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Belonging and Trust in the Inter-Media Society: The Case of the 3.11 Disaster

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Abstract

The 3.11 disaster in Japan is an epitome of an unexpected, highly complex and intrinsically disruptive media event, and remains an ongoing concern even after eight years. The complexity of the triple disaster not only brought destruction to the surrounding environment but also reconfigured many people's sense of place, security and communal belonging. In addition to the material reconstruction in the aftermath of disasters, it became equally essential to understand the social aspects of disasters, including how different media forms can aid recovery by strengthening connections with self, family and society.

In the context of the sense of communal belonging and perceptions of trust in media, significantly shaped and reconfigured by the 3.11 disaster, this study expands the scholarship on the role of media in disaster communication to focus predominantly on individual media usage patterns and behaviour within contemporary Japanese society. Examining individual media usage experiences utilising various media forms, from traditional mass media forms such as television and newspapers to new, digital players, social media platforms and online news websites, this study looks specifically at how individuals experience their sense of communal belonging and trust in the context of the complex, inter-media environment of the 3.11 disaster. Based on in-depth interviews and social media data from Japan, this research examines the role of traditional mass media and non-traditional online media in evoking and amplifying a sense of belonging to spatial and relational communities. Here, the study elaborates on the role of online media in disaster communication and challenges they impose on traditional mass media use. Furthermore, this research looks at changes in individual perceptions of media credibility in a disaster context and present day, elaborating how shifting trust in media intersects with the changes in the way individuals use and rely on media. Main findings of the study suggest that in the wake of the disruptive media event, Japanese media users move from using traditional mass media as a sole source of news to personalised, inter-media environment which supports the emergence of affective connection to a community. The intensified sense of communal belonging further facilitates the practice of seeking and evaluating information and media credibility through new media forms of connectivity.

Declaration

I hereby declare that this submission is entirely my original work and that any information and material derived from other sources has been indicated and adequately acknowledged. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, figures, references and appendices

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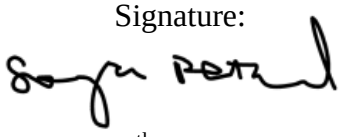

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Parts of the publication [Petrovic, S. (2019). A Sense of Communal Belonging in Digital Space: The Case of the 3.11 Disaster. *New Voices in Japanese Studies*, 11, 74-98. doi: 10.21159/nvjs.11.04] were used in Chapter Five of this thesis. The opinions and arguments presented in the publication are my own.

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Glossary

1. jōhō shakai (情報社会)
   information society
2. yon-baitai (四媒体)
   the four media
3. uchi (うち)
   in-group, traditional Japanese household
4. ikken isshi (一県一紙)
   one daily newspaper per prefecture policy
5. senbaiten (専売店)
   private delivery agencies
6. kisha kurabu (記者クラブ)
   press clubs
7. kyōkai (きょうかい)
   news industry association
8. keiretsu (系列)
   media groups
9. fuei futou (ふえいふとう)
   the policy of impartiality
10. mini-komi (ミニコミ)
    news pamphlets
11. keitai (携帯)
    a mobile phone (in Japan)
12. matome sites (まとめ)
    aggregated news websites in Japan
13. kyurēshon
    news curation
14. tsukeppanashi (つけっぱなし)
    leaving a device on
15. shūkan (習慣)
    habit, custom
16. Nihon-jin (日本人)
    Japanese person, Japanese people
17. kizuna (絆)
    social ties/bonds between people
18. anpi (安否)
    safety
19. dema (デマ)
    a false rumour

1

Introduction

1.1 Disasters and Media

Disasters come as uncertain situations which cause disruption to everyday life. The old order of things no longer exists. Not only do they have a severe impact on local and regional infrastructure and industries, but they significantly shape and change communities, who in the wake of the disaster, actively engage in saving themselves and those around them. Disasters, as shared experiences, produce new forms of communities, where people who share the same struggle and who feel like they are members of the same society threatened by the disaster, step up and help each other, improvising support. As routine is severely disrupted at the individual level, the need for social togetherness and consolation triggers or amplifies the individual's sense of place and social attachment consequently. It is in this context that individuals turn to media to gather information and find solace.

Media plays a significant role in helping people understand and respond to a disaster and gather knowledge about affected and distant communities, regardless of spatiotemporal barriers. In an increasingly media-saturated environment, live images, and emotion-filled discourses have the potential to mobilise collective solidarities and produce feelings of communal belonging, immediately after the disaster. As disasters become more documented today, it is essential to understand how they are constituted in the age of rapidly evolving media technologies, and how different media forms enable people to witness and respond to them.

On 11 March 2011, at 14:46 JST, a 9.0 magnitude earthquake struck the northeast coast of Japan, marking the beginning of the triple disaster now known and referred to as 3.11: the term I will use in this thesis. The Great East Japan Earthquake caused a succession of calamitous events, including a powerful tsunami of up to 40 metres in height and aftershocks that continued for more than a month. The tsunami devastated the coastal area of the northeastern Tōhoku region and southern Hokkaidō (see Image 1.1) and claimed the

majority of the 15,848 lives lost.[1] It also caused damage to several nuclear reactors at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant, resulting in the considerable emission of radioactive materials into the environment. The destruction of the nuclear plant was reported as the world's worst nuclear catastrophe since Chernobyl in 1986 (Okumura, 2014) and required the immediate evacuation of surrounding areas. The earthquake and tsunami destroyed commercial and residential infrastructure, including roads, in many coastal municipalities, and over four million households lost electricity and water for several days. The enormous scope of 3.11 meant that many individuals felt a disruption to the patterns of everyday life and their sense of security. This in turn triggered social changes and new interactions among individuals, reconfiguring their sense of social connection and communal belonging.

Image 1.1 The map of the disaster area

Source: http://blog.japanwondertravel.com/report-of-fukushima-exclusion-zone-tour-from-tokyo-10784

Japan's media played a crucial role in how people communicated and coped with this complex catastrophe. In a time of natural disasters and crisis, citizens' demand for

[1] Officially recorded death toll as of 10 February 2012

information increases, and their main aim is to get in touch with their family and friends. The 3.11 disaster was both a "natural" and a "man-made" disaster (Kingston, 2012), which triggered the critical need for up-to-date and credible information. One of the main characteristics of Japan's media landscape during 3.11 disaster is the growing role of social media and its potential to serve as a new information tool and an essential medium for real-time, up-to-date news when other communication systems are not working. At the same time, traditional mass media, especially television, remained relevant and was widely used during the disaster, especially as the most trusted source of news in the first moments of the disaster. In a survey conducted by Nomura Research Institute in 2011, the majority of respondents (80.5 percent) found NHK television to be the most reliable source of information after the earthquake (Jung, 2012). However, the complexity of the triple disaster, especially the nuclear meltdown and the diffusion of radioactive materials, altered this significantly. A lack of institutional guidance and credible information flow, as well as the communication gap between local and central government alongside contradictory reports disclosed to the public by Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings Incorporated (herein TEPCO)[2] and media institutions significantly contributed to the public's profound sense of distrust towards government and mainstream media institutions (Funabashi & Kitazawa 2012; Hobson 2015). This led people to seek out alternative sources of information as the disaster was unfolding, and to connect with a variety of sources and communities. In this context of the individual's sense of social connection and perceptions of media credibility were significantly shaped and reconfigured by the 3.11 disaster. This study seeks to examine individual motives behind using different media forms in the wake of the disaster and thus expand the scholarship on the role of media in disaster communication.

This study draws on two different but interrelated concepts, sense of communal belonging and trust in media, to examine media use following 3.11, and provide a nuanced understanding of the changing media environment of contemporary Japanese society. First, it explores the role of traditional mass media and non-traditional online media, in creating

[2] TEPCO (Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, Inc.): Japanese electric utility holding company that operates the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. TEPCO bears the primary responsibility for the incompetent handling of the nuclear disaster in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant, which happened on 11 March 2011, due to its failure to meet basic safety requirements in risk assessment.

and fostering an individual's sense of connection to multiple spatial and relational communities. Second, the study is compelled to explore the role of new digital technologies and online media in disaster communication, and their contribution to the emergence of new, affective connection to a community. Third, the study examines changes in trust and perceptions of media credibility in a disaster context and present day. More precisely, how changing levels of trust in both traditional mass media and new, online media, impact the changes in the way individuals use and rely on media. Through investigating these three areas of concern, the study aims to offer a comprehensive understanding of how 3.11 disaster is constituted in a complex, inter-media environment and examine changes and dynamics in media use in the context of contemporary Japanese society.

The scope of this study will be limited to an examination of traditional mass media, defined as television broadcasts and printed newspapers, and online media, understood as encompassing social media and online news websites. Traditional and online media are positioned as the primary sources that individuals utilise to fulfil different needs in the time of disaster. That is, to inform themselves about the disaster, to connect with others, to engage in discussion about critical events and unfolding situations, to reduce anxiety brought on by disaster and to find/disseminate social or emotional support. The study conceptualises the 3.11 disaster as three interrelated events: earthquake, tsunami and nuclear disaster. It differentiates between four main phases of the 3.11 disaster for the purposes of analysis: the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami (11 March 2011), the week following the earthquake (until 18 March 2011), the immediate aftermath of nuclear explosion (12 and 14 March 2011) and the point of the interviews in November 2017, which I will refer to in the below as "present day," or six years after the immediate aftermath.[3] My study builds on the existing scholarship on the 3.11 disaster (discussed in Chapter Two), by offering an in-depth examination of how a sense of communal belonging manifests across traditional and new media forms, and how this is informed by individual notions of trust in the credibility of media reporting across the four main phases.

[3] The interviews with participants were conducted in the period September–November 2017 (see Chapter Three for more information).

After providing some context of the study and problem statement, the following section gives a brief overview of the literature in the field, main research questions, significance of the study and thesis structure.

1.2 The Context of the Study and Problem Statement

Media use is often associated with concepts such as a sense of community and perceptions of media credibility. Sense of community is a multidimensional non-static concept, affected by time and external factors, one of which is also media (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p. 19). An individual's sense of communal belonging and shared emotional connection is especially evident in the time of natural disasters and crisis when people who experience a crisis together are more likely to connect in communities (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). When transmitted through media, affect helps maintain feelings of community and mobilise a sense of compassion of mass media audience (Döveling, Scheve, & Konijn, 2011; Pantti, Wahl-Jorgensen, & Cottle, 2012). In a sociological context, media provides emotional support, sense of companionship and community for individuals who are faced with a crisis (Perez-Lugo, 2004). Television has a strong potential to provide the audience with the sense of togetherness through live transmission of events and social sense of currency or awareness of shared social realities (Couldry, 2003; Ellis, 2000, 2007), and cultivate a sense of compassion for distant others through live dissemination of visual images (Chouliaraki, 2006). Furthermore, the emergence of new media technologies significantly contributed to the rise of new visibility of the disaster, thereby creating more complex information environment (Pantti et al., 2012).

The role of mass media is increasingly challenged with the new flows of communication and online media, where social media have become integral to the way people experience and react to disasters, making shared emotions and affect more visible (Döveling, Scheve, & Konijn, 2011; Pantti et al., 2012). Social media plays a significant role in emergencies, not just as a communication channel and alternative source of information, but as a space for uniting individuals with a similar experience of disaster and for providing them with emotional and therapeutic support (Macias, Hilyard, & Freimuth, 2009). Through emotional identification with distant others in time of crisis, social media can serve as a new space for storytelling, which fosters mediatised emotional exchange and feelings of

community, consequently leading to the emergence of new form of affective communities in a digital environment (Döveling, Harju, & Sommer, 2018).

The extensive literature on the 3.11 disaster pointed to the significance of social media as a critical communication tool in the wake of the disaster (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Cho, Jung, & Park, 2013; Hashimoto & Ohama, 2014; Hjorth & Kim, 2011; Umihara & Nishikitani, 2013; Yoshitsugu, 2011), or as a platform where individuals disseminate their opinions (Endō, 2012, 2013; Gill, Slater, & Steger, 2013; Yoshimi, 2013), and to the centrality of social media in Japanese society after the 3.11 disaster (Kindstrand, Nishimura, & Slater, 2016). Most studies on the 3.11 disaster highlight the major fault lines in Japanese journalism, strong media and institutional bias, where Japanese mass media is heavily dependent on government, thereby lacking independent and critical angles in the coverage of the disaster (Galbraith & Karlin, 2016; Gill et al., 2013; Kingston, 2012, McCarthy, 2014; McNeill, 2013). Furthermore, recent media reports show that trust in media and government institutions is considerably low in Japan (2018 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report) and that the press freedom has been on the decline since 2012 (World Press Index report 2011–2018).

While research on the 3.11 disaster has identified low levels of trust in Japanese mainstream media and government institutions, little attention has been paid to individual perceptions of media credibility. Gaziano and McGrath (1986) define media credibility as a multidimensional concept, based on the user's perception that includes believability, accuracy, and fairness. They, among other scholars (Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Westley & Severin, 1964), argue that media use has significant implications for an individual's perceptions of media credibility and level of reliance on media. The intersection of media use and media credibility remains under-researched, as the extensive literature on the 3.11 disaster mainly focuses on each of these aspects respectively, without further analysis of their interrelationship that emerges in a time of disaster. Therefore, this study brings the three concepts together to explore media use in the context of 3.11 and its implications for an individual sense of communal belonging and perceptions of trust. Furthermore, this study examines how the role of traditional mass media in Japan is now challenged by new, online media technologies, in the context of disaster and present day.

As online media evolves fast and brings new changes and implications for society, it is worth exploring the different ways in which they facilitate and shape a sense of social connection and perceptions of trust.

1.3 Definitions of Media

In examining how individuals utilise different media forms, it is necessary to think about how mass media can be defined in a contemporary world of rapidly evolving and expanding communication technologies. This study breaks down the term media into two main categories: mass media and online media.

O'Sullivan, Dutton, and Rayner (2003) suggest that mass media is traditionally differentiated from other types of communication in terms of the one-way process of producers creating content that is transmitted to a broad audience. With the development of internet and social media, the concept of mass media has become more difficult to define. However, following O'Sullivan et al. (2003), this study uses the term mass media to specifically refer to traditional models of communication, television and newspaper, which offer information to the public in a one-to-many (one-way) communication flow. The two most influential forms of mass media in Japan are traditional mass media forms: broadcast and print media.

In the contemporary media environment, online or digital media is an overarching term that encompasses both mobile and internet mass communication services such as email, social media, websites and internet-based television and newspaper, which are also known as traditional forms of mass media when they are offline. Therefore, online media is used to describe computer-based technologies that are more interactive than traditional mass media forms, providing two-way communication and facilitating the sharing of ideas and information and other forms of expression with users via virtual communities and networks. A further difference that marks online media apart from traditional mass media is that on some online media, particularly social media, the role of user and producer of media content often converge (Jenkins, 2006). Social media networks are defined as "web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and

traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). The focus of this research will be on both online social media platforms and online news websites (herein referred to collectively as "online media"), which are an important part of the contemporary Japanese media landscape: Facebook, Twitter, Line, YouTube, 2channel, NewsPicks, Yahoo News and so forth.

1.4 Research Questions

How do individuals experience their sense of communal belonging and trust in the context of the complex, inter-media environment of the 3.11 disaster? To explore this overarching issue, this study will investigate the following research questions:

RQ1. How does use of traditional mass media evoke or intensify an individual's sense of communal belonging in the context of 3.11?

The first research question aims to explore the implications of traditional mass media, mainly television and newspapers, for an individual sense of communal belonging and social connection. This thesis defines a sense of communal belonging *as a multidimensional concept, evoked and intensified through shared emotional connection to the 3.11 disaster and affected communities. In relation to media, a sense of communal belonging is affected by different forms of media (i.e. live broadcasts, video images, printed words), information flows and different levels of trust in media.* To explore this research question, I ask how mass media forms contribute to the development of an individual's sense of social connection, and in what contexts individuals rely on mediated information to form their evaluation of community? To explore this question, I examine individual perceptions of belonging to multiple communities in relation to mass media use, in the context of the 3.11 through semi-structured interviews in which participants recount their media usage over the immediate and aftermath phases of the disaster, as outlined above (see Chapter Four). The focus is mainly on television, as it is the most accessed source of news during the disaster.

Additionally, I examine whether in the present-day phase (i.e. 6 years on from the immediate phase), traditional mass media forms, that is, television and newspapers, remain a central source of news in participants' daily life and media use. By exploring new patterns

and dynamics in individual's media use, we can identify changes in the media landscape and the growing popularity of new digital media platforms and explore whether patterns of traditional mass media use remain stable after the 3.11 disaster, and what this tells us about the role of television and newspapers in Japan. This leads to greater explication of the challenges that traditional mass media is facing in Japan.

RQ2. How does use of online media evoke or intensify an individual's sense of communal belonging in the context of 3.11?

The second research question aims to explore new patterns of online media use and their implications for evoking and intensifying a new affective connection to communities in a digital space. How does online media foster a sense of communal belonging, through social sharing of emotions and emotional alignment, in the wake of the 3.11 disaster? I examine different levels of the individual's digital engagement across the four phases, to understand the potential of various online media platforms to contribute to an individual's sense of closeness to others and social connection, in a disaster context. Furthermore, I investigate if online media, by connecting geographically dispersed individuals through collective knowledge and experience of the 3.11 disaster, has the potential to generate and foster "imagined communities" and consciousness of shared temporality (Anderson, 1983; Gruzd, Wellman, & Takhteyev, 2011) as it is posited that traditional mass media forms do.

RQ3. How do shifting levels of trust in media intersect with changes in an individual's media usage patterns, in the context of 3.11 and present day?

The third research question aims to examine individual notions of media credibility, both traditional mass media and online media in the context of 3.11, and the implications this has for changes and dynamics in media use in the present-day phase. To answer this, I first examine participants' perceptions of the credibility of media they utilised in the context of the immediate and aftermath phases of 3.11, to understand the implications their perceptions have for shifts and changes in their media use habits. Then, I examine participants' current perceptions of media they use and changes in general information seeking, to understand whether the 3.11 disaster triggered any of the changes in their media use. The comparison of the immediate phase with the present-day phases proves significant for understanding how participants' notions of media credibility fluctuate and intersect with

their everyday media use, and why participants assign higher credibility to certain media forms.

Overall, this study explores ways in which traditional and non-traditional media evoke and intensify a sense of social connection and belonging to multiple communities. The study aims to explore media use in relation to the perceptions of belonging and media credibility, by looking into individuals' experiences with utilising different forms of media in the context of 3.11 disaster, as well as general media usage habits of the present day.

1.5 The Significance of the Study

This study uses the case of the 3.11 disaster to examine how media use changes in connection with the notions of belonging and trust. The 3.11 disaster is a significant time point for Japanese media, because it carries profound implications for new emerging communities and interactions among individuals, which were mainly supported by the growing role of social media as a space for exchanging informational and socio-emotional support (see Chapter Five). In the context of the growing visibility (and arguably growing frequency) of natural disasters (Pantti et al., 2012) and a rapidly changing media environment, it has become critical to provide in-depth understanding of the diverse roles of both old and new media forms. Further, how these media forms can be utilised to facilitate disaster communication and help people cope with unfolding disaster in the context of fulfilling different type of needs.

Based on in-depth interviews and social media data, to examine media experiences of comparatively less affected individuals, this study contributes to the growing literature on the media and disaster communication in Japan. In this way, through a combination of methodological approaches and concepts which remain under-researched in the context of 3.11, my study represents a significant addition to the extant studies of the 3.11 disaster. Furthermore, by analysing the supposedly positive social context of media use, and its implications for a sense of social and communal connection and trust in media, this study is relevant to discussion of post-disaster recovery and the questions of how to build resilience for future disaster.

Employing different but interrelated concepts: a sense of communal belonging, affect, trust and new technologies, this research explores and theorises the interplay of old and new media and its role in mediating disaster. In this way, this study serves as a foundation for future studies on the role of media in post-disaster recovery.

1.6 Thesis Structure

The first three chapters of this thesis are background chapters, which situate the current study in relevant literature and discuss theoretical underpinnings of the intersections of media, sense of communal belonging and media credibility, to guide the inquiry.

Chapter One introduces the thesis through five components, the context and problem of the study, a brief literature review, main research questions, study significance and thesis overview. The chapter establishes the rationale behind using the 3.11 disaster as the main time-point for exploring the intersections of media and society in the context of contemporary Japan. Then, the chapter continues to establish the context of the study within the broad literature of media sociology and works related to 3.11, thereby addressing the critical points of concerns and a problem statement, which is how individuals experience a sense of communal belonging and trust in the context of the inter-media environment of the 3.11 disaster. The research aim and scope is then followed by an outline of the three main research questions, research approach and data collection method, the significance of the study and thesis structure. **Chapter Two** establishes a theoretical framework for key concepts of the research: media use, sense of communal belonging and media credibility, for further exploration of their intersections in the second part of the thesis. This chapter provides an in-depth literature review on the background to the media environment of the 3.11 disaster and critical concepts of a sense of communal belonging, mediated disasters, affective and imagined communities, traditional and non-traditional media use, and media credibility, by drawing insights from the literature of media sociology**. Chapter Three** details the rationale behind the qualitative research design, which is the aim of the study to develop an in-depth understanding of the individual's subjective perspectives and media experiences in the context of the mega-national disaster. Following a detailed description of the qualitative method—semi-structured interviews and

qualitative content analysis—the chapter explains the data collection and analysis procedures, as well as the ethical considerations and limitations of the study.

The second part turns to analysis of the data and presents the findings. In **Chapters Four**, **Five** and **Six**, I aim to address one research question. In **Chapter Four**, I address the first research question, related to the intersection of mass media and an individual's sense of communal belonging. This chapter presents analysis and discussion of the most representative comments of participants, which reflect their media use in the context of the disaster and perceptions of belonging to multiple communities in relation to mass media use. The main research findings, summarised in the concluding section of the chapter, suggest different ways in which television creates or intensifies a connection to multiple communities, through its liveness, visuality, the familiarity of the medium and inherent trust. Furthermore, in the same chapter, I argue that television has remained the central medium in individual's media routine, although challenged by the role of new digital platforms. **Chapter Five** investigates the relationship between online media and a sense of communal belonging. In this chapter, I analyse and discuss key findings through interview comments and brief social media content analysis, to explore the potential of different online media, social media and news websites for evoking and intensifying an affective connection to the community. The findings of Chapter Five suggest the emergence of a sense of communal belonging even among geographically distant individuals, intensified in the immediate aftermath of 3.11 through a combination of emotional online discourses, user-generated content and the potential of social media to enable users to meet similar others. In the chapter, I argue that there has been a subtle shift happening in Japan after the 3.11 disaster, where Japanese media users continue to utilise online space for the expression of opinions and critical evaluation of information and credibility of media. Participants' comments from interviews are supported with examples taken from their social media accounts, from Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube, to better illustrate the use of social media in a disaster context. In **Chapter Six**, I compare the main phases of the 3.11 disaster with the present day, to analyse and discuss individual notions of trust in media and their intersection with the media use, thereby investigating whether the shifting levels of trust triggered any changes or dynamics in media use of present day. In Chapter Six, I argue that trust comes from combined media use, in other words the interplay of traditional and

new modes of communication which facilitate an individual's evaluation of media credibility and guide his/her media engagement. Finally, I conclude the thesis with **Chapter Seven**, by reviewing and consolidating the main findings of the research, its importance and implications, along with the limitations of the study and the unique contribution it makes within the discipline. My Japanese case study indicates that, in time of a mega-national disaster, a sense of social togetherness among geographically dispersed media users is intensified, and public perception of trust in media is significantly altered, subsequently leading to the incorporation of online sources in the traditionally established patterns of media use. In such an inter-media environment, the interplay of traditional mass media and online media spheres creates a platform for the evaluation of media credibility and development of personal opinion.

2

Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

Media Use, Sense of Communal Belonging, Media Credibility

2.1 Introduction

This study puts three concepts together: media use, sense of communal belonging and media credibility, to explore the intersections between media and society in the context of the 3.11 disaster. First, the study starts by exploring how traditional mass media forms—television and newspapers—fostered and cultivated a sense of social connection and feeling of national togetherness in the context of the mediated 3.11 disaster. Additionally, the study examines whether traditional mass media use, that is, television watching and newspaper reading by Japanese media users remains stable, and how new, online media forms are challenging it. Second, the study moves on to explore the role of online media and its potential to create a new, emotional connection to a community in a digital environment, in a disaster context. Finally, after establishing the link between the concept of a sense of communal belonging and media use, the study further examines how changes in media use intersect with an individual's perception of media credibility.

This chapter aims to form the basis for the empirical chapters and provide a theoretical background for the three main questions of the study. Keeping in mind that the research aim is to explore social aspects of media use in disaster context, I have selected a subset of literature, to address three main problems which this research investigates in the context of the 3.11 disaster:

1. The implications of mass media for a sense of communal belonging.
2. The implications of online media for a sense of communal belonging.
3. The intersection of media credibility and changes in media use patterns.

The first group of studies examines the concepts "sense of communal belonging" and "community." By differentiating between the traditional and non-traditional concept of community, I establish the definition for "sense of communal belonging," before moving

on to examine how it is evoked and intensified in a disruptive media event and through media use.

The second group of studies examines theories on media events, with the focus on disruptive events. Here, I examine concepts of affect and emotion, to understand their role in intensifying an individual's connection to the community, mobilising public compassion and evoking community participation, in the context of mediated disasters.

The third group of studies elaborates on works within media sociology, to understand how the emergence of traditional mass media, namely television and newspapers, changed the nature of social interaction. Theories that examine the role of television and its different features that contribute to individual's sense of presence, togetherness and national unity, are crucial to understanding how television evoke and intensify a sense of social connectedness in the context of the 3.11 disaster.

The fourth group of studies that establish the link between online media use and the individual's sense of connection to community are critical to addressing the role of online media in amplifying an individual's sense of social belonging. This group provides a theoretical basis for understanding a new concept of digital affective communities, facilitated by the potential of social media to foster feelings of community, through emotional identification with distant similar others in time of crisis.

A theoretical framework for examining how an individual's perception of media credibility intersects with changes and shifts in the individual's media use, in the context of the 3.11 and the present day, is established in the fifth set of studies. This is followed with the section on the Japanese contemporary media landscape, encompassing main phases in the development and growth of traditional mass media and non-traditional, online media, along with their main features and aspects, which are essential for understanding the media landscape of 3.11 disaster. Within the section on Japanese media, I review literature on the credibility issues in the traditional mass media, along with the latest statistics on public trust in Japanese media institutions, which provide a solid basis for examining changes in trust in traditional mass media in the context of the 3.11 disaster.

The following section aims to clarify some of the main concepts of the study, starting with the sense of communal belonging, mediated events and affect, before discussing how they relate to media use.

2.2 Sense of Communal Belonging

McMillan and Chavis (1986) understand a sense of community as a non-static feeling, which is built and maintained through a dynamic of four main elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection. In McMillan and Chavis (1986), membership is the sense of belonging to a community, through which the individual feels a personal relatedness and emotional safety. Influence works as a bidirectional concept: individual members need to feel they have some influence and make a difference in the community; the community needs to have some influence on its members for the cohesion of the community. Integration and fulfilment of needs refer to the feeling that members are willing and able to help each other and receive help in return. It is the feeling that individual needs will be met through membership in the community (p. 9). The final concept, which in combination with the other three concepts builds a sense of community, is an emotional connection or a belief that the community shares a history, time, events, places and similar experiences. McMillan and Chavis (1986) make a connection between the shared events and social bonds in the community, arguing that "*the more important the shared event is to those involved, the greater the community bond.*" (p. 14). This is especially evident in the time of natural disasters and crisis when people who experience a crisis together are more likely to connect in communities (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Traditionally, the community has been broadly defined within the geographical notion, as a community of people formed around the location and social relationships, while the relational notion of community refers to the quality of the human relationship, regardless of location (Gusfield, 1975). In this way, we can distinguish between physical, real-life communities and experienced or virtual communities (Blanchard & Markus, 2002). With the emergence of new, online media, the term "community" is defined in the context of social relations, rather than geospatial location, as "the nature of the community is changing, from being a social network of households to a social network of individuals"

(Wellman, 2005, p. 55). These relational communities are also known as virtual communities, or communities of people who are geographically separated but connected through computer-mediated communication (Rheingold, 1993). Virtual communities have similar characteristics to real-life communities, but they are not time and space bound: they are communities of common interest and not of location. In traditional communities, an individual has a strong sense of place where the interaction occurs, in clearly defined geographical boundaries between members and non-members. Contrastingly, in virtual communities, individuals are expected to imagine the idea of community and place, as they cross geospatial barriers to pursue mutual goals.

Online community, as one of the forms of virtual communities, can be defined as a group of people with common interests whose primary method of communication is the Internet (Preece, 2000), that provides general public with informational and emotional support, and ways to maintain their social networks and meet new people (Wellman, 2001). Within the online community, a sense of belonging and social attachment emerges from a shared emotional connection and similar experiences, such as experiencing natural disasters and crisis (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). In this thesis, I adopt the concept of online communities (Preece, 2000), to explore the emergence of affective bonds between geographically dispersed individuals, based on shared experience and sentiments of the 3.11 disaster.

This research adopts the view that sense of community is a multidimensional concept, which four main factors: membership, influence, integration and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection, dynamically work together to create (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Also, the sense of community is not a static concept, because it is affected by time and external factors, one of which is also media (McMillan & Chavis, 1986, p.19). In this study, I adopt this view, arguing that both mass media and online media have substantial implications for an individual's sense of communal belonging. Furthermore, individuals can define themselves as members of many different communities, where each one is fulfilling specific needs (Mannarini & Fedi, 2009), consequently developing a sense of belonging to multiple communities (Brodsky & Marx, 2001).

In the context of the current study, during and immediately after the 3.11 disaster, the individual's sense of communal belonging is affected by different forms of media,

information flows, and different levels of institutional trust. Vague and non-specific media coverage of the disaster made individuals question the information they received, at the time when the credibility of information obtained in media is as essential as food and water. Japanese individuals who lived in different regions of Japan at the time of 3.11, could define themselves not only as members of the specific geospatial local community but also as members of multiple communities, sharing an emotional connection and similar experiences and connecting with fellow citizens from other parts of Japan through different media forms. This study draws from McMillan and Chavis' (1986) work, but instead of using "sense of community," it unpacks this concept to specifically focus on a sense of communal belonging. Thus, my study defines a sense of communal belonging as *a multidimensional concept, evoked and intensified through shared emotional connection of the 3.11 disaster and affected by different forms of media, information flows, and different levels of institutional trust.*

Considering that the research uses the Japanese case study of a mediated disaster, I move on to the next section to give a more detailed insight into the classifications of media events and spectacles, as the live coverage of the disaster significantly affects regular broadcast, disrupts everyday media habits, and intensifies a sense of belonging and social togetherness.

2.3 Mediated Disasters

In a time when global disruptive events are more common, catastrophic and are experienced through different media forms, it has become critical to explore how these mediated events are constituted in a complex contemporary media environment. Tomlinson (1999) defines the concept of mediation as the capacity of the media to overcome the distance in communication between viewers and distant others, and create a sense of co-presence, through immediacy and overcoming geographical distance. In this context, mediated communication differs from face-to-face communication, as it is carried out by the use of information communication technologies.

Selected key studies of media events have examined the role of television in evoking and constructing collective memory, which is critical for understanding the shared experience

of television watching and social power of mass media. For example, Dayan and Katz (1992) establish the view that media events interrupt the rhythm of everyday life, due to the cancellation of regular broadcast, often triggering an upsurge of feelings of solidarity between the members, or a sense of belonging to a national community. Similarly, Couldry (2003) defines media events as ritualised forms of television viewing, where television enables shared experience of watching important national events, through which viewers imagine to be connected as members of the same society.

The concept of media events was extended and revisited in the growing number of studies that make a distinction between "regular" and planned media events and exceptional media-event-like phenomena such as disasters (Cottle, 2006; Couldry, Hepp, & Krotz, 2009; Scannell, 1999) or "disaster marathons," (Liebes, 1998) to define the interruption of the regular broadcast to deliver emergency news and updates on evolving disaster. Scannell (1999) makes a distinction between controlled media events, and events that happen suddenly and out of control, such as natural disasters. Cottle (2006) sees media events as "exceptional media phenomena," which disrupts the media routine and serve to evoke public sentiments. Similarly, using the example of 9/11 terrorist act, Chouliaraki (2006) addresses the coverage of extraordinary mediated events as ecstatic news, which is mediated simultaneously as news and a historical event.

While both ordinary and tragic media events disrupt routines and regular broadcast, they also evoke a sense of solidarity and collective sentiment. A significant difference between disruptive and regular media events is in the anxiety and shock caused by the sudden, uncertain event, and the constant dramatic updates and announcements, inserted into the routine of television watching. Disaster news is intrinsically disruptive and deeply embedded in emotion and affect, and not in a neutral and regular tone, so it has a strong emotional effect on the wider population (Pantti et al., 2012). Due to the nature of disaster news, it is important to explain the role of affect and emotion in evoking and amplifying a sense of togetherness in distant individuals. Although the terms affect, mood and emotion are used almost synonymously, Barlett and Gentile (2011) conceptualise affect as more global and complex, encompassing multiple emotional and mood states. They suggest two perspectives on the role of affect related to media use. The first view is that affective state

can be a response to some stimulus. In the context of this study, watching news coverage of an unfolding disaster can, for example, create and intensify some emotions. Mediated events amplify emotions in the audience members or users through the portrayal of emotional topics and events. In other words, it is the transmission of emotions through live broadcast and a real-time stream of vivid images, that create and maintain feelings of community and foster compassionate responses of the mass media audience (Döveling et al., 2011). Chouliaraki (2006) investigates how television can create and cultivate sentiments of compassion for distant others. She discusses different ways in which television uses language and visual image to evoke emotion, sense of care and responsibility for distant others and enable individuals to witness the event by bringing images and experiences from distant places to their homes (Chouliaraki, 2006). At the same time, through live dissemination of images, television brings audience members together, in new forms of emotional connectivity.

Barlett and Gentile's (2011) second view is that individuals actively seek out and use the media in order to change or enhance a particular affective state and connection to the community, which corresponds to the uses and gratifications theoretical approach (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Rubin, 2009). Following this theory, my study perceives individuals as active users, who have power over the selection of media which can best address their needs. Katz et al. (1974) classify these as cognitive, affective, integrative and escapist need. Cognitive need refers to the need for acquiring information, knowledge and understanding. Affective need relates to emotional experience and feelings. Integrative need can be divided into personal need: providing a sense of security, stability and trust, and social need: strengthening the sense of social connection with friends, family, community and state. Escapist need refers to tension release and disconnection from reality through media use. In the context of this study, the 3.11 disaster as a disruptive and uncertain event intensified the need for receiving information, and the need for social togetherness, which affected how individuals utilised media to address their specific needs.

In this thesis, I adopt the definition of media events as intrinsically disruptive, unscheduled and tragic events (Couldry et al., 2009; Cottle, 2006; Döveling et al., 2011; Liebes, 1998), inscribed with emotions and affect, which mobilise compassion, feelings of solidarity and

national sentiments through television's liveness, simultaneity and visual features (Chouliaraki, 2006; Döveling et al., 2011; Pantti et al., 2012). I use this definition to examine how disruption in the routine of television watching in Japan, due to unprecedented disaster, affected the individual's sense of communal belonging and notions of trust.

The following section elaborates on key works within media sociology, to understand how the emergence of traditional mass media has changed the nature of social interaction, and how different features of television contribute to a sense of togetherness and national unity.

2.4 Traditional Mass Media Use and Sense of Communal Belonging

For understanding the relationship between media and society and, within that relationship, the intersections of media use with notions of social belonging and media credibility, this study adopts selected key works within media sociology as its broad theoretical framework. The focus on media sociology is on critical theoretical arguments about the nature and impact of different mass media and online media forms on an individual's notions of communities and trust. This section draws on a substantial body of literature in the field of media sociology studies, which shows how different features and aspects of television watching construct and shape individual's sense of social togetherness and belonging.

2.4.1 Imagined Communities

The emergence of mass media, particularly newspapers and books, significantly contributed to the construction of the concept of communal and national unity and social cohesion (Anderson, 1983; McLuhan, 1964). Marshall McLuhan (1964) illustrates the relationship between the birth of print books and people's visualisation of unity. The mass distribution of print media standardised the language and unified the population. Mass media contributed to the formation of a sense of community and social cohesion by enabling individuals to perceive the nation as a community to which the individual belongs. Anderson (1983) associates the emergence of nationalist feeling with the rise of print capitalism and emphasises the significance of the everyday ritual of newspaper reading that contributes to the construction of shared national imagination. The nation is imagined because its members will never physically meet, but through sharing similar experiences

and interests, they identify themselves as the members of the same community. Such imagination is enabled and facilitated by media, television and newspapers, in a way where media enables people to connect in "imagined communities," forming a sense of belonging to a collective (Anderson, 1983).

Recent literature extends the concept of "imagined communities" to new digital media and social media platforms, which have enabled people to imagine communal belonging by sharing similar interests, sociability, support and a sense of identity (Gruzd et al., 2011; Jones, 2013). Social media users exhibit imagined consciousness of shared temporality, being aware of other users' presence, seeing posts from other sources, and writing for an intended audience who follow them (Gruzd et al., 2011). Similarly, Jones (2013) perceives digital narratives as an essential element for maintaining communities, arguing that people may imagine themselves to be a part of a community based on their reading of the narrative. This is similar to what Anderson (1983) referred to as an imagined community of fellow readers. The idea of "imagined communities" in digital space (Gruzd et al., 2011; Jones, 2013) will be adopted in this thesis for examining how online media evoked the individual's sense of connection to multiple communities in the context of the 3.11 disaster. If the system of traditional media was able to sustain "imagined communities," how does online media differ? This is one of the questions this thesis aims to achieve.

2.4.2 Television and Social Togetherness

The works mentioned above have established that the development of different media technologies has transformed the nature of social interaction. This is critical for understanding the role of television in evoking and intensifying individual's sense of social togetherness.

The deployment of television broadcasting has transformed the nature of social interaction and created new space for perceptions of others, enabling individuals to access the public realm and experience events without spatial and temporal barriers (Thompson, 1990, p. 246). This kind of social interaction, which Thompson addresses as a mediated quasi-interaction, differs from face-to-face and mediated interaction, as it is based on the one-way flow of communication, but it is quasi-interaction because individuals are linked together through the reception of the same media content and process of communication. Through

watching the same news on television, despite the geographical distance, audience members share a common bond. The contemporary view is that mediated online interaction via social media does not share this monological character, but it is dialogical because multiple participants actively contribute to the interaction (Thompson, 2018). In other words, even though mediated online interaction is stretched across spatiotemporal barriers, its dialogical nature distinguishes it from the kind of mediated publicness associated with television.

Selected works have examined the role of television in evoking a sense of social and national togetherness. Scannell (1988, 1996) argues that scheduling of television broadcast has structured and sustained audiences' everyday life and practices, contributing to their sense of togetherness with other viewers through common awareness that they share reception of a TV program. Morley and Robins (1995) perceive television as a central mechanism for constructing the collective life and culture of a nation, where broadcasting helps to construct a sense of national unity. In more recent work, Morley (2006) points out the fact that television started as a public medium, with audiences gathering in public spaces to collectively watch the broadcast of national events. In the context of Japan, this kind of national television watching is discussed more in Subsection 2.7.1.1 of this chapter.

The sense of togetherness of audience members is achieved in two ways. First, through television's social sense of currency, where audience members belong to the same present through shared simultaneous watching of TV (Ellis, 2000, 2007). In other words, getting the same information at the same time as other fellow members enables the individual to experience a strong sense of social togetherness with others. Television brings the nation together because through simultaneous consumption of the same content, people share a similar perspective on the world (Couldry, Livingstone, & Markham, 2010, p. 25). The live coverage of events can create a sense of immediacy and closeness with other members of the geographically dispersed audience, who follow the same broadcast, which sometimes cause feelings of anxiety due to the uncertainty of the narrative of live, ongoing updates (Ellis, 2007). Second, the sense of togetherness is achieved through a sense of liveness, facilitated by television's live transmission of events which causes individual's strong sense of co-presence with the events it shows. Ellis (2000) suggests that the new audio-visual

technologies of television have significantly altered the scope and nature of witnessing the events. In a similar manner, Thompson (2005) argues that the new form of de-spatialised visibility, brought with the development of new audio-visual technologies, where the visual richness of television, its close-up images, accompanied by spoken or written cues, continually shape the way in which individuals see and understand events as they unfold. The rise of new visibility is linked to the emergence of new media forms, thereby creating a more complex information environment (Thompson, 2005). The concept of new mediated visibility will be adopted in this thesis to explore distinctive characteristics of mass media and online media and ways in which online media facilitates and shapes an individual's sense of social connection and perceptions of trust.

Within the field of disaster and communication studies, recent work offers a nuanced understanding of new media possibilities for witnessing and responding to the disaster (Pantti et al., 2012). Pantti et al. (2012) study is a key reference as it explores the role of new media technologies in challenging the role of traditional mass media, thereby providing new insights into the transformed role of visibility due to the processes of communication changes and shifting communication power. Although the study addresses the concepts, such as media use, affect and new technologies, further research is necessary to understand how the concept of media credibility is linked to the emotional dimension of both mass media and online media. My research aims to fill the gap in the literature by bringing all these concepts together and exploring further their intersection, in the context of disaster and complex media environment of contemporary Japan.

This section has examined main works within media sociology which establish the link between traditional mass media use and social togetherness. My study of the 3.11 disaster adopts the concept of "mediated interaction" (Thompson, 1990, 2018) to examine how individuals perceive others through television watching and online media use, thereby creating a new interaction between individuals who are spatially dispersed. Furthermore, drawing on the concept of "social sense of currency" and "sense of liveness" (Ellis, 2000, 2007) achieved through the new mediated visibility (Thompson, 2005), this research examines how television's role in evoking a sense of belonging and co-witnessing the

disaster is challenged with the role of online media and the emergence of new affective communities in digital space, which is the focus of the next section.

2.5 Online Media Use and Sense of Communal Belonging

In a sociological context, media has been found to provide emotional support, as well as a sense of companionship and community for individuals who are faced with a crisis (Perez-Lugo, 2004). Similarly, an examination of the role of blogs in crisis communication during hurricane Katrina argues that social media can serve as a space for emotional and therapeutic support, as it allows users to discuss and share their emotions online with other individuals (Macias et al., 2009). Overall, the social media environment enables people who have lived through similar experiences of a traumatising or disruptive nature to share their emotions online, thereby significantly facilitating the coping process (Döveling 2015, 2017). Further, storytelling in the interconnected online environment facilitates a process of "cathartic" sharing, which allows individuals to work through the experience of trauma or crisis and opens new opportunities for community-building (Arthur, 2009). Online support and empathy of similarly affected others can make individuals feel less lonely and isolated, and the feature of anonymity of many social media platforms can enable them to express feelings more comfortably than in direct communication (Hartig & Viola, 2016).

Working through anxiety, many individuals turn to social media as a space for storytelling which fosters mediated emotional exchange and feelings of community; this in turn leads to the emergence of affective communities in the digital environment, also conceptualised as "digital affect cultures" (Döveling et al. 2018, p. 1). These affective communities manifest at different levels of social media use through communicative acts which indicate discursive, emotional or empathic alignment with similar others, thereby creating a sense of belonging even among geographically distant individuals. The emotional alignment was mentioned earlier in this chapter, to challenge the concept of traditional communities, and argue for conceptualising a sense of community as relational, and based on shared emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), or a belief that the community shares similar experiences, one of which is also media use.

Döveling et al. (2018) break down social media use into three intersecting levels: micro, meso and macro. The thesis adopts this categorisation as the main framework for analysing how individuals in Japan during and immediately following the 3.11 disaster affectively engaged in digital space. According to Döveling et al. (2018), micro-level is the most local and personal form of social media use, where emotional interaction occurs within the close circle of family and friends. Meso-level refers to less immediate emotional bonding among individuals within one community or a group over a specific theme or universal need. Macro-level refers to collective dealing with emotions via online discourses—narratives, videos, hashtags, photos—thereby encompassing a more global level of communication where social media users who do not know each other personally come together over a common theme, disaster or sentiment. Drawing on this multi-level model of social media use, my study will demonstrate how social media fostered a sense of communal belonging through the social sharing of emotions and emotional alignment during and immediately after the 3.11 disaster.

A 2016 study by Papacharissi developed the concept of "affective publics" to explain how people engage with and experience current events through social media, drawing on two case studies: the use of Twitter following the events of the Arab Spring, and the use of the hashtag #ows during the Occupy Movement protests. Papacharissi sees social media platforms, Facebook and Twitter, as a space for storytelling, which enables individuals to engage and experience the events as they unfold and imagine their sense of place and belonging through the sense of immediacy these social media provide. She examines how people utilise social media platforms to express themselves, stressing that technologies support the interactions within which affect emerges and that affective attunement is enabled through social media platforms as a way for diverse individuals to connect and align with the event (Papacharissi, 2014, 2016).

Comparatively, some scholars argue that social media, particularly Twitter, provided new spaces for civic interpersonal responses and helped people manage crisis and grief through sharing sympathies and emotions with other users, thereby creating a form of mobile intimacy (Hjorth & Kim, 2011). Hjorth and Lim (2012) define mobile intimacy as an overlaying of physical geographic space and electronic position and social, emotional

presence. My study builds on work in this area by offering an in-depth examination of how a sense of communal belonging manifests across different social media platforms, by exploring the experiences of social media users of Japanese nationality across a broad age range (20–59) (see Chapter Three).

As this chapter has earlier established, the role of mass media is increasingly challenged with the new flows of communication and online media, where social media has become integral in the way people experience and react to disasters, making shared emotions and affect more visible (Döveling et al., 2011; Pantti et al., 2012). The immediate nature of social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube have significantly contributed to the emergence of the new visual culture of the disaster, where the individual's strong sense of co-presence and witnessing the disaster is facilitated by real-time, user-generated visual images and footage of the disaster, which serve as tools for production and circulation of affect (McCosker, 2013). Through the close analysis of YouTube video tribute for victims of a bus accident, the anthropologist Penelope Papailias (2016) investigates the shifts in public grieving and memorialization of catastrophic media events, by considering the concept of 'affective witnessing' and formation of new social networks it creates. Building on the work of McCosker (2013) and Papailias (2016), my study aims to examine the evolving potential of social media to generate affective connections to community, contribute to disaster visibility and open up new opportunities for community participation. Following the works of Papacharissi and Döveling, in this thesis I use the case study of the 3.11 disaster, to think through the ways in which individuals engage emotionally in digital space, and examine how social media in Japan supports the emergence of a new sense of belonging in digital space.

My study also contributes to knowledge in other areas. Since 2011, a considerable amount of research has emerged in the areas of disaster and emergency communication and digital media studies examining the role of Twitter in contexts of natural disaster, crisis and upheaval (e.g. Bruns et al., 2012; Bruns & Burgess, 2012; Oh et al., 2015; Papacharissi, 2016; Sadri et al., 2018; Stieglitz et al., 2018). My study builds on this body of research by broadening the line of inquiry to encompass a wider range of social media platforms, both homegrown (Mixi, Line) and imported (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube). It uses the case of

3.11 to explicate the sense of communal belonging which evolved in the wake of disaster through the communication of emotional alignment and discursively constructed emotions and demonstrates how this was variously fostered in different social media environments. In the context of the disaster, it is crucial to understand the dynamics of various social media platforms in Japan, to investigate how individuals adopt and utilise new communication tools to cope with the disasters, by fulfilling the need for belonging and emotional relief.

I move on to the next section to examine the literature on perceptions of media credibility, as another essential element which is shaped and reconfigured by the disaster, thereby carrying significant implications for changes in media use.

2.6 Media Credibility

The previous section has highlighted the growing potential of online media to evoke and intensify an affective connection to community, based on shared emotional connection and experience of the 3.11 disaster. In a time of disaster, through different forms of media, individuals seek informational, social and emotional support from "similarly affected" others, as the growing body of literature had already confirmed. Besides the need for belonging, another reason why people are drawn to media, especially at times of disaster and disruptive events, is the need to collect necessary and reliable information on the disaster. In that context, it is essential to include another concept: media credibility.

This section establishes the theoretical underpinnings of the third research question, which examines how an individual's perceptions of trust in mass media and online media intersect with changes in their media use. The focus is on general literature within works of media sociology, which defines the concept of media credibility and establishes a link between individual notions of trust and media use and reliance.

2.6.1 Theorising Media Credibility

Research interest in media credibility first flourished in the 1960s, when many scholars attempted to identify its underlying factors, such as safety, qualification, dynamism, accuracy, fairness, completeness and knowledgeability (Berio, Lemert, & Menz, 1969–70;

Jacobion, 1969; Lee, 1978). Since it is challenging to differentiate between concepts underlying media credibility, as well as to identify different media forms and functions, many scholars have argued that credibility is a multidimensional concept (Burgoon, Burgoon, & Wilkinson, 1981; Meyer, 1974). Previous research has pointed out that different factors may affect the credibility of a media message, such as the medium, or channel through which the message is delivered, and often the structure and content of the message itself (Metzger, Flanagin, Eyal, Lemus, & McCann, 2003). Therefore, credibility has been separated into three different areas: source, message and medium credibility. In this thesis, I use medium credibility as a central concept.

