During Times of Crisis, Librarians Connect to Their Communities

USC School of Information Science, College of Information and Communications

SOUTH CAROLINA STATE LIBRARY

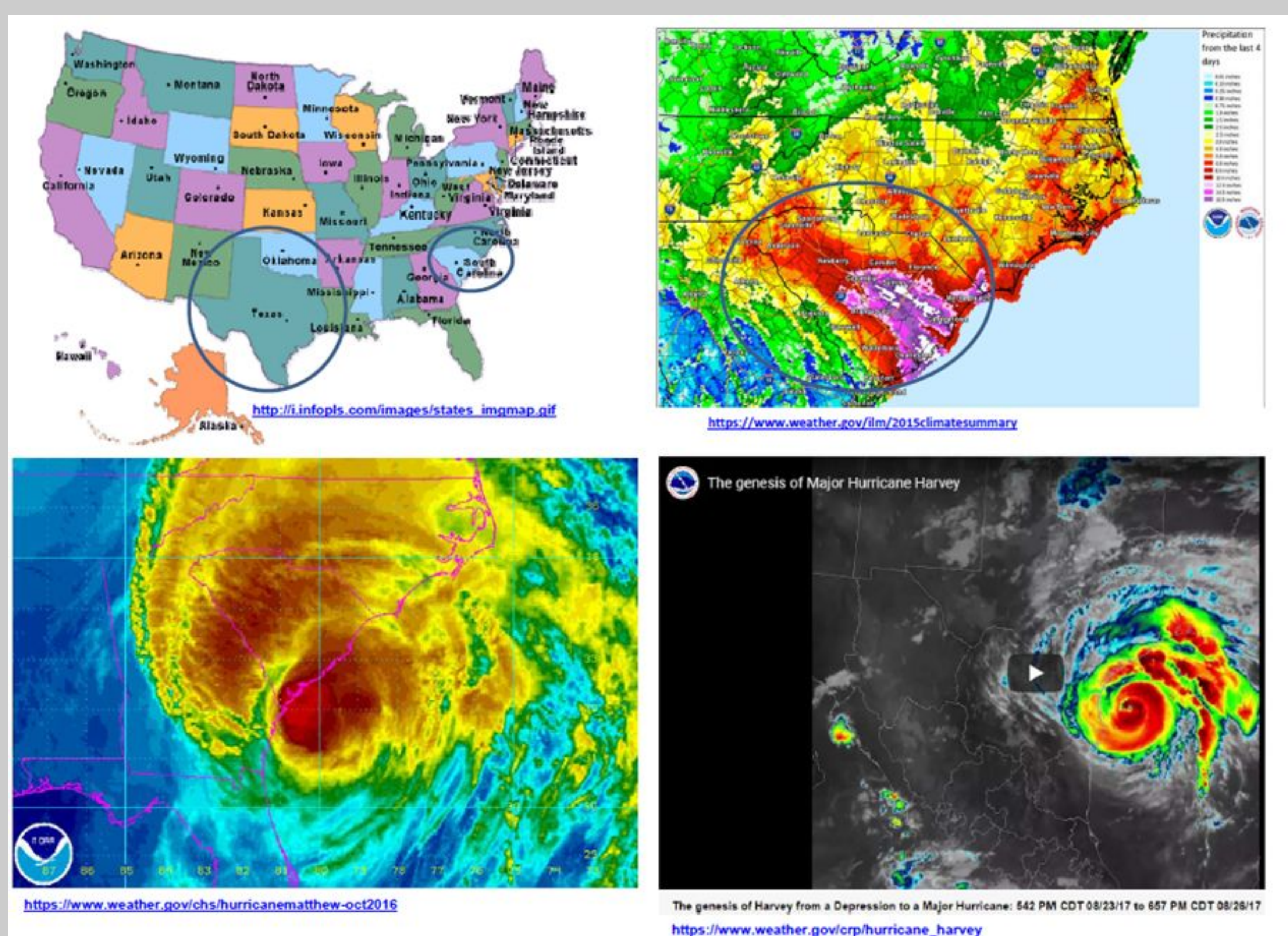**Feili Tu-Keefner, PhD, MLIS, feilitu@sc.edu, School of Information Science, University of South Carolina**
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http://i.infopls.com/images/states_imgmap.gif
https://www.weather.gov/ilm/2015climatesummary
https://www.weather.gov/chs/hurricanematthew-oct2016
The genesis of Harvey from a Depression to a Major Hurricane: 542 PM CDT 08/23/17 to 657 PM CDT 08/26/17
https://www.weather.gov/crp/hurricane_harvey

