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Social media, citizen empowerment and crisis communication during the 2014 UK Floods

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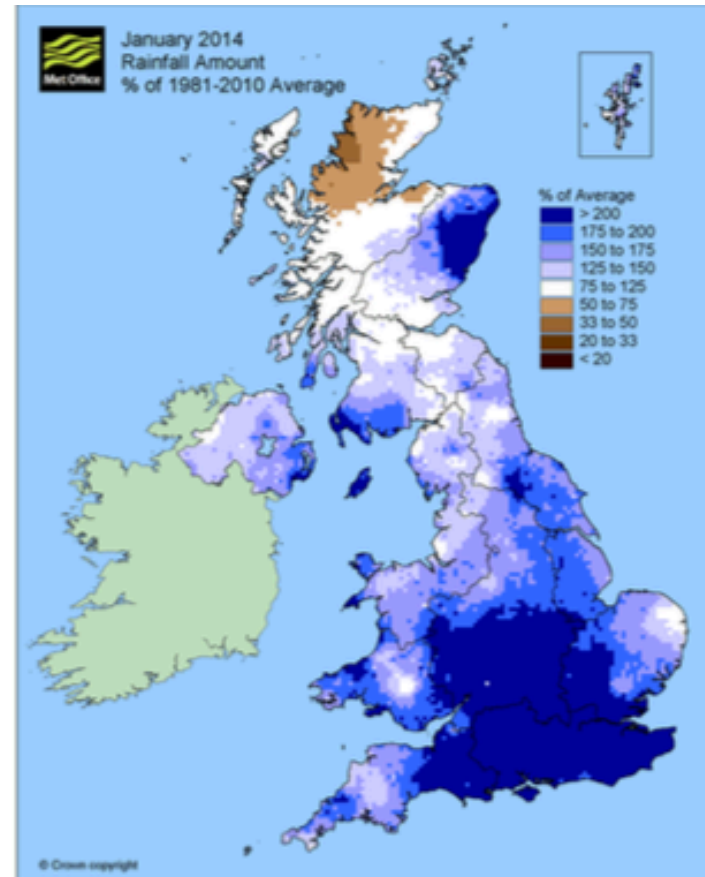
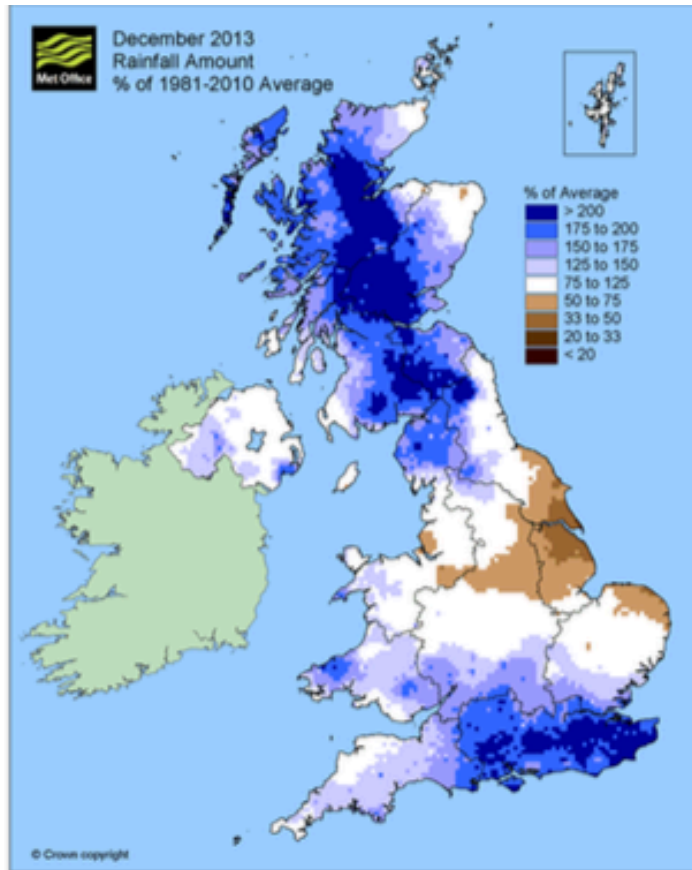
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ESRC CASCADE-NET Seminar