Medium credibility refers to "the channel through which the content is delivered," rather than the source which communicates it (Kiousis, 2001, p. 382). Westley and Severin (1964) first noted that demographics (age, gender, and education) mediate an individual's perception of medium credibility and that media reliance and use is positively associated with the evaluation of medium credibility. The findings of their study show that television is perceived as the most accurate medium, more than newspapers. Two decades later, Gaziano and McGrath (1986) conducted a factor analysis to develop new ways of measuring the concept of credibility and identify its various dimensions by focusing on television and newspaper news. Treating credibility as a multidimensional concept, they developed a credibility index which contains 12 factors, including trustworthiness, bias, accuracy, fairness and community relations (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). They found that credibility depends on the perceived norms of fairness, accuracy and bias rather than perceived reliability of the information**.** Following this, Johnson and Kaye (2015) proposed that "credibility is not inherent in a medium, but it is a user-based perception that includes believability, accuracy, and fairness." (p. 545).

The study suggests that the main reason for selecting television as the primary source of news is the overall view that picture delivers credible information, and that exposure to conflicting reports and news in time of disaster, will impact people's perception of media credibility (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). The credibility of the news disseminated in the media is critical in alerting the public about disasters and emergencies. Major and Atwood (1997), however, found that the decline of credibility is not consistent across media as the

credibility of television and radio has not diminished in comparison to newspapers. This indicates the difference between the credibility of newspaper and television or radio information.

Following this argument, in my thesis, I examine the reasons underlying an individual's evaluation of mass media and online media credibility. Whether television has been perceived as more credible than other sources of news, and how television coverage of the 3.11 disaster affected individual's perception of medium credibility are questions which will be examined in the core chapters of this thesis. The main measurement for the concept of media credibility in this thesis, in the context of 3.11 and present day, is Gaziano and McGrath's (1986) credibility index, conceptualising media credibility as a multidimensional concept, based on individuals' perception of accuracy, fairness and bias.

2.6.2 Media Use and Perceptions of Credibility

Some early studies have established the view that media use has significant implications for individual's perceptions of media credibility and a level of reliance on media. Westley and Severin (1964) are among the first scholars who established that an increase in media use is often accompanied by high credibility ratings for that particular medium, which in their research was television. Similarly, Wanta and Hu (1994) argue that an individual's perception of medium credibility is strongly related to how often they use that medium. On another note, the findings of the study by Gunther and Lasorsa (1986) show that despite the public's decreasing levels of trust in television and newspaper, people rely on media sources due to the view that they are professionally organised to check and validate the content, rather than hearing from other people and using unchecked source.

Subsequently, scholars have examined the perceptions of all three media forms—television, newspapers and online media—to understand how media credibility is related to reliance on specific media forms (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). The study used surveys to examine whether online users find Internet news sources as credible as their traditional counterparts and discovered that online media and print media were both seen as partially credible. Additionally, the findings of the study show that the more credible the public finds a medium, the more they rely on it as their primary news source and that the lack of trust in

media leads to changes in media use (Johnson & Kaye, 1998). Following Johnson and Kaye's (1998) argument, I have designed the third research question, which examines the implications of shifting perception of media credibility for changes in media usage patterns in the case of 3.11 disaster.

Similarly, after assessing people's perceptions of news credibility for television, newspaper and online news, Kiousis (2001) suggests that public opinion on mass media credibility has been changed with the introduction of online sources and that people are generally sceptical of the credibility of all three media forms. While Kiousis' (2001) study shows the linkage between public perceptions of medium credibility and media use, it also reveals that future studies should examine participants' opinions of news credibility. Similarly, Bucy (2003) defines media credibility as "perceptions of a news channel's believability, as distinct from individual sources, media organisations or the content of the news itself" (p. 248) and highlights that the survey cannot effectively explore how media use is linked to enhanced perceptions of credibility.

Studies which compare perceptions of information found on social media to the ones found on traditional media, found that although traditional media is perceived as more credible than social media, all forms of media were judged as moderately credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2015; 2016). At the same time, their findings show that despite users' perception of social media as not very credible, users heavily rely on social media for need satisfaction, one of which is the need for social connection. In other words, reflecting on the uses and gratifications approach, users consume media that fulfil cognitive, affective, integrative and escapist needs (Katz et al., 1974). Reliance is proved to be another important predictor of credibility, and the more people rely on the source, the more credible they judge it to be, as one study shows (Johnson & Kaye, 2016). In the context of natural disaster, the previous study argues that people seek for different ways to find the information they need and look for trusted media sources to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity (Lachlan, Spence, Edwards, Reno, & Edwards, 2014). In other words, people trust the source they rely on most.

The literature outlined in this section has demonstrated that media use intersects with the individual's perception of media credibility. However, more qualitative research is necessary to examine the individual's attitudes and the notion of credibility, and reasons for

relying on media (Bucy, 2003; Kiousis, 2001). Based on in-depth interviews, my study aims to build on previous works within the field of media credibility and examine how changes in media use affect individual's perceptions of credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 1998, 2016), keeping in mind that media use is not always an indicator of high levels of trust in media. The use of traditional mass media forms remains stable, due to the view that the information they provide is professionally checked and verified (Gunther & Lasorsa, 1986). The use of social media remains stable, due to different motivations for using social media to find information, connect with others, experience sense of belonging, reduce feelings of isolation and anxiety, and avoid traditional media bias (Johnson & Kaye, 2015). Drawing on both views, I examine how participants evaluate the credibility of mass media and online media, and whether participants still rely on some media forms, despite perceiving them as not very credible.

Finally, more recent findings confirm that people who use social media more often, trust their network and online news more (Warner-Søderholm et al., 2018). This study also argues that social media has enabled people to communicate with others, and in that way, achieve a sense of belonging to a virtual community. However, it is important to mention that the credibility of social media is often questioned due to its open access, unregulated flow of information, fast dissemination and an abundance of unchecked sources, which the following sections aim to highlight.

2.6.3 Online Media Credibility

Johnson and Kaye's (1998) study has shown that in some cases, online media is perceived as more credible than mass media, however the study did not exclude that the unregulated flow of information on the Internet affects its credibility. Within online media, social media might not be perceived as very credible, because users find it difficult to judge unfamiliar and diverse sources. Anyone who has access to the Internet can post information online, without going through the process of checking, filtering, and editing. This comes as the main difference between social media and traditional mass media, which is generally perceived as a channel that provides valuable and timely information, that went through the process of accuracy check and verification (Heath, Liao, & Douglas, 1995). Sutton, Palen, and Shklovski (2008) argue that social media is gaining prominence as a crucial source of

information in a time of disaster, even though the accuracy of the distributed information is often unclear, due to fast dissemination and different information flows. The study addresses these unofficial communication channels as "backchannels" (p. 625), placing them in contrast with official and formal ones. Sutton et al. (2008) argue that backchannels have a growing capacity to serve as a means for supporting critical and accurate dissemination of information within the public sphere. I adopt this view to examine how participants utilised social media to exchange and disseminate alternative knowledge on the 3.11 nuclear disaster, which was not covered by traditional mass media.

More recent study, however, sees the question of perceived source credibility on social media relevant as the gatekeeping function is shifting from producers to consumers, especially in a time of crisis and risk communication (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2014). Social media has a crucial role in disaster communication and management, but with the increasing amount of information on different social media platforms, fast dissemination and lack of traditional and professional gatekeepers to check the content, it is critical to examine more how people evaluate and perceive the credibility of information they consume on social media (Westerman et al., 2014). Similarly, in examining how individuals assess the credibility of tweets and retweets, Lin, Spence and Lachlan (2016) found that people seek information from official sources and websites, perceiving them as more credible. Other studies also argue that open access and free flow of information of user-generated content, in time of uncertain situations, increases the possibility of misinformation and poor quality messages, because any social media user can publish information (Lachlan, Spence, Lin, Najarian, & Del Greco, 2014; Lachlan, Spence, & Lin, 2014). In the case of Twitter, sometimes the 140-character limit can lead to posting brief updates which are not supported with facts or founded opinion (Lachlan et al., 2014b). In examining the role of speed in the perception of media credibility, using Twitter as an example, previous scholars found that the messages which are received quickly are seen as more relevant, such as breaking news. However, the study also points to the risks of fast dissemination of information, which can often be misleading, inaccurate and unchecked, which at the same time affects the user's perception of media credibility.

Additionally, a study which examines trust-influencing factors in interpersonal social media communication has found that familiarity and information quality, besides convenience and shared preference, are one of the critical factors in individual's trust levels (Cheng, Fu, & de Vreede, 2017). If the user is unfamiliar with the person he/she communicates with, that may lead to low levels of trust and vice versa. In relation to information quality, false information or advertising may also influence an individual's levels of trust and motivation to continue the communication (Cheng et al., 2017).

This section has demonstrated that within online media, social media is not perceived as very credible, due to unregulated flow of information (Johnson & Kaye, 1998), fast dissemination and lack of professional gatekeepers (Westerman et al., 2014). In this thesis, I adopt the works of Westerman et al. (2014) to examine how participants evaluate social media credibility, where the role of user and producer converge, and how they evaluate the credibility of different sources on social media, differentiating between official and unfamiliar sources (Cheng et al., 2017; Lachlan et al., 2014a, 2014b; Lin et al., 2016).

The following section moves on to provide a brief overview of the main media forms in Japan to familiarise the reader with the main features and aspects of the Japanese contemporary media landscape. With regard to the concept of media credibility, the following section, among other things, tackles the problems within Japanese traditional mass media and recent reports related to levels of public trust in mass media institutions.

2.7 Japanese Media Landscape

Considering that the research is placed within the context of the contemporary Japanese media environment, this section aims to highlight the main features of traditional mass media in Japan, television and newspapers as one of the most influential media in terms of both time and revenues (Valaskivi, 2015) and a principal source of news in contemporary Japanese society, despite the rapid growth of online media. Moreover, it provides a brief historical background of the development of the internet and mobile technologies in Japan, with an overview of major online media platforms and their features. Without a basic introduction to the online media landscape in Japan, we cannot understand the new forms of interactions and social connection, created and maintained on social media throughout

the 3.11 disaster. Additionally, the section introduces main issues in Japanese mass media, and their impact on public perception of the credibility of traditional mass media forms, television and newspapers, followed by current trends and statistics related to public trust in media institutions.

2.7.1 Traditional Mass Media

Media consumption is, after sleep and work, the third largest daily activity engaged in by Japanese citizens (Holden & Scrase, 2006); hence, Japan has a fully developed information society (*jōhō shakai*). Four mass-media forms dominate Japans rich and diversified media landscape: television, newspaper, magazines and radio, often addressed as "the four media" (*yon-baitai*). The high-circulation newspaper market, and a dual broadcasting system which includes public service broadcaster NHK, and five national and commercial broadcasters, characterise Japan's contemporary media landscape. Since the 1960s, television in Japan proliferated to become the most popular source of information and entertainment, with the growing viewer preference for television over other mass media forms (Stronach, 1989, p. 132). Television has a central role in the culture of the daily life of Japanese citizens (Yoshimi, 2003), and newspaper remains one of the most significant sources of news. However, the slow decline in newspaper circulation (Newman, Fletcher, Levy, & Nielsen, 2016) indicates changing trends in the use of traditional mass media forms, especially print media, due to the growing popularity of new digital players and the importance of adjusting traditional mass media content to new digital platforms.

2.7.1.1 The Growth of Japanese Television

In addition to the rapid economic growth in the 1960s, two main national events contributed to the early diffusion of television sets in Japan—the marriage of the crown prince Akihito in 1959 and the Tokyo Olympic Games in 1964. In 1959, the television broadcasting of the royal wedding parade, as one of the most significant national events in Japanese postwar history, led to the emergence of a new television culture, which has taken its place in the domestic atmosphere of Japanese households, where citizens enjoyed and experienced the mood of the national parade of the emperor's marriage, despite the geographical distance. Nearly 15 million people watched the broadcast from their homes,

and only 500,000 went to parade, which points out the significance of television watching of the event over the direct experience (Yoshimi, 2003). Furthermore, the first live broadcast of the Olympic Games in 1964 via satellite was an excellent opportunity to present new Japan to the world, its post-war economic boom and political development (Stronach, 1989). In the television industry, the Olympic Games also marked the shift from black and white to colour television and stimulated more TV sales and international TV programming (Cooper-Chen, 1997; Stronach, 1989).

The public use of television has continued throughout rapid economic growth in post-war Japan, in the 1960s and early 1970s (Chun, 2007; Yoshimi, 2003). Yoshimi (2003) refers to the concept of "national timetable" television use in Japan, describing television as a national medium with a new social significance, that has structured daily life in Japan since the 1960s, linking the family with the state through a uniform national timetable (pp. 475–478). Television broadcasting had three time zones: morning, midday and evening. The first time zone, between 7 am, and 9 am, was reserved for morning news and shows. Between 11 am and 2 pm, people followed dramas and variety shows. The evening time zone, between 7 pm and 10 pm, was "golden time" which usually started with the evening news, followed by family programs, dramas or sports. In this way, television created a sense of connectedness, enabling people around Japan to imagine connections with their fellow citizens through the established patterns of television viewing, thereby leading to the formation of social stability and a cohesive community (Holden & Scrase, 2006).

Similarly, in her ethnographic research on Japanese audiences, Takahashi perceives television as vital to maintaining the interiority and connection between family members in a traditional Japanese household (*uchi*), by developing a uniform national timetable system (Takahashi, 2010a). Since the term "uchi" refers to the concept of community and belonging to "in-group" such as home and company, it also stresses the importance of collectivity and interiority.

Moreover, Andrew Painter's research investigates how morning news programs on Japanese television are used by audience members to link diverse regions in Japan into one single whole, thereby creating a sense of unity (Painter, 1996). In this context, through watching the morning news or afternoon-wide shows, people from various parts of Japan,

even if they have never met each other, connect in “imagined communities.” The sense of participation created when many people share the same experience by watching a specific event on television is one of the essential functions of the television industry (Hirata, Morofuji, & Aramaki, 2011).

My research adopts the works of Yoshimi, Takahashi and Painter with the aim to explore the concept of the cohesive televisual community, by focusing on individuals’ experiences with utilising television during the 3.11 disaster, as a medium through which they could “connect” with other fellow members by sharing a sense of collective viewing experience.

In the late 1980s, the emergence of new communication technologies, cable television and satellite broadcasting altered terrestrial broadcasting and the national viewing habits of Japanese people. NHK started experimental broadcasting in May 1984 and officially commenced its 24-hour service on two channels in June 1989. Since then, Japanese people could watch programs of different genres (documentaries, movies, international news) and commercial channels. Furthermore, in 1995, television played a significant role in disseminating news on two major national disasters—Great Hanshin earthquake in January 1995, which took more than 6,000 lives and destroyed more than 150,000 homes; and the Tokyo subway gas attack, when Aum Shinrikyo cult members killed 12 people with sarin gas and injured around 5,500 others. During the earthquake, television provided information about individuals who were seeking their families and friends, while the Tokyo subway gas attack ranked as a top story in mass media, which took on international dimensions.

2.7.1.2 Current Trends in Television Use

According to recent media reports, television is still a prime source of news and important medium for accessing information about major national events (Dentsu Innovation Institute, 2016). Japan still has a dual broadcasting system, where television broadcasting is provided by NHK, which has nationwide coverage and 127 commercial broadcasters with regional coverage, most of them being affiliated with the five key broadcasters (Dentsu Innovation Institute, 2016). Unlike commercial broadcasters, which are all funded by advertising and sponsoring, the public broadcaster NHK is independent of government and corporate sponsorship, and its revenue mainly comes from subscription fees to its terrestrial

and satellite services. There are five nationwide commercial broadcast networks, each centred in Tokyo, operating as network affiliates and broadcasting programs produced by key stations with the highest revenues in the television industry.

The media environment in Japan has changed significantly since the 1980s, with the spread of cable and satellite television, the Internet and growing variety of media forms that people can access today. NHK Broadcasting survey, conducted every five years since 1985, can best reveal the long-term changes and contemporary trends in television viewing. NHK Broadcasting survey, conducted in 2015, as the latest nationwide survey on television viewing and media use in Japan, show changes in the public's usage patterns and attitudes towards television. While television remains a familiar medium in people's lives and an essential source of information, there has been a significant drop in the number of hours spent daily watching television, among people in a wide range of age groups, from their 20s to their 50s (Kimura, Sekine, & Namiki, 2016). Older people in their 60s continue to have long television viewing hours, but the number of individuals who have more frequent access to the internet has grown from 27 percent in 2010, to 38 percent in 2015, and more young people choose the internet over television (Kimura et al., 2016). These findings indicate changes in television watching habits due to a changing media environment and spread of mobile phones, the internet, social networks, where the older generation makes up the majority of those who watch television daily.

2.7.1.3 The Establishment of the Japanese Press

The modern Japanese newspapers, which came with the Meiji Restoration in 1868, gradually contributed to high literacy rates, with their easy-to-read content and small format (Rausch, 2012). The first regulations of government against press publications were enacted by the Meiji government in 1869 and 1875, to reduce the spread of any form of political opinion that contained criticism and anti-sentiments towards the authorities and state. Instead of being the "voice of people," newspapers served as a medium through which government can spread their policies and interests, consequently creating strong affiliations of newspapers with political parties formed in the 1870s and 1880s (Lohr, 2004). The war period played a significant role in the print industry and censorship in Japanese media. During two wars, the Sino-Japanese (1894–1895) and Russo-Japanese War

(1904–1905), Ministry of the Army of Japan imposed strict regulations on press publications, the military focus of the content and providing newspapers with stories that public wanted to read, which increased the newspaper readership and advertising income. Considering this study examines individual notions of trust in media and the concept of media credibility, it is essential to include a brief history of regulation and press censorship in Japan.

In 1925, two newspapers in Osaka, *Asahi Shimbun*, and *Mainichi Shimbun* reached a total circulation of one million in 1925, marking the start of their national circulation. Today, these two papers have, after *Yomiuri Shimbun*, the highest daily circulation in the world. Taisho period (1900–1930) marks a significant change in the Japanese newspaper industry, where the press changed a political medium to be "a commercial medium for the masses" (Lohr, 2004, p. 438). The foundation for the present newspaper system was mainly formed in the first and second decades of the 20th century, when major newspaper companies established a set of morning and evening editions of newspapers, as a single newspaper product (Lohr, 2004). Major newspapers in Japan still maintain this practice of selling morning and evening edition as a single copy.

The issue of the press freedom, which existed during the Sino-Japanese war, continued in the Taisho period when the *Asahi Shimbun* was convicted of having an editorial which contained criticism against the government bureaucracy. In the period of the Russo-Japanese War, the government continued with the strict censorship of the press. The advances in printing technology, which made kanji characters and fonts easier to read, led to the increase in newspaper readership, high circulation and the growth in the number of daily newspapers in the 1930s. However, in 1938, the Japanese government started its concentration process of the press with the general mobilisation act according to which smaller newspapers are forced to disband or to merge, putting into effect "one daily per prefecture" policy (*ikken isshi*), which allowed only one newspaper to be published per prefecture (Lohr, 2004, p. 439). Due to the economic expansion in the 1960s, newspapers depended more on advertising, instead of subscription revenues, which led to a great increase in the paper's revenues, by almost 125 percent from 1951 until 1985.

2.7.1.4 Japanese Press Today

Japan is one of the world's leading countries for its newspaper sales and readership. Japanese newspapers are characterised by a large circulation and stable home-delivery system, with over 40 million copies still printed daily, and more than 95 percent of papers still bought through subscription (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2017). The most prominent national newspapers, *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Asahi Shimbun*, are not only among the top five largest newspapers in the world, but they are also the oldest newspapers which are still in circulation, with *Yomiuri Shimbun* leading with 9.14 million copies a day and *Asahi Shimbun* following with a circulation of 6.71 million copies (Dentsu Innovation Institute, 2016).

The main reason for the constant high newspaper circulation in Japan is its delivery industry's well-established and strong network. The home-delivery system is based on networks of private delivery agencies (*senbaiten*), which is allegedly independent, but in fact dependent on the newspaper company for which they deliver the product (Lohr, 2004). The specific business model of Japanese newspapers, which relies heavily on a stable home-delivery sales system, is producing high stability in the revenue stream. Willingness to pay for the printed newspapers is caused by the perception that the value of paid content is higher than free content. "The larger the circulation, the most trustworthy the newspaper and the higher the news quality" is a general belief which makes people subscribe to a printed daily. The loyalty of newspaper readers, who subscribe to one paper throughout their entire lives, is an essential element of newspapers' success in Japan.

On another note, the specific business model which relies more on circulation revenue than advertising revenue has been dropping in recent years (Dentsu Innovation Institute, 2016). Print is still highly profitable, but due to the rise of new technologies and social media, newspapers are slowly adjusting to new trends, bringing structural changes and promoting their digital editions. Today, all five major Japanese newspapers now have digital editions, which people can access through a paid digital subscription. Mainichi Shimbun first introduced its paywall for the digital edition in 2015. However, the most successful were Nikkei Shimbun (*Nihon Keizai Shimbun*), with 450,000 paid digital subscribers, while

Asahi Shimbun follows with 240,000 subscribers, which is still a small number when compared to its total circulation of seven million copies (Newman et al., 2016).

This section has provided a brief historical overview of the establishment and development of traditional mass media in Japan, television and newspapers, followed by an overview of the main characteristics and current trends in mass media use, to understand their dominance in the contemporary media landscape of Japan. However, it is essential to explain issues in Japanese traditional mass media, which significantly affect its credibility, to understand individual perceptions of mass media credibility and levels of public trust in Japanese media.

2.7.1.5 Cartelisation of Japanese media

Throughout the historical development of Japan and its newspaper industry, there has been a constant issue of press censorship and governmental regulations of press publications. While Japan has one of the highest newspaper readerships in the world and is considered a democratic country where media should be free from censorship, its mass media news content is often characterised by a lack of diversity and investigative reporting. Mass media is under the strict control of the government, while the three top institutions: press clubs (*kisha kurabu*), industry associations (*kyōkai*) and business groups (*keiretsu*), oversee the news-management process. Each institution has a different role in the "information cartelisation" process and the state-media-society relationship, but they are also interconnected and work together to maintain this system.

Kisha clubs are the primary mechanism for news gathering in Japan. They have a well-established network all over the country and refer to the highly structured organisations of journalists who cover all the main organisations in Japan: business, local, state and political. Journalists who are the members of *kisha* clubs have close ties with official news sources from which they draw material for their stories, collectively deciding how this information will be used (Freeman, 2003, p. 237). *Kisha* clubs focus on the relationship between official news sources and the reporters that cover them, but other institutions, news agencies, and associations (*kyōkai*) decide what topics will be covered and how the information will be used. In this sense, Freeman (2000) addresses *kisha* clubs as "information cartels" (p. 4), because of the cartelisation process that results from the

institutionalisation of the close relationship between official news sources and reporters, controlled and the regulated process of information flow, and uniformity in reporting. One thing that all Japanese newspapers have in common is their reliance on news generated by the press clubs (De Lange, 1998). Independent reporting is non-existent in mainstream Japanese newspapers, which all offer similar content and cover the same stories, without including too many details.

Keiretsu or media groups are organised around five major national newspapers, and their role is to make sure that other news outlets follow the rules of news gathering and reporting. In other words, the role of keiretsu is to link the print media with other sources of news available to the public, such as television, magazines, and other sources. Since the "big five" newspapers control other media outlets, such as magazines and local newspapers, even five major television networks, they work to maintain the monitoring of these outlets and standardised content, which leads to the homogenisation of news content. Another reason for the homogenisation is undoubtedly the oligopolistic market structure of Japanese mass media and concentration of ownership—where five major commercial media conglomerates own newspapers and broadcast stations through cross-ownership (see Table 2.1).

The high degree of homogeneity and standardisation is also a feature of broadcasting in Japan. Besides NHK, the world's largest public broadcasting corporation, there are five nationwide commercial broadcast networks, each centred in Tokyo, operating as network affiliates and broadcasting programs produced by key stations with the highest revenues in the television industry.

Table 2.1 Affiliations of broadcasting and newspaper companies in Japan

TV Stations	Newspapers
NTV (Nippon Television)	Yomiuri Shimbun
Asahi TV	Asahi Shimbun
TBS (Tokyo Broadcasting System)	Mainichi Shimbun
Fuji TV	Sankei Shimbun
TV Tokyo	Nikkei Shimbun

Today, even though Japanese broadcasting law officially promotes diversity and has specific regulations on cross-ownership of the media, in addition to the affiliation of the leading national newspapers with the major TV stations in Japan, this cross-ownership extends to magazines, local newspapers, television stations and tabloids. Consequently, the uniformity in reporting becomes a problem in how mass media communicates information to members of the public, who migrate to different media platforms in a search for information. The mass media cross-ownership and lack of diversity in reporting made a significant impact on national media framing of 3.11 disaster and public perceptions of media credibility, which will be examined in Chapter Six.

The cartelised media system is one of the most controversial parts of Japan's mass media, where Japanese journalists rely more on official sources than striving to provide an alternative perspective. Japanese newspapers follow the policy of impartiality (*fuei futou*), which was adopted in the 19th century. In 1946, Nihon Shimbun Kyokai formulated the Canon of Journalism, which points out that fundamental rule for reporting is objectivity and conveying accurate facts. However, reporting is far from neutral and objective, because it is in the interest of the state. Instead, media portrays events as they are supposed to be: harmonious, defusing conflict, rather than reflecting it (Cooper-Chen, 1997, p. 18). On the other hand, alternative press, such as local magazines, community papers, *mini-komi* (pamphlets and broadsheets), and freelance journalism, are all excluded from *kisha* clubs and regarded as press without proper credentials (Freeman, 2003).

The next section continues to highlight the problems of Japanese mass media system, and how media censorship and lack of diversity affect public trust in media institutions.

2.7.1.6 The Erosion of Public Trust

The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer global report shows that Japan has very low levels of institutional trust. With no change in levels of trust in media and government institutions since 2017, with only 32 percent (for media) and 37 percent (for the government), Japan is placed within the category of "distrusters" (see Table 2.2).

Table 2.2 Trust in media and government institutions in Japan 2012–2018

Trust in Institutions: Japan			
	Media	**Government**	**Average Trust**
2012	33%	24%	32
2013	34%	27%	35
2014	38%	39%	40
2015	30%	36%	34
2016	38%	39%	38
2017	32%	37%	35
2018	32%	37%	37

Source: 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report

This report also shows the overall distrust in both mass media and social media in Japan, with an insignificant gap of 4 percent between trust in journalism (41 percent) and social media platforms (37 percent). A Reuters study from 2017 shows similar results, with only 43 percent trust in news overall, and 44 percent trust in news used (Newman et al., 2017). Thus, media credibility in Japan deserves renewed attention.

First, it is necessary to highlight factors that led to such low media credibility. Japanese national television and newspaper have been widely trusted over the years, but public levels of trust in media institutions and government significantly shifted after the 3.11 disaster (Newman et al., 2016). According to World Press Freedom Index report 2011-2018, it is evident that media freedom has been on the decline since 2012, which is partially due to the incomplete coverage of Fukushima meltdowns and 3.11 nuclear disaster (see Table 2.3).

Table 2.3 World Press Index Report 2011–2018: Japan

World Press Freedom: Japan Ranking Index		
Year	**Rank**	**Index**
2011	22	
2012	22	
2013	53	25.17
2014	59	26.02
2015	61	26.95
2016	72	28.67
2017	72	29.44
2018	67	28.64

Source: World Press Freedom Index 2011-2018, Reporters Without Borders, https://rsf.org/en/ranking_list/archive

The majority of studies within the literature on the 3.11 disaster, find the major fault lines in Japanese journalism, strong media and institutional bias, where Japanese mass media is heavily dependent on government, thereby lacking independent and critical angles in the coverage of the disaster (Galbraith & Karlin, 2016; Gill et al., 2013; Kingston, 2012). After 3.11, many freelance journalists faced threats in reporting on the issue of a nuclear meltdown in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant. Due to the closed *kisha* club system, where professional journalists affiliated with the government are the only ones who can attend press conferences, freelance and foreign journalists faced many discriminatory measures taken by TEPCO and the Japanese government. They were prevented from attending press conferences and denied access to the direct information they provided (Segawa, 2011). Similarly, Pacchioli (2013) highlights that it was hard to understand the risks and overall severity of the disaster because the government was not explaining the situation to journalists and reporters, while Friedman (2011) discusses the problem of the minority of specialist reporters who had technical knowledge about nuclear disaster and radiation risks. The lack of communication from the government's side led to the promotion of the view in mass media that the situation in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant was stable and under control (McCarthy, 2014, p. 185). In relation to this, McNeill (2014) argues that mass media sanitised news on the disaster to suppress panic and maintain a good image of the

state, by limiting and often suppressing investigative reporting, in order to broadcast homogenised content.

The suspension of investigative reporting is especially evident in a single notable appearance of academic Yuko Fujita, an anti-nuclear expert, who was invited to Fuji TV on the afternoon of 11 March. During his appearance on Fuji TV, Yuko Fujita speculated the possibility of a nuclear meltdown. After that, he was never asked back on mainstream media to discuss this issue (McNeill, 2013). Journalists covering the disaster rejected this speculation, explaining that there is a "partial fuel melt suspected" in the nuclear plant (McNeill, 2014, p. 66). Furthermore, some studies argue that NHK did not report on nuclear disaster thoroughly, despite being the only television station with nuclear specialists among its journalists, but instead relied on TEPCO and government information sources, without utilising the expertise of its sources (Ito, 2012; Yamakoshi, 2015).

Even though all forms of censorship were abolished in Japan in 1947, media censorship was still on the rise after the war and is still present today. From the time of 11 March 2011, there have been significant developments and changes in Japan's government and political landscape, which also affected media institutions. Ever since the current Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's administration took office in 2012, the media freedom in Japan has been declining (see above Table 2.3). According to the media advocacy group Reporters Without Borders, Abe's administration poses a threat to media independence, by interfering in the editorial policies of Japan's public broadcasting service, dismissing journalists and reporters who are critical of the ruling party, taking less account of the citizens' right to information. Since the State Secrecy Law was launched in Japan in 2013, which allows the government to designate sensitive information as state secrets, investigative journalism has been on the decline and the public's right to information has become restricted (Oishi & Hamada, 2019).

While the previous body of literature on the 3.11 disaster has identified low levels of trust in mainstream media and government institutions, little attention has been paid to individual's perception of the credibility of both mass media and online media. Most of the earlier credibility studies, which I outlined at the start of this section, were conducted before the emergence of social media platforms. Additionally, the extant literature on the

3.11 disaster mainly focuses on the role of social media immediately after the earthquake and nuclear disaster, without further examination of how individuals perceive their credibility. My thesis aims to fill this gap and explore individuals' notions of media credibility, with a specific focus on its intersections with media use.

The following section continues to provide main phases of the development of the Internet, mobile technologies and major social media platforms in Japan. Introduction to the main features and aspects of online media in Japan is essential to understand their potential to evoke a sense of social connection in a disaster context.

2.7.2 Online Media

Japan's media landscape is gradually increasing its online audience – through newspaper and television developing its online platforms and a wide range of social media platforms that people use to meet their specific needs. Recent statistics show that Internet penetration in Japan is 94 percent, where the Internet is most commonly accessed through mobile phones (Newman et al., 2017). Aggregated news sites are the norm, being the largest source of news, with Yahoo News being a dominant source of news with over 59 percent weekly reach, aggregating news from multiple publishers across web and mobile (Newman et al., 2016).

2.7.2.1 The Internet Development

The Internet was first introduced in Japan in 1984 as an experimental computer network project, to enable universities and researchers to achieve better communication and exchange their ideas and research data on a non-profit basis. However, due to a relatively low Internet penetration rate and slow connection, the spread of Internet-related technologies was somewhat slow in Japan. It was not until the end of the '90s that Japan saw a rapid increase in the number of Internet users.

The year 1995 was a milestone for Internet development in Japan for two main reasons. First, Windows 95 was launched in Japan, which enabled easier Internet access and led to a rapid increase in the number of Internet users. Second, the Great Hanshin earthquake (Kobe earthquake) in 1995 was a critical time point for spreading awareness of how the exchange of emails over the Internet can contribute to disaster communication and community

building. The Great Hanshin earthquake facilitated the awakening of the voluntary spirit of Japanese activists and volunteers and helped them in connecting with overseas supporters and (re)building communities in the aftermath of the disaster (Okada, 2012; Tatsuki, 2000). After the Great Hanshin disaster, another milestone for Internet use in Japan is the 3.11 disaster, as it greatly expanded the awareness of the significant role of the internet and social media in disaster communication and management. The role of media during 3.11 will be examined in detail in Chapters Four, Five and Six to understand the changes and advances in the technology used to access news and the centrality of new media technologies—that is, social media—in contemporary Japanese society.

While Japan looked towards internet technologies as a key component of economic recovery, the Internet did not spread as rapidly as expected. The reasons for the slow adoption of the Internet in Japan were high costs, slow connection and low penetration of personal computers, and well-grounded concern about the credibility of online media among Japanese users (Kaigo, 2017). However, the widespread adoption of *keitai* in Japan and the introduction of the mobile phone-based internet helped in increasing Internet penetration rates.

2.7.2.2 Keitai Culture

Japan's media landscape is characterised by the widespread popularity of mobile phones, known under the term "keitai" which itself carries the connotation of "something portable," referring to portable cellular phones, with the capability to make calls, send and receive email, play games, and access Internet anytime and anywhere. Due to urbanisation advancement in the 1980s and bubble economy in the early 1990s, people in Japan adopted mobile media. Since its widespread introduction in 1996, *keitai* became a significant part of one's routine, creating a unique culture, where nearly every Japanese citizen owns at least one *keitai*, as a platform for dealing with numerous practices, such as surfing the Internet and using social media, listening to music, or playing games. The small size and portability of *keitai* enable people to send messages at any time and in any place.

Keitai is not so much about its technical capabilities, but the personal device that has reached levels of universal presence in the everydayness of Japanese culture. The heavy use of *keitai* for internet use and text messaging has made Japan the country with the highest

mobile phone density in the world. In 1994, Japan had 2.13 million cell-phone subscriptions, and in 2006, this number reached over 82 million (Matsuda, 2005, p. 19). The main reason for such a rapid increase is the introduction of flat-rate pocket billing for data communication in 2004, after which the number of mobile broadband subscribers exceeded 69 million or 77 percent of mobile users (Kim, 2012). In the late 1990s, *keitai* became very popular among the young population but was criticised by the public for having adverse effects on young people, regarding poor manners and superficial relationships (Matsuda, 2005). In the 2000s, *keitai* became firmly established in Japan, with new I-mode system expanding email and information access and Japan became the first country in the world with more mobile than landline phones (Coates & Holroyd, 2003).

2.7.2.3 Curated (matome) Websites

In the Japanese online media landscape, the top online news source remains Yahoo Japan, a portal website that aggregates news stories from a range of news providers (Newman, Fletcher, Kalogeropoulos, Levy, & Nielsen, 2018). In addition to Yahoo Japan, there are numerous curated (*matome*) news websites, which aggregate top news stories from major media outlets, providing in-depth information and allowing users to leave comments on news articles.

The Japanese term *kyurēshon* refers to the customisation of news (Akimoto, 2014), where users get concise information all in one place, quickly and easily accessed through mobile phones. In Japan, *matome* sites like Line News, Smart News, NewsPicks and others, serve as complementary channels of news which are used to browse for information quickly. NewsPicks, an online financial news service, has around 60,000 subscribers and stands out as an example of an Internet-based company which thrives on a three-element model: a news aggregation platform, a social media community, and original news content (Murai, 2018).

Most of these websites allow users to create a personalised timeline of the content in which they are interested, to automatically receive news updates related to the specific topic of user's interest. Thus, curated (*matome*) websites can act as gatekeepers of information (Kaigo, 2017). In comparison to traditional mass media, these news websites "do not adhere to government and professional norms or regulations, and supposedly provide both

sides of any issues" (Kaigo, 2017, p. 28), thereby making them more credible than traditional mass media. Furthermore, the comment section on curated (*matome*) sites enables users to express their opinions, provide additional information, and think about each issue through comments provided by other users, which significantly contributes to the information validation process.

2.7.2.4 Social Media

Before the 3.11 disaster, social media was predominantly used in Japan as a social networking tool for keeping in touch with family and friends and keeping up with the flow of popular culture and relevant news (Kindstrand et al., 2016). Japan's first social media platform, Mixi, emerged in 2004.[4] It started as a social networking service which enabled users to express themselves on blogs and profile pages, add friends, and join communities in which they could share personal problems, similar interests or feelings that they could not talk about directly (Takahashi, 2010b). The anonymous feature is one of the main reasons for the popularity of Mixi, as Japanese social media users are concerned about online privacy, and reluctant to show personal information and photos. Mixi enabled people from different regions of Japan to connect through private and closed communication. In the context of 3.11, Mixi was still popular among Japanese users as a fast medium through which they can obtain free, uncensored news, as opposed to traditional mass media. Like Facebook, Mixi also had a search engine employed within its interface, which led to the emergence of new communities around requests for accurate information about the evolving disaster (Mullins, 2016).

Similarly, the Japanese social media app Line[5] started with the aim of facilitating instant communication in the wake of 3.11 disaster when the majority of communication channels were down, and the only functioning communication tools were social networks on mobile phones. Since 2011, Line was mainly used as a mobile chat service, to support the direct, interpersonal exchange of email and phone calls between existing friends. Similar to Mixi, Line also has an option of creating and joining different groups, where users can join up to

[4] Mixi had a monopoly on the social media landscape in Japan until 2008, when it lost its influence due to the growing competitiveness of other social networks such as Line, Facebook and Twitter (Wong, 2016).

[5] Launched in June 2011, as a project of Japanese office of Naver, Korean tech company, Line has grown to be Japan's favorite mobile messenger app. With approximately 62 million monthly users, Line continues to be the top messaging app in Japan (Wong, 2016).

500 groups and chat on “bulletin boards,” posting pictures, texts or emoji stickers. Today, Line is the most frequently used social media in Japan (Dentsu Innovation Institute, 2017). In contrast with these platforms, Twitter and Facebook facilitate content-sharing with a broader audience, which makes them more public than Line and Mixi.

Twitter was not widely used in Japan before 3.11, and the subscribers it did have tended to use it as a tool for social networking and sharing daily activities (Yoshitsugu, 2011). Twitter is popular in Japan for its high ease of use on mobile phones, which already had Internet capability at the time Twitter appeared on Japanese social media market. The largest demographic on Twitter is users in their twenties, which at the same time have the highest smartphone adoption rates in Japan (Dentsu Innovation Institute, 2016). Much of Twitter’s success in Japan can be attributed to its relative anonymity, as it allows users to post daily thoughts or self-related messages and interact with other users without the need to reveal their identity.

Facebook arrived in Japan in 2008 and experienced slow user growth as it struggled to compete with homegrown social networks and Twitter, which already dominated the social media landscape. Facebook policy of using real names did not meet cultural tendencies of social media users in Japan who value personal privacy and avoid sharing too much background information on social media (Acar & Deguchi, 2013). Even though the growth of Facebook in Japan has been slow, it is still established as important social network and communication channel, among the top five according to a Reuters study from 2016, and reaching 26 million monthly active users as of 2016, as Facebook directly reported. Keeping in mind that people use Facebook for more professional purposes than Twitter, Facebook has more adult users than Twitter, with over half of them being in their 20s and 30s (The Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications Japan, 2016).

A recent report shows that the most popular social media platform in Japan is YouTube, followed by Twitter, Line and Facebook (Newman et al., 2018). YouTube is arguably aimed at developing new relationships and communities around similar interests and experiences. As a powerful content-based, online video-sharing social platform, YouTube can generate online communities of individuals who subscribe to the same channel and communicate through response videos, written comments and ratings of video content.

Moreover, video sharing on YouTube enables users to express themselves through a combination of audio and visual content. This allows rich messages to be conveyed, which can be considered more visually appealing and engaging than text-based social media (Rotman & Preece 2010).

2.7.2.5 Social Media During 3.11

In the context of the 3.11 disaster, social media has played a critical role as a communication channel and an alternative source of information and space where individuals can exchange social and emotional support. The emergent use of social media in the wake of 3.11 disaster has been extensively explored in several studies, with the focus on Twitter as a critical communication tool immediately after the 2011 earthquake (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Cho et al., 2013; Hashimoto & Ohama, 2014) and the psychological effects of Twitter on users in disaster affected areas (Matsumura, Miura, Komori, & Hiraishi, 2014; Umihara & Nishikitani, 2013), or as a platform where individuals disseminate their opinions (Endo, 2012, 2013; Gill et al., 2013; Yoshimi, 2013). After the earthquake, even the Japanese government and other public organisations, recognised Twitter as a crucial tool for risk communication, opening their own official Twitter account and issuing social media guidelines for local governments who are interested in joining (Akimoto, 2011). These studies use similar methodological approaches: they either draw on surveys of users who resided in disaster-stricken areas, or analyse their Twitter posts. While other scholars have discussed how social media served as a space for the exchange of emotions and anxieties in the wake of the 3.11 disaster (Slater, Nishimuira, & Kindstrand, 2012a), their study is based solely on examples of Twitter use. In contrast, my study combines analysis of social media use across multiple platforms with in-depth interviews, thereby contextualising user behaviour and providing a deeper understanding of social media's role in their experience of the disaster than can be gained from content analysis alone. Therefore, the study represents a significant addition to existing scholarship on the 3.11 disaster.

Furthermore, this study relies on the concept of inter-mediality, previously theorised as a connection and interaction between traditional mass media and social media forms (Endo, 2004), which, in the context of the 3.11 disaster, developed in a mutually complementary

manner, as sources of information (Endo, 2013). The main findings of this internet-based survey show that social media gained prominence as a complementary source of information, but without replacing traditional media players (Endo, 2013). My research takes a qualitative approach to explore further the concept of inter-mediality in the context of 3.11 and learn from participants' narratives how they evaluate both traditional and online media forms. In other words, this study uses the concept of inter-mediality as an overarching theme to explore individual's sense of communal belonging and notions of trust in the context of the disruptive media event—the 3.11 disaster in Japan.

This section has highlighted some of the main characteristics of the online media landscape in Japan, which is essential for understanding the changes and dynamics in participants' media use in the context of the 3.11 disaster. Even though the previous literature underlines the significance of social media, for exchanging information, communication, or dissemination of personal views, more analysis is necessary to understand the individual's perceptions of social media as a space where they can exchange emotional support and experience sense of belonging to multiple communities.

2.8 Synthesis of Key Literature

This chapter has established a theoretical basis for exploring the intersections between media and society in the context of the 3.11 disaster, which is in the focus of this thesis, addressing three key concepts of the research: media use, sense of communal belonging and media credibility.

In this thesis, to understand how "sense of communal belonging" intersects with media use, I suggest its definition as *a multidimensional concept, evoked and intensified through shared emotional connection to the 3.11 disaster and affected by different forms of media, information flows, and different levels of institutional trust*. Drawing on the work of McMillan and Chavis (1986), I conceptualise it as multidimensional, maintained through dynamics of four main elements, one of which is emotional connection and belief that the community shares similar experiences, such as natural disasters (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Media sociology is used as a broad framework for understanding how media technologies continuously shape the way in which individuals understand their sense of

community and the world around them (McLuhan, 1964), enabling people to connect with each other in "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983). Selected key works within media sociology establish that television broadcasting has created a new space for perceptions of other audience members, enabling individuals to access the public realm and experience events without spatial and temporal barriers (Thompson, 1990) thereby experiencing a sense of togetherness through shared viewing experience (Couldry et al., 2010; Morley, 2006; Scannell, 1988, 1996; Takahashi, 2010a; Yoshimi, 2003), and sense of liveness (Ellis, 2000, 2007). I adopt the definition of media events as disruptive, unscheduled and tragic events (Couldry et al., 2009; Cottle, 2006; Döveling et al., 2011; Liebes, 1998), which mobilise compassion, feelings of solidarity and national sentiments through television's liveness, simultaneity and visual features (Chouliaraki, 2006; Döveling et al., 2011, Pantti et al., 2012), to examine how disruption to the familiarity of television watching in Japan, due to the 3.11 disaster, affected individuals' sense of connection to community and notions of trust.

Considering the relationship between online media and feelings of belonging in a digital space, I adopt the notion of "online communities," in which community is theorised in the context of social relations (Preece, 2000; Rheingold, 1993) to explore how online media supports the emergence of affective bonds between geographically dispersed individuals, based on common experience of the 3.11 disaster and the need for informational and socio-emotional support. Furthermore, building on works which examine the potential of online media to generate new affective communities (Döveling et al., 2018; Papacharissi, 2016) and challenge the role of traditional mass media with new visibility (Döveling et al. 2011; Pantti et al., 2012), my case study of the 3.11 disaster examines how different social media platforms in Japan support these affective interactions between individuals, and contribute to a new sense of communal belonging.

With regard to media credibility, this thesis adopts the view that media use is one of the most important underlying factors of media credibility (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Westley & Severin, 1964). Early studies reveal that more qualitative research is needed to understand participants' opinions of news credibility, as surveys alone cannot effectively answer the question of whether people tend to use

media they perceive as credible and whether media use contributes to evaluation of credibility (Bucy, 2003; Kiousis, 2001). Furthermore, I adopt the view that social media has a critical role in communicating disaster response, but its credibility is somewhat questionable due to the fast and unregulated flow of information on internet (Lachlan et al., 2014b; Lachlan et al., 2014c), diverse and unfamiliar sources, as well as the shifting role of "gatekeepers" from producers to consumers (Westerman et al., 2014).

The last section, which is an overview of the Japanese contemporary media landscape, underlined that media credibility in Japan deserves renewed attention, due to low levels of public trust in media institutions (2018 Edelman Trust Barometer Global Report; Newman et al., 2017), and their inadequate response to provide transparent information and appropriately communicate it to the public during the 3.11 disaster. In this thesis, I further explore this issue, focusing on individual perceptions of media credibility in the context of the 3.11 disaster and the present day. Despite the extensiveness of literature on various aspects of 3.11, very few studies explore the relationship between media use and media credibility, usually focusing on just one of these aspects, without further analysis of their intersection.

Chapter Two has established main framework and outlined key literature which serves to support the main arguments of this research: that both mass media and online media have a strong potential to evoke and intensify a sense of belonging to multiple communities, and that the role of traditional mass media is challenged by new digital platforms. Moreover, this chapter has established that shifting trust in media often leads to changes in the way individuals utilise media.

Before presenting and discussing empirical findings, Chapter Three moves on to establish a methodological framework and discuss relevant literature which underpins the qualitative research approach.

3

Methodology and Research Approach

3.1 Philosophical Underpinnings and Research Approach

This study examines the relationship between media and society, more precisely individual media use related to media credibility and a sense of communal belonging in the context of a mega-disaster. Social meanings are continually changed and revised through social interaction and researchers' subjective interpretation of meanings (Bryman, 2008). This study, therefore, examines individual experiences to understand how media use intersects with perceptions of community and trust in the context of the 3.11 disaster. The study positions itself within the constructivist worldview, which perceives reality as subjective and socially constructed and knowledge as known through the subjective experiences of individuals (Creswell, 2013). The constructivist approach rejects the idea of truth as universal and absolute (Guba & Lincoln, 2003), leaning towards epistemological relativism, which maintains that there are multiple realities and interpretations of truth. The intent is to illustrate the intersection of media and society through a complexity of views, as these socially constructed meanings are multiple and varied (Creswell, 2014; Brennen, 2012). Henceforth, this study employs a qualitative approach to develop an in-depth understanding of changes and dynamics in participants' media use in the context of the 3.11 disaster.

The main difference between quantitative and qualitative approaches within the field of media sociology is framed in terms of how communication and media use are perceived. The quantitative approach draws on the scientific model to measure different effects that media exerts on society, while the qualitative approach aims to understand the relationship of media and society, considering the diversity of meanings created in media. Thus, a qualitative approach helps us explore or clarify the role of media within a society (Hardt, 1992; Pauly, 1991) and develop a more nuanced understanding of media use as a social and cultural practice (Brennen, 2012). Furthermore, the aim of the qualitative approach is not to quantify objective data but to interpret meaningful relations (Kvale, 1996); in this study between media use and an individual's notions of community and media credibility.

This study relies on a qualitative approach to discover subjective meanings behind the participants' media use, their feelings, emotions and attitudes towards media, within the specific context of Japan. The aim of the study is not to provide precise measurements or answers to how and why participants rely on certain media forms, but to discover different aspects of this intersection through participants' subjective viewpoints. The following section aims to introduce the research strategy and design for the study and clarify the reasons why qualitative methods are relevant for answering media-related research questions.

3.2 Research Strategy and Design

This study aims to explore the individual's perceptions and experiences with using media. Research questions for this study are designed to be open-ended, to encourage a variety of potential responses, experiences, and perspectives, as well as aspects of the topic not previously considered. The study posits the following three main research questions:

1. How does use of traditional mass media evoke or intensify an individual's sense of communal belonging in the context of 3.11?
2. How does use of online media evoke or intensify an individual's sense of communal belonging in the context of 3.11?
3. How do shifting levels of trust in media intersect with changes in an individual's media usage pattern, in the context of 3.11 and present day?

