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Making Sense of Disinformation in the Swedish Heterogenous Society: Understandings, Experiences, and Vulnerabilities

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ABSTRACT

In this paper, we provide knowledge about how people make sense of disinformation in the Swedish heterogenous society. Departing from a bottom-up perspective, we draw on individual interviews and focus groups to capture the experiences and practices vis-à-vis disinformation. We analyze the results using the theoretical concepts of sensemaking and vulnerability. The results indicate that there are differences in how people make sense of and act in relation to disinformation depending on age, educational background, and previous experiences. Furthermore, the results indicate that crises and uncertain times make people more vulnerable to disinformation. We argue that disinformation can be viewed both as a risk and as a crisis in itself. We conclude that lack of adequate information from trusted sources during crises and disasters makes people more exposed to and more vulnerable to disinformation.

KEYWORDS: Disinformation, risk and crisis communication, vulnerability, sensemaking

Introduction and Aim

The digital and globalized flows of information have turned into a breeding ground for the dispersion of incorrect and deliberately false information. This dissemination of disinformation is one of the major concerns in the digital risk society and a potential threat to democracy in many countries worldwide (Klein, 2018).

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Consequently, the task of agencies who are responsible for reaching the public with information about potential risks, crises and disasters has become ever more complex. This is not only because it is hard to cut across large flows of information of which some is disinformation, but also because our societies are becoming more heterogenic. Reaching a heterogenic public with important information demands good knowledge of the various information needs and use of communication channels, as heterogeneity in terms of backgrounds, linguistic abilities, values and socioeconomic conditions, brings a heterogeneity both in perceptions and actions in relation to risks and crises and also in media use (Rattay et al., 2021; Falkheimer & Heide, 2006; Cornia, Dressel & Pfeil, 2016; Spence, Lachlan & Griffin, 2007). Hence, the large flows of information likewise require good capacities within the population in order to differentiate between correct and false information. Previous research on disinformation has mainly addressed the phenomena in a descriptive way from a top-down perspective with a focus on the technical aspects (e.g. Irwin, 2020; Hameleers & Minhold, 2022; Zinn, 2021). In this study, we will in contrast depart from an explorative bottom-up approach and focus on the understandings and experiences of disinformation among the heterogeneous Swedish public. The aim of this study is to create an understanding of how people make sense of disinformation and how we can comprehend people's vulnerability to disinformation. Furthermore, a certain focus is directed at how people make sense of disinformation in relation to risk and crises. A deeper knowledge and understanding for how people make sense of disinformation and how they act in face of disinformation could furthermore contribute to more successful targeted information campaigns on disinformation.

Literature Review

We depart from an understanding of disinformation as all forms of false and misleading information created, designed, and distributed with the intention to destabilize, polarize, seek profit and/or decrease trust in the state and weaken democracy (HLEG, 2018; Klein, 2018; Humprecht et al., 2020). Misinformation, by contrast, is misleading information spread without the intention to deceive, although the effects can still be harmful, and what initially is

spread as intentional disinformation can easily transform to misinformation when people are sharing it further without knowing that what they share is incorrect (Psychological Defence Agency, 2022). Disinformation can be traced back in history, and like Brisola (2019), we do not view disinformation as a new phenomenon but acknowledge the ways that the globalized and digitalized world has changed the possibility of spreading disinformation fast and widely. This has led international and national actors to recognize disinformation as a direct threat (UN, n.d.; European Commission, 2022; WHO2, 2020; Psychological Defence Agency, 2022). When referring to true and accurate information, we mean true as in what can be proven by the most recent facts rather than ideas based on values and beliefs (Lockie, 2017; Wikforss, 2017). What is considered true is also dependent on what is known at a current time, depending on the facts currently available. During a crisis, this is a challenge, since crises and disasters usually are of a dynamic nature, characterized by non-routine events (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013).

