

A Systematic Literature Review of Natural Disaster Reporting on Douyin in the Era of Short Videos

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ABSTRACT

With the widespread adoption of smartphones and the rapid development of network technology, the short video industry has risen quickly, ushering in an era of rapid growth. Short video news, characterized by its visual appeal, real-time updates, multimedia elements, mobile-friendliness, and user engagement, meets the modern social media audience's demand for fast access to and sharing of news information, making it an increasingly favoured form of news reporting by media outlets. Douyin is China's most popular short video platform, with 755 million monthly active users in China as of February 2024, far surpassing any other short video platform. As one of the countries most affected by natural disasters, China places great importance on disaster reporting and risk communication in the digital age when faced with sudden natural disasters. Therefore, natural disaster reporting on Douyin has garnered significant attention. To construct a research framework for natural disaster reporting on Douyin, this paper conducted a comprehensive literature review. While current academic research provides a wealth of literature on Douyin and disaster reporting, few studies narrow the scope specifically to natural disaster reporting on Douyin. Using keywords such as natural disaster, crisis, natural disaster reporting, social media, Douyin, short videos, short video reporting, and citizen journalism, this paper follows the literature review procedure described by Otero-Cerdeira et al. (2015) and searches web-based literature (including blog posts and institutional websites), official literature (e.g., government and disaster organization reports), and scientific literature (e.g., books and journal papers). The review also included a backward search of references to identify additional relevant literature. The systematic perspectives from the literature were summarized and are explained in this paper.

Keywords: Short video news, Douyin, Natural disaster reporting, social media, Citizen journalism

INTRODUCTION

Disasters are inevitable events in the development of both nature and human society (Leroy, 2022). Disaster events are widespread and characterized by suddenness, destructiveness, complexity, and uncertainty, garnering high levels of public attention. Whether in developed or developing countries, natural disasters severely disrupt people's lives. Globally, natural and human-induced disasters exhibit different trends: natural and technological disasters occur more frequently than financial crises or violence-related disasters when measured by the average number of occurrences per country per year (Aldrich et al., 2014; Sawada, 2017).

China is one of the most frequently and severely affected countries by natural disasters worldwide (Jiang & Shaw, 2021). Due to its complex geological and climatic conditions, disaster losses have gradually increased in recent decades (Shi et al., 2016). When facing sudden catastrophic natural disasters, disaster reporting and risk communication play critical roles, especially in the digital age. Disaster reporting is no longer solely narrated by traditional media. In the era of new media, advancements in technology have led to new forms of reporting, such as robot journalism, slow live streaming, and short videos. Traditional media are no longer the exclusive platforms for disseminating disaster news; social media and user-generated content platforms often become primary sources of disaster information due to their swift response following disaster events. Many stakeholders have pointed out that traditional news outlets are too slow in updating disaster information (Lovari & Bowen, 2019). Increasingly, citizens are actively involved in narrating disaster stories through citizen journalism.

With the rapid development of communication technology, the widespread adoption of smartphones, the deployment of 5G networks, and the reduction of mobile data costs, short videos have replaced text and images as the primary medium through which audiences access information, entertainment, education, and lifestyle improvements (Lowenstein-Barkai & Lev-On, 2018). Given that visual communication plays a key role in most people's daily lives, it is essential to analyze and understand the impact of visual media on society (Schneider, 2021). Throughout history, visual propaganda has been a powerful tool for persuasion, manipulation, and control (Belicove, 2011; Goldstein, 2009; Rose, 2012; Seo & Kinsey, 2012). Visual communication not only conveys information but also evokes emotions and elicits responses (Bo et al., 2002; Borth et al., 2013; Campos et al., 2017; Zhang et al., 2009). A defining characteristic of the modern media environment is the presentation of information through short video platforms (Luo, 2021). Short video news, with its visual appeal, real-time updates, multimedia elements, mobile-friendliness, and user engagement, meets the demand of modern social media audiences for quick access to and sharing of news information, making it an increasingly favoured form of news reporting by media outlets. Short video news primarily features dynamic footage ranging from 15 seconds to 5 minutes, often combined with short text descriptions or voiceovers to present the core content of news events. This format leverages the convenience of mobile internet and suits the fast-paced lifestyles and fragmented reading habits of modern audiences. Short video news is highly immediate, transmitting the latest information quickly, with strong visual impact through images and sound, and it is highly interactive users can participate in the secondary dissemination of news by liking, commenting, and sharing. For instance, earthquake rescue reports on the Douyin platform not only quickly conveyed information about the disaster but also showcased rescue operations, attracting widespread attention and charitable efforts, highlighting the efficiency and influence of short video news (Haitao et al., 2024).

