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Hijacking an Organizational Crisis:

A multiple case study on how organizational crises can be used
to highlight narratives about Sweden

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Abstract

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This study analyzes the influence techniques applied when hijacking an organizational crisis in order to construct a larger narrative about Sweden. By applying the concepts of narration, mythical speech and moral culture, the study investigates which narrative techniques are applied to generate engagement in disinformation narratives. This was done through conducting a qualitative content analysis of Twitter posts published during the first two months of the organizational crises. During the data analysis, four patterns were identified, including: providing incoherent narratives, inflicting victimhood status, generating a backlash against victimhood morals as well as framing and ignoring organizational responses. The patterns suggest the emergence of a third party which uses the organizational crises to further specific political agendas. Specifically, this is done by taking advantage of different cognitive vulnerabilities and human principles, which connect the organizational crises to broader topics. On this basis, the findings of the study challenge the dominant perspective on how social media platforms can be used as strategic communication tools in times of crisis. The study suggests that the new actors need to be integrated in strategic planning and crisis prevention plans, in order for organizations to use social media platforms as strategic crisis communication tools.

Keywords: Organizational crisis, Influence techniques, Disinformation, Narratives, Myths, Moral cultures

Word count: 19,699

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1 Introduction & Problematization

In strategic communication, focus has been put on how social media can be “used as effective tools for strategic communication in times of crisis” (Eriksson, 2018, p. 526). Following this perspective, crises are perceived as opportunities to build relationships with key stakeholders in order to reach long-term goals (Eriksson, 2018). An extensive amount of crisis communication literature focus on crisis communication tactics that are ‘honest and transparent’ with the goal to engage social media users in two-way communication (Maal & Wilson-North, 2019; Ngai & Falkheimer, 2016; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011; Wang, 2016). However, social media has given rise to a new kind of information environment, where consumption of news is intertwined with interaction with news. Specifically, news is co-constructed by the public as the meaning of the material is negotiated and shared online (Asmolov, 2018). This is exploited by malicious actors who aim to influence the public debate. Manipulating public opinion through the use of social media channels is a growing threat to democracy in contemporary societies. Specifically, the amount of fake news, bot operations and trolling are increasing on different social media platforms. In several cases, foreign actors have been involved in distributing fake news and other biased content for social media aimed at manipulating public opinion elsewhere (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018). In this way, contemporary international conflict additionally includes actors using means outside the realm of the military to achieve their goals (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018). These type of activities are referred to as influence or disinformation campaigns and include purposeful distribution of misleading, fake or manipulated material in order to further a certain political agenda (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018). However, independent actors can additionally be involved in spreading false and manipulated information (UNESCO, 2018). Influence campaigns aim to undermine trust in journalism, political leaders and various institutions (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018). Therefore, they disrupt the democratic system through questioning fundamental elements such as rule of law and human rights (Swedish Civil

Contingencies Agency, 2018). The new information environment on social media therefore contributes to a co-construction of manipulated content. As a result, the audience experience fake news and manipulated content as information shared by their friends, who have higher influence capabilities (Asmolov, 2018).

In recent years, Sweden has experienced a large increase in the amount of influence activities online (Jansson, 2019). Increasing polarization in Western societies are being exploited by actors who take advantage of issues that residents have concerns about (Benett & Livingstone, 2018; Bjola & Pamment, 2018). The East Stratcom Task Force has pointed out Kremlin and the Russian state as the most active source of disinformation directed towards Sweden (European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, 2019). As a response, the Swedish government has put forward the goal that public officials “should be able to identify and counter information influence activities and neutralize propaganda campaigns” (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018, p. 5). Modern crisis management tactics often rely on the assumption that stakeholders’ interests are legitimate and that tactics aiming to further such interests should be applied (Ngai & Falkheimer, 2016; Maal & Wilson-North, 2019). However, the field of crisis communication research and practice is becoming more complex, as new actors aiming to spread disinformation have emerged. Both private and public organizations are vulnerable to influence attempts during an ongoing crisis, where external actors can ‘hijack’ the crisis in order to further a specific political agenda. Specifically, an organizational event can be used in order to construct a broader narrative that aims to undermine the basic institutions and functions of society as a whole (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018). Tactics aiming to build relationship with identified actors might be ineffective if the organizational crisis is ‘hijacked’, as actors aiming to spread disinformation do not have interest in the organization per se. Efforts to engage in relationship building activities during a crisis which is ‘hijacked’ might therefore result in economic loss for the organization. In such cases, other tactics aimed to identify and counteract disinformation might be more effective (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018). In order for communication professionals to identify and neutralize disinformation, they need to be able to recognize the techniques that can be used to connect the organizational crisis to a broader narrative. A first step in developing such methods includes understanding how, and in what way, an organizational crisis can be

‘hijacked’ by malicious actors in order to construct a grand narrative. On this basis, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of this phenomenon by providing practitioners and researchers with relevant conceptual tools. Specifically, the aim is to analyze which techniques actors use in order to ‘hijack’ an organizational crisis.

1.1 Aim and Purpose

The main purpose of the study is to expand the knowledge of crisis communication research by highlighting the increasing complexity within the field (Asmolov, 2018; Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018). In this way, expanding the knowledge in the field of strategic communication by problematizing the dominant perspective on how social media platforms can be used “as effective tools for strategic communication in times of crisis” (Eriksson, 2018, p. 526). Specifically, the study sets out to demonstrate the emergence of a new actor aiming to use the organizational crisis in order to further a specific political agenda. The increasing complexity within the field demonstrates the need for better integration between research within the field of disinformation and crisis communication research, which have been treated as relatively separated from each other. The study sets out to integrate the two fields by investigating how organizational crises can be used by malicious actors. Specifically, cases which represent instances where it is plausible that the organizational crisis has been used to distribute false or manipulated content about Sweden will be analyzed. This will be done through a qualitative content analysis of Twitter posts that were published during the crisis. A narrative approach will be combined with a cultural perspective on conflict in order to discover which narrative techniques the actors apply in order to penetrate different social spheres and generate engagement. Specifically, the study seeks to understand which cognitive principles that are exploited in order to generate attention, as well as what functions engagement in the material might fulfil for individuals. By doing this, the goal is to identify patterns between the cases. In this way, moving beyond analysis of isolated cases and instead investigate how similar techniques can be applied in different cases. In turn, providing communication practitioners and researchers with a conceptual basis that deepens the understanding of the phenomenon.

1.2 Research Question

- Which narrative techniques are used on Twitter in order to connect the organizational crises to specific narratives about Sweden?

The research question aims to investigate which narrative techniques are applied on the social media platform Twitter in order to connect the organizational crisis to broader narratives about Sweden. Specifically, the study sets out to understand which cognitive vulnerabilities and rhetorical means that are used in order to generate engagement in disinformation narratives on Twitter. While doing so, the goal is to examine any potential patterns between the cases and in turn generate a deeper understanding of the techniques.

