The Active Agency of Ordinary People in Mediatized Crises

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Designerly Approaches to Social Media
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WORLD

Parisians Use #PorteOuverte Hashtag for Those Seeking Safety From Attacks

BY **ASHLEY ROSS**   NOVEMBER 13, 2015 6:08 PM EST

T he hashtag #PorteOuverte spread on social media Friday night after a series of attacks shook Paris. The hashtag, which means "open door," started spreading as a way to offer shelter after dozens were reported dead and many reported taken hostage in multiple attacks.

A shooting was reported at a restaurant near the 10th Arrondissement of the

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Kan vi samla alla som öppnar upp sina hem i Stockholm under en hashtag? #openstockholm ?

🌐 Käännä kielestä ruotsi

↩ 19 🔁 947 1,4 t.

Civic responsiveness in crises

- The changing communicative role of ordinary people in times of crises and disasters
    - From passive spectators to active agents
- Ordinary media users can now themselves participate in the construction of crisis via digital media technologies
- Ordinary people as non-professionals

Agency

- Individual's socially constructed capacity and ability to act on their own choices
- The question of agency in a crisis is important
- The capacity for action and connection to others creates conditions for survival
- Contrarily, powerlessness and solitude create conditions for vulnerability
    - Victimhood is linked with loss of agency by trauma
- Disaster sociology: pro-social actions of ordinary people
- Institutional actors (authorities, journalists, humanitarians): citizens are passive & irrational

Mediatization: theory of social change

- Mediatization theory aims to capture the growing infiltration of media in different spheres of social life (e.g. Lundby 2014)
- <u>Changes</u> resulting from media-saturation of societies, cultures, institutions, practices
- Waves of mediatization (Couldry & Hepp 2017):
    - Mechanization
    - Electrification
    - Digitalization
    - Datafication } era of deep mediatization

"The very elements and building blocks from which a sense of the social is constructed become themselves based in technologically based processes of mediation" (Couldry & Hepp 2017, 7)
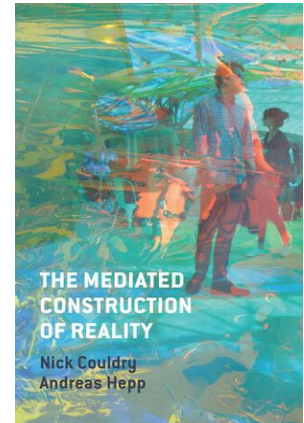
Mediatization of crises

- Media reports, reflects and represents crises
- The changing media plays also performative and constitutive roles in crises
    - New communicative conditions
- Undetermined consequences: reduce, intensify, transform, produce new forms of crises (Hjarvard et al. 2015)
- Terror attacks: "designed *for the media* as much as *for the chaos*" (Cui & Rothenbuhler 2018, 157)
    - E.g. Christchurch attack 2019

Changes in three levels

1) Macro-level approach, mediatization is considered one of the meta-processes that shape modern societies, alongside globalization, individualization and commercialization (Krotz 2009, 24)
2) Meso-level of institutions: how societal institutions are affected by media institutions (Hjarvard 2013)
3) Micro-level of individuals: media-related social practices at the grassroots level (Mortensen 2014)

Crisis research

- Crises "offer an opportunity to examine many aspects of social life which in normal times are hidden" (Sorokin 1943, 244)
- Crises feature death, threat, urgency and uncertainty (Boin & t'Hart 2007)
- Crises are becoming more complex & common
- Crises demand action
- Crises are increasingly embedded in digital media

Crises occur in hybrid media environment
(Chadwick 2013; Sumiala et al. 2018)

- Hybridity refers to the interplay and inter-dynamic between 'older' and 'newer' media
    - Multiple actors (journalists, authorities, politicians, ordinary media users, perpetrators)
    - Multiple platforms
    - Multiple narratives (information and misinformation)

- Two levels of crisis: specific location & hybrid media environment

- How crises are constructed and reconstructed through the digital media has important consequences for victims, communities and societies

