

VOICES IN THE ARENA

A Participation-Centred Study of Multivocal Risk and Crisis Communication on
Social Media

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M. Sc.

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“How can I keep quiet?”: Motivations to participate in vaccination communication on Facebook. Originally published in *Communications*. 2022. DOI: 10.1515/commun-2021-0081

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Abstract

Contemporary risk and crisis communication take place in a complex multiplatform and multivocal environment, where numerous social media foster and facilitate online participation. Lay social media users are thus able to create, maintain, and share their own crisis narrative(s), which exist alongside official information and media reports.

Traditional theoretical and practical approaches to risk and crisis communication focus primarily on strategic communication by organisations and institutional actors, and thus fail to account for lay people's participation. In contrast, this dissertation draws on the Rhetorical Arena Theory and aims to explore the multivocality of risk and crisis communication from the perspective of lay social media users' participation.

Voices in the arena offers three studies conducted in the two risk and crisis communication contexts related to the public health: the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak and vaccination communication in Sweden. The results of the dissertation deepen the understanding of multivocal risk and crisis communication and expand the Rhetorical Arena Theory by offering insights into (i) the variations and interplay of communicative contributions on rhetorical sub-arenas by the news media and social media users, (ii) motivations for online participation as well as the ways sociality and visibility of communication on Facebook affect these motivations, and (iii) the effects of trust beliefs on motivations for online participation and corresponding participation roles.

Keywords: risk and crisis communication; social media; online participation; Ebola; vaccination; Sweden