1.3 Delimitations

The aim of this study is not to generalize regarding the most common influence methods. Rather, it sets out to generate a deeper understanding of the phenomenon and provide a conceptual basis for practitioners and researchers. Specifically, the thesis aims to understand which techniques are applied to generate engagement in disinformation narratives. However, it is important to underline that the study does not account for the actual intent behind posting or engaging in disinformation narratives, according to actors' or interpreters' understandings of the material. Instead, the study focuses on potential interpretative meanings which might contribute to engagement in the material, in accordance with the theoretical concepts applied. Additionally, the posts that have been gathered as empirical material should be regarded as plausible influence techniques. Several of the techniques analyzed break the rules of civilized debate but are not guarantees of influence activities. In accordance with the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency's guidelines, a holistic view of techniques representing instances of malign rhetoric have been applied in order to single out plausible disinformation activities, which is further explained in the methodological section.

1.4 Disposition

Followingly, the thesis is divided into five parts. The first part includes the literature review. The literature review will provide an overview of different definitions and developments in crisis communication research as well as disinformation research. The next part of the thesis constitutes the theoretical framework, including narration, mythical speech and moral cultures. Following this, a section explaining the methods applied in this study is provided. This section offers an overview of the research strategy, selection of cases, data collection, data analysis as well as methodological reflections. The next section involves the empirical analysis, which is divided into eight subchapters. The first four subchapters give a brief description of the cases, while the other four discuss the patterns identified during the data analysis. Finally, a summary and concluding discussion is provided where conclusions and recommendations for future research are highlighted.

2 Literature Review

This chapter aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the research conducted within the field of crisis communication and complement it with a research overview on the current state of research within the field of disinformation. Firstly, an insight into different definitions of organizational crises and crisis communication, as well as the development of different strands guiding such definitions, is provided. Following this, a section addressing the current state of research on the topic of disinformation is offered. Both reports from Swedish authorities as well as independent studies analyzing the phenomenon are presented. A synthesis is provided at the end of the chapter, discussing the key elements and defining features of the literature review.

2.1 Defining Organizational Crisis

The first wave of crisis communication research was mainly focused on answering questions of what crisis communication is as well as outlining ‘best practices’ for management (Diers-Lawson, 2019). However, experiences in the late 20th century demonstrated that not only corporations but different types of organizations can be affected by crises and that the cause can be anything from a mistake to something that lies outside of the organization’s control (Diers-Lawson, 2019). Consequently, different definitions of organizational crises have emerged in the communication literature in recent years (Ndlela, 2019).

Some scholars define crises by focusing on the distinguishable characteristics of the situation. According to Lebringer (1997), a crisis comprises three key characteristics, including: uncertainty, suddenness and time compression. Managers often experience difficulties obtaining adequate information in complex organizational environments. The suddenness and unpredictability of the crisis together with the complexity in the surrounding environment contributes to difficulties in making

decisions, at the same time as rapid decisions have to be made. The identified time compression contributes to straining of organizational resources (Lebringer in Ndlela, 2019). Similarly, Hermann (1963) identified three main characteristics separating crisis from other types of situations. These characteristics include surprise, short response time and threat. During a crisis, managers acknowledge a threat they believe might hamper the realization of the organizational goals. As a result, they recognize that actions must be taken. In addition, managers need to be ready to face elements of surprise. A crisis therefore hinders realization of organizational goals, is unexpected and offers a restricted timeline for decision-making. The threats experienced during a crisis can have consequences for the organization's reputation, finances as well as stakeholders and therefore require rapid responses (Hermann, 1963, in Ndlela, 2019).

The definitions offered above stress the organizational perspective of crises and potential responses. More specifically, they represent a sender-oriented approach, where focus lies on identifying response tactics and predicting how the public react to such responses (Heath R. L., 2010). According to Dier-Lawson (2019), the perspective represents the second wave within crisis communication research. In recent years, however, research focusing on stakeholders' perceptions have increased substantially (Diers-Lawson, 2019). As an example, Coombs (2007) argues that crises are mainly perceptual. Specifically, Coombs argues that a crisis exists if stakeholders believe the organization has violated their expectations and neglecting the situation will therefore have negative consequences. Coombs additionally highlights that crises effects how stakeholders interact with organizations by having an impact on the organization's reputation (Coombs T. , 2007). Similarly, Pearson and Mitroff (1993) perceives organizational crises as an event that threatens an organization's reputation. Specifically, the authors argue that an event must have great impact on the organizational reputation to be considered a crisis. Pearson and Mitroff additionally underline that a crisis has five key features, including "high magnitude, require immediate attention, an element of surprise, the need for taking action, and are outside the organization's [complete] control" (Pearson & Mitroff, 1993, p. 49). Similarly, Heath and Millar (2004) offer a definition of crises as "an untimely but predictable event that has actual or potential consequences for stakeholders' interests as well as the reputation of the organization suffering the crisis.

That means a crisis can harm stakeholders and damage the organization's relationship with them" (Heath & Millar, 2004, p. 2).

The definitions offered above stress the need to understand stakeholders' perception of the specific event. Specifically, the definitions assume crises are defined by their public nature by underlining that crises affect people in the environment in which the organization operates. Crisis communication should, therefore, mainly be focused on key stakeholders' activities and interest. Finally, the definitions assume that the most important asset challenged during a crisis is the relationships with stakeholders (Diers-Lawson, 2019). Stakeholder-centered definitions thus highlight the threat to the organization's reputation and the need for urgent responses to minimize stakeholders' attribution of blame (Gigliotti, 2019). The receiver-orientated approach constitutes the third research wave within the field of crisis communication, which aims to understand crisis events and organizational responses from the stakeholders' perspectives (Diers-Lawson, 2019; Heath R. L., 2010). As a consequence, a perspective of crisis communication as a process of creating shared meanings has emerged. Specifically, Sellnow and Seeger (2013) defines crisis communication as "the ongoing process of creating shared meaning among and between groups, communities, individuals and agencies, within the ecological context of a crisis, for the purpose of preparing for and reducing, limiting and responding to threats and harm" (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 13).

Despite that stakeholder-centered definitions are gaining more scholarly support, the organizational perspective is widely applied within the research field. As a result, two main strands exist in literature (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). While some scholars focus on the distinguishable characteristics of a crisis and the level of harm on the organization, others argue that a crisis is defined by its "personal, community and even cultural perception" (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 4). The wide range of application within academia and practice results in unclear boundaries of what constitutes a crisis. This thesis will, however, mainly depart from a stakeholder-oriented definition, where organizational crises are classified according to the amount of engagement on social media platforms.

