

學術對談

危機傳播管理的前世今生：經典危機溝通理論的再思考

對談人：蒂莫西·庫姆斯、黃懿慧
翻 譯：付涵



蒂莫西·庫姆斯教授
(Prof. W. Timothy Coombs)

「在危機溝通與管理的範疇中，我看到了兩個充滿潛力的新領域。其一是行為經濟學，因為它有助於解釋為什麼管理者經常不遵循危機傳播研究提供的建議。當組織不遵循研究人員提供的『處方』時，我們不應該感到驚訝，那是因為有多種因素會阻礙建議被採用；注重避免損失的行為經濟學是一個奇妙的解釋工具。其次則是公共衛生危機研究，此領域結合健康傳播和風險溝通，產製了許多豐富的知識。」

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Dialogue

Revisiting the Situational Crisis Communication Theory

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Abstract

W. Timothy Coombs is an outstanding communication scholar with a particular focus on crisis communication. His work was instrumental in developing Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT), which is one of the most widely accepted theories in the field of crisis communication. In this interview, Professor Coombs first shares how he applied attribution theory and the concept of perceived responsibility in crisis communication studies. He then argues that the social media era calls for a variety of media forms and content. He stresses the importance of ethical base response for crisis communication in different cultural contexts. He also explicates the research on paracrisis and stresses the importance of cross-disciplinary crisis communication research with other fields (e.g. management theory, behavioral economics, health communication, risk communication). Finally, Professor Coombs points out that there is still much for researchers to contribute to crisis communication studies. He encourages further exploration of crisis response strategy's

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Revisiting the Situational Crisis Communication Theory

operationalization. According to Coombs, researchers should not focus merely on theory but should keep track of the crisis communications profession as well.

Citation of this article: Coombs, W. T., & Huang, Y.-H. C. (2020). Revisiting the situational crisis communication theory. *Communication & Society*, 53, 1–19.

《傳播與社會學刊》，(總)第53期(2020)

蒂莫西·庫姆斯教授簡介

蒂莫西·庫姆斯教授任教於德克薩斯州農工大學(Texas A&M University)傳播系，主要研究領域是危機溝通。庫姆斯教授深耕「情境危機溝通理論」(Situational Crisis Communication Theory, SCCT)，此系列理論為危機應對策略提供了理論基礎和經實踐檢驗的戰略性建議。庫姆斯教授獲得了多個公共關係與大眾傳播領域的獎項，包括：2002年度美國公共關係協會「Jackson, Jackson & Wagner行為科學獎」；2013年度Institute of Public Relations「開拓者獎」；2015年被任命為奧胡斯大學商務傳播系名譽教授。

TC：蒂莫西·庫姆斯

YH：黃懿慧

YH：「情境危機溝通理論」(Situational Crisis Communication Theory, SCCT)已在危機溝通領域被廣泛引用。可否跟我們分享下您從1995年開始發展這個理論的研究歷程？譬如您一開始的研究似乎相對偏向於政治傳播，是什麼原因啟發您進行危機溝通方面的研究呢？另外，是怎樣的契機，讓您將歸因理論(Attribution Theory)與感知責任(Perceived Responsibility)運用到危機情境研究中呢？

TC：我在研究生期間寫過一篇危機審視的論文，自此對危機溝通產生了興趣，危機溝通似乎是公共關係領域中非常有趣的一面。後來，我結識了一些危機溝通專業人士，他們對工作的奉獻精神以及幫助人們時的專注態度給我留下了深刻的印象。作為研究者，我認定這個領域是我想要貢獻的。人們往往錯誤地以為，危機溝通是為保護組織而存在，其實關注點應該放在保護利益相關者身上。是的，保護利益相關者其實也可以為組織提供幫助，讓雙方受益，而大多數失敗的危機溝通，源於組織管理層將他們的需求置於利益相關者之上。1985年，有篇文章提到將各種危機類型與危機應對措施聯繫起來的必要性，其中挑戰在如何建立牢固的

