

Digital soldiers emerge heroes in Kashmir flood rescue

ht hindustantimes.com/india/digital-soldiers-emerge-heroes-in-kashmir-flood-rescue/story-WuHYPkoQxNtJQzvVMLDnqK.html

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In Kashmir's massive flood rescue operations, a group of digital volunteers - some based as far away as the United States and Singapore - has emerged as unlikely heroes, whose selfless service on social media has helped save thousands of stranded people across the devastated Himalayan region.

The Twitter account, [@jkfloodrelief](https://twitter.com/jkfloodrelief), set up by the group is among the foremost platforms curating and disseminating relief and rescue information from other users and putting it up on their handle and dedicated website www.jkfloodrelief.org. So useful is the information provided by the group that even the Indian army and the National Disaster Management Authority have been monitoring their updates and acting upon them.

Initially, before communications broke down, the group, working across time zones, depended on the relatives of those stranded and contacts on the ground for information. Their experiences during similar disasters in the past - Uttarakhand floods and Cyclone Phailin - encouraged them to start their efforts early and keep them more coordinated. When telecom networks crashed, the group still managed to relay information through the army.

"Our goal is to update on priority needs for relief, donation collection centers, and donation transportation logistics for public awareness on what to help via donations, where and how, and therefore, avoid mismatching of what is needed vs what is offered," said Hemant Purohit, a 27-year-old computational social scientist on crisis informatics at Kno.e.sis Center in Ohio, United States. The center has set up a dedicated 'Twitrus event' which identifies the most used hashtags and most active users, bringing their tweets together in one click.

The group's efforts supplemented those of the army which used social media extensively to coordinate its relief and rescue operations.

Meanwhile, the army has set up a dedicated WhatsApp group connecting all important stakeholders. All information received through social media channels are passed on to this group. Their efforts led to the rescue of a heavily pregnant woman on Tuesday.



Moriam Nessa

Sep 8th, 11:09am

I do not know if anyone will be reading this message and if this will be of any help. But I have my sister who is stranded in Srinagar. She is 9 months pregnant. And they need help. We have been desperately trying to get through the help lines but nothing is working. She is stuck on the 3rd floor of her house along with the other family members. Water level has already crossed the 2nd floor of their house. 3 houses have collapsed in their neighborhood since morning.. they need immediate help Name: Mr Sheikh Ali Mohammad Location: H.N 171, A JAWAHAR NAGAR AL-FAROOQ COLONY NEAR JK BANK. Near mobile tower. red color house Cell no: 072 98 957367 No of people trapped: 20 (including 2 babies below 2 years) No of stories:3 Can anyone please direct this message to the right concerned people. Thank you so much for your help.

ADGPI - Indian Army

Sep 8th, 3:24pm

Jawahar Nagar is heavily flooded. Rescue teams will be going there. So dont worry they will be all right. Indian Army is there



Moriam Nessa

Sep 8th, 7:28pm

Hey, Thank you so much for your effort in your rescue operations. But I'm writing to you again about any update about the situation in Jawahar Nagar. My concern is that a young girl there is pregnant.



Moriam Nessa

Sep 9th, 8:27am

Thank you so much again for your relief work and in helping out people. My sister has been rescued. All thanks to you and your team. They wouldn't have made it without you.

Graphic: Hitesh Mathur

"Initially we didn't have a plan in place on to address these (messages on social media requesting help). So, we put in place a WhatsApp group with all major stakeholders and started sharing these messages there to properly facilitate help," said an Army official explaining how the Indian forces are using social media.

Purohit tweets and retweets late into the night about relief and rescue efforts. His colleagues, some based out of Singapore, do the same, in between managing their regular jobs.

The group is amply supported by voluntary organisations and corporates such as Twitter India, Kno.e.sis Center, Google India, Cipla, IndiGo Airlines, DeVil On Wheels, Biocon, and Emami.

"Goonj has supplied close to 2500kg of relief materials, Emami has supplied 560kg of feminine hygiene products, Cipla has supplied 126 cartons of meds, Indigo is supplying a large amount of basic essentials like soap, toothpaste, toothpowder, biscuits, etc. from Mumbai and is on standby to provide foodgrains, Uday Foundation has sent 200kg of relief that includes kids' clothes, woolens and medicines and Biocon is on standby to provide insulin vials," explains Bhavana Upadhyaya, another core member. DeVil On Wheels has helped the organisation build connections with on-ground volunteers.

Social media organisations are not far behind as well.

"We have advised (them) on things like what kind of hashtags to use, what they should name their handle, etc." explained a Twitter official. Meanwhile, Google has launched a Onebox to give helpline information to the Army, Home Ministry, and NDRF Control Room.

Jammu and Kashmir Floods Information

Emergency Army Helpline: (+91) 011-23019831 · (+91) 011-23322045

Home Ministry Helpline: (+91) 011-23093054 · (+91) 011-23092763

NDRF Control Room: (+91) 011-26107953 · (+91) 0-9711077372
