Religion and technology use in disaster situations

During a disaster, religious authorities or religiously-motivated NGOs can be more efficient than regular emergency managers as they are trusted and culturally aware of the needs of local populations (Reale 2010). In Muslim-majority areas such as Afghanistan, aid coming from Western actors are perceived by some people as suspicious and linked to the political agendas of Western power (De Cordier 2009). No clear results have been found on how technology adoption during a disaster would be related to religion, but one could suppose that in this context of suspicion in certain areas, if a technology is clearly associated to another religion or an untrusted political force it would not be used. More research on this topic is necessary. Nevertheless, there is some evidence that religion impacts the way people use a technology during and in the aftermath of a disaster. Through the EMSC tools, eyewitnesses who just felt an earthquake can leave a comment and then share what they experienced. A qualitative analysis reveals that in Muslim countries people tend to be more inclined to leave a comment about God. For instance, after an M5.2 earthquake in Algeria on May 2016, 15% of the comments left on EMSC mobile application LastQuake by the eyewitnesses mentioned God. These comments vary from praises to God, phrases such as "Allah Yostor" (meaning May God protects us) or even a connection between the quake and religious beliefs: "Hamdoullah, it was strong, we all woke up. Stop doing bad things and Allah will spare us Inchallah". These comments were compared to a set of earthquakes of the same magnitudes in different areas where the mobile application is also used, but which are not characterized by their strong Muslim culture; results showed that god was much less mentioned and people used mainly the app to comment about what they felt. For instance, after a M5.2 quake in Greece in November 2014, no comments mentioning God were found, even though 79% of the Greeks are religious (European Commission 2010). In Romania, where 92% of people believe in a God (European Commission 2010), citizens were reported by the local press to hope for God's protection from earthquakes after the M5.7 earthquake on 23 September 2016. However, for this earthquake, only 1% of LastQuake users who reported that they felt the earthquake mentioned God. More systematic research about this use is necessary, but preliminary results suggest that religious backgrounds do influence the way people use technology after an earthquake; however, they do not prevent them from adopting and using the technology. No specific research was found on how religious-oriented groups on social media react during a disaster. However these online communities could be of great help to respond to a disaster as they are influential and aware of cultural needs in the aftermath of a disaster.

Note: See source document for full reference.

Applicable to:

Stakeholders: Norms/values, Customs/traditions/rituals
Disaster Phases: Response
Types of Actors Concerned: Non-active citizens
Hazards: Natural hazards, Man-made non-intentional hazards or emergency situations, Man-made intentional hazards

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Recommendations:

- Develop guidelines for disaster practitioners that take into consideration the different needs of and approaches to different ethnical groups

Source

Deliverable D3.1 "Cultural factors and technologies" (page 51)

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