

Diffusing Humour in The Disaster Risk Communication Strategy to Increase The Resilience of The Affected Community

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Summary

The 2011 tsunami in Japan and the 2010 Haiti earthquake provide evidence that failure in disaster risk communication leads to more fatalities among at-risk communities. In the past five years, disaster practitioners have utilised a wide range of strategies to communicate disaster risks. The strategies used are diverse according to its objectives, tools, coverage, and target audiences by mainstreaming the audience's needs, local norms, geographical areas, and cultural values. These strategies are not solely intended to deliver reliable disaster risk-related information efficiently. More substantially, the strategies are also expected to quickly bring resiliency to the disaster-affected communities. This Op-Ed will provide an early understanding of the concept of disaster risk communication and its strategies, including resilience concepts and frameworks. Moreover, this Op-Ed also underlines further discussion on how vital disaster risk communication is, how the communication is linked with the conceptual elements of the resiliency of disaster-affected communities, and how humour can be a promising entrance to establish a more disaster-resilient community.

Keywords: Humour, Disaster Risk Communication, Resilience Community

The Consequences of Failure in Applying Disaster Risk Communication

Doerfel et al. (2022) stated that communication is crucial in shaping resilience. Failure to coordinate and integrate information flows from different sources, according to Shittu et al. (2018), leads to weak post-disaster response operations and increases the vulnerability of affected communities. For example, The Economist (2012) covered the Japanese government's bungling of an unnecessary evacuation order during the 2011 tsunami in Ukedo, which resulted in approximately 1,800 casualties.

More tragically, the lack of coordination and collaboration between humanitarian organisations during the 2010 Haiti earthquake led to 200,000 casualties and forced millions to live without shelter facilities. In addition, Rahman and Khairul (2018) also detail more on how the lack of disaster risk communication raised the high amount of fatalities during the 2004 Indian

Ocean tsunami and influenced misperceptions among Japanese people, thinking that they were safe and lowering their alertness during the 2011 Japan tsunami. In other words, putting the right approach in disaster risk communication is integral to accelerating life-saving efforts to establish disaster-resilient communities.

Defining Disaster Resilient Community

Haque et al. (2022) define resilience as *"The ability to bounce back or re-establish stability after being disturbed or perturbed"*. Furthermore, IFRC gives an additional interpretation defining resilience as *"The ability of individuals, communities, organisations or states exposed to disasters, crises, and underlying vulnerabilities to anticipate, prepare for, reduce the impact of, cope with and recover from the effects of shocks and stress without compromising the long-term prospects"* (IFRC, 2014).

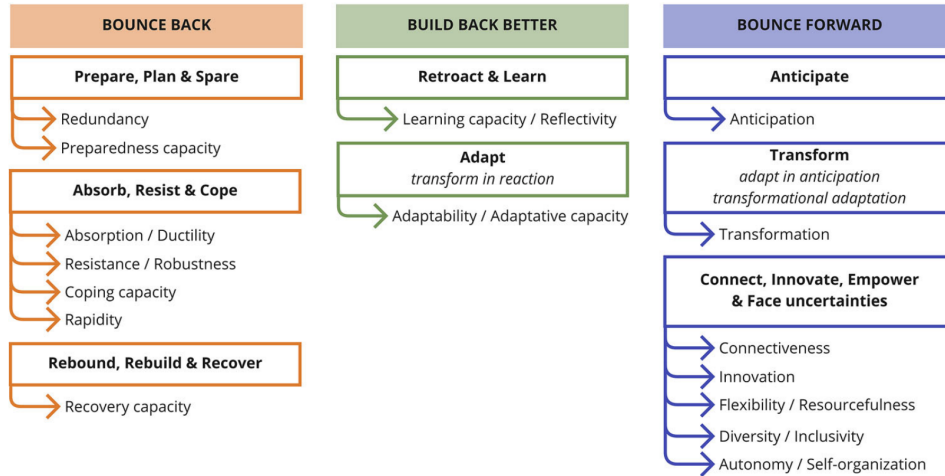


Figure 1. Conceptual Dimensions of Resilience Components
Source: Gravelin and Daniel, 2022

Before visualising the conceptual dimensions of resilience (see **Figure 1**), Gravelin and Daniel (2022) identified the 25 most often-mentioned components defining resilience in scientific studies on risk and disaster management published in 1999-2021. Through those components, the authors then grouped it into 3 (three) conceptual dimensions of resilience proposed by Chen (2020), which are bounce back (resist), build back better (adapt), and bounce forward (recover quickly). To operationalise the components, they merged some components with the same interpretations.

