

Preconceptions from Media Influenced Disaster Preparedness During Super Typhoon Haiyan

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Abstract

Days before Super Typhoon Haiyan (Yolanda) expected landfall, local radio stations had their extensive information dissemination in some of their programs. Print, local and regional television had their constant advisories for the preparation. But despite of the public dissemination, this resulted to a lot of human casualties because of subtle response in the preparation stage. This paper looks at some gaps in media's dissemination and peoples' preconceptions to explore inputs in media's role in disaster planning. A focus group discussion (FGD) was implored to Barangay Officials guided with a questionnaire to identify thematic clusters using a deductive approach. Results shows that media became a source of preconceptions in the preparation stage as people were not able to understand terminologies. The role of mass media in comprehensive dissemination affects public response in disaster preparedness.

Introduction

The Philippines is situated in the typhoon belt of the Pacific (Ganachaud et al., 2014), periodically visited for at least 15-20 typhoons per year in which five or six are strong enough to cause substantial damage (Hughes & Connell, 1999). Super Typhoon Haiyan, locally known as Yolanda hit the central Philippines on November 8, 2013. Devastating along its path, a huge part of Visayas; killing at least 6,190 people, injuring 28, 626 and 1,785 missing individuals. (NDRRMC, 2014). It is the deadliest Philippine typhoon and the fourth strongest typhoon recorded in human history (Dimacali, 2013).

Because of its confining threats, international media were focused on the forecasts on the developments of this atmospheric disturbance. They were in full alert in gathering information in order to warn the public. Mass media, which includes the television, radio, print, and online, has always taken the important role of information dissemination on disaster preparedness before, during and after its impact (Shklovski et al., 2008). This significant social contribution had proven mitigation in saving lives and reducing economic damages to a considerable extent (Nagao& Ohuchi, 2012; Nair, 2010; Ngamassi et al., 2016). Media always pay enough

attention to the disaster response (Alexander, 2014) which the public's basis for planning, evacuation, risk assessment and management systems. According to Republic Act 10121 or the National Disaster Risk Reduction Management (DRRM) Act of 2011 (Llosa & Zodrow, 2011), an integrated approach of DRRM include: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, rehabilitation and recovery. Mass media's engagements on education were always valued (Baring & Cacho, 2015) as it bridges government and the general public.

November 5, 2013; upon the discovery of the low pressure, national televisions have started disseminating news, alarming the public of the possible strength of the massive low-pressure area (LPA). Days before landfall, local radio stations had their extensive information dissemination, hereby putting up exclusive coverage Bantay Yolanda in some of their radio programs even until the day of the landfall. But despite of the efforts, thousands were killed and gone missing caused by 5.2 meters (max) storm surge (The Daily Telegraph, 2013) that obliterated coastal communities.

The devastation was very massive including 3, 424, 593 families or 16, 078, 181 individuals in Regions IV-A, IV-B, V, VII, VIII, X, XI, and CARAGA (NDRRMC, 2014). Meanwhile, the total cost of damages reached (and is counting) at Php 36, 690, 882, 497. 27 with Php 18, 336, 576, 627. 39 for infrastructures and Php 18, 354, 305, 869. 88 for agriculture (NDRRMC, 2014).

Materials and Methods

This paper aims to depict how people perceived the information disseminated by local media regarding preparation for the Super Typhoon Yolanda. This would also view on the details on the forms of media, preconceptions about the super typhoon and their awareness of the information they obtained. Four Barangay Officials of Brgy. 83-A Burayan, Tacloban City were interviewed on a focus group discussion guided with a structured questionnaire. All of the respondents were consenting adults, composed of two males and two females. A short orientation was given prior the FGD and consent were solicited from the respondents. Thematic analysis using deductive approach (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006) was formulated to come up coding schemes of the responses. An assigned encoder was designated while an interviewer facilitated the FGD.

Results

Radio was the most used form of media. Local radio stations were able to come up with exclusive coverage such as Bantay Yolanda, while; two of the respondents have additional source on local print and television media. Three themes were generated from the information: nature of super typhoon, preparation for the super typhoon, and awareness of the information. Sub-themes were also included in the analysis.

Under the theme *Nature of Typhoon*, the sub-theme storm surge emerged. Participants stated that the radio announced Super Typhoon Yolanda was so strong that it can cause storm surge. Some of the responses that coincide with this theme:

'Makusog an bagyo; makakapabirik na hin bulldozer.' (The storm was too strong that it can overturn a bulldozer).

"Makusog daw an bagyo kay signal no.4 na." (The storm was strong because it reaches signal no. 4). *"Makusog an bagyo kay makatumba hin lubi"* (The storm was strong because it can uproot coconut trees).