In times of uncertainty, during a crisis or when a disaster happens, the public needs and requires information to take preventive or mitigating actions to protect themselves. Risk communication as a field of study is extensive and varied, encompassing topics such as proactive communication, risk perception, the social construction of risk, media communication, the interplay between risk and emotion, framing, social movements, public engagement, and importantly, crisis communication (Cho et al., 2006; Ulmer et al., 2011). Risk communication and crisis communication can be distinguished as communication before critical events and communication during critical events. The fields of risk and crisis communication have been researched side by side, but also as two separate fields (Nohrstedt, 2016). Similarly to various previous research (e.g. Palenchar, 2020; Veil et al., 2011), we understand risk and crisis communication as highly intertwined and consequently and when applicable, we will refer either to risk and crisis communication, risk communication or crisis communication throughout this paper. Drawing on Boholm (2013), our comprehensive understanding of risk and crisis communication entails the communication required to educate the public about risk to influence

their behavior and attitudes, act in accordance with disasters and crises, and guide the public in decision-making.

Information and communication in times of crises are characterized by large demand and supply, and by uncertainty. In connection with uncertain events, such as the coronavirus pandemic or the Russian military invasion in Ukraine, the mass of related information is rapidly increasing, and thus the distribution of information on social media platforms is both an asset and a threat. Liu et al. (2016) use the term *information holes* to explain people's need for information during a crisis and in times characterized by uncertainty. Disinformation is critical in relation to information holes, as disinformation can further destabilize an already difficult situation. Digital channels enable fast dispersion of disinformation, emerging information holes, which are defined as security threats that must consequently be managed both systematically and intentionally (Golobiewski & Boyd, 2019). A similar, related term is *infodemic,* an "epidemic of misinformation", which refers to the rapid and destabilizing spread of false information. A recent example is the Covid-19 pandemic where the Director-General of the World Health Organization stated in the initial phase that "we are not just fighting an epidemic; we're fighting an infodemic" (Zaracostas, 2020:676). During the coronavirus pandemic, the spread of conspiracy theories and mis- and disinformation lead to anxiety and mistrust in organisations responsible for managing the crisis, as well as to an increase in anti-science activities making it harder to implement public health policies (Pool et al., 2021; Hotez, 2021).

Digital communication is an important tool for public agencies and media to publish and share information. At the same time, it is difficult to manage and control the spreading of initially isolated messages with false information. Hence, fake news and dis/misinformation can spread fast during extraordinary events and crises in society (Eriksson Krutrök & Lindgren; 2022 Mayorga et al., 2020). Indeed, false information has been shown to spread much faster than true information in a study on the social network Twitter (Vosoughi et al., 2018). This is not due to an automatized activity of bots, but because Twitter users have been more likely to spread false information than true. Vosoughi et al. (2018) suggests

this is due to human psychology; false information is often novel information and novel information is more likely to be shared than is old information. The use of digital tools and social media is widespread, and the potential of false rumours and disinformation to undue stress and anxiety while also leading to erroneous behaviour is a risk (Drouin et al., 2020). Making sure that the population can navigate within the flow of information about risks during crises is thus crucial. Newman (2016) describes the new media climate as one where the heterogenous population is not only designated as audience and receiver of information and messages – the population is likewise part of shaping and producing information. In other words, the public is viewed as receivers of information and at the same time as agents, producers, and senders of information. This implies that it is crucial not only to understand how people understand disinformation, but also how they react when identifying it.

