site, and with the wider community;
  - provision of accurate, trustworthy information;
  - follow-up action which gains results; and
  - offline relationships and partnership building among key participants.

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