



## Real time use of social media during disasters

This discussion topic built upon the quantitative set of questions asked in the morning session, i.e. why social media messages originated by one entity may be trusted, or distrusted, more than those originated by others, with a specific emphasis on potential differences between messages from public authorities and messages from other private social media users. Here, participants in all groups described how they used Facebook or Twitter to receive, or exchange, information with friends and family members during earthquakes in Italy and/or recent terrorist attacks in the UK in “real-time” (G3-P9 - see source document for full reference). In particular, some older participants, whilst finding websites of public news media to be the most trustworthy, showed also the strongest positive attitude towards social media: “I had friends in the region quite close to Amatrice, who were staying in their summer houses, and we tried to gather news and participate in the situation. I then realised that social media today are real” (G8-P11). “Social media are very useful and very powerful tools” (G7-P5). “I would like to underline the fact that social media are very effective. I remember that when there was the fire in Fiumicino, at the terminal, various Facebook groups spread the message to stay at home rather than crowding the streets [...] Why this information came from private groups and not from public authorities? What we see on TV is not institutional, it’s journalism, it’s communication filtered by journalists [...] If there is a disaster, the information must be institutional” (G10-P5). The latter statement demonstrates a perception prevalent with many other participants where social media, though not substituting the need of timely information from public authorities, are seen to at least provide somewhat unfiltered information, and may be in some cases the only source of information at all: “Users’ updates and status updates, even though they are uncertified sources, they can be useful in disasters, for example with regard to villages being cut off by snow. Sometimes the official sources from there do not arrive. It doesn’t matter if reliable or not, sometimes these are the real source of information” (G4-P9). Similarly, a number of participants outlined that the Facebook safe message feature may be misused but, still, “it is better that it exists rather than it does not” (G2-P5). Generally, most critical voices came from the youngest discussion groups, pointing at the perceived high frequency of fake news at Facebook but, at the same time, describing their strategies to verify information received via social media: “When the earthquake happened I went on Twitter, to check trends. Can Twitter be trusted? I think so because you filter the news, you see if people talk about the same topic” (G1-Alessia); “Now you also have the live streaming on Instagram and Facebook. You can see what happened before and after a certain fact” (G1-P1). Interesting, in this context, is the role of pictures and videos which, rather than mere text, was seen to provide authentic information: “On thing is the image and one thing are the comments added [...] these images are real” (G8-P5). Additionally, the speed of information provided via social media – “On Facebook every two seconds you were updated: Montesacro, shake just happened... Flaminio, shake right at this moment... all areas of Rome communicated what was happening” (G9-P4) – creating a sense of authenticity and, thus, being “more truthful” (G9-P7).

**Applicable to:**

Stakeholders: [Open-mindedness](#), [Communication](#), [Attitudes toward the media](#), [Social networks](#)



Disaster Phases: [Response](#)

Types of Actors Concerned: [National civil protection body](#), [Local authorities](#), [Non-active citizens](#), [Active citizens](#), [Media](#), [Government](#), [Red Cross](#), [NGOs](#), [Military](#), [Law enforcement agencies](#)

Hazards: [Natural hazards](#), [Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations](#), [Man-made intentional hazards](#)

**Recommendations:**

- [Inform citizens about the risk they may face and about possible actions and measures, they can take to reduce vulnerability and better prepare themselves](#)
- [Use cultural factors to improve the effectiveness of disaster communication](#)

## Source

[Deliverable D5.5 "Report on citizens' reactions and opinions: Citizen Summit 3 \(Italy\)" \(page 24\)](#)

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