聯繫。根據一些回應困境的人際傳播的研究，及運用歸因理論探討產品危害事件的營銷研究，歸因理論和感知責任似乎存在著聯繫。危機類型會因產生的危機責任程度不同而相異，組織也因其其在危機中所應承擔的責任程度不同而採取不同的因應策略。在我看來，歸因理論為危機類型和危機應對之間提供了粗淺的聯繫，該聯繫需要進一步的完善與測試。

YH：所謂情境 (situation)，除了危機本身，當然也涉及事件所處的語境 (context)。接下來的問題是想請教您情境與語境交互作用對於危機溝通與回應的影響。首先，在當前社交媒體被廣泛使用的前提下，您對「情境危機溝通理論」也做出一定的檢視和修正，也有學者在SCCT的基礎上發展出社交媒體下的危機溝通模型 (如 social mediated crisis communication)，因此，您對社交媒體環境下的危機情境理論應用與挑戰有何看法？

TC：社交媒體平台必須整合到危機溝通的各個層面。但是，專業人士和學者會錯誤地只重視社交媒體。在新冠肺炎期間，我與歐盟進行了危機溝通方面的合作。這個項目關乎如何促進地方政府官員進行危機溝通。當然，社交媒體很重要，但並非所有民眾都能使用社交媒體，因此，危機溝通需要進行媒介的整合。永遠不要忘了，多渠道溝通是危機中的最佳選擇，因為多餘的渠道有時可以助你一臂之力。目前有許多學者把關注點放在不是很重要的元素上。相對而言，嘗試繪出社交媒體上危機動態變化才是值得關注的焦點。社交媒體如何塑造危機的演變和擴散？現在還沒有令人信服的證據支持社交媒體可以根本改變人們如何看待危機或對危機策略的反應 (這是情境危機溝通理論兩個重要的部分)。關於渠道效應的研究則尚無定論。兩項研究表明，渠道效應可能會發生——社交媒體的使用可能改變人們對危機應對策略的反應——但並不排除其他的重要解釋，比如危機類型的變化和強雷效應 (stealing thunder effect)。關於渠道效應的數據非常令人懷疑，而且之後的研究實際上也未發現它的存在。在我看來，渠道效應是學者在社交媒體研究的一個錯誤方向；那些聲稱社交媒體使之前的危機溝通知識變得無效的說法是錯誤的。社交媒體增加了我

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們對於危機的認識，如果比較目前給予專業的建議，依然與1980年代早期多數專業人士提出的建議十分相似。我將在後面關於類危機(paracrises)的問題中，討論我如何看待社交媒體的變化。我們需要了解如何使用社交媒體以進行危機審視與管理，尤其是了解受眾對危機及危機信息傳播的反應，那是學者真正可以幫到專業人士的地方。危機管理者試圖縱覽所有的溝通渠道以找到一個最佳渠道方案，實質上是無意義的——首先，它不存在，因為大多危機溝通渠道需視情況而定；另外，在危機溝通中僅僅使用一個渠道的做法是錯誤的。

YH：此前您也曾經到訪過中國大陸和香港，目前華人學者對於危機溝通的研究也在不斷深入，您對於不同社會文化背景下，「情境危機溝通理論」的適用性有何看法？您認為在華人社會進行危機溝通時，SCCT理論模型內容是否需要作出調整和改變？另外，能否分享在非西方社會（譬如華人社會），您最關心的危機溝通課題或研究方向？

TC：歸因、危機感知以及對危機應對措施的反應是情境危機溝通理論的核心。這三個要素在西方和非西方文化中很可能有所不同。比如，文化在危機如何構成、如何看待不同危機類型，以及人們對不同危機應對策略的反應，可能都有影響。危機應對策略的有效性可能因文化而異。我希望看到一些研究詳細回答「為什麼」，例如為什麼對危機的感知和對危機應對策略的反應，中美之間應有差異？這種研究所依據的理論應可指導可能的差異分析和解釋。對我而言，最緊迫的問題是，情境危機溝通理論中的倫理基礎回應(ethical base response)是否具有普遍正面的影響。初期回應階段需要倫理基礎回應，以告訴人們如何保護自己避免危機(指導性信息)，以及幫助他們在心理上應對危機(調整性信息)。這類似於災難研究中「心理急救」的概念。在大多數危機中，倫理基礎回應是一種最佳反應，它將使受害者和組織的利益最大化。聲譽建立策略可能對此有所補充，但是倫理基礎回應是關鍵。我認為我們需要知道在各種文化中，倫理基礎反應是否受重視或被視為最好選擇。我希望它普遍適用，但這仍是研究需要探索的問題。