Moreover, when the resilience concept is

contextualised at the community level, IFRC (2014) has proposed six characteristics a community should have to be categorised as resilient. The characteristics include some points having been listed below (see **Figure 2** for its visual formation):

1. Knowledgeable, healthy, and can meet its basic needs.
2. Socially cohesive (connected).
3. Having economic opportunities.
4. Having well-managed and accessible infrastructures and services.
5. Able to manage its natural assets.
6. Connected.

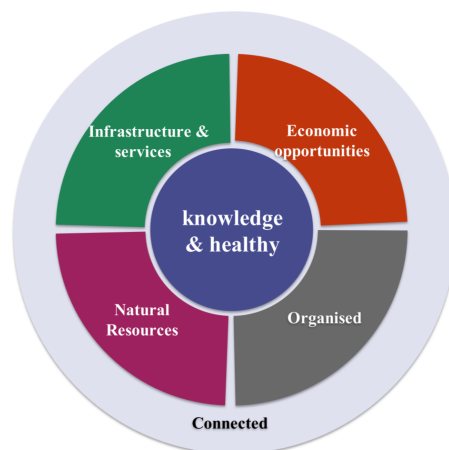


Figure 2. The Characteristics of a Safe and Resilient Community
Source: IFRC, 2012

Another definition, proposed by the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Risk Reduction by Tariq et al. (2021), defines a resilient community as “A community exposed to hazards which can resist, absorb, accommodate to, and recover from the effect of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions”. Championing a resilient community relies heavily on managing risks using various risk reduction strategies. It may include an effective risk communication strategy in order to strengthen capacities, advance coping ability, stimulate positive behaviours, and, on the other hand, minimise vulnerabilities among communities (Zhai and Jae, 2024).

The Concept of Risk Communication

An easy way to understand the interpretation of risk communication from the standpoint of Kondo et al. (2019) is “The way to let communities know about the potential risks, including the size and how to reduce and even avoid it”, which is then defined as a factor potentially causing damages. Further, Bourrier (2018) mentioned Abraham’s thoughts on the core principles of risk and its communication: straightforwardness, planning carefully, informing early, being transparent, respecting social, local, and cultural values, and building trust.

UNDRR (2023) also states risk communication can be effective if the approach considers the psychological, political, social, and cultural aspects that influence how people understand, believe, and react to risks. In addition, Salmani et al. (2023) show that five components significantly influencing disaster risk communication have to be considered, including the message, message sender,

message receiver, message environment, and message process.

Risk communication itself should affect or even increase the level of resilience of affected communities to disasters, which is described, from the perspective of communication studies, by Okeukwu-Ogbonnaya et al. (2024) is influenced by the length of time needed for information dissemination to 90% of the affected population, referred to as “the diffusion period”. This period is driven mainly by trust in the local authority and people, cable news, and social networks, as well as network properties. In the cases of both normal and disaster circumstances, the shorter the diffusion period, the faster the dissemination time of certain information to 90% of the population, meaning that there is a higher possibility of affected communities being more resilient.

The Variation of Disaster Risk Communication Strategies

In the context of disaster response, risk communication is then translated into various strategies, such as using “Disaster Tales”, as studied by Mazzoglio et al. (2021) as the development of disaster reports by incorporating audio-visual aspects as elements that can increase the awareness of at-risk communities and generate new behaviours, increasing resilience in facing disasters. In addition, as a good practice elaborated by Bodoque et al. (2019), the use of storytelling in elaborating the audio-visual media and engaging dialogues has proven effective in raising people’s awareness about flood risks.

