



Answering the Call for Scholarship: The *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*

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In the foundational work *Normal Accidents*, Charles Perrow (1984) observed that advances and globalization of technology were creating a form of “interactive complexity” where seemingly minor failures could escalate and cascade throughout a system, leading to devastating accidents. Furthermore, as technology became more ubiquitous and complex, such accidents become normal in the sense that they are programmed into systems. Tight coupling; lack of buffers; and interactive, unanticipated nonlinear interactions may create systemic collapse. Simply put, crises of significant magnitude are, as Perrow predicted, increasing in frequency and intensity (Helsloot, Boin, Jacobs, & Comfort, 2012). The magnitude, complexity, and frequency of such events challenge the existing conceptualization of crisis management in general and crisis communication specifically (Topper & Lagadec, 2013). Communication is essential to understanding and managing crises in two general ways. First, communication is necessary for meaning making around what are very uncertain and equivocal events. Second, communication is instrumental as part of the crisis and risk management functions (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). This includes activities such as environmental scanning for risks, creating an effective response, resolving crises, and learning the lessons from these events.

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Coordinated responses, cooperation, evacuations and warning, risk education, processes of crisis planning and crisis decision-making, memorializing and grieving, resolving, and repairing all require communication.

This journal, more than 15 years in the making, grew out of a recognition that crisis and risk communication are growing research topics with important applied, global, and interdisciplinary dimensions. This diverse body of research follows a variety of methodological and epistemic traditions, and although other traditional outlets for communication scholarship have been open to publishing crisis and risk research, the volume of work warrants a dedicated journal. Topical conferences, such as the International Crisis and Risk Communication Conference and the biannual European Communication Research and Education Association Crisis Communication Conference, as well as handbooks, including the *Handbook of Crisis Communication* (Coombs & Holladay, 2011), the *Handbook of Crisis and Risk Communication* (Heath & O'Hair, 2010), the *Handbook of International Crisis Communication* (Schwarz, Seeger, & Auer, 2016), and research and theory texts, such as *Theorizing Crisis Communication* (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013), are further evidence that a focused academic journal is needed. These outlets also demonstrate that the field is maturing and relevant.

Crisis and risk communication also have important interdisciplinary connections, and we believe that grounding this journal in the communication field, with its tradition of eclectic approaches to inquiry, allows investigators to make important contributions across related fields. Psychology has contributed significantly to the literature on risk perception, while economics has pioneered understanding of risk assessment, and both include work in risk communication. *Risk Analysis* is one primary outlet for this work. Sociology and, to a lesser degree, anthropology have focused on issues surrounding warnings, evacuation, and coordination, and much of this work appears in the *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management*. Communication researchers seeking outlets for their work have turned to more general journals, such as the *Journal of Applied Communication Research*, *Management Communication Quarterly*, or one of many journals in public relations.

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(*JICRCR*) also acknowledges the close intersection of crisis and risk communication. Several important efforts have been made to connect what have historically been separate domains of research inquiry and practice (Heath & O’Hair, 2010; Reynolds & Seeger, 2005). Risk and crisis communication can be understood as two interconnected processes in a larger system of managing, responding to, and understanding an emerging threat. They may also be understood as counterpoints such that crisis is the manifestation of a risk and the failure to manage it successfully. Heath and O’Hair (2010) described crisis and risk as fundamentally linked. *JICRCR*’s attention to both phenomena creates opportunities to explore those linkages.

The inaugural issue of *JICRCR* reflects the range and reach of crisis and risk communication research. This includes qualitative and quantitative approaches to crises that are functions of organizational decisions, natural disasters, and emerging diseases and crises that are associated with a wide range of cultures and locations. In addition, the journal is inclusive of local, state, federal, and international perspectives and of work from the research, policy, and practitioner communities.

Climate change, emerging diseases, population migration and displacement, breakdowns in civil society, aging infrastructure, rising expectations, limitations and competition for critical resources—food, water, energy—technological complexity and collapses, and many other forms of natural, human-caused, and interactive events will challenge and, in many cases, overwhelm our communication processes and capacities. Systemic research is one important element in understanding, managing, responding to, and learning from these events.

Matthew W. Seeger, PhD, is a faculty member and administrator at Wayne State University. His research concerns crisis and risk communication; health promotion and communication; crisis response and agency coordination; the role of media, including new media; crisis and communication ethics; failure of complex systems; and postcrisis renewal.

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