The development of short video social media platforms is particularly prominent in China, where such platforms have permeated nearly every aspect of users' daily lives, including job-seeking, entrepreneurship, entertainment, socializing, and consumption (Hou & Zhang, 2022). Among social media platforms with short video functions in China, Douyin is the most established: it boasts a vast user base and provides a diversified and technologically advanced ecosystem, including live streaming, e-commerce, and digital entrepreneurship (Yu et al., 2023). As of February 2024, Douyin had 755 million monthly active users in China, far surpassing any other short video platform (Thomala, 2024).

Natural disaster reporting on Douyin has garnered academic attention. To construct a research framework for natural disaster reporting on Douyin, this paper conducted a comprehensive literature review. Following the literature review procedure described by Otero-Cerdeira et al. (2015), the review involved searches of web-based literature (including blog posts and organizational websites), official literature (e.g., government and disaster organization reports), and scientific literature (e.g., books and journal papers). Keywords used during each search included: natural disaster, crisis, natural disaster reporting, social media, Douyin, short videos, short video reporting, and citizen journalism. To locate emerging reports on the application of social media in disasters that may not yet have appeared in official or scientific literature, Google Scholar was used to search for online sources. Google Scholar was also used to search for official literature, while scientific literature was retrieved from JSTOR, PsycINFO, and Academic Search Complete databases. The review also included a backward search of references to identify additional relevant literature. After the initial literature search, all sources (articles, blog posts, reports) that appeared relevant to the research topic were further reviewed based on their titles, and sources explicitly discussing natural disasters and Douyin were retained. Once all sources were identified, an in-depth analysis was conducted, categorizing the literature into traditional modes of natural disaster reporting, the rise of social media and citizen journalists, the emergence of short video platforms and Douyin, ethical issues in natural disaster reporting, the impact of audience psychology on disaster reporting, communication strategy in natural disaster reporting, and future trends in natural disaster reporting in the short video era. Relevant sources were then grouped under these categories, which are explained and elaborated in the following sections.

TRADITIONAL APPROACHES TO NATURAL DISASTER REPORTING

Traditional media, such as television, newspapers, and radio, possess extensive reach and authority enabling them to swiftly convey critical information to the public. This helps individuals access necessary knowledge during times of crisis, allowing them to respond promptly and appropriately. When people are threatened, whether the danger is real or perceived, the desire for information intensifies. In such circumstances, national

mass media systems bear a significant responsibility in disseminating news and shaping public perceptions of disasters (Zemp, 2011). In the context of natural disaster reporting, traditional media not only act as conveyors of information but also serve as pillars of social stability and public safety. Greenberg and Scanlon (2016) argue that the media play three key roles: first, acting as information brokers and channels during the response and recovery phases in affected areas; second, signaling and informing others about the consequences of the disaster and its impact on affected populations; and third, serving as a stage for various actors to play their roles, shaping and influencing the framing of disaster events. Each of these roles is critical— as information brokers, the media ensure that people in crisis or disaster-affected areas are aware of the risks they face and how they can protect themselves and those around them; as signalers, the media can mobilize relief efforts and advocate for aid; as stages for disaster contention, the media provide key actors in disaster response with a platform to shape or problematize their actions and perspectives.

For the vast majority of people—whether government officials, journalists, or ordinary citizens—understanding disasters, as well as their causes, responses, and impacts, largely comes from mass media coverage (Quarantelli, 1991). Hiroi et al. (1985) noted that during the warning phase, mass media are the primary source of information in most cases. However, warnings often fail to reach all audiences or prompt adaptive responses. During and after disasters, the operation of mass media faces challenges such as difficulties in mobilizing resources, reliability of news sources, uncertainty, and communication breakdowns.

Traditional media reports typically respond to the public's need to understand what is happening and can attract national and even international attention to local events. This is crucial for raising funds to support post-disaster recovery and for highlighting governance or decision-making failures that may have contributed to the events. However, for most people directly affected by disasters, news reports alone are not an adequate source of information. Coverage may be slow, sensationalized, and focus more on official perspectives than on the needs of the affected population (Sutton, Palen & Shklovski, 2008).