Considering that each research question seeks to explain the relationship between concepts, with defined boundaries and specific context of the study, 3.11 disaster, the case study becomes the preferred method.

3.2.1 Qualitative Case Study Research

Yin (2009) notes that explanatory "how" questions are more likely to favour the use of case study, because this type of questions explains contemporary phenomenon and circumstance within a real-life context, which "needs to be traced over time, rather than mere frequencies" (Yin, 2009, p. 9). Case studies are a design of inquiry in which the researcher develops an in-depth analysis of a real-life, contemporary case, bounded by time and

activity (Creswell, 2014). A case study is seen not as a methodology, but a choice of what is to be studied, within a clear bounded system (Stake, 1995). The rationale for using the case study research strategy, therefore, lies in the aim of exploring how participants utilise media in the context of the 3.11 disaster. In other words, the research uses the 3.11 disaster as a time point through which to explore social aspects of mass media and online media usage, as well as contemporary attitudes towards media institutions and different forms of community.

In case study research, study often starts with the case description, looking for themes and concepts related to main research questions, which appear to give adequate coverage of the case (Yin, 2009). Therefore, the main chapters of this study which present and discuss the findings (Chapter Four, Five and Six), all start with the brief description of a central theme within the case study of the 3.11 disaster, related to one research question. For example, Chapter Four, which explores the first research question by examining the intersections of mass media use and individual sense of social togetherness, starts with a description of the role of television during and immediately after the 3.11 earthquake. Similarly, Chapter Five describes the role of online media in the 3.11 disaster to provide a necessary foundation for examining how these media evoke or intensify individual's sense of closeness and connection to community; the second research question. Chapter Six starts by introducing the issues with media credibility and shifts in public trust in media institutions and government immediately after the 3.11 nuclear disaster, to provide a basis for presentation and discussion of main findings in concluding sections of the chapter in relation to the third research question.

The value of qualitative research lies in reporting a diversity of perspectives rather than generalisability and reporting frequencies. From this, a detailed understanding emerges from examining a specific case, by building patterns or explanations (Yin, 2009). The use of theory, according to Yin (2009), helps define the research design and data collection methods, but it is also essential for generalising the results of the case study, confirming, challenging or extending the theory, also known as analytic generalisation. Stake (1995) refers to propositional generalisation to address the researcher's summary of interpretations and claims complemented with his/her personal experience. This study employs a single

case study design to explore and explain the individual's media usage patterns and behaviour, within the precise boundaries of the 3.11 disaster and the present day. As outlined in the previous chapter (see Chapter Two), the study is guided by the theoretical framework of media sociology. The design of the research questions, however, allows participants to share their views and convey multiple perspectives, which consequently shapes and modifies the theory. This enables an in-depth understanding of the concept of media use through a variety of individual perspectives and experiences of the disaster. It will do so through case study analysis, by establishing patterns and looking for intersections of central concepts and categories, showing their relationship.

3.2.2 Semi-structured Interviews

In case study research, evidence comes from multiple sources: interviews, a variety of documents, formal studies or evaluations of the same case which is studied. In this study, interviews are employed as a primary method for data collection process. Interviews allow the researcher and participants to explore the research questions through verbal interactions. In qualitative interviews, subjective evidence is assembled based on individual views and knowledge is constructed through people's subjective experiences. This knowledge is socially constructed in the relationship between interviewer and interviewee (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The qualitative interview is perceived as an attempt to "understand the world from an individual's point of view and unfold the meaning of their experiences" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 1); through the discussion with others we can work through a variety of conceptual issues (Brennen, 2012). The use of language is an essential way through which we construct meanings and our social realities, and understand concepts based on people's experience, within a specific cultural, historical and political context (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

The interviews conducted for this study are designed to prompt individual participants to reflect on their experiences with using different media in the context of 3.11. Engaging with participants is critical for the case study because they convey their opinions and provide insights into specific matters (Creswell 2013; Yin 2009). Analyses of the individual experiences with using media garnered from the interviews will then be positioned within the context of the immediate 3.11 disaster and the point of reflection, thus enabling us to

understand the dynamics of each individual's media usage. The semi-structured interviews aim to achieve openness and variety of subjective views and perspectives. These interviews are based on a pre-established set of open-ended questions which are posed to all participants (see Appendices),[6] but allow greater fluidity and flexibility than structured interviews. They allow change of question forms to reassess the answers given by the participant, even though they follow a pre-planned and consistent set of interview questions. It is crucial to follow the participants' narrative and adapt questions to investigate more deeply into a specific matter or give the participant a chance to elaborate on issues or clarify their answers. Semi-structured interviews are neither an open-day conversation nor a closed questionnaire (Kvale, 2007). Face-to-face interviews are a powerful and flexible means of investigating underlying meanings in a way that other methods cannot. One-on-one interviews offer the opportunity to see participants' non-verbal cues that can reveal messages or communicate the participant's mood or attitude, which helps in understanding their verbal responses.

Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, this study seeks new angles on the concept of media use, looking more closely into individual experiences with using media and stimulating participants to share their stories and personal views freely. The information gathered through in-depth guided conversations with participants aims to broaden the existing knowledge about the concept of media use, but more importantly to provide understanding for alternative points of view and new aspects emerging from the data collection process. Interviews are chosen to be a primary method for data collection for the purpose of this study, to look closer into participants' experiences and perceptions of media forms; both mass media and online media. However, the detailed understanding of the research matter emerges from multiple sources of evidence, as previous studies have highlighted (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). In addition to providing insight into the research problem, some well-informed participants can help the researcher identify other sources of evidence for the study (Yin, 2009). In the present study, one such area was that of social media content.

[6] The list of interview questions, both Japanese and its English translation, is provided in the Appendix of the thesis.

3.2.3 Qualitative Social Media Content Analysis

Well-informed participants can help in identifying other relevant sources of evidence for the case study research (Yin 2009). This study utilises additional material—social media content from some of the participants' social media accounts, offered by participants during or after the interview as an example of their social media use to better understand how participants utilised different social media platforms to connect with friends, family, and other users in the immediate aftermath of the 3.11 disaster. Analysis of such social media content enriches the findings of the qualitative interviews, to better illustrate how a sense of communal belonging manifests across different social media platforms.

Texts are considered to provide traces of socially constructed reality, which is understood through the evaluation of words, themes and concepts that reside in texts, within a particular cultural context (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011). Benski and Fisher (2013) suggest the internet as an essential source of evidence for exploring affective responses in digital space, as it offers a unique space for studying emotions, reflecting immediate feelings as they occur (p. 6). In the context of the disaster, the immediacy and spontaneity of the online environment serve as a useful way to explore participants' notions of community that are based on the shared experience of the triple disaster. Furthermore, the complexity and diversity of social media offer the opportunity to explore participants' multidimensional use of social media in the disaster context, (see Chapter Five).

The social media content shared by the participants consists of Facebook posts and comments, tweets and YouTube videos and comments. A qualitative content analysis is employed to identify themes and patterns and offer descriptive evidence that is supportive of the existing scholarly theory (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). These social media posts, thus, have a complementary role to the information gleaned from interviews.

3.3 Data Collection Process

To examine the relationship between the media and society in the specific context of the 3.11 disaster, gathering the first-hand information directly from the field is essential. As Milligan notes "researchers take on different positionings dependent on the situation that we may be in, the people we are interacting with and familiarity of the linguistic and socio-

cultural norms" (Milligan, 2016, p. 239–240). Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to reflect on their subjective experiences of using media in different phases of the disaster and share their general attitudes towards media, their credibility, community and social bonds.

Before going to Japan for two-months-long fieldwork, I designed a set of questions, organised around three main themes: participants' current media usage patterns, participants' experience with utilising media during the 3.11 disaster and their perceptions of community in the context of disaster and recovery with concluding questions. The design of questions related to participants' notions of community draws on McMillan and Chavis' (1986) model of four elements of sense of community: membership, influence, integration, and fulfilment of needs and shared emotional connection. Thus, the sense of communal belonging is measured as the feeling of belonging to a community, a sense of making a difference in the community, the feeling that members' cognitive and affective needs will be met through membership to the community and as the commitment and belief that members share a similar experience of the disaster. The sense of communal belonging, as one of the main concepts of this study, is perceived as a multidimensional, non-static concept, shaped and affected by media use. The other key concept for this study, media credibility, is also measured as a multidimensional construct, depending on the user's perception of believability, accuracy, bias and depth as the main measures which have emerged from previous studies on media credibility. Following the argument that media use is one of the most important underlying factors of media credibility (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Westley & Severin, 1964), interview questions are designed to explore the degree to which a participant relies on media and judges it as credible, in the context of the 3.11 disaster and the present day.

Considering that the main case for the study is the 3.11 disaster, consisting of three inter-related events: earthquake, tsunami and nuclear meltdown, the interview questions were designed in a certain way to explore participants' media use in different phases of the disaster. Vultee and Wilkins (2004) outline five phases of disaster reporting: warning, impact, immediate post-impact, recovery and mitigation. In a similar way, the design of interview questions related to individuals' experiences of utilising media relies on four

different phases: the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami, the week following the earthquake, the immediate aftermath of the nuclear disaster and the present day. Furthermore, the interview questions follow the scope of this study, which is limited to three primary forms of media that participants used in the 3.11 disaster: television, newspapers and online media (social media and news websites).

3.3.1 Participant Recruitment

The most common sampling technique used in qualitative research is a non-probability, purposive sampling, where the researcher relies on personal judgment to select a sample for the study to achieve a particular purpose. Having in mind that the aim of this study is not to seek statistical generalisability, a snowball sampling method—a type of purposive sampling—was used to select participants for the study. During the two-months-long fieldwork in Tokyo, I interviewed the total of 38 Japanese nationals, who were recruited by utilising a personal and professional network to reach some of the first participants, who then provided the referrals for the further interviews. The sample size is justified with the concept of saturation, where further interviews do not produce any new information for the study (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

As this study examines the relationship between media and society, by looking at individuals' recounting of media habits and experiences with using different media forms: TV, newspapers and online media (social media, news websites), the main population of interest for the study is individuals who actively use some, a combination of, or all the above-mentioned media forms. Based on preliminary research on media usage patterns and trends in Japan, in television watching, newspaper reading and online media use (see Chapter Two, section 2.7), four different age groups were included to ensure that the sample represented a broad cross-section of media users. The four different age groups were: 20–29, 30–39, 40–49 and 50–59 and over. Interviews with individuals from these groups enable examination of how different generations utilise and trust different media forms. Furthermore, considering that small sample sizes in qualitative research allow for richness of data and a variety of participants (Moser & Korstjens, 2018), I intentionally selected participants differing in age, with the aim of providing diverse perspectives on

media use. Disasters do not select for demographic. I approached the study with this in mind and therefore avoided focusing solely on one group of media users.

As the study uses the case of the 3.11 disaster to highlight changes and dynamics in individuals' media use, it was essential to recruit individuals who were in Japan, preferably Tokyo or the vicinity, at the time of the 3.11 disaster, and who actively used some of these media forms. In the recruitment process, I avoided interviewing participants from Tohoku region as it was directly affected by the triple disaster, and participants' media usage patterns were disrupted and limited by the severity of the disaster, loss of electricity, evacuation and displacement. Also, a digital engagement of the people in the severely affected region was limited due to demographics and geography (Slater et al., 2012b, p. 98). In this way, I was able to recruit participants who were comparatively less affected by the 3.11 disaster than people in the Tohoku region and southern Hokkaido, and who did not suffer personal losses and psychological trauma. While Tokyo was not devastated by the tsunami like the north coast of Japan, aftershocks lasted for days, and many people were fearful about the impact of the nuclear disaster, as the Metropolitan Tokyo Area had several hot spots with high levels of radioactive caesium (Oishi & Hamada, 2019). Interviewed participants from Tokyo and surrounding areas could still feel the effects of the disaster, such as infrastructure disruptions, food and water shortages, electricity outages, mobile network failure and many others. Commuter trains, subways and bullet-trains were all shut down due to the earthquake. Phone signals were mostly dead, preventing calls and messages from getting through for hours after the earthquake, so people formed lines in front of public phone booths. However, internet services were available in the areas with undamaged infrastructure, so people in Tokyo were able to use email, Skype, Line, Facebook or Twitter to establish contact with family and friends. Also, by using existing contacts and snowball sampling method, I was able to recruit participants who were not direct victims of the disaster, who did not suffer the loss of close relatives, family members or friends in the disaster, and who did not experience psychological trauma or distress.

Table 3.1 provides basic demographics for all interviewed participants, including information on main media forms used in the context of the 3.11 disaster.

Table 3.1 Basic demographic information about the participants (name, gender, age, city/region, media use in the context of 3.11)

Name (pseudonym)	Gender	Age Group	City (present-day)	City (3.11)	Media Use (3.11)
Hideki	Male	20–29	Tokyo	Fukushima	TV, Twitter, YouTube, 2channel
Toshi	Male	20–29	Tokyo	Tokyo	Twitter, Yahoo News, TV
Mei	Female	20–29	Tokyo	Kobe	Facebook, Twitter, Line
Kenta	Male	20–29	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, Line, Yahoo News
Miyuki	Female	20–29	Tokyo	Tochigi	newspaper, TV, Yahoo News
Sana	Female	20–29	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, Facebook, Twitter, Line
Takashi	Male	20–29	Tokyo	outside Japan	online newspaper, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube
Tomoki	Male	20–29	Tokyo	Nagano	TV, news websites, newspapers
Yumi	Female	20–29	Tokyo	Nara	TV, Facebook
Michiko	Female	20–29	Tokyo	Kanagawa	TV, newspaper, news websites
Ayumi	Female	30–39	Tokyo	outside Japan	Yahoo News, TV and online newspaper
Eiji	Male	30–39	Tokyo	Tokyo	Facebook, TV, news websites
Hiro	Male	30–39	Tokyo	Tokyo	Twitter, Facebook, Line, Yahoo News
Yoshi	Male	30–39	Tokyo	Fukuoka	TV, Yahoo News, Twitter
Naoko	Female	30–39	Tokyo	Tokyo	Line, TV, Facebook
Hiroshi	Male	30–39	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube
Mayumi	Female	30–39	Melbourne	Tokyo	TV, Line, Facebook
Saki	Female	30–39	Tokyo	Tokyo	Yahoo News, TV, Twitter, Facebook
Shinji	Male	30–39	Melbourne	Tokyo	TV, online newspaper, Yahoo News, Twitter
Rika	Female	30–39	Kyoto	Kyoto	radio, TV, Facebook, Mixi
Wataru	Male	30–39	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, news websites, online newspaper
Ayako	Female	40–49	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, news websites, Facebook
Chieko	Female	40–49	Tokyo	Tokyo	Facebook, TV
Atsushi	Male	40–49	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, Facebook, Line
Daichi	Male	40–49	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, Facebook, news websites
Hana	Female	40–49	Osaka	Osaka	Yahoo News, Facebook, Line, TV
Naoki	Male	40–49	Chiba	Yonezawa	TV, news websites
Kensuke	Male	40–49	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, Mixi, news websites
Masayuki	Male	40–49	Tokyo	Tokyo	Yahoo News, Facebook, TV
Takuya	Male	40–49	Tokyo	Saitama	TV, YouTube, Facebook
Kazuya	Male	40–49	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, news websites
Fuji	Female	50–59+	Tokyo	Kawasaki	TV, news websites
Kenjiro	Male	50–59+	Tokyo	Gunma	radio, TV, news websites
Kaori	Female	50–59+	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, news websites
Ryota	Male	50–59+	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV, news websites
Haruna	Female	50–59+	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV
Takahiro	Male	50–59+	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV
Momoko	Female	50–59+	Tokyo	Tokyo	TV

As shown in Table 3.1, most participants are from Tokyo, the city with Japan's leading rate of mobile phone subscription, the highest mobile Internet penetration (63.3 percent), and second highest Internet penetration rate (71.9 percent) (Slater et al., 2012b, p. 98). This is consistent with the research aim of reaching Japanese individuals, most of whom use social media and access news on mobile phones and internet.

3.3.2 Description of Fieldwork Activities

This study relies on five stages of the interview process: introduction, warm-up, main body, cool-off and closure, as proposed in previous work (Robson, 2011, p. 284):

- Introduction: the first part of the interview process consists of introducing the research topic and aim to research participants within the initial email invitation to participate in the study. On the day of the interview, each participant was provided with the details of the research and was given a consent form to sign. Before conducting the interview, participants were asked again for permission to switch on the audio recorder and start the interview.

- Warm-up: the second part of the interview focuses on "warm-up" questions about the participant's general media usage patterns, to understand what media forms the participant uses, how often and for what main reason.

- Main body: after easing the start of the interview process with warm-up questions, the focus is on the main concepts of the study: perceptions of trust and a sense of social connectedness in relation to media use. First, participants are asked questions about their general perceptions of media credibility, thereby exploring the reasons for high, moderate or low levels of trust in specific media forms. Second, the interview moves on to explore participant's personal experience with using media during, immediately after and in the following week from the disaster. The aim is to explore the consistency, changes, dynamics and shifts in using media, in different stages of the disaster, as well as the participant's attitude towards media regarding reliability and trust. Another aim is to see how the participant was personally engaged in sharing, exchanging or discussing news (online or directly) during and after the disaster. After establishing how participants utilised media in the context of

the 3.11, the interview continues to explore their perceptions of social bonds and attitudes towards local and regional communities, and how they construct their notions of community in a more general context.

- Cool-off: The last part of the interview consists of simple but concluding questions, to find out more about participants' overall impression of media in the context of 3.11, and their current attitudes towards mass media and online media to address the central research proposition.

- Closure: The interview is finished by asking participants whether they have anything else to add to the conversation or summarise their feelings, attitudes and thoughts about the research problem. At the end of the interview, each participant is acknowledged for the time spent during the interview and his/her valuable contribution to the study. Even after turning off the recorder, some participants came out with interesting stories or examples, which were documented in the form of field notes, shortly after the interview.

According to Yin (2009), pilot interviews are an excellent way to develop a relevant set of interview questions and refine data collection plans, and these pilot cases are usually selected based on convenience. Before going to Japan, in August 2017, I conducted two pilot interviews in Melbourne to workshop interview questions. These interviews served to facilitate the revision and clarification of interview questions so that participants can easily understand all the questions, encouraging them to share their views and perspectives.

In the fieldwork period, from 15 September to 1 December, I conducted a total of 38 interviews. Each interview was held in various locations in Tokyo, in spaces where participants felt comfortable, such as less crowded coffee shops, restaurants or conference and meeting rooms. All the interviews were conducted in Japanese,[7] without the help of an interpreter or third-party assistance and digitally recorded with the participant's written consent. Digital recording of the interview is essential because it provides "more accurate rendition of an interview than any other method" (Yin, 2009, p. 109) and provides a

[7] The exception is Mei, a participant who preferred talking in English and Japanese throughout the interview. Therefore, some of Mei's comments are in English, as the following chapters will show (see Chapter Four, Five, and Six).

permanent record, allowing the researcher to concentrate on conducting the interview. Especially in the case of semi-structured interviews, due to the substantial amount of data, it is not always possible to write everything down or remember, so taking notes is not sufficient. After each 30–60 minute interview, I reviewed the recording and organised field notes, to prepare for the following interviews and adjust or clarify questions if necessary or do a follow-up with the participant in case there were any inconsistencies or issues with the recording. I also made field notes, writing down any relevant thoughts and common patterns which emerged from the interviews. The open-ended questions enabled me to collect data on participants' experiences with using media as well as their attitudes towards local and regional communities. In addition to the pre-established list of questions, follow-up questions were asked to elaborate on the participant's feelings, experiences to discover new patterns and understand the social aspects of participant's media usage that I was not familiar with before this fieldwork.

3.4 Methods of Data Analysis

The three most common approaches to qualitative analysis are the quasi-statistical approach, a thematic coding and grounded theory approach (Robson, 2011). This study employs the thematic coding approach (Robson, 2011) and six stages of the analytical process (Creswell, 2014):

1. Data organisation
2. Familiarisation with the data
3. Generating initial codes
4. Identifying themes
5. Constructing thematic categories and networks
6. Interpreting findings

3.4.1 Data Organisation and Familiarisation

During the time spent on the field, shortly after each interview, I listened to the recordings, checked field notes and familiarised myself with the material. I made short memos and

summaries and highlighted whether I needed to follow up with the participant for further clarification or explanation. After a few interviews, upon noticing any emerging common themes or patterns, I made a rough analysis in the form of notes and shared this with my supervisor in our fortnightly Skype consultations. Early analysis helped me confirm and validate the findings and assured me that my research was on the right track.

After collecting all the primary data for the study, and upon returning from fieldwork, I moved to the first phase of the analysis process, which starts with organising and sorting all the data: transcribing interviews, typing field notes and converting raw data into write-up version, and sorting the data into categories depending on the information source. I used the online software Transcribe (https://transcribe.wreally.com/) to transcribe all interviews. My decision to transcribe all the interviews without the help of an assistant or third-party is motivated by the theoretical view that researchers should transcribe their interviews because they can learn more about their interviewing style and have the social and emotional aspects of the interview reawakened during transcription (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). As transcription is a very time-consuming process, it took me one month to transcribe 38 interviews and compare transcription against the original recordings, to check any inconsistencies. Most participants are from Tokyo, but there are some from Osaka, Nara, and surrounding regions, which means that participants have slightly different dialects. In instances where I needed to check on specific words and phrases, I consulted with my supervisors, Dr Claire Maree and Dr Ikuko Nakane, both of whom have a considerable knowledge of the Japanese language.

3.4.2 Coding

The third phase of the analysis process is reading and looking at all the data to get a general sense of information. After familiarisation with the data, listening to recordings, re-reading the data, making brief memos and summaries, I outlined main ideas and concepts, highlighted the most relevant stories and moved to the third phase of analysis: aggregating and coding the data by labeling them into several themes and categories, using NVivo Pro11. The purpose of using data analysis software in this research was to facilitate sorting and coding all the interviews, social media content and field notes and to identify emerging patterns and common themes across categories and sources. Furthermore, NVivo “ensures a

complete set of data for interpretation than it might occur when working manually" (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013, p. 3).

The coding process involves organising text data collected through interviews by segmenting and bracketing sentences into categories and labelling them with a title, which is usually the central concept or a topic. This is also known as the first-level coding and presents the necessary foundation for second-level (pattern) coding and subsequent analysis (Miles & Huberman, 1984). Creswell (2014) differentiates between codes which emerge from the data analysis process and are developed from the study and pre-determined codes, which are based on common sense, theoretical framework and previous studies. Within this research, I used both types, starting with a pre-determined set of codes, based on main theoretical concepts: a sense of communal belonging, media use and perceptions of media credibility, which all had their sub-categories. For example, "media use" as the primary code had two sub-categories: "general media use" and "3.11 media use," and "perceptions of media credibility" had two: "trust in online media" and "trust in mass media."

The fourth phase of analysis involved coding and generating several themes which show multiple perspectives, have several quotations and appear as significant findings. Within this phase, some of the new codes were developed from the study, such as "media and sense of communal belonging," "communicative involvement," "changes in media use," which also turn out to be main findings of this study, as the following chapters will illustrate.

The fifth phase of the data analysis process is mainly related to planning and outlining how the main themes will be represented and discussed in the qualitative narrative and core chapters of this thesis. In the sixth phase of analysis, which involves interpretation of findings, I conducted a thematic analysis to identify key themes emerging from the data, and then identify central themes from the case study in the context of existing theories and literature on the intersections of media and society to address the research proposition. In other words, I analysed each code separately, writing memos and conducting more in-depth analysis, by comparing the findings with information from theories and literature. In a case study research, establishing patterns across categories (codes) is essential because it shows the correspondence and the relationship between categories (Creswell, 2013).

According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), an analysis focusing on meaning involves not only coding but also condensation and interpretation of meaning. The term "condensation" refers to short formulations of meanings expressed by the participant and compressing lengthy statements into short ones, thereby explicating main themes (p. 207). Interpretation of meaning refers to the process of going beyond the direct quotes and statements and re-contextualising them within the broad theoretical framework (p. 207). Some ad-hoc techniques proposed by Kvale (2007) used in this study are: noting patterns and themes, clustering, counting and making comparisons across codes. In all stages of the data analysis process, keeping memos is a good way of capturing and linking ideas together (Robson, 1993), which is why the coding process was frequently interrupted to write down theoretical notes and ideas.

Although the theoretical framework guided the conceptualisation of the data collected, the findings of the study also suggest new questions and aspects of the media use not previously considered or examined, and convey multiple and diverse perspectives from participants. Creswell (2014) considers that the diversity of perspectives is a hallmark of a proper qualitative research (p. 99). The findings of the study also provide general lessons learned from examining the case of the 3.11 disaster, thereby building patterns and explanations for media use concerning other concepts: a sense of social belonging and trust, which will be helpful for similar case studies in the future.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

When knowledge is constructed through the interaction between researcher and participant, it is critical to consider the ethical implications of this personal interaction and conduct research with integrity, honesty and fairness (Kvale, 1996). In social science research, the main way to assess and mitigate the risks is by using ethical guidelines. These guidelines stress the importance of obtaining informed consent from each participant to voluntarily take part in the study, intending to secure and protect participant's privacy and confidentiality.

Before conducting the interview, each participant received two forms in the Japanese language: a plain-language statement and a consent form, which informed them about the

overall purpose of the research and any possible benefits and risks which can arise from participation in the study. Both forms included information on participant's right to withdraw from the study at any time, information that only I as a researcher and my supervisor would have access to the interview, as well as details about the researcher's right to publish excerpts from the interview. Additionally, both forms provided crucial information about confidentiality and privacy, specifically that data identifying the participants will not be disclosed and that their identity will be hidden by using pseudonyms instead of their real names. Furthermore, to guarantee participant anonymity, screenshots of original social media posts taken from participants' social media accounts, will not be presented.

3.5.1 Data Management

During the data collection phase, all field notes, scans and interview recordings were kept securely in password-protected digital files. All the information collected during fieldwork is kept strictly confidential, and participants are kept anonymous. After the data collection phase, interview transcripts, notes, contact details, and other information about participants, is stored securely in password-protected digital files, anonymised and categorised by interview date. The digital files are backed up to an external hard drive. For safety and security concerns, access to hard drives is password protected to ensure the privacy of sensitive information. Only I and the responsible researcher, Dr Claire Maree, have access to these files. After the completion of this research project, the data collected and processed will be published only with the consent of the participants as outlined in the consent forms.

The recordings and transcripts will be kept by the responsible researcher and me in a secure location for at least five years from the time of the interviews. After that period, if there is no need to retain data for future use, all the data will be destroyed and disposed of securely.

3.5.2 Risks and Benefits

Undertaking fieldwork in the post-disaster context means that there will be specific issues that need to be considered before embarking on the field. Even though the 3.11 disaster in Japan happened six years prior to the time the interviews were conducted, participants were asked questions about the ways they used media during the disaster, that require reflecting

on a somewhat negative experience. Having in mind the negative impact of the media and overall sentiments of the triple disaster, I avoided recruiting people who were directly affected by the earthquake, tsunami or nuclear disaster or those who have suffered personal loss and psychological trauma. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, the risk of interviewing direct victims of the disaster was reduced by choosing participants who were in Tokyo or surrounding area at the time of 3.11, and who have not suffered any losses or extreme discomfort due to the disaster. As participants were recruited through the snowball sampling method, where previously interviewed participants suggested other individuals for me to interview, I knew whether any of them was a disaster survivor or bereaved. However, the study still considered the possibility that some participants could feel slight discomfort during the interview and refuse to answer some of the questions. Before performing fieldwork, the discomfort was perceived as a minimal but possible risk, as anxiety induced by the interview. In such case, if discomfort occurred, the interview would be terminated, and participants would be provided with the contact of support counselling services in Tokyo, to which they can turn to for consultation. Therefore, before departing for my fieldwork, I prepared the list of public phone counselling services for general matters, one of which is Tokyo Inochi no Denwa, whose purpose is mainly suicide prevention, but also offers support for depression, anxiety and other matters.

All the interviews were conducted smoothly, and participants freely shared their experiences and expressed that they enjoyed contributing to this research. Although it is difficult to reflect on the memories and negative sentiments of the disaster, participants were extremely cooperative. Such was the case of Ayako, who had tears in her eyes when she was reflecting on how she watched broadcast of the tsunami, which triggered some memories of the disaster. Even after I insisted on stopping the interview, to avoid causing further discomfort, Ayako was eager to continue sharing her experience and vent her feelings. In this instance, the participant indicated that the minimal potential risk, identified as discomfort, was deemed to be outweighed by the benefits of continuing in the interview. Previous studies have shown that sharing personal stories through interviews can contribute to the healing process for some interviewees, allowing them to experience positive effects and a sense of empowerment from being listened to (Corbin & Morse, 2003; East, Jackson, O'Brien, & Peters, 2010; Leseho & Block, 2005). My hope is that the interviews enabled

some participants to reflect on their own experiences, and freely share personal views and attitudes.

3.6 Research Goals and Limitations

This study predominantly focuses on individual media usage experiences in the context of the disruptive media event of the 3.11 disaster, to provide a comprehensive understanding of the changes and dynamics in the contemporary Japanese media environment. Considering that natural disasters are becoming more frequent and that the situation in the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant continues to worsen after years of ongoing meltdowns,[8] the significance of this study is to provide a nuanced understanding of how different media forms facilitate and contribute to individual's sense of social connection, in a disaster context.

It is important to note several limitations of this study. As mentioned earlier, I have conducted interviews with participants in Japanese, without the help of an interpreter or third-party support, which represents one of the limitations for this study. Being a second language user of Japanese has possibly affected the way in which follow-up questions were asked, and the possibility of expanding the conversation beyond the prepared questions and agenda. However, my decision to conduct interviews without an interpreter's help can have benefits for the study, as it does not involve the presence of the third-party, which can sometimes affect how much information participants share during the interview and how they respond to questions. Without the intermediary present, it is easier to make a connection and have close communication with each participant and give them the opportunity to share more, without the interruption or delay that comes with translation. The same goes for the process of transcribing the interviews. The researcher's decision to transcribe all the interviews without the help of an assistant may represent one of the limitations for this study, as it is possible to omit or mishear certain words and dialects,[9] with which the researcher may not be familiar. However, Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) advise researchers to do their transcription, as it helps them become familiar with the data,

[8] Radiation levels at Fukushima reactor puzzle nuclear experts (2017, February 10). Retrieved from http://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/AJ201702100035.html

[9] Most participants are from Tokyo, but there are some from Osaka, Nara, Fukuoka and so forth, which means that participants have slightly different dialects.

start early analysis and re-live the interview experience, which brings back ideas or feelings experienced during the interview.

This study employed a snowball sampling method to recruit participants for the interviews, which is considered non-representative of the population. A purposive, snowball sampling method, in which interviewed participants are used to identify other members of the population, can increase the number of information-rich participants and possibly their openness, but it can also increase bias and reduce representativeness of the sample. Different sampling methods should be employed to reach a more representative sample and include more participants to understand their different motivations behind using media, as the results of the study cannot be generalised based on the sample of 38 participants. However, the risk of recruiting a biased sample was reduced by choosing four different age groups, and users of different media forms, which will provide a diversity of perspectives on media use, crucial for answering research questions of this study.

Considering that the sample size is closely linked to the generalisability of the study and that this study employs a flexible research design, using the case study of the 3.11 disaster, one of the limitations can be generalising from a single-case study. Within the case study research, the generalisation comes in the form of theoretical conceptualisation of what is found in one case, or how the findings of the single-case study can be applied to other settings or cases (Robson, 2011, p. 152). The study uses a single case study to illustrate participants' perceptions and experiences with media use, collecting evidence from interviews and social media content. Similar findings from different methods of data collection may increase confidence in their validity (Robson, 1993), but interviews and brief online media content may not be enough for adequate coverage of the case. However, flexible research design, such as the case study, considers that the sample size is likely to be purposive or theoretical, rather than seeking to be representative of a known population or achieving a statistical generalisation. Following the view that the particularity is more critical than generalisability (Creswell, 2014), the study explored participants' media use within a single-case study, providing an in-depth understanding of the case.

Timing may also represent the strong limitation for the study, affecting or altering the accuracy and completeness of the content of memory reported through interviews, as

participants were asked to share the experience with using media during the disaster, from six years ago. Even though a few participants could not accurately recall information how they utilised media in the week after the earthquake, I was careful to give them enough time between questions to gather their thoughts and give more in-depth response.

However, even with the few outlined limitations, this study is a significant contribution to the growing literature on media and disaster communication in Japan, as it examines social aspects of both old and new media in the context of the 3.11 disaster, and changing media environment of contemporary Japan. Qualitatively approached, this study contributes to the post-disaster recovery and building resilience for future disasters, by analysing the supposedly positive implications that different media forms have for an individual's sense of social connection and trust.

3.7 Reliance on qualitative approach

This chapter established the rationale behind the research design and data analysis. Since the study relies on individual subjective perspectives and experiences of the 3.11 disaster, semi-structured interviews emerge as the most appropriate for providing a thorough understanding of the media use. The three research questions are aimed at explaining the relationship between three concepts: media use, a sense of communal belonging and trust, within the defined boundaries and context of the study: the 3.11 disaster.

Although a theoretical framework guides the study, the data collected from interviews consequently modifies and shapes the theory, building patterns and explanations and discovering new aspects of media use. The single case study is not meant to generalise the findings but establish patterns and show the relationship of central concepts and categories. Thus, the aim is to add this study to a collection of similar case studies from which generalised claims can be made.

The following chapters of this thesis present and discuss the main findings and emerging themes, to provide a detailed understanding of the participants' multiple perspectives and media use practices in the context of the disaster and present day. Each of these chapters answers one research question of the study, offering an in-depth analysis of participants'

most representative comments to illustrate main arguments and help the reader evaluate the meanings that participants ascribe to central concepts of the study.

4

Intensifying Community Feelings Through Television Watching

4.1 Broadcasting and Disaster

This chapter aims to address the first research question: How does use of traditional mass media evoke or intensify an individual's sense of communal belonging in the context of 3.11? First, I will examine the ways in which traditional mass media, especially television, contribute to the development of the sense of communal belonging, drawing on previous work within media sociology which examines the following aspects and features of television: shared viewing experience (Couldry et al., 2010; Morley, 2006; Scannell, 1988, 1996; Takahashi, 2010a; Yoshimi, 2003), sense of liveness and social sense of currency (Ellis, 2000, 2007), media events (Cottle, 2006; Couldry, 2003; Couldry et al., 2009; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Liebes, 1998) and the concept of "imagined communities" and "shared temporality" (Anderson, 1983).

The chapter will examine how television fostered and cultivated the individual's sense of connection to multiple communities and how aspects, such as familiarity, liveness and visibility, was altered with the 3.11 disaster. The role of newspapers is explored only in the context of general media use, because participants mainly utilised TV or online media as their primary source of news on the disaster, as they recount it. Additionally, Chapter Four aims to examine whether television and newspapers still have a central role in participants' daily life and media use, as well as challenges that traditional mass media is facing due to changes in the media landscape and the growing popularity of new digital media platforms. Did patterns of traditional mass media use remain stable after the disaster, and what does this tell us about the role of television and newspapers in Japan?

4.1.1 The Case—Broadcasting in the Immediate Aftermath of the 3.11 Disaster

On 11 March 2011, at precisely 14:46 JST, television networks in Japan interrupted their regular programming to deliver the first news of an earthquake that hit the northeast coast of Japan. From that moment, television stations completely changed the tone of their broadcasting, covering the news on the triple disaster as it was unfolding; starting with one

of the strongest earthquakes in the history of Japan, followed by a massive tsunami and nuclear meltdown. The constant television coverage, lasted for around three days on all major national and commercial broadcasters, without commercial breaks (Galbraith & Karlin, 2016). This interruption significantly affected the regular television programming thus disrupting established routines of television watching.

NHK was the first to break its regular programming of the live coverage of a session in Japan's Diet, to report the news of the earthquake, just a few seconds after it hit Japan.[10] As the national public broadcaster, and under the Broadcast Act, NHK has the responsibility to issue early warning reports in case of natural disasters and provide its coverage with impartiality and independence. With remote cameras set up along the coast in case of emergency and deployed helicopters, NHK could provide live feeds of the earthquake from stricken areas and footage of the powerful tsunami that instantly devoured buildings and washed out coastal towns, leaving nothing but a pile of rubble. Many international broadcasters used the dramatic footage of tsunami and individuals shared it on social media platforms. These images are the first signs of the cascading nature of the 3.11 disaster[11] as a mediatised event. NHK's live broadcast was especially helpful for those people who could only access the news on TV, due to destroyed ICT infrastructure and inability to use the Internet and mobile phones. Furthermore, NHK's constant live reports enabled those who did not have the skills to utilise news on the Internet and alternative media platforms to follow news of the disaster.

To enable people who could only use online media to access TV news, NHK began broadcasting its news on streaming websites NicoNico and Ustream. Moreover, just five days from the earthquake, NHK started a collaboration with Google Person Finder. This provided access to an open database where citizens can check the information on evacuated or missing individuals. The address of Person Finder was displayed at the top of the screen on NHK's main domestic channel.

[10] In the cooperation with Japan's Meteorological Agency, NHK can issue emergency alerts just a few minutes after the quake.

[11] Japan Tsunami Disaster Footage 2011 (NHK Footage). (2011, March 12th). Retrieved from: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kZGcWTPkKAk

Just a few minutes after the great earthquake, other channels[12] switched from their regular programming to full-time earthquake coverage. Unlike public broadcaster NHK, which relies on subscription fees from its viewers and some funding from the government, commercial broadcasters rely entirely on commercial revenues. For them, it was somewhat difficult to decide the appropriate time to continue with the regular programming, as the emerging nuclear crisis at the Fukushima plant indicated that there was no closure of the disaster. It remained critical to provide news as the disaster was unfolding. On 12 March 2011, at 23:56 JST, TV Tokyo was the first to continue with regular programming. Some channels, such as TV Asahi, had not broadcast commercials for more than 70 hours. Even after resuming the regular programming on 15 March, most commercials were public service announcements (Galbraith & Karlin, 2016).

Before the 3.11 disaster, the daily television programming schedule in Japan was still structured according to a uniform national timetable (Yoshimi, 2003). There are only two instances in the post-war period when the national viewing habits of Japanese people were altered due to the emergence of new communication technologies and two major national disasters (see Chapter Two, section 2.7). This uniform schedule is said to contribute to feelings of national togetherness and evoke a sense of connection to outer, social world. The events of 3.11 not only caused severe disruption to the ways people utilised media to gather crucial information, but it also disrupted patterns television watching. Everyday media habits were significantly reconfigured by the 3.11 disaster in ways that have implications for wider social interaction and community.

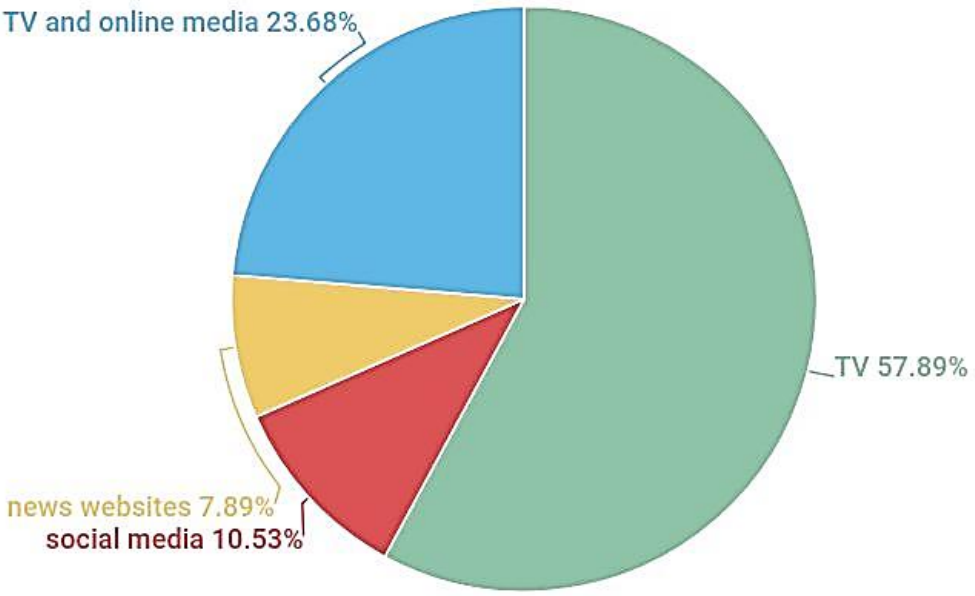
4.2 Familiarity, Companionship and Liveness

Immediately after the great earthquake, the primary source of news for many participants in this study was television. More than half (58 percent) of the total number of interviewed participants (38), recount using the TV as their first source of news (see Figure 4.1). The participants mainly followed NHK or any of the main commercial channels from home, work, hotel, or a friend's house to get the first updates and understand what happened. Even if they could not access TV immediately, after arriving home, they would turn the TV on,

[12] Commercial broadcasters such as NTV, TBS, TV Tokyo, Fuji TV, TV Asahi broke the news on earthquake and soon afterwards stopped their regular programming.

or join a family member who was already watching the news. The pattern of participants' responses points to continuous television watching, an increase in checking TV news and leaving the TV turned on in the background to pick up on live updates as the disaster was unfolding.

Figure 4.1 Participants' primary source of news immediately after the 3.11 earthquake



The notion of continuous viewing is evident in the use of the word "*tsukeppanashi*" by seven of the participants to refer to the ways in which they watched TV in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. "*Tsukeppanashi*" implies "leaving the device on in the background," and in this instance, "leaving the TV turned on." It was used 14 times across seven different participants. Reference to continuous television watching during 3.11 suggests that participants not only turned to TV to find first news on the earthquake, but they continuously followed live news as the disaster was unfolding.

Most participants referred to the TV as a common medium to which they turn in an emergency such as a natural disaster. The term "*shūkan*" (habit) was used to explain this. For example, one of the interviewed participants, Shinji[13] perceives TV as the primary medium for obtaining crucial information in a time of natural disaster:

> *At least it is my habit to first turn on NHK, and if there is an earthquake, it has become customary to watch NHK. For now, it seems that many Japanese people have this habit of turning to NHK.*[14]

Atsushi has a similar perception of TV, as he explains his experience with watching TV immediately after the quake:

> *The first thing I noticed is that I watched TV all the time. The primary source of information for most Japanese people at that time was probably TV.*[15]

The way in which Shinji and Atsushi both assumed that many Japanese people (*Nihon-jin*) turn to NHK for the first news on the disaster, indicates that television watching is experienced as a communal norm, something habitual or customary for Japanese people. The notion of NHK as a familiar source of news in a time of emergency such as natural disaster comes from the established role of NHK as official public institution mandated to keep the public informed in an emergency. In 1961, after the 1959 Ise Bay typhoon killed more than 5000 people in central Japan, the Japanese government established the Disaster Countermeasures Basic Act. In the Act, NHK is a designated official emergency agency in disasters, required to disseminate timely and accurate information (Tanaka, 2013). Therefore, NHK's role in an emergency is twofold, as it reports on the disaster, and contributes to disaster prevention and crisis management through its broadcasts. The television programming schedule in Japan has been described as structured according to a uniform national timetable since long before 2011 (see Chapter Two for discussion). This

[13] For a list of participants please refer to Table 3.1 in Chapter Three, section 3.3.2

[14] はじめに NHK をつけてるなんか少なくとも僕の習慣ではあって、地震があったら NHK それは一つの習慣になって、たぶん多くの日本人はその習慣を持ってるん？じゃないか、とりあえず NHK。

[15] テレビを見て、全部テレビを見て、初めてすごいことになって気づいて。主な情報源は多分日本人はほとんどテレビ、あの時は。

cultural context also explains participants' references to collective news watching. We can summarise that previously established viewing patterns motivate participants to turn to TV as the main medium for disaster news. An intimate feeling of contact with television audience is created through following a regular programming schedule, which underpins the familiarity and comfort of the TV as a medium (Ellis, 2007, p. 177).

The concept of temporality or schedule is directly referenced by Kenjiro, who perceives television as a significant part of his media routine. He refers to his "habit" of following morning and evening news:

> *TV watching has become a habit because the latest news is delivered at a fixed time.*[16]

Kenjiro, who was in the prefecture of Gunma, north of Tokyo and in the vicinity of affected Fukushima prefecture at the time of 3.11, immediately turned not to television, but to the radio when he felt the earthquake and sought to check what had happened. This is consistent with disaster practices in Japan that counsel people to seek information from radio in case of emergencies. Shortly after listening to the radio news he turned on the TV to find more detailed information. The live broadcast on NHK helped him realise the severity of the disaster, which is the main reason why he kept watching TV in the following days.

Another participant, Naoki, also makes note of habitual use of television. Naoki habitually leaves the TV on in the background after arriving home from work, regardless of whether anyone is watching it or not. Naoki notes that he has been watching television ever since he was a child, which might be one of the strong reasons why he still maintains this habit, even if it means only picking up on updates from the TV in the background:

[16] 決まった時間に一番新しい時間ニュースをやってくれるので、習慣になってますね。

I think I have been watching TV ever since I was a child… When I come home, I turn on the TV, it is a habit. Even if I don't watch it, I have a habit of turning on the TV.[17]

When talking about the constant news watching in the context of the 3.11 disaster, it is necessary to keep in mind the psychological impact of constant broadcast on participants' mental and emotional state, considering the severity of the triple disaster. Previous research on the media coverage of the 9/11 terrorist attack, found that among respondents directly affected by the attack, prevalence of depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was associated with the frequency of television image viewing (Ahern et al., 2002). The 3.11 disaster triggered a certain disruption in participants' everyday media use pattern, as they were pulled out of their regular media routine to constant exposure to negative news and live scenes of disaster. Although participants I interviewed were comparatively less affected than people in the Tohoku region (see Chapter Three, subsection 3.3.2), they voiced concerns about negative effects that constant television coverage of the earthquake and tsunami had on their emotional state. For example, Michiko, who was in Tokyo at the time of 3.11, always had the television on in the background, even while she was sleeping. She mentions that she felt somewhat depressed with constant news, as there was no balance in programming:

Looking back, I wish there were at least some (TV) dramas, even if just for one hour, instead of 24/7 broadcast of the disaster.[18]

For Michiko, being able to watch television dramas may have helped to reduce anxiety caused by the disaster. This points to the underlining importance of having some part of the daily flow of programs and routine in order to achieve a sense of balance even in the context of 3.11.

[17] 子供の頃から… だと思いますよ。家ついたら、テレビつけっちゃう、習慣だなあ。みてなくても、テレビつけっちゃう習慣がある。

[18] その今から振り返って考え（て）みると、そんなにその 24 時間情報流しっぱなしじゃなくて、例えばその間にドラマを一時間だけでも放送したりとかそういうのがあっても、よかったのかな

Michiko is just one of twenty participants who referred to an imbalance in disaster coverage, which had a significant impact on an individual's emotional state. When I first talked to Ayako about her experience with watching the first news on the earthquake and tsunami, she had tears in her eyes as she reflected on the live broadcast of the tsunami wave, which washed away houses and destroyed homes in a matter of minutes. Reflecting on her experience six years ago, Ayako could still remember the shocking NHK footage of the tsunami (see footnote 13 in this chapter), which had an immense effect on her emotional state; she could not stop crying. Ayako further explains how, although she watched television news "all the time" to stay informed, she felt depressed due to prolonged exposure to the images of the disaster. After the broadcast went back to its standard programming, she immediately felt better, even just by watching commercials she felt as if life was back to normal:

> *Since the video of the tsunami was constantly broadcasted, I became depressed and felt mentally exhausted; it was too biased… The good thing was that due to the 3.11 earthquake, commercial television voluntarily refrained from showing them. However, the next day, there were cheerful (positive) commercials, and I felt so much better. I felt like daily life was back to normal. Of course, I could go to a video store and rent a video, but after all, it is common for me to watch television every day, so it is good to have positive news.*[19]

The traumatic dimension of disruption in the regular schedule is emphasised with the absence of commercials, which are an essential part of the normal flow of TV's broadcast (Doane, 2006). Ayako's comment strongly suggests that television is embedded in her daily routine as a comforting medium. Furthermore, that there is a difference between renting a video and watching television. Meyrowitz (1985) makes a similar comparison between listening to music on a cassette and on the radio. The main difference between the two is in that "listening to (a) cassette tape cuts you off from the outside world, while the radio

[19] 津波の映像が流してるので、気持ちが暗くなる、精神的にものすごくダメージが大きくて、あまりに偏りすぎて… 良かったところは、３．１１の地震があったから自粛して出さないコマーシャルテレビでけっこうあったのですね。次の日だったんですけど、あれってものすごく明るいコマーシャルができてたんですよ。気持ちが晴れやかになった… 日常生活に戻って来たなっていう気がしました。もちろんね、ビデオショップ行けばでビデオ借りられんですけど、でもやっぱり日常的にテレビをつけることが多いから、明るいニュース流して、よかったこと。

station ties you into it" (Meyrowitz, 1985, p. 90). In the same way that radio operates as a connection to the world, Ayako's preference for television watching over renting a videotape, allows her to experience a sense of shared viewing and connect to the outer, social world.