The majority of previous research on disinformation, fake news, and misinformation depart from descriptive, psychological and technical perspectives and often focuses on political discourses as well as traditional and social media (e.g. Irwin, 2020; Hameleers & Minhold, 2022; Zinn, 2021, Pennycook & Rand 2021; Silverman, 2016). In a recent systematic literature review focusing on disinformation, misinformation, and fake news, Broda & Strömbäck (2024) conclude that qualitative research on disinformation using interviews and focus groups are rare and needed to provide a more nuanced understanding of the phenomena. However, there are examples of studies on people's anxieties and worries about the related concepts of misinformation and information influence activities (Wagnson 2020). Wagnson (2020) focused on and discovered to what extent people in Sweden worry about information influence activities, such as disinformation campaigns, and if so, what they worry about. The results indicates that participants primarily worry about social cohesion and the effects on democracy, and how information influence activities can decrease trust in the EU and other public institutions. Knuutila et al. (2022) uses survey data from 142 different countries to examine whether internet users are afraid of fake news. The findings show that risk perception varies across regions of the world. The majority of internet

users globally worry about misinformation and the concern is highest in countries with liberal democratic governments. The risk of misinformation in the context of the coronavirus pandemic has been pointed out by Krause et al. (2020) who describe misinformation as a meta-risk that can affect the public's perception of the original risk.

There are differences in how people understand and perceive risk depending on their positions and backgrounds such as for example gender and ethnicity (e.g. Finucance 2020; Olofsson & Öhman, 2015), class (Lachlan et al., 2009) and education, political standpoint, and previous experiences (Lujala et al., 2015). Previous research has also concluded that impacts of crises and disasters fall most heavily on those who are most vulnerable (e.g. Tierney, 2019, 2022). We can assume that similarly, people of different backgrounds may perceive and understand disinformation differently; and that people may be more or less vulnerable to disinformation. Unfortunately, there is a lack of research on how people make sense of disinformation and our contribution will thus partly be to start filling this knowledge gap. Against this background, our study will contribute with new understandings of how people in the Swedish heterogenous society make sense of disinformation with a certain focus on disinformation in the context of risk and crisis communication. Another contribution is a deeper insight into how disinformation may increase vulnerability on individual and societal levels.

Sensemaking and vulnerability: theoretical points of departure

Following Wall & Olofsson (2008), we define sensemaking of risk as *the way people materialize meanings of risk within a social context* and consequently how they take mitigative action in relation to these risks (Wolbers 2021). The mitigation of risk is predominantly influenced by our assessment of the plausibility of such occurrences and, consequently, our cognitive capacity to acknowledge them as making sense as risks necessitating proactive measures. Should individual or institutional risk be fundamentally constructed through interaction with the social environment, it can be viewed as a process of making sense of reality

(Douglas, 1986; Weick, 1988, 2011, 2005). The concept of sensemaking makes it possible to understand how people make sense of disinformation not only as an individual construct but also how social relations and general beliefs about the world and life may influence their understanding (Kendra & Wachtendorf, 2003; Weick, 1995; Zinn & Schulz, 2024). Norms and perceptions are considered to be formed through interactions with others, whereby individuals then interpret and make sense of the world around them (Weick, 1995). Furthermore, people are influenced by faith, trust, intuitions, and emotions, in ways that they deem reasonable, even though they may appear irrational to an expert (Zinn & Schulz, 2024). Sensemaking should therefore be viewed as an individual as well as a social process as individuals are embedded in the social. Uncertain situations, such as a crisis, when the meaning is ambiguous, have been identified as triggering sensemaking (Maitlis & Christianson, 2014). In digital societies, social media platforms have shown to be an important arena for sensemaking during crises and in uncertain situations (Stieglitz et al., 2017; Stieglitz et al., 2018).

Hansson et al. (2020) use the concept of communication vulnerability to deepen the understanding of communication related drivers that can exacerbate vulnerability. Through the suggestion of a heuristic framework, they argue that individual, socio-structural, and situational drivers of vulnerability, and the way they are intersecting, affect peoples' abilities to access, understand, and react to risk and crisis communication. They have additionally identified disinformation as a situational driver of vulnerability, in the sense that disinformation affects peoples' abilities to adequately interpret and understand an ongoing situation. Disinformation can intensify vulnerability during crises, as people will have difficulties interpreting information, which can affect their understanding of the crisis and their capacities to protect themselves and take mitigating actions.

