

ZiF-Research Group *Communicating Disaster***Closing Conference “Dealing with the Disasters of Others”**

26-28 January 2012

Presentation:***Digital Volunteerism: How Social Media Enables and Structures Collective Action during Disaster***

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Date & Time: Friday, 27 January 2012, 15:00

Location: Center for Interdisciplinary Research, Bielefeld, Germany; Room 222 “Plenarsaal”

Abstract:

Sociologists of disaster have long recognized that people will converge onto the scene of a disaster, often attempting to provide assistance to those affected or those responding. ICT and social media are now enabling a kind of digital convergence in the wake of crisis events. For example, hundreds of thousands of people around the world turned to Twitter in the wake of the 2010 Haiti Earthquake. This presentation begins by describing an empirical study of a group of those people who converged via Twitter in the early aftermath of the earthquake and then began to act as digital volunteers, self-organizing into an emergent digital response organization. I will give an accounting of some of these activities and discuss how features of the technical environment offered structure for self-organizing and collective action.

The Haiti earthquake precipitated and marked a turn towards digital volunteerism and recognition of the potential of social media-enabled collective action during crisis events. Crisis mapping efforts by OpenStreetMap and Ushahidi volunteers received a great deal of attention from the mainstream media and mixed, but generally positive feedback from the humanitarian response community. Emergent groups of digital volunteers formed networks that they would continue to leverage for future events, and some formalized their efforts as ongoing digital response organizations. Humanity Road is a virtual crisis response organization that connects volunteers from around the world, and works using a variety of social media platforms and other networked applications to help affected people by collecting, verifying and routing information during disasters. This presentation will describe some of Humanity Road’s work and again show how affordances of the tools they appropriate structure their activities and organization.

For further questions on the conference or the research group,
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