Media play a significant role in disaster interactions and communication (Englund et al., 2022). As the eyes and ears of citizens, journalists are instrumental in creating coherence and meaning (Newman et al., 2009). During disasters, journalists do not just report on events but also bear witness to them—what Cottle (2013) refers to as "bearing witness." At their best, the media's role in informing the public during crises can prevent panic and anxiety: effective reporting can support and comfort victims and their close relatives (Englund et al., 2014, 2022; Englund & Arnberg, 2018).

RISE OF SOCIAL MEDIA AND CITIZEN JOURNALISTS

In an increasingly globalized world, disasters and crises transcend geographical boundaries, affecting diverse regions with greater frequency and immediacy. The infusion of communication technologies—including mobile phones, the internet, and social media—into everyday life has profoundly reshaped the role of journalists in bearing witness to these events. Journalistic functions now extend beyond conventional platforms and intersect with new, alternative avenues for information sharing (Singer et al., 2011).

Emerging technologies have facilitated novel forms of disaster reporting—such as automated journalism, slow live streaming, and short video platforms—diminishing the former exclusivity of traditional media in disseminating urgent news (Lovari & Bowen, 2019). In the early phases of disasters, social media and self-media often outpace traditional outlets, offering rapid, real-time updates. Notably, social media's first large-scale use in crisis communication took place on Twitter during the 2010 Haiti earthquake, whereby numerous on-the-ground witnesses provided immediate reports that supplemented or preceded formal news coverage (Holdeman, 2016).

Increasingly, emergency management agencies (EMAs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), media institutions, and the public turn to social media for rapid information collection and dissemination (Marx, Mirbabaie, & Ehnis, 2018). Scholars identify these platforms as critical channels, observing that traditional outlets sometimes update disaster information too slowly (Lovari & Bowen, 2019). As a result, many citizens actively participate in shaping disaster narratives—often referred to as "citizen journalism"—by generating and sharing user-created content such as photos, videos, and live streams (Ofli et al., 2020). Citizen journalism rests

on participatory practices that blur the lines between professional journalists and laypersons, enabling firsthand information to circulate swiftly and influencing the broader public agenda (Singer et al., 2011).

Local online community bulletin boards represent one particularly noteworthy venue for such participatory engagement—these platforms operate as informal “backchannels” through which residents share region-specific updates, needs, and clarifications that may not be covered by national news sources. Such community-driven portals can be a “noble” tool for disaster response, offering timely, granular, and contextually relevant information, often when conventional reporting structures are slow or overwhelmed (Sutton, Palen, & Shklovski, 2008). Compared to mainstream media outlets that rely on multiple offline sources, these hyperlocal channels can rapidly respond to the evolving needs of affected populations and provide vital assistance to emergency responders in the most critical moments (Shan et al., 2013).

Furthermore, studies indicate that new media and traditional media coalesce and reinforce one another rather than compete in a zero-sum fashion (Salman et al., 2011). For example, during hurricanes, social media users frequently record firsthand accounts and even live-stream extreme weather conditions (Finau et al., 2018). Public hashtags, such as #StrongerThanWinston, have been shown to foster communal solidarity and collective action in the face of crisis.

Nevertheless, the rise of citizen journalism also generates ethical challenges, particularly in catastrophic events where, for instance, certain individuals highlight sensational or distressing images to attract more viewers (Alswailim, 2023). Such attention-driven content can overshadow critical facts, compromise privacy rights, and ultimately prove detrimental to public understanding of the disaster. Despite these drawbacks, citizen journalism—when practiced responsibly—can amplify local voices, reduce informational blind spots, and expedite humanitarian interventions during emergencies.

In sum, digital communication technologies offer unprecedented opportunities for inclusive and timely disaster reporting, transforming both the speed and the substance of crisis communication. The interplay between professional journalism, citizen-generated content, and hyperlocal platforms underscores the evolving complexity of how societies document, perceive, and respond to global disasters.

THE RISE OF SHORT VIDEO PLATFORMS AND DOUYIN

With the rapid advancement of communication technology, the widespread use of smartphones, the deployment of 5G networks, and the reduction in mobile data plan costs, short videos have replaced text and images as the primary medium for audiences to obtain information, entertainment, learning, and improving their lives (Lowenstein-Barkai & Lev-On, 2018).

