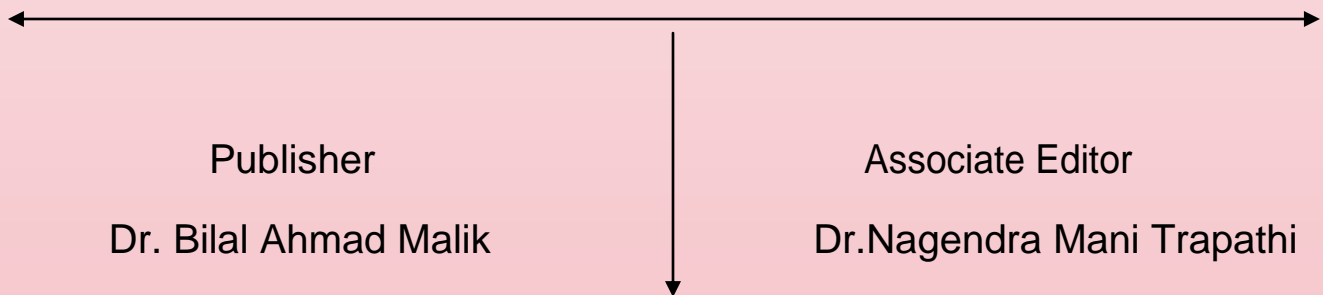


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ROLE OF MEDIA IN DISASTER RISK REDUCTION IN INDIA

PATIL AMOL ASHOK KUMAR*

*Asst. Professor, Dept. of Sociology, Smt. C. B. Shah Mahila, Mahavidyalaya, Sangli-416416.

ABSTRACT:

Disaster is a sudden, calamitous event bringing great damage, loss, and destruction and devastation to life and property. This influences the mental, socio-economic, political and cultural state of the affected area. It is possible to reduce the adverse impacts of disasters and avoid damage to property and infrastructure in the region and save many lives by providing better and effective information, awareness and communication to all the stakeholders involved. The Media (both electronic and print) thus plays a very important role in disaster risk reduction as it also plays a vital role in educating the public about disasters, warning of hazards, gathering and transmitting information about affected areas and alerting government officials and other stakeholders, relief organizations, and the general public to the specific needs about disaster preparedness, response and relief. In this context the present study aimed at getting sociological evidences with respect to "Role of Media in Disaster Risk Reduction in India".

Key Words: Media, Disaster, Environment, Communication.

INTRODUCTION

India has experienced severe disasters in the past. In view of its high vulnerability to various types of hazards, the India has become one of the most disaster prone regions in the world. Disaster is a sudden, calamitous event bringing great damage, loss, and destruction and devastation to life and property. The damage caused by disasters is immeasurable and varies with the geographical location, climate and the type of the earth surface/degree of vulnerability. This influences the mental, socio-economic, political and cultural state of the affected area.

Generally, disaster has the following effects in the concerned areas:

1. It completely disrupts the normal day to day life

2. It negatively influences the emergency systems
3. Normal needs and processes like food, shelter, health, etc. are affected and deteriorate depending on the intensity and severity of the disaster.

It may also be termed as “a serious disruption of the functioning of society, causing widespread human, material or environmental losses which exceed the ability of the affected society to cope using its own resources.”

Thus, a disaster may have the following main features:

- Unpredictability
- Unfamiliarity
- Speed
- Urgency
- Uncertainty
- Threat

In simple terms we can define disaster as a hazard causing heavy loss to life, property and livelihood. When we talk of disaster we assume that a catastrophe has occurred in ways that the natural laws of nature have been violated or disrupted. There is disarray, confusion and panic. The dictionary defines disaster as: An occurrence causing widespread destruction and distress. A grave misfortune; a total failure; an evil influence of a celestial body; a calamity of great destruction; Hardships and loss of life; Grief; and tragic outcome with irreparable loss. One definition is, “situations characterized by surprise, high threats to important values, and a short decision time” Another goes as follows: - “A disruption that physically affects a system as a whole and threatens its basic assumptions, its subjective sense of self, and its existence core”. In industry or production plants they define disaster as: “An extraordinary event or series of events that adversely affect the integrity of the product the reputation or financial stability of the organization or health of the well-being of employees, community or the public at large. In the modern technology of satellite, disasters can be prevented, controlled and bad effects made manageable and minimized. We are no longer in the Stone Age where disaster should come as if we are helpless victims of God’s wrath.

