

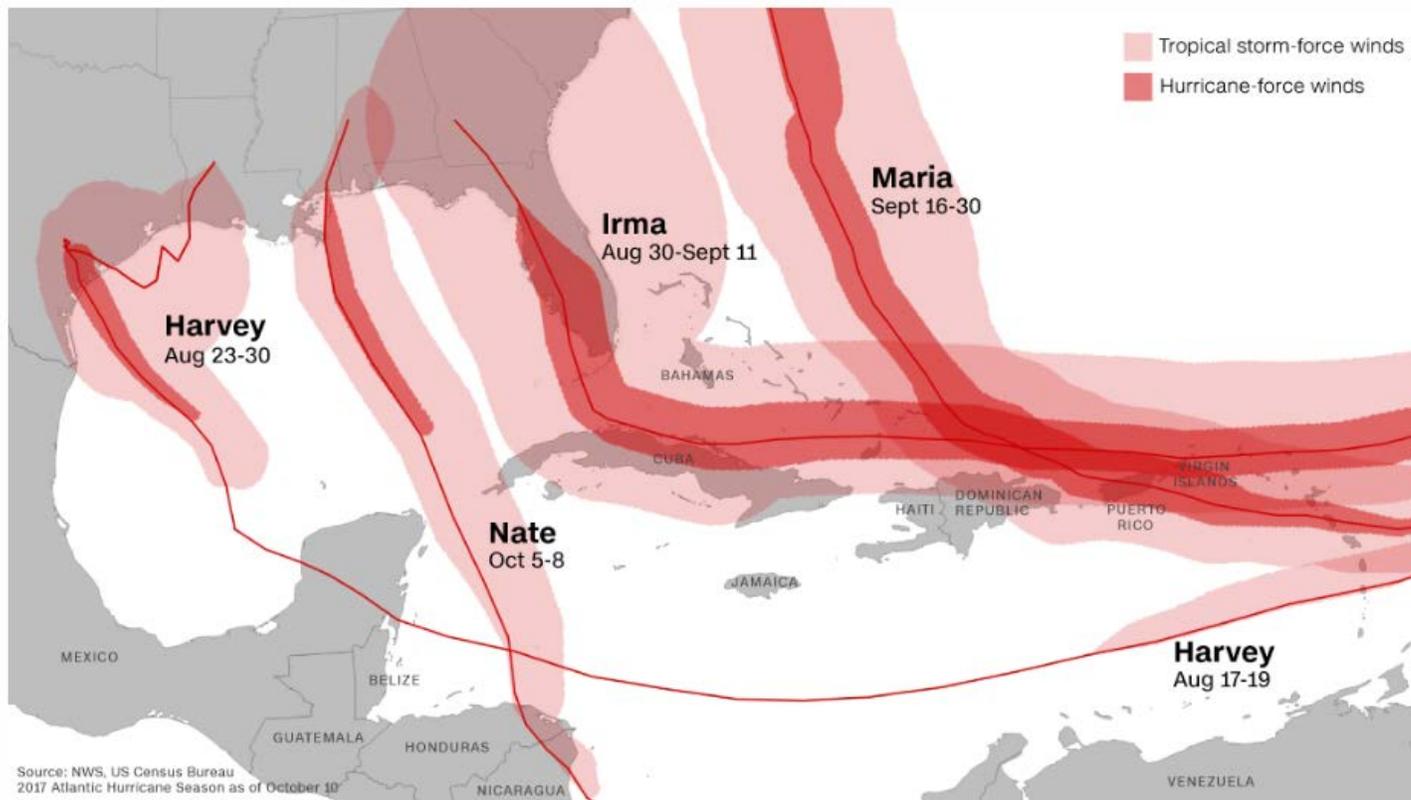
Role of 311, 911, Social Media during Hurricanes: Harvey, Irma, Maria

When It's a Matter of Life or Death

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Harvey, Irma, Maria



The 2017 Hurricane Season

- ▶ Three Category 4 or 5 monstrous hurricanes, back-to-back-to-back
- ▶ More costly land-falling storms than the past few years combined
- ▶ Harvey - most rainfall; Irma - most powerful, deadly storm surges; Maria - partial power loss, causing a humanitarian crisis for 3.4 million U.S. citizens
- ▶ Caribbean Islands (USVI) ravaged by Irma, then Maria
- ▶ A unique clobbering from each storm posing different threats

