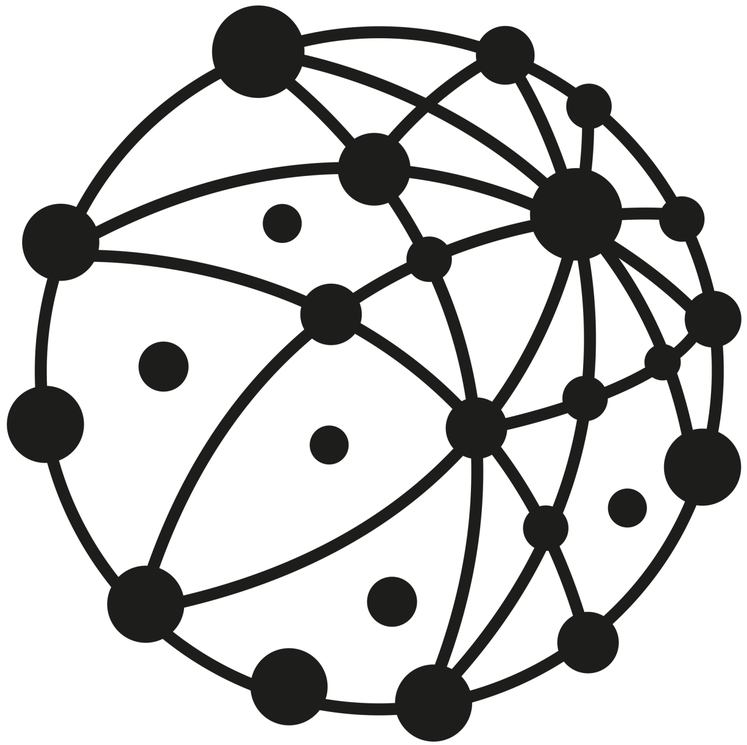


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Crisis Communications in the Digital Age

Hanoi, 28 March 2025



Introductions

John Bailey, Managing Consultant

- Launched IATA Crisis Communications service for the global airline industry (1998-2004)
- Provided Crisis Communications training and consultancy for more than 70 airlines and most major manufacturers, plus seven hotel groups and clients from multiple sectors including many of Europe's national Football Associations
- Author of the IATA *"Best Practice Guidelines on Crisis Communications and Reputation Management in the Digital Age"* (2012-2024) and the *UEFA Crisis Playbook* (season 2024/5)
- Regular guest speaker at the NTSB Training Centre and at conferences around the world



The Communication Landscape

The Media Environment

- Mainstream media outlets going “all-in” on digital channels
- Audience *engagement* the key metric, not “eyeballs” (or readership)
- Top 3 news channels for Under-25s (Gen Z)*:
  1. YouTube
  2. Instagram
  3. TikTok
- Newsroom budgets slashed – fewer/younger reporters, less editorial control
- “Branded” news, commentary and analysis still has credibility and value, but the audience is bombarded with content, mostly unsourced/dubious

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**MorningConsult*, February 2024

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The Battle for Our Attention

1. On a typical day, people post 500 million tweets, share over 10 billion pieces of Facebook content, and watch over a billion hours of YouTube video*
2. Social media driving people into “Echo Chambers”: algorithms will show you more of what you like to see, thereby reinforcing existing beliefs/prejudices and minimizing exposure to alternative sources
3. “Fake News” 70% more likely to be shared or re-tweeted, because of novelty/surprise value and because it’s often designed to provoke an emotional response (eg: anger, disgust)**
4. “Generative AI” causing further disruption – long-term effects unclear

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** Source: “Why Social Media Has Changed the World” MIT, 2020*
***Source: Sinan Aral, “The Hype Machine”, Random House 2020*

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Real…or Fake?



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AVIATION NEWS

Emirates Denounces Fake Plane Crashes

Emirates is trying to get rid of viral videos depicting its airliners crashing.