Vulnerability as a concept is forward-looking as it denotes the prospect of experiencing some kind of loss or damage in relation to one's life situation, and the degree of vulnerability is related to the capacity to handle the risk. Furthermore, vulnerability is also tied to the longevity of risk exposure. Finally, certain groups are more

vulnerable than others because of for example socio-economic factors and thereof limited abilities to act in relation to critical events (Tierney, 2019; Alwang et al., 2001). Being vulnerable thus means being at risk (Blaikie, 1994; Tierney, 2019). Vulnerability should not be seen as a static characteristic labelled on a certain group or individual but rather as a result of complex social processes (Hilhorst & Bankoff, 2004). This means that anyone can be vulnerable depending on the situation and circumstances, and action can be taken towards the various factors that lead to vulnerability. We use the concept of vulnerability as a lens through which we understand the various effects of disinformation.

Methods

The empirical material was collected through semi-structured individual and focus group interviews held during the second half of 2022 and the beginning of 2023. The interviews were held as a part of the data collection for the project *People, measures and resilience: new ways to study risk communication, responsibility and preparedness*. Thirteen focus group interviews were held with two to five participants and eight interviews were held individually. A total number of 52 people participated in the interviews. We made an effort to recruit a diverse group of respondents. The youngest participant was 18 years old, and the oldest was over 80. The respondents had varying levels of education, ranging from high school diplomas to vocational training, and advanced academic degrees. They resided in locations north of the Arctic Circle to the south of Sweden. Some were living with a spouse or partner, while others were in single-person households. We also focused on recruiting participants who had migrated to Sweden, many of whom were from Russia and Ukraine and had prior experiences with the spread of disinformation. We view the combination of focus groups and individual interviews as an opportunity to enrich the data (Lambert & Loiselle, 2008). Focus groups are beneficial since data is produced on three different levels: the individual, the group, and the interactive level (Cyr, 2019).

By conducting individual interviews alongside focus groups, certain themes and questions raised by the participants in the focus groups could be further developed and discussed more in

detail in the individual interviews. Focus group participants could further discuss. In this sense, the two interview methods contributed to a rich set of data and informed each other. The interviews were registered on external voice recorders and lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. The respondents were recruited mainly through advertisements on the university's website and social media. We posted information on Facebook and Instagram and were contacted by people who had seen it themselves, while participants not using social media platforms had been informed about the study through family members. The respondents were selected strategically to have participants representing different age groups, geographical locations, experiences, and backgrounds (Patton, 2015).

The focus groups were put together based on similarities in age and geographical location. During the interviews the participants were invited to discuss their communication needs in relation to three themes: extreme weather events, violent events such as terrorist attacks, and finally hybrid threats and disinformation respectively. The participants were encouraged to share their own experiences in relation to the different themes, meaning that the different interviews ended up concerning information and communication during events such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the Russian war in Ukraine, and the terrorist attack in Stockholm in 2017 since these events were discussed by the participants. Disinformation was additionally addressed in all interviews related to the different events, and when discussing participants' understandings of disinformation and their media habits when encountering disinformation.

The interview guides started with a brief background presentation of the interviewees followed by questions about previous experiences of the specific theme and how the interviewees searched for information in different situations. Furthermore, the interviews addressed information needs related to the different themes. Given the semi-structured interview form, each interview and focus group was allowed to move in the direction pointed out by the participants, who were invited to speak freely about the different themes. This is seen as a benefit since the understandings and experiences of the participants are aimed to be reached through the collection of empirical data (Morgan, 1996). All interviews were transcribed and coded thematically using an inductive

approach. This means that codes and themes were identified in the actual data allowing what is in the transcripts to be fully accounted for (Braun & Clark, 2006). Several themes were identified in the reading of the transcripts and coded in different colours. The citations presented in the results are showing typical different positions and understandings identified as themes in the interviews and focus groups.

Results and Analysis

Based on our results and analysis of the individual interviews and focus groups, we depart from the concept of sensemaking to account for how the participants make sense of disinformation with a certain focus on uncertain times and crises. Furthermore, we identify and exemplify vulnerabilities to disinformation depending on experiences, circumstances, and situations.