1 December 2017



Met Office: Record rainfall recorded in UK December 2013- January 2014 (since 1910)





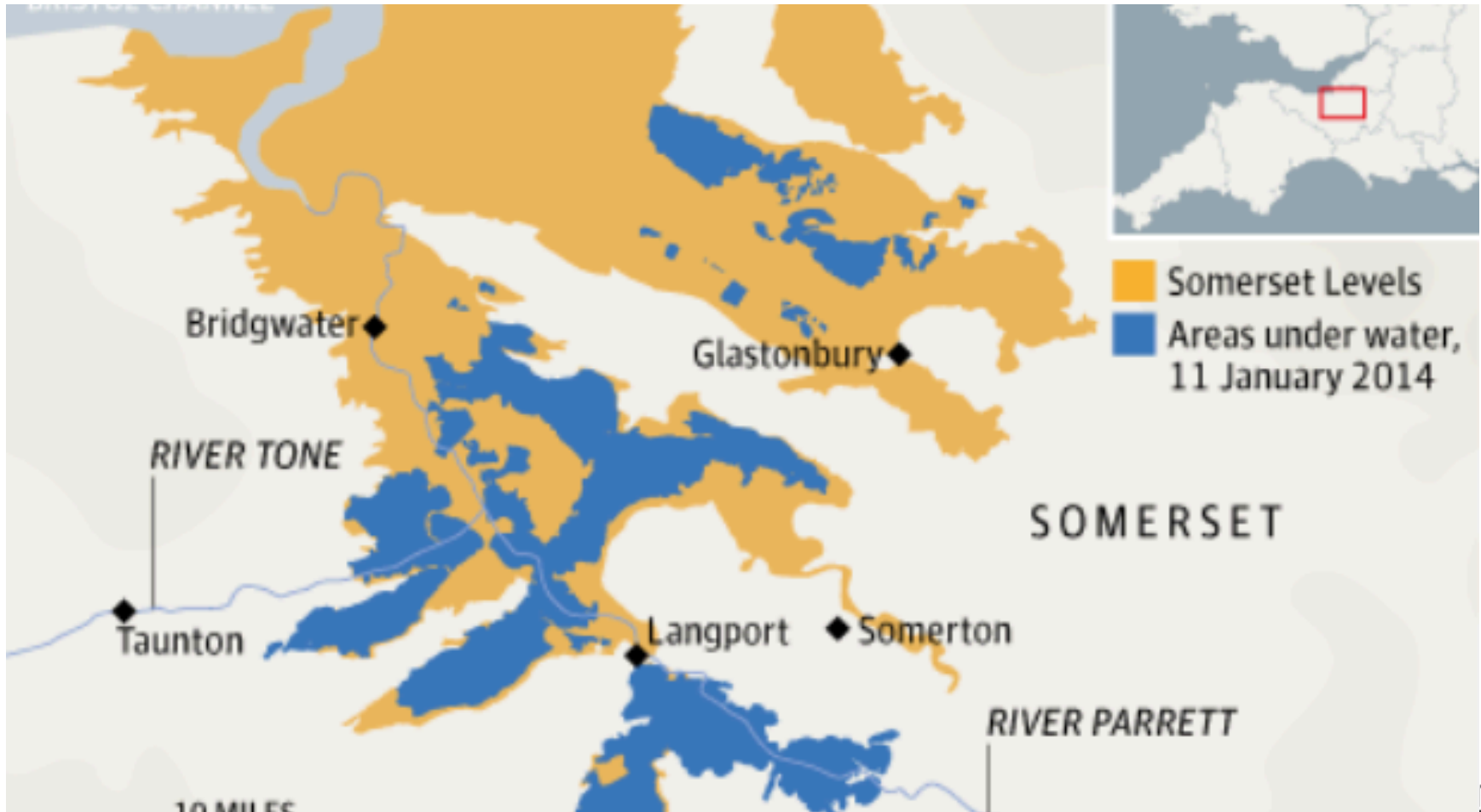
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December 2013: Storms cause tidal surge, high tides and high winds in coastal areas





