

# Social Media for Disaster Management in Tribal Communities of Kerala: A Case Study of Kolathara Adivasi Village

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## Abstract

Kerala has been facing floods for the last two years. The media, government, and citizens collaborate to address this situation. Voluntary initiatives and action group-oriented movements play a protuberant role in relief activities. Social media helped a lot in mobilizing resources and social support. The government used social media as an instrument to reach out to cases. Many young people of Kerala worked on social media, verifying information and passing it to the rescue team during the floods. The current research is a case study of the flood relief activities held at the tribal village Kolathara near Ambalavayal, Wayanad. Tribes from the Paniya group inhabited the village and endured poor economic and social conditions. Many of the families lived in the houses built by the government after the previous year's floods. Focus group discussions and intense interviews were conducted among the people, including opinion leaders of the community. Mobile phones and social media are used vastly in the village, which immensely helped during the floods. The study reveals the use of social media for emergency responses, facilitating rehabilitation, crowdfunding, and relief activities in the remote tribal communities of Kerala. The study explores new trajectories by proclaiming that the planned use of social media can efficiently aid disaster management.

## Keywords

Social Media, Tribal Communities, Disaster Management, Paniya Group, Kerala Floods

## Introduction

Natural disasters are the consequences of natural hazards. It could be a flood, a tornado, a hurricane, a volcanic eruption, an earthquake, a heat wave, or a landslide. Recent years have witnessed a series of natural disasters around the world. Numerous regions of the world are struck by tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, and tornadoes, which cause severe economic and resource damage. Kerala had the worst flood in nearly a century on August

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2018. It secluded people in different areas of the state, which was not equipped to handle this massive damage to life and infrastructure.

The public authority affirmed 387 passings. The state government has assessed the starter misfortune at Rs 20,000 crore, which is around 15% of the state's Gross domestic product gauge for 2018-19. According to Mind Evaluations, the flooding has influenced multiple million individuals in the state. In August alone, individuals would lose compensation worth Rs 4,000 crore. More than 1,000,000 individuals were protected in help camps across the state. Harmed street framework generously influenced rapid alleviation and modifying activities.

Due to these occurrences, extended communication was required for people to interact with their loved ones in the disaster zone and to look for information regarding food, shelter, and conveyance. Social media has assumed a crucial part in spreading facts about these fiascos by permitting individuals to share data and request help. Social media are likewise becoming essential to recovery endeavours after crises and reconstructing basics.

The extensive scope of informal organizations allows individuals recovering from catastrophes to quickly interface with critical assets. There are many gatherings in the most famous long-range interpersonal communication locales, allowing people allied with diverse parts of disaster mindfulness and willingness to interface, mention, and share information in explicit arenas. The point of the paper is to break down the opportunities for utilizing web-based mass media in the administration of catastrophic events and recommend essential rules for sorting out interchanges and information trade between the members on such occasions.

The traditional modes of communication were ineffective during the flooding as telephone and mobile networks failed. This lacuna made it challenging to deal with requests for help and coordinate rescue efforts. At this point, people across the world turned to volunteers with social media platforms and instantly geared up rescue and relief operations.

## **Review of Literature**

Communication is functional in all three administration phases: arranging, reaction, and recuperation (Houston et al., 2015). Alternatively, as Coombs

(2010) calls them, the pre-emergency stage, the emergency reaction, and the post-emergency stage. Communication inside the primary stage plans to forestall or set up; the subsequent one tends to an emergency and the third concern follow-up activity. Haddow, G. what is more, Haddow (2014) adds another stage. They discourse moderation, readiness, reaction, and recuperation.

While relief incorporates the activities taken to decrease the effect of possible fiascos, later on, readiness is about the activities engaged when a calamity is unavoidably approaching. Reaction alludes to the quick responses to the repercussions of a calamity and incorporates activities engaged in saving lives, assets, and requests. Recuperation is the last stage and incorporates all plans to return to ordinariness (Haddow, G. and Haddow, 2014). As needs be, Fiasco Communication incorporates both emergency and hazard Communication (Houston et al., 2015).

The increment in the degrees of precipitation in Kerala causes seriousness in floods. Kerala State Calamity, the executives' Plan Profile clarifies that recovering water bodies and wetlands increases the prospects of a flood. Right around 15 level of the all-out state is inclined to floods.

The crisis organizations act essentially and decrease the dangers of emergencies with the assistance of the data from various wellsprings of web-based media. Crisis occasions are told and tended to with the assistance of long-range informal communication stages. The input from the public is appropriately thought about before aiding them (Alexander, 2014).

Renn (2010) distinguishes four significant elements of hazard Communication: managing public insight, changing the singular conduct, acquiring trust and believability, and including partners in the Communication cycle. While the fundamental point is to ensure the partners, auxiliary objectives, such as securing reputational and monetary resources, assume extra generous parts (Coombs, 2010). The standing of an association can even be improved since a regularly expected incidental effect is to build up open trust in the capacity of an association (Carroll, 2013). Calamity Communication's viability may have positive and negative effects in the aftermath of the debacle. (Houston et al., 2015). Its turn of events and development ought to be exceptionally focused on by all partners included.

Gao et al. (2011) called attention to clients via online media stages who generally react very quickly to crises by posting data about those crises in informal organizations. Crisis offices could utilize that data to get convenient knowledge about a specific circumstance. This opportune obtaining of data is, without a doubt, essential, mainly because, in those circumstances, the absence of practicality could bring unsuitably severe and hazardous results.