Initially, the lack of experience using social media and a non-digital background is described as making it harder to navigate in the digital world and the mass of information dispersed through digital platforms. Some of the elderly participants described disinformation as something worrying and pointed out that not being used to the digital environment is an obstacle to handling and navigating in flow of information.

> Disinformation is something that worries me. When I am looking at how the society is changing and what it has become… I did not grow up… I am not raised in the digital era.
>
> Man, 67 years old, Swedish background, small town, farmer

While older and less digitally experienced respondents make sense of disinformation as something worrying, younger participants in contrast talk about disinformation as something less worrying and in fact, rather normal. They grew up in the digital era and habitually use digital tools as well as multiple social media platforms, and thus disinformation has become an integral part of their daily digital lives and something that they are often exposed to.

> –Yes, talking about disinformation… It's like, fake news on TikTok.–
> Is that where you primarily have been exposed to disinformation?–
> Yes! Very much and very often.
>
> Man, 18 years old, Swedish background, northern city, student

Younger participants spoke confidently about how they normally handle a situation when they suspect that they are exposed to disinformation. They shared examples of how to identify fake websites and how to recognize bots. Furthermore, younger participants highlighted that they often fact-check suspicious information by talking to an adult they trust, such as a parent or a teacher, or compare it with information from sources of public service. This is an example of the social aspect of sensemaking, and how they make sense of disinformation as well as of other information that is dependent on and negotiated in their social networks. The older participants similarly expressed that their children might know more in certain situations, and the children can therefore be used to help validate the information. Information triangulation was used by several of the respondents to make sure that the information is accurate. Having technical skills as well as a social network thus appears to be important in making sense of disinformation and in navigating the digital world.

Being exposed to disinformation by using digital- and social media can be understood as affecting the way that the participants make sense of disinformation. One younger participant reflected on when and where disinformation is occurring and concluded that in society today, people seem to talk and share ideas on different topics without having essential and trustworthy background information, meaning that it is common for unreliable information to circulate in both online and offline contexts. The large amount of information makes it hard for people to know what is true and what is not, meaning that you have to be aware at all times not to fall victim to disinformation yourself.

> Well, I believe that I stumble upon disinformation quite often. I mean, both in real life and on social media platforms. People that are trying to scare you or simply don't have the, or all the information required to say something about a certain topic. It is quite often... It feels like a quite usual thing in today's society that not all information is reliable.
>
> Woman, 21 years old, Swedish background, big city, student

Knowing how to search for reliable information is highlighted by several participants as the way to go about a situation when something appears as disinformation. This includes both knowing

how to handle technical tools such as smartphones and computers and knowing how to search for reliable information on the internet and evaluate sources. None of the respondents can remember that they have ever received or read particular information about disinformation specifically and how to handle disinformation. However, some participants highlighted that they search for information in traditional news media and public service channels themselves and that their trust in official media sources is high.

> I think that now there is a lot of information on social media, on the Internet, and therefore it is necessary to filter it all, not to accept everything that you read and hear. Only in this way you can somehow protect yourself.
>
> Woman, 35 years old, migrant background, big city, academic

Being critical of the information people read and hear is thus identified as a crucial skill in coping with today's digital environment. Differences in skills, habits, and personal traits along with the increasing use of social media in authorities' risk and crisis communication thus risk rendering the less tech-experienced population more vulnerable and less equipped to handle disinformation. Common examples of topics with a lot of disinformation disinformation discussed by the participants were the coronavirus pandemic, the ongoing war in Ukraine, and the terrorist attack in Stockholm in 2017. Examples from the coronavirus pandemic were often connected to the massive amount of information that circulated and the resulting challenge in orienting to all of the information early in the pandemic. For example, one respondent mentioned that not knowing what information to trust worried her at the beginning of the pandemic – the infodemic distressed her. Feeling like there was insufficient information and a heightened sense of uncertainty made her consume a lot of different news and information and left her unconfident in what to believe amongst all the different news and information circulating making her even more anxious:

> I am a pretty anxious person. I mean, I worry about things, and can really get my head around things, so I read and read and read... And

> it only makes me more anxious. I am not an ideal example of a calm person... I am... I can easily get hysterical almost.
>
> Woman, 32 years old, Swedish background, small town, nursing assistant

Discussing how they reacted to their friends and family believing in and sharing disinformation was a reoccurring theme. It became clear that disinformation affects private relations, and that disinformation results in distrust not only of official information but also of primary sources even when the primary sources are friends and family. One respondent discussed that disinformation was a polarizing force, sharing an example of how it affected her during the COVID pandemic. She initially tried to talk to her friends when she noticed that they were sympathizing with alternative narratives and disinformation with roots in conspiracy theories. It became hard given the fact that her friends were distrusting, suspecting, and opposing all official information coming from what she considered trustworthy sources like the Public Health Authority and Public Service. It became personal, and even harder to handle when they were questioning her own experiences and what she was witnessing every day at work. After making some effort, she gave up on trying to convince these people. She describes it as difficult when they were suspecting and opposing all information coming from what she considered trustworthy sources, and the first-hand information coming from herself.

> I made some effort to talk to these people... But you know, when they are questioning the fact that I see people dying... I ask them, we have known each other for 15 years, don't you trust me? The situation becomes very sensitive when they think I am 'bought by the state', or I am 'bought' by someone who wants to fool the whole world
>
> Woman, 49 years old, Swedish background, countryside, hospital manager

From this example, we can learn about how disinformation leads to polarization and decreased trust in official information but also in other people, and how aspects of belief and faith affect how people make sense of information. Disinformation related to the coronavirus pandemic and distrust in information from experts, authorities, traditional media, or even people

with first-hand information about the situation can, for example, lead to a person not taking preventative measures which, in turn, can increase the number of infections. One respondent working in the healthcare sector gave examples of how she experienced disinformation during the coronavirus pandemic and reflected on the big flows of information during extraordinary events in today's media climate and how it affected her during the coronavirus pandemic. She pointed out that it made her worried not knowing what to trust during the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, and that she consumed a lot of different news and information, not knowing what to believe. The large amount of information made her anxious, and by continuously consuming it, even more anxious:

> I have experienced disinformation, especially during covid. We were in the middle of it where I work, so we were... not hysterical, but we... it was the only thing we talked about, and the only thing that happened, and every day we discussed it, like "have you read this?" and at the same time thinking "but maybe it is wrong". I did not know what to believe, it was almost like you scared yourself, or at least, where I work, I felt like we did... But yes... It was almost constantly new things.
>
> Woman, 32 years old, Swedish background, small town, assistant nurse

Another event discussed by several of the participants was the Russian invasion of Ukraine. One participant with Ukrainian background reflected on the Russian invasion of Ukraine and concluded that her perception and understanding of disinformation is affected by her experience of it:

> I think that at least there will be such situations [the dispersion of disinformation], at least with Russia, what we just talked about. This happens and this can happen again, in theory.
>
> Woman, 42 years old, migrant background, big city, academic

Another participant who also originated from Ukraine had lived in Sweden for several years prior to 2022. She shared experiences on disinformation both before and after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. When reflecting on what she did when she identified that disinformation was accepted as truthful information by other

people in their surroundings, she explained that she tried to talk with people based on her personal experiences from Ukraine:

> What did I do? I talked about it with those people who succumbed to this flow of disinformation. I tried to express my point of view, probably an objective one, based on the fact that I know the situation in Ukraine from the inside. This is what I did.
>
> Woman, 45 years old, migrant background, big city, academic