We investigated phenomena related to libraries and their social responsibilities to the communities they serve. The findings show that the **community members studied valued highly the critical information services provided by public libraries and librarians***.*

Background

Three situation-specific case research studies:

- explore the role of public libraries in South Carolina and Texas during emergencies

- examined how community members used libraries' critical disaster information services

- Identify librarians' crisis leadership competencies and emotional intelligence levels at work in times of crisis

- examine how these crisis leadership competencies can be integrated in the LIS curricula and professional development training opportunities

Situation-specific Case Research

2015:
- Public librarians' use of multiple channels and technology for information distribution and services
- Public libraries' collaboration with multi-level agencies to facilitate emergency response and recovery

2017:
- Community members' use of disaster information sources and services

2018-2019:
- Role played by local public libraries in Houston, Texas
- Community members' access to information services during the catastrophic hurricane and flooding in the Houston metropolitan area

Methodology

2015-2016	2017	2018-2019

• **Public Libraries' Partnerships and Librarians' Operations**
  ○ 3 focus-group meetings with public library administrators and librarians
 	
• **Public Libraries' Partnerships with Other Agencies**
  ○ An in-depth interview with a Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) agent
	• **Community Members' Information Access**
	
	• **Disaster information sources the community members used**
	
	• **How people shared information with others (e.g., social media, etc.)**
	  ○ Three sets of survey questionnaires were used.
		• **Public libraries serving as community catalysts to facilitate the building of community capacity and resources for emergency response and recovery**
		  ○ 5 focus-group meetings with Houston Public Library's administrators and librarians

We Learned …

Public Libraries and Librarians:

- select and disseminate trustworthy digital health resources

- promote the use of selected credible resources in multiple languages and services by the public libraries' websites anytime, anywhere

- promote public librarians' use of disaster information resources prepared/published by authoritative sources (e.g., governments and major public health organizations)

- deliver collaborative real-time health information services through the use of social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter

Communication and Community Relationships

Significant Technology Access

Resources such as the Internet, Websites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr, Instagram

The **Internet** was predominantly used during and after the disaster.

Social media served as main channels to provide real-time information services.

" … On the Richland Library's Facebook site, the library's posts were **shared 1,386 times**, an average of 98 shares for each post. …our [Facebook] posts reached a total of **109,882 people**. They had **6,200 impressions per day** …" [Library Administrator/Librarian Subject #7]

" … **on the library website**, much of the information on each location was updated pretty **immediately** after the storm occurred to let customers know that there were the impacted locations …" [Library Administrator/Librarian Subject #4 in Houston Public Library]

