

Keri K. Stephens (Ed.), **New Media in Times of Crisis: New Agendas in Communication**, New York, NY: Routledge, 2019, 241 pp., \$48.95 (paperback).

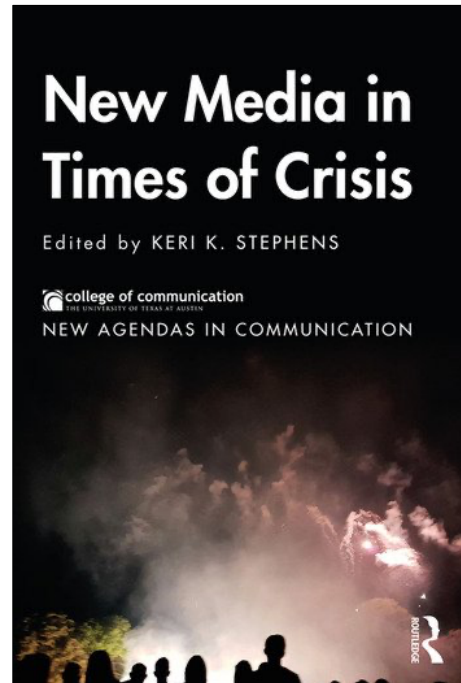
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Edited by Keri K. Stephens, ***New Media in Times of Crisis: New Agendas in Communication*** brings together 17 authors from multiple disciplines to “understand human behavior—specifically organizing—now that people have so many forms of media to use when communicating” (p. 1). The book comprises three sections and 11 chapters, with each chapter authored by one or more scholars in the associated field. Though the text is intended for advanced students and researchers in crisis, disaster, and emergency communication, it could also be helpful for emergency managers and crisis response professionals.

The editor’s primary objective is to establish new directions for research and practice across multiple disciplines. Indeed, this notion of cross-disciplinary research makes this book unique. The editor notes that the book “uses the terms *crisis* and *new media* broadly with the hope that they can transcend disciplinary boundaries” (p. 1). She reasons that all crisis events (hazards, disasters, and emergencies) studied by scholars across multiple disciplines have a high level of uncertainty involved for the event’s participants. Therefore, in crisis events, the need for accurate and timely information is crucial (p. 1). For this reason, scholars from organizational communication (chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 8, 10, and 11), public relations (chapters 5 and 6), computer science (chapter 9), and civil engineering (chapter 7) author chapters throughout the book.

The first three chapters comprise the first section, “Focusing on Crisis Responders,” and focus on emergency responders and crisis communicators. In this section, the experiences of those frontline responders are weaved together with theoretical understandings (p. 11). It focuses on how professionals in crisis scenarios use social media. This book was released before COVID-19, but many of the techniques explored in this section are pertinent to COVID-19 communication. More recent books such as *Communicating COVID-19: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (Lewis, Govender, & Holland, 2021) and *Managing Organisations During the Covid-19 Vortex: Comprehensive Guidelines for Leading Your Organisation Through the Vortex* (Crous, 2020) focus solely on COVID-19 crisis communication.

In chapter 1, “Organizational Crisis Communication in the Age of Social Media,” Ashley K. Barrett and Cindy Posey use an example of communication associated with an active shooter at a university to explain Karl Weick’s (1969) theory of organizing. In this theory-heavy chapter, the benefits and detriments of social media in times of crisis are explored. At the same time, the authors continually return to the active shooter situation



to provide examples. A recurring theme throughout the book is how false rumors spread on social media can create other crises within the greater crisis. This inclusion of both strengths and weaknesses of social media use in times of crisis helps to generate greater dialogue and future research questions. This topic is more deeply explored in Jin and Austin's (2022) *Social Media and Crisis Communication*.

In chapter 2, "This Is Getting Bad," Jody L. S. Jahn explores how sensemaking, both individually and in groups, occurs in response to cosmology events. For this chapter, a study of sensemaking, referring to how individuals define meaning for a new experience or cosmology event, was conducted on wildland firefighters. The study's results were used as examples of sensemaking to help the reader understand the term and concepts. Jahn found that "cosmology events prompt . . . sensemaking that occurs through bodily enactment . . . and is codified into a narrative by which the individual makes sense of the event" (p. 49). One weakness of this chapter is that it did not discuss how new media may affect sensemaking. Though, the idea of sensemaking in response to cosmology events was still valuable as background knowledge for the rest of the book.

