Abstract

THESIS: Weather Warnings on Social Media: User Participation and Response

STUDENT: Katelyn E. Grove

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Over the past twenty years technology has rapidly evolved and altered the way the public receives weather warnings. Since the emergence of social media hundreds of social media sites have developed as a primary form of communication. Social media users often post about what they are thinking, doing or experiencing. In April 2012 the National Weather Service (NWS) began experimenting with Twitter and Facebook as supplemental channels for improving weather awareness.

One issue with using social media to warn the public is the limited space allowed to convey a message. Twitter, for example, only allows users 140 characters forcing the message composer to make the message short and concise. With such a limitation, it would be beneficial to use the most efficient warning message. Prior research has indicated that grammatical differences in messaging alters the behavior of the person receiving the message and influences how they respond.

This study demonstrates that in general, respondents found weather information from “Weather Company X” to be more reliable than that shared by a “friend” and thus were more likely to respond (find the information reliable, seek additional information, seek shelter) and participate (share/retweet the message). Second, user actions in response to damage reports posted by their “friends” or “followers” vary with the magnitude of damage. The EF1 level appears to be a threshold for reliability of the message while the EF2 level appears to be the threshold for seeking shelter and sharing the message. Finally, as the literature suggests, this study confirms that respondents were generally more likely to think about responding and participating with a message when it is written in the progressive form (is + VERBing) as opposed to the present perfect form (has + VERBed).