2.2 Crisis Communication Theory and Best Practices

Early crisis communication research was heavily influenced by a sender-oriented bias, which is reflected in research within the realm of crisis communication theory and response strategies. Specifically, extensive focus has been put on identifying response strategies and assuming the stakeholders' reactions to various crisis responses. In turn, these studies have contributed to development of crisis response strategies that managers can use (Heath R. L., 2010). For example, Linkugel (1973) presented the idea of apologia – “a distinct form of public address” containing “sufficient elements in common so as to warrant legitimately generic status” (Linkugel in Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 293). Apologia should, however, not be confused with apology. While apologies' main focus is to communicate regret, apologia means “speech in defense” (Linkugel in Sellnow & Seeger, 2013, p. 165). The theory includes five different response strategies, including denial, bolstering, differentiation and transcendence (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Building on the idea of apologia, Benoit (1997) developed his theory of “image repair” (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). The theory of image repair includes clusters of communication response tactics which can be applied to generate a more favorable image during a crisis. To engage in image repair, Benoit argues that the organization must know its audience. Specifically, this is done by analyzing the accusations which threaten the image and who the key stakeholders are. The theory includes five potential response strategies; evading responsibility, reducing offensiveness, corrective action and mortification (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Despite acknowledging the importance of analyzing the accusations made by stakeholders, Burns and Bruner (2000) argue that the different response strategies offered within the theory are not clearly linked to stakeholders' perceptions of the event. Additionally, Burns and Bruner argue that the theory reflects a linear perspective on rhetorical thinking (Burns & Bruner, 2000). Benoit's theory is one of the most applied theories within the field of crisis communication research (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). It is appealing as it is relatively easy to adapt to different contexts, which makes it useful for a wide range of situations (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Both Benoit's and Linkugel's theories belong to the rhetorical research tradition and relies on the assumption that stakeholders react in a predetermined way to different response strategies (Heath R. L., 2010).

In recent years, research on crisis response strategies departing from stakeholders' perception have increased considerably. A receiver perspective on crisis communication aims to understand the event from the perspective of the stakeholders. As an example, Coombs (2007) situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) aims to comprehend how stakeholders understand the event and how they react to the crisis response. The approach is based on attribution theory and underlines that stakeholders' definitions and understandings of the crisis should determine appropriate response strategies (Coombs T. , 2007). Specifically, the theory offers a set of response strategies based on feedback provided by the public (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Coombs highlights that the overall reaction to the organizational responses will be more positive if the response strategy is based on stakeholder's understanding of the event. As a result, a well-adapted response strategy can contribute to strengthening the organizational reputation (Coombs T. , 2007). Situational crisis theory belongs to the rhetorical research tradition but differs from earlier rhetorical theories, as it shifts focus from the organization to stakeholders' perceptions. A key aspect of SCCT is the level of responsibility attributed by key stakeholders (Sellnow & Seeger, 2013). Similarly, Frandsen & Johansen developed the concept of the rhetorical arena (RAT). RAT applies an external perspective, aiming to explain the arena that opens up during a crisis, where stakeholders compete, negotiate and collaborate about the crisis narrative (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017). The theory is rooted in the rhetorical tradition and aims "to identify, describe, and explain patterns within the multiple communication processes taking place inside the arena" (Frandsen & Johansen, 2017, p. 142).

Both SCCT and RAT have been applied in a wide range of studies focused on investigating how crisis response strategies can help build a favorable reputation among key stakeholders during a crisis. In this way, an organizational crisis is often perceived as an opportunity to engage in dialogue with different stakeholders and realize their interests. For example, Ngai and Falkheimer (2016) analyzed how IKEA turned its crisis regarding the cuddle toy Lufsig, in Hong Kong, into an opportunity to strengthen the relationships with key stakeholders. By applying SCCT, the study suggests that an "integrated use of the accommodative and defensive strategy could help reduce the impact of the crisis" (p. 248) in crisis situations with a

political dimension (Ngai & Falkheimer, 2016). Conclusively, the study demonstrates that successful application of integrated response strategies on different platforms is an example of how crisis managers “should connect with the public to resolve an impending situation through the use of both traditional and social media” (Ngai & Falkheimer, 2016, p. 248). Similarly, several case studies aim to demonstrate how social media can be used in order to build stakeholder relationships during a crisis (Wang, 2016; Maal & Wilson-North, 2019; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011). For instance, Maal & Wilson-North (2019) lists “the do’s and the don’ts” on social media. The study stresses the importance of being honest and transparent as well as relationship building as overall crisis strategy (Maal & Wilson-North, 2019). This is additionally demonstrated in Wang’s (2016) case study on two brand competitors in Sina Weibo. The findings of the study show that when response strategies are “adequately used in social media communication, the negative effects on the brand can be reduced and the public’s sympathy for the organization can also be evoked” (Wang, 2016, p. 69). Further, Wang argues that “the organization can even take advantage of this opportunity to promote its products and services so as to reinforce its brand image” (2016, p. 69). Modern best practices within the field of crisis communication are heavily influenced by receiver-oriented theories, demonstrating how response strategies can be used during a crisis in order to realize stakeholders’ interests and maintain a favorable reputation. However, with the emergence of new actors aiming to spread disinformation (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018), the dominant perspective on how social media channels can be used as tools for strategic communication during a crisis needs to be problematized. Therefore, this thesis aims to integrate crisis communication research with research within the field of disinformation, in order to develop an understanding of the increasing complexity within the field.

2.3 Defining Disinformation

According to the Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency (SCCA), influence activities are defined as “harmful forms of communication orchestrated by foreign state actors or their representatives” (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018, p. 11). However, the definition offered by the SCCA is relatively narrow. Specifically,

UNESCO¹ defines disinformation as “deliberate (often orchestrated) attempts to confuse or manipulate people through delivering dishonest information to them” (UNESCO, 2018). Specifically, UNESCO underlines that it is often orchestrated, but does not have to be. In other words, disinformation could be spread by independent internal as well as external actors (UNESCO, 2018). This thesis will depart from this wider definition, perceiving disinformation activities as attempts to confuse or manipulate people by providing manipulated or false information.

By spreading disinformation, actors aim to create a “climate of distrust between a state and citizens” (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018, p. 11). In this way, they are systematic attempts aimed at undermining democracy. These activities can be part of a larger campaign but can also be carried out separately. Due to the ambiguity surrounding influence activities, it is difficult to differentiate between genuine public debate and actual influence activities. The SCCA underlines professionals “should be wary... when several techniques are employed simultaneously, or temporally close, by a single source, or by sources with known connections to the benefactor of the techniques” (Pamment et al., 2018, p. 32). In order to determine what is plausible disinformation and not, a holistic view of different activities and their relationship to each other is needed. Moreover, organizations and the public are especially vulnerable during crises or political charged periods, as the events can be used in order to gain leverage for a specific political agenda (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018; European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, 2019).

