Interview with Earthquake Guy

02/03/2017 – Phone call

Context:

Earthquake Guy on Reddit and Facebook is providing users with information about ongoing seismic events. He claims to be a non-seismologic. Questions about the reasons and consequences of his actions were asked during an interview by phone. The goal was to understand why a citizen takes the role of information provider on social media and how he faces the challenges and responsibilities of this action.

Notes:

Presentation and interest for EQ:

Real name is Carl Bolland, 23 y.o., studying business at the university and live in NZ since 10 years (Originated from England).

He never studied EQ, but got interested after the 7.1 he felt in September 2010. It was the first EQ he ever felt, was around 17yo at the time. It was 4:45am, and he describes it as a "very strange feeling", few damages around his area. He was very disappointed by the way media covered the event. It was very sensationalistic and he didn't find the answers to his questions, about why it happened, what will be going after and what to do now. People felt helpless and felt that the media were useless. It's not only his feeling, it was shared among the population (at least part of it). The news was on TV only half an hour after the main shock, the radio coverage was OK. Websites were updating info were slowly. On Facebook a lot of questions were left unanswered and he felt that if media had done their job they wouldn't be so many questions, they should have answered them.

He was also resentful about the media that stopped talking about the even after acknowledging that no death was tolled. His family abroad couldn't get updated information either because the media coverage was too low, because not enough sensational story to tell.

"The news dropped us like that".

Resentful against the media but not the political as for instance the local mayor went in the street and made sure citizens were Ok.

What he did: went for information on the Internet, mostly Wikipedia (to understand earthquakes causes and consequences, but also get some tips about what to do). Also went on Reddit and USGS website because it is where the info was.

<u>Use of SM</u>:

Use a lot SM for his work in business "to know what the clients and consumers want and talk about". Use them also for personal reasons, FB with friends, FB messenger, Snapchat, Instagram, Reddit as an information source. On Reddit we get to know what is worth knowing about. Use it since 4 to 5 years. Spend less time today on SM as he is working + On FB if you go twice a day you can see that there have been nothing new in between your two visits whereas on Reddit there's always new stuff and information.

<u>About EQ Guy</u>:

He launched the EQG account after an EQ in Chile in 2014: an 8.2 in Aquino. He saw that a lot of people on the Internet and especially on Sm were asking questions about what happened, what they should fear in the future and what they should do now. In California for instance people were asking questions about whether it was a sign of an upcoming EQ in their region or not, and whether they should prepare a kit or not.

He remembered all the questions he had and the stress that it was not to get answered so he used the knowledge he had to answer those people, creating a specific question for that. He didn't want to use his real name in order not to get any comments about the fact that he wasn't a seismologist. He stated many times that he wasn't and never claimed to be one but he thought his knowledge would be more recognized and valued this way. If he's not sure about something he's asking a seismologist or state that he doesn't know: "you don't want to misguide people". EQG is like "a brand", people can easily identify it. He always quotes sources.

Sources of information: mostly USGS (he gets notifications from them), because they are the most trusted among the people he is addressing to. Not because he trusts them the most. What matters is that people feel that the source is serious. The majority of the audience on Reddit is American (according to him). He also tries to give local sources, for that he tries to calculate what part of the world is awake at that time. He finds serious TW accounts that may provide information, because "TW is the first SM to be updated". He wants to quickly pop in as soon as an EQ occurs to **prevent fake information** to happen.

He also did some non-seismic events like Turkish riots in 2015, nuclear tests in North Korea, always to prevent fake news.

According to him, people are tired of sensationalism and want factual info.

<u>About the responsibility to be perceived as an information provider:</u>

"Work" also with Science Matter and Seismic girl, seismologist accounts on Reddit, but they don't have the same audience as him as he arrived first and is seen as the reference even though he is not a seismologist. "EQG has become a Reddit law", and systematically have

more vote than any other post, even if they say the same. He became "famous" and an authority.

It can be a chore sometimes and also stressful but he likes it. It is very time demanding (not always but certain periods are very intense). But he always remember the moment when he didn't find info and was stressed out during the 1stEQ, and how much he would have loved to get something like that.

Most stressful moments of EQG:

- Quake in November 7.9 in NZ because it was mixes between duty and personal life. He experienced the EQ at the university. For a previous and smaller earthquake they had to evacuate buildings for 4 hours and during the 7.9 only for 30min. He feared aftershocks and for their safety so he asked his friend to pack and evacuate. In parallel he was updating the EQG account with found information.
- Quake in Japan, 2 quakes of 7.2 within a day, and "only" 3 people died. There were near no news so he searched a lot and couldn't find much, no paper and no imagery. Even started to doubt that the USGS was right but finally found out that it was a non-event for Japanese, so they didn't say much as they are used to it.

How he communicates and interacts with the users:

He first communicates on Reddit as it is where the audience is. Facebook comes in second when other questions are asked or when he can provide a stronger analysis, after the crisis, to warn people who didn't know about the EQ. Also when he doesn't have access to a laptop he prefers to go on Facebook as it is easy to post there from a smartphone. As much as possible he tries not to leave any comment unanswered.

On Reddit he finds that there are a lot of different people, seeking different purposes. At first there were some trolls and people saying "bad things" but he decided not to answer. The feed is now clean of these trolls and mostly nice messages are posted. He always replies to serious comments and finish the message by "stay safe" to: (1) be positive, (2) end the conversation as he cannot get into long and time-demanding conversations (3) show empathy. Also uses emoji "when I don't forget" and have a moto "don't be scared, get prepared". He wants people to realize that it's not a robot that is answering them.

The communication on Facebook is a bit different as he is able to know more about the people, he indeed has access to their name, location, pictures… When answering he acknowledge the interest of the question, address them by their name, and respect the users even if he disagrees with them, not forgetting that they are worried.

Has been in contact with some seismic institutes (Geonet in NZ, USGS, IRIS) and newspapers (News in NZ, The Daily dot, Al Jazeera,…) But tries not to get too involved to keep time, professional and private life.

<u>Cultural differences in the way people interact with EQG:</u>

He finds that:

- Americans are always worried about "the big one" and are looking for signs. They need a prediction, even though impossible. They also leave a lot of comments wondering why the other were not prepared (not the same level of economic development usually).
- Japanese people are very polite, thanking a lot.
- Swedish very scared
- Italian very pessimistic
- In Oklahoma, strong reactions in favor and against fracking.

<u>General thoughts about information related to EQ and disasters:</u>

He is really resentful against the media and the sensationalist part of it. He argues that the scientific and serious data is available (mostly) but needs to gain visibility. **He advocates for a specific media related to disasters with serious and factual news, public to avoid sensationalism.** According to him media shouldn't be commercial.