



Social Media and Flash Floods: A Review from the Perspective of Responsibility and Conscience

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to determine the role of social media and the responsibility and conscience of others to help when they have been exposed to disaster information. This study used a qualitative case study approach. The informant selection technique used purposive sampling. Data collection techniques included in-depth interviews and direct observation. Data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification were used for analysis. The results of the study indicate the conclusion that the role of social media as part of disaster communication is: (a) Coordination between agencies related to government communication must be able to act more quickly and coordinated with each other, (b) The community as users of social media has conveyed valid and realistic information about disaster developments, evacuation processes, and assistance services provided in Sumatra and (c) social media also plays a role in reducing public emotions caused by the government's slow response to natural disasters in Sumatra

INTRODUCTION

The flash floods and landslides that occurred in several provinces in Sumatra from late November to December 2025 constituted one of the greatest ecological and humanitarian tragedies in recent decades. This event claimed a massive number of lives, with official reports stating more than a thousand people died and hundreds more were missing, and hundreds of thousands of residents were forced to evacuate their homes in Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra (BNPB, 2025). Beyond the loss of life, the damage to infrastructure was extensive, with hundreds of thousands of homes, public facilities, health facilities, schools, places of worship, and bridges damaged or destroyed, demonstrating the scale of the disaster. The floods that occurred on the island of Sumatra were unpredictable, yet they significantly impacted the sustainability of human life and the environment (Rahman et al., 2025). These flash floods not only impacted the socio-economic lives of the directly affected communities but also raised profound questions about the underlying structural causes. Various environmental groups and scientists have linked the intensity of extreme rainfall to global climate change, but local factors such as deforestation and land-use changes are also seen as exacerbating the situation (Kompasiana, 2025). Studies and observations show that upstream areas previously forested with dense vegetation have been converted to plantations and other economic activities, reducing the natural capacity to absorb rainwater and retain soil during the rainy season.

The Indonesian government, through various official statements and reports from institutions such as the National Disaster Management Agency (BNPB), has consistently released data on victims and the impact of disasters, as well as ongoing response and recovery efforts. However, official government statements are often criticized for creating a gap between the formal narrative and the reality of victims' experiences on the ground. This criticism grew especially when the government refused to declare a national disaster status, despite the impact and scale of the disaster involving thousands of victims and massive damage. Essentially, the government must be able to build communication that can reassure the public, not the opposite. Disaster communication is crucial for facilitating response, disseminating information, and coordinating disaster management and recovery efforts (Dwiningtias and Didik, 2024). In the context of disaster management, concerns have also emerged regarding the government's responsibility to respond quickly and effectively. Social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter (X), and TikTok have highlighted delays in aid, the ongoing challenges in logistics distribution in many remote areas, and the limited information available to address real needs on the ground, demonstrating the bureaucratic system's unpreparedness to face a crisis of this magnitude. Even the government's decision to reject foreign aid has drawn criticism from various parties, who believe this reflects a political or nationalist orientation that compromises the effectiveness of its response to the victims' needs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

An interesting and important academic study is the role of social media in mediating the flood experience on the island of Sumatra. Social media has become a space where affected residents and volunteers share visual and narrative accounts of real-world conditions, including documentation of floodwaters, destroyed infrastructure, and accounts of isolated residents awaiting aid. This content often circulates long before official reports are published, creating a public space filled with empathy and criticism of the government's perceived slow and inadequate response. Given that social media is not just a news channel but also an arena for collective moral interaction, this phenomenon opens up opportunities to study how society uses social media to exercise social control and express public conscience. Criticism of corporate social responsibility is also a key component of this phenomenon. Several reports and statements from authorities have indicated that they are investigating the involvement of companies in the deforestation process, which is suspected of exacerbating the impact of the floods. For example, the Ministry of Forestry stated that investigations have been conducted into several companies, including reviewing documents related to land use permits and potential legal violations by corporations operating in the affected areas (Kemenhut, 2025). Administrative actions such as the cancellation of dozens of forestry permits indicate a structural recognition of the link between economic practices and ecological damage that contributed to the disaster.

