



# REACHING OUT TO SAVE LIVES

HOW SOCIAL MEDIA TRANSFORMED INDIA'S READINESS TOWARDS DISASTERS



## REFORMS THAT TRANSFORMED



**NATIONAL DISASTER MANAGEMENT AUTHORITY**  
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, GOVERNMENT OF INDIA

# HOW SOCIAL MEDIA TRANSFORMED INDIA'S READINESS TOWARDS DISASTERS

## Introduction

### A digital first

This booklet describes how the Government of India, under the vision and direction of Hon'ble Prime Minister and Chairman of NDMA Shri Narendra Modi, has acknowledged the significance of social media in managing disasters. It is the first instance in the country of the government keeping pace with the digital aspirations of new India and harnessing the enormous potential of social media to good effect.

This booklet also tells the story of how the National Disaster Management Authority's social media initiative was transformed into an interactive single window for information related to disasters.



## The need for reform

Earlier in India, awareness related to disasters was limited to a privileged few. Citizens were rarely informed as to the ways in which they could prepare for a disaster. Moreover, in the midst of their day-to-day chores, not many paid heed to disaster information either. Conversation on disasters was limited to a few closed conferences and seminars. People at large expressed curiosity and concern only when a disaster actually happened.

But Indians had taken to social media extensively, and were using it even in the midst of their daily chores. So here was an untapped opportunity – to reach relevant information to vast numbers of people directly. But there was no vision as to how social media platforms could be used by the government in disaster management. Awareness generation was not paid much attention. In fact, social media was looked upon as a distraction and not as a power tool for disaster governance.



Social media is transforming disaster response. It is helping response agencies in quickly organizing themselves, and enabling citizens to connect more easily with authorities.



- **Shri Narendra Modi**, Prime Minister  
AMCDRR, 2016

# Harnessing social media to make India calamity-ready – the journey

## Vision and approach

The vision of the government in 2014 was clear – it should connect directly with citizens using the instant communication tools offered by social media.

With novel intention and clarity of vision, Hon'ble Prime Minister and Chairman of the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Shri Narendra Modi directed the National Disaster Management Authority to harness the power of social media in managing disasters. Creation of a single-window information point for the public and making them aware of the do's and don'ts of disasters was the first step.

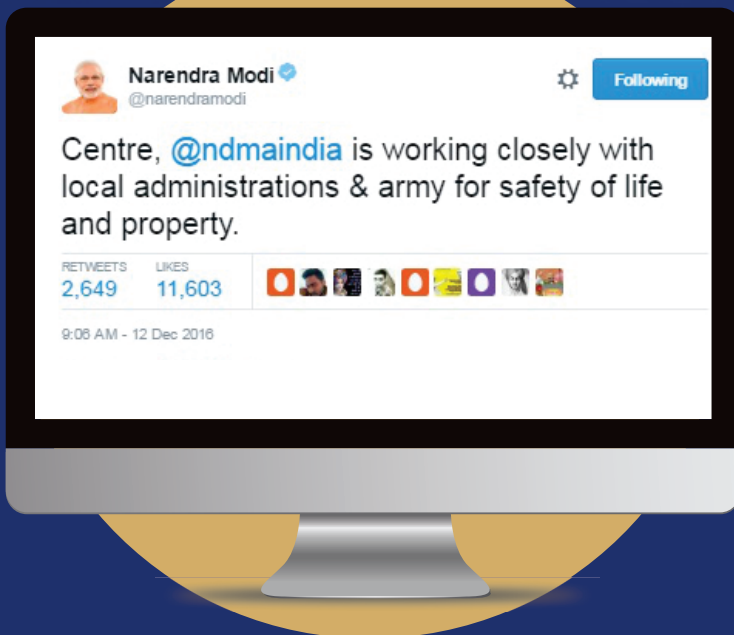
## What was done

In May 2016, ten years after the National Disaster Management Authority was formed, an information, education and communications (IEC) cell was established within NDMA, as per the directions of Hon'ble Prime Minister and Chairman of NDMA, and social media profiles for the Authority were created. With the help of young and contemporary communication experts, NDMA's social media space came bubbling alive, churning out important tweets and posts 24X7.



