The Necessity of Informing the Public in Disasters and theCritical Assessment of the Informing Systems in 2019 Iran Floods

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LETTER TO THE EDITOR

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Risk communications in planning and disaster management possess fundamental importance and it has been mentioned as one of the key principles of disaster management (1). Risk communication is a dynamic process in which risk information and messages are exchanged between people, groups, and organizations (2); and to deliver this information in-time and accuratley, new and practical procedures and technologies are used (3). There are different methods for delivering risk messages to people. In past, classic mass media such as newspapers, radio and television were used to provide the required information for the general public; but recently people and organizations use social networks as one of the novel informing strategies to receive and spread information (4).

According to a study, approximately sixty percent of the general public use social media as a source to obtain the required information (5). Social networks' potential and their wide use in disaster management have attracted people significantly (6), and these networks allow people to exchange short messages with each other and to follow public messages about disasters (7). Using these social networks may accompany problems, and the most important problem is the distribution of inaccurate and inappropriate information through innumerable rumors in different stages of the disaster cycle that leads to many concerns in this regard (8). Dissemination of false information and rumors through an event could lead to public fear in large-scale and even economical losses (9). The best interaction to prevent the distribution of these rumors in risk communication is to inform people in-time and truly (10).

What happened in several cities in 2019 Iran floods expressed that people who were affected by the flood needed information from reliable personnel but some of the media and social network followed another pathway instead of distributing correct and accurate information and that was making rumors that faced public opinion with several troubles and concerns. Examples of these gossips were the distribution of an image from some drowned children in mud and announcement of their death that regardless of its renouncement, a few people insisted to record this image in cyberspace; or the gossip of opening the floodgates of SEIMARE dam and its consequent flood; which were spread extensively (11). These rumors led to the arrest of twenty-four rumormongers (12). A review of these rumors

mainly distributed in social networks reveals that in-time and correct informing of responsible people and using novel technologies in this regard could have an important role in preventing rumor distribution. This issue requires amplification of the communication with official media in the time of disasters in order to reduce the volume of rumors (11). Limitation of using some networks was the reason that organizations could not use from these options for informing and management of social space affected by flood disaster and this opportunity was given to people that didn't have any responsibilities for informing people to increasingly raise citizens distress and misery and to cause public fear by distributing rumors and negative advertisements. Therefore, the best way to prevent rumors made by social networks and media is establishing constant communication with all types of media and distributing information fast and in-time in the affected societies.

Conflict of interest

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