Some participants found fast dissemination of information through live broadcast as a way of maintaining a connection with the society. This afforded the individual a certain sense of security and reducing feelings of anxiety and isolation. Haruna, who was in Tokyo at the time of 3.11, left the TV on throughout the first week of the disaster, immediately after the earthquake and tsunami and in the following week, after the nuclear explosion. She recalls that she "left the television on" (*tsukeppanashi*):

> *I think I left the TV on (tsukeppanashi) from that time. Because, emergency news on the earthquake was continually flowing, and because of the continuous aftershocks, I was scared if I did not have the TV turned on, so I left it on (tsukeppanashi). Also, there was a nuclear disaster in Fukushima, and one thing after another from the TV news, so I left the TV on in the background (tsukeppanashi), as I was worried about what will happen next.*[20]

In an emergency, due to an undermined sense of stability and security as well as the overall uncertainty of the disaster, receiving information could help in alleviating anxiety and fear. Besides cognitive needs, television can address a personal and social integrative need, providing a sense of security and companionship, and helping individuals overcome loneliness by enhancing the feeling of others' presence. This function of media to address the need to affiliate with others is also known as a social utility function (Dominick, 1993). Haruna's case highlights the use of television to overcome anxiety and loneliness, as she perceived TV to be a familiar and comforting medium, and a "companion." Watching the repeated news and updates and having the sound of the TV news running in the background reduces the feeling of loneliness as it creates a connection with the outside world. At the

[20] あの時からテレビをつけっぱなしでしたかな。だって、緊急地震速報が流れる、だから余震が次々あったので、テレビつけとかないと怖くて、つけっぱなし出てきまして…福島の原発もあったし、そういうのはテレビでニュース次々に流れるので、やっぱり次になにがおこるだろう不安で、テレビでつけっぱなしでした。

same time, Haruna is referencing the continuous flow of emergency news as the main function of television in disasters, such as the role of NHK to serve as one of the designated official emergency agencies in time of disaster (see earlier in this section).

Another participant, Takahiro, is more explicit than other participants in explaining his perception of TV as a companion and a means through which he feels connected with the social world. In the below excerpt, he explains how he would feel detached and lonely without it:

So really, it's like if it's not on, you feel lonely… When the information comes in you are alone, right. So really, you're not alone, you feel psychologically like you're connected to society… Since there is no such simultaneity on the website, the feeling of being connected to society is rather weak, but the feeling that Japanese people watch TV simultaneously is the feeling of connection to society.[21]

Takahiro's reference to simultaneous news watching that can create a sense of belonging to a community of TV audience members who follow the same news fits neatly with Anderson's concept of imagined communities (Anderson, 1983) and the collective awareness of a shared temporal dimension in which media users coexist. Takahiro does not see this feature of simultaneity on the internet and online media, which explains the reason behind his preference for using the TV during the disaster. He can collect information through live transmission of video, explanation, commentary, but also maintain a connection with society and community and alleviate loneliness through watching live broadcasts.

Previous scholars have illustrated that live coverage of events can create a sense of immediate contact with other members of the audience, thereby generating a connection to shared social realities as they are happening (Couldry, 2003; Ellis, 2000). The sense that others are sharing the same moment, through simultaneous news watching, creates a sense

[21] どちらかというとつけてないと寂しいから… あのう情報が入ってきてると一人っていう感じじゃないですか。どちらかと言うと、一人ではなくて、社会とつながってる感じが心理的にするから…ウェブサイトっていうのはその同時性がないので、社会とつながってる感じが薄いんですけど、テレビはみんな同じものその時世界、日本人見てるっていう感じが…社会性を感じれる、社会とつながる感じですね。

of togetherness and has a significant impact on an individual's sense of community. In addition to achieving a sense of connection to society and nation through TV's features of liveness and simultaneity, participants' recurring references to "Japanese" (*Nihon-jin*) strongly indicate that TV watching is firmly embedded in Japanese behaviour, as a habitual and familiar medium through which they can maintain a connection with the society and the nation as Japanese people.

This section also explores how television's feature of liveness can contribute to individual's sense of social connection. Most participants refer to television's live broadcast positively, such as: being able to immediately receive the news, feeling a sense of connection to other audience members who follow the same disaster news and finding TV to be a highly credible medium for its feature of liveness. Live broadcast and real-time information are generally perceived as highly reliable, due to the rawness, immediacy, and authenticity of image and video. Participants' perceptions of media credibility, both TV and online media, will be thoroughly examined in Chapter Six.

Besides familiarity and the sense of companionship which TV provides, most participants found its features of liveness and vividness of images important. This is evident from the repetitiveness in the use of the word: "*eizō*" (映像) when participants explain their preference for television in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear explosion. The word "*eizō*" is translated as "video image" or "screen image." It was concurrently used across participants of varying ages, in the context of reliance on television and confidence in television's credibility. Moreover, participants talk about TV as an effective way to understand the severity of the event and visualise the disaster as it is unfolding, without a time lag. This consequently created a sense of immediacy and closeness with the event itself.

Ellis (2007) perceives television as a medium of the moment, which is embedded in the people's everyday lives, and it is always available at the touch of a button. One of the interviewed participants, Fuji, explains she mainly watched television for its continuous live coverage of the evolving disaster, and the constant flow of information which she can easily access just by switching on the TV. More importantly, Fuji notes that her preference for television during the 3.11 disaster over other media forms comes from the perspective

that the video image can best capture the real nature of a disaster. As an example, she mentions live footage of a helicopter flying over the Fukushima nuclear plant shortly after the explosion on 17 March 2011, which helped her understand the situation immediately after the nuclear disaster. The helicopter footage was mentioned by other participants, like Takuya, in a similar context, as one of the more effective ways to understand the evolving nuclear disaster:

> *The good side of television is still video image, isn't it? Real-time… Horrible images are coming in real-time…*[22]

As Takuya's statement shows, live, closeup images of a hydrogen explosion and later of the helicopter dropping water on the nuclear plant, helped people visualise the disaster and understand its scope. Toshi also acknowledges television's feature of liveness and its ability to accurately report the nuclear disaster in Fukushima, adding that it would be hard for him to understand the situation without video images. Especially in case of such a complex disaster as 3.11, it is these "moving" video images and liveness of broadcast that gave participants the confidence to make sense of information overload and believe that what they are seeing is a true representation of the situation unfolding.

More than half of the participants preferred television as their primary source of news immediately after the earthquake. Only one participant, Takashi, who was outside Japan at the time of the disaster, used online newspapers as a primary source of news on the 3.11 disaster because he could not access Japanese television. Many other participants, who were in Japan during 3.11, used the combination of traditional printed newspapers with digital newspapers, news websites or social media. In some regions, due to loss of power or flooding, some local newspapers could not deliver or publish its printed edition, which resulted in its delay (Matthews, 2017). Television's live feature is mentioned in the context of being more efficient than the newspapers, radio or even internet, as it delivered information in real-time, making it easier for participants to visualise the disaster, rather than reading about it in print, on websites or even hearing about it on the radio. Because of

[22] テレビのいいところはやはり映像ですよね、リアルタイム。結構リアルタイムで恐ろしい映像は入ってくる。

its visual richness, television has been perceived to have more potential to arouse emotion than print media (Grabe & Bucy 2009), as the shock of the visuals made participants emotionally relate to the affected region and communities.

Most participants in their thirties referred to television as more efficient and visually engaging than newspapers, because unlike older generations who still rely on traditional mass media, people in their twenties and thirties are more attuned to the idea of accessing news via smartphone news apps, curated (*matome*) websites and social media and most of them do not get newspapers delivered (see Chapter Two, section 2.7). One of the participants, Yoshi (male, 30–39 age group), found it easier to receive information visually and understood the situation better through live broadcast, rather than reading about it later in newspapers. Rika (female, 30–39 age group) compares television and radio, noting that live TV broadcast of the disaster had a far more significant impact on her than hearing about the disaster on the radio, as she could immediately see shocking video images of the disaster on TV and understand the severity of what happened. Naoko (female, 30–39 age group) found television to be the most beneficial for first updates on the earthquake. It is worth noting that, compared to people who were in directly affected areas, these three participants had different experiences of the disaster, as they were geographically far from the affected region. Yoshi, who was in Fukuoka, had electricity and access to all the media forms, so he had more options for gathering the information and combining media sources to check disaster news. Rika, who was in Kyoto at the time, felt the earthquake and immediately turned on the radio and then TV, watching the news throughout the disaster, mainly for the visual impact of video image:

> *At that time, the video images on TV had a greater impact than the radio, the information was fast, and the video image was the most shocking.*[23]

Similarly, Naoko felt the earthquake in her apartment in Tokyo and immediately turned on NHK to gather information, after which she continued to follow friends' updates on Facebook. Naoko, explains that television is not just a familiar medium, but provides

[23] その時はやっぱりラジオよりテレビの映像がやっぱりインパクトがあった、情報も速いし、映像が一番ショッキングでしたね。

information much faster than the internet, which has a slight time-lag in delivering news, so she habitually turns on TV when something happens:

> *I guess it is a habit, after all, to turn on the TV. Also during the Kumamoto earthquake, I first turned on the television. In an attempt to look for information, it seems that television delivers the image faster. Internet, however, delivers image after, with the time lag.*[24]

On another note, Hideki, the only participant who was at the time of 3.11 in the affected region, in Fukushima, the capital city of Fukushima Prefecture, directly felt the disaster's effects such as continuing aftershocks, concerns about radiation, infrastructure disruptions, and food and water shortages. Even though he was in the disaster area, Hideki made similar references to television as Naoko, Rika and Yoshi, in terms of being more efficient than newspapers in delivering disaster news. In Hideki's case, there was a significant delay in delivering news through local newspapers to which he is subscribed, so alternatively he used television to collect local information about the evacuation measures, levels of radiation and water safety.

These four examples indicate that the preference for television over other sources, regardless of participants' geographical proximity to the disaster area, comes from television's liveness and visual impact, which proved to be useful for a general understanding of the events. Findings from the interviews resonate with previous research that notes television provides its audience with a strong sense of co-presence with events it shows through a live performance which creates a direct and intimate link with a television audience (Ellis, 2000, 2007). Live performance and images on the TV screen are perceived as more "convincing" than text on something which has already happened, and the familiarity with events comes from "reality effect" which live television facilitates (Gripsrud, 1999). Participants also pointed out the feelings of closeness and familiarity with events or places, through watching the live broadcast, making television "the most familiar medium," and information which is delivered "close" and "real-time," which often

[24] 習慣ですかね、やっぱりテレビをつけるっていう、熊本の時もまずテレビつけました。情報知ろうと思った時に、テレビが速いイメージがあるんですようね。インターネットはそのあとっていうイメージ、タイムラッグがあるイメージ

significantly contributes to the notion that the live broadcast is highly trusted (Ellis, 2000). Immediately after the 3.11 earthquake, a live video stream from the disaster area was continuously broadcast in a small square at the top of the screen, while the main TV screen showed news commentators and presenters speaking in the studio. The continuous flow of disaster news enabled participants to visualise the disaster and evaluate live news as highly credible. As one participant, Ryota, explains:

> *I found it reliable because there was a real-time video stream as soon as the earthquake happened. One good thing was that close; real-time information was continuously appearing.*[25]

Participants' perceptions of media credibility, both TV and online media, will be more thoroughly examined in Chapter Six.

This section has highlighted the centrality of television as a medium in participants' experience of the 3.11 disaster. Participants immediately turned to the TV for first-hand, real-time and visual information on the earthquake, continuously watching live news, and leaving the TV on in the background ("*tsukeppanashi*") due to its familiarity and out of habit ("*shūkan*") and previously established patterns of TV watching. In this way they could reduce feelings of loneliness and isolation and create a sense of security. One of the recurring concepts in participants' comments is "Japanese people" (*Nihon-jin*), mainly used to explain the habitual use of TV in Japan, which has substantial implications for how participants foster connection to society and nation. It is through that kind of media engagement, such as sharing, discussing and exchanging news from TV or newspaper, that participants felt the sense of belonging to a group of fellow audience members, who share the experience of the disaster, through live TV broadcast and awareness of others who watch the same news. The term "*Nihon-jin*" enable participants to explicitly express their sense of connection to the national community and imagine the nation as united by the act of watching the disaster news. Participants mainly chose television for its liveness, real and

[25] 起きた時はリアルタイムの映像が流れてくるので、そのことについては信頼できると思ってました。一つはいいところはリアルタイムの近い情報がどんどん出てきたこと

immediate news, authenticity and visual feature of video images ("*eizō*"), which all contributed to a sense of closeness with the affected region and communities.

The following section aims to explore how participants exhibit awareness of other users through television watching, and how having common information and experience of the 3.11 disaster through live broadcast can help an individual form an idea about the community to which he/she belongs.

4.3 Shared Viewing Experience

Television creates a sense of togetherness and co-presence with the events it shows, through its liveness and simultaneous transmission of events and a social sense of currency, or awareness that we belong to the same present as other fellow audience members through shared viewing experience (Ellis, 2000, 2007). Through receiving the same information or news at the same time as "others," the individual can experience a sense of closeness with other members of the dispersed audience and use information acquired through television or newspapers, to reflect and learn about local or regional issues. Similarly, simultaneous reception of disaster news in different stages of the 3.11 disaster enabled participants to feel connected with their friends who follow the same news. The following two subsections provide an overview of how participants shared and discussed TV news to alleviate anxiety induced by the 3.11 disaster. I will first examine participants' recounting of the period in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake and tsunami (from 11 March to 12 March) when they mainly discussed and shared information about the infrastructure problem and first impressions of the disaster with others. I will subsequently examine participants' retellings of the immediate aftermath of the nuclear explosion, when participants mainly discussed and shared their concern about the impact and effects of the 3.11 nuclear disaster. This event is pivotal to the ways in which participants subsequently evaluate the credibility of the television medium.

4.3.1 Infrastructure Problems and Immediate Concerns

Immediately after the quake, besides establishing the first contact with their family and friends, participants recounted that they were actively involved in sharing and discussing news they heard on TV, with their friends, colleagues, family, relatives, and members of

the public who was following the same news. Yumi and Hiroshi, note that almost every conversation at that time was about the 3.11 disaster. While participants utilised digital space to exchange necessary information or (re)establish a connection with close friends and other users (see Chapter Five), they were also engaged in the "offline" environment, in subsequent discussion with friends about the news from television, which was the fastest medium to deliver the first news on the earthquake. Through watching the broadcast of the disaster during and shortly after the earthquake, participants learned about local and regional matters and issues, which immediately became main news on all TV channels. The shocking broadcast of the unprecedented disaster only intensified participants' need to share the information with others who saw the same news. Twenty-seven of the participants recalled sharing or discussing the news acquired from television.

After watching dramatic news reports, participants explained that they found it necessary to share local information about earthquake intensity, transport delays, the scope of the disaster and many other concerns, which would help them cope with uncertainty and anxiety. Due to confusion and information overload, participants were eager to confirm what they'd seen on television with others, which would give them peace of mind, as they become aware that others share the same struggles, fears, and anxiety. Second, in the aftermath of the earthquake, participants mainly shared their impression of the breaking news, their shock, and overall surprise, and uncertainty about what exactly has happened and how it will affect them.

Yumi, for example, explains how she discussed the disaster with her family and school friends, mainly sharing the first impressions about the seriousness of the situation, and what kind of preparations they need to undertake. Yumi notes that every conversation she had with others at that time was based on the information she obtained through the TV:

> *The conversation about the terrible thing that happened became a topic in my family and between my school friends. I feel like we were talking about what kind*

of preparations we should take. We did not exchange information, but we talked with each other based on what we saw on TV.[26]

Other participants similarly explained how, after watching TV news on the disaster, they discussed or shared their concerns and fears, seeking out others who shared the same concern and talking about the news they just saw on TV. Most participants recounted talking to their family and friends while watching live news to find some reassurance and comfort. Mayumi states that she discussed the news with friends and family, to understand the complexity of the triple disaster, adding that especially in the following week from the earthquake, there was no other choice but to continue watching TV news:

Even if it was said to be confusing, earthquake, tsunami, nuclear power plant… the opinion of friends and family was very valuable… well, the next week is was really quite difficult (to watch), just watching that, but because there was no other choice I just turned on the TV and watched it.[27]

Participants expressed that they were, after the nuclear explosion, generally overwhelmed with information and confused with the contradictory reports on the situation in the nuclear plant, radiation levels and disaster effects, so they found it necessary to discuss the news with others.

4.3.2 Nuclear Disaster and Subsequent Concerns

Most participants who were living in Tokyo at the time of 3.11 felt that Tokyo could have been directly affected by radiation. Furthermore, the safety of food and water became real issues for Tokyo residents. Shinji and Saki note that immediately after watching the news about the nuclear plant, they talked to their friends via email or social media to check if the information they received was accurate and reliable. In a similar way, other participants, such as Kensuke, Hana and Ryota, found it crucial to exchange information and opinions

[26] 家族や、学校の友人との間で、大変なことが起きているねという話が話題に上がった。どういう事前準備をしておいたら良いのだろうという点は話し合っていたような気がする。情報交換はしていないが、テレビで見た情報をもとに、みんなで会話はした。

[27] わかりにくいといわれても私たちも地震、津波、原発… 友人と家族すごく貴重の意見として… 次の週にさすがすごいつらくなってきたっていうか、そればかりを見てて、ほかのチョイスがなかったので、テレビつけるそれみたいな、

with their friends, mainly about the concerns related to the nuclear plant: the seriousness of the disaster, the location of safe zones, radiation effects, safety of food and water due to radiation and similar. When I asked Ryota whether he discussed disaster news with friends and others, he explained:

> *We talked about the damage, and whether we can help in any way, and how will the nuclear disaster end… and because there was a story on radiation, where should we go and which food and vegetables are unsafe…*[28]

Some participants, like Kenta, discussed TV news with their family and friends, whilst watching a live broadcast of the hydrogen explosions. He said they exchanged opinions on whether they should leave or stay in Tokyo, due to radiation. Takahiro talked with his colleague whose family evacuated to Sapporo, about the rumours and contradictory information on radiation effects, they heard on TV, as well as other issues which were insufficiently covered in Japanese mass media. These participants' responses indicate that they turned to their friends and family to establish what news is reliable and relevant to them. This demonstrates how discussing information with their immediate community of audience members contributed to the formulation of their perception and evaluation of media credibility (see Chapter Six for an in-depth analysis of this).

Participants exchanged views on the news they heard on TV, mainly to check and confirm the information with their friends, as they found it contradictory or less credible, especially after the nuclear disaster. For example, Hideki, who was in the affected Fukushima at the time of the nuclear disaster recounted that he talked to his family and friends about places with low levels of radiation to which they could flee. They also discussed news about radiation levels as they were unsure as to whether they should eat a specific food or drink the water. Not only those in the immediate affected area, but also those at a greater distance were prompted to seek advice on the information gained from television reports about the ramifications of the nuclear incident. Chieko and Atsushi, who were in Tokyo, both noticed that, after watching TV news on the high levels of radiation in specific regions and its

[28] 被害の状況だったりとか、なにかサポートができないだろうかとか、発電所の話はどうやって結末… どこに逃げたらいいのか、あとは放射線の話があったので、どこの食べ物、野菜はだめだ…

effects on food and water, they became more cautious with food. Atsushi remembers he discussed the news with friends, talking mostly about radiation effects. He thinks what made him more cautious is the overall panic caused by news on TV, and seeing other people rush to supermarkets to buy bottled water. Chieko similarly explains that only after hearing stories and TV news about the contaminated food, she started reconsidering food safety.

Some of the participants also mentioned that they became aware of a difference between national and international broadcasting of the nuclear situation. Hana, who was in Osaka, talked to her friend from Malaysia, who followed the same broadcasts of the disaster. She recalls discussing via telephone the difference between international and Japanese mass media coverage. Following that discussion, Hana said she found it challenging to decide which coverage is more reliable, considering that unlike the international media, the Japanese media had rather homogeneous coverage of the disaster. Another participant, Kenjiro, mentions the residents of Iitate village, who stayed in areas with high levels of radiation because the evacuation was delayed, and noted that the media did not cover this particular situation. Kenjiro recalls discussing why Japanese media failed to cover critical data on radiation levels and dispersal of radioactive materials, even though international and online media published it saying

> I talked to neighbours about why Japanese media did not give news, although news appeared in the international media and on the internet.[29]

Most participants recalled also discussing news from television with their friends via email or social media. Daichi explained that he chatted with friends on Facebook, asking them whether it is safe in Tokyo, or if they should leave due to the radiation. Takuya joined a Facebook group to discuss news originating from mass media with other people who were sceptical about the credibility of the mass news. These examples suggest that people also used social media to actively seek others with whom to share opinions while following

[29] 近所の人と話して、外国のニュースだと、ネットだと出てるのに、なんで日本メディアあれのニュース出さないね…

news in television or newspapers. The role of social media and how it complemented television use will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Five.

4.3.3 Collective Awareness of the News

One of the recurring concepts in participants' comments is the universal awareness that others follow the same news on TV. This awareness as articulated in the interviews indicates that the practice of television watching has substantial implications for evoking and intensifying an individual's sense of connection to a community of similar TV-watching audience members. In his interview, Daichi implicitly states that he discussed news from TV with other people who have the same knowledge about the broadcast of the nuclear disaster, indicating that his preference for TV as a medium comes not only from his everyday media use habit, but also because other people within his circle of friends also watch TV. Television has traditionally been an essential facilitator of conversation and social interaction, and its images, stories, and texts provide much of the conversational currency of our daily lives (Silverstone, 1989). The process of communication and symbolic exchange of information articulated by the participants shows that television has the potential to facilitate a new form of interaction between individuals who share the same knowledge, but who are sometimes geographically dispersed, thereby creating a specific social or communal experience through television viewing. Mediated quasi-interaction, established by mass media, differs from the idea that interaction and information exchange are bound to the dialogical conversation in a shared spatiotemporal setting (Thompson, 1994).

In case of disaster, it becomes even more critical to informally exchange news, primarily due to the collective awareness that information needs to be clarified and substantiated. Eiji, who was in Tokyo at that time, watched TV and talked to his colleagues and friends, who shared the same knowledge of the disaster news. When I asked him whether he exchanged news from TV with other people, he explains that he did talk with others on the trains. However, he notes that "*there was a stiff feeling of talking about it or exchanging information. Everyone knows the information to some extent because everyone watches*

TV."[30] Here Eiji perceives TV not only as a common medium, but more importantly, he imagines himself as belonging to a wider group of other viewers who are not physically watching TV news together, but who form part of a collective audience of similar viewers.

Some participants made references to shared viewing experience in a more general context. For example, Takeshi's choice for television as a central medium comes from the notion that everyone else watches TV, so it is easy to discuss news when there is a collective awareness of the topic. In the context of the 3.11 disaster, some participants like Hiroshi, made references to the collective news watching, perceiving this side of mass media as positive, as it helps people have a universal awareness of the events and of others who share the same experience:

> *The positive side of mass media is its ability to provide common information and collective experience. Watching the same image, listening to the same story and thinking about the shared social experience of the 3.11 disaster, throughout the country, seems like a good side of mass media.*[31]

Hiroshi is more explicit in elaborating on the positive side of television in facilitating access to the collective experience of the 3.11 disaster through the process of watching the live broadcast at the same time, thereby creating a sense of shared membership in a national community and evoking collective sentiments of the disaster.

Even amongst those who turn to print media, there was a sense of collective readership. Looking at her usual media usage pattern, Saki explains that she reads the newspaper because everyone around her does, so it is easy to join the conversation and talk about news together:

[30]…電車の中例えば、本当に残念ですねぐらいで、なんかこう話したりするとか、情報交換するっていう、そんな堅苦しいような感じではなかったですね。テレビでみんなも見てて、ある程度みんな知ってるんで

[31] マスメディアの良い点は共通の情報を持って、共通の体験をできる。日本中があの映像を見たし、同じ話を聞いたりして、社会としてあの地震っていう、３．１１の経験を共有したよねっていう風に思えるのがマスメディアの良いところ。

> I think it is the most reliable and many people in my surrounding read newspapers so that we can have a conversation based on that.[32]

For Saki, the main reason for preferring the newspaper over other media forms is also its credibility and awareness that there are others with whom she can connect, thereby explicitly exhibiting the attachment to the community of fellow readers.

Overall, the observation based on the interviews shows that through engaging in sharing and discussing news from TV, participants aimed to discuss news about the earthquake and share first impressions. The shock of visuals and raw images of the disaster only intensified their need to share and discuss the news with others, mainly family and close friends. Checking information gained from watching TV news reports and direct coverage helped participants evaluate the accuracy and credibility of news, indicating that, in some cases, participants' sense of belonging to a community of fellow audience members contributed to their evaluation of media credibility. Seeking out a community in which to discuss news, offline or online in times of disaster significantly implicated participants' perceptions of media credibility, which will be further examined in Chapter Six.

Besides news, participants shared concerns, fears, and feelings which were evoked by the disaster and shared by all fellow nationals. The term "Japanese" (*Nihon-jin*) appears again to highlight the universal awareness that everyone—that is "everyone who is Japanese," watches the same TV news at the same time, thereby creating a strong connection to the national community and collective knowledge of the 3.11 disaster.

Thus, the sense of shared viewing experience is attached to feelings of national belonging, as participants' TV watching is considered to be a part of a collective, national process. This shows that the driver for participants' use of TV, in the context of mediated 3.11 disaster, is not only the need for up to date information, but for information that can be shared among their immediate networks of friends and family. This need for social belonging and to feel a connection to the national community could be said to be intensified in times of national disaster. The following section further examines how 3.11 triggered an upsurge of collective solidarity and national unity, through the media discourse of *kizuna*.

[32] 一番信頼できるって思っているのと、周りに新聞読んでる人が多いのでそれをもとに会話ができるかな。

4.4 Mobilising Feelings of Solidarity

Natural disasters are shared experiences, that create a specific emotional solidarity among people who, due to disruption to everyday patterns of life and widespread sharing of loss, danger and deprivation, have a sense of belonging to a "community of people thrown together by circumstance" (Solnit, 2009, p. 274). The previous section has established that viewing live broadcasts of visual images on the television facilitated the participants' sense of closeness with other audience members, and that participants actively sought out other fellow audience members with whom to discuss and clarify the information they had gained from television broadcasts. This section will elaborate on how mediated 3.11 disaster broadcasts produced mutual feelings of solidarity and togetherness within the society, and how the imagining of national belonging, constructed through television viewing, consequently triggered local actions such as donations and volunteering, to support affected communities.

A surge in volunteerism in Japan came before the 3.11 disaster, with the Great Hanshin (1995) earthquake when volunteer activities had a significant role in disaster relief and reconstruction. The collective experience of the disaster created a common purpose of reconstruction with the aim to create a new kind of altruistic community (Okada, 2012). A new civil society emerged as a response to the 1995 earthquake, with a stronger sense of self-governance and community solidarity (Tatsuki, 2000). One of the lessons that emerged from the experience of the 3.11 was the importance of community bonds and volunteer action. Almost all interviewed participants expressed their concern for the affected region and communities, saying that after watching live news on the triple disaster and the broadcast of disaster victims' stories, they felt the need to help in some way.

The reporting on national disasters usually mobilises compassion to strengthen the emotional connection to nation and community, thereby inviting the audience to share sentiments of the disaster and imagine the nation through common values and uplifting stories (Pantti et al., 2012). The most effective way of capturing audience attention, without explanations and statistics, is through emotionally charged and moving images and visuals of the disaster victims and suffering. Most participants referred to the 3.11 disaster media coverage in terms of live images of suffering they have witnessed through television, which

made them emotionally relate to the disaster victims and affected communities. Earlier in the chapter, I mentioned the concept of liveness and the importance of the moving visual image as a key factor that emerged from participants' accounts of shared viewing experiences that forged a sense of closeness with other audience members who had viewed the same images simultaneously. The visuality of television broadcasting strongly contributed to the participants' sense of co-witnessing the disaster, which in turn resulted in confidence in the credibility of television. Here, I explore how the liveness of the television broadcast and its visual moving images evoke and intensify participants' emotional connection to regional, affected communities and mobilise feelings of solidarity and national togetherness.

The impact of the live video image lies in its ability to provide a closer insight into the situation in the affected region as an event is happening. The immediate presence of the camera at the scene of the action makes a claim to the authenticity of the image, bringing back home the rawness of the event as it unfolds, and creating a new connection between the viewer and distant others (Chouliaraki, 2006). Through viewing live coverage of affected areas on the television, participants gathered knowledge about regional, affected communities, that fostered a sense of connection and consequently led to many exhibiting altruistic behaviour. This is directly mentioned by participants in the interviews. For example, Mayumi thinks that, besides conveying facts, the rawness and visual features of television, as well simultaneous coverage of events, have a significant impact, as they contribute to better understanding of regional communities, where TV can transmit the voices of people from the affected region, and give closer insight into their lives:

> *Television's ability to constantly transmit live information from affected areas is great… There is also a substantial impact of the photograph, but with the video, you can see facts and simultaneous flow of video and audio… Because there is a*

constant flow on TV, I want to know what those people feel and what they need, I mean, I want to listen to the voice of people from the affected area.[33]

Mayumi links TV broadcasting of the 3.11 disaster with changes in her perception of community. She explains that TV's live images helped her access the voices of people from affected communities and their needs. This consequently triggered her enhanced need to help with donations and to join charity events and participate in volunteering. Mayumi concludes the interview with the following remark of the impact of the 3.11 broadcast:

Although there were many suspicions, after all, there has been much reporting at that time; I cannot forget images of troubled and sad people and the intense time of the first report of the tsunami and houses that were swept away. When I realised that there are people who suffer and grieve the same, I felt like I wanted to contribute and do something positive, such as donating.[34]

As the above excerpt shows, reflecting from the present day, Mayumi identifies how the images she witnessed on the television led her to feel the need to act. Television as a medium has a great potential to contribute to a sense of closeness with the affected region, through simultaneous flow of dramatic moving images and emotional accounts. Through witnessing the shock of visuals, viewers emotionally relate to affected others, and facilitate their imagination of communal belonging (Pantti et al., 2012). Mayumi expresses empathic alignment with the affected region and a strong urge to find news on affected areas in order to understand how affected individuals feel. The medium through which she can achieve this is televised live, and through watching such broadcast she engages with distant affected others. The live, visual transmission of information via the television acts as a tie between those viewing and "distant others."

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[33] 現地の情報常にライブで伝えられるっていうのはすごいテレビの大きな… 写真の強みのインパクトもありますけど動画で実際それを見れて映像と音声が同時に見れるもの… テレビでずっと流れてるので、とにかく現地の声が聞きたい知りたいっていうか、その人たち何を感じて何を必要としてしたり

[34] 結構疑心暗鬼というかはあるのですけど、やっぱりその当時本当にすごく報道されてたんで、あの困った人だったりとか、悲しんでる人のイメージにはぬけなくて、あとその津波の第一報の時のものすごい勢いっていう、家を巻き込んで流れてきてっていうあの状態をを見たのはすごい心に残ってて… 同じぐらい苦しんでたりとか、悲しんでる人たち居るんだなっていうのおもったら、募金とかでちょっと何かがプラスの方向に代わるんだったら貢献したいみたいな気持ちになりましたね

Momoko also recounts watching the TV to find updates on the disaster itself, and information on how to help affected communities, with food, clothes and other necessities. In the aftermath of the disaster, she was engaged in volunteering in the affected area of Minamisanriku, Miyagi prefecture, and also donated money. Momoko recalled that she often talked to her friends and family about the news she watched, saying that she was worried about people who live in the affected region, even though she was geographically far from it:

> *The news about the nuclear disaster became the main story on television and in newspapers, and without proper knowledge of the situation, I watched the news while worrying about the affected region.*[35]

As Momoko's reflection illustrates, watching televised news on the disaster helped her to gain knowledge about regional communities, consequently triggering compassion and an enhanced need to help and support through donations or by sending essential goods. The emotional discourse of disaster news mobilises collective sentiments of the disaster and invites the audience to take part and respond to the suffering they see televised (Ellis, 2000). Engagement in support of affected regional communities, through acts such as donations, sending relief parcels or volunteering, indicates a shift from being a receiver of news, to being an actor who utilises TV news to become informed and enact concrete actions (Pantti et al., 2012). Another participant, Mei, also recounts that, after watching live news, she discussed with other family members how they can help communities and donate some money, however, their attitude is decidedly more passive than demonstrated by Momoko:

> *One of the topics among my family and friends was: How can we help them? Should we donate, or send some stuff, because like sadly we couldn't go there, we couldn't volunteer, but financially can we help, where is the best to donate... so my dad said, government will do this, and my mum said, if we donate to this TV*

[35] テレビと新聞、原発になってたからも、そのニュースが一番メインで、よく事情が分からないまま、現地のことも心配だったし… と思いながら見てましたニュース

program it goes directly to Red Cross, so maybe that's good. Even though we would like to help them, we cannot give this money to the neighbourhood right. So we need information, but we are too lazy to Google it, because in order to Google it or search it anywhere, you have to actually work from yourself... donations, where is the best, but the media, especially mass media, it is very passive.[36]

Here, Mei explains her family's attitude towards donating and their use of information provided by as a credible source to orient them towards secure donation. Mei and her family find TV's "passive" nature beneficial as they can quickly receive the information, rather than searching online.

Kenjiro is another participant who recounted that shortly after watching live news on earthquake and tsunami, he felt an increasing need to help the affected communities in some way. The fact that the tsunami affected his hometown in Iwate prompted Kenjiro to engage and help Iwate communities, as he was anxious about his family and friends who live there. He offered temporary accommodation for a few people who had lost their homes. He recounts watching live broadcasts and continuously thinking about disaster victims. Participants made strong references to television news watching as a way of taking an interest in the local and regional community in the context of 3.11 disaster. Besides making a small donation herself, Ayako realised that after 3.11, donations and mutual help among people became more common. Although Ayako said she did not directly engage in any community activities, she explains that she took an interest in the community through media consumption—watching television news and reading the newspaper. Similarly, Tomoki, who was in Nagano at the time of 3.11, close to the affected region, often discussed TV news with friends, exhibiting concern for affected Fukushima. In spite of the fact that he was not engaged in the community and did not go to the affected region during 3.11, Tomoki perceives the active collection of information on the disaster through television watching or reading newspaper as his way to take interest and indirectly engage in the community.

[36] Mei's original interview comment is in English, as she insisted on talking in both Japanese and English throughout the interview.

Acts of donations and volunteering were not only driven by the television watching, but also by online media use. However, the findings discussed in this chapter indicate that it was television that facilitated the sense of connection with people from affected areas, by cultivating the individual's empathy for affected communities, regardless of spatial or relational proximity. Participants recounted gaining knowledge about the situation in the affected region, which intensified feelings of togetherness with those affected and for those from the region who were not there in the moment. This consequently triggered public actions, such as donations or volunteering. Of the eighteen participants who were in some way engaged in helping affected communities, thirteen of them made small donations, and three participants attended or organised charity and fundraising events to collect money to support the affected region. Five of the eighteen said they did not usually donate to charities but nonetheless made a small contribution or joined volunteering groups in affected areas a few days or even months after the disaster. Looking at demographics (age group) of participants who were in some way engaged in disaster volunteering and donating, the majority belongs to the 30–39 age group, followed by an equal number of those from the 40–49 and 20–29 groups, with only one person of the 50–59 group. These findings indicate that the 3.11 disaster triggered increased public participation, community engagement and strong feelings of solidarity with the affected region across varying age groups, which was much facilitated by the use of both traditional and non-traditional, online media forms.

National disaster news is intrinsically disruptive and has a strong emotional effect on viewers, suggesting with which emotion viewers should react to the event and what actions they should take (Döveling et al., 2011). Therefore, in the context of the 3.11, the mobilisation of compassion was made possible through disaster news and narratives of suffering, with the aim to prompt participants' actions and engagement in helping affected communities, with donations, volunteering and so forth. While not all participants were moved to partake in acts of donating and/or volunteering, for those participants who were, engagement in the community was triggered by a sense of co-witnessing the disaster. For many, this was facilitated by watching live broadcasts, although instances where this was facilitated through other mediums will be discussed on Chapter Five. Through watching the transmission of stories and images of the disaster, inscribed with emotions and affect,

participants who were moved to act felt like they belonged to the same national community as those directly-affected others.

4.4.1 The Discourse of Kizuna

In the case of the 3.11 triple disaster, an enhanced sense of togetherness, solidarity and national unity was manifested in campaigns to support and help disaster victims. In particular, as intensified social bonds were seen in the way people cooperated in the recovery process following the earthquake and tsunami, government and public relief efforts adopted the rediscovered ideal of "*kizuna*" (絆) in their campaigns. The concept of "*kizuna*" or "familial bond," witnessed a revival as a general discourse emerged that highlighted and praised the strong social ties in Japanese society and the importance of social cohesion in the wake of the disaster. The popularisation of the term *kizuna* is seen in its increasing use as a keyword of various recovery projects such as Japan News Network's Kizuna Project and the Japan Foundation's Kizuna Project. Japanese actor Ken Watanabe launched the website Kizuna 3/11 (http://kizuna311.com/) with the aim of helping disaster victims in different ways. Even a political party, formed in January 2012 by former members of Japan's Democratic Party, was named Kizuna Party. In April 2011, former Prime Minister Naoto Kan expressed gratitude for international aid in his statement entitled "Kizuna: The Bonds of Friendship." The word *kizuna* was subsequently chosen ahead of the characters for disaster or earthquake as the kanji of the year 2011.

A renewed emphasis on the importance of mutual support and social ties is a key feature of use of the term *kizuna* in newspaper articles, television shows, advertisements. For example, *Nikkei Shimbun* published the article "Toward a New Japan: The Recovery is Nation Building," to address the necessity of community building in Tohoku region, linking two concepts, change and community, together (Samuels, 2013, p. 108). Furthermore, all five major Japanese newspapers frequently used word "*jishuku*" or "self-restraint" in the first week of April 2011 (Rausch, 2014) to address the necessity of national mourning, collective sacrifice, voluntary conservation efforts in the form of refraining from usual consumption patterns and everyday life (Galbraith & Karlin, 2016). "*Kizuna*" was repeatedly used by government officials in their appearances on mass media, to lift the spirit of affected communities, calling for community building and restoration of Japan,

with the connotation of collective sacrifice and self-restraint (Galbraith & Karlin, 2016). As the term *kizuna* saturated public and mass media discourse, I found it essential to collect participants' views on social bonds in the context of the 3.11 disaster, which consequently helped me discover more about their perceptions of community.

Overall, participants were familiar with the word *kizuna*, and almost all of them (37 out of 38) provided an explanation in their own words. The majority of participants defined *kizuna* as a human connection on both familial and national level. Four participants defined *kizuna* as "connection between people" (*Hito to hito to no tsunagari*). Ten participants defined *kizuna* as a connection, or close ties, family and friends; a special connection which individuals cannot have with everyone, which once again reflects the original meaning of the word *kizuna*. Both of these explanations closely mimic the dictionary[37] definition of the word: *Hito to hito o hanaregataku shiteiru mono. Tatsu koto no dekinai musubitsuki. Hodashi* (That which makes it difficult for people to part from one another. A connection that cannot be severed. Family ties). Seven of the participants extend the meaning of *kizuna* beyond the dictionary definition to explain that human ties can also be created and strengthened through mutual help and support in time of disaster, between local community members. In these explanations, participants used terms such as "compassion" (*omoiyari*), and "mutual help" (*tasukeai*). Sixteen participants described *kizuna* as the connection between people who do not know each other (*shiranai hito to no musubitsuki*); a connection towards "others," based on unconditional trust, and naturally embedded companionship. For example, when I asked Ryota to define *kizuna*, he explained:

> *I think it means to care for others as you care for yourself. Even if not directly related, because there are experiences such as helping each other in hard times and having someone help you when you are in trouble, of course, it is important to take care of people who are related to you, but also when this is not the case.*[38]

[37] Japanese Language Dictonary (*Nihon Kokugo Daijiten*) – a dictionary of Japanese language and terms, accessed through university library's database Japan Knowledge+

[38] 相手を自分と同じように思いやることだと思います。直接関係しなくても、お互い様困ったときに助け合うとか、困ったときに誰かに助けってもらったとかっていう経験もちょっとあるので、自分と関係がある人もちろんだし、 そうじゃない方も大事にすることが大事なんじゃないか…それが絆じゃないか。

In Ryota's explanation, we can identify the concept of a collective consciousness which is critical for individuals to overcome and recover from the disaster situation.

The term *kizuna* was used long before the 3.11 disaster to refer to the bonds between family or community members, with the connotation of familial and personal relationship (Samuels, 2013; Tokita, 2015). Most participants mentioned that *kizuna* and the associated sense of solidarity are embedded in Japanese society from a long time ago, coming from a collective consciousness to "help each other and appreciate help" (*tasukeai seishin*). In the context of 3.11, most participants perceived *kizuna* in a positive sense, as the feelings of togetherness, collective solidarity, and national unity, that can help individuals cope with the evolving disaster through sharing the same struggle and sentiments. While most participants see *kizuna* as a close connection between friends or family members, at the same time they refer to *kizuna* as the genuine need to help others that is firmly embedded in every Japanese person. In this way, *kizuna* refers to bonds of solidarity between individuals that are felt on a national level and shared by all fellow nationals, almost as a "familial connection." It is a crucial constituent of Japaneseness and national identity. Reflecting on the shocking videos she watched in the aftermath of the 3.11 disaster, Ayako explains, with tears in her eyes, that the real meaning of *kizuna* is aligned with the concept of "Japaneseness":

> *I think it is the feeling that best represents the way Japanese people see things. When I heard the word "kizuna," I thought of the Japanese spirit, that Japanese are great, the feeling of helping each other, and the feeling of helping the person in need and each other no matter how far away.*[39]

At this point of the interview, noting Ayako's emotional response, I insisted on stopping the interview to avoid causing any more stress or discomfort. Ayako, however, continued explaining that *kizuna* is the most representative feeling, deeply embedded within the "Japanese spirit" (日本人の心). Ayako's emotional response to the term *kizuna*

[39] 日本人の思いを一番表してる感じだとやっぱり思いますね。絆っていう言葉を聞いた時に日本人の心だなって思ったのと、日本人ってすごいなと思って、その助け合う気持ち、困ってる人がいたらどんなに離れてても助け合う気持ちがあるなっていう。

demonstrates how deeply she feels about the concept of social bonds as crucial to Japaneseness and foundational to Japanese society, especially in the context of the disaster.

Participants' references to *kizuna* as a relationship based on social trust, suggest the concept was a crucial asset in the process of coping with anxiety, fear, and overall confusion, caused by the disaster. Social trust can contribute to creating a high level of social cohesion between individuals, as it can exist within the close circle of family and friend ties, as well as in the broader community among its members.

The awareness of collective solidarity was facilitated through live television broadcasts of the affected region and communities, by notification of volunteering campaigns and donations in the mass-media and above all through mobilisation of the discourse of *kizuna*. Many participants found the use of *kizuna* in mass media to be highly favourable, as it addressed the importance of helping others in need and mobilised collective support to rebuild communities in the aftermath of 3.11. Through watching television broadcasts, participants noticed both the increase in donations for the affected communities and also the perseverance of Japanese citizens in those communities who banded together in difficult circumstances often without food and water. Saki finds mass media use of term *kizuna* highly positive, as it facilitates spreading awareness among Japanese people that struggle and the burdens of the disaster are felt at the national level.

For example, Chieko, who was not able to go back home from Yokohama on 11 March, stayed in a hotel and followed news on the disaster from the TV in her room. She explains how she felt "useless" due to the inability to directly help or engage in the community, other than just watching the news. As she watched TV news to collect information on the disaster, images of collective solidarity and volunteer actions in affected areas made her feel less isolated and aware of the collective support and others who share the same struggle:

> *I certainly think it is essential to help each other, but since I could not directly help, I did not feel kizuna at that time, because I was alone in the hotel, unable to*

act on my own. However, when I watched TV news, looking at how everyone encouraged each other, I felt like I am not alone.[40]

These and similar comments correspond to earlier works that perceive television as a highly involving medium due to its visual and auditory features (McLuhan, 1964), affording immediate and direct emotion communication, and as a result mediated empathy, sympathy and compassion (Döveling et al., 2011). Chieko's reference to an enhanced sense of social bonds and the need to help points out the idea that she indirectly felt a sense of connection with her fellow citizens through television watching. The real-time broadcast of 3.11 helped participants visualise the situation in the affected region, which triggered an upsurge of solidarity, and a sense of shared membership in the national community.

Furthermore, Mei explains how she felt the need to help affected communities, after listening to broadcast of the then Prime Minister Naoto Kan's speech expressing gratitude for international aid and his statement entitled "Kizuna: The Bonds of Friendship." The word "*kizuna*" was repeatedly used in the speech, with the aim of lifting the spirit of affected communities, calling for community building and restoration of Japan, with the connotation of collective sacrifice. Mei says she felt moved by the Prime Minister's speech she saw on TV and decided to engage and help communities with a small donation:

Kizuna itself it means like connection, well any human connection, but in case of this, and especially for human connection, and I feel a very part of that. As I have mentioned, I was very safe, one of the choices I had was ignore, and keep with my personal life, you know. But then, using kizuna, or Prime Minister saying: Hey, we have to work as one team, those messages reach me just like everyone, and then how can we help them, you know.[41]

Rika and Yoshi both see the positive side of mass media to spread awareness of the significance of social bonds between members of the local community. Rika addresses the

[40] 確かにね、助け合うっていうことは大切なことだと思うけれども、実際に自分が助け合ってないから、一人でホテルに泊まって際、全然一人で行動してたから、あまり絆感じてないね、あのとき。でも、テレビのニュースを見てると皆で助け合って励ましあってみたいな、そういうのを見てるとみんな一人なわけじゃない助け合って、いきてるなとは思います。

[41] The original interview comment is in English

importance of TV, and its live broadcast, as it has a significant impact on disaster response, facilitating collective awareness of *kizuna* and the significance of mutual support and help within the local community. Similarly, Yoshi recognises TV as an essential medium which helps people realise the significance of "togetherness" within the local community, which is in Tokyo challenging to achieve due to many different local communities. However, it is important to note here that Yoshi and other participants talk about their local community in terms of the geospatial neighbourhood. Yoshi also addresses the vital role of social media for strengthening and establishing social ties between people in the context of disasters, within the local community. However, he stresses that social media can hardly contribute to the immediate creation of *kizuna*:

> *It is essential to make a network somewhere close to you. Of course, the information on the internet is important, but it is not like you can form bonds right away, without everyday communication it is difficult.*[42]

Yoshi identifies the benefits of media, especially TV in enabling people to gain knowledge on local and regional communities and realise the significance of *kizuna*, which is critical for coping with disaster. He also addresses the ephemeral nature of social media, which can only be used for small-scale, local information. Without everydayness of communication and familiarity it is difficult to evoke feelings of togetherness and national unity.

Some participants had mixed feelings about the use of *kizuna* discourse in mass media. Sana, who watched television throughout the disaster, perceives *kizuna* as something that genuinely represents Japanese people, but also feels that the term was manipulated to make people feel as if they are all connected:

> *I think kizuna represents Japanese people. It was really intense for people who lived in Japan during 3.11… It all seemed unbelievable, like a movie, but I think each person felt like they had to do something. Even though it was not visible,*

[42] 近くでなんかネットワークを作るということがすごく大事だ。もちろん、そのインターネット情報大事なんですけど、すぐ絆っていう作れるかていうとそのことはなくて、日常的にコミュニケーションがないと、難しい。

people wanted to feel connected… I wonder if this word was used a lot, in order to feel that.[43]

As is evident from Sana's conjecture, the discourse of *kizuna* not only enabled people to feel connected but was perhaps used to create that feeling of connection. Five participants think that mass media created a different context of "kizuna," which was somewhat deceiving, and that overuse of the term shifted the attention from real problems and attempted to calm down citizens by showing only the positive aspects of the disaster. Shinji and Kaoru critique the repetitiveness of the usage of the term and how it served as propaganda. Moreover, Mayumi thinks the use of *kizuna* was ineffective for the recovery process, as it was used more like a "collective trend" and to imply the end of the ongoing disaster. For other participants, like Kenjiro, Hiroshi and Yumi, continuous repetition and artificial use of "*kizuna*" did not make any sense, especially coming from Tokyo, where people were not directly affected by the disaster. Furthermore, Takahiro thinks that the repetitive use of *kizuna* in media was ineffective, without long-term impact on rebuilding the communities or social change.

As the above excerpts illustrate, the majority of participants perceive *kizuna* as a human connection on a national level, which can be found between people who do not necessarily know each other but are bound together by collective consciousness and sense of solidarity, as representative values of Japanese people. In this sense, the notion of "Japanese" and "Japaneseness" through *kizuna* discourse, produced a sense of shared membership in the national community. This led some participants to engage in helping the affected communities through donations and volunteering. The use of the term "Japanese" (*Nihon-jin*), which also appeared in participants' accounts of the customary and habitual use of TV in Japan, and the universal awareness that all Japanese people watch the same TV news on the disaster simultaneously, is once again activated to express a sense of national belonging that indicates the emergence of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983) connected through media usage. In this way, the media discourse of *kizuna* signalled sense of shared

[43] 絆なんかすごく日本人らしいとおもいます。多分、本当にあのう３．１１日本に住んでる人たちにとってすごい強烈なことで… なんか、映画を見てるみたいちょっと信じられないようなかんじだったですけど、でも一人一人が多分何かしなきゃいけないって多分どっかで感じでいて、なんかそういう目に見えないけれど、つながってるようなっていうのを感じたかったとか… 感じるために、そういう言葉がたくさんいわれたのかなって思って。

membership in the national community, which consequently led to active engagement to help affected communities. However, not all participants evaluated this positively. Considering that some participants made negative remarks regarding television and its coverage of the 3.11 disaster, it is necessary to highlight how participants' perceptions of television in the context of 3.11 trigger some of the changes in their current media use and attitudes towards television. The following section aims to achieve two questions: Did participants' patterns of television watching remain the same after 3.11? How is the role of the TV being challenged by the new digital technologies and the proliferation of social media?