### Case study – Cyclone vardah – the first challenge

Within just a few months of establishment of the IEC cell of NDMA under the vision of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India's east coast was threatened by Cyclone Vardah on 6th December 2016. Activity on NDMA's revitalized social media platforms heated up, gradually catching the public eye. As Cyclone Vardah progressed to its landfall, there were constant warning messages and relevant do's and don'ts posted extensively by NDMA.



When the cyclone intensified around the Andaman Islands, the situation looked grim for those who were trapped. Many among them were tourists who had an active social media presence. For the first time, people were able to approach NDMA's twitter handle with specific queries. Many made requests for rescue services. NDMA reassured them with quick real-time acknowledgements and routed their requests to response agencies. The situation was also being closely monitored by the Prime Minister himself. For the first time ever in India, as a disaster was rolling out a tech-savvy Prime Minister was able to tag his disaster management agency – @ndmaidia – in his tweets. With the Prime Minister himself taking the lead, the people on the ground who were facing the threat the cyclone caught up soon and started to check NDMA's twitter handle (at that time it was new and had a small yet rapidly increasing follower base) as the most authentic source on the disaster on social media. While the rest of India slept, NDMA was up and awake on twitter, posting information in the darkest hours of night during that calamity. This strenuous effort helped build credibility for NDMA's social media presence and went a long way in furthering its main objective of awareness generation. It also improved NDMA's follower base dramatically.





### The significance of social media presence for NDMA

India had been witnessing exponential growth in the number of internet and mobile users. Citizens were quickly adapting to a life where information was only a click away. But the previous government could not get anywhere close to recognizing the aspirations of this new India. There was no proactive measure to fill the widening communication gap between citizens and government. Given the plethora of social media messages and the clutter of multiple hash-tags that crowded the social media space, people craved for an authentic source of information in the context of disasters. There was a clear need to inform the public of calamities beforehand, by providing them with early warnings, do's and don'ts, and reliable real-time information on the situation through official social media channels. During – and even after – a disaster, people had limited sources of information to help them connect with rescue authorities. Clearly, reform in the way the government interacted with the citizens directly was on the horizon, and NDMA was among the rising stars in social media.



## A transformational change...

The most important and challenging aspect of NDMA's social media operations lies in making people aware of the do's and don'ts during various disasters. NDMA endeavours to educate people on how to prepare themselves before a disaster strike.

NDMA's posts range from simple do's and don'ts for various disasters to daily IMD warnings. Apart from doing this, NDMA also runs interactive quizzes and expert interviews, and does live broadcasts of all the major events related to disaster management.

To improve its reach and followership, a creative bank of posts is created. No complacency is in order here, and this bank is updated from time to time. Posts are run as per the annularity of disasters to increase awareness. Current standards are chosen in the matter of formats and content in creating the posts, while design aspects are consciously chosen to 'break through the clutter.'



## NDMA's social media growth – a people-centric effort

NDMA is now globally recognized as a go-to place for authentic and real-time information on anything related to disasters in India. Within a span of four years, NDMA has acquired a following of more than 2.4 lakh on Twitter. Its followership growth on Twitter has been completely organic.

### The Twitter growth story

Only a few years into its social media operations, NDMA, from no presence at all, currently has one of the highest organic follower bases in Asia (in its domain of activity) and is catching up fast with its counterparts in the developed world too.