From top-down to bottom-up approaches

- Crisis and disaster research has placed a long-standing emphasis on organizations and authorities
- Since 2010 a "third wave of crisis communication": focus on ordinary people
    - Social media
- Digitally connected individuals engage in crisis communication

Participatory turn in crisis communication

- From the role of spectator, viewer and consumer to the role of media user
- "Bright" side of grassroot-level participation
    - People used websites to create lists of missing people response to the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami
    - In response to 2005's Hurricane Katrina, ordinary people used online forums to connect with their local communities, exchange information, cope with disruption and coordinate disaster relief
    - In the 2007 Virginia Tech school shooting, students used Facebook to determine whether other students had survived
    - Australia's South East Queensland floods in 2011 Twitter played an important role in sharing and disseminating information between local authorities, states, ordinary people and journalistic media

- Yet, the dark side of the social world is online and works as a driving force in certain crises, such as school shootings and terror attacks (Sumiala & Tikka 2011a; 2011b).

Crisis response in real-time & at any distance

- Emerging field of research 'crisis informatics'
- In the digital age, the temporal and spatial scales of involvement in crises have mutated; people can participate in crises practically in real-time and at any distance from the physical crisis itself
- New roles & practices
    - Citizen witnessing, digital humanitarianism, crisis mapping
- Coordinated and emergent action
    - Established actors interested to harness & capitalize the labour of digital volunteers
    - Spontaneous self-organization as a response to external events

Hype & critiques

- Digital media could serve as a cosmopolitan moral space in which to respond to mediated suffering
- Change in power hierarchies by empowering formerly distant publics and affected communities
- International humanitarian organizations will play more limited roles in future crises

- The potential of digital communication is not realized equally for all disaster victims
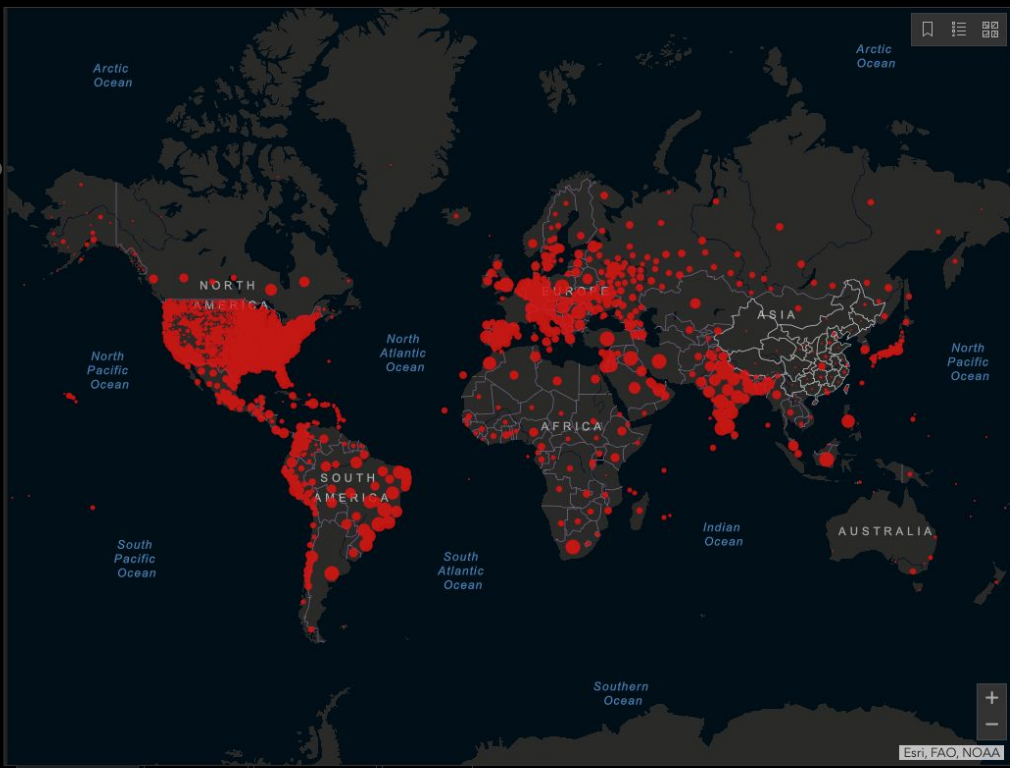- 'Digital inequalities amplify social inequalities' in the context of crises and disasters (Madianou 2015)