Short videos refer to content suitable for viewing on mobile devices during brief moments of leisure, shared and played frequently on various online media platforms, ranging in duration from a few seconds to several minutes (Qiao et al., 2016). In the Chinese market, People’s Daily Online (2020) defines short videos as a form of internet content dissemination, typically less than 5 minutes in length, spread across online new media platforms.

One characteristic of the modern media environment is the presentation of information through short video platforms (Luo, 2021). Short video news, with its visual appeal, real-time updates, multimedia elements, mobile-friendliness, and user engagement, caters to the modern social media audience’s demand for rapid news access and sharing. As a result, short videos have become an increasingly favoured format for media reporting. The development of short video social media platforms in China has been particularly notable, as they have penetrated various aspects of users’ daily lives, including job seeking, entrepreneurship, entertainment, social interaction, and consumption (Hou & Zhang, 2022).

In 2011, the mobile short video social application Viddy was publicly launched, making it the world’s first app that allowed users to post and share short videos within 15 seconds. In 2013, Twitter officially launched the Vine iOS app, enabling users to create 6-second video clips seamlessly integrated into Twitter messages. The same year, Instagram, which had over 100 million users at the time, introduced video-sharing features, allowing users to create videos up to 15 seconds long (Wang et al., 2015).

Musical.ly, a short video music community app, was launched in April 2014. Users could create 15-second music videos by pairing their videos with songs from a music library or popular tracks of their choice, often synchronized with lip movements or body actions to create mini music videos. Douyin, China's leading short video platform, was initially launched on September 20, 2016, as a music-focused creative short video social app. Due to the early overlap in functionalities between Musical.ly and Douyin, Beijing-based ByteDance acquired Musical.ly in December 2017, transferring its users to TikTok, the international version of Douyin, in 2018. Douyin and TikTok are "sister apps" under the parent company ByteDance (Abidin, 2020).

Currently, Douyin is only available to Chinese users, while TikTok is an international short video social app covering over 150 countries and 75 languages. TikTok primarily attracts younger users, with a focus on sharing everyday experiences and predominantly native content, while Douyin in China covers a wider age range. Over time, Douyin has evolved into a platform with diverse content and a broad user base, making it the most popular short video media platform in China, followed by WeChat. As of February 2024, Douyin had 755 million monthly active users in China, far exceeding any other short video platform (Thomala, 2024).

Among social media platforms with video features, Douyin is the most mature, boasting a wide user base and offering a diversified, tech-enhanced ecosystem, including live streaming, e-commerce, and digital entrepreneurship (Yu et al., 2023). Platforms like Douyin and TikTok play a crucial role in allowing the public to experience natural disasters firsthand, share information, and coordinate peer-led disaster relief efforts. These platforms not only provide immersive experiential content but also foster public engagement and emotional connections through digital storytelling. On Douyin, the attributes of the narrator primarily affect the audience's emotional response, while the choice of narrative visual frameworks and presentation techniques significantly impact various aspects of social media interaction (Liu et al., 2024).

Although traditional media news content emphasizes timeliness, digital platforms like Douyin present news with a more personalized style through storytelling techniques. This content not only offers immediacy but also reflects individual needs and emotional expression (Q. Yin et al., 2023).

ETHICAL ISSUES IN NATURAL DISASTER REPORTING

The study of ethical issues in information dissemination on Douyin encompasses multiple aspects. Firstly, most scholars focus on the accuracy and authenticity of information. Belsey and Chadwick (2002) argue that journalistic ethics are inextricably linked to journalism itself, as journalistic practices revolve around a set of fundamental ethical concepts: freedom, democracy, truth, objectivity, honesty, and privacy. If the legitimate function of journalism is viewed as the dissemination of information, the core ethical issue lies in maintaining the accuracy of that information. Accuracy is upheld through thorough disclosure in context, candid, truthful, and honest communication, as well as respect for rights, fairness, and dignity (Bowen, 2016). During disasters, communication occurs within uncertain frameworks, and there is a high demand for knowledge regarding risks and emergency responses. The public's ability to "exchange facts and knowledge about related issues" is influenced by credibility and trust (Palenchar, 2005).