In the final chapter of section 1, "Crisis Response in Multistream Systems," Elizabeth A. Williams focuses on how multistream systems cultivate relationships before a crisis to facilitate effective communication and response during one (p. 61). Communication within a multistream system, defined as a system with multiple teams working together to achieve a collective goal (p. 62), is demonstrated in this easy-to-follow chapter by a qualitative study of a U.S. emergency response team. Again, focus is paid to how social media allows these independent organizations to remain in contact with each other while there is no active emergency.

Section 2 focuses on the individual's role in crisis communication. This four-chapter section titled "How Individuals Seek, Share, and get Messages" starts with chapter 4, "Risk Information Seeking at Work." In this chapter, Jessica L. Ford presents a study about how people seek risk information around workplace hazards and injuries. Ford introduces the reader to multiple information-seeking models to examine how both new and old media lead to information-seeking for people at work. Along with the interdisciplinary focus of the broader text, this chapter emphasizes the implications of this work in noncommunication disciplines, especially public health. Readers interested in this section may also be interested in *Internal Crisis Communication* (Heide & Simonsson, 2019), which focuses on crisis communication *within* an organization.

Next, the book investigates how an organization's reputation can be threatened by public relations crises on social media (p. 81). In "Trouble at 30,000 Feet," a clear and thorough chapter (5), Michael A. Cacciatore, Sungsu Kim, and Dasia Danzy use United Airlines' back-to-back public relations crises to illustrate situational crisis communication theory (SCCT). In this case, the authors noted that the public's response to United Airlines was based on the frequency of crisis events and United's perceived control (or lack thereof) of the events, aligning with SCCT. Ultimately, United's lack of following SCCT and subsequent public reaction to the crises highlights the theory's usefulness (p. 121).

Chapter 6 discusses wireless emergency alerts (WEA), focusing on how the public receives crisis-related information. These messages are pushed to geo-targeted smartphones in areas where people's safety is threatened (p. 126). As the alerts were first rolled out in 2012, they are still relatively new, and Hamilton Bean and Stephanie Madden outline some of the early research ongoing to understand potential improvements that can be made to the system. Bean and Madden focus much of the chapter on how studies of map

interpretation with WEA have produced mixed findings. The authors also discuss the public's trust in WEA alerts after the 2018 ballistic missile false alarm in Hawaii and the lack of alerts associated with a 2017 Northern California wildfire that killed 44 people (p. 127).

The final discussion on individual roles in crisis communication was in chapter 7, focusing on transportation issues in evacuations. Written by civil engineers Tarun Rambha, Ehsan Jafari, and Stephen D. Boyles, this chapter outlines how information dissemination causes people to decide when, where, and how to evacuate and how those decisions influence the evacuation itself. This chapter was filled with discussion on transportation models. While the language could be difficult to follow at times, it is an excellent resource for understanding evacuation decisions. The authors also include a section on the need to research recovery (people returning after the disaster). This is rarely studied (p. 159) and certainly achieves the editor's goal of establishing new directions for research.

The book's final section is titled "Opportunities for New Forms of Organizing During Times of Crisis." It focuses on "ways that groups organize to cope, collaborate, and create new organizations with lives of their own" (p. 6). The authors in this section's chapters, J. Brian Houston, Amanda Lee Hughes, and Chih-Hui Lai, almost exclusively focus on how social media influences crisis-related organizing. In chapter 8, Houston discusses how social media affects community resilience. He notes that relationships and connections can be built within the community on social media. This increases community resilience and, as Lai notes in chapter 10 ("Dormant Disaster Organizing and the Role of Social Media"), this can allow dormant organizations to keep in contact with each other to rapidly activate in times of crisis. Lai writes that old social media pages can be used to preserve organization information for use in future situations. Another theory-heavy chapter, chapter 10, could have benefited from a case study like in chapter 5, though charts help explain types of dormant disaster organizing (p. 220).

Finally, in chapter 9, "Site-Seeing in Disaster," Hughes, a cybersecurity scholar, focuses on social media convergence during and after a disaster. Hughes lists and provides examples of seven types of people that converge on social media after a disaster. This provides a helpful way to make sense of online data about a disaster event (p. 201).

The book concludes with a final chapter written by the editor, again emphasizing the need for interdisciplinary research on new media to assist practitioners and first responders. The editor reminds us that all these topics interact, and we must look at them holistically to better understand crisis communication in this era of new media.

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