For another instance, Teo et al. (2019) proved that local values such as ethnicity and local language can be optimised to increase the acceptability of the disaster risk

communication strategies used among locals. Despite all the specific tools mentioned, Mileti and John (2019) also reveal that using diverse media to diffuse disaster risks is essential. Interestingly, a novel approach to disaster risk communication has been developed by adopting humorous elements, which was recognised by Veatch (1998) as a mysterious yet interesting phenomenon to be explored.

The Use of Humour in Increasing The Resiliency of Disaster-Affected Communities

Discovering the use of humour in disaster risk communication gradually raises a bright spot for resilient communities worldwide. This is because, in disasters, humour is recognised

by various study fields, as stated by McBride and Jessica (2022), as a promising framing-purposed tool that can reduce stress and raise empathy, compassion, and engagement among affected communities.

As Kuiper (2012) points out, from a psychological perspective, humour is often linked to a positive psychological approach. This approach, which emphasises the existence of positive personality constructs that facilitate personal growth and enhancement, as well as psychological well-being, underscores the reassuring role of humour. Peterson's view of a resilient community (see **Figure 2**) further reinforces this, highlighting humour as a strong predictor of life satisfaction and a key factor in community cohesion and social support.

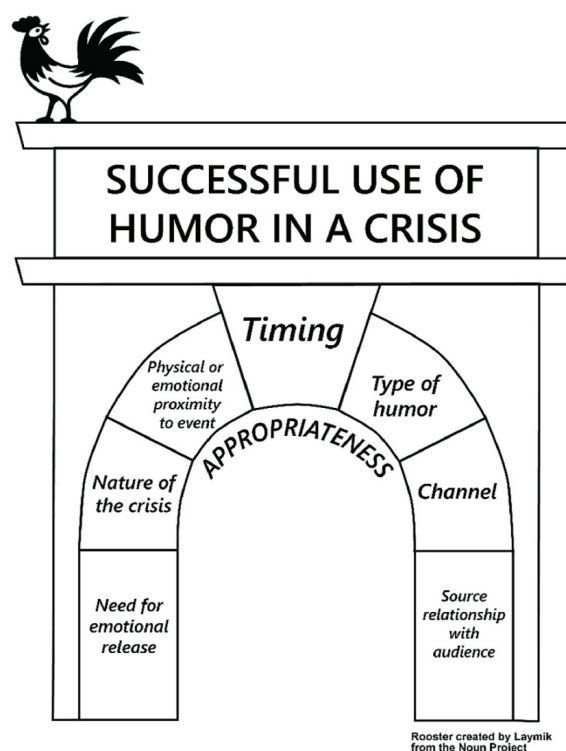


Figure 3. The Model of A Successful Use of Humour in Disaster Risk Communication

Source: McBride and Jessica, 2022

McBride and Jessica (2022) have contextualised a model of humour in disaster risk communication from an early conceptual model of communication proposed by Westley and Malcolm (1957). The first-mentioned model (Figure 3) shows that a successful humour diffusion in disaster risk communication is determined by seven elements, including

1. Timing;
2. The appropriateness of humour topics;
3. A communal need for release;
4. The forms of crisis;
5. The physical and emotional proximity to the event;
6. The acceptability of communication channels; and
7. Trust between information sources and communities.

The model emphasises that “Timing” (the most significant part of all elements) is the fulcrum of humour usage in disaster risk communication. This means that without fitting timing, all elements of humour usage will be meaningless, even if at their best. On the other hand, “a communal need for release” and “trust of communities towards the information source” are visualised as their foundations, which rely on types of audiences.

Conclusion

In short, risk communication is integral to reducing risks and increasing resiliency among disaster-affected communities. Through its thoughtful application, disaster risk communication can raise certain behaviours that benefit the community when facing vulnerabilities, including the use of humour as one of its strategies. On a daily basis, humour has been recognised as a

universal approach for people worldwide to communicate and engage deeper with one another. When it comes to the disaster field, humour clearly shows that humour has interconnections with dimensions of resiliency, meaning that there is a reciprocal influence on the level of resiliency among disaster-affected communities.

Disclaimer

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