# Understanding the Use of Social Media in The Disaster Context – A Tropical Cyclone Debbie Case Study

## Abstract

While traditional modes of communication and media remain integral to contemporary disaster management, it is now well recognised that web-based technologies and social media can facilitate the rapid dissemination of critical information in a disaster context. Consequently, there has been increasing government and agency interest regarding the opportunities and utility of such resources to provide effective, accurate and timely public information. Many of these agencies and organisations have adopted an active web and social media presence, however there is still limited research based in understanding how individuals use and perceive this web-based content during an extreme event.

An online survey of Facebook users (n=4196) conducted around the Tropical Cyclone Debbie event in March 2017, provides direct insight into where respondents sourced relevant risk and hazard information, how they used and shared it on social media, and how they perceived the information accessed in terms of trust and credibility. Open-ended responses further highlight preferred communication styles and strategies. While pervasive concerns regarding the proliferation of conflicting, misleading and inaccurate information from individuals and unofficial sources on social media appear somewhat justified in this context, the general sentiment from respondents was that Facebook provided direct, easy, and on-demand access to a range of information sources to assist informed decision-making. Such evidenced based research supports the value of an official online media presence and recommends popular strategies to develop and enhance exiting communication capacities.

3 KEY LEARNING POINTS
1. Social media has become a key resource for the public to access and share information in disaster events in Australia.
2. Despite the level of public trust in official information sources most people supplement this content with information from multiple informal sources online.
3. Effective online risk and hazard communication should be timely, easily accessible, understandable, locally relevant, credible, accurate and responsive to questions

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