### **Objectives and Methodology**

The study's main objective is to give a brief account of the role of social media during the floods at the tribal settlements in Kerala. The study follows a qualitative case study. Qualitative research allows researchers to recognize the involvements of individuals and how people concept and understand their worlds (Merriam, 2009). According to Merriam (2009), "Engaging in systematic inquiry about your practice – doing research – involves choosing a study design that corresponds with your question; you should also consider whether the design is a comfortable match with your worldview, personality, and skills."

The study was conducted in Kolathara Adivasi village of Panamaram 19th ward. The village is situated in the middle of Wayanad and establishes approximately 300 people belonging to the Paniya Tribal sect. The Paniya community is the most significant single Scheduled Tribe in Kerala. They are seen in 25 panchayats, three municipalities in Wayanad district, the neighbouring Karnataka, and the Nilgiris district of Tamil Nadu. They speak a language of their own initiated by the South Dravidian family, closely related to Malayalam, with borrowings from Kannada and Tamil.

The study uses two methods: focus group discussion and intensive interview. A group of eight people, four female and four male residents of Kolathaara Adivasi village, were selected for the discussion. The Ward member and a volunteer from relief actions were interviewed.

### **Analysis**

Kolathara tribal village has been familiar with floods for an extended time. Water bodies surround the place and must cope with the environmental issues during monsoons in Kerala. 2018 and 2019 were two years when the entire state confronted floods and had a considerable loss. Kolathara had to face the worst issues during that period.

The period of the flood is divided into three phases to examine the process.

*Phase – 1*

*Planning*

When many places reported heavy rain and floods, there were warning from the part of officials in the village. The main hardship was convincing people to evacuate houses. Traditional door-to-door communication was used for this. Volunteers aged 15 to 25 were identified and split into five groups. They went to each house and personally communicated.

Government officials gave speeches at junctions regarding the importance of moving to safe positions. Vehicle announcements played a prominent role in the phase. People who moved to camps accompanied the group in this process. The health and safety of cattle were addressed separately. Traditional communication methods played an essential role in this phase.

Most households in the village had televisions and cable connections, but only a few used them to obtain news about floods. The inability to comprehend the language and lack of interest were contributing factors. Radio stations available in the location gave important news and updates which were of the least use to the people in the village.

Even though social media helps provide efficient data about a crisis and how hands-on steps must be taken in tribal settlements in the initial stages of the floods. One house member was involved with social media; this had little use in the planning stage. The volunteers used the videos and photographs spread through social media while persuading people to move from houses to safe camps.

In Kolathara, people aged 18 to 35 were social media users and had a minor role in the family's decision-making process. This phenomenon was one of the reasons wherefore social media was not used in the persuasion and planning phases.

*Phase – 2*

*Response*

There are seventy families in the settlement. Once the rain worsened, the families started evacuating houses as per the initiatives from the first stage.

The ward member, an educated government employee, and an adult lady from the tribal group acted as opinion leaders. Electronic media were utilized. *Asianet News* and *Mathrubhumi News* were active in the coverage of the evacuation process.

Nine families were isolated and rescued with the fire force's help, which was given on Facebook live by an employee in the fire team. Radio and other media had significantly less role in the phase. Mobile phones were used to communicate with officials and political leaders. Interpersonal communication had a significant role in the whole process. Some individuals used social media in the settlement.

### *Phase – 3*

#### *Recovery*

The major crisis faced by the settlement was rebuilding lives after the floods. The process involved materialistic, emotional, and financial rebuilding. During the past floods, 10000/- was issued immediately by the government to each household, making the process easy. The lack of this fund created a dilemma even among the village officials.

Eight groups came to the village with blankets and food kits. Each family received a steel cot from a private group. Another team provided tarpaulin and ropes. Clothes and stationery kits were also provided. This process significantly contributed to the reconstruction of life in Kolathara village. The failure of traditional methods and the immediate entry of a comparatively new and unfamiliar arena of communication by the tribal society were witnessed in this phase.

### **Conclusion**

Social media is used by significantly fewer people in the tribal village but still greatly impacts events and happenings. It helps in connecting people across geographic boundaries and zones through collaborative platforms. Even in the remote villages of Kolathara, with the advent of smartphones, informing people and mobilizing are becoming more accessible and faster.

The effect of social media during the flood in a society can be broadly divided into three phases, Planning, Reacting, and Recovery. This phenomenon is different in the case of the tribal village Kolathara. Social

media does not directly impact people, yet the first two phases only matter a little in the village.

During the initial stage, direct door-to-door interpersonal communication effectively educated the people about the flood, passed related information regarding handling cattle and household accessories, and persuaded them to move to relief camps nearby. In the second stage, it was electronic media that was actively involved. The media gave the shifting process and the rescue operations much attention.

The final recovery phase has the most impact on social media in the village. Social media users mobilized recovery activities and long-term help to restore situations using social media. Likewise, as with any innovation, there are several obstacles between present use and ideal social media abuse. Perceive and investigate the innovation's restrictions in danger, weak populaces.

Right now is a perfect prospect to begin assigning these innovative advancements while producing significant capacities of their viability and the exactness and convenience of the information they give. Web-based media may well upgrade communication frameworks along these lines, considerably expanding the capacity to plan for, react to, and recuperate from compromising individuals and foundations.

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