311 and 911 Calls from Seven Florida Counties

	311/EOC	911	Fire	Notes	
Orange	64,106	70,147	N/A	Sept 1-17/2017	
Palm Beach	18,672	13,659	9,017	Sept 1-17/2017	
Broward	60,479	N/A	N/A	Sept 1-17/2017	
Hillsborough		50,421	N/A	Sept 1-17/2017	Awaiting response from IT Lee County Uses 211 for EOC calls
Lee	42,733	30,397	N/A	Sept 1-17/2017	
Miami-Dade	189,264	N/A	N/A	Sept 6 to 17/2017	
Monroe	N/A	2,588	N/A	Sept 1-17/2017	Monroe stated they can't track their Governmental calls

N/A = not available

Please Help



When being at home is not safe



Communication Strategies: 211, 311, 911, Social Media

- ▶ Traditional 311 systems used for emergency preparation, response, recovery
- ▶ Examples from Houston, TX; Lee County, FL.
- ▶ Houston - residents used it to report flooding, debris in city roadways
- ▶ Lee County, FL - 211 Hotline set up at the EMC; rotating crew for 4 nights straight (24/7); 20,000 calls in one day.
- ▶ “We’re trying to just be the hub of information and then to get it all back out to the community,” Linda Hafner, VP of United Way.
- ▶ Coordinated food and water distribution among nonprofits, faith groups and disaster relief organizations; let callers know where to get help.

311 vs. 911

- ▶ 911 systems were overwhelmed by calls. Houston 911 received over 56,000 calls in one day, compared to the daily average of 8,000.
- ▶ "I had to tell people I couldn't get anyone [to them] for at least a few hours. Many of them were stuck on their roofs. It was so heartbreaking," one operator said. "I was doing my best, but the calls were so backed-up."
- ▶ In Broward County, more than 6,400 storm-related calls were answered by 311 operators by Sept. 7, 2017 (three days before Irma).

Social Media - Double-edged Sword

- ▶ Used to coordinate the efforts of first responders, communicate between those affected and their broader networks, and support recovery efforts.
- ▶ Texans affected by Harvey were generally discouraged by official sources from using Twitter, Facebook, other sharing platforms, citing concerns about robbery, misinformation, and widespread panic.
- ▶ In Florida, government agencies embraced Twitter, Facebook and other services, because of their ability to disseminate information much faster than the emergency-response protocols.

Social Media - USVI, Puerto Rico

- ▶ USVI - pleas for aid posted on social networks in the hurricane's aftermath helped keep media attention on the US Virgin Islands.
- ▶ The Stateside St. Johnians Alliance for Hurricane Irma Facebook page ballooned from 4,000 to 10,000 members within a matter of days.
- ▶ Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram posts multiplied and the media took notice.
- ▶ PR - wrecked communication infrastructure kept people in the dark.
- ▶ A Twitter campaign, #MeUnoAyudar, which loosely translates as "I'm joining to help," helped to connect people in the island

Social Media - Florida

- ▶ Florida's tourism office, a public-private partnership that is partly funded by the state, sent targeted messages to 281,000 people on [Facebook](#), believed to be visiting the state, advising them to take precautions.
- ▶ Florida worked with Google to ensure that road closures in the state were quickly reflected on Google Maps.
- ▶ Apps - Zello emerged as a literal lifeline, allowing [Good Samaritans](#) to coordinate and offer aid to first responder rescue efforts.
- ▶ City of Key West - Twitter and Facebook accounts helped people evacuate the city

Social Media a Game Changer

- ▶ Social media has been a game-changer for Americans coping with natural disasters
- ▶ “As long as the phones are charged, you can find out almost instantly that people in the danger zone are doing OK,” said Fordham University communications professor Paul Levinson
- ▶ “Social media makes people feel like they are doing something, as opposed to nothing,” one user said.
- ▶ Facebook activated its Safety Check feature for people to let friends and family know they’re safe.

Five Categories of Social Media Use Identified

- ▶ Securing Rescue - traditional means of securing rescue are inadequate. People turn to social media
- ▶ **Volunteerism - social media** used for soliciting and organizing efforts of volunteers seeking to help those impacted by the hurricanes.
- ▶ Information Sharing - individuals, governmental agencies, and businesses used social media platforms to share information during the hurricanes
- ▶ Activism - some people used social media to promote causes such as questioning why a particular church closed its doors
- ▶ Keeping Family and Friends Updated - inform them about safety and location

Conclusion

- ▶ 911 may not have been as effective as 311 calls in reaching responders
- ▶ Need for agencies to recognize social media users and include them in response and recovery efforts.
- ▶ Social media likely to reach everyone, including undocumented immigrants.
- ▶ Social media messages may be more believable because they come from those in networks