RUSS NILES Updated Jan 7, 2025 5:16 AM EST



YouTube screenshot

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How the US News Media Operate

- Intense polarisation reflecting political divisions in the US
- Influence of “mainstream” news channels eclipsed by online outlets, podcasts and viral clips amplified by search algorithms
- “Rest of the World” barely exists to the US domestic audience. Coverage of foreign affairs or events reflected almost entirely through the prism of US interests/involvement
- Rolling news channels like CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, etc may go “all in” on major events such as aviation accidents


LEADING THE NIGHTLY NEWSCASTS
MISSING MALAYSIAN FLIGHT 370
11 DAYS STRAIGHT
abc NEWS
CBS NEWS
NBC NEWS
FOX NEWS FOX NEWS
LIVE

How the US News Media Operate

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- Rolling news channels like CNN, Fox News, MSNBC, etc may go “all in” on major events such as aviation accidents
- Multiple parties speaking to the media during response phase: emergency services, airport operator, local/state/federal agencies, politicians


BREAKING NEWS
PIERS MORGAN LIVE
WAS FLT. 370 A 'ZOMBIE PLANE'?
LIVE CNN
BE FLIGHT 370 WRECKAGE ▶ OFFICIALS CAUTION THE OBJECTS MA
6:29 PM PT

Starting Assumptions:

- Foreign airlines (especially non-Western) are less safe, not as well-managed and subject to less stringent regulation than US carriers
- Foreign pilots are not as well-trained as their US counterparts, and therefore less proficient at operating sophisticated Western-built aircraft
- American victims and their families will probably not receive the same standard of care as they would if they were traveling on a US airline
- Suing the airline in a US Court is probably the only way to secure their rights (amplified by plaintiffs' attorneys quoted in the media)
- A new "wild card" to consider…



"Irrespective of the substance of Trump's speculation, by engaging in it, the President of the United States shattered decades' worth of precedent, both legal and cultural, that has guided Heads of State to avoid overt interference…in active air safety investigations".

Trump upends decades-old global air safety investigatory norms

A rush towards speculation and blame could compromise the vital work of the NTSB

Jon Ostrower, Will Guisbond and Elan Head · Aviation Safety · January 30, 2025

***The Air Current*, 30 January 2025**

Photo by Yuri Gripas/Abaca/Sipa USA via AP



“ALWAYS ON” CRISIS RESPONSE

Evolution of Social Media

Mobility

- 8.89 billion smartphone subscriptions (110% of global population)*
- 95% of the world's population lives within reach of a mobile broadband internet connection**
- 40% of the world's population covered by 5G networks