However, criticism of the government and corporations is not solely about what happened, but also about what should have happened. Normatively, the state is expected not only to respond to disasters after they occur but also to have robust preventative mechanisms, including sustainable land use regulations, ecosystem monitoring, and strict law enforcement against environmentally damaging activities. This responsibility also includes empathetic and transparent crisis communication skills, where the state focuses not only on statistics but also respects and humanizes the experiences of victims. This approach is part of the ethics of public policy oriented towards holistic human well-being. Communities often demonstrate extraordinary solidarity through aid campaigns, donations, and volunteer mobilization in various affected areas. These civil society movements reflect an active and responsive collective conscience to the suffering of fellow citizens, which in many cases moves more quickly and directly than some formal government responses. In this perspective, social media serves as a tool of coordination and witness, strengthening a sense of humanity and social responsibility among ordinary citizens. The tension between the official government narrative and the narratives circulating on social media reflects a communication and moral gap in disaster management. While the government places greater emphasis on administrative procedures and statistical jargon, the public, through social media, emphasizes real-life experiences, empathy, and the urgency of action. This difference extends beyond mere language to values regarding how disasters are understood and the moral priorities for responding to them. In the academic context of public communication and public policy, this highlights the need for a critical examination of social media's role as a

negotiating space between empirical reality and the ideal of moral responsibility. Research that positions social media as both a source of discursive data and an arena for narrative contestation provides an opportunity to understand how society interprets state and corporate responsibility in crisis situations.

This research is crucial not only for critiquing unilateral government responses or corporate behavior, but also for understanding the dynamics of communication, public morality, and social responsibility in the context of major disasters that impact the lives of millions of citizens. Data-driven analysis and the study of social media discourse can reveal how society articulates its moral expectations and evaluate whether structural responsibilities by both the state and corporations have been properly implemented.

METHODOLOGY

Type of Research

This study used qualitative methods. Bogdan and Taylor state that qualitative methodology is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written and spoken words from people and observed behavior (Murdiyanto, 2020). The data concerns "Social Media and Flash Floods: A Review from the Perspective of Responsibility and Conscience."

Research Subjects

The subjects of this study were informants selected through purposive sampling, a sampling technique with specific considerations. These considerations include those who are considered to know best what we expect, or perhaps those in authority, thus facilitating the researcher's exploration of the social object/situation under study (Sugiyono, 2015). The subjects of this study relate to news coverage on social media such as Instagram and non-governmental organizations.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection techniques in this qualitative research are divided into two:

Observation

According to Soemitro in Subagyo (2011), observation is a form of systematic observation of social phenomena with a focus on psychological symptoms. The objective was to record data regarding Social Media and Flash Floods: A Review from the Perspective of Responsibility and Conscience.

In-Depth Interviews

The researcher used a planned but unstructured interview method. This means that the researcher did not use a systematic format or standard rules, but rather used interview guidelines in the form of an outline of the issues to be addressed (A. Muri, 2014). Interviews were conducted with volunteers from non-governmental organizations.

Data Analysis

According to Miles and Huberman, as quoted by Subagyo (2011), data analysis consists of three simultaneous activity streams: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Natural disasters can occur suddenly or through a gradual process. Some types of disasters, such as earthquakes, are nearly impossible to accurately predict when, where, and how strong they will be. Meanwhile, other disasters, such as floods, landslides, droughts, volcanic eruptions, tsunamis, and weather anomalies, can still be predicted in advance. Nevertheless, disasters always have a surprising impact and cause significant losses, both in terms of life and material damage. These shocks occur due to a lack of awareness and preparedness in facing the threat of danger. With the enactment of Law Number 24 of 2007 concerning Disaster Management, disaster management is expected to improve, as the central and regional governments are responsible for disaster management. Disaster management is carried out in a targeted manner, starting from pre-disaster, during emergency response, and after a disaster. The initial stage in this effort is to recognize/identify the source of the danger or threat of disaster (BAKORNAS PB, 2007). According to Law No. 24 of 2007 concerning Disaster Management, a natural disaster is a disaster caused by an event or series of events caused by nature, including earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanic eruptions, floods, droughts, hurricanes, and landslides. These natural events naturally carry certain risks and can have devastating impacts. According to Law No. 24 of 2007 concerning Disaster Management, risk is defined as the potential loss caused by a disaster in a specific area and within a specific timeframe, which can include death, injury, illness, threatened lives, loss of security, displacement, damage or loss of property, and disruption of community activities.

The concept of disaster management has undergone a paradigm shift from conventional to holistic. The conventional view considers disasters to be unavoidable events or occurrences requiring immediate assistance, thus shifting the focus of disaster management to relief and emergency measures. Therefore, this perspective is called the Relief or Emergency Assistance paradigm, which focuses on meeting emergency needs such as food, emergency shelter, health care, and crisis management. The goal of disaster management, based on this perspective, is to minimize losses and damage, and to quickly restore the situation. Furthermore, disaster management can be achieved through effective communication to prevent a crisis for those affected.

The end of November 2025 was a devastating experience for the people of Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra. Heavy rains that lasted for several days caused flash floods and landslides that submerged many villages, damaged public facilities, and caused power outages, road closures, and disrupted communications. As of December 4, 2025, at 1:05 PM WIB, the confirmed death toll reached 776, with 564 missing and 2,600 injured (<https://www.ums.ac.id/>).