Another respondent remembered experiencing the terrorist attack in Stockholm in 2017 and shared how her behaviour regarding information-seeking changed. The lack of information made her read everything she could find and share it with her friends without prior reflection on the truthfulness of what she shared. Although describing herself as normally critically thinking and reading news from well-known sources such as newspapers and the public broadcast radio, and never trusting rumours on social media, this situation made her consume everything she could find from all possible sources. She described this in relation to the fact that she was in the middle of a cordoned off area without the possibility to leave:

> It was such an absurd situation, and especially for us who were locked in. It was... I mean... When it was written, especially on social media, that there were shootings in several places... It was really like... It became real.
>
> Woman, 40 years old, rural area, academic

Ultimately, the uncertainty that characterized the situation led to an urge for any kind of information, showing how a certain situation and context can make one vulnerable to false information and rumours although normally not consuming any kind of alternative news. This is an indication that what people believe they will do during crises is often different from what actually happens in the situation of a crisis.

Discussion and Conclusions

In this paper, we aimed to create an understanding of how people make sense of disinformation, how vulnerability to disinformation can be understood, and finally how people make sense of

disinformation in relation to risk and crisis communication. We have shown that the contemporary dependence of public agencies on social media for the distribution of risk and crisis communication intensifies the demands for as well technological skills and critical evaluation of the information among the heterogenic public. How people make sense of disinformation depends on various factors. In our analysis, it becomes clear that experiences and level of comfort with digital tools and social media impact how people make sense of and understand disinformation. Older people are expressing worry about disinformation, describing how it leads to a general skepticism towards digital and social media. Disinformation makes some people turn away from social media in general, with the consequence that they have less access to important information and thus fewer opportunities to act in relation to potential risks or ongoing crises when information is distributed on these platforms. A few participants, notably the elderly, admit that they feel unsure about digitally distributed media and that they both lack technological skills and sometimes a capacity to critically evaluate information. Vulnerability can thus be seen to increase amongst groups in the digital society that lack the knowledge to use digital and social media.

The character of the situation affects how participants make sense of disinformation. During crises, disinformation is understood as more worrying, even to someone who normally feels confident in their consumption of media and information. Such situation as well as times of uncertainty can leave people more vulnerable to disinformation. Several participants discussed three major crises and disasters that occurred during the past six-year period and how they experienced disinformation during these events: the terrorist attack at Drottninggatan in Stockholm in 2017, the coronavirus pandemic, and finally the Russian military invasion of Ukraine. In these accounts we can see a shift when it comes to awareness of disinformation and additionally, the role of disinformation in the information holes when people are requesting information. During the hours following the Drottninggatan attack, one respondent described how "everything could be true" so she started sharing every piece of information about the event that she could find with people she knew, without critical evaluation of the information. On

the other hand, accounts connected to the coronavirus pandemic, relate how friends and acquaintances held beliefs that "nothing was true" about the coronavirus, the covid disease, and virus transmission. Finally, some participants described that during the initial phase of the Russian invasion, there was a conception of information as "everything could be true and nothing could be true". It is however worth noting that at the time of these interviews, the Russian invasion was recent, whereas both the Drottninggatan attack and the coronavirus pandemic were past events.

Returning to discussing verifiable information this study demonstrates there has been a gradual shift in how people perceive the truthfulness of information and the function of true information in society. In other words, there is an ongoing renegotiation of the concept of 'truth'. It thus appears that disinformation is a societal crisis in relation to truth and trust. Disinformation and reduced of trust in public agencies risk making individuals and societies more vulnerable to threats and disasters. Apparently, and as a critique of the categorization by Hansson et al. (2021), disinformation cannot be viewed only as a situational factor impacting people's abilities to understand risk- and disaster communication. We argue that disinformation permeates the information society and that individual and socio-structural factors influence people's information behavior. In this sense, the dispersion of disinformation has turned into a societal crisis in itself. Finally, considering the importance of information to the public about how Swedish society prepares for crises, in terms of as well institutional measures such as individuals' household preparedness, disinformation is a substantial threat to the strive to build a disaster-resilient society.

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