TYPES OF DISASTER

Generally, disasters are of two types – **Natural** and **Manmade**. Based on the devastation, these are further classified into major/minor natural disaster and major/minor manmade disasters. Some of the disasters are listed below,

Major natural disasters:

- Flood
- Cyclone
- Drought
- Earthquake

Minor natural disasters:

- Cold wave
- Thunderstorms
- Heat waves
- Mud slides
- Storm

Major manmade disaster:

- Setting of fires
- Epidemic
- Deforestation
- Pollution due to prawn cultivation
- Chemical pollution.
- Wars

Minor manmade disaster:

- Road / train accidents, riots

- Food poisoning
- Industrial disaster/ crisis
- Environmental pollution

Environmental degradation is a result of the dynamic inters play of socio-economic, institutional and technological activities. Environmental changes may be driven by many factors including economic growth, population growth, urbanization, intensification of agriculture, rising energy use and transportation. Poverty still remains a problem at the root of several environmental problems.

It is possible to reduce the adverse impacts of disasters and avoid damage to property and infrastructure in the region and save many lives by providing better and effective information, awareness and communication to all the stakeholders involved. Timely mass media response about impending disasters can lead to appropriate individual and community action, which is the key to implementing effective disaster prevention strategies, providing relief and rescue operations including evacuation of people to safe areas. The Media (both electronic and print) thus plays a very important role in disaster risk reduction as it also plays a vital role in educating the public about disasters, warning of hazards, gathering and transmitting information about affected areas and alerting government officials and other stakeholders, relief organizations, and the general public to the specific needs about disaster preparedness, response and relief.

Media can play a significant role in creating awareness about disasters among common masses and thus reduce disaster risks. During disaster situations, Media should not only inform the public with timely and factual information but also advice the public about actions to be taken (e.g. evacuation, useful tips, techniques, do's and don'ts etc.) and also inform on actions being taken by authorities and aid groups, relief organizations. During an emergency, the media should be sensitive to the needs of the public in affected areas and should avoid misinforming and broadcasting unconfirmed reports that may lead to despair and panic. Reliable and timely information provided through the media can help people to overcome unnecessary fear and fatalism during and after an emergency. For the media to fill these roles most effectively, the government, the scientific and disaster mitigation organizations need to establish and strengthen working relationships with the media.



METHODOLOGY

The main objectives of the study are:

- 1) To study the role of media in public safety during disaster.
- 2) To study the benefits of media in generating public awareness about disaster risk reduction.
- 3) To recommend measures that can sustain media interests before and after disaster.

In order to achieve the objectives, the relevant material is collected from secondary sources and process of data analysis is discussed subsequently.

Environmental Issues in India

There are many environmental issues in India. Air pollution, water pollution, garbage, and pollution of the natural environment are all challenges for India. The situation was worse between 1947 through 1995. According to data collection and environment assessment studies of World Bank experts, between 1995 through 2010, India has made one of the fastest progresses in the world, in addressing its environmental issues and improving its environmental quality. Still, India has a long way to go to reach environmental quality similar to those enjoyed in developed economies. Pollution remains a major challenge and opportunity for India. Environmental issues are one of the primary causes of disease, health issues and long term livelihood impact for India.

Role of Media

We rely on newspapers and television to keep us informed. But the media play a vital role not only in the reporting of ongoing crises, but also at every stage of disaster management: from before a disaster strikes, through the heart of the crisis, and during the post-disaster recovery phase. The media can provide much needed impetus in risk mitigation and disaster preparedness in any society, in any country around the globe. Contributions made by the media can save lives and reduce economic losses to a considerable extent. To have such a lasting impact, however, the media need to appreciate their social responsibilities in disaster risk reduction.

Newspapers, radio, television and other media play an important role in creating awareness and disseminating information about natural hazards and disasters. The media can make a real difference in the way people think and act about disasters. Reporters, commentators, editors, broadcasters, and all members of the

media can do more than just inform and raise awareness about disasters. By exploring the root causes of disasters and their social dimensions, the media can help communities and countries understand what it is that makes them vulnerable, and what they can do to increase their capacities to cope with disasters.

The media is a powerful force that can influence policy change and, together with other development stakeholders, bridge the information gap between communities and governments. The dialogue created by the media between government and communities can help to shift the focus from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention. Working with journalists from The Guardian, Thompson Reuter's Alert Net, the BBC, Vietnam TV, and Tempo in Jakarta, UNISDR produced a guidebook for the media to learn more about disaster risk reduction issues.