A comparison of twitter accounts of nodal disaster management agencies of some countries and global organisations dealing with disaster management is given below:

Chart 1 : Twitter followers of NDMA

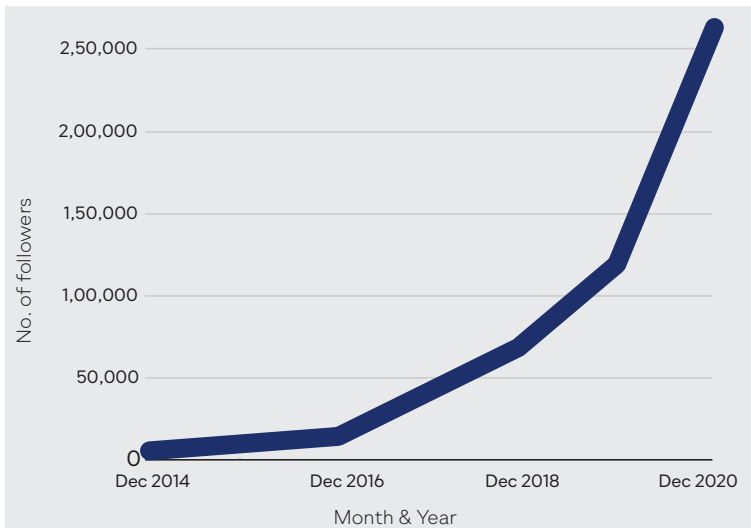
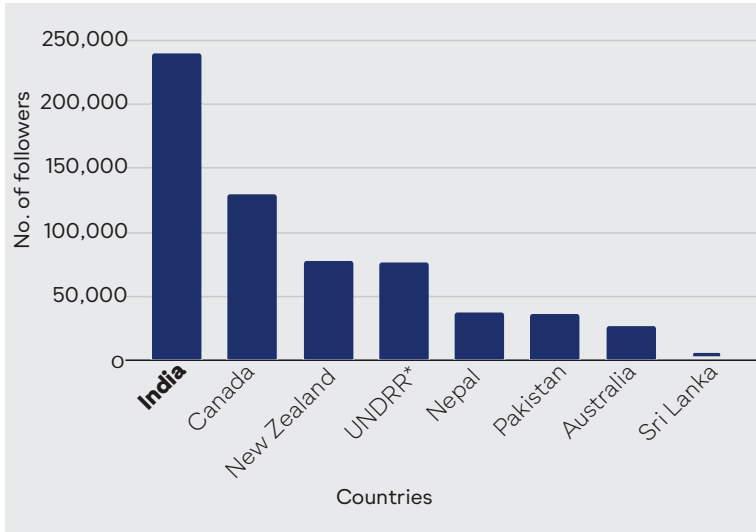


Chart 2 : Twitter followers of disaster management agencies



### Campaigns and strategies

One of the difficult challenges for NDMA was to attract the attention of social media audiences towards advice provided on advance preparation for a disaster.

#### NDMA acted on four-pronged strategy –

1. **Periodic interactive campaigns** to involve the people and get them to participate. One example was the Ask NDMA Expert campaign (see box). The other was the posting of interesting information, such as descriptions of traditional disaster management systems, the 'Did You Know?' campaign, etc.
2. **Annual calendar for disaster awareness:** To disseminate the do's and don'ts for various disasters on a timely basis, an 'Annual Calendar' of awareness activities was created. It factored in the seasonality of the disasters and helped in timely dissemination of the relevant do's-and-don'ts messages, giving people plenty of time to prepare themselves for the likely eventualities.
3. **Crowd-sourcing during disasters:** NDMA's social media is used not just for giving out information but also for crowd-sourcing the

same. Many individuals tag NDMA during disasters and share real-time pictures and videos from disaster sites. NDMA's active interaction with its audience enhanced its credibility and has helped it build a solid, foundational, authentic follower-base.