Influence activities aim to exploit various vulnerabilities in society in order to increase polarization and decrease levels of trust (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018). These vulnerabilities are part of the general process of opinion formation and can be exploited in various phases of the process. For instance, when an event occurs, it goes through the process of being documented by witnesses, officials and experts who explain the chain of events to other people. Afterwards, the media picks it up and communicates it to the public. Finally, the information reaches various stakeholders through the information channels they consume and

¹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

the community they belong to. However, the contemporary media system has several vulnerabilities which can be exploited. For instance; technological advances, changes to the journalistic profession and the increasing amount of alternative news sources contribute to making the media system vulnerable for exploitation. Additionally, public opinion formation can be exploited through a phenomenon referred to as “social proof”. Social proof entails that people often copy others behaviour if it is considered desirable. However, trolls and bots can create a false image of social proof through extensive amounts of engagement in specific online material. As human beings, we additionally suffer from cognitive vulnerabilities, meaning we cannot interpret all the information we receive. As a consequence, we look for a certain type of information to confirm our already held beliefs. This confirmation bias results in a relatively predictable online behaviour, which in turn is exploited by influence activities through psychographic targeting (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018). Disinformation campaigns therefore constitute deceptive elements in order to mislead or disinform, are not concerned with a constructive solution and might involve a level of interference (Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman, & Fjällhed, 2018).

The strategy applied during influence campaigns comprises three key elements, including; strategy, level of operation and message-orientation. Specifically, the strategic narrative can be either positive, negative or oblique. Actors can aim to construct a positive narrative, which is a coherent narrative complementing existing narratives, or aim to construct a negative narrative, which attempts to prevent the emergence of a coherent narrative. The activities can additionally aim to divert attention, through the use of sarcasm, humor and memes (Pamment et al., 2018). However, Pamment, Nothhaft, Agardh-Twetman and Fjällhed (2018) highlight that influence strategies are only correctly understood if narratives are perceived as interrelated with facts. Specifically, narratives rely on statements of facts “which represent a fact more or less well” (Pamment et al., 2018, p. 27). When facts are applied to a sequence of events in a narrative, the narrative can transform the premises of the factual statement. In addition to the overall narration strategy, three main categories of targeting constitute the level of operation. These three levels involve the general societal level, sociodemographic targeting based on group belonging

and psychographic targeting based on individual traits. Finally, the general approach can involve either an environmental-oriented strategy, where the main goal is to alter the information environment, or a message-oriented strategy, directed towards individuals or a specific political issue (Pamment et al., 2018).

2.4 Master narratives – Disinformation

European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force (EEAS's Task Force) has pointed out the Russian state as the most active source of disinformation directed towards Sweden and lists five common master narratives that is applied in pro-Kremlin disinformation activities (European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, 2019). These five narratives include; "The elites vs. the people", "Threatened values", "Lost sovereignty or threatened national identity", "Imminent collapse" and the "Hahaganda narrative" (European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, 2019). The first narrative, "The elites vs the people", include propagating that "the evil elite" does not care about the needs of the "people". According to EEAS's Task Force, the narrative is often applied during election periods. It is effective since it provides a scapegoat to blame for experienced social and political issues. A common aspect of this narrative is additionally to question the legitimacy of the electoral process. The second narrative, "Threatened values", includes questioning and challenging Western attitudes towards ethnic and religious minorities, such as the rights of women, LGBTQ groups, among others. Following this narrative, the West is falling apart due to extensive feminism and "political correctness". The narrative focuses on communicating that concepts such as tradition, decency and common sense are threatened. The third narrative, "lost sovereignty/lost national identity", includes communicating that no country is sovereign. For instance, NATO and the EU is framed as having bureaucratic and militaristic aims. In turn, disregarding the wishes and needs of their member states. The fourth narrative, "Imminent collapse", includes communicating that European member states is "on the verge of civil war" (European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, 2019). The narrative works most effectively during times of political challenges and target audiences often include those who already fear social and political disturbances. The final narrative includes joking about the subject at hand, referred to as the "Hahaganda" narrative. This narrative involves

tactics such as sarcasm, satire and humor and is often recognized in “memes”. The main aim is to ridicule different institutions or leading figures (European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, 2019). It is, however, important to recognize that the framework offered by EEAS’s Task Force represents a western bias and that a pragmatic standpoint should be applied when using it. Therefore, this thesis seeks to problematize these narratives by analyzing what functions different myths fulfil for various individuals and, therefore, not dismiss them as illegitimate.

Departing from the perspective of master narratives, Levinger (2018) analyzes how master narratives can be used in order to make ‘falsehood’ more appealing. By applying a narrative approach, the study aims to investigate what myths actors construct in order to generate a credible disinformation narrative (Levinger, 2018). Specifically, Levinger highlights that lies appeal despite involving no persuasive evidence. For instance, a study carried out by MIT demonstrates that “falsehood... were 70 % more likely to be retweeted than the truth” (Levinger, 2018, p. 126). Levinger (2018) concludes that disinformation needs to be neutralized with compelling counter narratives, which in turn might inspire “constructive collective action” (Levinger, 2018, p. 132). Similarly, Mills and Robson (2019) underline that current research on managerial methods aimed at countering ‘fake news’ are not adequate. Instead, the authors argue that fake narratives need to be counteracted with compelling brand stories (Mills & Robson, 2019).

2.5 Disinformation and Social Media

Asmolov (2018) applies a network approach in order to understand how influence activities disrupt horizontal network connections online (Asmolov, 2018). Specifically, Asmolov demonstrates how influence campaigns disrupt horizontal connections in order to “strengthen a state’s capacity to construct an image of an external enemy” (Asmolov, 2018, p. 69). Asmolov additionally highlights the social nature of disinformation. Specifically, news is co-constructed by the public as the meanings of the material are discussed and reconstructed online. In turn, this phenomenon is exploited by actors aiming to manipulate public opinion (Asmolov, 2018). Consequently, people experience disinformation as information shared by their friends or family, which have relatively high influence capabilities. In this way,

“crowdsourced information warfare” (Asmolov, 2018, p. 71) is a powerful tool applied during influence activities, relying on the mobilization of an audience’s resources. The success of influence campaigns therefore lies in their power to generate engagement in different social spheres (Asmolov, 2018). From an organizational perspective, these actors can be perceived as external actors aiming to influence the organization’s key stakeholders. At the same time, public spheres in several democratic countries have become more polarized due to growing challenges in areas effecting the democratic principles of authoritative information as well as political and social institutions (Benett & Livingstone, 2018). On this basis, Bennet and Livingstone (2018) argue that the decrease of trust in democratic institutions, such as press and politics, is the main cause behind the increasing amount of disinformation (Benett & Livingstone, 2018). On social media platforms, polarization is exploited in order to trigger opposing opinions on a specific issue. The SCCA highlights that this strategy is frequently applied, where “trolls and bots are... used to reinforce extreme opinions” (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, p. 29).

