LINKS · Save the Children

#EmergencyHashtags

Objectives:

- Get to know the correct use of hashtags during emergencies

STEP BY STEP

Before starting

The teacher shares with the class the definition of the word **hashtag** (you can use the one in the glossary):

Hashtag: a word or short phrase (consisting of written words all joined together) preceded by the hash symbol (#) that is used to label a topic in social media so that all communications made by users on that topic can be found quickly.

Hashtags originated on Twitter (which we now know as X) to "tag" posts. They have since been used on other social networks as well to categorize a topic being talked about. With their use there is the possibility of reaching a great many people in a very short time. This is precisely why they can be very effective during emergencies, because they give the opportunity to communicate in real time to a very large audience.

The search for hashtags

The teacher then asks the class to provide some examples of what hashtags are and in what contexts they are commonly used. Once the responses have been collected, if it has not already emerged from the sharing, the teacher reveals to the class that hashtags can also be used during emergencies and that in these contexts they play a very important role for responders and technicians who plan the response.

At this point, it is suggested that the class consult a social media outlet of their choice and search for the hashtag **#earthquake**. Once the hashtag is found, the top 10 associated hashtags should be listed.

Hashtags in emergencies

From the guidelines provided by OCHA, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, we reflect on how hashtags are used during an emergency:

– The first standard hashtag is about the l**ocation affected** by the disaster, such as **#Italia** or **#Rome**.

– The second standard hashtag is about identifying **entities** in the area that are **involved** in the **emergency**. One then looks these entities up online to see how and what hashtags are being used.

– The third type of standard hashtag is for "**public reporting**" (**#PublicRep**), and is used to share information or testimonies, such as a collapsed building or a blocked road.

The teacher divides the class into groups and comes up with 5 scenarios of emergency contexts (see attached "#EmergencyHashtags - Scenarios" below). Each group will have to create a 35-word post ready to be published on social media containing 3 possible hashtags, one that relates to the location, one that relates to the realities of the area, and one that relates to public reporting.

Concluding thoughts

The definitions of Social Media, Emergency and hashtags (see glossary) are recalled by the teacher, who also reiterates to the class the importance of a correct use of hashtags in order to ensure effective communication, essential during a disaster event.

The teacher can guide the reflection by dwelling on some incorrect uses of hashtags:

– *Do not use hashtags to make personal comments that may be misleading and unrelated to reporting an event*

– *Do not create alarmism*

– *Do not spread fake news*

ATTACHMENTS

PDF

#EmergencyHashtags - Scenarios