

Home > Life in Japan > Technology

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TECH_JAPAN

WEB

The mobile-Internet is a lifeline for people in postquake confusion

By **AKKY AKIMOTO**

When the earthquake hit northern Japan on Friday, voice calls from mobile phones became immediately unavailable in order to leave room for emergency calls. However, in the Kanto area, mobile Internet connection was mostly kept on, and many people turned to the Web to exchange information.

On Japan's main social networking site, mixi, some communities were set up soon after the quake to keep people informed. The [largest one](#) now has over 300,000 members and it has guides to communities by region and purpose.

Mixi also has a function that displays how recently your friends logged in, so you can check if your friends have accessed mixi after the quake. Another feature, *ashiato* (footprints) — which was once one of the key attractions to mixi — shows when another user viewed your page (profile/diary/message/etc). While it is possible to send messages to your most important family and friends, features that do not require any direct interaction meant that even those who are not close friends can see who is OK.

Twitter was heavily used as well. When most railways stopped in greater Tokyo on Friday evening, many office workers were isolated in central Tokyo and decided to either stay put or walk back home. A lot of assistance was offered over Twitter by stores, restaurants, campuses and even people in houses along main roads who tweeted that help was available. Twitter even set some official hashtags to help identify your tweet, such as #jishin (general earthquake information); #j_j_helpme (requests for rescue or other aid); #hinan (evacuation information); #anpi (confirmation of safety of individuals, places, etc.); #311care (medical information for victims). And although it is not official, #jishin_e seems to be used for English, too.

TV news was also able to get out beyond normal channels as people utilized services such as Ustream and Nico Nico Douga. Initially, some users began redistributing NHK and other TV news video on Internet live video-streaming sites, then some TV networks including NHK, TBS and Fuji officially gave permission and opened channels saying: "This is an emergency and any method to share information is appreciated." Some of the live-video streams online saw the number of viewers exceed 100,000 people.

Internet radio also played a part, as the Radiko online station temporarily deregulated its regional block. Usually, it is limited within certain prefectures due to broadcast licenses. Kanto-based radio stations such as InterFM can also be listened to on PC and smart phones.

As news of the massive damage in the northeast became more widely known, people began thinking of ways to help people in the Tohoku region.

Many big websites are accepting donations via their usual payment methods. Some simply accept money, while others are selling avatars, coupons and virtual items. with proceeds going to charities. Some software/service vendors



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- Forewarned is forearmed. This information will save lives.**
- All this does is scare people. It's not helpful.**
- It's inspired me to think more seriously about possible evacuation routes.**
- Numbers like these aren't much more than a guess.**

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are offering their apps for free in Japan.

Grassroots activities are also emerging. A student at Tokyo University of Foreign Studies created a website and called for people to translate advice on how to cope with the earthquake, and received many responses via Twitter and other networks. The site has now been translated into 28 languages, with the aim of helping foreigners in Japan: nip0.wordpress.com/.

In an effort to conserve electricity there are now blackouts in the Kanto area, and some websites are reassembling the official PDF information from Tokyo Electric Power Company, offering address and postal code searches to check when and how long your area will be blacked out (see list below).

People in Japan who are still able to use the Internet know they are lucky, and the idea that you can somehow contribute to those less fortunate is widespread. The Web has surely played a major part in this.

Info on power blackouts:

webtool.fizsoft.net/tepco

machi.userlocal.jp/teiden/en.php (in English)

noveliba.jp/teiden

Streaming video: Ustream:

NHK www.ustream.tv/user/NHK-TV

TBS www.ustream.tv/channel/tbstvTV

Nico Nico Douga live.nicovideo.jp

Radio:

Radiko.jp radiko.jp

Enterprises Efforts on Helping Disaster Victims:

togetter.com/li/110998

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