4.5 Shifts and Dynamics in Mass Media Use

The previous sections have examined how television use contributed to the renewal and strengthening of feelings of togetherness and shared awareness of belonging to the same present as others. At the same time, it has identified that participants felt overwhelmed by the constant disaster news and exposure to shocking images. While TV was the primary medium participants used immediately after the earthquake, they often combined it with other media forms; a combination with online sources, social media or aggregated news websites like NewsPicks or Yahoo News, to get more detailed information. By accessing online media, they collected more detailed information to question the news from the mass media, especially in the aftermath of the nuclear incident at Fukushima, about the levels of radiation in the vicinity of Tokyo.

In the interviews, participants discussed how they utilised a combination of mass media forms, television and newspapers to inform themselves about the disaster. Shinji notes that he first watched NHK news, but also checked the breaking news on the *Nikkei Shimbun* website, which he regularly checks. As well as watching the first news on TV, Momoko and Tomoki said that they read local newspapers. Other participants who chose TV as their first source complemented their viewing with more detailed information from various social media platforms, or news websites such as Yahoo News. Looking at participants' responses related to the changes in their media usage pattern which were triggered by the 3.11 disaster, it is evident that one of the major changes was participants' awareness of the significance of online media, and their potential to deliver information as well as socio-

emotional support. Some of the patterns in participants' responses reveal changes in media use, which was to some extent caused by the impact of television broadcast and somewhat negative perceptions of television in the light of what was happening during 3.11 disaster.

The majority of participants in the 40–49 and 50–59 age groups recognised the potential of online media in disaster communication as an alternative way to find more detailed information. This group of participants recounted that they would mainly watch television and then check the news online, on social media or news websites, trying to find more local information on how to engage and help affected communities. Finding information on the internet proved to be useful for Kenjiro, who after watching the news of the earthquake and tsunami, searched for information online, to gather more details. He found information on volunteers who came from France to Japan to go to the affected region, so he immediately contacted them, and as a French speaker, offered help with translation and transport from Tokyo to Miyagi. In this way, accessing information via the internet complemented television use, and was a useful tool for mobilising action and help for the affected region.

Second, the majority of younger participants, age group 20–29, realised the significance of social media for its speed and ease of access. This prompted many to open accounts on different social media platforms. They mention that they have incorporated these accounts into their media usage since the disaster. After watching the breaking news on NHK, Toshi, for example, recalls that he immediately turned to Twitter, which provided fast updates on the earthquake's intensity. From then onwards Toshi says he used Twitter more than usual, mostly to access information in real-time, adding that it was easy to understand everything. Although he was not very familiar with social media before 3.11, Tomoki also said he utilised it as a communication tool immediately after the quake as an additional source of detailed information. After the disaster, internet and social media became one of the primary sources of news in his regular media use pattern, besides TV and newspaper.

> *I have started using SNS (Social Networking Site) since that time, but it may not be directly related to the disaster. Before that, it was TV or newspapers, but recently there are a lot of SNS, and they are becoming a source of information. After that, when there was an earthquake, it became easier to get in touch with parents than*

before via Line. I think that the ease of communication has increased as the number of media that I use has increased.[44]

This excerpt not only stresses the changes in Tomoki's media use, in terms of utilisation of various online media sources, but also his awareness of easier communication that these social networks provide in time of disasters and emergencies.

Participants from the 30–39 age group expressed their dissatisfaction with the repetitive news and footage of disaster scenes on TV, which caused them to feel discouraged and depressed. Participants could not take their minds off the horrible events and with no regular broadcasting to turn to, they turned instead to social media for support. Hiroshi, for example, felt the severe emotional impact of the news broadcast, which he compared to PTSD. Feeling mentally drained and depressed he said he stopped watching TV and started using social media to shift his mind away from the negative thoughts caused by disaster news. He explains:

I became emotionally unstable while watching those images. I was close to the state of PTSD when looking at those images. Watching mass media discouraged me… on the other hand, watching SNS and seeing what people are writing, there is much hope, and everyone writes things that motivate me…[45]

As we can see from the excerpt, Hiroshi identifies benefits in accessing social media. Not only did it provide more local information than the mass media but facilitated social interaction with similar others. Indeed, due to repetitive, imbalanced and insufficient coverage of the nuclear disaster, many participants felt they could not trust television or newspaper as before.

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[44] そのころから SNS 使い始めたているんですけど、それは直接震災とは関係ないかもしれない。その前はテレビとか新聞とかだったんですけど、最近は SNS が多い、情報源になってますね。そのあと、LINE とか初めてその地震があったり、地元地震があったりした時に、親との連絡は取りやすくなりました、前より。自分の使うメディアが増えたことでその連絡しやすさが高まったのかなと思います。

[45] その映像見続けて、すごく精神的に不安定になったんだよね。PTSD の近い状態が自分がなって、その映像を見てる時点で…マスメディアを見てると、discourage される… 一方で SNS を見ていて、人々が何を書いてるかみると、すごく希望が入ってくる、元気をもらうようなことみんな書いてる…

The majority of participants who expressed an increasing lack of trust in television and newspaper media were from the 40–49 and 50–59 age groups. This indicates subtle changes in the way older participants perceive mass media in terms of credibility and suggests that this has motivated them to embrace online media. Some told me that they had decided to stop watching TV. They turned to social media such as Facebook or Twitter, to check and compare the information circulated by mass media. Although this expression of a lack of trust was voiced by more of the older participants, participants from each age group expressed their need for more critical, less biased coverage of the nuclear disaster. This stated need to find more balanced reporting helped them see and utilise the potential of social media as an open space for discussion, the positing of different views, and for diverse information dissemination.

Most participants recounted that they became more active on social media, joining groups, posting information themselves, and checking other users' opinions and views (this will be further discussed in Chapter Five). As an example, Ryota said that he regularly followed the live broadcast of the disaster, but simultaneously checked information online, through other websites or friends on social media, to confirm the information from TV:

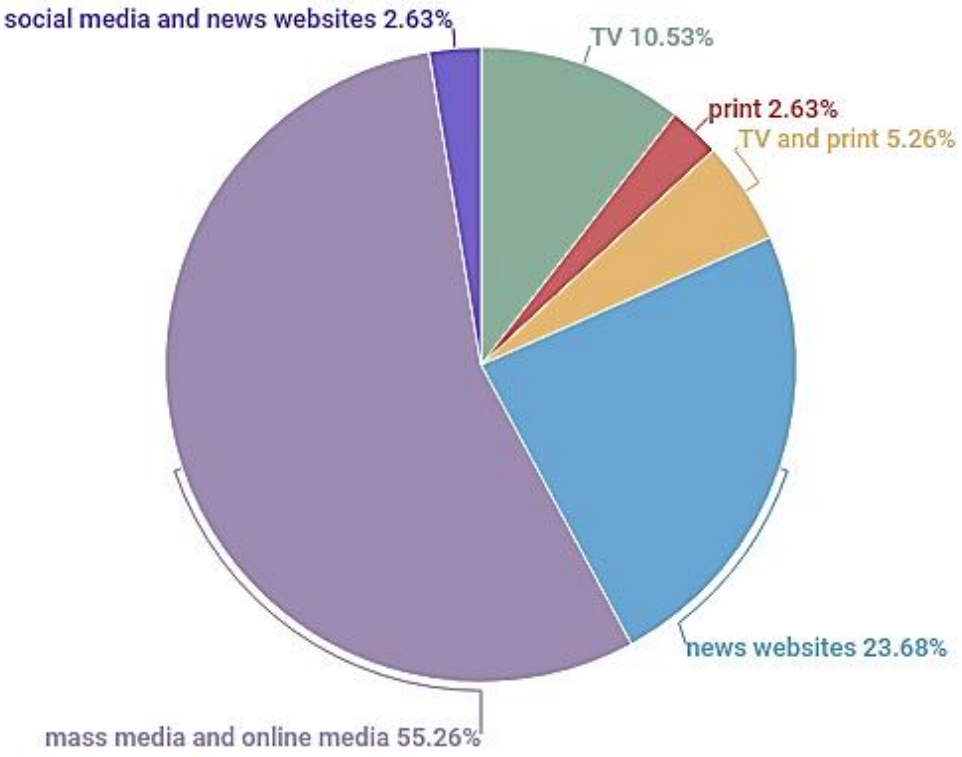
> The television was left on for a long time. At the same time, as breaking news continued to flow, with the TV on, everyone was checking the information on the internet.[46]

Additionally, some participants felt that mass media and the government were trying to hide real problems by propagating a sense of national unity and cultivate a safety myth or the view that "everything is under control" through the promulgating *kizuna* discourse. The growing distrust in media caused some of the significant changes and shifts in participants' media use, such as utilising online media sources, reducing the time spent watching TV, or combining TV and online media to check and challenge the information from mass media. Participants' perceptions of media credibility and its implications for changes in their media use patterns will be discussed and examined in Chapter Six.

[46] テレビはずっとつけっぱなしでした。速報がずっと流れ続けたので、テレビは音のまま、それと同時にインターネットで情報をみんなで確認していました。

Looking at participants' responses related to their present-day media use pattern, 21 out of 38 utilise a combination of television and online media (social media or news websites) to check the news, rather than relying on just one medium (see Figure 4.2). It is interesting to note that combined media use is almost evenly spread across four age groups, with the same number of participants for age groups 20-29 and 50-59. This indicates that when it comes to general media use, there are no gaps between young and old participants, as they all utilise new inter-media environment.

Figure 4.2 Participants' primary source of news in the context of present-day media use



Furthermore, participants who read the newspaper, prefer digital edition of major national papers such as *Asahi*, *Mainichi* or *Nikkei*, rather than subscribing to the printed edition, explaining that it is easier to handle and read newspapers on the go. Of course, this does not necessarily mean that all participants access the digital edition, as there are still some of them who subscribe to the printed edition, both older and younger generations. As outlined in Chapter Two, due to the rise of new technologies and social media, Japanese newspapers

are slowly adjusting to new trends, with five major Japanese newspapers introducing their digital editions which people can access through a paid digital subscription (see Chapter Two, section 2.7). It is important to note, however, that television retains the first place as a relevant source of news, as the majority of participants (28 out of 38) use it as the primary source of news, even though online media often complements its use. Moreover, eight participants whose primary source is online media, are either of age 30–39 or 40–49, and they mainly access news websites such as NewsPicks or YahooNews. This indicates television's changing role due to personalised media use, shifting media habits and the growing importance of online media, which was to some extent triggered by the 3.11 disaster.

Overall, the media environment of the 3.11 disaster is characterised by the dynamic relationship between television and online media, participants' use of multiple media platforms and the growing popularity of social media that served as an alternative source of more detailed information on the disaster, which was not sufficiently covered by the mass media. Both media had their advantages and limitations, and their relationship was complementary, rather than the confrontational one, as many participants utilised the combination of media forms to make sense of the disaster and compare different sources of news. We can conclude that this is a movement towards inter-mediality. Moving beyond the dualism of mass media and online media, the context of the immediate aftermath of the 3.11 disaster fostered an inter-media environment where individuals make subtle shifts to their established media usage patterns.

The term inter-mediality explicates the interaction between mass media and online media, where their role and influence are not isolated from each other, but they develop in a mutually complementary manner (Endo, 2013). In this way, with the proliferation of social media platforms in the context of 3.11, participants were no longer dependent on television, and other mass media forms as their only source of information. Rather than arguing that one form of media is more relevant than another in disaster communication, we can thereby surmise that media use is both shifting and dynamic in the inter-media environment of the disaster.

4.6 The Continuing Centrality of Television

Television had a critical role in delivering breaking news on the 2011 earthquake, tsunami, and ensuing nuclear meltdowns. Findings from the interviews suggest that habitual use of television, and the viewing of live, simultaneously-broadcast audio-visual features significantly contributed to a feeling of co-witnessing that cultivated feelings of communal belonging and a national unity. Individuals felt a sense of connection with the affected region and other fellow audience members regardless of spatial and temporal differences. Previously established patterns of national television watching in Japan (Yoshimi, 2003), underpin the familiarity and comfort of TV as a medium. In this social context, television watching is experienced as a communal norm, something habitual and customary for "Japanese people." Here, the notion of *Japaneseness* is tied with the concepts of "television," "habit," "fixed schedule," "leaving the TV on" through the participants' repeated use of *Japaneseness* to explain the centrality of television. The mediated national disaster temporarily disrupted the daily flow of programming, and it was the familiarity and everydayness of TV as a medium that, paradoxically, contributed to amplified feelings of togetherness and a sense of national unity. Participants see television as less ephemeral than social media, in terms of facilitating more solid and long-term feelings of togetherness. Here we can pause to consider if the trope of the *Japaneseness* is invoked in response to their participating in interviews with me as a visually non-Japanese researcher investigating media use in disaster situations. Whilst this may be a contributing factor, as the discussions of the *kizuna* discourse show, it was this very trope of *national togetherness* = *Japaneseness* that was invoked and manipulated in the context of the unfolding disaster.

The analysis of the interviews illustrates how television's liveness and simultaneous transmission of disaster news, contributed to participants' sense of shared viewing experience (Ellis, 2000, 2007) and shared temporality (Anderson, 1983). This is a collective awareness that we belong to the same present as fellow audience members. This notion of shared viewing experience enabled participants to feel connected to a community of fellow audience members who are linked together in mediated quasi-interaction (Thompson, 1994). Additionally, the sound of television and live images always on in the background created the feeling of social presence, which aided in reducing feelings of isolation and

anxiety. Through discussing disaster news with other viewers, participants could share their impression with others, which helped them cope with anxiety. In the immediate aftermath of the nuclear disaster, due to contradictory reports, participants were eager to check the news and seek out others with similar concerns to find reassurance and comfort. As some of them used online media this points to the emerging inter-mediality of the Japanese mediascape.

Regardless of the nature of the interaction, whether it was face-to-face or mediated (phone or social media), TV news of the 3.11 disaster provided "a common point of reference, a means through which one belongs to the same present as others" (Ellis, 2007, p 11). In that way, television facilitated communal experience between geographically distant individuals who share the same knowledge of the 3.11 disaster. Participants' references to TV as a connection to a social world and Japanese society, indicate that in the context of 3.11, individual TV watching is a part of collective, national process, where common information and collective experience of the disaster significantly intensify participants' sense of shared membership in a national community, and social interaction with audience and communities who are spatially dispersed.

The findings discussed in this chapter repeatedly show the significance of televised video in facilitating mediated empathy. The power of the live image lies in its immediacy and rawness, which help participants visualise and better understand the severity of the disaster and receive information in real-time. Through watching disaster news, particularly the tsunami footage, participants had the sense of witnessing the disaster through audio-visual affordances of TV, visual proximity of camera, real-time transmission, and raw and unedited images of disaster. These images helped them create the feeling of closeness to disaster region and communities and perceive television news as highly credible. Döveling et al. (2011) argue that the visual proximity of the camera can convey the emotional tone of a disaster, thereby reducing the uncertainty and perception of media as unreliable, or moderately credible. Participants' preference for TV over other media forms is linked to television's feature of liveness, immediate accessibility, participants' trust of images and the notion that "seeing is believing" and "the picture does not lie," addressing the TV as faster, more efficient, visual and convincing than other media forms. Participants perceive

television to be a highly credible medium when it comes to mediating the earthquake, tsunami, and a nuclear explosion. Moreover, through images that evoke emotions and create or intensify emotional connections (Pantti et al. 2012) participants note that they experienced enhanced feelings of solidarity and compassion. For some emotional discourse (Ellis, 2007) called them to actively engage in supporting affected regions. The need for social connection is intensified, inscribed with affect, feelings of empathy and compassion towards the affected communities and strong feelings of belonging to the same society threatened by calamity (Solnit, 2009). However, with imbalanced and biased content, it is important to consider the negative effect of constant emotional displays where such intense emotions can also lead to the perception of television news as sensationalised and moderately reliable, an aspect that will be examined in more detailed in Chapter Six.

From the analysis outlined in this chapter, we can conclude that in the context of the 3.11 disaster, TV viewing was very much social. Participants' perceptions of "others" and their sense of belonging often shifting between multiple communities– personal and local (family and friends), regional (affected communities), and the more general idea of imagined audience of fellow Japanese. Findings show that in Japan, TV continues to be central to everyday life, acting as a common point of reference and providing opportunities for developing relationships that cultivate a sense of social belonging. While this chapter has briefly highlighted the emergence of cross-media use, where participants used online media to discuss TV news on the 3.11 disaster, more research is needed to examine how online media and multi-screening practices (Marinelli & Andò, 2014) strengthen the social dimension of TV watching experience in Japan.

Participants see the positive side of television in facilitating and spreading awareness of collective struggle and shared burdens of the disaster at the national level, consequently leading to the notion of "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983), where through sharing similar experience of watching disaster news, participants identified as the members of the same national community. Furthermore, the awareness of collective solidarity and the imagination of the nation was also facilitated by the mass media discourse of *kizuna*. Participants' notion of *kizuna* as a relationship between people who do not know each other but are bound together by unconditional trust, collective consciousness and sense of

solidarity, as representative values of Japanese people, builds on the idea of imagined communities to show that participants feel a sense of national belonging through shared awareness of Japaneseness.

While this chapter predominantly highlights the positive aspects of television and its potential to create a connection to the social world and national community and trigger public action, it is important to mention that negative sides do exist. Around 20 out of 38 participants voiced the negative effects of the constant broadcast of the 3.11 disaster and repetition of disaster images, which significantly affected their emotional state. This is in line with Pantti et al. (2012) argument that disaster news can be both source of anxiety and a site for managing anxiety. While TV served as a medium to provide information and create a connection to social reality and a sense of co-witnessing the disaster, through its visual nature, the repetitiveness of raw visual images had negative effects on viewers, who become overwhelmed by the experience. These 20 participants voiced the importance of balanced broadcast and presence of commercials, dramas or anything that creates a sense of familiarity and routine of TV watching.

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter set out to explore the shifts and dynamics in media use, triggered by the 3.11 disaster, and how new technologies and social media are challenging television's role. Findings suggest that since the 3.11 disaster, television is still used as a primary and relevant source of news, but its use is often complemented with online media forms, mainly social media and curated (*matome*) websites. Since the 3.11 disaster, there is a growing awareness among participants about other (online) alternatives to check and challenge news from mass media and find detailed information. A significant change in the media use of older participants, age 40–49 or 50–59, is the awareness of the significance of new media technologies and social media, which they gradually incorporate in their daily media use, besides watching television or reading newspapers. While older generations recognised the significance of social media after the 3.11, younger participants, age 20–29, with already established social media habits, see subtle changes in their media use, namely increasing usage of online media platforms. Participants' responses indicate that some of the changes in their media use come from a negative perception of television's coverage of 3.11

disaster, regarding efficiency, trust, balance and bias. Participants' shifting attitudes towards television, regarding its credibility, are reflected in their more personalised everyday media use, utilising a combination of old and new media to check news, rather than relying on a single medium. Interestingly, findings show that combined media use is evenly spread across varying age groups, suggesting that both young and old generations embraced the inter-media environment, adjusting their media habits. Overall, television as a medium retains its centrality in participants' media routine, but with subtle changes due to the growing popularity of social media and participants' personalised media use.

This chapter examined how mass media, particularly television, evoke and intensify an individual's sense of social togetherness, in the context of the 3.11 disaster. The analysis has shown that individuals identify themselves as members of multiple communities, through television's ability to create a new space for perceptions of others, without spatial and temporal barriers. Television's immediacy, liveness, the vividness of video images, the familiarity of the medium and inherent trust, all served to contribute to individual's sense of belonging to multiple communities: local, regional, national and imagined communities, through a collective awareness of shared viewing experience and social reality of the 3.11 disaster. The findings of the study also highlighted the shifting role of television as the primary source of news in a time of disaster, since its use was much complemented with online media—social media and news websites.

Following the findings presented in this chapter, which also tackle the growing role of online media, the next chapter aims to explore how online media affects the individual's perception of community to answer the second research question of the study: How does use of online media evoke or intensify a sense of communal belonging in the context of 3.11 disaster?

5

A Sense of Communal Belonging in Digital Space

5.1 The Potential of Social Media

In the time of natural disasters and crisis, people's demand for information increases and their main aim is to get in touch with friends and family. The complexity of the 3.11 disaster, especially the nuclear meltdown and the diffusion of radioactive materials, caused the critical need for credible and updated information. However, a lack of institutional guidance and credible information significantly contributed to the public's growing scepticism and a profound sense of distrust towards government and media institutions (Hobson, 2015), thereby stressing the necessity for utilising alternative sources of information as the disaster was unfolding (see Chapter Four, section 4.5). The 3.11 disaster created impetus for the development of social and alternative-media outlets that people accessed to find reliable information. One of the main characteristics of Japan's media landscape during 3.11 was the growing role of social media as an alternative platform for collecting and disseminating crucial information on the evolving disaster, mobilising help and encouraging community engagement and participation. Thus, social media provided a space where individuals could connect with similarly affected others and exchange social and emotional support.

User motivations for engaging with social media changed significantly following the 3.11 disaster. Social media became a space to share anxieties and emotions, triggering volunteer recruitment and organisation of anti-nuclear protests and movements (Slater et al., 2012a). Facebook's policy of using real names enabled people to locate friends and family and find information on the disaster as it was unfolding, and Twitter was "one of the few functioning communication tools immediately after the earthquake" (Acar & Muraki, 2011, p. 393), breaking the first news 20 minutes before the mainstream media. Furthermore, social media was utilised as a platform for initiating community and relief-oriented actions. Although television and newspapers remain relevant and widely used, especially for those people who did not use or have access to social media, an increasingly inter-mediated landscape emerged in the aftermath of 3.11 (see Chapter Four).

The 3.11 disaster had a severe impact on many aspects of Japanese society, triggering social changes and new interactions among individuals, and reconfiguring individual's sense of social connection. As Chapter Four highlighted, Japan's mass media played a crucial role in how people stayed informed on the situation and therefore how they coped with a complex catastrophe. Constant reporting on the disaster largely displaced the daily flow of regular broadcasts by major national and commercial mass media channels, and, surrounded by images of the disaster and pessimistic news, many people turned to social media for support. It is in this space that they were also able to cultivate a sense of belonging to a wider community of people dealing with the effects of national disaster.

In this chapter, I aim to examine the intersections of social media use and the individual's sense of communal belonging in online media usage. In doing so, it is hard to omit the potential of social media to offer opportunities for meeting similar others and experience a sense of social connection, especially in a disaster context. Moving away from the traditional notion of community as connections based on spatial proximity and face-to-face communication, online community can be defined as a group of people who are drawn together by a shared purpose or a common interest. In this configuration, community members use online platforms "to interact and create user-generated content that is accessible to all community members" (Rotman & Preece, 2010, p. 320). The social media environment enables people who have lived through similar experiences of a traumatising or disruptive nature to share their emotions online. This can facilitate the coping process (Döveling 2015, 2017). Storytelling in the interconnected online environment is therapeutically beneficial, as it facilitates the process of cathartic sharing and works through the experience of trauma or crisis, which opens new opportunities for community-building (Arthur, 2009). In a disaster context, many individuals turn to social media as a new space for storytelling which fosters mediatised emotional exchange and feelings of community, consequently leading to the emergence of new form of affective communities in a digital environment. These communities are conceptualised as "digital affect cultures" (Döveling et al. 2018, p. 1) and manifest at different levels of social media use through communicative acts which indicate discursive, emotional or empathic alignment with similar others, thereby creating a sense of belonging even among geographically distant individuals.

Chapter Five aims to address the following research questions: How did individuals experience their sense of communal belonging, in relation to online media they utilised to obtain information on the disaster and connect with similarly affected others? How does use of online media evoke or amplify a sense of communal belonging in the context of the 3.11 disaster? The chapter aims to explore how distant individuals come together in digital space, conceptualising community as relational, based on the shared experience of the 3.11 disaster.

5.2 Multi-Level Social Media Use

Social media use can be broken into three intersecting levels: micro, meso and macro (Döveling et al. 2018). The chapter adopts Döveling's categorisation as the main framework for analysing how individuals in Japan during and immediately following the 3.11 disaster affectively engaged in digital space. The multi-level model enables analysis of the dynamics between different levels of belonging. The first, micro level, is the most local and personal form of social media use, where emotional interaction occurs within a close circle of family and friends. In the case of 3.11, this refers to the exchange of messages related to safety confirmation immediately after the quake, between individuals who are connected as family members or close friends. The meso level refers to less immediate emotional bonding among individuals within one community or a group over a specific theme or universal need, which in the case of 3.11 refers to the collective need for emotional support and shared feelings of togetherness on a regional level. The macro-level refers to collective dealing with emotions via online discourses—narratives, videos, hashtags, photos—thereby encompassing a more global level of communication where social media users who do not know each other personally come together over a common theme, disaster or sentiment. Using the example of a YouTube community which was formed during 3.11, gathering individuals from different parts of the world, this chapter highlights the macro-level of social media use and the potential of YouTube to serve as a platform for global emotional flows and alignment, in the context of disaster. To better illustrate micro and meso level of participants' social media use, and their intersections, this chapter complements interviews with some of the participants' social media posts from

Facebook and Twitter.[47] In particular, discussion of the macro-level of social media use is based on one of the interview participant's YouTube use. The example illustrates how a specific YouTube community was created in the wake of the 3.11 disaster. To explore how different levels of social media use fulfil the participants' need for receiving information (cognitive), the need for social connection (integrative), the need for emotional experience (affective) and the need to relieve tension and stress (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 2009), this chapter will also make use of gratifications theory(see Chapter Two, section 2.3).

5.2.1 Micro Level: Safety Concerns and Local Actions

In the immediate aftermath of the great 2011 earthquake, participants explained that their main aim was to get in touch with their family and close friends, through any means available, regardless of where they were at the time. Since the majority of participants were based in Tokyo at the time of the quake, many of them were stranded in different parts of the city. Most were unable to return home immediately or were stuck in their offices at work due to train delays and cancellations. Participants recounted watching breaking news about the earthquake with their colleagues, on TV or *keitai* (mobile phones), or asking people on the train and in the city whether they had any news about the unfolding crisis. In many cases, participants could not immediately access media and could not acquire information, so they were eager to find alternative means to learn about the situation.

The common narrative that emerges from the participants' accounts illustrates that the priority was to reach family members, relatives or close friends, to check their safety, and to find any available information to understand the severity of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami. Unfortunately, due to phone network congestion and problems with the electricity in some parts of Japan, including Tokyo, participants had difficulty calling their families, and instead sent emails on their mobile phones, laptops, PCs or tablets, or posted status updates on social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter. Of the total of 38 participants, 17 of them used email to reach family and friends, 12 of them found social media the most convenient way to confirm their safety, sometimes in combination with email; 10 of them solely used phone to reach their family, even though it took them a

[47] Screenshots of original social media posts from participants' social media accounts, will not be presented to protect their anonymity.

few hours to make contact. In more extreme cases, five participants waited for a few days until they were able to contact their family and friends via regular phone call.

Participants' accounts of media use right after the initial 2011 quake reveal that social media proved to be useful for establishing contact with family and friends, sending local information and messages of support, and for maintaining contact in the days following the earthquake. During the 3.11 disaster, such interpersonal communication was facilitated by homegrown social networks Mixi and Line. Facebook and Twitter were also found to be efficient in instantly informing friends of one's well-being and spreading local information on train delays and the availability of food supplies in supermarkets, in addition to general information on the earthquake.

Kensuke is one of the participants who found Mixi useful for staying up to date with his friends' circumstances:

> *With Mixi, I can understand friends' situation. I cannot get information about my friends on TV, whether they are safe or not safe, in trouble or not in trouble. I think the news on the internet contained the same information as real-time TV, so, well, I can watch it whenever I want.*[48]

To establish first contact after the quake and check on his friends, Kensuke chose Mixi as it was a network via which he could directly message them. Kensuke compares TV and the internet, saying that both deliver the same information, but that he cannot access information about friends on the TV.

Another homegrown social network, Line, was also widely used among participants, to exchange direct and private messages and maintain contact with those close to them. Shortly after seeing breaking news of the earthquake and tsunami, Naoko, who was at home in Tokyo at the time, contacted her family and colleagues through both Line and Skype. She did not immediately understand what had happened but knew that it must be something serious since the phone lines did not work. Concerned for family and friends, she utilised

[48] Mixi だったら、友達の状況がわかる。無事に安全に、セーフかセーフじゃないか、困てるか困ってないか、友達の情報はテレビじゃ得られない気がします。インタネットニュースは本当のテレビと同じ情報だったと思うんですけど、まあみたいときに見れる

Skype and Line to ensure they were safe. Naoko's use of Line and Skype indicates the small-scale, interpersonal level of online interaction, where she briefly exchanged messages with family and friends. Additionally, Naoko utilised her Facebook timeline to post messages and let her friends know she is safe, because she was aware that they all used Facebook to upload posts, photos, comments and inform each other about their situation. Naoko's combined use of "homegrown" (Line) and "imported" social networks (Skype and Facebook), is an example of mixed social media use in the context of 3.11.

The micro level of social media interaction is illustrated in a brief message exchanged by participants on social media. Some participants were not able to immediately access news on the earthquake or return home after work due to train cancellations and delays. Unable to return home to Tokyo from Yokohama, which is 27km away, Chieko decided to stay in a nearby hotel and ask people in the hotel for more detailed information. She could only use television in her room, to receive updates on the earthquake, but used Facebook to inform friends and family that she was safe. Chieko and her friend exchanged the following on Facebook just a few hours following the earthquake on 11 March 2011 (see Extract 5.1).

Extract 5.1 Facebook message exchange between Chieko and her friend[49]

Keiko: *The earthquake was scary, so I'm now stuck here with a client until trains begin to move. Are you okay?* [50]

Chieko: *I can't return from Yokohama (>_<) oh, poor me… (T__ T)*[51]

Keiko: *Trains are starting to move in the city, but JR and other lines are still not operating. Please do not catch a cold!*[52]

In her post (Extract 5.1) Chieko briefly replied to her friend that she is in Yokohama and includes an angry face and a crying face emoticon[53] to express how she feels about the

[49] This and similar extracts are used throughout the thesis to present social media content collected from some of the participants' social media accounts

[50] 「地震怖かったですが、今会社でお客?様と電車動くまで缶?詰になっとります。地震?大丈夫でしたか。」All translations are author's own except where noted.

[51] 横浜から帰れずにいます (>_<)とほほ・・・(Ｔ＿Ｔ)

[52] 「都内はぼちぼち、復活し始めてますが、JR などはまだですね。風邪ひかないようにしてください。」

[53] Emoticon refers to a series of text characters that are utilised to textually form a facial expression or a gesture (Hakami, 2017).

whole situation. In response her friend consoles her by sharing local information and showing genuine care and concern for Chieko's well-being. A similar example of micro-level social media use comes from Toshi's use of Twitter. Shortly after the initial quake, Toshi recounts that he called his parents who live in Chiba, a city located 40km southeast of Tokyo, and that he also established and maintained contact with friends through direct messages on Twitter. Toshi also utilised his Twitter feed to post photos from local convenience stores and circulate information on water shortages to other Twitter users who live in the same district:

> *For example, I went to a convenience store, and it was like, there was no water, so I took a photo which showed there was no water. It was not an everyday situation, so I posted it [on Twitter]. At that time, [bottled] water was out of stock… The water supply had stopped and no one could buy water; people panicked; that photo circulated and there were tweets about it on Twitter…*[54]

Toshi perceives Twitter as a fast and efficient medium to distribute local information. Toshi's digital engagement immediately after the earthquake illustrates the use of Twitter as a space for the circulation of vital local information, to help other members of the local community understand the real situation.

In relation to the local level of concern and social media use, some participants were eager to establish contact with their family members and friends who live in affected areas. In these few cases, the concern for people who lived in affected the region at the time of the 3.11 is still seen within the local and small-scale context, as it was aimed at close ties: family and friends. Firstly, participants who grew up in or near the affected region had an enhanced need to reach their friends from their hometown and collect information on the affected region. Ayumi and Masayuki both grew up in Ibaraki prefecture, located in the northeastern part of the Kanto region, bounded on the north by Fukushima Prefecture. Ayumi, who was temporarily in Italy at the time of the earthquake, felt anxious about her

[54] 例えば、コンビニに行って、水が全然ないみたいな・・・写真とって、「水ない」みたい。ちょっと、非日常なので、出したりとか。その時、品切れという・・・みんな、水がとまちゃって買えなくて、パニックであって、その写真が回ってきて Twitter でそれについて tweet とかありましたし・・・

friends from Ibaraki after she saw the news on the disaster, so she contacted them through Facebook, Twitter and email, to check on their safety. Masayuki used email and Facebook to contact his friends and colleagues from Tokyo, but he also exchanged messages with many friends from Ibaraki to check whether they were safe. For a few days, Kenjiro was not able to account for parents, who lived in a tsunami-affected area of Iwate Prefecture in the Tohoku region, until he got a phone call from his sister from Iwate, confirming they are all safe. Kenjiro recalls contacting people from affected areas mainly to check on their safety. Mayumi, established contact with her friends from Fukushima through Line or Facebook to check if they are safe and if they need any essential goods, clothes or food. Mayumi notes that it was easy to reach them in this way since they actively use social media.

From the interviews with participants about their media usage right after the great earthquake, it is evident that social media has become a vital communication tool, rather than merely an alternative source of information. Although phone lines were down, participants were still able to use the internet and social media on their mobile phones, to keep informed about the earthquake and locate their loved ones. Participants reflected on the overall feeling of uncertainty and annoyance with phone congestion and train delays, as their one aim was to establish contact and tell their family and friends how they are doing. In this sense, participants like Atsushi, perceive social media and the internet as a vital tool for safety, security and establishing lifeline. He explains that: "*At that time, there was Facebook, and so it was really useful.*"[55] Besides expressing personal concern through direct messages to private social networks such as Mixi and Line, many participants found group-oriented networks such as Facebook and Twitter to be useful as a means of informing their friends or spreading local information on the availability of food in supermarkets, train delays and cancellations and general information on the earthquake.

Therefore, participants' responses revealed the need to contact close friends from the affected region, and inquire about their situation, that is, to engage in interaction that involves a regional level of concern. This suggests that there is some extent of cross-level linkage of the local and regional level of concern. The next section aims to clarify this and

[55] その時に、Facebook があったから、すごいに役に立って。

demonstrate the dynamics and intersections of micro and meso-level of participants' digital interaction.

5.2.1.1 Intersections of the Micro and Meso-Level

Among participants who actively used social media to establish contact with friends and family, the context of communication transcended the local level, intersecting with references to the affected region and implying a crossover of micro- and meso-level social media use, which this section examines in more detail. To best illustrate the linkage of the micro and meso levels, I use the example of Hana, a participant from Osaka, who used Facebook solely to inform others about the disaster and establish contact with her friends. In addition to Line and regular email, through which she contacted family, Hana used Facebook updates to inform her friends that she was safe, to which they replied with messages of relief (see Extract 5.2).

Extract 5.2 Facebook message exchange between Hana and her friend on 13 March 2011[56]

Hana's friend: *Glad you are safe sweet friend. My prayers go out to all in the disaster zone.*

Hana: *Thanks for your kind. We are all safe. Hope everyone over there overcome soon.*

In this brief message exchange, two days after the quake, Hana's friend expressed both relief in knowing that Hana was safe and concern for the people in the disaster zone, sending prayers for those directly affected by the earthquake and tsunami. Soon after receiving the message, Hana replied with a similar reference to those in the affected region, wishing for their safety. While this kind of online interaction happens on the interpersonal and familiar level between two friends who exchange messages to enquire about each other's safety, they both exhibit compassion for the affected region, which exceeds the micro-level of online interaction. The shift from a local to a regional level of concern for affected communities despite geographical barriers is illustrated through these Facebook posts. It demonstrates how emotional flows emerge and manifest in digital space, thereby blurring the boundaries between private and public, immediate and distant.

[56] Original social media (Facebook) post is in English.

Another example for the cross-level social media use is the case of Mei, who was based in Kobe and utilised Facebook to express concern and frustration due to an inability to contact her father, and to express concern for people in the affected region. The extract below illustrates Mei's use of Facebook a day after the quake, on 12 March 2011 (see Extract 5.3).

Extract 5.3 Mei's Facebook post on 12 March 2011

Mei: *I'm really worried about my friend in Tokyo and people in the east part of Japan. Is everyone ok? I still can't contact my dad in Tokyo, aaaahhhh. I'm worried, and I can't sleep!!!!!!* 東京のみんな～大丈夫？関西でもゆれたけど、ニュースで破滅的な影響をうけた東京を 心配している！！！ ああ、私もまだお父さんと連絡がとれなくて、心配で、眠れない！！！！[57]

Mei's friend 1: *I'm in Tokyo, but I'm okay!! It seems that phone lines are not working... Hope your dad is okay… makes you worry, doesn't it…*[58]

Mei's friend 2: *Hope you can contact your dad soon; ____;*

In her first Facebook post after the earthquake, besides giving an update on her situation, Mei expresses equal concern for people from Tokyo, her local communities, and "people in the east part of Japan," thereby directly addressing people from the affected region. In this way, Mei's digital narrative indicates a shift in her sense of communal belonging from personal, micro level of concern for family and close friends to meso-level concern for the affected communities. Even though she is geographically far from the affected region, Mei shows a sense of connection. She utilises her Facebook timeline as a space where she can convey and send her emotions across distance through text and emotive punctuation as well. In this sense, she situated herself as feeling like a part of a broader community, thereby highlighting the potential of social media to create affective connection to community even in distant individuals (Döveling et al., 2018). Through sharing her feelings with friends on Facebook, Mei expresses the need to seek out similarly affected individuals

[57] Mei, the author of Facebook post, wrote it in both English and Japanese. The author of the paper provided English translation for the response of Friend 1, which was originally in Japanese.
[58] 私東京だけど大丈夫です！！今は電話の回線がうまくつながらないみたい… お父さん大丈夫かな… 心配だね…

who are also having problems contacting their families—in other words, others who are aligned with Mei's feelings and can provide compassion, solidarity and emotional support.

In this way, Facebook serves not only as space for one-directional emotional communication, where an individual vents personal feelings, but it invites affective attunement with other users who connect and align with the event, through liking and commenting on a Facebook post, thereby creating affective publics (Papacharissi, 2016). The concept of affective communities in digital space moves beyond the feelings of the individual to emotional flows and bonding between users online, generating digital affect cultures (Döveling et al., 2018) and a new sense of communal belonging in digital space, based on the shared emotional experience of the 3.11 disaster. The emotional bonding and empathic alignment within a familiar relationship, as illustrated in Hana's and Mei's case, makes it harder to separate the micro level from the meso level of belonging, as they intersect and feed into each other, indicating that affective connection to community can be built on the intersections of shared feelings between friends and feelings of compassion toward distant yet similar others.

In conclusion, through exchanging messages immediately after the quake participants demonstrate that they were eager to immediately establish and further maintain the connection with their close ties—family and friends. Moreover, participants' Facebook posts indicate that besides cognitive need, this social media platform was utilised to express affective connection to both local and regional communities, thereby gratifying participants' need for emotional experience (affective need) and social belonging (integrative). In addition to establishing communication after the quake, sixteen participants were actively using social media to post, exchange, share, or read information online not only with close friends but other individuals, who are members of the same online community of similarly affected people. They had the same goal: to find information and support, when other communication channels are down, slow or insufficient in response. The following section aims to highlight the meso level of social media use, additionally exploring how participants imagine themselves to be a part of the community, based on their reading or creating the narrative in digital space.

5.2.2 Meso Level: Evoking Belonging through Digital Narratives

Some individuals imagine their membership in a broader community based on the reading or creating the narrative in digital space (Jones, 2013). While many participants utilised social media to reach family and close friends immediately, other participants were strongly motivated to voice informational or emotional support through digital narratives within a community or a group and use social media as a space for community engagement and participation. Sana is one such participant.

Sana actively used social media during the 3.11 disaster, mainly to share local information on train delays or food and water supplies with friends in Tokyo. Moreover, Sana shared general updates in a Facebook group that she created to inform people who live outside Japan about the situation. The extract below shows the comments Sana made on 12 March, one day after the mega earthquake (see Extract 5.4).

Extract 5.4 Sana's Facebook post from 12 March 2011[59]

Sana: *Thank you for everyone that is worried about me and praying for me. I really appreciate it and it makes me stay calm. According to the latest news, more and more earthquake hit many cities, such as Nagano, Niigata, Tochigi in Japan during the midnight.*

In her comments (Extract 5.4) Sana positions Facebook as space where she can find relief from anxiety, through reading friends' supportive messages and comments. In another Facebook post a couple of weeks later, Sana invites her friends to join her in organising a local event. Some of her friends commented on the post, expressing their interest in joining the event and doing something for the affected communities (see Extract 5.5).

[59] Original social media (Facebook) post is in English.

Extract 5.5 Sana's Facebook post from 21 March 2011

Sana: *I am thinking about organising a charity event at the hula dance club. This is still just an idea, but I wonder if anyone is interested in participating*[60]

Sana's friend: *I think that's great! We can do it. I really want to take action*.[61]

In this way, Sana used Facebook as space where she can share her ideas on how to help affected communities and invite her friends to join, thereby evoking community engagement. This meso level of digital engagement indicates a significant shift from the immediate need to contact family and close friends to a broader need to find concrete ways of supporting affected communities, thereby fostering community engagement and participation through social media use. Although Sana was involved in volunteering activities and looked for ways to help local and regional communities, she also needed to express concern for the affected region in digital space. Just a few days from the earthquake, Sana posted a link to a YouTube video[62] titled "*Yōtsube no shirōto-tachi ga utatta - We are the world*," a music video made of YouTube video clips of amateur musicians singing the charity song "We are the world." This song was initially recorded in 1985 with the intent to appeal for aid to Africa. In the post, Sana dedicates the video to her family, friends and people of Tohoku. While the song title alludes to the idea that "we are united as members of the world," the lyrics "*we can't let them suffer, no, we cannot turn away, right now they need a helping hand*" motivate the dedication of the video to people of the affected region. Sana thereby expresses feelings of connection and emotional or empathic alignment with affected areas (Döveling et al., 2018).

Takashi is another participant who expressed his need to send a message to the people of Tohoku by utilising social media. Takashi, who was doing an internship in Malaysia at the time, posted a message on Facebook shortly after the quake, to check if his friends in Japan were safe. Just two days from the earthquake, Takashi posted another message on his Facebook timeline. In the interview he explained that he felt the need to express his feelings

[60] フラダンスサークルで、チャリティーイベントできないかなーなんて考えてる。まだアイデアベー スでしかないけど、私たちにもなんかできるんじゃないかって。

[61] すっごくいいと思う！私たちにできること。実際に 行動したいな

[62] Original link to the video that Sana posted on Facebook is: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LLLsSgitp5w

because, despite being physically outside Japan, his heart was in Japan and he felt connected to people who were affected by the disaster. In his narrative, Takashi stresses the significance of human bonds and collective solidarity:

Extract 5.6 Takashi's Facebook post from 13 March 2011

Takashi: *Now I'm a person from the affected country… Really many people sent me messages, people I've never spoken to, the Indian guy in the student cafeteria. May you experience God blessings and as far as to say, let me pray for you. I have not experienced the earthquake, but I feel that we are human beings by helping each other, before the differences in religion and way of thinking.*[63]

Takashi shares his experience as a Japanese person who is away from the disaster area and home but who identifies as someone who belongs to the country where the disaster occurred. He empathised with Japanese people, as if he is physically there, thereby demonstrating his sense of social connection and attachment to the Tohoku region and greater Japan. Facebook as a platform has the potential to facilitate and foster this sense of connection to regional communities, despite spatial and temporal barriers.

5.2.2.1 Digital Memorial of 3.11

Globally disruptive events, such as the 3.11 disaster, evoke temporary rituals of grief and commemorative practices, which are empowered by social media. The establishment of Facebook in people everyday routines as a platform for everyday communication and practices might be a reason why Facebook often hosts commemorative events (Christensen & Gotved, 2015). Similarly, findings from my study show how some participants utilised Facebook as a space to commemorate the 3.11 disaster in a more visible, personalised and creative manner, through images, narratives and videos. Previous work on the commemoration of the 3.11 disaster explores the role of Twitter to reflect on how communal remembrance and commemorative practices are constituted in the new hybrid media environment (Rantasila, Sirola, Kekkonen, Valaskivi, & Kunelius, 2018).

[63] 自分は今被災地の国の人なんだ・・・本当に何人も声をかけてくれて、何人もチャットを飛ばしてくれて、しゃべったことない人やら学食のインド人まで心配してくれて、神様の庇護がつきますようにとか、祈らせてくださいとかまで言ってもらって、自分は地震を体感はしていないけど、宗教や考え方の違いやそういうものの前に、助け合ってこそ人なんだってのを肌で感じてる

The visual culture of the disaster has shifted from television to digital space, with YouTube and other video sharing sites and their visual archives. This enables users to form intimate connections to the experience of the disaster, a strong sense of presence and immediacy, through raw, real-time, user-generated footage of the disaster (McCosker, 2013). In the words of Papailias (2016): "the technological affordances of networked digital media have affected the pervasiveness, the tempo, and the proliferation and accessibility of once complex processes of (re)mediation and materialization" (p.452). Some of the participants like Takashi mentioned in the interview that one of the positive features of YouTube is its function as an archive. Commemorating the events of 3.11 through videos and keeping the memory of the disaster alive:

> *People say that the raw footage of tsunami can be seen even today on YouTube, triggering flashbacks of such a terrible earthquake. I think it is essential to remember the disaster properly.*[64]

Takashi notes the shock and trauma that these videos produce. Reflecting on the traumatising disaster, remembering the disaster victims, sending prayers and wishing for fast recovery and peace, all point to the emotional dimensions of social media and its power to not only raise awareness of the disaster but keep its memory alive, through digital commemorative narratives.

Masayuki, who in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, posted encouraging messages and pictures on his Facebook timeline to cheer up his friends and let them know they are not alone notes that this was motivated by his own professional training:

> *I am engaged in training and counselling as a profession, and because I have customers, I made inspirational messages and video stream. I made a post which was something like "you are not alone" and uploaded it.*[65]

[64] 生々しい津波の動画とか、そういうのを今も YouTube とかで見れたりしていて、そういうのはこんなひどい地震だったんだなっていうのを flashback させるっていう。ちゃんと記憶残すって上ではすごい大事なことだなって思います

[65] 私職業が研修とかコンサルティングとかやり、職業でお客さんいるんで、勇気のメッセージを作って、動画流したりしましたね。 あのう一人じゃないようみたいな郵便を作って、それはアップしました。

On the anniversary of the 3.11 disaster, 11 March 2012, Masayuki made dedicated memorial posts on his Facebook timeline, reflecting on the previous year, saying that the disaster is far from over (see Extract 5.7). Along with the photo of a sunset, he sends his prayers and promises he will continue to do what he can. Masayuki's friends, precisely 34 of them, liked this social media post, which is a relatively large number in the context of his feed.

Extract 5.7 Masayuki's Facebook post from 11 March 2012

Masayuki: *A year since then… The road to recovery is still ongoing. I want to pray today quietly. So I will continue to do what I can…*[66]

In another Facebook post on 11 September 2012, Masayuki once again "commemorates" the 3.11 disaster, by sending his prayers to everyone who lost lives, saying that he feels grateful for being alive, but at the same time, he thinks about the disaster victims. This post received 36 likes and one comment from his friend (see Extract 5.8).

Extract 5.8 Masayuki's Facebook post from 11 September 2012

Masayuki: *Eleven years since the terrorist attack in the United States… One and a half year since the Great East Japan Earthquake… a moment of silence… Because I'm alive, I feel a sense of fulfilment, and eagerness to live. Some people could not live, even though they wanted to…*[67]

Friend 1: *I really think so. You've brought back the feelings of that time. This photo is also very beautiful.*[68]

The analysed extracts from Masayuki's digital memorial discourse show how mundane social media such as Facebook can be re-appropriated to suit the needs of commemorative practices such as remembering the disaster victims and offering prayers. Personalising the

[66] あれから一年・・・。復興までの道のりはまだまだ。 今日は静かに祈りをささげたい。 そして、できることをこれからも継続しよう。

[67] 9 月 11 日 アメリカ同時多発テロからなんと 11 年... 東日本大震災から早 1 年半･･･ 黙祷。。。 生きているからには、充実感を感じて、懸命に生きたい。 生きたくても、そうできなかった人たちもいるのだから。

[68] ほんとうにそう思います。 あの頃の気持ちを思い出させて頂きました。 この写真も、とてもいいですね。

memorial by sharing the imagery of nature and sunset to offer hope. Furthermore, Masayuki's digital prayers and tributes to those who lost their lives in the 3.11 indicate the power of social media to transcend temporal and spatial barriers, and to enable the continuation of imagined bonds with disaster victims and deceased, keeping them "alive" through their online presence. Masayuki also mentions the 9/11 terrorist attack, thereby drawing a parallel between 9/11 and 3/11, which are contextualised as two extraordinary and disruptive mediated events that serve to evoke sentiments and mobilise solidarities (Chouliaraki, 2006; Cottle, 2006; Couldry et al., 2009).