Furthermore, Jack (2017) points out that rumors and misinformation further complicate issues of credibility, trust, and authenticity. Hung-Baesecke and Bowen (2017) contend that the rapid spread of false information on social media stems from a lack of editorial oversight. Misinformation poses a potential threat to both citizens and the media. Seeger et al. (2003) note that during crises, ethical issues such as sincerity, honesty, deception, and even lying become more complex. Moreover, due to rapid dissemination and the lack of credibility checks, misleading, inaccurate, or harmful information can spread quickly in emergencies. Government agencies and official organizations find it challenging to curb the spread of inaccurate information during disasters. Scholars have found that rumors can spread in a highly contagious manner, making correction exceptionally difficult (Kimmel, 2004; Vraga & Bode, 2018).

Another urgent ethical dilemma in disaster reporting is the issue of privacy invasion. When providing real-time updates, journalists may infringe upon the privacy of individuals involved in the crisis, potentially exacerbating their trauma or suffering. While it is important to inform the public about the impact and severity of crisis events, maintaining ethical boundaries is equally crucial. Knudsen and Rahbek (2022) assert that ethical journalism

adheres to the core principles of responsible news reporting, requiring journalists to be factually accurate, truthful, fair, objective, and accountable, while always being aware of the direct or indirect impact of their words and images on the lives of others. Research after disasters is diverse, and potential participants vary widely, with some requiring special attention or protection (Norris et al., 2006). In a mediatized context, disasters have the capacity to mobilize solidarity both domestically and internationally. Media reporting plays a critical role, as it places us within a global moral community and conveys the normative sentiments and ethical responses of journalists and audiences (Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2013b).

Discussions of journalistic ethics in disaster reporting have traditionally focused on how to avoid “bad” news practices, particularly those involving invasions of victims' privacy and the portrayal of bloody images of death and suffering. Discussions often revolve around how individual journalists and news organizations violate ethical norms in the pursuit of sensational news, neglecting care for victims and their families (Sanders, 2003), or provide guidance for journalists reporting on disasters and trauma. In addition to these traditional areas of discussion, there exists a relatively new and productive field of research in disaster reporting. Although it rarely explicitly addresses ethical issues (Chouliaraki & Orgad, 2011), it primarily focuses on journalists' ethical behavior and its impact on audience responses. This research examines disaster reporting within a globalization context, exploring how compassion is presented in disaster coverage and how the suffering of “distant others” is depicted (Chouliaraki, 2006).

Disasters and their reporting have far-reaching ethical implications, not only involving the understanding of journalists' roles in society and issues related to their journalistic practices but also concerning how journalists and their work position audiences and encourage specific ways of thinking and behaving when responding to the suffering of “distant others” (Wahl-Jorgensen & Pantti, 2013b). Li Mengrui (2023) posits that journalistic ethics refer to the ethical issues within the processes of news dissemination, particularly focusing on moral principles and ethical norms in journalism. The content of journalistic ethics can be roughly divided into two aspects: first, journalists' self-discipline, where media professionals establish corresponding self-restraint and collective adherence practices within the industry. Secondly, there are external societal expectations of journalists, arising from conceptual, moral, legal, and public opinion frameworks that require journalists to adhere to ethical values in their professional activities.

Additionally, from an ethical perspective, a more pressing issue is the gap in internet usage caused by disparities in wealth and education. This phenomenon, known as the “digital divide” (Gunkel, 2003), is evident even in highly interconnected countries like the United States, but is particularly pronounced in developing nations. Low-income populations, rural residents, young children, individuals with physical or language barriers, and the elderly may be excluded due to the digital divide (Madianou, 2015).

AUDIENCE PSYCHOLOGY AND THE IMPACT OF DISASTER REPORTING

Based on existing historical research, audience psychology can be divided into three aspects: cognitive, emotional, and behavioural. Debord (1967) argues that the world has become a public stage devoid of privacy, with human society entering a “society of the spectacle” driven by consumption, where the creation and consumption of spectacles become the ongoing goals of individuals. In the new century, Douglas Kellner (2002) proposed the theory of media spectacle, pointing out that media constructs a spectacular social landscape through various information dissemination modes, leading to the dramatization of mainstream values, thought processes, and interpersonal relationships. Drawing on the theories of Debord and Kellner, mobile short videos, through the comprehensive use and dissemination of audiovisual symbols, provide audiences with an immersive virtual “social space,” allowing them to both observe others and be observed by them. In this space, individuals can showcase and express themselves, satisfying their psychological needs for observation while also fulfilling their curiosity by watching videos of others in their private lives.