The severe flooding that hit Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra was not solely due to heavy rainfall. Rather, it was a symptom of a spatial governance crisis on the island of Sumatra. The floods and landslides that devastated Sumatra signaled that a development model based on natural resource extraction had reached a dead end. Naturally, tropical forest areas such as those in Sumatra and Kalimantan have a canopy that can capture and store up to 35 percent of rainwater, with approximately 65 percent of the remaining water reaching the

ground. If the land surface is not disturbed, for example by construction activities, up to 55 percent of the rainfall can infiltrate the ground. The remaining 10-20 percent enters rivers. This water balance formula applies to forest areas. (<https://mongabay.co.id/>)

The natural disasters that occurred in three provinces on the island of Sumatra certainly require effective and optimal mitigation, one of which is through the study of communication science, which plays a crucial role in disaster management. Wood (2006: 38) states that "communication conveys an understanding of ongoing human interactions, aimed at creating a shared understanding." This understanding relates to the needs and is immediately provided to victims to prevent a crisis. Within the concept, crisis communication plays a vital role in natural disaster management, especially in disaster-prone countries like Indonesia, and in the current situation on the island of Sumatra, particularly in Aceh, North Sumatra, and West Sumatra. (Nursanti et al., 2025).

Indonesia is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world, with over 500 earthquakes occurring annually (BMKG, 2020). The islands of Java and Sumatra, located on the Pacific Ring of Fire, make them vulnerable to earthquakes, tsunamis, and volcanic eruptions. Furthermore, 2025 is a historic year for Sumatra, marked by natural disasters such as flash floods. Therefore, disaster communication, imbued with social responsibility and a conscience, is crucial, especially for the Indonesian government. Many victims still lack adequate care.

Disaster communication focuses on conveying information to optimize disaster mitigation, while also utilizing a cognitive approach to empower communities and disaster survivors with knowledge and skills to address issues related to disasters (Aziz, 2024). Disaster mitigation can undoubtedly save humanity from natural disasters. Everything must be done effectively, especially by providing a sound understanding to the public to avoid unexpected natural disasters. Furthermore, natural disasters such as flash floods on the island of Sumatra are a form of communication that is reported through social media platforms like Instagram and spreads rapidly. Current disasters can be immediately known or disseminated through social media, allowing the public to immediately increase preparedness (Simon et al., 2015).

Within seconds, social media can disseminate information about recent events or disasters, making it easier for people to take preparedness measures to prevent their impact (Muniz Rodriguez et al., 2020). Therefore, social media plays an active role in providing rapid and widespread information dissemination services during disasters, including news and social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp (Binte & Hasan, 2023). Social media has a very significant positive impact on disaster awareness, as evidenced by the rapid dissemination of information received by students and the public regarding disasters occurring in an area (Dwivayani & Boer, 2020) (Zhang et al., 2019). Disasters are unavoidable, but their impact on society can be anticipated or minimized (Aznar-Crespo et al., 2021). From a communication study that can be delivered more easily and quickly, namely by using social media to control the situation regarding disasters, namely (a) Coordination between Agencies: can

be done by disaster management agencies, local governments, non-governmental organizations, and the private sector. The government must be able to act more quickly, especially regarding the physical and mental safety of victims, not only doing self-image and showing selfishness, (b) The community as users of social media has conveyed valid and realistic information, namely information about disaster developments, evacuation instructions, and assistance services available in Sumatra. The actions of people throughout Indonesia to help others in Sumatra are a form of conscience. Helping with all maximum efforts such as disseminating account numbers that can be used to transfer money so that they can buy priority needs and (c) social media can also play a role in reducing the emotions of the community caused by the slowness of the government in responding to natural disasters in Sumatra. Furthermore, through social media, it also makes neighboring countries feel empathetic to help even though they are again rejected by the selfishness of the Indonesian government only because they want to maintain the dignity and honor of the nation.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study show the conclusion that the role of social media as part of disaster communication is (a) Coordination between agencies related to government communication must be able to act more quickly and coordinated with each other in various government agencies. However, in this coordination the government is still very slow, (b) The community as users of social media has conveyed valid and realistic information. The actions of the Indonesian community to help others in Sumatra are a form of conscience. Helping with all maximum efforts such as disseminating account numbers that can be used to transfer money to buy priority needs for victims and (c) social media also plays a role in reducing the emotions of the community caused by the slowness of the government in responding to natural disasters in Sumatra. Furthermore, through social media, neighboring countries also feel empathy to help even though they are again rejected by the selfishness of the Indonesian government only because they want to maintain the dignity and honor of the nation. Through social media, the community as netizens can unite to properly publicize the crimes of irresponsible mining actors in the destruction of the beauty of Sumatra Island.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations, so further research is needed on the topic of Social-Media and Flash Floods: A Review from the Perspective of Responsibility and Conscience in order to perfect this research and increase insight for readers.

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