YH : 目前危機情境理論比較著重於危機發生後 (post-crisis) 階段進行應用，但危機發生前的預防階段其實也非常重要，您認為在危機預警階段應該如何進行呢？您提出過「類危機」(paracrisis) 的概念，您如何看這個研究方向的發展潛力？

TC : 在這裡，我將回到社交媒體和情境危機溝通理論。類危機是組織在公眾全面關注下須應對的危機風險。類危機通常是由利益相關者創造的，他們聲稱組織的行為是不負責任的。社交媒體促進了類危機的發展和存在。有人稱它們為「社交媒體危機」，但這是個毫無意義的術語。每次危機都可能以某種方式牽涉到社交媒體，所以「社交媒體危機」是沒有意義的稱呼。類危機仍然需要來自組織的回應，然而這是在危機發生前的階段。有效的回應將防止實際危機的發展。雖然有些相似之處，危機管理者在類危機回應上依然有不同的選擇。例如你可以選擇忽略一個類危機，但你無法承受忽略一個類危機可能導致的後果。同樣，否認在類危機中是可行的，惟於實際危機中則是可怕的錯誤。在社交媒體的情境中，情境危機溝通理論需要延伸至危機發生前的階段，以增進對類危機類型的理解，並制訂一個修訂列表或應對策略，並考慮哪些因素會影響應對策略的選擇。

YH : 您的研究和理論主要應用於企業/組織，但現今許多公眾人物的危機事件頻發，您如何看待企業危機和個人危機的聯繫與區別？情境危機溝通理論在兩種主體的應用可能會有那些不同？此外，關於「情境危機溝通理論」(SCCT) 在目前 COVID-19 全球危機事件中的角色，您有何發現與建議？

TC : 企業危機和個人危機之間存在異同。主要區別在於個人可能具有多種可行的危機應對策略。個人和企業關係的動態變化會影響溝通選擇。新冠肺炎與風險溝通和道德基礎回應 (心理急救) 有關，與聲譽修復無關。人們在危機中如何「表現」將影響人們對危機的看法，但重點在於人們如何獲得幫助。它與遵守安全措施有關，是風險溝通的一部分，而不是傳統的危機溝通。例如，平行過程延伸模型 (extended parallel process model) 對於理解新冠肺炎溝通非常重要，因為它為危機溝通提供了一個更加豐富的解

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釋。風險溝通是危機溝通中不可或缺的部分，並在公共衛生危機（如新冠肺炎）中扮演最重要的角色。同樣，來自危機管理的傳統思維也得以應用，比如為危機做前期準備和在危機計劃中受益。但是危機溝通中的聲譽部分不應放在公共衛生危機中。美國應對措施所存在的問題，主要在於政治人物，他們更擔心聲譽（和選舉），而非人民。

YH：在研究危機溝通傳播的過程中，效果的評估往往是人們關注的重點，在您此前的研究中也採用了大量的實驗法對這方面進行探討，但往往在實踐當中對於危機處理效果的評價難以完全用實驗法進行衡量，可否請您分享對於實際案例中危機溝通效果的看法？再者，從理論模型的建構與再研發的角度而言，除了實驗法，您是否有想過使用其他的研究方法，譬如大數據以及混合方法（mixed method）？如果已經有這個嘗試，可否跟我們分享一下你的經驗和心得？

