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Social media, diversity and vulnerability: their role in a disaster

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Very few research studies have been dedicated to understanding the role of social media, diversity and vulnerability during a highly impacting event for a society. Social media are very important nowadays as a way to be in "connection to" and "link between" individuals. Thanks to technological support it is possible to create new virtual and real social relationships and networks and to be always up to date about what happen in the world. The role that virtual space plays "reducing distances", connecting people and places and facilitating the provision of support to people in need, has been receiving increasing interest in disaster studies in last years. In particular, connectivity has assumed an increasing role in relation to the diffusion of means to reach people and places in virtual mode. Furthermore, the use of social media as a means of providing information on disasters and risks could help to reduce exposure in disasters. However, several knowledge gaps are still opened, and in particular which are the potential repercussions of a high connected disaster management process on vulnerability? How can the weight of diversity change into the virtual space? The premise is that not everyone has the same possibility of accessing social media (e.g. to be informed, to know what is happening and to link with rescuers). The difficulty of accessing social media can make people invisible into the disaster management process with the risk that someone could be left behind. Thus, this presentation aims to discuss the challenges that derive from an increasing use of social platform in providing and receiving information during disasters. A second relevant point, that this presentation aims to discuss, is linked to the way citizens perceive communication platforms and how the flow of information significantly impacts on the interpretation and on the management of risk. Conclusions of this work suggest that communication should take into account the risk perception models by the public and therefore the peculiarities of each vulnerable group, to provide "targeted" communications in relation to the cultural context with the aim of reducing vulnerability growing up citizens' awareness and knowledge. This presentation is the result of the work provided as part of the EU H2020 founded project LINKS (<http://links-project.eu>).