The strength of the typhoon was clear on the side of the respondents. In fact, they make use of heavy things to depict the strength of the typhoon. They were not able to perceive those strong winds will generate swells of storm surge, nor; it was not elaborated in simple terms for them to understand. Some of them had heard that word for the first time.

"An siring nira super typhoon. Pagtima na an bagyo, amo pala an pagklaro han storm surge". (They said that it was a super typhoon. They just explain the storm surge after the storm). *"Maaram la ak nga may bagyo"* (I just know that there is a storm coming). *"Di ak maaram hit nga storm surge. Syahan ko pala pakabati hit ha iya."* (I don't know about storm surge. It is my first to hear about it). *"Sige manla it ira pagyinakan hin storm surge"* (They just keep on talking about storm surge).

Preparation for the Typhoon. The FGD revealed that there were two themes on the preparation of the participants towards the upcoming super typhoon which they heard through media sources. These sub themes included: negligence and immediate response. Some of the participants neglected the information acquired from media. All of the participants stated that the precautionary measures were disseminated by the media. Some of them were informed to evacuate from their places and bring important things that will help them in disaster.

“Mag-evacuate daw kay makusog an bagyo, labi na adto ligid baybayon nga mag-evacuate ngadto hataas nga lugar” (We were informed that approachin typhoon is strong and people living along the coastal areas must to higher places). “Ginpapag-andam hiton first aid kit, radio ngan flashlight” (We were told to prepare first aid kit, radio and a flashlight). “Ginpapag-andam kami hin pagkaon ngan tubig.” (We should prepare food and water).

On the other hand, some did not heed to the advisories of the media. They were unresponsive because they did not expect on the impacts of the super typhoon. Some stayed in their house and evacuate during the super typhoon.

“Ha balay la kami kay diri man namon maaram nga masusugad hadto an mahihitabo; nag-evacuate na kami dida mismo han adlaw na han bagyo.” (Since we did not expect that the typhoon was that bad, we just stayed home; we evacuated during the day of the typhoon). “Nag-relax la ako syempre kay dire man ako nag-i-expect nga sugad kakusog an Bagyo Yolanda . Waray ako mag-prepare. (I just relaxed because I was not expecting Typhoon Yolanda was that strong. I did not prepare)

Some of the participants, on the other hand, immediately responded to the news they heard. Though they don't know the impacts of the typhoon, they responded immediately to the advisories.

“Nanipig kami han amon mga gamit sugad han mga importante nga dokumento, live birth, ID. Nag-andam gihap kami hin pagkaon.” (We secured our things especially important documents such as Live Birth, ID, etc. We also prepared supply of food). “Nag-evacuate kami three days before han bagyo.” (We evacuated three days before the typhoon landed). “Kinulba ako kay makusog man an bagyo nga maabot. Naghigot kami han amon balay basi diri maguba.” (I felt afraid because the coming typhoon would be strong. We fixed our house so that it would not be destroyed). “Nag-empake largo han bado han mga kabataan ngan namiling kun hain pwede mag-evacuate.” (We immediately packed our things and evacuated to a safe place).

Thematic clustering on the **awareness of the information** they received were classified into neglect, and lack of awareness. FGD showed that respondents were preoccupied with things, resulting into neglect in the preparation for the upcoming typhoon.

“Nalibang ako pagkinita ha TV han kan Napoles hearing” (I was more concerned about the Napoles' senate hearing rather than the weather updates at that time). “Na-busy ako han akon trabaho” (I was busy with my work).

Whereas, some participants were aware on the possible destructions or damages that may happen. This showed that the respondents were varied in their awareness levels pertaining to the super typhoon.

“Maaram talaga kami nga mahitaas an tubig ha dagat.” (I really knew that there’s a probability that seawater level will rise). “Nagpahimatngon man gud nga mag-andam kay may dara nga tubig.” (We were informed to prepare because seawater level to rise). “Waray kami mag-expect hin tubig kay waray kami pakakaintindi han termino nga strom surge” (We didn’t understand what storm surge means that’s why we didn’t expect of the water). “Waray man ako pakabati hiton nga storm surge” (I did not even hear about storm surge). “Waray man magsiring nga mahataas an tubig” (They did not tell us that the seawater level will rise.)

Some of the participants stated that they heard about the storm surge but they did not take necessary actions because they did not understand the term or they don’t know the extent of the damage it could bring.

Conclusion

Radio has a wider reach to the population and was persistent in advisories. In the context of technical terms, media should explain in simple language in order for the bigger population to understand. Preconceptions may develop that may impede in disaster management.

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