TC：你的方法取決於你的研究問題。情境危機溝通理論首先要驗證關鍵變量之間的關係。接下來，情境危機溝通理論要測試干預措施（因果關係）的有效性。實驗法是探索這兩個問題的正確方法。已經有多種方法被用來探索危機應對策略在現實世界中的影響。這包括評估在社交媒體上的評論，追蹤股價的波動以及聲譽度量值的變化等。許多研究者甚至專業人士都曾用這種評估方法來比較情境溝通危機理論最佳（最推薦）和次佳響應的效果。這些研究得出的結論是相同的，最優的應對策略對測量的影響比次佳策略有更為積極的效果。各種數據來源都證明了情境危機溝通理論建議的可行性。這並不奇怪，因為情境危機溝通理論的建議確實反映了早期的專業建議，即關注受害者的需求。比如，帕特里克·傑克遜（Patrick Jackson）在1980年代就提倡以受害者為中心，而大多數由專業人士提供的危機培訓項目都保留這一建議。大數據是了解這類情況的另一種方式。我最近與一位從業人員完成了一個項目，即用人工智能可以檢測危機何時出現，並對危機和危機類型進行分類。在三個案例中，數據表明使用最佳應對策略對數據中的情感分析具有最積極的影響。情境危機溝通理論幫助解釋為

什麼關注受害者是個好主意，並提供各種數據源支持這一觀點的價值。

YH：不僅僅是危機溝通領域，在整個傳播學的領域下，跨學科的應用越來越成為一種趨勢，您認為在危機溝通領域最有趣的跨學科有哪些？為什麼呢？

TC：危機溝通與管理學之間有著天然的聯繫，因為兩者都對這個話題（跨學科的應用）表現出了濃厚的興趣。與管理學進行思想交流豐富了危機溝通，而管理學的危機研究也得益於我們的研究。在危機溝通與管理的範疇中，我看到了兩個充滿潛力的新領域。其一是行為經濟學，因為它有助於解釋為什麼管理者經常不遵循危機傳播研究提供的建議。當組織不遵循研究人員提供的「處方」時，我們不應該感到驚訝，那是因為有多種因素會阻礙建議被採用；注重避免損失的行為經濟學是一個奇妙的解釋工具。其次則是在公共衛生危機研究，此領域結合健康傳播和風險溝通的見解，產製了許多豐富的知識。像 Yan Jin 這樣的研究人員才剛剛開始挖掘那片沃土。

YH：「情境危機溝通理論」目前已發展超過20年，作為情境危機溝通理論的奠基人，您如何看待這一理論的未來發展空間，包括這個理論未來10年或20年的前景？它所面臨的最大的機會和挑戰是甚麼？同時，您對越來越多研究危機溝通與管理的學者與後進，有何建議？

TC：情境危機溝通理論中最有希望的方向之一，是探索如何實施各種危機應對策略。危機應對策略是對危機應對的關鍵要素的描述，但是實施這些策略的方式不盡相同。例如，創建信息的方式是否傳達了某些情感？研究者正在探索表達危機應對策略的不同方法，以及這些方法如何影響人們對危機信息的回應方式。在危機應對策略的操作化上，仍有很多問題可以討論。另一個需要探索的領域，是管理者為什麼使用次佳危機應對策略，以及我們如何鼓勵他們使用這些策略。我曾提到行為經濟學有助於我們理解這個主題，但還有更多的工作需要去做。通常，我們只是將危機失敗視為管理不善，但除此之外，還有很多其他原因。挑戰不在於

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欠缺視野的理論，也不是要考慮研究結果的實用性。「短視」的意思是不要太關注於理論，以至於缺失了對行業的了解。是的，你可以證明X似乎很重要，但是X在真正的危機中是否有意義？我們可以探索和區隔基於理論的細微區別，但根本上與行業無關。例如，我們知道對組織有高度認同感的人對危機溝通的反應不同，因為他們更願意接受較少調整性的策略。但實際上，我們不能在高認同感的利益相關者那裡找到低自認同感的利益相關者帶來的不同訊息。即使你知道一個渠道主要是針對高認同感利益相關者，另一個渠道是針對低認同感利益相關者，但人們會看到這兩種不同的信息，並想知道為什麼它們不同。現實中，管理者必須考慮到低認同感的利益相關者，並且要更加包容，因為儘管高認同感的利益相關者可能認為信息太多，但不太可能產生負面反應，他們對低認同感的利益相關者不太關心。危機研究人員一定要記得去考察，他們發現的差異對於危機溝通的實踐是否真的重要。對於危機溝通的社會評論和批判性評估總是有討論空間，但是該領域的主要重點應該放在尋找更好地理解危機溝通實踐的方法和尋找有助於改善實踐的方法。我們應該幫助那些有奉獻精神的危機管理者，他們希望了解危機溝通，並改進他們的危機回應。