Xu Ziheng and Chen Huan (2023) note that with the continuous advancement of social media and digital technology, news reports can be easily disseminated and shared, sparking individual interest and attention toward specific events. However, the emergence of new media on the internet has also brought greater complexity and challenges in discerning the authenticity of news reports. This not only imposes a significant psychological burden and cognitive demand on audiences but also threatens the authenticity and objectivity of news reporting,

leading to a decline in audience trust and acceptance of news. This era, characterized by the decline in trust and acceptance of news due to the proliferation of internet new media, is often referred to as the "post-truth era."

Gustave Le Bon (1985) stated, "An isolated individual may be cultured and refined, but once they enter a group, they become a barbarian." Individuals within a group exhibit characteristic of being easily influenced and suggestible. At the same time, algorithm-driven personalized information production and dissemination exacerbate the risk of individuals being trapped in "information cocoons," making it increasingly difficult for internet users to access comprehensive information. As a result, individuals consciously or unconsciously establish connections between themselves and specific groups, bearing pressure from the group to adjust their behavior to align with the collective will, thus satisfying their needs for identity recognition and social acceptance. This process represents a way of integrating into society and groups, manifested as "identification" and "self-identification."

Noelle-Neumann (1974) proposed that public opinion is the psychological impact of the "climate of opinion" on individuals' fears of isolation, forcing them to reconsider or conform to "mainstream views" through irrational means rather than engaging in rational discussion. This phenomenon is known as the "spiral of silence." Based on this irrational psychology, individuals' viewpoints and attitudes are reinforced within the overall "climate of opinion," leading to the emergence of group polarization.

Exposure to new media platforms covering disaster reporting may elicit psychological responses from audiences. Research by Pfefferbaum et al. (2014) reveals a connection between exposure to media reports and audience psychological outcomes, demonstrating the dominance of psychological effects, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) or post-traumatic stress (PTS), as well as depression, stress responses, anger, substance abuse, negative emotions, anxiety, and complicated grief. Additionally, Wood and Miller (2021) conducted studies showing that emotional responses to news information or reports are related to personal risk perceptions, such as fear, apprehension regarding disaster-related stressors, and vulnerability. In the context of this study, the impact of audience psychological states on emotions and behaviors—especially regarding sudden disaster tragedies reported on Douyin—will be a central focus of the research.

COMMUNICATION STRATEGY IN NATURAL DISASTER REPORTING

In the context of natural disaster reporting, current research primarily focuses on communication strategy aimed at media platforms or government entities, with less emphasis on the role of social media platforms such as Douyin and citizen journalists.

In an ideal scenario, organizations would prioritize crisis prevention to safeguard their reputations and stakeholders (Coombs & Holladay, 2012; Fearn-Banks, 2016). However, complete avoidance of unpredictable crises remains challenging in practice, particularly in the context of natural disaster reporting. Unforeseen external factors—such as environmental events or shifts in public opinion—can render even the most diligent prevention measures insufficient (Coombs, 2015). Thus, while crisis preparedness should aim to minimize potential harm and reputational risks, organizations must also rely on robust crisis communication frameworks to manage eventual disruptions (Benoit, 1997; Bradford & Garrett, 1995; Coombs, 2007, 2014b, 2015; Sturges, 1994).

To assist organizations in mitigating or reducing damage during crises, scholars have developed various crisis management theories or models. As early as 1994, Sturges identified three communication strategy—directive information, adaptive information, and internalized information—each addressing a distinct dimension of crisis response. Directive information guides immediate physical actions, adaptive information helps individuals cope psychologically, and internalized information is designed to foster or restore a positive organizational image (Sturges, 1994). Across these frameworks, communication strategy are broadly defined as organized tactics and procedures used by companies, groups, or individuals to achieve predetermined objectives. The core purpose of such strategies is to establish effective channels that efficiently disseminate information and produce outcomes aligned with organizational goals (Cheng, 2018).