Speed

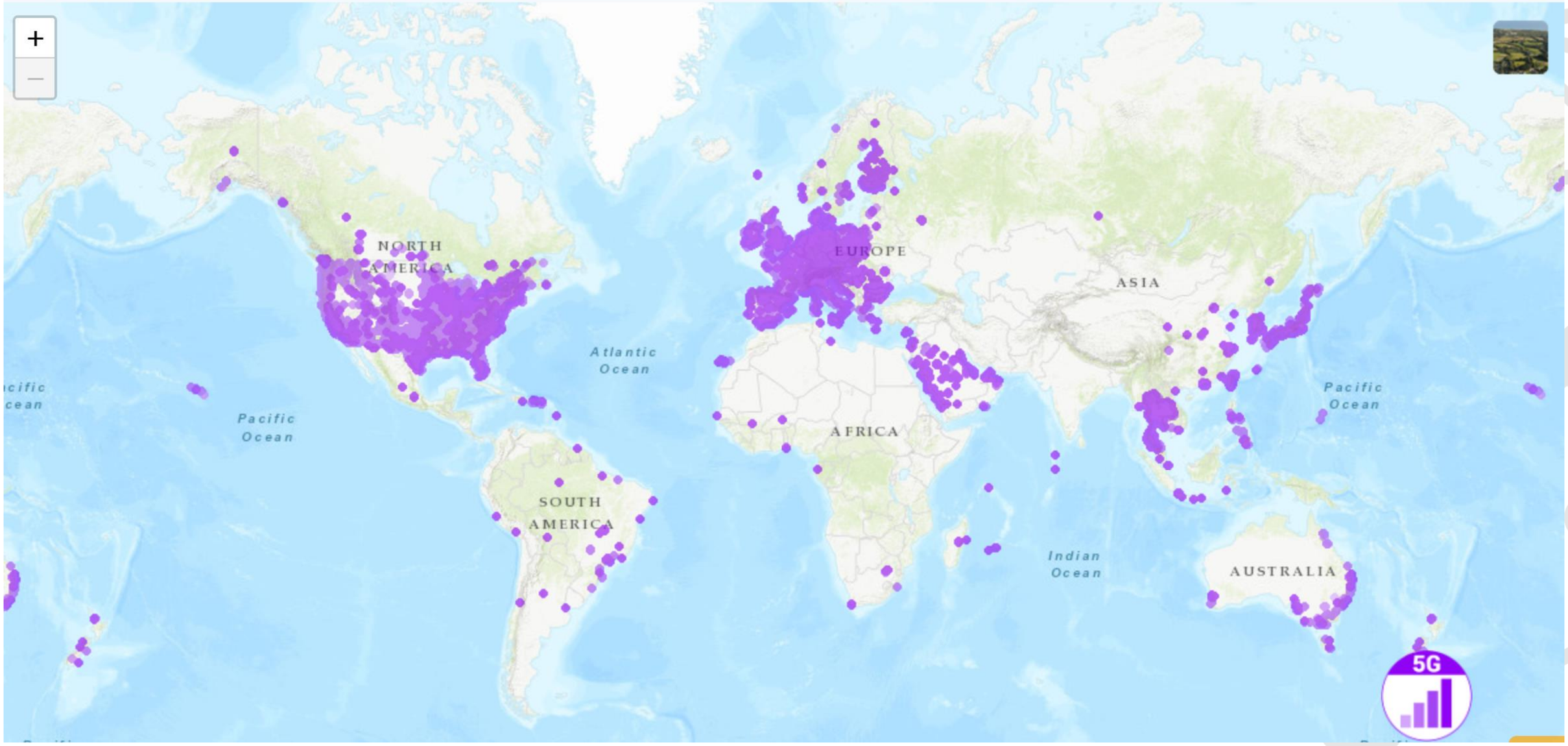
In the five years from 2018 to 2023***:

- Average fixed broadband speed more than doubled
- Average mobile broadband speed more than tripled (mainly 4G)
- With 5G, mobile broadband speed up to 13x faster