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本文引用格式

蒂莫西·庫姆斯、黃懿慧 (2020)。〈危機傳播管理的前世今生：經典危機溝通理論的再思考〉。《傳播與社會學刊》，第 53 期，頁 1–19。

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Academic Dialogue with **W. Timothy Coombs**

Revisiting the Situational Crisis Communication Theory

TC: W. Timothy COOMBS

YH: Yi-Hui Christine HUANG

YH : Situational Crisis Communication Theory (SCCT) has been widely applied in the field of crisis communication. Please share how you have developed this theory since 1995. For example, what inspired you to conduct research about crisis communication? What circumstances led you to connect the Attribute Theory and Perceived Responsibility with crisis situation study?

TC: I became interested in crisis communication when I did a paper examining crises in graduate school. It seems like a very exciting aspect of public relations. Later I was able to meet crisis professionals and I was impressed by their dedication to the job and their focus on helping people. I thought that is the type of work I would like to contribute to as a researcher. People wrongly assume crisis communication is about protecting the organization when its primary focus should be on protecting the stakeholders. Yes, protecting stakeholders should then help the organization but it is not wrong for both parties to benefit. Most failed crisis communication is a result of the organization management placing their needs over those of their stakeholders. In 1985, an article was written about the need to connect the various crisis types with the various crisis responses. The challenge was making a strong link. Based upon some readings in interpersonal communication about reactions to embarrassment and marketing research on product harm crises that used attribution theory, that seemed to be the connection. Crises varied in the amount of crisis responsibility they evoked and the crisis response varied in terms of the amount of responsibility they accepted for a crisis. Attribution theory provided the rough connection between crisis types and crisis response. That connection needed to be refined and tested further.

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YH: In addition to the crisis itself, situation also involves the context of the incident. The following questions concern how the interaction between situation and context influences crisis communication and response. First, given the widespread use of social media today, you have updated SCCT to some extent. Based on this theory, some scholars also have developed crisis communication models in the context of social media. What do you think of the application and challenges of this theory in the context of social media?

TC: Social media platforms must be integrated into all aspects of crisis communication. However, both professionals and academics can make mistakes in thinking social media is the one thing. During the COVID-19, I did some work with the EU about crisis communication. It was about helping local government officials with crisis communication. Of course social media was important but not all constituents have access to social media, hence, you need a media mix. Never forget that multiple channels are the best option in a crisis because redundancy can work in your favor. For academics, there can be a focus on factors that might not really matter. Trying to map the dynamics of a crisis on social media is a valuable focus. How do the social media platforms shape the evolution and spread of a crisis? There is no compelling evidence to support that social media fundamentally changes either how people view a crisis or react to a crisis strategy (two key components of SCCT). The research on channel effects is inconclusive. The two studies that indicate a channel effect may occur—the use of social media may alter how people react to a crisis response—do not rule out important alternative explanations such as variation in the crisis type and the stealing thunder effect. The data on a channel effect is very suspect and later studies have not actually found it to exist. I think the channel effect is one misdirection academics follow with social media. Also, claims that social media invalidates previous crisis communication knowledge is simply wrong. Social media is adding to what we know about crisis communication but if you compare the advice being given to professions today, it is very similar to the advice advanced by early writers (most professionals) in the 1980s. I will discuss how I see the modifications of social media in the later question on paracrises. We need to understand how best to leverage social media for crisis scanning and monitoring, especially monitoring

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of reactions to crisis and crisis communication messages. That is where academics can really help the professionals. Crisis managers must leverage all communication channels so trying to find the ONE BEST channel does not really make sense. First, it does not exist because so much in crisis communication is contingent and second, it is mistake to ever use just one channel in crisis communication.

