

## **Abstract**

Despite the many existing risk and crisis communication theories, none of them specifically integrate visuals or guide on how to use them to support the public during prolonged crises. There's a missing link conceptually connecting prolonged crises with instructional risk communication and visual framing. Addressing this glaring scholarship gap is, therefore, the main focus of this PhD project. I do this by making a key contribution to theory-building by proposing the VIM conceptual framework (Visual Simplicity, Infodemic Management, and Instructional Communication of Risk) to guide the design of visual strategies during prolonged crises and offer insights for why this matters.

The project applies the theoretical frameworks of prolonged crises, instructional risk communication, and visual framing and conceptually combines them to get insights for how to design visuals to meet the public's information needs for self-protection during prolonged crises. In a world that is crisis-prone and inherently visual, the urgency to rethink visual strategies for prolonged crisis contexts was overdue. How governments and organizations integrate visuals into public-facing instructional risk communication is not a question of *if*, but *how*.

The project uses mixed methods and is based on four publications designed to provide a coherent flow that leads to the conceptualization of VIM – review of literature to identify the specific scholarship gaps (I), synthesis of existing risk and crisis communication and visual framing literature to propose an initial version of the framework (VISTA) (II), empirically validating VISTA constructs to create VIM (III), and, finally, testing VIM's applicability in different prolonged crises and geographical context (IV).

The originality of VIM is that it offers a critical redirection of existing risk and crisis communication scholarship and provides guidance for applied theory. By proposing an entirely new conceptual framework arguing for the integration of visuals during

prolonged crises, the application of VIM has the potential to shape risk perception, enhance sensemaking, mitigate the impact of infodemics, and promote positive behavior which are crucial for the public's self-protection during prolonged crises.