COVID-19 Dashboard by the Center for Systems Science and Engineering (CSSE) at Johns Hopkins University (JHU)

Global Cases
143,863,080

Cases by Country/Region/Sovereignty

31,862,375	US
15,930,774	India
14,122,795	Brazil
5,436,229	France
4,673,699	Russia
4,446,591	Turkey
4,411,068	United Kingdom
3,904,899	Italy
3,446,072	Spain
3,222,888	Germany
2,769,552	Argentina
2,718,493	Poland
2,701,313	Colombia
2,315,811	Mexico
2,311,813	Iran
2,043,779	Ukraine
1,719,088	Peru
1,620,569	Indonesia
1,609,861	Czechia
1,569,935	South Africa

Admin0   Admin1   Admin2

Last Updated at (M/D/YYYY)
4/22/2021, 8:20 am

192
countries/regions

Cumulative Cases   Incidence Rate   Case-Fatality Ratio   Testing Rate

Global Deaths
3,058,161

569,401 deaths	US
381,475 deaths	Brazil
213,597 deaths	Mexico
184,657 deaths	India
127,577 deaths	United Kingdom
117,997 deaths	Italy
104,937 deaths	Russia
102,046 deaths	France
80,938 deaths	Germany

Global Deaths   Global Recovered

Total Test Results in US
419,722,893

58,075,920 tests	California US
49,224,295 tests	New York US
22,494,107 tests	Texas US
22,059,218 tests	Florida US
21,839,226 tests	Illinois US
20,522,711 tests	Massachusetts US
13,035,565 tests	New Jersey US
12,568,901 tests	Pennsylvania US
12,371,644 tests	Michigan US

US Test Results   US Deaths
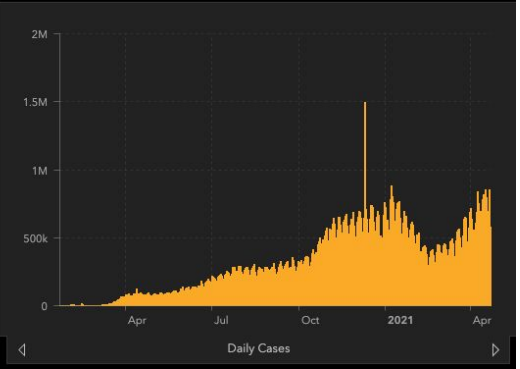
Daily Cases

Lancet Inf Dis Article: Here. Mobile Version: Here. Data sources: Full list. Downloadable database: GitHub, Feature Layer. Lead by JHU CSSE. Technical Support: Esri Living Atlas team and JHU APL. Financial Support: JHU, NSF, Bloomberg Philanthropies and Stavros Niarchos Foundation. Resource support: Slack, Github and AWS. Click here to **donate** to the CSSE dashboard team, and other JHU COVID-19 Research Efforts. FAQ. Read more in this blog. Contact US.

Cases and **Death** counts include confirmed and probable (where reported).

Esri, FAO, NOAA

Some takeways

- Ordinary people are able to perform as active agents in times of crisis
    - Digitally connected individuals can speak for the victims, mobilise aid, collect funds and offer shelter
- Yet, no revolution but more subtle changes
    - Distance matters
    - Emerging aid groups are local (Covid-19)
    - This means that physically and culturally distant crises and their victims receive less attention, engagement and visibility (East Africa famine)
- Existing social power structures and inequalities tend to be reflected in digital crisis communication

Consequences of citizen participation?

- Ordinary people can affect how crisis is socially constructed
    - Mediatization from below
- Ambiguous implications
    - Ephemeral social cohesion (Stockholm terror attack 2017)
    - Reproduction of historical conflict (Flotilla 2010)
- Implications need to be studied in empirical contexts