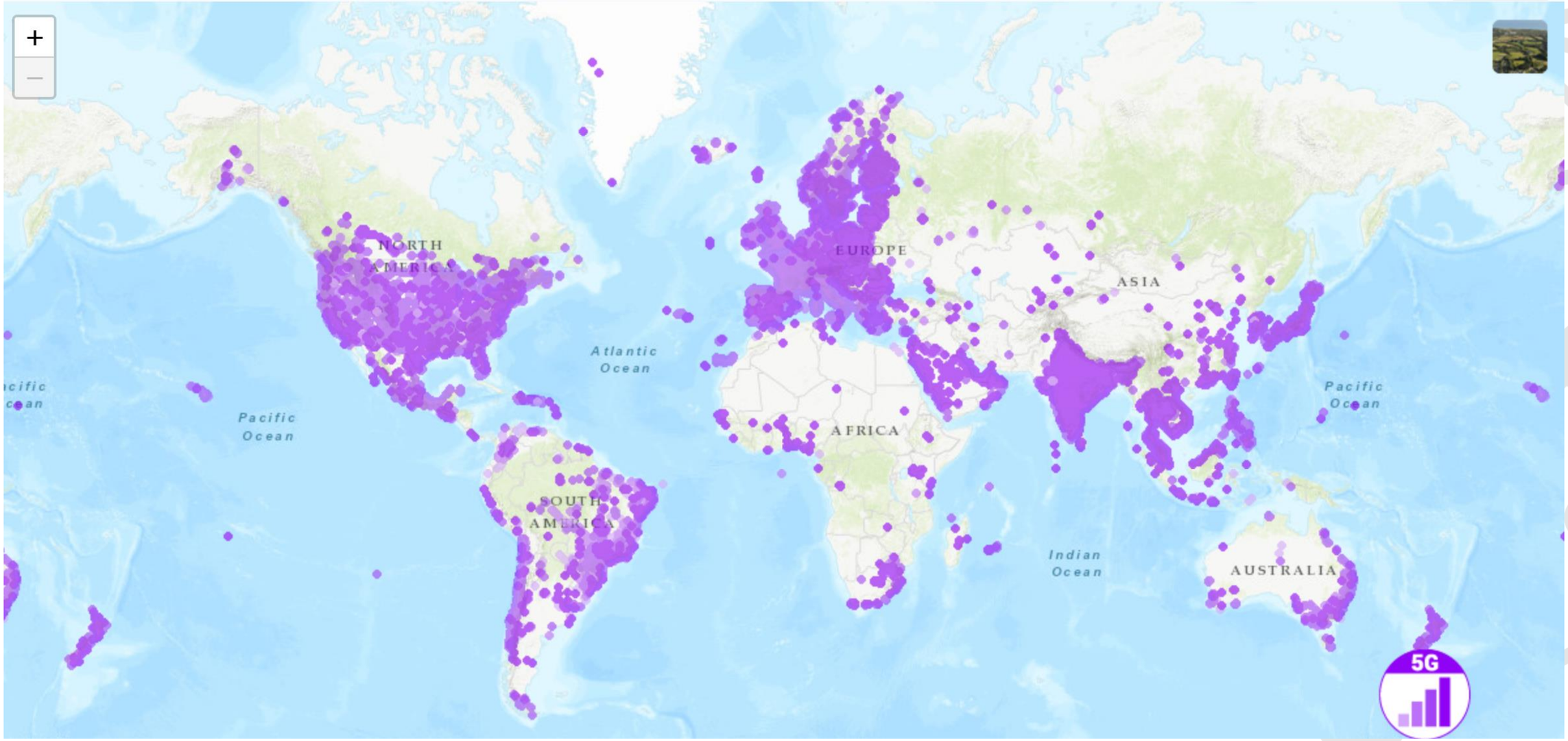
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**** Statista 2023***
***** ITU: Measuring Digital Development, 2023***
****** Cisco Annual Internet Report, March 2020***

