

Nov 04, 2016 by **Lauren Brodsky**

Social Media and Resilience in the Face of Hurricane Sandy ^[1]

As temperatures drop across the East Coast, where the clean up efforts from Super Storm Sandy are ongoing, stories of resilience are permeating online: tales of New York City Marathon runners shifting gears from the cancelled event to volunteer efforts in Staten Island, tales of moms in New Jersey organizing clothing and supply drives to help those in the cold and dark, tales of musicians gathering in Brooklyn to entertain volunteers.

When it comes to our election, we may be divided. But when our focus is rebuilding our communities, we are united. And this rebuilding effort is both amplified and orchestrated by social media. The power of the media to connect, help and inform people is profound, and it is something to be proud of in this dark hour. We must demonstrate this tool and share it with the world.

While we are again amazed by the power of social media to connect us, many societies remain digitally disconnected. As these societies fall deeper into the digital divide, they miss some of the most valuable possibilities of human connection in our global age. In order to demonstrate the value of social media during times of local crisis, public diplomacy organizations must broadcast globally the story of the online efforts after Sandy.

There are two reasons for this – the first is to tell a story of what is best about America. Organizations such as Voice of America have been telling America's story, from various angles, since the dawn of the Cold War. This mission remains important - by telling our story we humanize our society to those behind an iron curtain of disinformation. Second, by demonstrating the non-political purposes of social media, we give citizens of closed media societies a safer way to demand this technology.

Dictators will remain skeptical, as they know that the dictator's dilemma decrees that a closed political system requires a closed media. But the compelling nature of social media in times of local crisis may push through a crack in the system. And as the U.S. government spent \$10 million in fiscal year 2011 to fight Internet access restrictions abroad, so that \$747 million worth of international broadcasting could reach target audiences, we need to push through this crack. We need our message of liberty, pluralism and justice to be heard through online forums. The story of Hurricane Sandy can aid our public diplomacy efforts.

We know that the value of the Internet is far reaching, from educating doctors in remote areas to providing payments for farmers in the developing world. In the aftermath of the Haiti earthquake, we saw how digital mapping helped the rescue and relief efforts. And stories from Sandy, such as the "Hurricane Hackers" at MIT who created a shared online space for information gathering and social projects related to the storm, reminds us that social media is more than a platform for self-expression - it is a tool for safety and increases the resilience of societies. Therefore, we must broadcast the value of social media through the story of Sandy,

we must showcase the American story of online resilience, and demonstrate the immeasurable value of media tools during times of crisis.