While some participants turned to social media to commemorate and remember the 3.11 disaster and its victims, other participants utilised social media to reflect on the issues surrounding the media censorship of the 3.11 nuclear disaster and express their frustration. In this way, Facebook served as an alternative platform for voicing personal views and dissatisfaction with insufficient mass media coverage of the disaster. In our conversation, Takuya mentions the repetitive and insufficient coverage as a pressing issue of mass media communication. He explains that it is the main reason why he decided to stop trusting and using television and newspaper immediately after the nuclear disaster. Instead, Takuya turned to alternatives such as watching YouTube videos, reading individuals' posts online, checking news websites and Facebook. He often shared the information from other sources on his Facebook timeline. Just a few months after the nuclear disaster, in October 2011, he reflects on the events in a Facebook post, saying that in such an emergency, information should not be hidden from the public, because it is only with the information that people can leave safely or make decisions on which course of action they should take.

Takuya joined a Facebook group which was formed immediately after the nuclear disaster, to gather like-minded people to discuss the problem of radiation. He mainly relied on the Facebook group to find more detailed information on the radiation and compare individuals' opinions to those given by government and mass media. He also measured levels of radiation himself in Saitama and shared results with his friends in a Facebook group, as an alternative kind of collective production and circulation of nuclear risk information, so that other individuals can make more informed decisions based on fact, rather than speculation. Takuya stayed consistent with posting and sharing news from other

sources on his Facebook, and just two years from the disaster, shared a photo of the anti-nuclear protest in Tokyo, that his friend shared on Facebook a day before (see Extract 5.9).

Extract 5.9 Takuya's Facebook post from 11 March 2013

Takuya: *Hibiya Park yesterday. I did not participate in yesterday's protest, but I support it.*[69]

Friend 1: *Same!* [70]

Friend 2: *Same!* [71]

In this case, Takuya used Facebook to express personal attitude on the nuclear disaster and resultant social situation of mass protest, even though he was not physically engaged in protest, through aligning his opinion with other individuals who joined the protest. His friends' likes and comments on the post, indicate support for anti-nuclear protests which took place regularly in central Tokyo for months after the disaster, as well as across Japan in the following years.

This section has highlighted participants' meso level of digital engagement. Participants' digital narratives illuminate the potential of social media to assist them to transcend spatial and temporal boundaries, enabling emotional bonding between individuals. This practice helps individuals to cope with traumatising events, as they find relief from anxiety and stress through sharing or reading the stories of others (Arthur, 2009; Döveling, 2015, 2017; Macias et al., 2009). The sharing of narratives highlights the potential for social media to serve as a space for different affective flows, and empathic alignment with regional communities. Feelings of solidarity and togetherness are amplified, despite the participant's geographical distance from the affected region (Döveling et al., 2018; Papacharissi, 2015, 2016). Furthermore, participants' digital commemorative narratives show how every day social media platforms can be utilised to "host" commemorative practices and serve as a new, community-oriented space for designing and mediating rituals of commemoration, in

[69] 昨日の日比谷公園。 参加してませんが、賛同します。
[70] 同じく！
[71] 同じく！

a more visible, accessible and creative manner, thereby also enabling the continuation of bonds with disaster victims (Christensen & Gotved, 2015). Of note is the way in which some participants utilised social media in some other context, to express anger and dissatisfaction with the government and mass media and criticise their ineffective response to the 3.11 disaster.

It is difficult to say, however, if there is a consistency in the way participants used social media to empathically and emotionally align with regional communities, and whether their temporary narratives lost meaning as familiar routines returned in the period after the immediate disaster.

The next section moves on to further explore meso level and its intersections with the macro level of social media use, by using the example of one of the participant's "digital diaries," to illustrate the more proactive and persistent use of digital space than other participants.

5.2.2.2 Hiroshi's Digital Diary

A more consistent use of social media during the 3.11 disaster is seen in the case of Hiroshi, who actively utilised Facebook timeline as a diary where he can document his experience of the disaster, share positive thoughts and motivational messages, and get his mind off the anxiety caused by the constant exposure to news about the disaster. Hiroshi's narratives illuminate the distinct role of social media in comparison with mass media, with reference to its ability to provide access to local information, facilitate social interaction with similar others and offer relief from the depressing atmosphere which dominated television news. During and following the disaster, social media offered an alternative space for Hiroshi which resonated with hope and positive comments, as all users that commented on his posts on all of the platforms expressed the same or similar sentiments as he did. As illustrated earlier in this chapter, participants' social media posts attracted reactions and comments from their friends and other users. Although Hiroshi's posts were open to his friends and followers, they gathered a few reactions and comments from his friends immediately after the earthquake.

One of the significant changes in Hiroshi's media use, in the week following the earthquake, was the shift from television news watching to utilising social media to post encouraging messages on Facebook and Twitter, and videos on YouTube, rather than just collecting information from other sources. Although not directly affected by the 3.11 disaster, but feeling like a member of the same national community of Japanese people, sharing the same struggle and sentiments of the disaster, Hiroshi felt the overwhelming need to help and engage by turning to Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to send his supportive thoughts, prayers and music he composed. In the interview, Hiroshi explains:

> *I stopped watching TV, and only SNS was left, but I began to use it differently, as I wasn't just collecting information, but started posting it myself. That's probably because of the fact that everyone experienced that earthquake. I knew there were so many things that all of Japan wanted to say, so I wanted to help, and I had so many different feelings…*[72]

Hiroshi's comment suggests that the major shift in his media use comes from the awareness of social media's potential to enable a user to move beyond the passive role of information receiver and post information himself/herself. At the same time, it reflects Hiroshi's feelings of belonging to the community of fellow nationals, through emotional alignment and shared experience of the 3.11 disaster, which intensified his decision to use social media actively.

Since 11 March 2011, after his train from Kyoto to Tokyo stopped in Shizuoka, halfway to Tokyo, due to the earthquake and emergency train announcement, Hiroshi started using social media. First, he checked his mobile phone to find more information on the earthquake, and Twitter to check other users' reactions and friends' comments. Soon afterwards, while the train was still in the emergency stop, Hiroshi started posting status updates on Facebook and Twitter, through linked accounts, informing his friends he is safe.

[72] テレビは見なくなって SNS だけのこってた。その SNS はちょっと使い方変わってきてて、情報集めるだけじゃなくて、発信するようになっていた。それがきっとあの震災みんなが体験してとても大事なポイントだったんだよね。日本中が言いたいことはいっぱいあったと分かったし、助けたいし、本当にいろんな気持ちがここにあって…

In some of the first Facebook posts from 11 March, besides some general updates about the earthquake and his situation, Hiroshi exhibits a sense of compassion for the affected region, wondering if the people of the affected Miyagi are safe and hoping there are no casualties. The extract below shows one of Hiroshi's posts on Facebook, where he empathically aligns with the affected region:

Extract 5.10 Hiroshi's Facebook post from 11 March 2011

Hiroshi: *I'm in emergency stop in the tunnel, but right now there has been an aftershock of about 1 or 2 seismic intensity. The shaking of the closed space has a considerable impact. Are people in Miyagi safe? I hope there are no casualties*.[73]

In addition to providing fundamental updates for his friends on Facebook, Hiroshi addresses affected Miyagi prefecture and communities, thereby expressing a sense of closeness with the affected region. Although his other social media posts invoke a sense of connection to affected communities of Tohoku region (see previous Extracts 5.5, 5.6), the case of Hiroshi is specific because of the continuity in digital storytelling and utilisation of different social media platforms immediately after the earthquake and in the following week.

Previous studies have established that social media has provided an alternative space for disseminating information emotional support, along with the feeling of community, as "one of the central features in managing personal grief and overcoming anxiety" (Döveling, 2015, p. 115). Online support and empathy can make individuals feel less lonely and isolated and social media features enable them to express feelings more comfortably, than in face-to-face communication (Hartig & Viola, 2016). Some of the first Facebook narratives imply that Hiroshi had a different aim than other participants in using social media. As mentioned earlier, Hiroshi perceives social media to be more beneficial than television to his emotional and mental state, as a space where people post motivational messages, which helped him shift his mind off the negative disaster news (see Chapter Four, section 4.5). Hiroshi not only provided updates on the disaster and his situation, to let

[73] トンネルの中に緊急停止中なんだけれど、いま震度 1 か 2 くらいの余震があった。閉鎖空間 の揺れはかなりインパクトがあるね。 宮城の人々は無事だろうか。死者のないことを強く祈ります。

his friends know he is safe, but his Facebook posts were mostly aimed at reaching out to people in the affected region and circulating motivational messages. For example, in Extract 5.11, Hiroshi mentions the people of Miyagi to express his sense of compassion for the affected region.

Extract 5.11 Hiroshi's Facebook post from 11 March 2011

Hiroshi: *Shinkansen is going slowly at 30km per hour. It is now one hour from Shin Yokohama. At this pace, it is expected to take more than an hour to Tokyo Station. I was surprised at how really happy I was at time like this to receive messages from those concerned about me. I feel weak and depressed because it is cold. How do people in Miyagi spend the night?*[74]

Furthermore, Hiroshi turned to Facebook and Twitter to evoke community engagement and participation, by inviting his friends and followers to make small donations and support the people of Tohoku (see Extract 5.12).

Extract 5.12 Hiroshi's Facebook post from 11 March 2011

Hiroshi: *People who don't have earthquake insurance in Miyagi find it really hard. Let's all send our feelings and donations. You can give a small donation, let's visit those who live alone. Loneliness is the greatest enemy after suffering an earthquake, that's what I've learnt this time*.[75]

Hiroshi's digital engagement in the context of 3.11 disaster show that Facebook and Twitter can be both used as action-oriented social platforms, where individuals initiate help and charitable donations, to support distant affected communities. His social media posts, enriched with flows of affect and emotional resonance with regional communities, show how every day social media such as Facebook, can be utilised to experience a sense of connection to regional communities, through storytelling in digital space.

[74] 新幹線は 30 キロ徐行です。これから新横浜まで一時間。同じペースなら、さらに東京駅 まで一時間以上かかる見込み。こんな時に心配してもらう連絡は、自分でも意外なくらい、本当に嬉しいです。 かなり体力もなく、寒いので、落ち込んでる。宮城の方はどんな夜を過ごすんだろう。

[75] 宮城で地震保険に入っていない人は、これから本当に大変だろう。気持ちと義援金をみ んなで出そうよ。小銭の募金でもいいし、特に一人暮らしの人には、会いに行こう。被災し たら孤独感が一番の敵だって、今回分かった。

5.2.2.3 Hashtags: Intersections of the Meso and Macro Level

A hashtag always starts with the hash sign "#" followed by a word or a combination of two or three words. Hashtags serve to mark the topic of a social media post and function to consolidate messages on the same topics for easy searchability (Murzintcev & Cheng, 2017). Hashtags can be used to alert others to an individual's emotions and experiences and evoke feelings of closeness and solidarity between users based on the shared experience of the event, including natural disasters, national crises, terrorist incidents and protests. Adding hashtags to social media posts can indicate a user's sense of connection with an event, or the desire to be recognised as a part of a community of users who use the same hashtag (Summerville, 2018).

In a disaster context, one of the most effective ways to disseminate information to the public and respond to urgent needs and requests is through standardised and unified hashtags, introduced and used by government and aid organisations. During the 3.11 disaster, some of the official hashtags recognised by the public for mobilising help and relief operations were: #jishin,[76] #j_j_helpme,[77] #anpi,[78] #hinan,[79] and #311care.[80] Also, the hashtag #prayforjapan went viral, consolidating compassionate messages, condolences, and prayers, sent by users in the disaster zone, across Japan and abroad. Since its emergence with the 3.11 disaster, the "prayfor" hashtag has become a social media norm internationally as a universal, compassionate response to disasters, crises, terrorist attacks and so forth.

On a few occasions, Hiroshi attached the hashtag #prayforjapan to his Facebook narratives to express his gratitude for the encouraging messages coming from all over the world for Japan (see Extract 5.13).

[76] Hashtag used for general information about the great earthquake.
[77] Hashtag used for requests for rescue or other aid.
[78] Hashtag used for confirmation of safety of individuals, places and so forth.
[79] Hashtag used for evacuation information.
[80] Hashtag used for medical information for disaster victims.

Extract 5.13 Hiroshi's Facebook posts from 11 and 13 March 2011

Hiroshi: *There are many messages with hashtag #prayforjapan, from all over the world. I feel the power of Twitter and the power and warmth of human life. Thank you!*[81]

Hiroshi: *To people of Tohoku, I made the video with messages #prayforjapan from all over the world. I can only do this small thing, but I would be happy if you can share it.*[82]

Hiroshi's use of hashtags indicates the intersections of meso and macro level of online communication. The use of the hashtag #prayforjapan refers to shared feelings of grief and emotional belonging on a more global level, helping users find "similar others" beyond their circle of friends. In the following days, Hiroshi kept writing his digital diary, sometimes posting more than five times per day, as if he was processing what is happening through his writing, just in digital space, imagining the community of similarly affected and emotionally resonated individuals to which he belongs. Online writing is therapeutically beneficial as it facilitates the process of coping with trauma or crisis, thereby opening opportunities for community building (Arthur, 2009). In this way, Hiroshi utilised social media to gratify emotional or affective need, and escapist or the need to reduce tension and stress caused by the disaster.

The case of Hiroshi is an excellent example for how every day social media platforms, such as Facebook, can manifest feelings of communal belonging, through writing a digital narrative for the writer himself, to emotionally cope with the disaster. At the same time, through continuous use of hashtag #prayforjapan, Hiroshi's use of social media extends beyond the interpersonal level of communication, indicating that social media can foster affective connection and a new sense of connection to the regional and national community as a response to the disaster. Moreover, similar trends in the use of English language hashtag #prayforjapan in recent Japanese natural disasters, such as floods in July 2018 and

[81] #prayforjapan のハッシュタグに世界中からメッセージが多数。Twitter のチカラ、そして 人間の命のチカラとあたたかさを感じます。ありがとう。

[82] 東北の人たちへ、世界中からの #PrayForJapan のメッセージ画像を 動画にしてみた。こんなことくらいしかできないけれど、シェアして頂けたら嬉しいです。

the Hokkaido earthquake in September of the same year, indicate that Japan is adjusting to global social media trends.[83]

The following section uses the example of a YouTube community formed during the 3.11 disaster to show the potential of social media to enable individuals who are geographically dispersed and do not know each other in person to experience a sense of belonging to the global community.

5.2.3 Macro Level of Belonging

In addition to Facebook and Twitter, Hiroshi utilised his YouTube channel to post videos with piano music he composed regularly. He posted six videos of his piano composition, on his YouTube channel, in the period from 12 March to 18 March 2011. In the brief introduction below the first video, posted a day following the earthquake, Hiroshi dedicated the video to the people of affected regions throughout Japan, in the hope that it would serve as some relief (see Extract 5.14).

Extract 5.14 Hiroshi's introduction to YouTube video from 12 March 2011

Hiroshi: *It may take some time to go back to everyday life. However, we have people who will support us. Even in Japan, we are willing to join forces to ensure the survival of the people in the Tohoku region and restore it. I made a video of prayers received from all over the world. The bad music is something I composed and played. I've arranged a song called "prayers for children", which I made in the past. If I can help you find inner peace, just a little, it would bring me great pleasure. Please do not push yourself and may you rest well.*[84]

This extract from Hiroshi's introduction to his YouTube music video highlights that Hiroshi's digital engagement was to some extent driven by a need to support affected

[83] At the time of writing, the most recent use of hashtag #prayforjapan was seen after the Kawasaki mass stabbing on 28 May 2019, and Kyoto Animation arson attack on 18 July 2019, showing that its usage has grown beyond the context of natural disasters to encompass crisis situations more generally. Posts using this hashtag can be viewed here: https://twitter.com/search?q=%23prayforjapan&src=typd&lang=en.

[84] 日常に戻るには時間がかかるもしれません。 けれども、私達には応援してくれる人たちがいます。日本国内でも、東北の方々の生存の確保と、復興 に向けて、皆が力を合わせる意志を持っています。 世界中から届いた祈りの画像を、動画にしました。 拙い音楽は私が作曲・演奏したものです。過去に作った「小さな子供のための祈り」という曲を編曲して います。 少しでも、心の平安にお役に立てれば幸いです。 どうか無理をなさらず、ゆっくりとお休みになれますように。

communities and spread awareness of the 3.11 disaster through personalised social media use, which combines various social media platforms with self-generated video content and digital diarising.

Additionally, in his initial video, Hiroshi states that all advertising revenue from YouTube will go to charity to support the reconstruction in the Tohoku region. This shows that he also utilised YouTube as an action-oriented platform by seeking and collecting donations for affected communities. In the context of his YouTube channel activity, Hiroshi's videos received a high number of views and likes from Japanese and worldwide users alike, who subscribed to his YouTube channel and commented below his videos, showing their compassion for the people of Japan and the affected region. In this way, YouTube, as a digital social media platform, facilitated online interaction and discussion, fostering feelings of togetherness and solidarity, and served as a platform for the public display of care, emotions and affective attunement.

Table 5.1 provides an overview of Hiroshi's videos, including their publication date and information about the general outreach of each video (dislikes, likes, number of views and comments).

Table 5.1 Overview of Hiroshi's YouTube videos

Video	Publication date	Dislikes	Likes	Number of views	Total number of comments
Video 1	12 March 2011	3	149	76,813	76
Video 2	13 March 2011	3	57	17,498	12
Video 3	14 March 2011	1	31	8,927	4
Video 4	15 March 2011	0	75	17,993	15
Video 5	16 March 2011	41	1,400	773,599	149
Video 6	18 March 2011	0	42	4,010	25

To further explore how the sense of communal belonging was generated and sustained in this series of YouTube videos, I coded users' comments on six videos posted in 2011. The coded data revealed repeated patterns in the way users reacted to the video and communicated with other users or Hiroshi (as the creator of the content). It also illustrates multi-directional online interaction, giving users the opportunity to feel like a part of a community of fellow users through watching the same video and sharing emotional

support. Hiroshi's YouTube channel reflects the central idea of a shared purpose or common interest that fosters online communities (Rotman & Preece, 2010), which in this case refers to posting user-generated videos, subscribing to the same channel or communicating through written comments.

The first pattern emerging from users' comments reveals that some users immediately shared Hiroshi's videos on other social media platforms or blogs with the aim of reaching a wider audience:

Extract 5.15 Users' comments on Video 1

User H.T.: *I'm late, but I wanted to share the video with as many people as possible, so I introduced it on the blog today. Thank you very much!*[85]

User M.O.: *I put it on two blogs and articles. For today's article, I wrote up and posted the message from the video.*[86]

These and similar comments suggest that other users utilised their social media or blogs as an action-oriented platform for mobilising support, as they shared Hiroshi's YouTube video across social media platforms to circulate awareness of the disaster and invite their friends, followers and other users to engage in collecting donations for the affected region.

The second pattern which emerged from coding is the users' empathic alignment with the affected region, despite being geographically distant from it. Solnit (2009) argues that disaster, as a shared experience of loss, danger and uncertainty, often creates emotional solidarity and empathy among affected individuals. In doing so, it creates altruistic communities, where individuals respond with an enhanced need to help and engage in the community as members of the same society threatened by the disaster (Solnit 2009). In the case of the YouTube community in the context of the 3.11 disaster, users who commented on Hiroshi's videos and interacted with other users online were not necessarily affected by the earthquake, tsunami or nuclear disaster, but they identified emotionally with the experience of the disaster. This emotional alignment of users from all over the world and

[85] 遅くなりましたが、少しでも多くの方と共有したくて、今日ブログで紹介させていただきました。ありがとうございます。
[86] 二つのブログや記事に貼らせて頂きました。今日の記事には、動画中のメッセージを、文章に起して掲載しました。

across Japan suggests the potential of social media to facilitate the emergence of a new sense of belonging in individuals despite their geographical distance from one another, as the sense of community is built and maintained through shared emotional connection beyond the geographical notion of community (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

For example, one of the users commented on the first video, which Hiroshi posted on 13 March 2011, expressing compassion with the affected region by saying that she cried after she heard about the disaster victims, even though she lives outside Japan. Her contribution to helping affected communities was through supportive and positive messages. As Döveling (2015) observes, emotional support communicated in digital space "may provide an alternative to traditional support channels [for individuals] confronting similar challenges" (p. 106). In reply to User M.B., Hiroshi explains how emotional support from other users helped him to feel less lonely immediately after the earthquake, as he became aware that others were going through similar emotional struggles (see Extract 5.16).

Extract 5.16 Users' comments on Video 1[87]

User M.B: *I've cried a lot when I saw the victims, though I don't know any of them… I don't have money to help, but I have my faith and my heart with you and Japan (-^ o ^-) So, be sure that there's nothing and nobody who can stop love!* ♥

Hiroshi: *Thanks. After the earthquake, I felt loneliness. I was lonely on this planet. But gradually, I found so many messages from abroad. Thank you. We are not alone.*

The third pattern which emerged from the analysis is users' sense of closeness with other members of the YouTube community. For example, one of the users shared updates on earthquake intensity and aftershocks, evoking feelings of collectivity (see Extract 5.17).

[87] Original users' comments are in English

Extract 5.17 Users' comments on Video 1

User S: *Meteorological Agency issued the probability of 70% that aftershocks with a magnitude of 6 will occur within three days from 13 March. Everyone, please take care of each other.*[88]

In this way, User S. perceives YouTube as a space where people stick together as members of the same community of similarly affected people, who need informational and emotional support. Other than transmitting vital information for individuals who are geographically closer to the affected region, in this case, social media also serves to circulate emotional support for those experiencing the same national disaster. Similarly, User K. expressed his affinity for one of the Hiroshi's videos and reminded other users that people in the disaster area still suffer and should not be forgotten, thereby indicating that sentiments of the disaster are felt at the national level. In this way, User K. feels like a member of the same community of fellow Japanese nationals, as he "invites" other users to empathically align with affected communities. In addition to transmission of emotions, the third pattern of responses alludes to the importance of human bonds (*kizuna*) and mutual help at the time of natural disasters, which sustain community feelings, often indicating users' will to do something to help or support the community. Following the idea of imagined communities in a digital space (Gruzd et al., 2011), I found one of the users' comments particularly interesting; it indicated the idea of a community of fellow users drawn together by watching the same social media content (see Extract 5.18).

Extract 5.18 Users' comments on Video 2

User K.M.: *What we can do. Now, like what you're thinking, there are various things I think. Looking at the video, many people have the same feelings and are trying to do something. I feel that's very nice. My heart is warm after watching the video. Thank you very much.*[89]

[88] １３日から３日以内、震度６級の余震確立７０％と解析気象庁だそうです。お互い気をつけましょう。皆さんも！
[89] 私たちにできること。今、思っていることなど、様々なことがあると思います。動画を見ていて、たくさんの人たちが同じ思いで、何かできることをしようとしている。それってとっても素敵なことだなと感じます。動画を見て心がなんだかあたたかくなりました。ありがとうございます。

Hiroshi: *We become a great force if we get together, even though each person is small. I want to continue to do what I can.*[90]

The fourth pattern of comments illustrates users' feelings of solidarity and compassion communicated through prayers in digital space. These served a similar purpose to the commemorative hashtag #prayforjapan: to generate feelings of togetherness and signify the connection with the event. The prayers that users posted on YouTube imply the users' collective need and desire for companionship and support, showing how this social media platform becomes an outlet for the public display of care. The extract below offers some of the examples of digital prayers that YouTube users posted as a reaction to Hiroshi's videos.

Extract 5.19 Users' prayers posted on all YouTube videos

User S.I.: *I'm praying for Japan. Love from Norway.*

User M.E.: *I just lit a candle and prayed! Japan is not alone; Estonia is with you!*

User K.A.: *I pray for peace in Japan. Everyone in Japan, please don't give up!【Taiwan's love】*[91]

User L: *We're praying for Japan 2!!! From Italy <3*

User N.H: *Pray for Japan from Vietnam*

As mentioned earlier, YouTube can serve as an action-oriented platform, but also as space where individuals globally align their emotions, thereby creating a sense of social connectedness even among participants who are geographically distant and not directly affected by the disaster. Expression of emotions, or affect, in the digital realm at a global level can be understood as anonymous emotional bonding, where communities of strangers are brought together around the bonds of sentiment and emotional attachment (Döveling et al., 2018; Papacharissi, 2016). Furthermore, the feature of anonymity of many social media, like Twitter or YouTube, allow individuals to express feelings more freely and comfortably than in direct communication. The anonymous feature of social media is especially relevant

[90] 一人一人は小さくても、みなが集まれば、大きな力に。できることを続けていきたいですね。
[91] 日本の平安を祈ります，日本の皆さん、頑張ってください 【Taiwan's love】

for Japanese social media users, who value personal privacy and are reluctant to share personal feelings and information (see Chapter Two, section 2.7).

In times of crisis or natural disaster, people become emotionally vulnerable, and there is a rise in the individual's need for psychological comfort and social togetherness. In the aftermath of 3.11, the digital, interactive environment of YouTube enabled individuals to express the most fundamental feelings of sadness, relief or anger, and share them with similar others, which consequently created a new sense of belonging to a digital community of users. In the context of 3.11 in Japan, the digital engagement between Hiroshi as the content creator and other YouTube users, while generating only a small number of donations, indicates a significant shift from utilising YouTube as a space of everyday entertainment to using it as a platform for initiating action and practical support.

5.3 Perceptions of "Others" in Digital Space

After an in-depth exploration of participants' affective use of social media, I found it essential to also include participants' perceptions of different online media, social media and curated (*matome*) websites, to examine whether these media have similar potential to traditional mass media forms—television, and newspapers—to foster "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1983).

Chapter Four has already established that participants experience a strong sense of togetherness, through shared viewing experience and sense of liveness, facilitated by television. Social media has created new spaces for perceptions of "others," where social media users, just like audience members and readers, share a consciousness of shared temporal dimension in which they coexist through a simultaneous consumption of media content. With the rise of different social media platforms and real-time mobile phone apps, individuals have vast options for following live updates.

In the context of the 3.11 disaster, many participants referred to the real-time, live feature of social media, usually in a positive tone. As an example, Hideki, who was in Fukushima at the time of 3.11, started checking YouTube for real-time footage posted by other users, useful for understanding the situation:

I started using YouTube videos to sort out what has happened at that time. Since many people took videos with cameras from various places, I could find out what I did not know before, so I started watching videos on YouTube.[92]

Hideki further explains that he started using different social media: Twitter, YouTube, 2channel,[93] to find out what are the views of people from his local community on different issues surrounding Fukushima, especially the issue of radiation levels, its effects and evacuation measures. The awareness of "others" in digital space is especially prominent in Hideki's reference to 2channel, an online bulletin-board service, which he accessed mainly to find out how "others" were talking about his local community in Fukushima:

Many people have comments about the people of Fukushima prefecture. They had comments which never appeared in the news, such as that people in Fukushima are exposed to radiation every day and that the food there is contaminated and cannot be eaten…That was what other people were thinking… I used 2channel to find out what other people think.[94]

This eagerness to find out how other individuals discuss similar issues shows how 2channel, an online community site in Japan, with an anonymous feature and open access, can facilitate community feelings, where users seek others with similar needs and concerns, thereby sharing the collective awareness that they all follow the same news on the 3.11 disaster. Furthermore, checking other users' comments helped Hideki evaluate the accuracy of information by comparing different users' reactions and comments, as they offer a broad range of alternatives and views.

Similarly, Hiroshi explains how on Twitter, besides checking the news, people like to show their reactions, share information or gain more followers. As mentioned earlier in this

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[92] あの時何があったのかっていうのを整理、自分でするために YouTube の動画を活用するようになりましたね。いろんな人がビデオカメラでいろんな場所でとってるので、自分が知らなかったことを知れたりするので、YouTube の動画をみたりするようになりましたね。

[93] 2channel (Japanese: 2 ちゃんねる) is an anonymous online Japanese textboard community that was established in 1999.

[94] 福島県人に対してのいろんな人がコメント持ってるんですね。あの人たちが被放射線されているんですが、あそこの食べ物おせんされていてたべれないですとか、決してこうニュースで取り上げられないようなコメントが持ってるね…それがほかの人どう考えるか…他者がどう思ってるかっていう、知るために 2channel を使った

chapter, Hiroshi turned to Twitter to check other users' reactions and comments, after his train stopped due to the earthquake:

> I connected on the internet and searched on Twitter… I searched for news on Google and checked Twitter to see what everyone is talking about.[95]

Following the concept of "shared temporality" (Anderson, 1983), Hiroshi shows awareness of other social media users who follow the same news. Moreover, checking other users' comments and reactions on Twitter helped Hiroshi understand the severity of the situation and collect more information real-time, as the disaster was unfolding. Earlier in this chapter, I explained that Hiroshi noticed changes in the way he utilised social media to document his experience of 3.11 disaster in the digital diary, create music videos on YouTube and initiate help and support for affected communities through donations, hashtags, and YouTube videos (see section 5.2.2.2. of this chapter). This kind of digital engagement reflects Hiroshi's awareness of fellow users, as he often exhibited a sense of shared temporality in digital space.

Another participant, Wataru, goes online to read other users' comments and opinions, mainly to check information from mass media. This kind of inter-media use shows how social media is perceived as an alternative to mass media, but also as space where individuals who follow the same media content can share their viewing experience, thereby creating a sense of belonging to a community of fellow users (Couldry et al., 2010; Scannell, 1988, 1996; Takahashi, 2010a; Yoshimi, 2003). Furthermore, Wataru sees a positive side of online media to help an individual become aware that there are "others" who share the same struggle and grief, and it is through that common awareness of "others" and the notion of shared pain that social media can help individuals recover from disaster:

> *The good thing is, after all, because we can heal sorrow and think that many other people have their grief, I guess it will be hard to recover if you only grieve inside*

[95] 携帯でインタネットでつながって、Twitter が検索したら…ニュースを Google で検索して、Twitter でみんな何にしゃべてるだろうのためにやって。

yourself, or people in the area… I think that sharing sadness will empower that person to recover.[96]

Wataru's comment reflects the idea that social media are challenging the role of traditional mass media, by making shared emotions and affect more visible (Döveling et al., 2011; Pantti et al., 2012), and serving as a therapeutic space for exchanging emotional support, which help individuals recover from the disaster.

Following the idea of "imagined communities" in a digital space, I found it essential to include participants' references to shared viewing experience through online news portals, which most participants used in the context of disaster. Curated (*matome*) websites, such as NewsPicks or YahooNews, are top rated among participants who check the news on the internet, mainly accessing these portals to check other users' comments and opinions, which help them learn more about the topic or understand news better.

NewsPicks, which was often mentioned among participants as their general source of news, was launched in Japan in 2013 as a social media outlet, created with a subscription-based model, featuring reporting from its own and Japanese media outlets, as well as international publications. As a curated news platform, NewsPicks allows users to gather news related to the topics of their interest and share articles along with their opinions, which are followed by discussion threads. One of the unique features of NewsPicks is that the user cannot interact with other users or reply to their comments but can only comment on a news article. In this way, each article has a stream of thoughts and immediate reactions of everyone who is reading the news story, which provides a variety of different opinions. This collective news watching in digital space extends on media sociology theories on shared viewing experience (Ellis, 2007) and shared temporality (Anderson, 1983) through TV watching, suggesting that sense of communal belonging to the same community of fellow users, can be achieved in digital space, through interaction on news portals. In other words, traditional mass media and non-traditional online media both have similar potential for creating a sense of belonging to a community of audience members and users, by

[96] 良い点は… やっぱり悲しみを癒されるっていうことは自分の悲しみを多くの人もしてもらっていうことでもあると思うので、悲しいこと自分中だけしかなかったりとかその地域の人だけの中しかなかったら、やっぱりすごく立ち上がるのに大変というか…悲しみを共有することでその人の立ち上がる力になると思います。

sharing collective awareness of shared temporal dimension through consumption of media content and seeking out others with similar needs and concerns.

I had not heard about NewsPicks until I talked to Naoko, who uses this portal mainly to check what other people think about specific issues, which also helps her check the reliability of information and find a more detailed explanation on a specific matter. She made two references to "shared viewing experience" about NewsPicks, which reflects Naoko's perception of "others" who follow the same media content. In the context of general and everyday media use, Naoko first referred to NewsPicks (and Facebook) when explaining which media form she enjoys the most:

> *There is NewsPicks, where there is various news and where various people and experts comment on news… I think that is very interesting, so I read the news.*[97]

Shortly after asking Naoko to elaborate on the reasons behind her preference for NewsPicks, she explained:

> *Since it sometimes happens that I don't know which information and news alone is right on NewsPicks, it is fun to be able to see news and how various people are watching it.*[98]

In the following interviews, I noticed that some of the participants who use these news portals, made similar references, like Ryota and Eiji, who both access NewsPicks to read other users' comments, which helps them understand and learn more about a particular topic. In the context of everyday media use, Ryota refers to NewsPicks as one of the primary sources of news, and other favourite media, after Facebook. He explains that rather than just checking news on NewsPicks, what he finds the most enjoyable about this portal is the ability to see both news and other users' comments, which help him form an opinion on the specific matter and learn something new. Similarly, Eiji accesses NewsPicks news

[97] NewsPicks っていうのがあって、そこには色んな色んなニュースとかニュースに対して色んな人がコメントをつける名人とか…それはすごく面白いなと思って、読んでます。

[98] NewsPicks は情報、ニュースだけでは何が正しいかわからないこともあったりするのでそれをいろんな人たちがどういう風に見てるかみたいなのはニュースと一緒に見れるのが面白かったですよ。

portal to check news, but more importantly, to pick up other users' comments on the news he is reading. Eiji notes that this kind of news collecting is very convenient because he can stay informed, without having to search and gather news by himself.

This sense of shared news checking experience is particularly relevant because, through internet news websites, people can gather knowledge and insights on a range of topics, and connect with fellow users, even if they have never met each other in a real world. Participants can form or reconstruct their opinion of the news by reading the comment section and other users' feedback on the article. In this way, the interactive nature of online news portals enables participants to gain more comprehensive experience and general perception of news, drawing on other users' ideas and different viewpoints and perspectives to form their own opinion.

5.4 New Online Sociality and Sense of Communal Belonging

The general theoretical literature that establishes the link between social media use and a sense of social connection is inconclusive with regard to how different online media platforms foster the individual's sense of attachment to local and regional communities in the context of the 3.11 disaster. Focusing on one of the three central research questions: How does online media use evoke or intensify an individual's sense of communal belonging in the context of the 3.11 disaster? this chapter has explored this through a multi-level model of social media use.

Findings show that the purpose of social media has significantly changed with the 3.11 disaster, as participants manifest diverse ways of utilising digital space to disseminate and obtain information as well as socio-emotional support. The interactive and open digital environment has enabled participants to experience a sense of connection to a local, regional and imagined community, through multi-level interaction with "similar others," based on the shared experience and sentiment of the disaster, and relational rather than spatial proximity.

The study used theories of online communities (Preece, 2000; Rheingold, 1993) and affect cultures (Döveling et al., 2018; Papacharissi, 2016), to develop a framework for examining how participants experienced their sense of communal belonging—i.e. by utilising different

social media platforms for informational and socio-emotional support—in the context of the 3.11 disaster. Consequently, findings suggest that, like television, social media significantly contributed to participants' sense of social connection, with online communication moving across levels and platforms, and different notions of community, which were intensified immediately after 3.11. To examine how social media generates affective communities, I analysed individuals' use of social media through the three-level framework of Döveling et al. These levels often cannot be separated, as the results presented in this chapter indicate the intersections of micro and meso, and meso and macro levels.

Furthermore, for exploring how Japanese individuals utilised online media in a disaster context, it is necessary to rely on uses and gratifications theory, which suggest that individuals seek out media that can gratify their immediate needs: cognitive, affective, escapist and integrative (see Chapter Two) (Katz et al., 1974; Rubin, 2009). It is essential to consider that disasters are uncertain and disruptive events, and often evoke or intensify the need for receiving fundamental information (cognitive), the need for social togetherness (integrative), and emotional experience (affective), which also affect how individuals utilise different media forms to address specific needs. Following Chapter Four, which examined how television was used to gratify different needs during the 3.11 disaster, Chapter Five takes a similar approach to examine different functions of social media and participants' motivations for using social media in the same context. This chapter suggests three intersecting levels of social media use, and findings are confident that each level of social media use, from small-scale (micro) to the most global (macro), served to fulfil participants' different needs, intensified by the 3.11 disaster.

Starting with the micro level, social media proved to be a vital alternative tool for disaster communication, establishing lifelines and providing an immediate connection to family and friends. For the private, interpersonal exchange of safety-related information and establishing contact with their close ties, most participants accessed homegrown social media networks, Line and Mixi, as well as regular email. This kind of social media use indicates that participants were eager to fulfil integrative over cognitive needs in the

immediate aftermath of the earthquake, and this kind of interaction was much facilitated by close-structured networks such as Line and Mixi.

Facebook and Twitter, as group-oriented social networks, proved to be useful for updates about friends' situation and the dissemination of fundamental local information. A sense of belonging at micro level was formed through emotional discourses between close friends and family members, where social media served as a relief from anxiety for participants immediately after the disaster. The potential of social media to connect participants via affective and integrative relations with their close ties proves to be more beneficial than television which, as Chapter Four established, can provide quasi-mediated interaction with different kind of others, but not direct contact. On another note, in the context of acquiring information, social media, thanks in part to Facebook and Twitter, is perceived as more helpful than television in addressing local concerns, as many participants have noticed.

Participants exhibited both local and regional levels of belonging, as they empathically aligned with the earthquake-affected region despite being geographically far from it. This indicates that participants shift from experiencing personal concern for family and close friends (micro) to the regional level of concern for affected communities (meso). The meso level of online communication highlights the potential of social media sites, such as Facebook and Twitter, to transcend spatial and temporal barriers, enabling emotional bonding between individuals through reading or sharing the digital narrative. This helps individuals cope with the trauma of the disaster and preserve the memory of 3.11 through Facebook memorial narratives or visual archives of YouTube. In the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, participants' Facebook posts indicate that besides the need to exchange or find information, this social media platform was utilised to express affective connection to both local and regional communities. Due to its interactivity and ability to cross spatial boundaries, social media facilitated the emergence of different affective flows and amplified feelings of togetherness, consequently leading to digital affect cultures. This kind of Facebook use shows the overlapping of affective and social integrative needs, as participants referred to the affected region, expressing concern and compassion for regional communities. The desire to gratify the need for social belonging is expressed through the use of Facebook as an action-oriented platform, to trigger local action or donations,

indicating participants' intense feelings of togetherness. Furthermore, utilisation of social media for initiating relief support and community involvement during the 3.11 disaster, show a significant shift in disaster response and communication since 1995 Great Hanshin earthquake, which was mainly facilitated by traditional mass media and exchange of emails over the internet (Tkach-Kawasaki, 2003). Comparatively, the 3.11 disaster has greatly expanded awareness of social media and its potential, enabling people to establish and maintain communication, visualise and co-witness the disaster, learn about the affected region, send aid and quickly coordinate their actions.

Participants' comments and social media posts on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube, show that social media was mainly used to fulfil affective needs and contribute to new forms of expression and sociality in the digital environment. Participants' narratives highlight the changing role of Facebook from an everyday social platform to an online emotional space of interaction, collectivity and transmission of emotions and a new space for mediating rituals of commemoration. Participants' use of social media to commemorate 3.11 in a more visible, personalised and creative manner indicates the shift of emotions and affect from personal to community-oriented space.

Some participants utilised Facebook as a platform for sharing their emotional experience of the disaster with others, thereby addressing both affective and social integrative needs, as they directly or indirectly express emotions and acknowledge the suffering of affected communities. Furthermore, participants' social media use aimed at documenting the experience of the disaster to shift their minds off the disaster news on TV, indicate the escapist or tension release function of social media. After Facebook, Twitter and YouTube proved to be the most used and established social media platforms for addressing affective, integrative and cognitive needs.

Facebook also served as space for an alternative production of knowledge related to radiation levels, as participants found mass media information insufficient and contradictory and initiated collective action to measure radiation and post their results online. Many participants found social media to be a useful communication tool, an alternative source of information, but also a relief from anxiety caused by the constant broadcast of the disaster. The use of Facebook for voicing personal opinion on the nuclear

disaster, radiation and similar topics, shows the overlapping of affective, escapist and cognitive need. The escapist need or tension release need is gratified through joining Facebook groups or similar online communities to discuss significant concerns of the nuclear disaster. The affective need is met through the use of Facebook, which allows individuals to share their emotions, whether they be anger, fear, dissatisfaction, disappointment, or any others; and finally, cognitive need is gratified through discussing existing and circulating new and alternative knowledge in this kind of online community, which could not be found in mass media sources. Most participants perceive social media more favourably than traditional mass media, in the context of 3.11, for its potential to serve as a space for circulating alternative information on nuclear disaster, uplifting messages and socio-emotional support, which might explain the emerging inter-media environment and changes in participant's media use (see Chapter Four, section 4.5)

Participants' use of the hashtag #prayforjapan on Twitter and Facebook highlighted how social media use could generate community feelings, alluding to the collective need for companionship and mutual support, as hashtags help users find "similar others" beyond their circle of friends. The use of hashtags on these social media platforms, fulfils the integrative social need, or the need to be recognised as a member of the community (Summerville, 2018). Moreover, as they invite emotional identification with those affected by the disaster, hashtags can address and fulfil an individual's affective need.

This chapter used the example of one of the participant's YouTube channel to think through ways in which individuals emotionally engage in the online community. YouTube's interactivity facilitates global alignment and affective attunement of users, drawn together by the shared sentiment and experience of 3.11, or just by the fundamental need for psychological comfort and social togetherness, regardless of geographical distance. Besides emotional support, the YouTube community was another way to initiate financial donations, as the video ad and viewing revenues were turned into charitable donations for the affected region. This implies that YouTube can be utilised as an effective action-oriented platform, rather than just an outlet for public display of affect. The macro level of online communication harnesses the power of social media to establish global affective communities; in this context, YouTube became an outlet for expressing solidarity and

aligning emotions globally through supportive and emotional discourse, prayers, and symbols of solidarity such as hashtags. Macro level social media use shows how YouTube, as a social media platform, can be utilised to address and fulfil social integrative and affective needs. Through watching and commenting on YouTube videos, other users could fulfil the need to voice their feelings, reduce anxiety and stress caused by the disaster and share emotional support. Besides this, YouTube served as space where users can come together, sharing similar sentiments of the disaster and acknowledging the suffering of affected communities.

However, as research has shown, feelings of togetherness and solidarity manifested on social media can fade and transform over time (Thomas, Cary, Smith, Spears, & McGarty, 2018). What is notable in the context of my study is that participants reflected on their social media use, suggesting that a short-term, ephemeral sense of communal belonging was intensified in the immediate aftermath of the 3.11 disaster, but without strong continuity in the following days. In the case of Hiroshi, the only participant who was already a regular social media user at the time of 3.11, we can see a more consistent use of social media throughout all three phases of the 3.11 disaster. Therefore, more research is necessary to provide in-depth understanding of how communal feelings are maintained in digital space, and how they change or fade over time.

While this study focuses on the positive uses and benefits of social media in a disaster context, it is important to acknowledge that negative aspects do exist. Social media's convenience, open access and lack of gatekeeping mean that the diffusion of rumours can be more rapid than in traditional mass media, which can cause significant confusion, as was the case with the Twitter posts that spread unfounded rumours about chemically contaminated rain in the week following the 3.11 earthquake (Takayasu et al. 2015; see also Umejima, Miyabe, Aramaki, & Nadamoto, 2011). The reliance on social media in the context of the 3.11 disaster, as findings show, is predominantly due to social media's potential to facilitate communication between friends and other users, fulfilling the need for social connection and socio-emotional support. It is important to note that almost all participants are aware that the gatekeeping process is essential to prevent the flow of misinformation and rumours, which they perceive as a negative side of social media.

Participants found social media less reliable during 3.11, because of the confusion and scepticism caused by information overload, different flows of information and the overall feeling that social media and news website feeds are filled with too-opinionated and biased information. More thorough examination of these issues and individual perceptions of online media credibility will be given in the following chapter (see Chapter Six, section 6.2.2).

Chapter Five also aimed at extending Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," to explore how social media use is closely tied to the development of a sense of shared temporality within a community, through simultaneous consumption of media content (Anderson, 1983, p. 30). Findings suggest that certain features of social media, such as interactivity, anonymity and real-time nature of Twitter, 2channel or YouTube, contributed to new perceptions of "others" in a digital space. Most participants utilised social media to seek other users with similar concerns and needs for information, social and emotional support, thereby perceiving social media as a space for the free articulation of feelings, concerns, and relief from anxiety. The real-time feature of social media and its immediacy is perceived as beneficial for fulfilling participants' cognitive needs, for timely information and understanding the overall scope of the disaster, as well as providing instant updates and keeping participants informed. The interactive and open nature of social media platforms, especially Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, facilitate the gratification of a cognitive, affective and social integrative need, as participants seek others who can provide information or new knowledge on the situation, and who have similar needs for social sharing of emotions. Additionally, these platforms are perceived as a site for managing negative emotions, thereby gratifying participants' need for stress and tension release, also known as an escapist function of social media.

Findings extend on "imagined communities" by showing participants' strong references to "shared viewing experience" and awareness of other users in digital space, through reading their comments and feedback on articles on the online news portal NewsPicks, which participants mainly use to gather knowledge, insights, check the reliability of news, and even construct personal opinions. The popularity of curated (*matome*) websites (NewsPicks) and digital textboard community (2channel) along with other users' Twitter

feeds, shows that participants' primary motivation for using these digital platforms, apart from the need for information, is the need for social connection (integrative need). Besides gaining new knowledge on different topics, most participants access curated (*matome*) websites for shared viewing experience: to read other users' comments and compare different point of views, which help them in evaluating medium credibility. These participants did not necessarily argue that they belong to a specific online community. They did not directly engage in joining groups and posting their own opinions but went online to read discussions and comments shared by other users. This, however, does not mean that participants did not find a sense of social connection online, because they still expressed awareness of other users in digital space and relied on other users' comments and opinions as a reference guide to decide what is relevant and reliable. These online activities, although not direct and explicit, still facilitated the participants' sense of communal belonging and had their social purpose.

The findings of the study expand on the concept of "shared temporality" (Anderson, 1983; Gruzd et al., 2011), and shared viewing experience through TV watching (Ellis, 2007), as participants exhibit a sense of connection to a community of fellow users through digital interaction on news portals, and suggests that what unites users online is the potential of online media to offer opportunities for meeting similar others and create or extend social networks, rather than just consuming content that media provides. Extending on the uses and gratifications theory (Katz et al., 1974), findings suggest that online media, like mass media, serves the individual's affective and integrative needs, such as finding emotional and social support, relief from stress and anxiety, and safe space for the free articulation of emotions, expression and personal narratives.

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter sought to examine how online media use generates a new form of affective community, in the context of the 3.11 disaster. I have shown how social media use fostered a sense of social connection in the immediate aftermath of the 3.11 disaster, even among geographically distant individuals. This sense of social belonging was produced through a combination of user consumption and production of media content and the potential of social media to enable users to meet similar others through its specific features. The

Japanese case study confirms existing findings in media literature regarding social media use during disasters and the manifestation of affective communities in digital space.[99] These communities develop through emotive online discourses, empathic alignment with the affected region and activating a sense of communal belonging in geographically dispersed individuals. Social media facilitated multi-level online communication and interaction, serving a kaleidoscope of needs for disaster communication, local action, psychological comfort and social togetherness.

Additionally, the Japanese case study sheds light on a new kind of online sociality among Japanese social media users, moving beyond the private, one-on-one communication supported by homegrown social media platforms to the more open and group-oriented online communication fostered by Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In the context of the 3.11 disaster, these social media platforms generated affective connection to communities and supported the free articulation of emotions, helping individuals cope with the disaster, initiate collective action and build community consciousness.

After analysing the role of online and mass media in a disruptive media event, in a way where media helps individuals experience a sense of social connection, it is essential to include another concept which has a significant impact on media use—media credibility. The following chapter aims to examine participants' perceptions of media credibility, to answer the third research question: How do shifting levels of trust in media intersect with changes in an individual's media usage pattern?

[99] Whether or not there might be a sense of communal belonging that is distinctive to Japanese users is an area worthy of consideration. However, a discussion of this is beyond the scope of this paper. For a comparative analysis of Japanese and US users' interactions in digital space, and how culture influences the use of Twitter, see Acar and Deguchi (2013), and for characteristics of Japanese Twitter users see Akioka et al. (2010). For analysis of social media use among Japanese youth, see Takahashi (2010, 2014)

6

Perceptions of Media Credibility

6.1 Media Credibility and Disaster

Analysis of interviews and media usage of participants in this study highlighted that in the context of the 3.11 disaster, individuals turned to both mass media and online media to seek informational and socio-emotional support, demonstrating the role of media use in fostering individuals' sense of connection to multiple communities. It was found that individuals utilise media in times of disaster to experience a sense of social connection and that they differentiate between the role of traditional mass media (television, newspapers) and non-traditional online media (social media and *matome* websites) (see Chapter Four and Chapter Five). In examining participants' perceptions of media, it is essential to include another key concept with significant implications for media use and reliance on media in the context of 3.11 disaster. That concept is media credibility.