4. **Content is king:** Social media is a harsh place for bad-quality content. NDMA keeps generating fresh content incorporating contemporary popular design formats. To grab the public attention
  - a) In-house capacities were developed to quickly come out with new posts;
  - b) Special social media cards were designed for all disasters and

### *The Ask NDMA Expert campaign #AskNDMAExpert*

*In the chaotic world of social media, public attention towards more in life – such as disaster awareness is a challenging task. One of the successful interactive online campaign NDMA on social media was the Ask NDMA Expert campaign. For the first time, experts and scientists interacted with the public on social media to answer queries on a variety of disaster management topics. The campaign helped in disaster education, connecting youth with disaster management experts.*



periodically renewed or redesigned;

- c) A large number new audio-visuals were produced and a 'creative bank' was built;
- d) These messages were rotated in various forms, with a healthy mix of campaigns, retweets, interactive quizzes, etc.

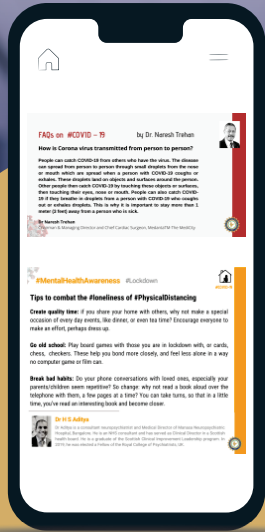
### Blog

NDMA also has a robust presence on Blogspot (ndmablog.in). While the usual social media channels have limitations of design and space, the blog gives the Authority the freedom to publish detailed articles and write-ups on various aspects of disaster management.

### Youtube

NDMA has a dedicated YouTube channel, which is also the central database of various videos on do's and don'ts during the time of disasters. With dedicated playlists for each disaster, the channel is a rich source of audio-visual content on disaster management.





## Case study – The COVID-19 challenge

NDMA was among the first few organisations in India to have started disseminating information on the COVID-19 pandemic. As early as in the last week of February 2020, NDMA's social media walls began to carry COVID-19-related messages. With little known about the disease, authentic information was researched and authentic videos with a medical expert explaining the situation and necessary precautions were quickly disseminated.

Social media was full of misinformation, myths, fake-news, unauthorised testimonials, etc., on the developing pandemic. NDMA brought in senior medical experts and ran campaigns on social media to differentiate between myths and facts and also



*posted a set of frequently asked questions with answers provided by top medical experts in India.*

*With the lockdown measures in place, and sensing that many individuals are prone to mental health illnesses, NDMA ran a dedicated campaign on mental health awareness. It also ran campaigns on domestic violence in the same context.*

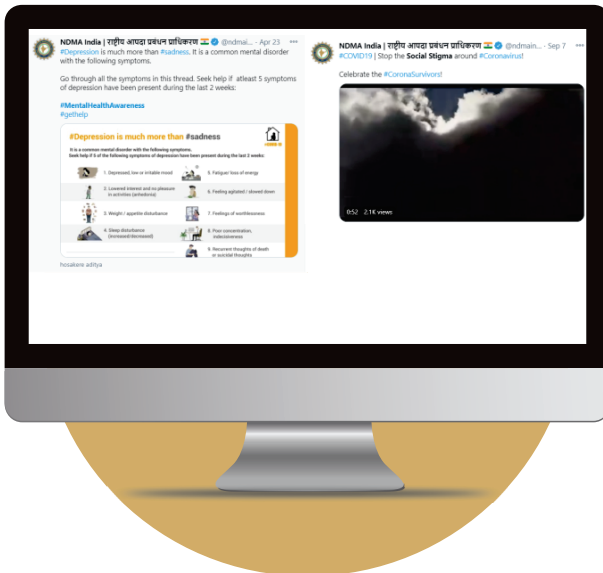
*NDMA also kept in mind the community of people who were fighting the virus from the front. Unique messages and guidelines were disseminated for various such vulnerable groups, such as sanitary workers, domestic helps, bank employees, and staff and inmates at old-age homes.*

*Insight-based video messages were produced to discourage negative attitudes towards COVID-19 precautions. Campaigns were also run anticipating various post lock-down situations; one of them was on social stigma faced by COVID-19- affected people.*

## Single window of information

The Government of India understands that managing disasters requires coordination among different stakeholders. Government agencies such as the India Meteorological Department (IMD) and Central Water Commission (CWC) were encouraged to create their own active social media presence. NDMA's well-established presence on social media has helped in wider dissemination of vital life-saving information from these social media accounts. In due course of time, the state disaster management authorities too have picked up the cues from NDMA and are increasingly posting information in various regional and local languages.