In relation to this, Nisbet and Kamenchuck (2019) apply a social psychological framework in order to analyze the cognitive and emotional responses the authors claim is the success behind influence campaigns. In doing so, Nisbet and Kamenchuck investigate why different audiences are more inclined to believe disinformation and what function the falsified information fulfils for these individuals (Nisbet & Kamenchuk, 2019). The findings demonstrate that ‘identity-grievance’ campaigns are the most common state-sponsored online disinformation method. These campaigns aim to exploit low institutional trust and activate polarized social identities, including national, ethnic, religious, racial or political identities. In turn, identity-grievance campaigns exploit two psychological mechanisms; affective polarization and motivated reasoning. By doing this, the information contributes to identity-building processes (Nisbet & Kamenchuk, 2019). In relation to this, Bennett and Livingstone (2018) underline that research on how political influence campaigns develop, are organized and spread, are scarce. Specifically, the authors argue that counteracting such activities “requires more than just fact-checking and setting the record straight and goes to deeper issues of repairing political institutions and democratic values” (Bennett & Livingstone, p.

124). It is highlighted that the amplifier effect of disinformation and fake news increases as established media fact checks the material. Specifically, it gives further attention to news that otherwise would be dismissed (Benett & Livingstone, 2018).

Methods of countering rumors on social media are often included as an ‘add-ons’ in crisis management studies (Smith & Sipika, 1993; Civelek, Cemerci, & Eralp, 2016; Lin, Spence, Sellnow, & Lachlan, 2016; Roshan, Warren, & Carr, 2016; Bratu, 2016). For instance, several scholars underline the importance of controlling rumors as part of the overall crisis communication strategy (Smith & Sipika, 1993; Civelek, Cemerci, & Eralp, 2016). These studies highlight that speculations and rumors will spread if organizations do not provide fast and adequate information to involved parties. It is underlined that providing fast and accurate information might shorten the post-crisis recovery period through creating shared understandings between the public and the organization (Smith & Sipika, 1993; Civelek, Cemerci, & Eralp, 2016). Similarly, some scholars highlight the importance of monitoring the spreading of misinformation and intentional rumors during a crisis (Lin et al., 2016). Studies on crisis communication therefore depart from the concept of rumors and assume that spreading of rumors can be controlled through applying ‘correct’ and timely responses. However, the concept of disinformation is often excluded from such strategies.

2.6 Synthesis

Several key strands can be identified in the literature review on crisis communication and disinformation research. Firstly, modern research on crisis communication and ‘best practices’ often perceive organizational crises as opportunities to build relationships with key stakeholders. These approaches are stakeholder-oriented, assuming that a crisis can be an opportunity to realize different stakeholders’ interests. This is achieved through using social media platforms in a strategic way, which contribute to relation-building processes and thus help the organization to reach its long-term goals. Such approaches therefore rely on the assumption that actors’ interests are legitimate and that their reactions can be somewhat anticipated based on the chosen crisis response strategy. At the same time, research within the field of disinformation has been treated as relatively separated from crisis communication

research. Crisis communication scholars point at the ability to ‘control’ rumors during a crisis. However, such measures are often included as add-ons to the overall strategy. Disinformation campaigns are relatively excluded from research conducted within the field of crisis communication. Specifically, crisis communication research and practices do not account for the increasing complexity in the social media environment, involving new actors which can have an impact on key stakeholders’ perceptions. Providing communication professionals with a conceptual basis to understand such attempts is of value in order to protect organizations from wasting valuable time and money on applying ineffective measures. On this basis, this study sets out to expand the knowledge within crisis communication research and practice, by investigating which techniques these actors use in order to ‘hijack’ an organizational crisis.

3 Theoretical Framework

In this section, the concepts that represent the theoretical framework will be presented. The theoretical concepts include narration, mythical speech and moral cultures. By applying the concept of moral culture, the aim is to explore the rhetorical techniques applied in the cases in order to generate engagement in the conflict. By combining a cultural perspective on conflict with a narrative and mythical approach, the study aims to investigate the myths and narration techniques that are applied and what vulnerabilities and principles that are exploited when doing so. The theoretical framework will therefore enable a thematization of the different techniques applied in the cases. In turn, enabling an understanding of how the techniques are used to hijack an organizational crisis in order to construct a narrative about Sweden.

3.1 Narration and Myths

Narration is defined as “a basic human strategy for coming to terms with time, process, and change” (Herman, 2009, p. 2). Narratives provide accounts of events which explain what happened by creating a link “between the self and the world experienced” (Herman, 2009, p. 11). In this way, narratives build causal-chronological connections, which help readers to make sense of the event or situation (Herman, 2009). Herman (2009) underlines that narratives often constitutes of four different elements, including worldmaking/world disruption, what it’s like, situatedness and event sequencing. As a result, a prototypical narrative can be described as an event which is situated in a certain context and which allows interpreters to make inferences regarding the timeline of different events. These events often contain a disequilibrium which is experiences by the actors in the story. The narrative additionally includes a description of the lived experience of the events in the specific story-world. In this way, a narrative often includes what is known as qualia – a sense of “what it’s like” (Herman, 2009, p. 14). In this way, narratives make it

possible to experience what it is like to live through the chain of events that is being described in the story. However, a story can contain more or less characteristics of the prototype and consequently fulfil different degrees of the category (Herman, 2009).

Stemming from the semiotic-structuralist tradition, Barthes (1973) developed his theory of mythologies and their link to narratives. Barthes (1973) underlines that interpreters of narratives make default assumptions if the text does not provide enough information in itself. Barthes's main argument is therefore that narration does not simply exist in relation to the text but is a cognitive process, as narratives include different signs which are produced and interpreted in a specific socio-cultural setting. Following a semiotic approach, a sign can be anything that communicates meaning to the person interpreting the story. According to Barthes, the signs that make up a narrative are socially constituted, constructed through conversation and embedded in certain social groups (1973). Specifically, Barthes depart from the concepts of sign, signifier and signified. The signifier constitutes the image or sound associated with something (christmas tree), the signified involves the idea or concept associated to that thing (christmas holidays), while the sign is the real object that connects the signifier and signified so that it becomes a meaningful element (firtree with decorations in it). In this way, the signifier is part of a myth, which has its roots in the history of the specific society. This three-dimensional pattern additionally serves as the basis for mythical speech. Signs have two levels of interpretation: denotation, which is the direct (explicit) meaning of the sign, and connotation, which is the cultural meaning of the sign. The connotational meaning of signs can differ depending on time and context. For instance, a dark red full glass bottle (sign) represents the alcoholic beverage wine (signifier). In France, however, it is additionally related to the idea of being healthy (signified). In this way, most signs are part of mythological speech, which varies depending on time and context. As a result, narratives often reflect myths in society that are reproduced through storytelling (Barthes, 1973).