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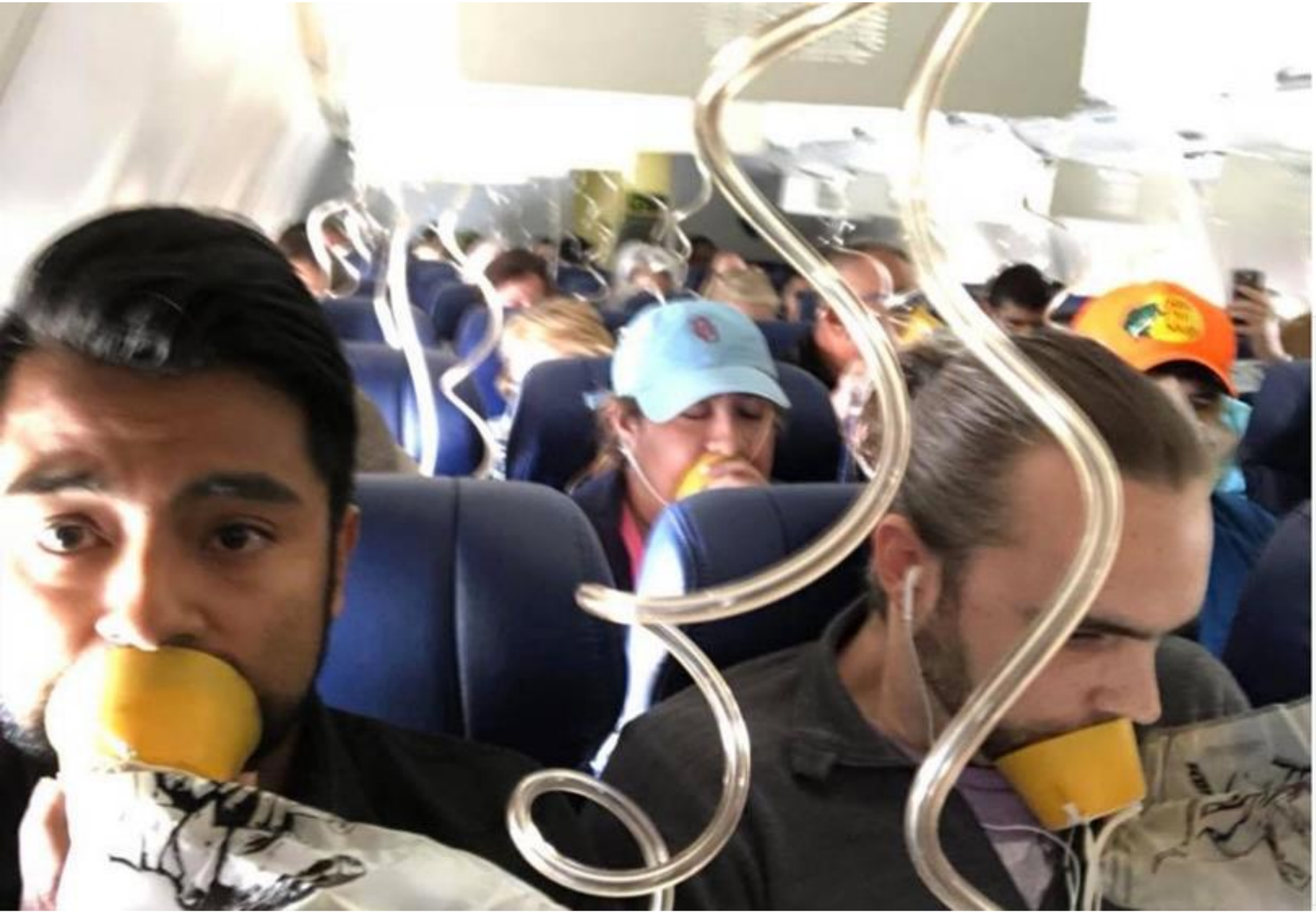


Global 5G Network Coverage, July 2021



Global 5G Network Coverage, July 2023


STARLINK



Marty Martinez
19 hrs ·

At Philadelphia International Airport.

Like Comment Share

403

196 Shares 241 Comments

View previous comments

Michal Lysek It's obviously more important to hold the cell phone and take selfie than strap & tighten the oxygen mask. It's sick. 8

Like · Reply · 2h

Maude Azema Dieu était avec vous ce jour là

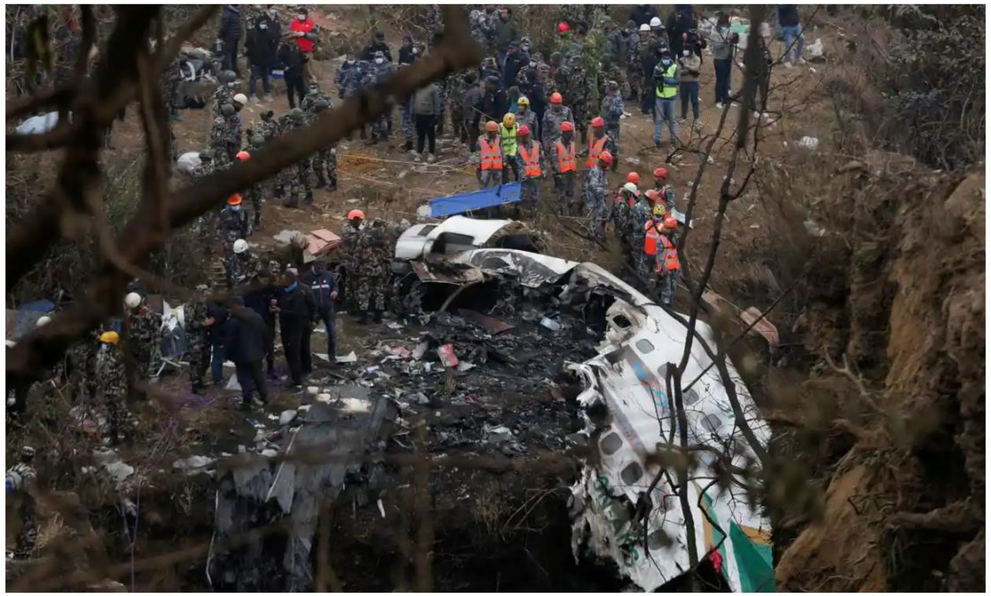
Like · Reply · See Translation · 2h

Alan Dutch Schaefer Addison notice the mouth breathers? Philip 1

Like · Reply · 2h

Nepal plane crash: last moments inside cabin caught on passenger's Facebook live video

