Exploring Risk and Crisis Communication Practices of Transnational Feminists in Ensuring Equity and Justice During COVID 19

Project Description

December 2020 will mark a year of COVID-19 pandemic which has challenged human civilization in a way we have never seen before. Amid this crisis, the gender perspective on COVID-19 is a matter that is often ignored specially because women are considered vulnerable and not able to manage a disaster or be part of the communications process. However, women do showcase rhetorical agency in managing disaster and crisis (Baniya 2020). Additionally, the intensification of injustices during a crisis are often ignored further deepening the impact of such crisis in marginalized spaces. UN Women reports that, "since the outbreak of COVID-19, violence against women and girls, and particularly domestic violence, has intensified" (p.2). To address these injustices during or post-crisis, professional communicators have civic-responsibility in ensuring equity, justice, and to intervene in high-stakes communication processes, despite fact that no institutions sponsor such advocacy for the public (Ding 2014). Meanwhile, the western knowledge-making practices, however may create difficulties in facilitating communication in risk or crisis environments (Boiarsky 2016) because of lack of a) contextual local knowledge, b) awareness of audience needs and requirements, and c) understanding of social justice and intercultural communications practices (Jones, Moore, and Walton 2016). These complexities in communicating risk and lack of understanding of risk as a social construct (Ding, 2014; Grabill & Simmons, 1998) leads to injustices during post-disaster situations. Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) argue that professional communications should "recognize, reveal, reject, and replace injustices, systems of oppressions with intersectional, coalition-led practices" (p. 133). This practice of intersectional and coalition practices has never been more important in risk and crisis communication as the world is constantly being challenged by various natural disasters, climate change, and now a global pandemic. I take up the call by Walton, Moore, and Jones (2019) in this project to understand and examine the strategies of transnational feminists' practitioners and activists who have used risk and crisis communications during the disasters like COVID-19 as a medium to ensure equity and justice.

Specifically, in this project I aim to conduct a narrative inquiry (Clandinin 2013; Jones 2017) with 10-15 feminist activists and practitioners from three different countries in the global south to understand how feminist leaders performed risk and crisis communication during the COVID-19 crisis. The project focuses on the role of women's coalitional networks in creating networks, planning actions, and managing risks about the issues related with women during disasters and epidemics like COVID-19. Interviewing grassroots feminist activists from various parts of the world who are leading risk/crisis communications, disaster management, response, this project focusses on finding answers to the following research questions:

1. How do transnational feminists practice risk and crisis communication to ensure equity and justice during and post global pandemic? Relatedly:
    a. How do women manage disaster like global pandemic and what are their coping, managing, and resisting strategies?
    b. What are the local knowledge and transcultural practices of recognizing, highlighting, and valuing marginalized perspectives during such crisis?

Significance of the Project and Outcomes

By seeking answers to these questions, this project will collect voices of women from various marginalized spaces, will attempt at finding out the intersections of vulnerability, resilience and adaptive

capacity of women. Findings from this research will contribute to the field of technical communication and the SIGDOC community by encouraging scholars and practitioners to consider the variety of ways that transnational feminist push towards gender-equitable, inclusive, and sensitive policies. Specifically, project will also find ways in which various feminist practitioners and activists use their local knowledges and transcultural practices of recognizing, highlighting, and valuing marginalized perspectives during a crisis like a pandemic. Additionally, this project builds upon previous scholarship in risk/crisis/ disaster (Grabill and Simmons 1998; Potts 2014; Stephens and Richards 2020) and will push the field forward towards rethinking of western centric thoughts and philosophies while practicing risk and crisis communications. Overall, this project will create a newer understanding of how the role of risk and crisis communications in ensuring equity and justice in the society. Particularly this project will **1) address research gaps in risk and crisis communication by amplifying the voices of women from marginalized countries in the global south; 2) investigate how social injustices are happening or happened in post-COVID 19 situation and how transnational feminists have tacked such injustices; and 3) provide strategies for better risk and crisis communications that is equitable and just for various communities globally**. With these goals, I envision following outcomes:

- o **Outcome #1 Advancing the field of technical communication** by rethinking risk and crisis communications strategies from intersectional perspective to highlight the knowledge of women and establishing stronger policies for women in disaster risk management
- o **Outcome #2 Creating a groundwork for future research** that can help both the scholars as well as practitioners in incorporating equity and justice while researching, teaching, or practicing risk or crisis communication.
- o **Outcome #3 Supporting and encouraging practitioners in the US and beyond** in highlighting and integrating local women's knowledge in disaster risk reduction, preparedness, and communications

Research Design: Narrative Inquiry

In this qualitative research I will employ narrative inquiry through interviews with 10-15 participants who represent various local community-based organizations or grassroots organizations or an emergent activist who have practiced risk or crisis communications during / post COVID-19 crisis.
Narrative Inquiry will allow us to listen to the firsthand experiences of the community members and involve them in the meaning making process (Jones, 2017). And it will provide a space for the feminist activists to share their strategies as well as local knowledges. I will take a grounded-theory approach to analyze interviews and identify the strategies used these transnational feminists for ensuring equity and justice within their communities. The information collected from these interviews will yield insight into how risk and crisis communications can be improved and channeled to address issues of equity and justice during a crisis like a global pandemic. Below I describe our research design in detail

Designing Questions and Creating Themes: The interview will loosely be based on the questions that is based on these larger themes a) risk and crisis communications for equity and justice; b) transnational feminist practices of communications; c) feminist strategies of survival during big disaster. Based on these themes, the interviews will focus on understanding how long-term community-university partnerships impact actual community members and how they can center social justice.

Participant Selection: 10-15 participants will be selected from three different countries (*country identity hidden as it can identify me*). I already have a community and contacts in these countries where I can recruit

participants. The participants will represent various grassroots-based feminist organization, community organizers, and emergent activists. Recruitment will be conducted via personal contact and by emailing or calling the potential organizations. IRB for the project will be pursued upon grant decision.

Interview: Because I am taking a narrative inquiry approach, the interview questions aim to solicit participant narratives as well as their strategies of using communications for justice. Each interview (with informed consent) will last between 45 minutes to 1 hour and will be recorded. If required, there will be a follow-up interview with participants.

Data Coding and Analysis: All 10-15 recorded interviews will be transcribed using Otter.ai software. I will take a grounded-theory approach to code and analyze our interview data for emerging themes as they relate to the theoretical framework of intersectionality and risk/ crisis communications. The coded interviews and the data will then be analyzed with NVivo, a qualitative data analysis application that allows the scientific coding for interview-based research.

Conclusion

This project addresses the call of the grant by focusing on social justice and equity in three different countries. If funded, the project will push the field rethinking about the role of global technical communications in the various situations of risk and crisis from the intersectional feminist and social justice perspective. The project is impactful to both academic and non-academic audiences in the US and elsewhere and will help in creating a space for the global south in the field of technical communications.

Research Timeline, Publications, Presentation Plans

Month	Plan of Actions
Spring 2021	o Getting an IRB Approval o Propose to present preliminary findings for SIGDOC 2021 o Start Recruiting Participants
Summer 2021	o Recruit Participants from Nepal, Nigeria, and Puerto Rico o Conduct interviews via zoom
Fall 2021	o Data Analysis o Prepare conference presentation for SIGDOC 2021, ATTW, ABC
Spring 2022	o Work on publication for submitting to *Communications Desgin Quarterly*

Budget Justification

Proposed Funding Activities		
Budget Item	Expense	Justification
Nvivo- qualitative data analysis software	$650	NVivo is a qualitative data analysis application that allows the scientific coding for interview-based research and provides a space to organize, store, retrieve and import data from text, audio, video, and email files, etc.
Undergraduate Research Assistant	$550 ($11 per hour for 50 hours)	Hire an underrepresented minority or a woc undergraduate student from professional and technical writing program from Virginia Tech University. The student will work for a total of 50 hours and support in data collection and data analysis. Student will also be encouraged to apply to SIGDOC's Student Research competition.

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