" … Our communication is very **centralized**. It really comes from the communication division [of the City of Houston] and, they are the ones who did Facebook, Twitter, Instagram. All of the social media goes out through them. We don't send out locally. …" [Library Administrator/Librarian Subject #4 in Houston Public Library]
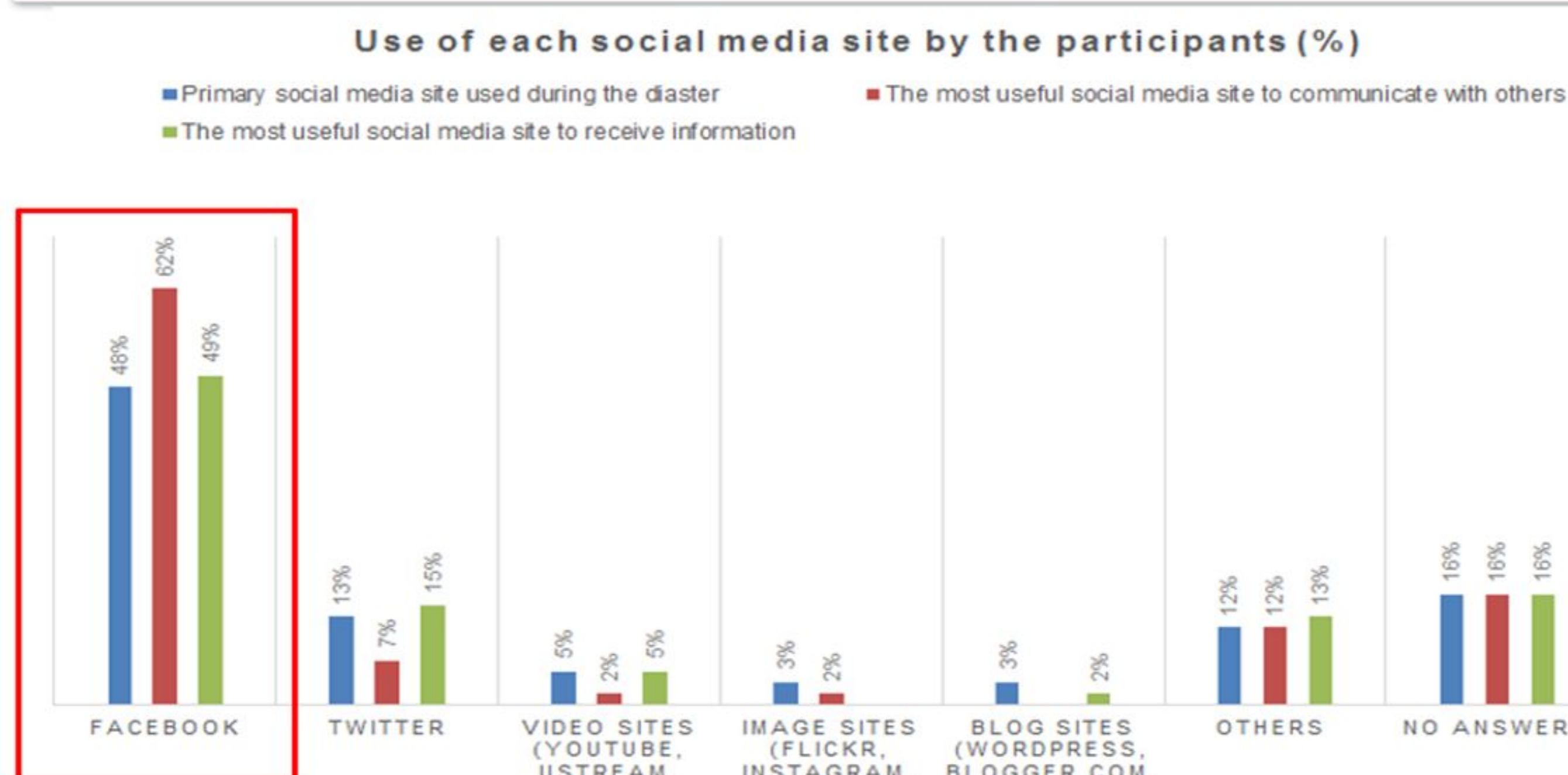
Community Members' Uses of Technology and Social Media

2015 and 2016:

The Internet was widely used during and after the disasters.

Use of each social media site by the participants (%)

- " … it would be beneficial for us to **start looking at ways to be prepared if this should ever happen again.** And maybe looking at organizations that we could connect with now, so that if this should ever happen, **we are better prepared to provide services and information.**" [Library Administrator Subject #13 -2015]

- " … those customers who **have an account** with us I do believe that they did a pushout to those customers saying 'Your holds can now be available at this location' trying to let them know **where certain services can continue that way.** … A lot of it I would say is very local and it's something we learned from Ike, we can do the big system pushout but its really **the neighborhood library staff going out to the areas and going out to social servicing and reaching out to others to let them know that we are closed** but we have this going on here, and letting them know that we are trying to do things …" [Library Administrator Subject #5 – 2018]

- " … In between [Hurricane] Ike and [Hurricane] Harvey we had started doing **Camp Stream which is our norm now our normal summer day camp offering.** So we had more experience with administering and all the logistical stuff that goes into taking care of kids and keeping them engaged for an entire day that **we're able to bring to that experience with Harvey that we didn't have that experience when we did this for Ike.** …" [Library Administrator Subject #2 – 2018]

Services Distributed by Local Public Libraries

2016:

Source/Measure Total (N)=145	All OR Most of the services and programs		Some of what it offers		Not much of what it offers		Nothing at all		Don't know		No answer	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Affected by Flooding Disaster in 2015 Total (N)=61	24	39	21	34	2	3	2	3	2	3	10	16
Affected by Hurricane Matthew in 2016 Total (N)=64	38	59	19	30	0	0	1	2	2	3	4	6
Affected by Disasters in Both 2015 and 2016 Total (N)=20	7	35	9	45	1	5	0	0	3	15	0	0
Subtotal	69	48	49	34	3	2	3	2	7	5	14	10

Ending Crises, Learning, and Making Changes