# Chapter 8
# In Prosperity Prepare for Adversity:
## Use of Social Media for Nonprofit Fundraising in Times of Disaster

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## ABSTRACT

*When a disaster strikes, nonprofit organizations face the need to mobilize resources as quickly as possible in a limited time frame. Given its characteristics to instantly spread information to masses of people, social media is considered one of the most effective ways for nonprofits to publicize opportunities to take voluntary actions. Despite the envisioned use, little has been examined about the effectiveness of social media in encouraging people to give. This chapter takes the case of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear threat that struck Japan in 2011 to examine whether the use of social media was effective in nonprofit fundraising. Analyzing data collected in an original online survey, the authors find that the use of social media both before and after the disaster has a positive impact on the amount of donations that nonprofits raise. Use of social media during non-disaster times is the key for successful fundraising in times of disaster.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit organizations today are one of the key actors in disaster relief, response, and reconstruction (Kapucu *et al.*, 2011). Not only are they active as first responders, but also essential organizations that facilitate recovery while working closely with organizations in both public and private sectors (Kapucu, 2007).

Disasters are times when nonprofit organizations face the need to mobilize resources as quickly as possible in a limited time frame. Once a nonprofit decides to engage in response activities, the organization uses multiple communication channels to send out information to mobilize people for financial donations, in-kind giving, and/or volunteering. These opportunities become chances for people willing to help those suffering from the tragedy to take actions. Solnit (2009) described the emergence of such highly motivated population as "A Paradise Built in Hell." Nonprofit organizations play an important role in transforming the desires of these people into actual actions (Okada & Yamauchi, 2014).

Given its characteristic to instantly spread information to masses of people, social media is considered one of the most effective ways for nonprofit organizations to publicize opportunities of voluntary actions in critical situations. Social media refers to "interactive online technologies and practices that people use to share opinions, insights, experiences, and perspectives with each other" (Haddow & Haddow, 2014, p.242). Examples include Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, just to name a few. Mayfield (2006) sees participation, openness, conversation, community, and connectedness as key features that distinguish social media from traditional media.

Despite the envisioned use, little has been documented about how nonprofit organizations use social media in times of disaster to mobilize the public towards voluntary actions. Much less known is whether the use of social media is effective in encouraging people to give or to volunteer. In this paper, we take the case of earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear threat that struck Japan n March 11, 2011 to examine the effectiveness of social media in nonprofit fundraising. To what extent did nonprofits use social media to mobilize the public towards voluntary actions? Did the use of social media change overtime from response to recovery phase? More importantly, was the use of social media effective in encouraging people to make financial contributions? We analyze these questions using an original data collected through an online survey and find that use of social media both *before* and *after* the disaster has a positive impact on the amount of donations that nonprofits raise. The paper thus argues that use of social media during non-disaster times is the key for successful fundraising in times of disaster.

The paper is organized as follows. We first review literature related to impact of nonprofits' social media use in times of disaster and clarify the contributions of this paper to the existing body of knowledge. The paper then draws three hypotheses on effectiveness of social media in the aftermath of disasters from existing studies. Following a brief description of the context of the study - the 2011 Japan disaster – we elaborate the survey design and present the analysis results. The paper concludes with implications drawn from the findings and future research agenda.

## 2. SOCIAL MEDIA, DISASTERS, AND NONPROFITS

As an emerging new tool, social media has attracted much attention in both disaster studies and nonprofit studies. In this section, we review the literature in these bodies of work and highlight our contributions.

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