This chapter aims to address the third research question: How do shifting levels of trust in media intersect with changes in the individual's media usage pattern, in the context of 3.11 and present day? First, I will examine participants' perceptions of the credibility of mass media and online media in the context of the 3.11 disaster, and the implications this has for shifts, changes and dynamics in their media use. In this chapter, I draw on previous media credibility research which maintains that media use is one of the most important underlying factors of media credibility (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Westley & Severin, 1964) and further, that in time of disaster, exposure to inconsistent news and reports has a significant impact on people's perception of media credibility (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). After examining perceptions of media credibility, I will examine changes in information seeking and media use in the context of the present day, precisely the reasons why participants assign greater credibility to particular media and how that affects participants' preference for media forms. I adopt the view that social media has a critical role in communicating risk and disaster response, but the credibility of social media is somewhat questionable due to the fast, unregulated flow of information on the internet (Lachlan et al., 2014a; Lachlan et al., 2014c), its diverse sources, as well as shifting

role of "gatekeepers" from producers to consumers (Westerman et al., 2014). This often makes people look for information from official and checked sources (Lin et al., 2016) such as television.

6.1.1 Communication Gaps and Information Needs

The 3.11 disaster revealed many shortcomings in Japan's mass media organisations and government, the main problem, arguably, being the communication gap between local and central government, TEPCO and media institutions and their contradictory reports disclosed to the public (Funabashi & Kitazawa, 2012; Hobson, 2015). The lack of communication from the government's side led to mass media promoting the view that the situation in Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Plant was stable and under control (McCarthy, 2014, p. 185) (see Chapter Two, section 2.7). Delivering information to the general public about levels of radiation was especially problematic shortly after the explosion in the nuclear plant. The Japanese Nuclear Energy Safety Organization informed the public that the radioactivity level was just 10 percent of that during the Chernobyl accident. However, due to the high amount of radioactive materials in the environment, on 12 April 2011, government officials raised the severity level of the nuclear accident, from 5 to 7 on the International Nuclear Event Scale. This consequently led to the extension of the radiation exclusion zone from 20km to the 30–50km range. The government's sudden decision to raise the classification of radiation levels and expand the exclusion zone only confused people, who turned to YouTube and other social media platforms to confirm or challenge information provided by the mass media. The then Japanese Prime Minister, Naoto Kan, kept assuring the public that there was no need to panic because the radiation released from reactors was not an immediate threat to public health and that the situation was slowly stabilising in the affected areas.

The inability of government, TEPCO, and national media to accurately communicate information and educate the public (Hobson, 2015), subsequently created confusion among citizens who, without prior knowledge on the levels of radiation, could not understand whether the reported levels of radiation were dangerous or not, or whether and in which direction they should leave. Further, the lack of transparency in mass media coverage of the nuclear explosion and levels of radiation resulted in a growing mistrust of the public who

turned to other sources for information. Many individuals turned to YouTube, where there was an abundance of videos of the nuclear explosion taken from foreign news broadcasters (Pacchioli, 2013). The footage of the explosion on YouTube reflects the capacity of social media to compensate for the lack of reliable information in mass media. This lack of reliable information had specific implications on individuals' perceptions of media credibility and cultivated their growing distrust in media institutions**.**

Research has shown that the levels of trust in media have significantly decreased since the 3.11 disaster (Aldrich, 2012; Newman et al., 2016). However, little attention has been paid to in-depth investigation of present-day perceptions of trust within the inter-media environment that emerged with the 3.11 disaster. This chapter aims to follow through by exploring this more fully.

6.2 Rethinking Media Credibility in the Context of 3.11

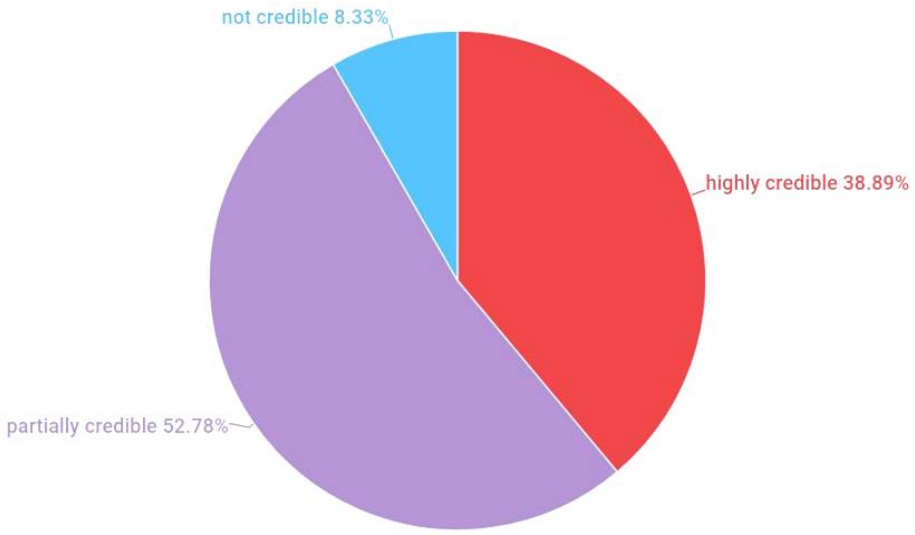
6.2.1 Perceptions of Traditional Mass Media

The primary source of news for most participants immediately after the great 2011 earthquake was television, often complemented with social media and news websites or used as a sole source of news (see Chapter Four, Figure 4.1). As noted in Chapter Four, the liveness of live broadcasts and familiarity of television as an everyday medium significantly contributed to participants' sense of social and national togetherness in this crisis. Findings suggest that television is still used as a primary and relevant source of news, although challenged by the role of online media. Still, around 22 of the 38 participants I interviewed, expressed negative perceptions of television during 3.11, regarding its efficiency, balance, trust and bias, which imposes a question that this section will examine: How do participants talk about the trust and credibility of media in the context of the 3.11 disaster?

Firstly, almost all participants—36 of them—made references to mass media when talking about the credibility of the news source they used immediately after the earthquake and in the following week. A larger proportion of participants, about 92 percent, find TV to be credible to some extent. Their opinions in regard to this can be divided into two groups. The first group is composed of those participants (about 39 percent) who find television to

be a highly credible source of news due to its liveness and immediacy (see Figure 6.1). Concerning demographic features, there are no significant disparities between younger and older age groups of participants in this group, who perceive TV's live broadcast as highly credible. The second group of participants (about 53 percent) find live television broadcasts reliable but show a lack of certainty when it comes to the mass media's coverage of the explosions and events that happened in the week following the earthquake and tsunami (see Figure 6.1). In this group, there is a slightly larger proportion of participants who belong to the 20–29 and 30–39 age groups showing higher scepticism towards news and media coverage of the nuclear disaster. One of the reasons for this may be that the most significant demographic of the main social media platforms in Japan are younger users, in their 20s or 30s (see Chapter Two, section 2.7), who already have established use of online media, and have other alternatives to check and challenge mass media news on the nuclear disaster.

Figure 6.1 Perceptions of television's credibility in the context of the 3.11 disaster



Early studies on media credibility indicate that the view "seeing is believing" is one of the most common reasons for selecting television as the primary source of news (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986). More recent studies on audience perspectives on trust in the media similarly indicate that the liveness and rawness of television gives people confidence that

what they see on television is true, which suggests that television is perceived to be less open to manipulation than social media or written text (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). Participants who found television reliable during the disaster refer to the authenticity of the live image, the flow of audio-visual content in real-time, which helps them ensure that there is no information that is not revealed and what they see on TV is real. For example, when I asked Hana if she trusted TV during the 3.11 disaster, she explained:

> *It was quite like a movie, how can I say… flowing, because the media conveyed what was happening, and not the instant picture.*[100]

Similarly, Fuji refers to the liveness and real-time nature of television, which makes information factual and trustworthy, as reporters deliver news in real-time and directly from the disaster site (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). Fuji explains that the picture does not lie, and she is confident about finding facts through a live broadcast. Rather than saying whether she trusts the TV or not, Fuji takes the live news as facts, and she illustrates it through the example of watching the live broadcast of the helicopter flying over the nuclear plant, which she found factual and credible and which helped her understand the situation.

> *Yes, I thought it was reliable. A video image does not lie. Rather than saying I believe it or not, I have to accept that video image is a fact. It is not that I can trust what people in the company are saying, but I took it as a fact because the person is in position to say that this kind of thing occurred in the nuclear power plant, such as the part from the helicopter.*[101]

Most participants refer to television as highly credible immediately after the earthquake and tsunami. Besides liveness and vividness of images and the sense of witnessing disaster through live broadcast, Naoko compares live TV broadcast with news commentators,

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[100] それはムービー結構、なんていう、ながれて、あのう瞬間的なお写真じゃなくて、実際に動いているものをメディア伝えられたので。

[101] はい、信頼できると思いました。映像には、嘘はない。信じてるかどうかというよりは、映像としては事実を伝えてるん、そのでてくる、その会社の人たちがいってることが信頼できるかということではなくて、この人がこういうことを言う立場いている、原発でこういうことが起きてるって、ヘリコプターからのぶんとかはそれは事実として、受け止めました。

saying that she only trusts news which conveys facts and is rarely manipulated, or as she puts it:

> *Because so much information comes through, I guess I can trust TV. Regarding the earthquake disaster, immediately after, right, there is no need to lie, because the information is more important than anything, so I trust it.*[102]

As discussed in Chapter Four, live coverage of the disaster created a sense of immediate contact with other members of the audience, who watched the same news simultaneously (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). For some participants, this simultaneous reception of news and awareness of shared social realities and experience of the 3.11 disaster becomes a crucial aspect in perceiving television as a credible medium. Takahiro explains that in such an emergency, national audience members should not have a preference for TV stations, because they cover the same news, at about the same time:

> *For example, um the Fukushima plant… umm, that explosion… the steam rising, there was a constant live broadcast. The explosion was simultaneously broadcast all over the country, so at that time, I did not feel like the information was hidden.*[103]

From these examples, it can be argued that live broadcast of the disaster is trusted more than later delivered news and, as some participants added, written text or comments in news media. The high levels of trust come from the notion that the moving screen images and audio-visual material show the actual information through the simultaneous reception of the same news and the sense of witnessing the disaster.

The role of television as a familiar medium and official source that participants can rely on for accurate and credible news is the reason for perceiving television as a credible medium in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake. One of the key themes emerging from

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[102] たくさんの情報が入ってくるので、テレビは信頼できるかな、震災に関しては直後ですよね、震災の直後はうそのつく理由でもないし、何よりも大事な情報なので、それだけ信頼しています

[103] 例えば、あの福島原発の… あの爆発も… あの水蒸気上がってところが、ずっと中継があったんで… ああいうことも全国に同時中継で爆発全部なまでうつしてたし、その時何か情報を隠すみたいなことは感じなかったですね。

participants' responses is the trust invested in certain brands, such as NHK, which was often compared with commercial broadcasters that participants found to be less reliable. NHK, the public broadcaster, is seen as the most reliable for delivering first-hand, up-to-date information on the earthquake, where participants perceive NHK as the familiar source they always turn to in time of crisis (see Chapter Two, section 4.2).

NHK, as the sole public broadcaster, sometimes described as the voice of Japan, traditionally serves as the platform by which Japan speaks to the nation and the world (Cunnigham, 2011). Serving as a window to the nation, NHK has historically reported on important national events, some of which are: Emperor Akihito's marriage in 1959, the Olympic Games in 1964, Emperor Hirohito's death in 1989, the Great Hanshin earthquake in 1995 and many others. In this way, NHK had a significant role in providing a sense of the shared experience of watching important national media events, where viewers imagine themselves to be connected as members of the same society (Couldry, 2003). NHK has historically and culturally been established as a national medium, providing a wide range of programs and news at fixed times, following a regular programming schedule, which significantly underpins the habitual use of TV in Japan (Yoshimi, 2003). Besides prompt and balanced coverage of the 3.11 disaster, participants refer to NHK as a habitual source to which they turn for first news and updates, which indicate that participants' perception of NHK as credible does not only come from the visual image, liveness and accuracy but positive personal experience and trust which has been earned over many years.

Shinji and Atsushi perceive NHK watching as a communal norm among Japanese people in time of disaster (see Chapter Four, section 4.2). Other participants, like Kaori, found NHK the most reliable at the time because she considered it to be the only neutral broadcast with balanced news content and reliable information. She also mentions commercial broadcasters, which, unlike NHK, had somewhat repetitive news and biased focus. One of the reasons for biased news content and uniformity in reporting is the high concentration of ownership in Japanese mass media, where five major commercial media conglomerates own newspapers and broadcast stations through cross-ownership (see Chapter Two, section 2.4.4). Additionally, participants' claims of bias and sensationalism in commercial broadcast can be understood by looking at differences between public and commercial

broadcasters in the focus of disaster reporting. In the context of 3.11, the focus of commercial broadcasters was primarily on sensationalist reporting which can bring higher ratings, such as high-impact images of the earthquake, building fires in and rescue operations (Tanaka, 2013). NHK, as a public institution mandated to disaster prevention, focused more on keeping the public informed about safety measures, tsunami warnings, evacuation sites, to protect lives and property and help people in the disaster area (Tanaka, 2013).

Another critical reason for trusting television at the time of the 3.11 disaster is participants' confidence in television as a verified, professional source of news. It is perceived as the opposite of social media, which is trusted less than television due to its reliance on individually interpreted opinions that can affect the accuracy and reliability of information (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). Gatekeeping is the standard process in traditional news formats, such as TV or print, in which the creator of the content decides which information will be given out and in what way it will be presented (Westerman, Spence, & Van Der Heide, 2011). The gatekeeping process through which information is filtered for publication and broadcasting is often the reason participants state confidence in the credibility of mass media over social media. In explaining the reason behind the preference for television as a source of information during the 3.11 disaster, Chieko makes a comparison between TV and social media (Facebook):

> *Of course, Facebook provides information, but precisely because it is Facebook, I do not know whether the information is accurate or not because each individual writes it. It is good as a communication tool, but I am not sure if it is appropriate for information dissemination. That is why I trust TV… The information dissemination is at least based on pre-established rules, so in such cases, I can probably trust it.*[104]

[104] もちろん、Facebook は情報発信するけど、Facebook こそ正しい情報かどうかわからない、各個人が書いて発しているから。連絡でもツールとしていい、だけど、情報発信としては適切かどうかわからない。だから、テレビはある程度… 一応ルールに基づいた情報発信されているもので、ああいう場合では多分信頼できたとそれしか信じることができない

The other participants who found television reliable at the time of the 3.11 disaster believe that TV's reliability comes from the immediate reception of visual images but are not entirely sure of the credibility of television due to insufficient coverage of the nuclear disaster in the week following the quake. Due to confusion and inconsistent information on radiation, evacuation and the overall scope of the disaster, many participants feel that information was hidden from the public, controlled by the government or inadequately communicated by mass media. Because of the abundance of differing and sometimes contradictory information on the nuclear disaster, it was hard to tell whether information was accurate and reliable. Participants seem to reference the same event, the nuclear disaster, as a turning point for sparking some level of distrust in mass media.

Kenjiro used television as his primary source of news on the 3.11 disaster, perceiving NHK as extremely useful for its instant and live updates in the immediate aftermath of earthquake and tsunami. However, after the explosion at the nuclear plant, Kenjiro complemented television watching with internet and international media sources, because he felt that Japanese mass media was hiding critical information on the radiation levels and overall risks of the nuclear disaster:

> *In the foreign media there was like a predicted map showing where radioactive substances would be dispersed in the wind direction, but I wonder why Japanese media did not do the same? I think I lost my trust in Japanese media after that. Information was given in foreign media… Japanese media did not release information… everyone was really worried.*[105]

Although Kenjiro felt that NHK was neutral in covering necessary information on earthquake and tsunami, without the sensationalist dimension found on some commercial TV stations, he is convinced that the Japanese mass media, including NHK, did not utilise the SPEEDI system[106] to release accurate data on radiation levels, which helps people

[105] そこで外国のメディアにはあのう… 風向きで放射線物質の飛んでる… こう予想図みたるのが出てるのに、どうしての日本のメディアはあれを出さないのか。あとに、日本のメディアに信頼を失ったと思います。外国のメディアは出してる情報…日本のメディアは出してない情報… 皆本当に不安でした。

[106] A computer system utilised during a nuclear disaster to predict dispersions of radioactive substances and help people evacuate to safe area. The government and mass media in Japan did not make use of SPEEDI which consequently led to the absence of accurate information to the public and people evacuating to places with high levels of radiation.

evacuate to safe areas. I could feel the disappointment in Kenjiro's voice when he reflected on the particular story about the residents of Iitate village in Fukushima prefecture, who stayed in the areas with extremely high levels of radiation, because the evacuation was delayed, which the media did not cover. Kenjiro concludes that the Japanese mass media failed to release critical data and fulfil their responsibility to provide detailed, unbiased and independent coverage of the disaster (McNeill, 2014), which made him question its reliability and gradually lose trust, turning to alternative sources—international media and internet:

> *The power of the state suppresses mass media… rather than being put under control, media is being watched carefully. If you report on something unwanted, you will be dismissed. There is no independence, which is dangerous.*[107]

Due to an established habit of watching television, Kenjiro still uses TV as the primary source of news, although he is aware that there is a need for more independence in reporting in Japanese mass media.

The gradual loss of trust and disappointment in Japanese mass media was also voiced by other participants, who felt that accurate and critical information was not adequately communicated to the public. Takuya agrees that television delivered useful, real-time, factual information on the earthquake and tsunami, but after the nuclear explosion, TV broadcast was repetitive and one-sided, propagating the government's view that the situation in the nuclear plant is under control and only partially covering the nuclear disaster (McCarthy, 2014), which made him lose trust in television.

With regards to the media coverage of the 3.11 nuclear disaster, there was a minority of specialist reporters who had technical knowledge about radiation risks and nuclear disaster (Friedman, 2011). Takuya also mentions that he could hardly understand information on the nuclear disaster without background knowledge, so he turned to alternative sources, social media and internet, to educate himself. Takuya mentions two significant changes in his

[107] マスメディアは国家権力によって抑えられっちゃう… だいぶそのコントロールされているよりは睨まれている。望まないような報道すると、首切られるよね。独立性はないよね。それは非常に危ないですよね。

media use: first, he stopped reading *Nikkei Shimbun* due to its controlled coverage and promotion of the nuclear industry, which he is firmly against. Second, he completely stopped watching and trusting television, which, in his opinion, failed to deliver unbiased and neutral views free from government control and ad agency sponsorship.

After losing trust in mass media, Takuya utilised Facebook to circulate information on the radiation levels in his hometown in Saitama, a city located around 30km north of central Tokyo, that he measured himself with a Geiger counter. He concludes by saying that Japanese mass media is biased and strongly linked to political parties and sponsored by advertising agencies, which significantly affects its impartiality and the neutrality of its content (Galbraith & Karlin, 2016; Gill et al., 2013; Kingston, 2012). Therefore, Takuya could only check information on different sources and decide which one is credible, as he notes: "*There is nothing that can be done.*"[108] This phrase "*shōganai*," which is used among other participants, reflects their view that Japanese mass media is unlikely to re-think the focus of reporting and broadcast and provide fair and balanced coverage, which is neutral from government's influence, especially in a time of disaster when there is much negative content.

Similar was the case with Daichi, who was watching television and reading newspapers during the 3.11 disaster. He felt sceptical because mass media did not deliver precise information on radiation levels and its effects on food and water after the explosion. Instead, mass media kept propagating the view that everything is under control and the importance of citizens to support each other in this time of crisis. For Daichi, the most significant impact of mass media was its unbalanced coverage of the disaster. He was particularly critical of the repetitive negative and shocking images, and propaganda of *kizuna* concept. He found the 3.11 mass media coverage overwhelming, saying that he could not take a calm attitude towards media, but just like Takuya concluded that nothing could be done about it. The phrase "*shōganai*" also indicates that any changes in Japanese mass media are beyond people's control.

[108] メディアはしょうがないね

In addition to Takuya's reference to the media's affiliations with political parties and government, Shinji goes even further to explain the role of *kisha* clubs. Also known as "information cartels" (Freeman, 2000), because of the cartelisation process that results from the institutionalisation of the close relationship between official news sources and reporters, *kisha* clubs are the primary mechanism for news gathering in Japan. They are referenced as an institution that contributes to a deficit of critical reporting (Kuga, 2016) by controlling and regulating the information flow (see Chapter Two, section 2.7). Shinji explains that the close relationship of *kisha* clubs with the government significantly affected mass media coverage of the nuclear disaster, concluding that Japanese mass media needs to reflect seriously on these problems. With a well-established network across Japan and strong affiliations with the government, *kisha* clubs make no room for critical and investigative reporting and pose a severe threat to the free flow of information. The censorship of 3.11 nuclear meltdown was one of the main reasons for the significant drop of public trust in mass media, where participants migrated to digital platforms and social media to find answers and alternatives, rethinking the reliability of mass media.

While the participants' responses reflect that 3.11 nuclear disaster was a turning point for their growing distrust towards mass media, there is more confidence in the sourcing and fact-checking through which mass media can verify facts and support claims with evidence. Kenta, who works at a major commercial network TBS, a TV station based in Tokyo, perceives TV as credible for its checking and filtering of information, confirming that the people who work in TV can never broadcast information which is not previously confirmed and checked. However, although he finds TV credible, Kenta also felt that the government's propaganda of the safety myth and concealing the fact there was a nuclear meltdown is questionable and cannot be lightly trusted, which indicates that working in media has not swayed his personal views. In his response to the question of whether he trusted television during the 3.11 disaster, Kenta explains:

> *Governments announcements, first of all, the nuclear power plant is relatively safe; for two days we have been told that it is safe, it is not a meltdown. I understood*

that it is a considerably dangerous situation, so the government announcement was a bit… it is not a lie, but it is incorrect information.[109]

From the representative examples, discussed in this section, it is evident that participants' trust in TV comes from the visuality of pictures and moving video images and the notion that mass media is professionally edited with fact-checking of content markedly different to the unregulated flow of information on online media. However, participants partially also believed that mass media coverage of the nuclear disaster was sensationalist, insufficient, biased and under tremendous political influence. Participants conclude that Japanese mass media inadequately covered the nuclear disaster. Indeed, the reporting, or lack thereof, of the nuclear meltdown was the main trigger for a strong distrust towards mass media. They mainly refer to the lack of critical, impartial coverage of the nuclear disaster, the poorly communicated levels of radiation, the censoring of information on the nuclear meltdown, the propaganda that the situation is under control and the role of press clubs and many others. As a result, participants show shifts in their media usage patterns, such as no longer watching TV or reducing the time spent watching TV news, cancelling the subscription to newspapers or complementing mass media use with online media—social media and news websites.

In addition to television, participants utilised online media, social media and news websites as alternative channels of communication, which provided more detailed information as the disaster was unfolding (see Chapter Five). However, the need for information was not the only reason for participants' reliance on online sources. Participants recognised the potential of different social media platforms and online news forums to serve as a space for free discussion and social and emotional exchange with other users (see Chapter Five). This also affected the way they perceive online media in terms of its credibility. The next two sections, therefore, move forward to examine how participants talk about online media credibility and explore how online media challenge the role of traditional mass media with regards to trust and credibility.

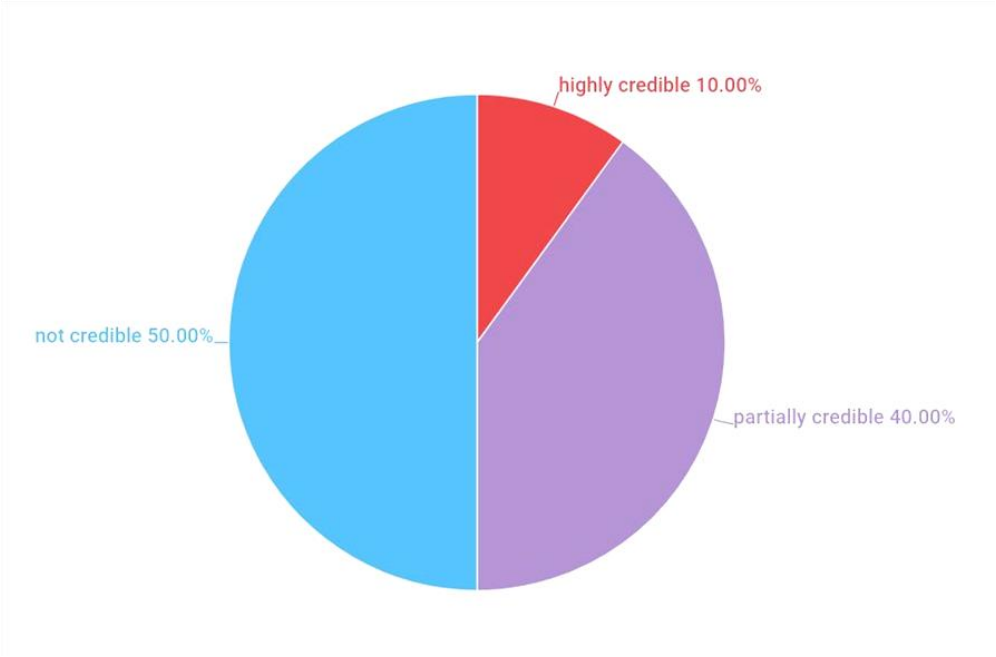
[109] 政府の発表、最初ね原子発電所を… 比較的… 安全っていうか、大丈夫だ大丈夫だという風に言われてて二日間立って見るとまメルトダウンじゃないですね。かなり危険な状況なってるっていうことは分かったので、政府の発表自体が少し。うその情報じゃないですけれども、まちがってたと

6.2.2 Perceptions of Online Media

In the context of the 3.11 disaster, the repetitive, biased and insufficient coverage of the disaster on TV, in some cases caused participants' shift to online media sources, social media platforms and curated (*matome*) websites as alternative sources of information. The individuals' sense of security has been, to some extent, disrupted due to constant dramatic updates and announcements, shifting levels of trust and new opportunities to share feelings and opinions in digital space freely. Social media served as a critical communication tool and alternative source of local information and a safe space for the free articulation of emotions and personal narratives (see Chapter Five). Due to the growing significance of online media, especially social media, in participants' media use during the 3.11, this section examines participants' evaluation of online media credibility: How do participants talk about the credibility of social media and online news websites in the context of the 3.11 disaster?

Half of the participants who used online media, solely or in combination with other media, perceive it as partially credible. One of the main reasons for participants' low trust in online media is the lack of trust in social media, which most participants perceive as not credible, or partially credible (see Figure 6.2). Low levels of trust in social media come from the participants' awareness of rumours, fake news and misinformation coming from random, unchecked sources in the aftermath of the earthquake and nuclear disaster. Participants who have the lowest trust in social media belong to the 30–39 age group and use social media as a complementary and not the primary source of news, while those who find social media to be partially credible are mostly active social media users in their 20s. Finally, the minority of participants who find social media to be highly credible are also in their 20s and rely on social media as a sole source of news. These figures are significant because they indicate that the level of reliance on social media has substantial implications for how participants perceive social media in terms of its credibility, as the majority of participants who are sceptical towards social media use it as a complementary and not primary source of news.

Figure 6.2 Participants' perceptions of social media in the context of the 3.11 disaster



While social media is considered useful for collecting localised information which can help people in decision making, some participants approached information on various social media platforms with a level of caution, because their friends had warned them about different cases of rumours, fake news and chain emails. For example, although Ayumi, who was not in Japan at the time of the 3.11, sees the benefits of social media in providing immediate access to information on her friends and family, she thinks it is crucial to address the problem of fake news in disaster communication. Because of the unchecked news, Ayumi questions the reliability of social media, concluding that people should not share or forward emails or unchecked information and should carefully approach information online:

> *I heard that simultaneous emails and chain emails circulated right after the earthquake, so I think that's not good. I think it is better not to forward to other*

people such simultaneous information or chain email you received from someone.[110]

Information which is posted on social media lacks professional gatekeeping, as social media users' function shifts from producers to consumers (Westerman et al. 2011, 2014), and this opens the way to free flow of unfounded opinions, misinformation and unchecked content (Lachlan et al., 2014b). Participants like Yoshi are aware that the gatekeeping process is essential to prevent the flow of misinformation and rumours, which they perceive as a negative side of social media:

In terms of social media, after all, there is a flow of rumours, because there is no filtering… social media is not bad, but its negative side is indeed spreading rumours.[111]

When discussing the problem of false rumours (*dema*), Yoshi and other participants, associate the credibility of news with professionally produced information that is filtered, verified, accurate, clearly communicated and fair. This corresponds to professional integrity and work of media producers, journalists, and reporters. The convenience of, and open access to social media means that the diffusion of rumours is more rapid than in traditional mass media. This can cause significant confusion, as was the case with the rumour tweets about the chemically contaminated rain in the week from the 3.11 earthquake (Takayasu et al., 2015). In the disaster context, rumours on Twitter often contained negative content that induced anxiety or calls to action. When tweets with such content are retweeted, rumours easily spread (Umejima et al., 2011).

Most participants, like Ryota, found social media less reliable during 3.11, because of the confusion caused by information overload and the overall feeling that social media and news website feeds are filled with too-opinionated and biased information:

[110] 一斉情報のメールとかそういうチェインメールが地震の直後に日本で回った聞いたのでそれはよくないなと思います。誰かからその一斉情報とか、チェインメール受け取ったとしてもなんか簡単にほかの人に転送したりとかはしない方がいいと思います。

[111] ソーシャルメディアというと、やっぱりデマが流れてくる、そこはフィルターかからないので…メディアが悪いんじゃないんですけど、そういうマイナスの側面はやっぱりどうしてもデマ

So there are heaps of individual opinions there, and people with different standpoints have different opinions, but because it is not organised, there are too many extreme opinions.[112]

Keeping in mind the problem of rumours and the absence of gatekeepers to check the accuracy and quality of information, it is evident that participants have more confidence in mass media sources, television and newspapers, than online media. This is because they perceive TV and newspapers as official sources of news, and less open to manipulation, at least when it comes to facts obtained through live broadcast.

Participants who perceive online media as trustworthy to some extent are those who used social media or news websites as their primary and only source of news for brief and real-time updates on the earthquake, tsunami or nuclear explosion. Kazuya, Takashi and Toshi, all find online media highly reliable for first updates on earthquake intensity and aftershocks, using Yahoo News, Twitter or news websites. In the context of the 3.11 disaster, when it comes to online media, participants invested more trust in news websites than random individual sources on social media.

Another reason for participants' partial trust of online media is the reliance on friends' comments or reactions, which act as a guide to what is relevant. People believe that interactivity around information facilitates their understanding of the reliability of stories, as others offer feedback and alternatives (Newman & Fletcher, 2017). The discussion and sharing of news among friends or more generally among other social media users' help participants realise whether the information is a fact or a rumour. If a user posts a rumour not based in fact, it is possible that other users will recognise it and correct it, providing more reliable information (Newman & Fletcher, 2017).

Immediately after the earthquake, as well as after the nuclear explosion, there was much confusion and an abundance of information. All participants discussed the information they gathered from the media, either at the local level of family, friends and neighbours or at the level of digital community of users who follow the same news or join the same online

[112] 個人の意見が山ほどのかってて色んな立場の人が違った意見でいうから、それがいいとこあるけど、整理がつかなくなっちゃうので、過激な意見もすごく多くて言い過ぎて

groups. Chapter Four has highlighted how participants discussed news on the earthquake and tsunami with their friends and family to share their concerns, fears and local information, to find reassurance and peace of mind. After the nuclear explosion, many participants who were concerned with the reliability of the information on the levels of radiation, evacuation measures and radiation effects on food and water, discussed the news with their friends, family or other online media users, as a guide to establishing what is accurate and reliable.

Most participants make a distinction between individual posts and opinions on social media and live updates which are mostly adopted from television or people who witnessed the disaster. As seen in the case of television, the authenticity, immediacy and liveness of video images significantly contributed to participants' evaluation of online media as credible. Participants who used online media evaluate these live updates as real stories which cannot be manipulated easily. This is different from the free flow of personally posted, agenda-driven information found on various social media platforms, which significantly separates social media from traditional mass media forms. The latter are perceived as more factual and verified than social media. To illustrate the difference between mass media and online media, Sana refers to the credibility of both and explains:

> *Because something that's posted and shared on social media differs depending on the individual's perspective and feelings, I think mass media is more reliable for confirming the facts without involving emotions.*[113]

This difference between mass media and social media, as seen in Sana's comment, is the reason why fewer people find online media credible in the context of the 3.11 disaster. Further, low levels of trust in online media have not changed over time (see section 6.4.1 of this chapter).

Trust is a critical component of disaster communication, and it is often tested in situations such as natural disaster (Mehta, Bruns, & Newton, 2017). Participants concluded that none

[113] ソーシャルメディアは結構その人個人の視点とか思いによって、共有されるものは変わってしまうので、もう少しフラットに事実を確認するためはマスメディアの方が信頼できるかなと思います。

of the sources could be trusted entirely and that trust comes from comparing multiple sources and relying on personal judgment to decide its credibility. This indicates that the complexity of the 3.11 disaster triggered a combined media use of participants who engaged in the inter-media environment which integrates both old and new media technologies, to critically analyse and evaluate news content and develop independent judgment. Online media facilitated the emergence of new activism, where participants gathered to discuss different social and political issues in the context of disaster, feeling like members of the same national community. The offline and online environment enabled fellow TV audience members to critically discuss, evaluate and question different aspects of mass media, ownership, control, responsibility and bias. The next section examines how shifts in participants' perceptions of media credibility affect changes in participants' media use after the 3.11 disaster.

6.3 Changes and Dynamics in Media Use

What are the dynamics and shifts in participants media use that are triggered by the changing levels of trust in media in the context of the 3.11? Did participants tend to use media they consider credible? Changes in participants' media usage patterns, triggered by the 3.11 disaster, were briefly explored in the previous chapters of this thesis (see Chapter Four and Chapter Five), and while these chapters highlighted the role of online media in complementing television use during the disaster, here I turn to exploring how changes and dynamics in media use can be linked to changing notions of trust and medium credibility. People rely on a medium they perceive to be credible, and changes in trust in media lead to changes in media use (Johnson & Kaye, 1998), therefore, this section aims to examine the implications of participants' shifting notions of media credibility for changes in their media use.

The first significant change in participants media use triggered by the disaster is the reliance on cross-media use for better evaluation of credibility, accuracy and up-to-date information. For example, besides watching television at work immediately after the quake, Toshi utilised a variety of official sources on Twitter. As he did not have a TV at home, Toshi accessed breaking news and mass media reports on the earthquake on Twitter, for its immediate and real-time feature and ability to provide instant updates and deliver accurate

reports on earthquake intensity and aftershocks. Reflecting on 3.11, Toshi explains that he only trusted the immediate, real-time reports on earthquake and tsunami, which he accessed on Twitter. He noticed changes in the way he used Twitter to continuously access updates and news from trusted news media sources on earthquake intensity, aftershocks and other critical information, rather than checking individual sources.

During crises and natural disasters, people tend to rely on Twitter for timely updates and real-time information, whereby this social network may be useful for identifying users' specific needs and concerns (Lachlan et al., 2014c). In this case, Toshi relied on cross-media use to access credible and verified information and facts about the earthquake, which could help him realise the severity of the disaster, indicating new media trends in Japan, as mass media use extends to digital platforms.

In some cases, decreased trust in television and print, due to somewhat repetitive and insufficient coverage of the nuclear disaster, led participants to replace traditional mass media with new, online sources, mainly social media. Kensuke, Atsushi and Hiroshi all mention that they recognised the significance of social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, in the aftermath of the nuclear disaster due to repetitive, sensationalist and biased coverage. From the start of the triple disaster, Kensuke followed TV news all the time and found it credible to some extent, but after the nuclear disaster he became sceptical of the news reported by the mass media, due to the repetitive and biased coverage. Throughout the interview, Kensuke repeats that Japanese government controls mass media, hiding crucial information and treating nuclear disaster as a political issue, which made him realise the significance of social media to make up for the absence of critical information in mass media:

> I stopped watching television. I could no longer trust it. After that, I started looking at social media, like Facebook and Twitter.[114]

[114] テレビは見なくなりました。それはあまり信用しなくなった。あとはねえ、SNS、Facebook とか Twitter、よく見るように使うようになった

Atsushi and Hiroshi also repeatedly mentioned that mass media failed to provide reliable information on the nuclear disaster, leading to their growing distrust and disappointment in mass media. This led to their decision to stop watching television after 3.11 entirely and turn to social media for a broader range of sources. Hiroshi values social media because he believes it can provide more specific, local information, which is not sensationalised, distorted or politicised. More importantly, he values social media for its potential to provide a space where people can express their views and see the views of people they know. In these three cases, social media served as the main source rather than as an alternative, replacing traditional mass media due to shifting levels of trust.

Another significant change in participants' media use is the preference for international media sources, due to decreasing trust in Japanese mass media. This change was triggered by shifting perceptions of Japanese media credibility in light of what was happening during the 3.11 nuclear disaster. Kaori, Haruna and Toshi all have a preference for international media, which provides more investigative independent journalism than the Japanese mass media, which they see as biased and controlled by the Japanese government. Toshi, who enjoys reading the *Financial Times*, *The Economist* and watching BBC News, sees these factors as the main reason for his distrust in Japanese mass media, due to its bias and obedience to the government, saying that this problem in media persists until today, years after the disaster. Similarly, Kaori and Haruna choose the BBC, *The New York Times* and other international media outlets for more balanced worldwide news.

In the context of the 3.11 disaster, participants looked for different ways to find the information they need, thereby using a combination of media forms to fulfil different needs. Rather than just selecting one source of news, participants were eager to check and challenge information from other sources and platforms and approach each medium with a dose of scepticism. These findings suggest there is an overall understanding that television is more professional and competent than online media in delivering accurate and reliable news. Participants tend to seek information from official and checked sources, still having confidence in the professional integrity of journalism and live broadcasts above the random sources and unregulated flow of information on social media. Recent studies compare perceptions of information found on online media to that found on traditional media,

concluding that traditional media is perceived as more credible than online media, but still judged as moderately credible (Johnson & Kaye, 2015, 2016). In a general context, television watching and newspaper reading remain stable in participants' everyday media practices, but the role of mass media as the only, or main, source of information is challenged by online media, which facilitates the practice of seeking and evaluating information and media credibility. Overall, findings suggest that participants are combining older and newer media platforms and personalised media use, rather than relying on a single medium.

The next section moves on to examine participants' present-day attitudes towards media credibility, so as to understand how participants evaluate the credibility of different media forms years after the 3.11 disaster.

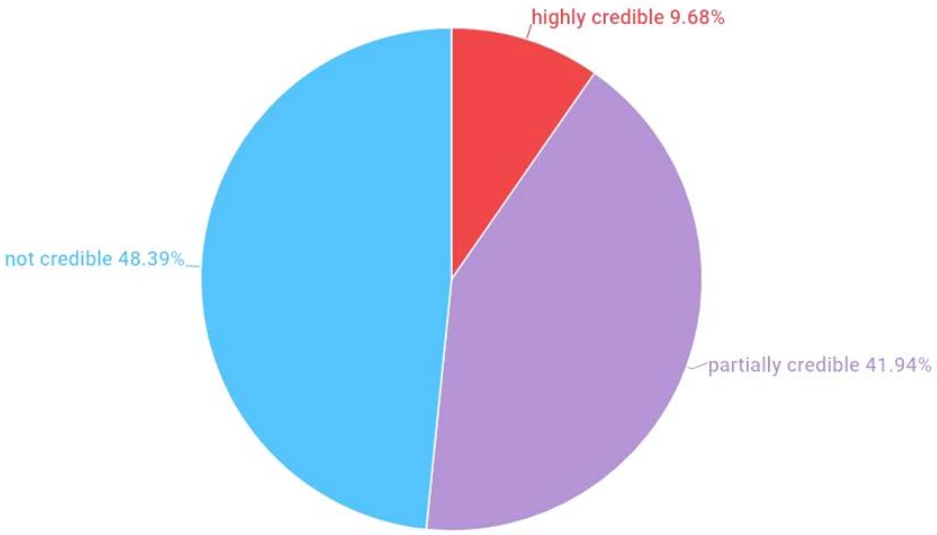
6.4 Current Perceptions of Media Credibility

6.4.1 Perceptions of Online Media

Following the changes in participants' media use triggered by the 3.11 disaster and the significant increase in the number of participants who shared their perceptions of online media credibility (from 16 to 31), it is evident that online media, social media and news websites were afforded a similar level of importance as traditional mass media in participants' everyday media use in the context of the 3.11 disaster. Through participants' attitudes towards online media, I could find out more about their perceptions of online media reliability and trustworthiness, as well as how participants use online media as a part of their everyday media routine.

Figure 6.3 below shows the figures for participants' current perceptions of trust in online media, six years after the mega-disaster in Japan.

Figure 6.3 Participants' current perceptions of online media (social media and online news websites)



As Figure 6.3 indicates, six years on from the disaster, fewer than ten percent of those interviewed found online and/or social media highly credible. When we break it down into the two types, none of the participants finds social media highly credible, however a small number of participants in their 30s or 40s perceive online media as highly credible. This group of participants use curated (*matome*) websites as their primary source of news and rarely follow news on traditional mass media, due to the view that the information is biased and only partially reliable. Curated (*matome*) websites such as Yahoo News, NewsPicks, Google News and others that bring together news items from third-party news sources (see Chapter Two, section 2.7.2.3 for an explanation) are predominantly accessed on participants' smartphones and are generally perceived as highly credible, delivering high-quality information.

In our interviews, participants often referred to NewsPicks when talking about news sources which they find reliable in their general media use (see Chapter Five, section 5.5). Eiji uses both social media (Facebook) and news websites, but for credible news, he entirely relies on curated (*matome*) websites, particularly NewsPicks. The main reason behind his preference for NewsPicks is the ability it affords him to see news of his interest

in one place, but more importantly to read other users' comments on articles, which facilitate Eiji's judgment of whether the news is credible or not. Similarly, Hiro explains that he regularly uses NewsPicks, because he can automatically see the comments of other people who frequently access news of similar interest, which helps him realise there are different perspectives on the story. In other words, Hiro checks NewsPicks not only for its news content, but to read other users' comments and feedback on the news and compare information to decide what is reliable (see more about NewsPicks in Chapter Two, section 2.7.2.3). Through comment reading, or "lurking," users become aware of different perspectives, which they can draw on to form their own opinion, and just like commenting, reading posts is considered participation (Springer, Engelmann, & Pfaffinger, 2015). This is because users can participate in the community by reading and associating with the views of like-minded others, thereby exhibiting a sense of inclusion and communal belonging (Barnes, 2015).

Among participants who partially trust online media, the majority belong to the 40–49 and 50–59 age groups, and they believe they can trust curated (*matome*) websites and get quick updates on information in their areas of interest. This group of participants still uses traditional mass media such as television or printed newspapers as a part of their media routine, complementing it with online news sources. Participants' combined media use is driven by the notion that they cannot rely on any medium entirely, but through comparing traditional and new digital sources, they can receive different perspectives and views and evaluate medium credibility.

Comparatively, participants' low trust in online media mainly comes from the participants' general view that information on social media comes from different individual sources, often agenda driven, biased with personal feelings and sometimes too opinionated to be perceived as credible. Figures also show that the age of participants with low levels of trust in social media ranges from the 20s to the 50s. Thus, findings suggest there is a general awareness among participants that social media is not a credible news source. For example, although Mayumi enjoys using social media regularly to stay in touch with friends and easily access information, she thinks the reliability of social media is rather low due to the lack of gatekeeping (as discussed in section 6.2.2 of this chapter).

Another reason for low trust in social media is the lack of balance and the proliferation of biased content, especially on Twitter, which is, according to Yoshi, filled with individually opinionated news:

> *When it comes to Twitter, I have to be careful because personal opinion is biased and there is a sense of imbalance. Since social networks are biased, I make sure I don't just look at one person's opinion.*[115]

Yoshi adds that he finds social media unreliable due to different flows of information and that his cautious use is merely aimed at social media platforms rather than news websites, which he perceived as checked sources. In his case, perception of media credibility depends on the source of news and, the more official the source is, such as newspaper or news websites, the more credible Yoshi finds it.

Additionally, participants generally agree that the reliability depends on the source, especially when it comes to online media, and they make a clear distinction between random individual posts on social media platforms and news circulated on curated news websites like Yahoo News and NewsPicks. Within the broad category of online media, these websites are perceived as more credible than social media platforms, because they curate top news stories from major media outlets, providing in-depth information and allowing users to leave comments on news articles. The awareness of other users who share the same present and experience of the 3.11 disaster gives the user more confidence that rumours and fake news will be quickly corrected, and the veracity of stories checked through other users' feedback and comments. This suggests that aligning with a community of users who comment on curated news significantly contributes to their higher evaluation of its credibility. This is further underlined by the comments that participants made in relation to familiarity and credibility.

Most participants have mixed feelings about the credibility of social media, trusting it only partially and mostly relying on their own judgment. However, the fact that participants

[115] Twitter になると個人の意見は結構偏り、unbalance の感じで、そこは気を付けないといけない。SNS は偏りがあるので、一人の意見だけを見ないよいにはしています。

have low trust in social media does not necessarily mean they will no longer use it, and the main reason for that is motivation for using media, and different needs which are gratified through media use (Katz et al., 1974). As discussed in the previous chapter, participants utilised different social media platforms to seek out and fulfil different needs at the time of 3.11 disaster. The purpose of social media is therefore, to fulfil affective and integrative needs, and enable users to freely communicate feelings and opinions, rather than just consume content. In this sense, even when the credibility is low, participants still found it essential to use social media for its affective function and sense of social connection (see Chapter Five). In the context of general media use, all participants who use social media refer to it as either a complementary source of information or enjoyable medium which serves as a connection to friends, entertainment and as a stress relief. Some of their comments are as follows:

> *I want to know what others are doing, I have friends, and I can post what I think about. Sometimes I want to see if there is some news for diverging stress.*[116] (Hideki)

> *Facebook is fun because I can easily know the situation of my friends and acquaintances.*[117] (Naoko)

> *As I'm usually overseas, social media is the easiest way to know about friends in Japan, and it can convey what I want to know.*[118] (Mayumi)

However, although participants find social media helpful, they remain cautious when checking the news, due to the abundance of unregulated information flows and an overall understanding that social media news channels are less professional and competent than the mainstream ones—television or newspapers. Participants tend to seek information from

[116] 相手が何しているのかなっていう知りたい、友達ではありますし、自分思ったこと発信できる。ストレスを発散を目的にそれこともあればなんとなく視聴したいニュースを見てて、思ったことがあって。
[117] Facebook は単純に友達とか知り合いの状況がわかるので楽しい。
[118] ソーシャルメディアは普段は海外にいるので、日本にいる友人のことを知ったりとか、自分がどういうことを知っているという伝えられる、一番手軽な、簡単な方法なので…

official sources or websites, as these are likely perceived to be more credible than social media (Lin et al., 2016). One of the participants, Sana, drew this comparison:

> *After all, I think that mass media have high reliability because many people put effort into it and information is organised to some extent. On the other hand, because there are all kinds of people put together, information on social media is fast, but I think that it is necessary to judge whether it is reliable information by yourself.*[119]

More than half of participants perceive online media as less credible than mass media, because there is a sense that social media platforms are filled with inaccurate information, personal agendas, and strong opinions, which sometimes lead to the emergence of fake news and hate speech. According to Ryota, social media is suitable for entertainment, but its negative side is the emergence of messages filled with hate speech, which are difficult to moderate on an open platform. He concludes that the careful selection of news is critical, which clearly explains why he uses both the Internet and television in his regular media routine.

Familiarity with the source is an essential factor in how respondents perceive the credibility of online media. In other words, participants tend to communicate with friends and people they already know, which gives them more confidence to regard the information that comes from familiar sources as credible to some extent. On the other hand, participants are cautious when accessing information posted by unknown sources and random individuals, as they perceived it as running a higher risk of being misinformation, a poor-quality message or fake news. Hiroshi, who often uses Twitter, is confident that the information which comes from reliable sources such as friends or, in the case of his explanation below, Twitter influencers, is credible to some extent.

[119] マスメディアはやっぱりいろんな人の手がかかって、情報が整理され、ある程度整理されて、発信されているので信頼度が高く、信頼度が高いなと思っています。一方、ソーシャルメディアはやっぱりいろんな人が合わせるので情報はすごく速いんですけど、ちゃんと信頼できる情報かどうかっていうのは自分で判断しないといけないという風に思っています

There are many people on Twitter. There are some you can trust, and others that you definitely cannot. Some of them are acting as influencers, and what they say and the things they introduce, they've checked them out to a certain extent, so they have a track record. So, rather than saying whether I can trust Twitter or not, on Twitter, there are people whom I can trust, so Twitter is suitable for making a direct connection with them.[120]

Takashi similarly explains that if he is not familiar with the person who posted information, he cannot find it credible, because there is a risk of misinformation or rumours. He goes on to explain that:

Since there are times when I don't know the source on social media, it might be a rumour. Mass media is more… On mass media, I try only to listen to facts.[121]

In other words, participants' responses indicate that the reliability depends not on the medium itself, but on the source. For examples, familiarity with the source leads to credibility, in the case of family and friends. Sources of information that have a 'track record' (*jisseki*) or that are 'factual' (*jijitsu*) are also noted to be trustworthy.

