

**“THE HANDBOOK OF CRISIS COMMUNICATION”
(2023), SECOND EDITION, EDITED BY W. TIMOTHY
COOMBS & SHERRY J. HOLLADAY, JOHN WILEY &
SONS LTD**

Mădălina Maria TOMA
madalina.toma@usm.ro

PhD Candidate of Doctoral School of Faculty of Journalism and
Communication Sciences, University of Bucharest
University Assistant at the Faculty of Letters and Communication
Sciences, "Ștefan cel Mare" University of Suceava

The second edition of the Handbook of Crisis Communication is a result of the need to modify established theories in the field of communication. Since the first edition was published in 2010, the field of crisis communication has evolved significantly, with technology and the online environment exerting a notable influence. If the first edition represented a pioneering "declaration of independence" for the nascent field of crisis communication, which then faced challenges in gaining recognition as a distinct discipline, this new edition serves to reinforce the consolidation and evolution of the field. Its necessity is no longer a matter of proof, but rather of development and adaptation to the current era, in which crises are becoming more unpredictable and diverse, and the time and manner of response have become critical considerations. The advent of new technologies has contributed to an increase in the complexity of crises, necessitating a shift in the timeframe for crisis response. This handbook is edited by W. Timothy Coombs, a prominent figure in the development of Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), and Sherry J. Holladay, a distinguished scholar in the fields of strategic and corporate communication. The Handbook provides an authoritative and nuanced perspective on the current state of the field.

The Handbook is divided into four major sections that collectively address methodologies used in crisis communication. These include computational methods and experiments, theoretical foundations, and a review and adaptation of existing theories such as SCCT, Stealing Thunder, Social Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC), Rhetorical Arena Theory and The Discourse of Renewal Theory. The third part presents new research directions and explores emerging areas, including pandemics, digital media, and the use of crisis

communication by U.S. presidents. The fourth part includes practical applications, case studies, and various suggestions for integrating research into practice. This rigorous structure reflects the evolution of the field of crisis communication, both in theory and practice.

Part 1 provides an overview of the methodologies used. It features contributions from distinguished researchers in the field who examine the use of computational techniques in crisis scenarios, with a particular focus on the potential of big data and automated content analysis to inform our understanding of public responses during such crises. This second edition of the Handbook of Crisis Communication identifies four distinct areas of crisis communication: organizational crises, public health crises, natural disasters and political crises. The methods presented are applicable to all four sub-domains. This section, comprising four chapters, elucidates trends and alterations in crisis communication research, culminating in a meta-analysis of pertinent research published in the Journal of Public Relations Research and Public Relations Review between 1975 and 2006. As in the majority of the contributions throughout the book, the preponderance of public relations as a parenting discipline is still a prominent feature of this analysis.

Those engaged in research within the field of crisis communication will find the methodological diversity covered in the second part of this handbook to be of interest. It is evident that the editors have sought to challenge the dominance of case-study based research by including studies that illustrate the value of alternative approaches, such as textual analysis, content analysis and experimental methods. This section, entitled 'Theory Refinement and Development', elucidates the most widely used theories of all time, extending their scope into interdisciplinary areas and offering refinements. It considers such theories as Corporate Apologia, Stealing Thunder, Discourse of Renewal Theory, Social Mediated Crisis Communication (SMCC), Rhetorical Arena Theory, and Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT). It also draws attention to current case studies in which these theories could be utilized.

As previously mentioned, this second edition of the Handbook addresses four distinct categories of crises: political crises, public health crises, natural disasters and organizational crises. The aforementioned categories are discussed by the researchers in the third part of the Handbook, which addresses emerging trends and contemporary challenges within these categories. The initial section, dedicated to the analysis of political crises, examines the influence of technological

advancement and political dynamics on the practice of crisis communication. One chapter examines the manner in which authoritarian regimes utilise digital technology to control the narrative surrounding crises, exploring the concept of "dictatorial dilemmas" in the context of digital crisis management. Another chapter examines the relationship between political crises and satire in the media, demonstrating how satirical representations can either amplify or, conversely, mitigate the impact of crises. Additionally, a chapter on American leaders examines the rhetorical strategies employed by US presidents in managing national and international crises, with illustrative examples drawn from their speeches.

