Editorial Essay: A Reflection on Methodological Diversity in the *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research*

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In our previous editorials, we have touched on different aspects of diversity and diversification in crisis and risk communication research. We have argued that while the field is starting to expand from its focus on Western corporate perspectives to include non-Western countries, non-corporate crises, and more broadly embracing different perspectives, we also suggest that diversification needs to continue to develop and be supported (Diers-Lawson & Meißner, 2021a). Furthermore, we have reviewed the multidisciplinary character of crisis and risk communication research, involving researchers from fields like public relations, political science, sociology, journalism, public health, and others suggesting this is not only healthy for the continued development of crisis and risk communication research but also necessary to more fully understand the phenomenon (Diers-Lawson & Meißner, 2021b).

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In this editorial, we would like to identify another aspect of diversity that we deem crucial: the importance of supporting methodological diversity in crisis and risk communication research. For both theory-building and theory-testing, it is fruitful, if not essential, to apply different methodological angles to increase the robustness of our findings and theories. In her analysis of the field's development, Diers-Lawson (2020) points out that the methodological diversity of crisis communication journal articles has evolved with the field's development with conceptual and best practices emerging first, followed by rhetorical, qualitative, quantitative, then experimental approaches.

Summary of *JICRCR's* Methodological Diversity, Volumes 1–4

Because the *JICRCR* is only beginning its 5th year of publication, methodological diversity in the journal looks somewhat different than what Diers-Lawson (2020) describes for the field overall. For example, the results of one-way ANOVAs looking for differences in the method and volume number, crisis type (i.e., transgression, event, reputational, or disaster), or organizational context (i.e., corporate, governmental, nongovernmental, or stakeholder-focused) were not significant suggesting that there is no systematic difference in the methodological approaches in research published in the journal over time or based on core crisis contexts. Because there have been three different editors over the journal's 5-year history, this also suggests that trends in methodology published are not attributable to editorial preference. However, when looking at the distribution of research methods, there are some clear trends in methods of the pieces submitted, reviewed, and published in the journal (see Figure 1).

Of the 58 pieces published in the last 5 years and 11 issues, 10 have been conceptual or theoretical (i.e., no new research reported), 13 have been rhetorical (e.g., thematic analyses or critical methods), 4 have been qualitative summaries of interview-based research, 6 have been quantitative content analyses, 2 have analyzed big datasets, 15 have been questionnaires, 4 have used experimental methods, and 4 have used mixed methods. Unsurprisingly, there are significant differences across the
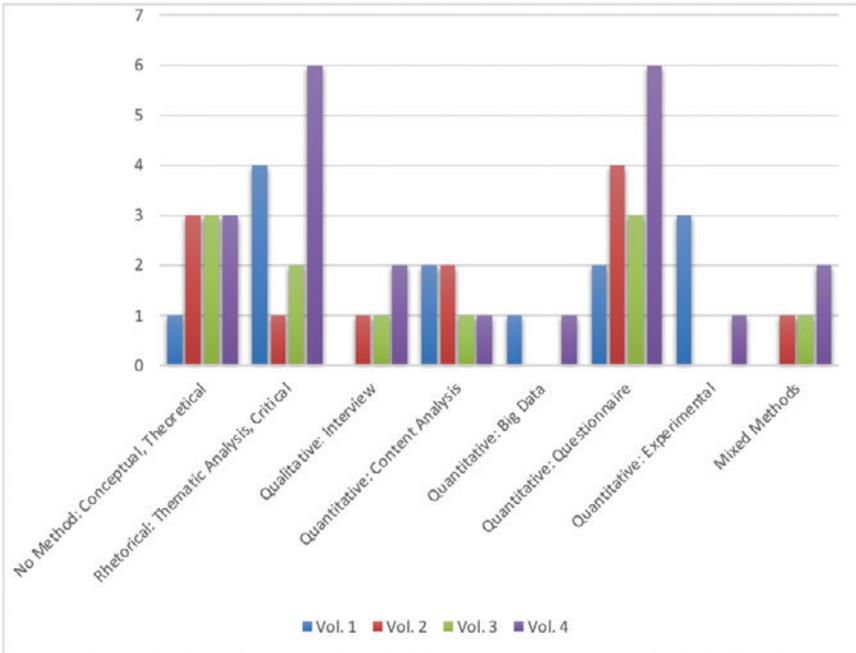
FIGURE 1 **Summary of Methods in the *Journal of International Crisis and Risk Communication Research,* Volumes 1–4**

publications in the application of different methods (C^2 (7) = 22.28; $p <.01$) with conceptual, rhetorical, and questionnaire-based research generally being overrepresented in the articles while interview, content analysis, big data, experimental, and mixed methods pieces are generally underrepresented in the articles.

While we do not intend to change the editorial policy nor will we preference any methodology, we would especially encourage the submission of some of the less represented methods into the journal in upcoming volumes and issues. For example, we would welcome more qualitative and *big data* (i.e., computational methods) submissions. These methods have traditionally complemented the classical crisis and risk communication research toolkit, adding both depth and scale to their endeavors and as we continue to develop and apply theory to crisis and risk communication strategy, it makes sense that these methods would be better represented in the journal.

