



Crisis-related research in communication and business journals: An interdisciplinary review from 1992 to 2011



Jin Hong Ha^{a,*}, Daniel Riffe^{b,1}

^a Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, Daegu University, Gyeongsan, South Korea

^b School of Journalism and Mass Communication, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Campus Box 3365, Chapel Hill, NC 27599, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 4 July 2014

Received in revised form 3 May 2015

Accepted 12 June 2015

Keywords:

Crisis communication

Interdisciplinary research

Content analysis

ABSTRACT

This content analysis sheds light on research topic, method, theory, and authorship in crisis communication research published in communication and business journals and assesses which field has been more “interdisciplinary” in approach. Crisis research in communication has focused heavily on the effects of crisis management, using a quantitative approach and content analyses, with media articles as data sources. Business crisis research has concentrated mainly on evaluation of crisis events, using a qualitative approach and narrative analyses, and with practitioners as data sources. The data suggest that, in the past 20 years, crisis research in communication has been more interdisciplinary in terms of theory and authorship, whereas business has been more interdisciplinary in terms of methods.

© 2015 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

An interdisciplinary approach can help researchers reframe knowledge using other fields’ models and terminology, reshaping knowledge into something more than in its original state (Locker, 1994). Is crisis communication research interdisciplinary? The answer seems almost intuitive because different disciplines have studied crisis communication and management strategies.

However, crisis communication scholarship has evolved along separate and non-converging paths. One (communication-oriented) approach has focused on *rebuilding relationships* between organizations and publics (An & Cheng, 2010). Another (marketing-oriented) approach has involved *recovery of financial damages* (Hart, Heyse, & Boin, 2001). Not surprisingly, some scholars suggest a third approach, with crisis communication practice guided by both communication and marketing perspectives and focused on restoring organizational image and reputation (e.g., Benoit, 1995; Gilpin & Murphy, 2006; Hearit, 1994). Gilpin and Murphy (2006) conclude that realities of crisis communication *practice* demand an interdisciplinary approach in scholarship.

Still, the question of whether crisis communication research is interdisciplinary remains essentially unanswered. A few studies (e.g., An & Cheng, 2010; Avery, Lariscy, Kim, & Hocke, 2010; Palenchar & Heath, 2007) provide descriptive

* Correspondence to: Assistant Professor in the Department of Journalism and Mass Communication, 1410 Joint Research Building, Daegu University, Daegu-daero 201, Gyeongsan, Gyeongbuk 712-714, South Korea. Tel.: +82 1023337692.

E-mail addresses: tarheel@daegu.ac.kr, jinhong.ha@gmail.com (J.H. Ha), driffe@email.unc.edu (D. Riffe).

¹ Richard Cole Eminent Professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communications at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Campus Box 3365, Chapel Hill, NC 27599.

insights (type or frequency of author, institution, research purpose, use of theory, and method), but were limited to crisis communication research in public relations, and not across disciplines.

This study examined crisis communication research published in journals in public relations, advertising, journalism, and telecommunications, and in business, marketing, and management, from 1992 to 2011. Data were compared between “parent” fields (communication or business), in terms of research topic, method, theory, and authorship.

2. Literature review

2.1. Interdisciplinary research approach

[Locker \(1994\)](#) describes research as interdisciplinary if it draws on theories from more than one discipline or field and employs multiple data collection and analysis methods: i.e., different researchers examine the same phenomenon, guided by what are presumably complementary theories, methods, and fundamental knowledge from diverse fields and disciplines ([Locker, 1993](#)).

For example, [Reinsch and Lewis \(1993\)](#) documented the interdisciplinarity of business communication scholarship which cited sources beyond business, management, and economics, such as written and speech communication, psychology, and social science. Similarly, in calling for an “open-system” approach to building theory in public relations, [Broom \(2006\)](#) invited more interdisciplinary research: e.g., when building a conceptual foundation for theory on public relations roles, he suggests looking beyond the public relations literature to fields such as business, counseling, psychology, sociology, anthropology, and economics. Recently, [Coombs \(2010\)](#) wrote that research on crisis communication should also emphasize connecting it to other fields, such as risk communication, issue management, and reputation management. [Cho and Khang \(2006\)](#) analyzed Internet-related research in major journals in communications, marketing, and advertising between 1994 and 2003, observing that the research was not concentrated in or dominated by particular institutions or scholars.