Harrowing footage shows passengers had no idea plane was in danger before crash



The Yeti Airlines plane carrying 68 passengers and four crew members crashed in Pokhara, Nepal Photograph: Reuters

In the moments before Nepal's deadliest air crash in decades on Sunday, four friends from India who were onboard began excitedly recording the descent on a Facebook live video.





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Pokhara, Nepal, 15 January 2023



Pokhara, Nepal, 15 January 2023

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AI for Modern Newsrooms

Journalists in over 650 newsrooms around the world rely on Dataminr for News to discover the earliest possible indications of breaking news and gain an edge in covering the stories that matter most to their audiences.

REQUEST A DEMO

ALJAZEERA The Washington Post CNN DW Deutsche Welle Daily Mail

Crisis Communications
“Best Practice”





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IATA Best Practice Guidelines

- A guide to crisis communications planning
- Outlines roles and responsibilities for all parties involved in response to a major accident
- Aligns communication messaging with legal/operational responsibilities in emergency response
- Helps everyone to “stay in their lane”
- Ensures an integrated & consistent response across all channels and touchpoints
- Provides a recommended timeline to guide communication strategy

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Responsibilities: Operating Carrier

- Care of survivors/families of victims
- Emergency call centre
- Family assistance centre/s
- Repatriation of victims
- Recovery, identification and return of personal effects
- Memorial activities (in consultation with families)
- Supporting the technical investigation
- Financial assistance/insurance settlements

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Airline statements should include:

- Expressions of regret and concern (focus on *people*!)
- Factual information about the flight
- Specific actions the airline has taken since learning of the accident/incident
- Factual information about the aircraft
- Factual information about the crew
- Factual information about the passengers on board
- Expression of support for the investigation
- Factual information about the airline

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Airline statements should *avoid*:

- How the investigation will be conducted
- Information in the maintenance records
- The possible cause/s of the accident
- The way the aircraft broke apart, and what this might indicate
- Finding key pieces of evidence, eg voice/data recorders
- The actions of the crew before the accident
- The potential relationship between crew training and the accident

Airline statements should *avoid*:

- The possibility of pilot error, or of error/wrongdoing by any other employee of the airline
- The likelihood that someone/something else must be to blame (eg the aircraft or engine manufacturer)
- The role of weather or air traffic control
- The condition of human remains, and how they will be identified

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Responsibilities: Airport

- Co-ordinating Emergency Response/Search and Rescue
- Immediate care/accommodation of survivors
- Secure accommodation for meeters/greeters
- Managing media presence/co-ordinating initial press briefings
- Minimising disruption to other airport users
- Arranging media access to accident site
- Overseeing clearance of aircraft debris
- Returning to normal operations ASAP

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Responsibilities: Manufacturers

- Supporting the technical investigation
- Notifying customers/operators of any safety recommendations resulting from the investigation

Responsibilities: Investigating Body

- Leads technical investigation (ICAO Annex 13)
- Coordinates supporting parties
- Manages flow of information on progress of the investigation (press statements & briefings)
- Issues initial findings
- Conducts public hearings
- Publishes final report
- Recommends safety enhancements

Other parties likely to be involved:

- Emergency services
- Police/investigating agencies (FBI/Interpol)
- Military/Coastguard (Search & Rescue)
- Local Prosecutor/Magistrate
- Airport Operator/s (origin/destination/point nearest)
- Air Traffic Control
- Government agencies/ministries (DCA/MoT)
- Head/s of State
- Foreign Governments/Embassies





30 January 2025


Any
Questions?

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