Rainfall leaves large sections of Somerset Levels under water (Jan 2014)





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5th February: Dawlish train line collapses





Impact of floods and storms

- UK Environment Secretary Owen Patterson states that 7 people had died and 1700 homes had been flooded in England in December and January
- Power cuts affect many coastal areas (e.g. 450,000 homes and businesses without power 14-15 February 2014)
- EA estimated that £135 million worth of damage was caused to flood defences
- Association of British Insurers state that there were 17,500 flood claims (worth an estimated £1.1 billion) between 23 December 2013 and 28 February 2014



How did key agencies communicate with the public during the floods?

- EA released three day weather forecasts and updated flood maps on their website (shared via Facebook and Twitter)
- BBC and other local radio stations transmitted public information e.g. where to get sandbags, areas to avoid
- Police, fire and rescue services used social media (Twitter in particular) to offer reassurance and issue warnings
- Cornwall Council used Twitter to provide travel bulletins, flood updates, and to call for volunteers to help people in affected areas



Our interviewees agree that:

- Key agencies see great potential in the use of social media to build an ‘intelligence picture’ around future incidents that informs decision-making
- Concerns continue to be raised about verification of user-generated content
- Local radio and television channels remain the most effective channels for communication during floods
- Communication strategies are driven by national infrastructure – “sometimes that will rule social media out” (White, EA).



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EA ‘hyper-local’ Facebook page supplements F2F meetings with local communities:

“It’s been again a really good example of where we can help change the culture within the organisation that face-to-face contact and engagement is fabulous and, you know, we’ll always do that, but now that can be supplemented with an online discussion which reaches many, many more people not just within that community but people who are interested in the issues around that community

(Lisa White, EA Head of Media & Comms)





Cornwall Council uses Twitter to help with distributing sandbags in between high tides

“So what I was able to do using my Twitter account was to get a message out very very quickly to call for volunteers to come down and help out [...] Within 5-10 minutes, messages were appearing all over the place and picked up by the local media and it has been retweeted many, many times by lots of people with thousands of followers [...] Within a few hours we'd managed to help the parish council get over 80 volunteers”

(Mark O'Brien, Community Network Manager, Cornwall Council)



Fire and Rescue Services use Twitter to feed messages of reassurance to the public via traditional media

“if I tweeted that the boats were launching to do a routine, um, run around a particular area, I knew that the BBC would come back to me within minutes, saying can we run this as a story. And my answer was, absolutely you can, yes please. So, so, that two way dialogue that starts very publicly was particularly effective [...] So you're kind of feeding that, that hunger and once you know that that's how they operate you can actually use it [...] but once you know what they respond to you can actually trigger the media to pay attention very easily and very quickly”

(Jon Hall, Glos Chief Fire Officer)





Citizen social media campaigns help with flood response (and recovery)

- #Forageaid initiative is resurrected to help provide supplies (e.g. feed, straw) to those affected
- Founder (and farmer) Andrew Ward (@wheat_daddy) receives an MBE in recognition of the initiative and sets out plans to turn Forageaid into a 'rapid-response' charity in December 2014
- #clubhectare and #AgrichatUK communities play a key role in connecting farmers affected by the floods





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Flood Volunteers created to provide assistance to farmers in February 2014

What we do

Flood Volunteers enables people to volunteer their time, equipment and skills to help those in flood-stricken parts of the UK. We connect people in need with local volunteers.



Find volunteers

Find help or volunteers in your local area.