The real-time, immediate nature of social media and its efficiency in delivering news is also mentioned as a problem when evaluating the credibility of online media. Some participants like Hana (see comment below), comment that because social media can deliver information instantly, faster than television or newspaper, this immediacy leaves no time for checking the accuracy of information:

[120] Twitter のなかでいろんなひとがいて、中には信頼できる人もいれば、全然そうじゃないものもあるとおもう。中には、本当に influencer として活動していて、彼らのいうこと、紹介する情報はある程度とってやるからの、っていうふうな実勢の人もいるから…だから、Twitter が信頼できるかどうかというよりは、Twitter のなかで信頼できる人もいるので、そういう人とダイレクトにつながるには Twitter が適している。

[121] ソーシャルメディアはソースがよくわからないこととかがあるので、うわさぐらいなっているできてます。マスメディアのほうが…マスメディアはマスメディアで事実しか聞かないようにしています。

In order to transmit and deliver information first, they rush ahead, so there is no reliability, and I don't think there is proper checking of whether the information is actually true or not.[122]

The speed and immediacy of social media posts come with the risk of incomplete, misleading or inaccurate information which can spread quickly, making participants rethink the credibility of social media and rely on their opinion instead. Sana and Rika both agree that being first does not mean being credible, and it is necessary to carefully access information online and judge for yourself whether it is credible or not.

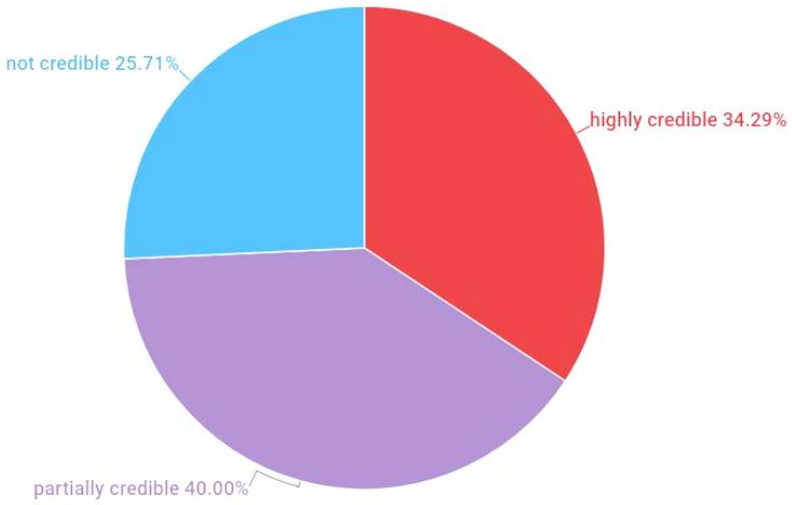
Although participants think that no medium is entirely credible, they perceive television and newspapers as official sources of information with gatekeeping structures where media professionals check and filter news before it is published or broadcast. This allows participants to judge these mediums as more credible than online media. Unlike mass media, anyone with an online media account can circulate and publish information. What is posted could be uninformed opinion presented as fact, or a personal perspective on the events, which can often be misleading or false. The credibility of user-generated content on social media platforms, websites and blogs is, therefore, judged to be questionable. Participants demonstrate awareness of mostly open flows of information and diverse, unknown sources.

6.4.2 Perceptions of Traditional Mass Media

A high number of participants, precisely 35 out of 38, shared their current attitude towards mass media regarding its trustworthiness and reliability. Comparing participants' levels of trust of the present day with levels of trust in media in the context of the 3.11 disaster, we can see that the largest proportion (40 percent) partially trust mass media, television and newspapers, while 34 percent find mass media highly credible, and only 26 percent hold low levels of trust in mass media (see Figure 6.4).

[122] なんか、その情報をいち速く伝えるために、争うが上にあのうさきぽしり、その信用とはないというか、本当に正しい情報かどうかっていうのが、しっかり確認されてない気がします

Figure 6.4 Participants' current perceptions of traditional mass media



Participants who perceive television and newspaper as highly credible rely on these media forms as their first source of news in everyday media use. The reliance on TV or newspaper comes from the centrality that these have in participants' daily media routine. Michiko, who actively uses TV and print media, perceives both forms as highly credible. Her reliance on newspapers and TV comes from inherent trust, saying that ever since she was a child, her parents subscribed to major national newspapers; in time reading newspapers became natural for her as a significant part of her media routine. It is important to mention that Michiko is one of the rare younger participants who does not use social media but relies only on mass media forms: subscribing to major national newspapers *Nikkei* and *Asahi Shimbun*, mainly because she perceives social media as not trustworthy. Additionally, Michiko explains that she watches television because she perceives it as a highly credible medium where it is easy to find all the information in one place.

Similarly, Miyuki, who is also one of the younger participants, enjoys watching TV and using social media regularly. She perceives TV as highly credible when it comes to live broadcast and announcements. Additionally, Miyuki's perception of TV as a credible medium comes from habitual use, as she has been watching television ever since she was little:

I've watched it ever since I was little, so there is no need to doubt it.[123]

In some cases, the habitual use and familiarity of an established pattern of television watching are so solid, that even a participant who found television coverage of the 3.11 nuclear disaster unreliable will continue to rely on TV for news, perceiving it as moderately credible. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Kenjiro is aware of the strong link between Japanese mass media and the government and maintains there has to be more independence in reporting. Due to the poor television coverage of the 3.11 nuclear disaster, he said he lost trust in Japanese mass media. However, years after the disaster, because of his long-running established habit of watching television (see Chapter Four, section 4.2), Kenjiro still perceives it as his most reliable medium for news. He especially notes NHK for its factual and credible reports, and also mentions that there are times when some issues, events and so on, are not reported:

TV watching has become a habit because the latest news is delivered at a fixed time. I don't think that is all, but I trust NHK to some extent. However, I think there are times when some things are not reported.[124]

In his evaluation of television, Kenjiro specifically mentions NHK. In relation to newspapers, many participants refer to *Nikkei Shimbun*, as the most reliable source of news, printed or digital edition. Although sometimes there is a certain scepticism towards news in mass media, participants think that major national newspapers, especially *Nikkei Shimbun*, deliver high-quality information, perceiving it as highly credible. Shinji is one of the participants who prefer *Nikkei Shimbun* for its factual and insightful reporting, covering topics related to his interests, such as politics and bureaucracy, which makes *Nikkei* enjoyable and significant part of his media routine. Shinji explains that *Nikkei* has little bias and is neutral to some extent, separating facts from fiction, which is the main reason why he finds this source highly reliable and trustworthy. Other participants, like Fuji, find *Nikkei* enjoyable and easy to read, because of a wide range of well-organised news. Fuji,

[123] 小っちゃい時は見てるから、あまり疑うことはない。

[124] 決まった時間に一番新しい時間ニュースをやってくれるので、習慣になってますね。それがすべてだとは思いませんけど、やっぱある程度 NHK は信頼して、でも報道されないこともあるんとおもいます

who is over 50 years old, prefers subscribing to printed *Nikkei* over its digital edition because she finds traditional mass media formats more credible and detailed than digital formats.

Mayumi and Kenta, who both work in Japanese television (NHK and TBS), said they found television the most credible source of news, explaining that there are no significant changes in their media use or levels of trust in television since the 3.11 disaster. Their high level of trust in television comes from the workplace knowledge that news goes through a process of verification and fact-checking, in order to ensure the accuracy of information before it is broadcast.

These examples show that participants' trust in major national newspapers and news broadcast on television is still solid, due to the overall view that mainstream publishers and networks deliver reliable, fact-checked news. The authenticity of the live broadcast and professional integrity of journalists and reporters who cover news stories is also a key component of this trust.

On another note, participants overall expressed their negative attitude towards media bias and a lack of critical and investigative reporting, which significantly affects their attitude towards their credibility, and lead to changes in their media use. Some participants stopped watching TV due to critical reporting on the nuclear disaster, turning instead to international media for more in-depth and impartial coverage of the disaster. Naoki perceives Japanese mass media as primarily controlled by the government, even though Japan is a democratic country. He turned to international media for more critical reporting. Incorporation of international media sources was also noted in other participants (see section 6.3). This is mainly due to the view that the international media is less biased than the Japanese mass media, who have no critical and investigative dimension, which intersects with low reliability and levels of trust. To illustrate his point, Toshi mentions the low ranking of Japan in the Press Freedom Index, an annual ranking of countries to reflect the state of media freedom.[125]

[125] At the time of the interview with Toshi, in year 2017, Japan ranked 72 on the Press Freedom Index. As of 2018 and 2019, there has been a slight improvement in ranking, as Japan went from 72 to 67 in the Press Freedom Index.

The second reason for participants' low trust in mass media is bias. Atsushi mentions bias as the main reason for his distrust in mass media or as he explicitly says a few times in the interview: "*I hardly ever watch TV or read newspapers because it is full of lies!*"[126]

After the nuclear disaster, Atsushi started doubting news from mass media, realising it is biased and controlled, without providing alternative views and reliable information, but repeatedly assuring the public that the situation is under control. Atsushi remains distrustful of Japanese mass media, turning instead to online media, Facebook and Yahoo News for a variety of content and choices. When it comes to media bias, the problem of political and institutional (ownership) bias comes into consideration when discussing the credibility of Japanese mass media. Another participant, Wataru, explains that his main decision to cancel his subscription to the *Asahi* and *Yomiuri Shimbun* comes from the view that major Japanese newspapers are tightly linked with political parties, and that this significantly affects the diversity of content. This is the main reason why Wataru utilises online news websites, which offers him the freedom to choose, organise news and compare sources.

Similarly, since the 3.11 disaster, Hiroshi stopped watching and trusting TV due to repetitive, sensational and unreliable coverage of the nuclear disaster. He perceives TV as a medium which aims to attract higher viewer ratings, and receive more money, rather than provide impartial information. Additionally, Hiroshi's low levels of trust come from the fact that Japanese mass media is affiliated with the government and political parties, which is a constant issue that persists over many years. Instead, Hiroshi finds alternatives in international media sources, news websites and social media, but regardless of low trust still relies on TV for more general news and worldwide updates and checks newspaper websites for summarised information.

Although most participants seem to be in agreement that the major media outlets, such as NHK television news and national dailies such as the *Asahi* and *Yomiuri*, can separate fact from fiction, there are mixed opinions about whether such outlets are critical enough. Although there is a consensus that mass media forms provide verified and general information, online media sources are also thought to provide different perspectives on

[126] テレビと新聞ほとんど見ないです。うそだから。

events, thereby suggesting that trust comes from a combination of multiple sources. Mei talks about how she views the information provided by mass media and online media as being different. She explains that mass media delivers official information at the macro level, while online media, especially social media, offers individual perspectives and opinions, which she sees as micro level of information. She stresses the importance of comparing both sources to see different viewpoints. Although she thinks Japanese mass media is not biased, she does say that it is essential to decide for yourself which source you will trust. Similarly, Mayumi thinks that information, whether it is reported on television or social media, can be, to some extent, influenced by one's emotions and thoughts. In this sense, Mayumi prefers comparing sources, even when it comes to stories covered by reporters and journalists: She relies on her judgment whether she trusts the source or not.

Participants who partially trust mass media, due to political and institutional bias and lack of critical reporting, often use mass media in combination with online media (see Chapter Four, Figure 4.2) to compare different sources. In other words, participants make their own decisions regarding the media they utilise. For them, mass media proves to be useful for more general news and facts, work-related information or updates they can pick up by leaving the TV on in the background. Through combined and personalised media use, participants make their decision regarding media reliability and trust.

6.5 Conclusion: Scepticism and Selective Media Use

This chapter has sought to consider how shifting levels of trust in media intersect with changes in individuals' media use, in the context of the 3.11 disaster and present day. To examine this research question, I first looked into participants' perceptions of traditional television and newspaper media, and also online media, in the context of the 3.11 disaster, and how it affected their media use, regarding any changes or dynamics in media use triggered by the disaster. I then moved on to examining participants' general perceptions of media credibility and present-day attitudes, to compare two time-points and understand how participants' notions of media credibility fluctuate and intersect with their everyday media use. In the context of the 3.11 disaster, findings suggest that television news is perceived as more credible than online media. This had implications for participants' preference for television as a primary source of news immediately after the earthquake.

Findings also suggest that the high levels of trust and reliance on mass media come from the familiarity of established media use, such as television watching or newspaper reading, and a sense of liveness provided by television.

The power of visuals and raw videos and images was essential for perceiving television as a highly reliable and involving medium (McLuhan, 1964). The authenticity of live moving images and audio-visual content created a sense of witnessing the disaster (Chouliaraki, 2006), a sense of closeness with the affected region, thereby intensifying participants' emotional experience of the disaster and identification or connection with affected others (Döveling et al., 2011; Pantti et al., 2012).The familiarity of television is the other main reason why it is considered highly credible. In particular, NHK is established as a national medium, traditionally serving as a platform for reporting on major national events, thereby providing a sense of shared experience in national audience members who imagine themselves to be connected as members of the same society (Couldry, 2003; Couldry et al., 2009; Dayan & Katz, 1992). NHK is also designated to contribute to disaster prevention and crisis management through its broadcasts. The centrality of NHK in delivering prompt and accurate news on the disaster additionally contributed to participants' high levels of trust in the public broadcaster. In contrast, commercial broadcasters, which are perceived as biased and affiliated with political parties and government, are trusted only moderately due to their perceived sensationalism and imbalance in reporting.

Another overarching theme emerging from the interviews, is that participants assign greater credibility to traditional mass media sources over social media. This is due to confidence in professionally produced and regulated news, fact-checking and sourcing (see also Newman & Fletcher, 2017). Participants are fully aware of rumours, fake news and biased, opinionated information, and therefore sceptically access social media.

Post 3.11, however, participants demonstrate a lack of trust in television and newspaper reports, stemming from the overall perception that the nuclear disaster was poorly covered and that imbalanced, partial, inconsistent reports and media censorship, were much caused by the media's affiliations with the government and *kisha* clubs. Due to overall confusion and panic, it was difficult to trust the news, especially without the ability to see what is happening and have a sense of witnessing the disaster, as was the case with the earthquake

and tsunami. The role of the visual image proved to be essential for evaluating medium credibility because in the absence of visuals and raw images, participants were insecure regarding which medium and information they should trust. Furthermore, in the context of disaster reporting, trust comes from neutrality and finding the right balance between objective and emotional accounts (Pantti et al., 2012). Although live broadcast of the earthquake and the tsunami was initally highly trusted among participants, it is the repetition and imbalance that made participants stop or reduce watching TV. The disappointment and negative attitude towards repetitive and biased coverage of the disaster created participants' perceptions of mass media as moderately reliable. Consequently, participants' shifting perceptions of media credibility had significant implications for changing media use, one of which was the utilisation of online media sources to complement mass media use due to uncertainty and gradual loss of trust.

The changing role of social media in the context of the 3.11 disaster is seen in its potential to provide new visual culture of the mega-national disaster, with user-generated videos and images that help participants gain alternative knowledge of events as they unfold. In some cases, growing distrust towards mass media institutions resulted in affective responses on social media and higher social trust or relying on different sources which can provide critical information on radiation or nuclear disaster, otherwise not provided by mass media. In such an intensified environment, where participants feel as if they cannot rely on mass media sources, especially at the time of the nuclear disaster, social media proved to be helpful as an alternative channel which can provide different views and perspectives on this matter. Checking other users' comments on social media and news websites indicates both a reliance on online media to obtain multiple perspectives (Beasley & Haney, 2015), and a more personalised and selective media use, where comparing sources helps participants draw their own conclusions about medium credibility.

In relation to the credibility of social media, all participants who use various social media platforms feel they can trust familiar sources such as friends or users who belong to the same online community or group as a guide to what is reliable and relevant. Discussing the news with family, friends and people from the same circle or community, facilitated participants' evaluation of mass media credibility and disaster news, thereby suggesting

that a sense of belonging to a community helped participants make decisions about the medium and source credibility. Furthermore, as is the case with television, trust in social media comes from the authenticity of audio-visual material and real-time information. A minority of participants who find social media to be moderately credible are those who used social media as their primary source of news during 3.11, for timely, real-time updates and facts or for checking what their friends talk about, to check or confirm credibility of information.

The 3.11 disaster altered some of the participants' views towards media and government institutions, changing perceptions of media credibility, which consequently led to changes in media use, mainly with regard to the inclusion of online media within one's media routine. However, although perceived as a source which can to some extent correct or complement mass media shortcomings, social media is still seen as less credible, due to the centrality that television and newspapers had in participants' media routine over the years. Traditional mass media sources remain the primary source of news, as official sources that are seen to deliver professionally produced, accurate and fair news. In the context of the current perspectives of media credibility, social media is still perceived as less credible than mass media, without significant changes in participants' levels of trust, from the time of the 3.11 disaster. Low trust in social media still comes from an awareness of biased, incomplete, misleading or inaccurate information, caused by its unregulated flow of information, immediacy and unchecked sources. More trust is placed in news portals and curated (*matome*) websites due to an overall feeling that the adopted news content from major news outlets is more credible than the individually posted information. Additionally, the collective process of checking other users' feedback and comments on aggregated news websites gives participants more confidence in the truthfulness of stories (Newman & Fletcher, 2017).

Nevertheless, growing distrust in Japanese mass media caused some participants to completely stop watching TV or reading newspapers, reduce the time spent using these media forms or even turn to international media for more critical and investigative reporting. Findings show that reliance on media significantly depends on participants' perception of media credibility (Johnson & Kaye, 1998), except when it comes to social

media, which participants continue to use even though they do not find it very credible. As the previous two chapters have established, participants utilised different media formats to fulfil different needs: for information (cognitive); to reduce anxiety, connect with similarly affected others (affective); and feel a sense of social connection (integrative) (Katz et al., 1974). Regardless of the low trust and having a clear sense of why they should cautiously approach social media content, participants still assign great preference to social media to fulfil the need for affective connection, social utility and communal belonging. The concept of social utility need refers to the need to create a personal, digital community for having something to talk about with others and finding out what others believe (Johnson & Kaye, 2015). The affective and integrative function of social media is to facilitate feelings of togetherness among social media users. In other words, flows of affect in a digital environment can help participants feel as if they belong to the same community, facilitating emotional bonding with similar others (Döveling et al., 2018; Papacharissi, 2015, 2016).

Overall, findings show that different media gratifies different needs, and that careful selection of news is essential for making a personal judgment of media credibility. Inter-media use across varying age groups is often caused by participants' sceptical attitude towards the credibility of mass media and online media, as they combine multiple sources, both old and new, to build and maintain trust.

This chapter has examined how changing levels of trust in media intersect with changes in an individual's media usage pattern, in the context of 3.11 and present day. The main findings of the study support the argument that shifting levels of trust intersect with media use, with participants' trust no longer manifesting in a single source but coming from the process of comparing multiple sources, mainly television and online media. The rise of social media has led to the emergence of new information flows and alternative knowledge of the 3.11 disaster, which has consequently led people to rethink and evaluate the credibility of mass media, as they had a wide range of alternative sources available and the ability to discuss news with others and express a personal opinion. The findings strongly suggest that the biggest reason for low trust in Japanese mass media are political and institutional bias and lack of investigative and critical reporting, suggesting that Japanese television channels and newspapers should consider focusing on providing less biased news

to address some of the concerns related to their credibility, which were also examined in this chapter. However, trust levels in Japanese mass media remain high, due to thorough professional principles and practices of fact-checking, verification and sourcing as well as visual evidence of live TV news, in contract to low trust in social media as a source of news due to low quality information, stemming from the variety of online sources and the risk of inaccurate and fake news. Although perceived as not very credible, most participants remain attracted to social media due to motivation to satisfy their social needs, communication with others, self-expression and personal fulfilment.

Following the findings from the previous two chapters, Chapter Six concludes that the need for social connection and trust significantly contributed to shifts and dynamics in participants' media use after the 3.11 disaster. The next chapter will review and consolidate the main findings of the study, its importance, and implications, along with the contribution it makes within the discipline.

7

Conclusion: Moving Towards New Inter-Media Society

7.1 Review and Summary

Pre-planned, ordinary (Dayan & Katz, 1992) and intrinsically disruptive, unscheduled and tragic media events (Couldry et al., 2009; Cottle, 2006; Döveling et al., 2011; Liebes, 1998), significantly disrupt the routine of daily life. This includes the rhythms of regular broadcasting. This study revisits theories on media events by examining the case of the 3.11 disaster in Japan which is an epitome of an unexpected, highly complex and disruptive media event that, eight years on, is, for many people, far from being over. The 3.11 disaster is directly affected and continues to affect the lives of many people. Existing theories on media events argue that disruptive events create and intensify feelings of community in audience members through live, visual images inscribed with emotion and affect, which serve to evoke sentiments and collective solidarities (Chouliaraki, 2006; Cottle, 2006; Couldry, 2003; Couldry et al., 2009; Dayan & Katz, 1992; Liebes, 1998). Furthermore, in a disaster situation, the fragility of media is exposed (Endo, 2013) and people seek different ways to find the information they need and look for trusted media sources to reduce uncertainty and ambiguity (Lachlan et al., 2014a).

By incorporating the role of online media, my study builds on the extant literature to examine the 3.11 disaster beyond traditional mass media context. It has examined the implications of media use for a sense of communal belonging and perceptions of trust in media during the immediate aftermath of a mega-disaster based on recollections by people distant from the epicentre. In the wake of the national disasters, the community has an active role in providing information and assistance to individuals affected by the disaster and contributing to rebuilding efforts. Further, as shared experiences of loss and uncertainty, disasters can generate emotional solidarity among affected individuals, who respond with an enhanced need to engage in the community as members of the same society threatened by calamity (Solnit, 2009).

Examining individual media usage experiences utilising various media forms, from traditional mass media forms such as television and newspapers, to new, online media,

social media and online news websites, and drawing on studies that demonstrate how people "pull together" and form mediated affective communities in national disasters, this study has looked specifically at how media use habits are constituted in the complex, inter-media environment of the 3.11 disaster, following three main problems:

- The role of traditional mass media forms, television and newspapers in evoking and intensifying a sense of communal belonging.
- The role of online media forms, social media and news websites, in evoking and intensifying a sense of communal belonging, through shared emotional connection.
- Individual perceptions of media credibility and their implications for changing media use and reliance on media.

My Japanese case study confirms that individuals' sense of communal belonging is intensified when dramatic live updates and disaster news disrupts the habituality of television watching, therein invoking a sense of social togetherness among media users despite their geographical distance from one another. Furthermore, that public perceptions of trust in media, altered particularly in the week following the earthquake, after the explosions and meltdown, enhanced the need for credible information. Consequently, in the wake of this unexpected disruption, Japanese media users moved from using traditional mass media as a sole source of news to an inter-media environment which supports the emergence of affective connection to community. It is here, I argue, that a sense of communal belonging among geographically distant and less affected individuals is formed, albeit for a limited duration. The intensified sense of communal belonging is evoked through the intersections of three elements of media usage: habituality, or a sense of shared familiarity, visual image, or a belief that the image doesn't lie, and liveness, a sense that what is unfolding on the screen is unedited and "true" depiction of real-life events. When these three elements align, users evaluate media as highly credible. When there is a disruption to one of these elements, or when they disalign, users consider the media to be less credible.

This chapter aims to summarise and briefly discuss the key research findings concerning the three research problems mentioned above, followed with the study contribution and suggestions for further research.

7.2 Television Use and Sense of Communal Belonging

How do individuals utilise traditional mass media forms—television and newspapers—to inform themselves about the disasters and maintain connections with the outer, social world and similar distant others? Interview findings from this study demonstrate that in the case of media users in the initial aftermath of the 3.11 disaster, habitual use of television, its liveness, simultaneity, and use of visual images significantly contributed to the construction of a sense of social togetherness, and intensified sense of national unity. This enabled individuals to indirectly feel a sense of connection with the affected region, and other fellow audience members throughout the nation regardless of spatial and temporal differences. The participants in this study identify themselves as members of multiple communities: local (family and friends), regional (affected others), national and a community of other media users, thus demonstrating how a sense of communal belonging is multidimensional, and based on shared concern, experience or emotional connection (McMillan & Chavis, 1986).

Interviews uncovered three main reasons behind participants' preference for television as the primary source of news on the 3.11 disaster. The first reason is the familiarity and habituality of television watching. Researchers have identified the centrality of television in the culture of the daily life of Japanese citizens (Holden & Scrase, 2006; Takahashi, 2010a; Yoshimi, 2003), and in this study, too, participants repeatedly use terms such as "habit," "fixed schedule," "leaving the TV on," to explain the centrality of television to their media use immediately after the 3.11 earthquake. Furthermore, participants perceive television as a habitual medium in Japan, through which they feel connected to Japanese society. Considering that the television schedule in Japan followed uniform national timetable (Yoshimi, 2003), the 3.11 disaster not only disrupted users' sense of stability and media routine, but also patterns of social interaction and community, which were established in Japan several decades ago. Thus, findings suggest that, in the immediate aftermath of the

great earthquake, the disruption to habituality of media use and rhythm of Japanese TV has significantly intensified participants' sense of national unity.

Participants also note a preference for television due to its liveness and simultaneity aligning with research that illustrates how live transmission contributes to individual's strong sense of co-presence and awareness of other audience members. Through shared simultaneous watching (Ellis, 2000, 2007; Thompson, 1990), viewers talk to and with other viewers and friends, sharing similar experience and sentiments. Moreover, participants' recurring references to TV as a connection to Japanese society and the world, suggest that individual TV watching is a part of a national process. Therefore, I propose that in addition to habituality, television's liveness and simultaneity intensify participants' sense of belonging to a community of TV audience members that is configured as a national community. Participants' awareness of TV watching as a collective national process is demonstrated through repeated use of the term "Japanese person" (*Nihon-jin*) to highlight the universal awareness that "Japanese people" watch the same TV news at the same time.

The third reason behind participants' reliance on television in the context of 3.11 is the visual image. As Chouliaraki (2006) notes, the authenticity of live, visual, raw and unedited images provokes a spectatorship of suffering for those in a distant geospatial location looking on to disaster. In the case of 3.11, audio-visual images induce a sense that individuals co-witness the disaster and emotionally relate to affected communities. This brings viewers together in new forms of emotional connectivity. Through the visual proximity of the camera, audio-visual features and real-time transmission of raw images, the video image has the potential to create a connection between viewers and distant others in which those spectators (Chouliaraki, 2006) express a feeling of closeness to disaster regions and affected communities. The emotional connection contributes to compassion for affected communities and triggers public response to support them through donations, volunteering and charity events. Interviews revealed that after watching disaster news, almost all participants were actively engaged in supporting Tohoku region with funds, charities and donations. In this context we can argue that television viewing potentially evokes distant others in Japan towards community participation and public engagement.

The shared awareness of national TV watching along with television's visual image and liveness, significantly contributed to the idea that the struggle and pain of the 3.11 disaster are felt at the national level. The notion of Japanese values, collective consciousness and a sense of solidarity, promoted through Japanese official discourse under the term *kizuna* (bonds), intensified individuals' sense of shared membership in a national community, consequently leading some to active engagement to help the affected region.

The idea that patterns of national television viewing (Yoshimi, 2003), and televisual community (Holden & Scrasse, 2006; Takahashi, 2010a) produce a sense of participation (Hirata et al., 2011) is well known. The current study expands these theories to online media by identifying how digital online media challenges the role of television by opening up new opportunities not only for documenting and visualising mega-disasters but for articulation of emotions and affect. I have argued that online media was a key platform that enabled users to sense a connection to the affected region and facilitated public action. Further, my study shows that the use of online media was not sustained over time, as it was particular to the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Also, that the affordances of social media to support the exchange of emotional support and solidarity among users, do not negate the negative aspects of social media communications, which include low credibility of sources, and the diffusion of fake news and misleading, untrustworthy information.

7.3 Changing Media Habits

Although television remains the primary source of news in Japan, new digital platforms have emerged to challenge this role. In the early 2010s, there was increased use of online media, and subtle shifts in traditionally established media usage patterns began to emerge. Within this broader mediascape, a new inter-media environment emerged within the aftermath of the 3.11 disaster. Inter-mediality is defined as the interconnectedness of social media and traditional mass media, where their role and influence are not isolated from each other, but they develop in a mutually complementary manner (Endo, 2013, p. 5). As my study demonstrates, where online and traditional modes of communication intersect and converge individual notions of trust guide their engagement with different media platforms and information sources.

This is highlighted as individuals began to question the credibility of television news coverage of the disaster amidst claims of bias and lack of critical reporting. People turned to online media for supplementary information, and found the new media space also offered alternative sources of knowledge on the 3.11 nuclear disaster. The participants' combined media use is almost evenly spread across four different age groups, suggesting that people of varying ages (20–59) are slowly embracing and adjusting to the new inter-media environment. Since 3.11, younger generations, in their 20s and 30s, migrated to digital platforms and increasingly use online sources. Older generations, age 40–49 and 50–59, recognised the significance and affordances of different online media, mainly *matome* websites and social media platforms, which they slowly incorporated in their everyday media use, complementing television watching or newspaper reading.

Within contemporary media scholarship, converging patterns of media usage are seen as "the process of co-evolution of distinct media that have been previously thought of as separate and self-contained" (Dwyer, 2010, p. 32). New media does not displace traditional media, but there is an interaction between different platforms and media forms (Jenkins, 2006). My study demonstrates that combined media use dominates the contemporary, post-3.11 Japan mediascapes, creating a media environment where traditional mass media and non-traditional online media coexist and complement each other. Increasing use of online sources such as news websites, social media platforms, supplement, not substitute the use of traditional mass media. The increasing use of and confidence in *matome* websites, such as NewsPicks and YahooNews, show that the internet in Japan, in addition to traditional mass media, plays a significant role in shaping public opinion.

7.4 New Visual and Participatory Culture in Digital Space

Drawing from work that explores transformations in disaster visibility through media (Döveling et al., 2011; McCosker, 2013; Pantti et al., 2012; Thompson, 2005), my study proposes that new, online media changes the visual culture of disaster. Specifically, that user-generated content in social media makes emotions visible beyond the traditional mass media platforms, but without detracting from the power of TV's visuality and the shock it produces. McCosker (2013) argues that social media extends the media environment and facilitates the emergence of affective intensity, as it provides space for instant involvement,

chance encounters and emotional interactions (p. 79–80). With social media, individuals who are caught up in the disaster can provide graphic insights, raw, unedited images and emotional disclosure of the events directly from the disaster zone. In this way, emotions become visible to others through media transmission of events to other users who are not physically present in the disaster zone. The potential of new media technologies to provide expressive, user-generated images and videos and serve as space for sharing personal accounts and emotions, shows how disaster communication is evolving in a changing media environment. At the same time, as my study demonstrates, with the overlapping communication flows and an abundance of unchecked sources in social media, the media environment is becoming complex and less controllable in terms of its reliability and transparency of sources.

As noted in Chapter Five, social media use fostered a sense of communal belonging in the immediate aftermath of the 3.11 disaster, even among geographically distant individuals. This sense of communal belonging was produced through a combination of user consumption and production and the manifestation of affective communities in digital space (Döveling et al., 2018; Papacharissi, 2016). These communities develop through emotive online discourses, empathic alignment with the affected region, and activating a sense of communal belonging in geographically dispersed individuals. As interview findings show, participants' motivations for engaging with social media in Japan significantly changed in the aftermath of a disruptive mega-disaster that was mediatised locally, nationally and globally. Online news sites and social media platforms became a space for people who needed to openly talk about their feelings and acknowledge the suffering of affected communities to participate in disaster communication. Participants' comments illustrate the multidimensionality of sense of communal belonging, as they simultaneously relate to a local, regional, national and imagined community through multi-level online interaction with similar distant others, based on the shared experience and sentiment of the national disaster.

The Japanese case study sheds light on a new kind of online sociality among Japanese social media users, moving beyond the private, one-on-one communication supported by homegrown social media platforms to the more open and group-oriented online

communication fostered by global platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. In the context of the 3.11 disaster, these social media platforms supported the free articulation of emotions, thus helping individuals at a distance from the immediate disaster zone to cope with the disaster, initiate collective action and build community consciousness**.** Social media accommodated new public responses and reactions, serving as an alternative platform for participants to voice their views and dissatisfaction with mass media or government, and as a space for an alternative production of knowledge on the 3.11 nuclear disaster and its effects. Social media posts, presented in Chapter Five, show participants' need to speak for themselves and voice their views and experience of 3.11, thereby reflecting the role of new media in contributing to participatory culture and new forms of self-expression. However, despite the affordances of social media platforms, television retained its central role in mobilising public compassion and strengthening the emotional bond to the nation. In interviews, participants reflected on their social media use, suggesting that a short-term sense of communal belonging was intensified in the immediate aftermath of the 3.11 disaster, but without strong continuity in the following days. This can be understood through extension of the concept of "shared temporality" through which "imagined communities" emerge in digital space (Gruzd et al. 2011; Jones, 2013). My findings suggest that Japanese social media users, just like audience members and readers, share a consciousness of shared temporal dimension through a simultaneous consumption of media content. Participants exhibit eagerness to use *matome* websites and forums (NewsPicks, Yahoo, 2channel) to check how other users discuss news and seek others with similar needs and concerns, thereby sharing the collective awareness that they all follow the same news on the 3.11 disaster. These online activities, reading users' discussions and comments, although not direct and explicit, served the social purpose of meeting similar others rather than just consuming the content that media provides. More importantly, the interactive nature of online news portals enables participants to gain more comprehensive experience and general perception of news, drawing on other users' ideas and different viewpoints and perspectives to form their own opinion and evaluate media credibility.

7.5 Trust in the Inter-Media Environment

Based on in-depth interviews with Japanese nationals, my study builds on previous works within the field of media credibility (Bucy, 2003; Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001) by exploring individual notions of trust in media in the inter-media environment of the 3.11 disaster. It reveals that shifting perceptions of media credibility had significant implications for participants' approach to media use and reliance on media. As participants engaged in the inter-media environment, they recall incorporating both traditional and online media to evaluate news content and develop independent judgment. That the complementary role of social media provided different views and offered a free space for discussion and social and emotional exchange shows that changes in participants' perceptions of mass media credibility led to changes in their media use. Thus, my study corroborates the view that media use has significant implications for individuals' perceptions of media credibility and a level of reliance on media (Gaziano & McGrath, 1986; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Kiousis, 2001; Westley & Severin, 1964).

Media use is not the only indicator of credibility, as the sense of belonging to the community of audience members or online media users contributed to the evaluation of media credibility, especially in the immediate aftermath of 3.11 disaster. The sense of belonging to a community of fellow TV audience members who were simultaneously co-witnessing a disaster mediatised through the liveness, simultaneity and visuality of television was the main reason for participants' confidence in the credibility of television, and through subsequent discussion of disaster news, helped participants evaluate the credibility of information at a time of great uncertainty. Trust in online media, however, comes from the new visuality facilitated by user-generated images and real-time videos of the disaster, which helped participants gain alternative knowledge on the disaster, and a means of comparing different media sources. Whereas trust in the television image stems from habitual engagement with the liveness of audio-visual news, confidence in online media stems from familiarity with its sources. That is, participants explain they put their trust in the comments and feedback provided by their friends, or same-community users, as a guide to what is relevant and credible. I argue, therefore, that a sense of belonging to a

community or a group of users significantly contributes to participants' evaluation of media credibility.

The 3.11 disaster exposed many issues with regard to Japanese mass media: bias, lack of investigative reporting (Gill et al., 2013; Kingston, 2012; McNeill, 2014), the cartelised media system (Freeman, 2000) and others. However, participants' responses show that the 3.11 disaster did not trigger radical changes in their media use. Even though recent statistics show low levels of trust in media institutions in Japan (Edelman Trust Barometer Report 2018), participants trust mass media more than online media due to the authenticity of traditional news formats. Why is this so? I posit that, as mentioned earlier, high levels of trust and reliance on television come from the familiarity and habit of television watching, and a sense of liveness and immediacy provided by television. This is further buoyed by confidence in professionally produced and regulated news, fact-checking and sourcing, as opposed to an unregulated flow of information on social media. Social media is not necessarily considered to be a safe space for the free articulation of emotions and public opinion, as interview findings in this study demonstrate. In the context of the 3.11, social media served as "backchannels" (Sutton et al., 2008, p. 625), providing isolated individuals with social and emotional support, and a transient sense of communal belonging, while traditional mass media served as a prime source of news, valued among participants for its authenticity and professional information gatekeeping.

In summary, then, participants rely more on traditional mass media due to a universal feeling that information they provide is factual, verified, organised and authentic, which explains why, in Japan, television remains a primary source of news. However, in a time of national emergency and mediatised disaster when bias and lack of critical reporting are highlighted, participants turn to online media in search of diverse perspectives and alternative views. This has implications for our understanding of "trust" in news sources in the inter-media environment. Trust comes from a combination of multiple sources and interplay of traditional media and new, digital forms. This study highlights the importance of examining a component of trust and credibility in the context of the disruptive media event. Further, the inter-media environment is becoming more complex and less

controllable with the rise of online media and individual's routine exposure to an abundance of opinions and information.

7.6 Towards New Inter-Media Society

In the context of mediated, national disaster, where individual need for immediate and credible information is at its highest, access to both mainstream and online media news sources intensifies a sense of communal belonging and social connectedness. As this thesis documents, through media use, individuals fulfil the need to collect credible information and to connect with similar, distant others, as a means of coping with disaster. The sense of communal belonging is multidimensional, as participants may simultaneously belong to multiple communities: local, regional, national; even the global community. Vast communications opportunities and overlapping information flow creates a more intense and less controllable media environment than in times of lesser disruption. In these more volatile times, participants turn to a combination of older and newer media platforms and demonstrate personalised media use. They rely on their own personal judgment in alignment with a familiar community of audience and users to evaluate media credibility.

Subtle shifts were witnessed in the incorporation of online media in the traditionally established patterns of media use in the aftermath of the 3.11 disaster. In the context of both regular and disruptive mediated events, television watching remains a customary norm and collective national process, however, it is increasingly paired with a public preference for mobile media, convenient digital formats and verified information. With the increasing role of online media providing space for active expression of opinions and critical reception of information within the community or a group, this study re-examines the concept of media literacy in Japan, to acknowledge the participatory culture of online media, where the focus of media literacy shifts from individual expressions to community involvement. As this study shows, the mass media audience is not likely to disappear despite the proliferation of online media, but with the expansion of new communication channels, digital transition, and migrating audience, it is uncertain how long the coexistence of old and new media will last.

Looking at previous research on affective communities, we can see that new affective communities are generated in the context of disruptive media events and national crisis (see Döveling, 2018; Papacharissi, 2015). However, in the context of the contemporary Japanese media landscape, dominated by traditional media forms, particularly television, the emergence of new affective communities in digital space indicates a remarkable development in disaster communication and civil society in Japan, where the sense of social belonging to existing and/or new networks facilitates the practice of seeking and evaluating information and media credibility, through new media forms of connectivity. The study shows that participants demonstrate enhanced awareness of the affordances of new media to allow for less rigid, less inhibited communication among users, and accommodate new responses and reactions, not otherwise supported by traditional modes of communication. Japanese media society is moving towards more community-oriented online communication, where the digital divide between older and younger generations slowly decreases. People in their 50s and over, who used to rely on television as a primary source, gradually incorporate online news website into their media routine as one of the news sources. Although subtle, there is a shift happening in Japan, where after 3.11 people utilise new platforms to evaluate traditional media sources, as guidance for challenging media credibility. Participants' experiences with using media in a disaster context demonstrate the great need for balanced reporting on a disaster, which should be informational, affective and more critical and independent, to increase levels of trust in mass media.

In the context of Japanese contemporary media environment, it becomes clear, then, that in the wake of national disaster, the internet serves as a space for those affected and emotionally disrupted by the disaster, and a platform where they can vent their feelings, protest and react to an ongoing event. On the other side, in the offline space, traditional mass media remain central, serving as a voice to the nation, first news in the emergency, and more trustworthy information than online media. In this way, the interaction among mass media and online media spheres, particularly television, news websites and social media, creates a platform for the evaluation of media credibility and development of personal opinion and judgement.

7.7 Thesis Contribution and Future Work

This study is a significant contribution to media sociology scholarship, as it examines how a disruptive media event is constituted in the age of rapidly evolving media technologies, which challenge the role of traditional mass media. It does so through a close examination of individuals' motives for using different media forms in the wake of the 3.11 disaster in Japan, and through an examination of different ways in which media contributes to an individual's sense of communal belonging and notions of trust. We can see that old and new media forms served to fulfil different individual needs for social belonging, which was, along with the need for credible information, enhanced in the wake of unexpected mega-national disaster. Within this interplay of old and new modes of communication, individual evaluations of media credibility guide media engagement.

As such, the study contributes to existing scholarship on the 3.11 disaster, as it combines analysis of social media use across multiple platforms with in-depth interviews, thereby contextualising user behaviour and providing a deeper understanding of social media's role in their experience of the disaster than can be gained from content analysis alone. Therefore, my study represents a significant addition to extant literature on the 3.11, as it provides insights from less-affected media users from Tokyo and surrounding areas, and an in-depth investigation of individual motives for media behaviour and main factors which contribute to the evaluation of medium credibility in the context of 3.11 and present day.

Qualitatively approached, this study contributes to research on post-disaster recovery and building resilience for future disasters (Aldrich, 2012), by analysing the supposedly positive implications that different media forms have for individual's sense of communal belonging and trust. While material reconstruction has significant importance in the disaster's aftermath and recovery, it has become critical to focus on the social aspects of disasters (Vainio, 2019), social relationships and public support mobilised in the response to disaster, and provide an in-depth understanding of how different media forms help in constructing the idea of others and in strengthening connections with self, family and society. Online expression can be therapeutically beneficial as it facilitates the process of coping with trauma or crisis, thereby opening up opportunities for community building (Arthur, 2009). On this basis, understanding the dynamics of media use across a range of

platforms is important because it may allow us to predict how people will adopt and utilise new communication tools to cope with disasters. Critically, considering that these tools are being increasingly relied upon in disaster circumstances (see Tomer et al., 2015), knowledge of social aspects of a wide range of media platforms and how they can evoke or intensify a sense of social belonging may have implications for how these platforms evolve to better support crisis-stricken communities in the future. Furthermore, the study looks at participants who are based outside the directly affected regions and yet exhibit affective connections to them. Insights from less-affected social media users may be useful in helping charity and relief organisations to more successfully engage volunteers and donors to assist with relief efforts, as well as in understanding how different online communities can motivate members of the public to make financial donations for affected regions.

My research has indicated the importance of employing a diversity of approaches to explore dynamics and shifts in media use in contemporary Japanese society. Moving forward, our aim should be to examine how both traditional mass media and online media can contribute to long-term feelings of belonging in the context of every day contemporary media practices and different media genres, not just news. This could be achieved by analysis of media use in the context of the developing inter-medial environment in Japan and national media events, such as the upcoming Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympics. The thesis suggests that the continued centrality of television and traditional news media consumption despite the credibility concerns, are culturally specific. As Japanese television still follows a national timetable, more research to gain understanding on how engagement with other TV genres in Japan, such as mornings or evening shows, dramas and family programs, will create a sense of social cohesion and connectedness. This thesis makes new theoretical connections that can contribute to our understanding of media use in terms of disaster communication, as well as traditional and online media's role in promoting communal relationships, which are also transferrable to other contextual settings both in Japan and outside of. Through multiple case studies of more recent or anticipated disasters, we can further explore the concept of social togetherness and belonging, and how it is being fostered or cultivated in the inter-medial environment. This research will serve as a guide for further examination of how emotional discourses around the remembrance of 3.11 are

developed in the inter-media environment, which will lead to deeper understanding of the emergence of affective communities and the potential of different media.

As noted above, this research has been driven by the data collected in which participants highlighted positive implications of social media in a disaster context. This is due to the capacity of social media to provide real-time information, alternative videos and updates, support local action and free articulation of emotions and opinions among similarly affected media users. Looking towards research (Cheng et al., 2017; Johnson & Kaye, 1998; Lachlan et al., 2014b; Lachlan et al., 2014c; Westerman et al., 2014) on the risks of fast dissemination, open access and free, unregulated flow of information of user-generated content, we must also be aware of the impact of rumour and misinformation, which significantly reduce the credibility of online media. Finally, having in mind the impact of different motivations and perceptions of media credibility on individuals' media habits, the next step is to examine how, alongside rapid changes in new media technologies and developments in the interplay of old and new media forms, both online and traditional mass media will evolve and reshape news habits and attitudes and contribute to disaster communication.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions (English)

Present-day media use

1. What type of media do you use? (TV, newspaper, social media…)
2. What type of media do you enjoy?
    a. How do you enjoy this media?
3. Do you check news?
    a. How do you access news?
    b. How often? (every day? how many times per day?)
4. Can you tell me a bit more why you use _____? (television, newspapers, social media…)
5. Do you trust ____?
    a. Do you find ____ more reliable than the other media forms?

Media use during 3.11 disaster

6. Where were you at the time of 3.11 disaster?
    a. Can you tell me how did you utilise media during 3.11 disaster?
    b. What was your primary source of information?
    c. How did you obtain necessary information during the earthquake?
7. Why did you use ____as a primary source of news during 3.11?
8. Were you able to contact your family and friends during 3.11?
    a. How did you stay connected with them?
9. How did you obtain necessary information in the following week?
10. Have you noticed any changes in how you used media after the disaster?
11. Did you find _____ reliable in time of disaster?
    a. Can you tell me more about that?

12. During 3.11 disaster, have you shared information yourself? (such as posting online on social media)
    a. Have you discussed disaster news with other people?
    b. Have you exchanged information with your friends?
    c. Did you join any groups to get the information you needed?

Perceptions of community and social connection

13. Since 3.11 disaster, the word kizuna was increasingly used in media, what do you think about that?
    a. How would you define word “kizuna”?
    b. Do you think “kizuna” is still used in Japanese mass media?
14. How do you take interest in what is happening in your local community or society?
15. How do you get involved in community/society in time of crisis or natural disasters?
16. After 3.11 disaster, has your opinion towards local community changed?
    a. Why did you change your attitude?
17. Have you started any new activities? (such as volunteering, donations and so forth)

Concluding questions

18. What do you find positive and what negative about the media after 3.11 disaster?
19. Have you noticed any changes in using media now, six years after the disaster?
20. Would you like to share anything else regarding the media or your overall experience with 3.11 disaster?

Appendix B: Interview Questions (Japanese)

現在のメディア利用

1. 普段はどのようなメディアにアクセスしますか？（例えば、テレビ、新聞、ソーシャルメディア…）
2. どのようなメディアを楽しんでいますか？
    a. なぜ楽しいですか？
3. ニュースをチェックしますか？
    a. どのようにニュースにアクセスしますか。（例えば、ネット、ケイタイなど）
    b. どれぐらいチェックしますか？（一日ですか？何回？）
4. ニュースを得るために、なぜ____にアクセスしますか？
5. ____が信頼できると思いますか？信頼性が高いと思いますか？

3.11災害時のメディア使用

6. 3.11 の時にどこにいましたか？
    a. 3.11 震災時にメディア利用した経験について教えていただけますか？
    b. 主な情報原は何でしたか？
    c. 東日本大震災の時に、どのように必要な情報を集めましたか？
7. 主な情報原として、なぜ___にアクセスしましたか？

8. 3.11 震災時に家族と友達に連絡することができましたか？
    a. どのように家族と友達との接続を維持しましたか？
9. 次の週にどのように必要な情報を集めましたか？
10. 3.11 震災後___さんのメディア利用に何らかの変化に気づいたことありますか？
11. 3.11 震災起きた時にに、____が信頼できると思いましたか？
12. その時に、自分で情報をだすことがありましたか？例えば、SNS で情報を投稿しましたか？
    a. 3.11 ニュースについて他の人と話し合ったことがありますか？
    b. 仲間内での情報交換 しましたか？
    c. 情報を得るために、何らかのグループに参加しましたか？

コミュニティと絆の個人的認識

13. 3.11 震災後、「絆」と言う言葉が多くのメディアで使われるようになったのですが、どう思いますか？
    a. ____さんにとって、絆と言う言葉はどういう意味ですか？
    b. 今、絆はマスメディアでまだ使われていますか？
14. 地域コミュニティまたは日本の社会で起こっていることにどのように関心を持っていますか？ 関心がありますか？
15. 自然災害の時に地域コミュニティにどのようにかかわっていますか？

16. 3.11 の後で、地域コミュニティに対する態度を変更しましたか？

    a. なぜ変更しましたか？

17. 3.11 以後、何か新しい活動を開始しましたか？（例えば、ボランティア活動、募金…）

結末の質問

18. 3.11 震災時のメディアの良いと悪い側面についておしえていただけますか？

19. マスメディアやソーシャルメディアに対する個人的な態度についてもっと教えていただけますか？

20. 3.11 震災時のメディアについてなにか言いたいことはありますか？結論として…