While an interdisciplinary approach seems desirable because it allows researchers to connect with larger conversations that span fields and disciplines and raise new questions for research ([Locker, 1994](#)), some researchers are wary of difficulties associated – correctly or not – with interdisciplinary research ([Kent, 1994](#)). First, such work requires fluency in multiple literatures, making it more time-consuming than narrower research ([Locker, 1993](#)). Second, different disciplines disagree fundamentally on what constitutes appropriate data, analytic approaches, and questions for research ([Larson, 1993](#)). Third, researchers may fear misapplying concepts and methods from other fields ([Jackson, 1992](#)). Finally, research conducted in different paradigms may be noncumulative, so knowledge may evolve more slowly ([Reinsch & Lewis, 1993](#)).

2.2. Trend study in communication research

Communication scholars have explored trends in research methods (e.g., [Lovejoy, Watson, Lacy, & Riffe, 2014](#); [Riffe & Freitag, 1997](#)), as well as substantive and conceptual areas like journalism (e.g., [Cooper, Potter, & Dupagne, 1994](#)), advertising (e.g., [Soley & Reid, 1988](#)), new media (e.g., [Cho & Khang, 2006](#); [Tomasello, 2001](#)), public relations (e.g., [Ki & Khang, 2005](#); [Pasadeos, Berger, & Renfro, 2010](#)), and crisis communication (e.g., [An & Cheng, 2010](#); [Avery et al., 2010](#); [Palenchar & Heath, 2007](#)).

Specifically, [Pasadeos and Renfro \(1992\)](#) documented the emergence of public relations scholarship as a literature addressing a specific public relations function not addressed by traditional social sciences. [Cho \(2005\)](#) investigated how authorship and programs of research reflected evolving functions performed by public relations. Most importantly, [Pasadeos et al. \(2010\)](#) used citations to identify new research topics, including a distinct new focus within public relations – crisis management – studied mainly by [Allen and Caillouet \(organizational impression management strategies, 1994\)](#), [Hearit \(rhetorical analysis, 1994\)](#), [Benoit \(image repair theory, 1995\)](#), and [Coombs \(situational crisis communication theory, 1998\)](#).

Despite what seems to be growing scholarly interest in crisis communication, studies examining that scholarship are limited ([Ha & Boynton, 2014](#)). [Avery et al. \(2010\)](#) analyzed crisis communication research in public relations, in terms of journal, method, sample characteristics, and theory: most articles relied heavily on rhetorical analyses and experiments, frequently used student samples, and focused largely on post-crisis and recovery management strategies. Similarly, [An and Cheng \(2010\)](#) explored research topics or themes, theoretical applications, use of research questions/hypotheses, data gathering procedures and sources, and sample methods in crisis communication articles published from 1975 to 2006; however, they focused only on public relations journals (i.e., *Public Relations Review* and *Journal of Public Relations Research*). [Ha and Boynton \(2014\)](#) recently examined how crisis communication research was conducted, using an interdisciplinary approach in terms of theoretical, methodological, and authorship frameworks, but extending the focus beyond public relations journals to other communication journals, e.g. advertising, journalism, telecommunication, etc.

Meanwhile, trends in business scholarship on crisis communication research have largely remained unexplored. However, [Hart et al. \(2001\)](#) illustrated developmental trends in crisis management practice (e.g., the evolution from an industrial society toward a risk society, or from episodic to continuous crisis management) and resulting challenges for crisis management scholars.

The current study takes the next step, comparing the interdisciplinarity of crisis communication research within the communication and business fields.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/138800>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/138800>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)