[Find Volunteers](#)

Request Help

Need help? Request volunteer services

[Request Help](#)

Flood Advice

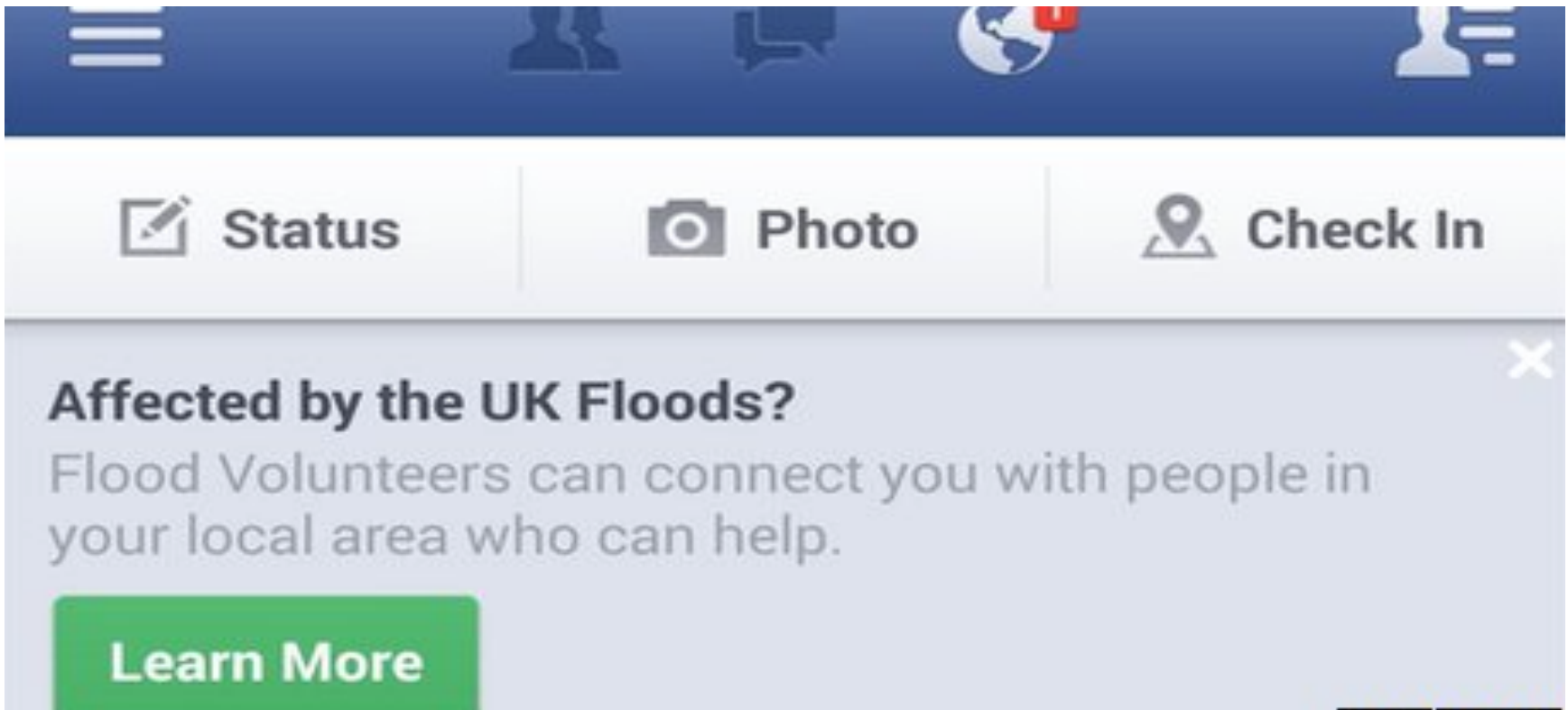
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Facebook directs its users towards the Flood Volunteers site:





Conclusion

- Key agencies used social media (Twitter especially) to reassure members of the public in flood-affected areas
- Nevertheless, local radio and television was still perceived by these agencies to be the most effective channel (due to its perceived trustworthiness)
- Social media empowered citizens to provide support for those affected by the floods (e.g. Flood Volunteers, #foreageaid)



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To Discover And Understand