YH: Second, you have been to mainland China and Hong Kong, where the current research on crisis communication among Chinese scholars continues to deepen. What do you think about the application of SCCT in different societies and cultural backgrounds? Does content of the model need to be adjusted or changed? Also, what crisis communication projects or research directions regarding non-Western societies, such as Chinese society, are you most interested in?

TC: Attributions, perceptions of crisis, and reactions to crisis response strategies are at the core of SCCT. It is very likely that these three factors can differ between Western and non-Western cultures. For instance, cultures may vary in terms of what constitutes a crisis, how various crisis types are perceived, and how people react to various crisis response strategies. It should be the case that the effectiveness of a crisis response strategy may vary by culture. I would like to see research that details why, for example, perceptions of crises and reactions to crisis response strategies should be different between the US and China. This research should be based on theory that can guide the analysis and interpretation of possible differences. For me, the most pressing question is whether or not the ethical base response in SCCT has universal positive effect. The ethical base response is the need for the initial response to tell people how to protect themselves physically from a crisis (instructing information) and to help them cope psychologically with a crisis (adjusting information). This is similar to the idea of psychological first aid in disaster research. In most crises, the use of the ethical base response is an optimal response that will maximize benefits to the crisis victims and to the organization. The reputation building strategies may be able to add to that but the ethical base response is the key. I think we need to know

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if the ethical base response is valued/optimal in a variety of cultures. I would hope it is universal but that is a question the research needs to address.

YH: At present, SCCT focuses on its application in the post-crisis stage, but the pre-crisis stage is also important. What do you think about how to apply this theory in the crisis warning phrase? You once put forward the concept of “paracrisis”; does this offer good potential as a direction for research?

TC: Here is where I will return to social media and SCCT. Paracrises are crisis risks that an organization must manage in full view of the public. Often they are created by stakeholders claiming an organization is acting irresponsibly. Social media has facilitated the development and existence of paracrises. Some people have called them social media crises but that is a meaningless term. Every crisis is likely to involve the social media in some way so the designation “social media crisis” is rather meaningless. Paracrises still require a response from the organization but this is actually during the pre-crisis phase. An effective response will prevent the development of an actual crisis. While there are some similarities, crisis managers have different options in the paracrisis response. For instance, you can choose to ignore a paracrisis but you cannot afford to ignore a crisis. Also, denial can be viable in a paracrisis but is a horrible mistake in an actual crisis. Social media created the need to extend SCCT to the pre-crisis, to develop an understanding of the types of paracrises that are emerging, to create a revised list or response strategies, and to consider what factors influence the selection of response strategies.

YH: Your research and theories have been mainly applied within enterprises or organizations, but given the increasing number of crisis events for public figures these days, what are your views on the differences and relationships between enterprise crisis and personal crisis? In addition, what findings and suggestions do you have about the role of SCCT in the current COVID-19 global crisis?

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TC: There are similarities and differences. The main difference is that individuals may have a wide array of viable crisis response strategies. There is a different dynamic in the relationship between an individual and an enterprise that can impact communication choices. COVID-19 is about risk communication and the ethical base response (psychological first aid), not about reputation repair. How people “perform” in a crisis will shape how people view them but the focus is on how people are being helped or not. It is about compliance with safety measures, part of risk communication, rather than traditional crisis communication. For instance, the extended parallel process model is critical to understand in COVID-19 communication because it provides a richer understanding of crisis communication that is relevant to the crisis. Risk communication is an integral part of crisis communication and plays its most prominent role in public health crises such as COVID-19. Again, traditional ideas from crisis management apply such as preparing for the crisis and benefiting from a crisis plan. But the reputational part of crisis communication should be put aside in a public health crisis. The problems with the US response are largely a function of a politicians worry more about reputation (and elections) than about people.

YH: You used to conduct a large amount of experimental studies about effect evaluation, which tends to be the center of attention in the process of crisis communication. However, it is often difficult in practice to thoroughly evaluate the effect of crisis management based on experimental methods, so could you please share your views on the effect of crisis communication in real cases? In addition, from the perspective of theoretical model construction and redevelopment, have you ever considered other research methods, such as big data and the mixed method? If you have performed some trials, can you share your experience with us?