NDMA continues to strive to achieve the PM's 10-Point Agenda for DRR, which emphasises 'Utilisation of opportunities provided by social media and mobile technologies for Disaster Risk Reduction'. With the help of the social media platforms it has created, NDMA, under the directions of the Hon'ble Prime Minister, has manifested into reality the vision of making social media a tool for DRR by becoming a single window for information related to disasters in India. Through NDMA,





“ I sent the information and within a few minutes, I received a call from NDMA. I am thankful to NDMA for the help. My family, friends and neighbours are safe. I am amazed at how a small message on twitter turned the situation upside down. This had never happened before . . . ,’ said an exultant Shailesh Parmar when his parents were rescued by the NDMA during the Rajasthan floods of 2017. In July 2017, during the floods in his state, Shailesh was following NDMA’s twitter handle, and via Direct Message to NDMA on twitter, had informed the Authority that his parents were stranded in the floods in village Dhola in Pali district and needed help. Immediately, the social media team connected Parmar with the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), which ensured the safe rescue of his family. ”



-Shailesh Parmar



the Government of India is now able to reach out to the wider public with the right mix of IEC content on disaster management. The cascading effects of this single window of information has helped disaster managers to plan much in advance of disasters; it has enabled response agencies to coordinate better among themselves and rescue those in remote locations; it has pushed the agencies to proactively reach out to people; it has helped spread information to the most vulnerable sections of society and has helped in improving overall governance with respect to disaster management.

## Outcomes

Adoption of new media technologies has completely changed the way Indian authorities coordinate during disasters. It has gone a long way in saving people's lives. It is a sweet story of success, of a seemingly quiet reform permanently transforming the way disasters are managed in India.

**The major outcomes of the transformation are as follows:**

1. People have ease of access to all information related to disaster management;
2. There is improvement in overall disaster governance, with NDMA as the central hub of disaster management activities;
3. It is now easier for disaster management agencies to reach out to the people, especially the most vulnerable sections of society, such as the elderly, women, children and people with disability;
4. Early warnings of extreme weather events are being communicated to the affected populations well in time;
5. It has enabled better planning for disaster management authorities.
6. It has enabled response agencies to coordinate better to rescue people from remote locations.

**Nikita Agarwal**  
@ikitaAgarwal2

@ndmaIndia floods in Madanpur (Araria).my Nani is kidney patient.stuck thr on d terrace.she suffering frm fever.pls save her urgently

12:10pm · 14 Aug 2017 · Twitter Lite

**Sudhanshu S. Singh** @sssing... 4m

Excellent. Greatly appreciate the efforts of @ndmaIndia to rescue people.

**Rajesh Kalra** @rajeshkalra

I have been seeing what @ndmaIndia shares. They are all useful. This one on how to minimise your damage from floods is good too. Should be shared widely!

**NDMA India** @ndmaIndia

Replying to @ikitaAgarwal2

Share her mobile number and address. Ask her to remain on high ground and be patient.

**NDMA India** | राष्ट्रीय आपदा प्रबंधन ... · 13h

#Flood | क्या आप जानते हैं #बाढ़ से कैसे बचा जा सकता है?

**NDMA India** @ndmaIndia

Replying to @ikitaAgarwal2

Share her mobile number and address. Ask her to remain on high ground and be patient.

**Vijay Rupani** @vijayrupanibjp

Thank you @ndmaIndia for the helping hand extended to rescue flood-hit people.