In general, communication strategy incorporates critical components such as target audience, objectives,

message content, media channels, timing, and mechanisms for evaluating effectiveness (George, Carlson, & Valacich, 2013). While everyday communication often occurs automatically, organizational contexts demand deliberate consideration of factors including stakeholder characteristics, message framing, and channel selection (Bozeman, 1996; Straub & Karahanna, 1998; Treviño et al., 2000; Webster & Treviño, 1995). This is particularly salient for government agencies and private sector entities responding to natural disasters, where accurate, timely, and empathetic communication can significantly influence public perception (Lovari & Bowen, 2019b).

In the era of rapidly evolving digital media, platforms such as Douyin and the rise of citizen journalism further complicate traditional frameworks of crisis communication (Liu & Zhao, 2020). Content creators on mobile short-video platforms leverage diverse narrative structures and background music to captivate audiences, creating media spectacles that immerse viewers (Liu & Zhao, 2020). Consequently, communication strategy must adapt to these newer channels while retaining the foundational elements of target audience analysis and clear objectives (Balli et al., 2022). As Balli et al. (2022) note, effective strategies also depend on role allocation, resource utilization, and community engagement—highlighting how internal and external communication boundaries increasingly overlap in contemporary crisis contexts.

From another perspective, Ma (2022) underscores the importance of information flow, sufficiency, and feedback loops in organizational communication strategy, examining these elements through the mediating role of teacher participation. These insights are transferable to the domain of natural disaster reporting, where the confluence of strategic objective-setting, audience targeting, and adaptive media usage can foster trust, enhance information accuracy, and ultimately bolster organizational reputation. By acknowledging the inevitability of certain crises while continuously refining communication strategy, organizations can more effectively manage disasters and safeguard public trust.

CONCLUSION

Natural disasters pose profound and universal challenges, underscoring the necessity for rapid, reliable, and ethically grounded communication strategy. Historically, conventional media outlets have played a key role in disseminating timely alerts and coordinating relief. In contemporary settings, however, the emergence of short video platforms such as Douyin, coupled with the rise of citizen journalism, has transformed the ways in which disaster narratives are generated and consumed (Singer et al., 2011; Luo, 2021). While these dynamic platforms allow for immediate, visually engaging coverage, they also raise critical concerns about misinformation, privacy violations, and potential marginalization of vulnerable populations.

Within this rapidly evolving environment, media—both traditional and digital—possesses a distinct capacity to foster long-term resilience in citizens, organizations, and society at large (Spialek & Houston, 2018; Houston et al., 2019; Antunes et al., 2022). By providing real-time information, media outlets increase awareness of immediate risks, thereby saving lives and expediting resource mobilization. Over the long run, consistent and in-depth coverage of disaster preparation and recovery builds collective knowledge and encourages proactive engagement among diverse stakeholders. Through repeated exposure to disaster-related narratives, communities can learn from past successes and failures, prompting policy reforms and institutional improvements that reduce vulnerability to future disasters. Moreover, media platforms—including short video applications—can serve as forums where local voices share firsthand experiences, highlight deficiencies in official responses, and offer innovative grassroots solutions. This sustained circulation of ideas not only aids in holding governments and institutions accountable but also helps cultivate a culture of collaboration and solidarity.

Nevertheless, the media's capacity to enhance resilience hinges on addressing several persistent challenges. Ethical considerations, such as the need to protect individual privacy and to ensure editorial accuracy, demand ongoing vigilance. Equally pressing is the issue of the “digital divide,” wherein uneven access to technology and information can exclude marginalized groups from potentially life-saving updates (Madianou, 2015). An overreliance on attention-grabbing imagery or sensationalized reporting may also detract from nuanced policymaking and community-building efforts. Therefore, while media expansions—particularly through user-driven platforms like Douyin—hold promise for enriching public discourse and mobilizing resources, they must operate within frameworks of verifiable information, journalistic ethics, and inclusivity.

Building on this analysis, future research should engage with questions of media governance, platform regulation, and cross-cultural dimensions of crisis communication. Systematic inquiries into how short video platforms shape audience reception and policy responses would be particularly valuable, as would investigations into the ways in which media coverage can transcend fragmented information ecosystems to strengthen global and local preparedness. Ultimately, by addressing these challenges, media can continue to serve not merely as a channel for immediate crisis updates, but as a foundational instrument in advancing disaster resilience—fostering community cohesion, promoting institutional accountability, and ensuring sustained support for recovery and risk-reduction initiatives across societies.

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