The second subsection examines public health crises, with a particular emphasis on their distinctive challenges, including the ongoing pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus. The chapter on integrated strategies introduces an innovative model that combines strategy with the "dosage" of information, offering solutions for reducing the unintended effects of messages and encouraging the public to adopt appropriate behaviours. A further key theme is the combating of misinformation, where the authors place considerable emphasis on the importance of building trust through transparent and evidence-based communication. This is particularly pertinent in the digital age, where the dissemination of misinformation is rapid.

The third subsection on natural disasters underscores the necessity for proactive planning and effective communication in the context of natural disaster crises. A chapter presents methodologies for risk analysis, resource mobilization and community involvement in disaster prevention and response, with illustrative examples drawn from recent cases. Furthermore, another chapter elucidates the role of social media and mobile technologies in disaster management, underscoring the necessity for collaboration between official agencies and volunteers. The concluding chapter of this section puts forth an innovative communication model for community resilience, which integrates individual and community perspectives to foster sustainable resilience to disasters.

The final subsection, on organizational crises, examines the insights gained from crisis management in corporate contexts. The case study of the Odwalla crisis provides an excellent illustration of the importance of reputation management and the need to rebuild public trust.

Another chapter examines the impact of linguistic choices in communication, investigating how language abstraction can influence the efficacy of responses during a crisis. Additionally, a novel concept

for the management of emotional and traumatic experiences, the "trauma-informed approach," is introduced. This approach is designed to provide support for employees who have been affected by a crisis.

The third part of the book offers valuable insights into new developments in crisis communication, addressing both global trends and methodological innovations. The topics analyzed reflect the diversity and complexity of contemporary crises, offering valuable tools and concepts for both practitioners and researchers. This section emphasizes the importance of adaptation and innovation in the face of the complex challenges of 21st-century crises by integrating practical examples with emerging theories.

Part IV of *The Handbook of Crisis Communication* explores the practical application of crisis communication theories and concepts. By means of case studies and illustrative examples drawn from real-life contexts, this section elucidates the intricate nuances of crisis management and proffers solutions tailored to a spectrum of organizational and social scenarios.

The initial set of chapters is dedicated to the examination of organizational crisis management. The Odwalla crisis study is presented as a model example of an effective crisis response, emphasizing transparency, accountability, and the building of trust with the public. Subsequent chapters examine strategies for responding to crises involving products, with particular emphasis on the role of language in facilitating effective communication.

Furthermore, the section examines the interconnection between emotional states and communication during crises. The concept of trauma-informed management is introduced, with particular emphasis on the importance of addressing the emotional and traumatic experiences of those affected. It is argued that empathy and psychological support are essential components of effective crisis communication.

Another significant area of focus is visual communication in crisis response. The function of digital platforms, images, and videos in influencing public perception and conveying clear messages is examined, emphasizing the impact of visual media in crisis situations. The section proceeds with an examination of the concept of strategic improvisation, which acknowledges the necessity for flexibility and adaptability in the context of unpredictable crises. Furthermore, the significance of meticulously crafted guidelines and communications is underscored.

An innovative concept is presented in the form of 'scansis', which addresses situations where an organization simultaneously faces a crisis

and a scandal. The section concludes with a discussion of solutions for the effective management of such circumstances.

The final section of Part IV considers the ways in which past crises have shaped public perceptions and influenced organizational strategies. An understanding of the influence of history on crisis management enables organizations to learn from past experiences and thereby improve future crisis responses.

The Handbook of Crisis Communication represents a comprehensive and significant contribution to the field of crisis communication. However, it should be noted that the work is not without certain limitations, which may impact its overall impact. One limitation of the text is its reliance on case studies, which restricts the possibility of extending the conclusions to a wider context. A further limitation is the preponderance of case studies from a Western perspective, which fails to take account of crises in other regions. The complex terminology employed in numerous chapters may prove challenging for readers lacking advanced training, and the absence of coherent integration between theoretical frameworks and practical applications impairs the overall cohesion of the work: Nevertheless, the book serves to consolidate the field of crisis communication and offers innovative insights on emerging topics. The clear classification of crisis types provides a practical framework for analysis. In conclusion, although the book has shortcomings, it is a valuable contribution to the understanding and navigation of contemporary crises. It provides a robust foundation for future research and applications in this field.