**NDMA India** @ndmaIndia

Replying to @ndmaIndia

#GujaratFloods: Rescue operations being carried out by NDRF (4 Teams), SDRF (2 Teams), SRPF (2 Teams), Army (60 pers along with Boats).

**Shamit Manchanda** @shamit

This @ndmaIndia has got hold of a good agency to make their graphics.

You should show these slides on national TV especially @DDNewsLive

**Ravindra B Bhujbal** @Armstrongravin

Replying to @NDRFHQ @ndmaIndia and 4 others

We r proud of u, friends...thousands of blessings to u & ur family members for every helping hand u forwarded towards peoples in disaster



RETWEETS 2

LIKE 1

9:47 AM · 17 Jan 2017

**Sanjay Dhotre** @SanjayDhotreMP · Oct 6, 2020

Reply to @shamit

#IndiaFightsCorona

Should you remove your #mask while speaking in a meeting?

✗ NO. Always #WearAMask! #StaySafe #MaskUpIndia via @ndmaIndia

Q- Should you remove your mask while speaking in a meeting?

Ans. **NO**

Small droplets containing Corona Virus expelled during normal breathing and talking can remain in the air and can infect others when inhaled.

Ministry of Education and 9 others

**Rajesh Kalra** @rajeshkalra · Dec 30, 2020

I love @ndmaIndia's messages. This one on how to cope with the severe #ColdWave | शीत लहर में नीचे कपड़े धुलना बंद करें। गर्म रहें सुरक्षित रहें। शीत लहर से बचें।



**NDMA India** @ndmaindia · 9h  
Call on NDMA control room: 9668101885, 011-1078

**Rakhi Singh** @Rakhii  
Replying to @ndmaindia  
Thank you for your prompt response

9:14 PM · 13 Aug 2017

1 Retweet 2 Likes

**VIKAS KUMAR SINHA** @SRKVIKAS  
@ndmaindia unable to contact my family plz help me out #araria #flood

6:28am · 14 Aug 2017 · Twitter for iPhone

1 REPLY 1 LIKE

**NDMA India** @ndmaindia · 1h  
Replying to @SRKVIKAS  
Share your mobile number and residential details.

**VIKAS KUMAR SINHA** @SRKV... · 1h  
Replying to @ndmaindia  
9905467761 +91 95767 20710  
hemant kumar sinha in front of shani mandir aashram mohalla near sahara bank araria

**NDMA India** @ndmaindia · 55s  
Replying to @SRKVIKAS  
Details given by you have been forwarded to NDMA control room.

**Alok Tiwari** @aalokarera05  
Replying to @NDRFHQ @PMOIndia and 2 others  
thanks to @NDRFHQ team India proud of u @ndmaindia more than 10 lcr people's life in ur hand, God help

11:15pm · 13 Aug 2017 · Twitter for Windows Phone

1 REPLY 1 RETWEET 2 LIKES

**Suparno Sapaty** @SuparnoSapaty  
I am hugely indebted to the officials of @ndmaindia for saving my wife. I am at loss of words to express my gratitude.  
Thank you \_/\_

SS

**NDMA India** @ndmaindia  
Car catches fire near #NDMA's building; NDMA officials save the life of a woman driver

RETWEETS 5 LIKES 14

9:17 AM · 18 Jan 2017

4%

Reply to @SuparnoSapaty

**US Consulate Chennai** @USAndChennai  
Staying informed of the weather forecast helps keep you safe. Please share your trusted weather resources with your U.S. citizens friends and family. Some official sources include @Indiametdept, @tnsdma @ChennaiRmc and @ndmaindia #Burevi

**WEATHER ALERT**

travel.state.gov/destination

1:00 PM · Dec 4, 2020 · Hootsuite Inc.

**Asif Khan** @\_asif  
We salute the @NDRFHQ for their acts of valour and kindness. A big thank you to @ndmaindia.  
#BiharFloods





“India's motto is  
'Reform, Perform, Transform'.”

Prime Minister **Shri Narendra Modi**