The 190-page manual, "Disaster through a Different Lens," describes how climate change, environmental degradation, poverty and rapid urbanization contribute to expose more people to disasters, and discusses what media can do to convince more national and local governments to invest more in disaster risk reduction policies.

Making sense of the big data by processing and analyzing them has been one of the biggest revolutions of the century. One such achievement is the role social networking sites plays in society during a crisis. During such times Twitter and other social media networks provide an instant view of conditions on the ground.

Broadly social media is used in 4 ways during a disaster:

1. Sharing information and spreading awareness.
2. For relief operations: E.g.: building communities, volunteering etc.
3. For collecting funds
4. Monitoring and providing insights to the whole situation.

For example, during Hurricane Sandy there were 20m disaster-related tweets in a single week. In December 2012, when typhoon Pablo struck the Philippines, a taskforce was assigned to analyze Twitter activity and map relevant information. They had analyzed 20,000 tweets in about 10 hours; the data collected had later become the basis for the official UN crisis map. When Typhoon Haiyan struck Philippines, a surgeon from Iloilo posted a simple but urgent message on social media asking people to donate so that a medical team could be sent to Tacloban; within 24 hours she received more than 30,000 pounds. According to another report, twitter usage in

Japan shot up to 11,000 tweets per minute on the day of Fukushima quake in April 2011 from an average of 3000.

This shows how social media has changed its significance from being a medium of connecting friends and family to being a lifesaver.

Case Study on Disaster in Uttarakhand and Social Media:

In June 2013 when the Himalayan Tsunami struck Uttarakhand, India; it caused devastating flood and landslides. A number of relief operations began to restore normalcy in the state. One of them was online campaigns on social networking sites which were started to trace information of missing victims. Social media had shown a ray of hope to people who had given up all hopes of finding their dear ones.

People were able to post pictures or search or even provide information of someone they had information about. A Face book page called “Uttarakhand flood disaster 2013: information, help and relief” is one such example.

The Face book page, ‘Help Uttarakhand – 2013 floods’ has traced information of 50 people so far, according to the page moderator. Other Face book pages include Uttarakhand Disaster, Khoya Paya, etc. The Confederation of All India Traders (CAIT), had also started sending out details of the missing people on emails to government officials and journalists through which tracing of victims became easier.

Another initiative during the disaster was taken by the State government of Uttarakhand when they created a Face book Page called “Uttarakhand State Govt. Initiative- Operation Connect”, to connect missing people with their loved ones.

Twitter played a big role in finding out information about missing people. There were several hash tags created such as #RebuildUttarakhand, #Uttarakhandhelp, #Kedarnath, #Uttarakhand and #SaluteIndianArmy. People had been actively engaging and spreading awareness all across the world through which many families have been united as well.

Google had also made a personalized ‘Person finder’, a portal where people could type the name of the missing person and through the help of Google database it would provide information of the person. Using this

portal more than 150 disaster victims have been traced so far. Anyone could provide or receive information which had made it really convenient and helpful. Press agencies and other non-governmental agencies' contributions to the data had made it even stronger.

Even YouTube was flooded with the video posts of the disaster. Apart from publishing and broadcasting news, dedicated channels for the flood were also created e.g. Flooded Uttarakhand.

CONCLUSION

Media has emerged as a new way through which natural or man-made disasters are dealt with. In fact, today social media is being used for almost all activities be it directly or indirectly. It has become a must for every sphere, for brands, for celebs, politicians, everyone! With its proper usage one has been able to create an impact on the society. And use of social media during a disaster or emergency management is an entirely new outlook.

Not insignificant is the contribution the media can make in countering the damaging, exaggerated and negative reporting and propaganda in the foreign media on the occurrence of the disasters. This country has witnessed such phenomena in the past. A prompt presentation of the real state of affairs by our media including the news-agencies, and the correction of the misrepresentations by them will go a long way in dispelling the wrong impressions created abroad which may otherwise have adverse effect on the administration, the economy and the polity of the country.

On some occasions in the past the media fulfilled its duties in full measure while on other occasions it was found wanting. However, if the media has to discharge its role properly on such occasions, it is also necessary to have a complete cooperation between it and all governmental and non-governmental agencies. The extent of the co-ordination and co-operation between them determines the nature, the degree and the scale of the preparation to prevent and meet the disasters.

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