Modern takes on Barthes aim to understand why people engage in mythical speech and what purpose the myths serve for individuals. Specifically, Campbell (2008) identified four functions of mythologies, including the metaphysical function, the

cosmological function, the sociological function and the pedagogical function. The metaphysical function involves generating “a sense of grateful, affirmative awe before the monstrous mystery that is existence” (Campbell, 2008, p. 7). This type of mythical speech focuses on stories that connects us to the concept of something else, such as godly experiences. The cosmological function is connected to the metaphysical but instead involves perceptions of the universe in such a way that it reconstructs the sense of amazement, such as the Big Bang theory. Mythical speech that fulfils a sociological function, however, generates and validates social systems, with shared understanding of right and wrong. Finally, the pedagogical function entails the psychological elements of myths that leads us through various stages in life in accordance with the social order existent in the group in which the individual belongs. In this way, it provides information on how one should live and establishes patterns of desired behavior (Campbell, 2008). In relation to this, Bjola and Pamment (2018) argue that mythological speech prey on four cognitive principles: a reality-principle, an identity-principle, a pragmatic principle and a modularity principle (Bjola & Pamment, 2018). The reality-principle entails humans having survival as key principle. This means that we are, to a certain degree, guided and controlled by the biological facts of life. We have to observe reality and make sense of it in order to survive. The identity-principle involves the tendency to disregard the truth in order to protect the experience of the self and the identity. The principle additionally reflects our social nature and wanting to belong to a certain group, as peace of mind is interrelated with occupying a specific position in a group. The pragmatic-principle includes the limitations of the human cognition, involving the shortcuts we take in order to save energy, such as being guided by heuristic principles. Finally, the modularity-principle entails that we have established cognitive modules which help us understand new phenomena and information. Often, we use old modules in order to solve new issues, meaning we often perceive and understand phenomena differently (Bjola & Pamment, 2018).

3.2 Conflicts and Moral Cultures

Conflict occurs when somebody has a grievance directed towards somebody else (Campbell & Manning, 2018). As a response to a conflict, social control is expressed. Expressions of social control include both mild signals such as rolling your

eyes, to more dramatic responses, such as reporting the behavior to the police. Sources of conflicts and types of social control vary depending on social setting and its moral culture. A moral culture is defined as a “cluster of social behavior”, including different expressions of social control. Two main strands of moral cultures have been discovered in research, referred to honor and dignity culture. These categories are useful when referring to broader patterns concerning morality. However, Campbell and Manning highlight that they should not be perceived as monolithic, since many differences exist within one moral culture (Campbell & Manning, 2018).

Status connected to physical bravery and objection to being dominated by others is referred to as honor. People that are socialized into honor cultures are often encouraged to display their courage by engaging in acts to defend themselves against people who offend them. Some insults might even require a violent response from the offended. If one’s honor is insulted, one is expected to defend it by ‘attacking’ the offender. If the offended does not respond to the insults, it is considered a moral failing. The offended might as a result be criticized by others and lose its reputation. Additionally, it is considered brave to insult others, which in turn establishes one’s reputation. Therefore, people socialized into honor cultures often use aggressive language and are quick to insult others (Campbell & Manning, 2018). As state authority and dependence on the law has grown stronger, honor culture has been largely replaced by dignity culture. Within this moral culture, people are perceived to have dignity, which is a status described by public opinion. This status exists no matter what others think of you. Therefore, reputation is less important. It might still provoke the offended to defensive acts but does not have the same impact on one’s status. For instance, it is recommended to have ‘thick skin’ in order to be able to ‘shrug’ off insults. It is expected that you avoid insulting others, both intentionally and unintentionally. Self-restraint is therefore highly valued. If conflicts arise, non-violent direct actions are prescribed. Such actions often include negotiated compromise (Campbell & Manning, 2018).

According to Campbell & Manning (2018), a new culture has spread in recent years, referred to as victimhood culture. Within victimhood culture, people are encour-

aged to take notice of what is called microaggressions. Microaggressions are defined as daily conversation or communication that contain denigrating messages directed towards marginalized groups in society. These messages can invalidate group identity or the experienced reality of the individuals in the specific group (Sue, 2010). Instead of having ‘thick skin’, one is encouraged to take actions against such insults. This is expressed through microaggression campaigns. Microaggression campaigns often consist of appeals to third parties, with the urge that they should step up and take action against the injustice (Campbell & Manning, 2018). Additionally, the complainant’s victimhood is often highlighted. In this way, sensitivity to insults is combined with appeals to third parties. The targets of complaints in victimhood culture often apologize for the offensive acts. Additionally, regulations from third parties are often implemented in order to hinder such acts in the future. As a result of focusing on injustice experienced by marginalized groups, groups that are marginalized are relatively protected against being villainized. In cultures where victimhood culture is a successful way of getting attention, a phenomenon referred to as competitive victimhood has emerged. Competitive victimhood entails fighting over who is the victimized party. In this way, other groups adapt the tools and strategies applied in victimhood cultures in order to gain advantages (Campbell & Manning, 2018). Kahalon, Shnabel, Halabi and SimanTov-Nachlieli (2018) argue that engagement in competition over victimhood status is an “active effort to gain social power” (p. 16). Specifically, engaging in this behavior can be a way of maintaining dominance and “avoiding giving up privilege” (Kahalon, Shnabel, Halabi & SimanTov-Nachlieli, 2018, p. 16). Engagement in competitive victimhood might consequently be grounded in a longing to improve one’s status or gain access to resources (Kahalon et al., 2018).

Campbell and Manning (2018) highlight that all three moral cultures often exist side by side in a society. As a result, large debates arise around things such as trigger warnings, safe spaces and the like (Campbell & Manning, 2018). People belonging to other moral cultures argue against the strong moralism within victimhood culture, which the authors argue often is directed towards the privileged. Therefore, a backlash against victimhood culture often do not involve advancing ideals of dignity, but instead a resurgence of honor morals (Campbell & Manning, 2018).

4 Methodology

This section contains the method applied in this thesis, including research strategy, data collection, data analysis and reflections on methodology. The research will be conducted as a qualitative content analysis, where primary data is collected from the social media platform Twitter. By applying a qualitative method, the study aims to generate key insights and conceptual building blocks that can contribute to further research. The section opens with an overview of the research strategy, followed by a description of the process of selecting cases. Afterwards, the data collection process is described, followed by the data analysis and reflections on the chosen method.