TC: Your methods flow from your research questions. SCCT began by first verifying the relationships between the key variables. Next, the SCCT moved to test the effectiveness of interventions—cause and effect relationships. Experiments were the right method to explore those two questions. A variety of methods have been used to explore the real

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world effects of crisis response strategies. This includes evaluating comments on social media, tracking movements in stock prices, and tracking changes in reputation measures. A variety of researchers and even professionals have used such evaluations to compare the effects of the optimal (recommended) and suboptimal responses in SCCT. The studies reach the same conclusion, the optimal response strategies have more positive effect on the measured outcomes than the suboptimal strategies. A variety of data sources point to the viability of the SCCT recommendations. That should not be surprising since SCCT's recommendations do reflect early professional advice to focus on the needs of the victims. Patrick Jackson, for example, was promoting the victim-centered focus in the 1980s and most crisis training programs by professionals retain that advice. Big data is another way to understand the situation. I recently completed a project with practitioners that used AI to be able to detect when a crisis was emerging, to categorize the crisis type, and to categorize the crisis. Using three cases, the data showed that using the optimal response strategy had the most positive effect on sentiment analysis in the data. SCCT helps to explain why the focus on victims is a great idea and provides various data sources to support the value of that claim.

YH: Cross-disciplinary research is becoming a trend not only in the crisis communication field, but also in the whole field of communication. What are the most interesting cross-disciplines in the field of crisis communication for you? Why?

TC: The connections between crisis communication and management are a nature fit because both have shown a strong interest in the topic. The exchange of idea with management has enriched crisis communication and the management crisis research has benefited from our work. I see two promising new areas. The first is behavioral economics because it helps to explain why managers frequently do not follow the advice offered by crisis communication research. We should not be surprised when organizations do not follow the prescriptions provided by researchers because there are various factors working against the use of the advice. Behavioral economics with the focus on desire to avoid loss is a wonder explanatory tool. The second is the insights gained by

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blending health communication and risk communication in the study of public health crises. Researchers such as Yan Jin have just begun to unpack that rich area.

YH: SCCT has been in development for more than 20 years. As the founder of it, how do you foresee its future development, say, over the next 10 and 20 years? What are the greatest opportunities and challenges? What advice do you have for the growing number of (future) scholars who study crisis communication and management?

TC: One of the most promising directions in SCCT is exploring how the various crisis response strategies are operationalized. The crisis response strategies are descriptions of the key elements of the crisis response but the strategies can be operationalized in different ways. Does the way the message is created convey certain emotions, for instance? Researchers are being to explore different ways to express the crisis response strategies and how those variations impact the way people respond to the crisis messages. There is room to explore a variety of ideas through the operationalization of crisis response strategies. Another area to explore is why managers use suboptimal crisis response strategies and how can we encourage them to use them. I mentioned behavioral economics can help with that but much more work is still to be done on the topic. Too often we just look at a crisis failure as bad management but there can be more to it than that. The challenges are not to become too myopic with theory and to consider the utility of the findings. By myopic I mean do not focus so much on the theory that you lose track of the profession. Yes, you can prove X seems to matter but does X have any relevance in a real crisis? We can explore small differences that are theory-based and can be isolated but in the end are irrelevant to the profession. For example, we know people who highly identify with an organization react differently to crisis communication because they are more willing to accept less accommodative strategies. However, realistically we cannot target high-identification stakeholders with different messages from low-identification stakeholders. Even if you knew one channel was mostly high-identification and another low-identification, people would see both messages and wonder why they were different. Realistically, managers have to assume low-identification stakeholders and be

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more accommodative because while high-identification stakeholders may think the message is too much it is unlikely to create the negative reactions that showing too little concern with evoke from low identification stakeholders. Crisis researchers much remember to consider if the differences they are finding really matter or not to the practice of crisis communication. There is always room for social commentary and critical assessments of crisis communication but the primary focus of the field should remain with finding ways to better understand the practice of crisis communication and finding ways to help improve the practice. We should help those dedicated crisis managers who want to learn more about crisis communication and to improve their crisis responses.

Selected Works by W. Timothy Coombs

Please refer to the end of the Chinese version of the dialogue for W. Timothy Coombs' selected works.