

Reviewing the Broadcast Coverage of the Great East Japan Earthquake

- How Victims and Survivors Were Reported on Television -

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(Summary)

This article examines the Great East Japan Earthquake coverage, focusing on the shift in the number of victims and damage situation that were grasped by broadcasters and on how afflicted areas and quake/tsunami survivors were reported on television.

The author analyzed disaster reports within the 72 hours after the earthquake on three TV channels, NHK General TV, NTV, and Fuji TV, as well as reports within a week after the quake on NHK General TV. Content analyses and text mining method were used for the quantitative analyses. The summary of the finding is as follows.

Shift in the damage situation grasped by broadcasters: It took a long time for the broadcasters to grasp the entire picture of the damage; for a while there was a huge gap between the reported and actual scales of the damage. The number of victims reported after a week was different from the number currently confirmed by about 3,000 persons.

Occurrence of information vacuum: Little information on heavily-damaged areas was reported, causing “information vacuum” on certain areas. While some areas were reported every day others received little media coverage even after a week despite the extensive damage they suffered.

Imbalance between information “for” survivors and that “from” survivors: As the days passed broadcasters started reporting more and more “information on living” for residents in afflicted areas, but after March 14th there was a relative decline in the number of such reports as the coverage of the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant accident increased. Reports on information about survivors also increased day by day, but communities that received such coverage were limited.

How afflicted areas and survivors were described: Survivors’ situation was reported mainly by announcers and reporters and rarely by survivors themselves in their own words. One of the most distinctive words repeatedly used for describing the enormous size of the damage was the adjective “devastating.” “Debris” was not often used at this point.

It was difficult to examine problems concerning expressions and perspectives regarding afflicted areas and residents only by quantitative analyses. The need for qualitative analyses focusing on specific matters remains an issue.