4.1 Research strategy

The study seeks to investigate how the selected cases have been ‘hijacked’ by malicious actors in order to construct a larger narrative about Sweden. The aim is to identify which narrative techniques are applied in order to connect the events to larger disinformation narratives, as well as to identify patterns between the cases. The research will be conducted as a qualitative content analysis, where primary data consists of posts from the social media platform Twitter. A qualitative content analysis was chosen in order to be able analyze the techniques in detail and thus enable investigations of potential interpretative meanings of the material. In this way, examining what principles and cognitive vulnerabilities actors exploit in order to generate engagement in the material. A qualitative content analysis is therefore a suitable method for reaching the overall aim.

An abductive research approach has been applied, involving both inductive and deductive reasoning. In this way, the research process “alternates between... theory and empirical facts (or clues) whereby both are successively reinterpreted in the light of each other” (Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2018, p. 5). When analyzing the social

media posts, I was guided by the theoretical concepts as well as the empirical material, in order to better understand how the concepts can be understood in the light of the specific cases. In this way, a more detailed understanding of the different concepts and the empirical material was generated. During the process, I have remained open towards new concepts as well as new empirical categories that might emerge in the data collection process. According to Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018), an abductive approach fosters a more nuanced research process, which in turn generates more credible research findings.

4.2 Selection of cases

Firstly, 15 Swedish organizational crises were analyzed. These 15 cases were selected on the basis of generating a large amount of engagement online (more than 50 posts) and occurring within the selected timeframe (2010-2020). The aim with the analysis of the cases was to identify any clear attempts of disinformation activities.

The cases that were analyzed include:

- H&M's crisis related to the sweater "Coolest Money in the Jungle" (2018)
- H&M's crisis related to child labor (2016)
- Swedbank's money laundering scandal (2019)
- IKEA's crisis related to Ingvar Kamprad's past and tax planning activities (2011)
- IKEA's horse meat scandal (2013)
- Telia's crisis related to bribes in Uzbekistan (2018)
- The crisis related to Svenska Akademien (2018)
- Kronfågel's crisis relating to their commercial (2020)
- ICA's horse meat scandal (2013)
- Vattenfall's coal energy scandal (2016)
- Oatley's controversial commercial 'ditch the milk' (2019)
- The crisis related to The National Board of Health and Welfare's brochure "Information to you who is married to a child" (2018)
- SAS's crisis connected to the commercial "What is truly Scandinavian?" (2020)

- The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise’s crisis related to Leif Östling’s statement “What the hell do I get for my tax money?” (2017)
- PostNord’s incident during the general election in 2018 related to delayed votes

Out of these, four cases that represent plausible instances of disinformation were chosen. Specifically, cases were selected based on the premise that the information spreading online during the crisis correspond to the common disinformation narratives identified by the EEAS’s Task Force (European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, 2019). In other words, the cases were not chosen on the basis of representing a certain crisis or organizational type, but on the basis of representing specific reactions on social media. The East StratCom Task Force was developed in order to address disinformation campaigns orchestrated by Russia. Specifically, the Task Force identifies disinformation from the Russian state and the Eastern Neighborhood by fact-checking material and examining different techniques (European Union, 2018). It does not target different opinions but investigates common methods used to spread fake content. Kremlin have been pointed out as the main source of disinformation targeted towards Sweden (European External Action Service's East StratCom Task Force, 2019), making the narrative framework suitable for selecting cases. The cases that were selected for analysis include SAS crisis related to the commercial “What is truly Scandinavian?”, The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare’s crisis related to the brochure “Information to you who is married to a child”, PostNord’s crisis in relation to delayed votes during the general election and The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise’s crisis in relation to Leif Östling’s statement “What the hell do I get for my money?”. The SCCA underlines that professionals “should be wary... when several techniques are employed simultaneously, or temporally close, by a single source, or by sources with known connections to the benefactor of the techniques” (Pamment et al., 2018, p. 32). While selecting cases, a holistic view of various techniques representing instances of malign rhetoric was applied. Specifically, the cases demonstrated involvement of the same Twitter accounts (to a certain degree). Additionally, the reactions were carried out almost simultaneously, or at least temporally close. Specifically, similar responses to the conflict occurred on the same date (or around the

same date). With regards to the other cases listed above, no clear influence attempts aimed at placing the events within a larger narrative about Sweden were identified.

4.3 Data collection

Posts, retweets and answers to posts published on Twitter during the time of the crises have been collected as primary data. Specifically, posts that represent malign rhetoric published during the first two months of the crisis have been collected. Disinformation activities directed towards Sweden often have the aim to influence the overall image of Sweden and can involve foreign influence (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018). On this basis, posts written in both Swedish and English were collected. Twitter was chosen due to the fact that previous case studies have identified Twitter as a prominent source of disinformation activities (Svenska Institutet, 2018; Fernquist, Kaati, Akrami, Cohen, & Schroeder, 2018). However, this means that posts which could be of value for this thesis, published on other social media platforms, are excluded from the analysis.

In order to collect empirical material, two separate searches on Twitter were carried out. Firstly, the organizations' names were used as key search words. After that, a phrase related to the organizational crisis was used as key search word, such as: "Information to you who is married to a child", "What the hell do I get for my money", "Delayed votes" and "Travelers bring great ideas home". From these two initial searches, Twitter threads and hashtags related to the events were identified, wherefrom new material was gathered. In this way, a snowball technique was applied when collecting the material, in order to gather as much relevant material as possible. All in all, 146 Twitter posts that represents plausible influence attempts were collected. In order to identify posts representing plausible malign rhetoric, a holistic perspective on strategic narratives, possible target groups and intent has been applied (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018). The SCCA is responsible for issues concerning civil protection, emergency management, public safety and civil defense (Agency, Swedish Civil Contingencies, n.d.). The agency is responsible for mapping disinformation attempts directed towards Sweden, making the agency's framework for identifying disinformation a suitable selection criterion. Specifically, questions such as: "*How strong are the indicators of misleading or*

disruptive intent?”, “*What do the strategic narratives and target audiences suggest about the purpose of the communications?*”, “*If a specific technique is being used, could it be harmful to the public or to our society?*” (Swedish Civil Contingencies Agency, 2018, p. 18) have been used as guiding framework for identifying plausible disinformation attempts.

The time span was chosen in order to demonstrate how the coverage of the conflict might change over a short period of time, from the initial reactions on social media to posts aiming to make sense of the event later on. However, during the data collection process, it became evident that most of the reactions representing plausible disinformation occurred during the initial days of crisis, which constitutes the larger part of the empirical material.