Qualitative research, especially interview-based data, can offer opportunities for in-depth analyses of the translation of the message (i.e., crisis and risk narratives) to different audiences. It can help the field better understand the messengers by connecting strategy and practice with the recipients of those messages to identify any opportunities to improve communication at critical times with targeted audiences. Of course, qualitative research is often viewed as instrumental in the development of theory; however, it should also be viewed as instrumental in evaluating theories that have been validated by quantitative methods to critically reflect on multiple measures of validity such as construct, content, and face validity. This may be particularly important as nations begin to emerge from the global experience of COVID-19, interview-based data presents an opportunity to ensure that, in the wake of the collective trauma, change, and challenge of the pandemic, people still perceive key crisis and risk communication issues like reputation, severity, and susceptibility (to name just a few) in the same way as before the pandemic. Perhaps the biggest strength of qualitative methods is that they enable us to reconstruct how different groups make sense of crisis and risk experiences. For example, Meißner's (2018) reconstruction of the professional role concepts by Japanese journalists in the context of disaster reporting provides such an example.

Comparatively, *computational methods* have the advantage that large datasets can be analyzed relatively quickly—which is especially advantageous in the context of crises where global reactions to live situations and thus copious amounts of data can be produced in short time spans. An overview of how computational methods are applied in crisis communication research is provided by van der Meer (2016), who points out that the classification of texts is a primary function of these relatively new methodological tools. An example is the topic modeling of psychological concerns related to COVID-19 expressed on Facebook (Chen et al., 2021). A development of better tools and methods of analysis of computational data within the crisis and risk communication context would provide significant value to a community of academics and practitioners often needing to make critical decisions and

strategic recommendations in a time-sensitive, media-rich, and information-rich environment. There is also insufficient development in much of the computational methods in terms of the translation of present theory into big data; therefore, additional research in this area will help to advance both theory and practice in crisis and risk communication research.

We would also strongly encourage research that uses a *mixed methods* approach, particularly in the context of crisis and risk communication research because they can provide deep and systematic understanding of crisis-related phenomena. For instance, the *digital ethnography* approach by Sumiala et al. (2018, 2019) shows how automated classification of social media postings and qualitative analysis can mutually inform each other and generate a deep and systematic understanding of crisis-related text corpora.

These examples are, of course, only the tip of the iceberg. Employing rhetorical, critical, qualitative, quantitative, experimental, and mixed methodologies, there are many research designs that have and continue to make important contributions to theory and practice in crisis and risk communication. These are intended to show just a few of the opportunities our growing methodological toolkit has to offer.

Methodological Excellence in Volume 5, Issue 1 of the *JICRCR*

One of the strengths of the present issue of the journal is that it showcases some of the methodological excellence in crisis and risk communication research developed and applied by our colleagues. The first two of the pieces reflect an underrepresented method in the journal—experimental design. Lin et al.'s piece, *"I Thought about It and I May Follow What You Said": Three Studies Examining the Effects of Elaboration and Source Credibility on Risk Behavior Intentions* is a three-study experimental analysis demonstrating that cognitive elaboration may be a critical factor to explain how people process risk information in different risk contexts. Likewise, Wang et al.'s piece, *"I Lose" "I Gain" vs. "They Lose" "They Gain": The Influence of Message Framing on Donation Intentions in Disaster Fundraising,* provides a good example of experimental design in crisis and risk communication research finding that

there are significant differences in first- versus third-person messages on charitable donation which presents both theoretical and practical advice on message development after crises. The third piece in this issue, Ansah's *COVID-19 Dialogue on Facebook: Crisis Communication's Relationship between Ghanian Authorities and Citizens*, uses another underrepresented method in the journal—quantitative content analysis—in order to explore dialogue and engagement between the Ghanian Ministry of Information and citizens of the country revealing the communication challenges emerging from the pandemic. In analyzing crisis communication in Africa, this piece also supports our previous call for improving the diversity of cultural perspectives represented in the journal as well.

The final piece in this issue, Rice and Bloomfield's *Commemorating Disorder in After-Action Reports: Rhetorics of Organizational Trauma after the Las Vegas Shooting,* represents a method often found in the journal—qualitative thematic analysis of documents—but represents a text not often explored in crisis communication research—the after-action report (AAR) and also uses theoretical approaches seldom used in crisis and risk communication research, thus blending new documents and older approaches to provide a novel understanding of the rhetoric of crisis renewal.

As a field, crisis and risk communication research is still developing and growing. As this volume demonstrates, crisis and risk communication research not only embraces different methods, perspectives, and approaches to understanding the phenomena studied, but also bridges the gap between theoretical and applied research. Thus, while it is right to celebrate and support this, we also recognize that we need to continue to develop and support diversity in crisis and risk communication research ranging from the perspectives and theories developed and adopted to the methods used to analyze data.

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