Analyzing Media Coverage on Government’s Disaster Management Practices after Wenchuan Earthquake: A Preliminary Result

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Background

• The role of mass media in the effective crisis and risk communication has been well recognized.

• Crisis communication research in Asia or in China is very limited.

• Uneven distribution of knowledge on disaster communication.

• A pressing need to explore effective means of crisis communications that are evidence-based and culturally sensitive.
Background

• An unprecedented opportunity for studying disaster media coverage in China
• A cross-cultural comparative approach
• Differences in media representations of disaster between national/local papers and party organ/market-orientated papers.
Background

- On 12 May 2008, an extremely severe earthquake, measuring 8.0 on the Richter scale, occurred in the Sichuan province of the People Republic of China.
- One of the most severe natural disasters in the 21st century.
- More than 80,000 people were killed, almost 46 million people were affected, while the monetary loss was estimated to be more than US$30 billion.
Objectives

- To investigate how the Wenchuan earthquake was portrayed by the newspapers in China and how the disaster management practices were covered when comparing to the disaster stories reported by the American media.
Second Day
14 May 2008
Method

- Quantitative content analysis was conducted to study the news stories of Wenchuan earthquake
- Six Chinese newspapers: People’s Daily, Sichuan Daily, Chengdu Commercial Daily, West China Metropolis Daily, Peking Youth Daily, Southern Metropolis Daily
- Study period: 13 May and 14 May 2009
- Focusing on the media coverage of disaster management practices – preparation, response & mitigation, recovery and deaths, injuries and destructions.
- Randomly selected samples of news stories will be used to assess the inter-rater reliability among raters.
- Comparing to the disaster stories reported by US media (Barnes MD, 2008)
Results

• Totally 547 stories from six newspapers were obtained and classified into four categories.
• The majority of the articles focused on the disaster response and mitigation (67.8%);
• 29.1% of the total stories reported the deaths, injuries, and destructions;
• only 2.6% reported the disaster preparation and very few covered the disaster recovery.
## Results

### Table: Distribution of the news stories covering disaster management practices on the first two-day after disasters (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disaster Management Practices*</th>
<th>People's Daily n=53</th>
<th>Peking Youth Daily n=57</th>
<th>Southern Metropolis Daily n=114</th>
<th>Sichuan Commercial Daily n=119</th>
<th>West China Metropolis Daily n=130</th>
<th>US media covering Hurricane Katrina** n=57</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response &amp; Mitigation</td>
<td>96.2</td>
<td>66.6</td>
<td>58.8</td>
<td>79.7</td>
<td>67.2</td>
<td>58.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recovery</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deaths, injuries &amp; Destorutions</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>28.1</td>
<td>33.4</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>32.7</td>
<td>38.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Inter-rater reliability: % of agreement = 0.6; Kappa = 0.51

Discussions (Very Preliminary)

- Different emphasis on various responses to the earthquake and mitigation actions by the government
- China and US media demonstrated similarities and dissimilarities in reporting their local disasters
- Further analysis: longer study period and with all variables
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