Weather the Twitter Storm
Social Media as a Disaster Response Tool for Libraries During Hurricane Sandy
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Research Question
What was the role of social media for public library services in response to Hurricane Sandy?

Introduction
Hurricane Sandy was the deadliest storm of 2012, resulting in federal agencies using social media for the first time in coordinating and implementing disaster response (Virtual Social Media Working Group & DHS First Responders Group, 2013). As community-based service providers, many public libraries also responded to the hurricane by sharing available resources and services with patrons. However, few studies examine the use of social media as a library tool to support their patrons and the community in disaster response.

This study explores the role of social media and its impact on public library services in response to Hurricane Sandy as a measure of libraries using digital mediums to support their communities.

Methods
- Case study of three public libraries’ Twitter activity during and immediately after Hurricane Sandy
- Collected individual tweets from each Twitter account published during the date range of interest (October 29th–November 2nd, 2012)
- Tweets categorized by types of content and characteristics

Results
- Evidence of situation monitoring and promoting social cohesion via social media
- Little evidence of social media integrated into disaster response protocols
- Possible reasons: reactionary response, differences in institutional priorities, lack of staff training
- Limitation: Twitter as a data source—does it produce comprehensive results?

Libraries and Disasters
- Natural disaster → loss of power and telecommunication resources → increased community need for information and access (Bishop & Veil, 2013)
- Libraries provide free/low-cost resources, access to credible information, and outreach services
- FEMA qualified public libraries as sites to receive emergency relocation funds—once limited to first responders, hospitals, utilities, and schools (Kelley 2011)
- Northeastern public libraries provided shelter, free Internet and electricity, activities, and served as donation centers for their surrounding communities
- Actions well documented in news and professional publications

Social Media Benefits And Library Twitter Content
- Monitors a situation
  - Hurricane information
  - Library event/service related to hurricane
  - Replies
- Integrates social media into emergency plans
  - Library policies
  - Library status
  - Non-library event/service related to hurricane
- Creates social cohesion and promotes therapeutic initiatives
  - Library event/service related to hurricane
  - Library event/service NOT related to hurricane
  - Non-library event/service related to hurricane
  - Replies
  - Social interactions

Future Steps
- Recommendations: improve relationships with first responders, further develop social media policies, staff training
- Closer examinations of more recent disaster responses, i.e. Hurricane Harvey and Maria
- Critical analysis of public library disaster policies and social media plans

Cited Sources