4.4 Data analysis

A qualitative content analysis was applied in order to analyze the empirical material (The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis, 2013). Firstly, segments of the empirical data were assigned to the categories of a coding frame. The coding frame included categories relating to the overall research question, such as; *link to unrelated happenings/news*, *attacking the protagonist*, *appeals to third parties*, *calls to action*, *competitive victimhood* and *world disruption*. During the initial categorization, it was evident that several posts often comprised more than one method and therefore belonged to more than one category. Therefore, clusters of empirical data were combined to create new categories. The categories that emerged in the categorization process were; *providing incoherent narratives*, *inflicting victimhood status*, *backlash against victimhood morals* and *framing & ignoring organizational responses*. It is important that the categories match the data (The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis, 2013). This was part of the reason why the coding frame changed during the data analysis. Specifically, attacking the protagonist was erased as category, while framing & ignoring organizational responses was added as a new category. Calls to third parties, calls to action and competitive victimhood were clustered into one category (‘inflicting victimhood status’), while link to unrelated happenings was renamed to ‘providing incoherent narratives’ and disruption

was renamed ‘generating backlash against victimhood morals’. The coding framework therefore helped to reduce the empirical data into four main categories, which provided a valid description of the data. The categorization was, consequently, done as an iterative process, where the coding frame was modified in the process in accordance with the empirical material (The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis, 2013). The method is suitable for answering the research question, as it allows for the emergence of both content-driven and data-driven categories. In turn, it enabled identification of techniques that laid outside the scope of the theoretical concepts. In this way, the method allows for a certain degree of flexibility which is needed in order to fulfil the study’s aim. Specifically, to generate a deeper understanding of the meaning of the material and consequently a more detailed understanding of the techniques applied in the selected cases. Finally, by reducing the data into four main clusters, patterns between the cases could be identified.

4.5 Reflections on Selected Method

By applying a qualitative approach, the aim is to generate a deeper understanding of plausible influence attempts directed towards organizations during a crisis. In this way, providing communication professionals with a relevant conceptual basis in order to better understand the phenomena. However, it is important to acknowledge that I have a Western bias. As a Western scholar, I perceive the empirical material influenced by definitions of disinformation offered by European, and to a high degree Swedish, scholars and institutions. Additionally, my selection criteria are based on definitions provided by these sources. However, while analyzing the data, I aimed to problematize how engagement in disinformation narratives can be perceived. Specifically, by applying the perspectives of moral culture and mythical speech, the aim is to understand what functions engagement in the material fulfils for different individuals. Engagement in the material might represent expressions of basic human tendencies or concerns, rather than ‘malicious acts’. By doing this, the thesis problematizes the assumption that all actors who engage in it are ‘trolls’. Moreover, the analyzed cases represent *plausible* instances of disinformation activities. This means that the collected posts might not be actual instances of disinformation. Several of the techniques analyzed break the rules of civilized debate but are not guarantees of influence activities. In accordance with the SCCA’s

guidelines, a holistic view of various techniques representing instances of malign rhetoric have been applied in order to collect empirical material. Finally, the study only includes Twitter as unit for data collection. Other platforms that could be valuable to include in order to discover other disinformation techniques are not included in this study. However, previous case studies have shown that Twitter is a prominent source of disinformation, making it a suitable choice for data collection (Fernquist et al., 2018; Svenska Institutet, 2018).

5 Empirical Analysis

In this chapter, patterns that emerged during the data analysis will be presented. The thesis aims to highlight the similarities in order to build a conceptual basis for practitioners and researchers to better understand the phenomenon. These patterns emerged while analyzing the timeframe of each case individually and was put together in order to make the overall analysis clearer and easier to comprehend. The chapter open with a short introduction of each case. After that, the cases will be discussed according to the different patterns that have been identified, including; *providing incoherent narratives, inflicting victimhood status, generating a backlash against victimhood morals and framing or ignoring organizational responses*. Each technique is discussed individually, involving both an overview of the empirical material and a theoretical reflection. Specifically, an overview of the empirical material connected to the pattern is presented first. Here, example tweets which represents the prototype of the technique is provided. After providing the empirical material, a theoretical reflection on the technique is offered. By thematizing the analysis according to this logic, the similarities between the cases are highlighted. In turn, this will provide a deeper understanding of the techniques applied when hijacking an organizational crisis in order to construct a narrative about Sweden.

5.1 Cases

5.1.1 SAS – “*What is truly Scandinavian?*”

On the 10th of February this year, the Scandinavian Airline Company SAS released a commercial on Youtube and their social media channels. The commercial starts off by answering the question “What is truly Scandinavian?” with “Absolutely nothing”. Afterwards, different inventions and concepts, such as parental leave and meatballs, are described as ideas that have been brought to Sweden from other parts

of the world through travels. It ends claiming that Scandinavians are good at integrating ideas from other parts of the world, adjusting them and making them “better”. At the end of the commercial it is stated that “Travelers bring great ideas home” (SAS, 2020a). The commercial immediately received a lot of negative attention on social media. As a result, SAS erased the commercial from the different platforms less than 24 hours after it was released. The explanation provided for erasing the commercial was that their campaign had been hijacked by malicious actors aiming to spread disinformation (SAS, 2020b). Not long thereafter, SAS uploaded a shorter version of the commercial on their social media channels, claiming they “stand by their message” (Ekblom, 2020). Researcher Mathias Cederholm made a statement in Aftonbladet² regarding an analysis of the social media activity surrounding the commercial. Cederholm stated that the Swedish alternative news sites, such as Samhällsnytt and Nyheteridag, were among the first to pay attention to the commercial. Afterwards, the news spread to radical right-wing supporters, who shared material on their social media channels. However, Cederholm additionally highlights that several individuals reacted to the video and published material related to it as well (Tronarp, 2020).

5.1.2 “Information to you who is married to a child”

On the 29th of March 2018, The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare published the brochure “Information to you who is married to a child”. The brochure immediately received a lot of criticism on Twitter (Jepsson, 2018). Several politicians from right-wing parties published statements on Twitter arguing that the brochure was highly inappropriate and was signaling that child marriage is tolerated in Sweden (Szyber, 2018; Billström, 2018; Sverigedemokraterna, 2018). Specifically, such Twitter posts highlighted that the brochure took the issue too lightly and failed to communicate that it is illegal to be married to a child in Sweden. This argument was additionally supported by many individuals, who published statements on Twitter condemning the brochure and the actions of the board (Jeppsson,

² Swedish daily newspaper

2018). On the 29th of March 2018, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare decided to withdraw the brochure claiming they agreed that the brochure needed to be revised (Svensson & Mokhtari, 2018).

5.1.3 PostNord's incident related to delayed votes

During the general election 2018, the Swedish post service company, PostNord, was delayed with delivering the advance votes. In turn, this delayed the counting of the votes with approximately two hours (Kleberg, 2018). At this time, PostNord was already experiencing a lot of criticism related to their services. This incident resulted in an extensive increase of criticism online and in news media. Specifically, several actors claimed that PostNord was taking part in a systematic election fraud (Sanning, 2018; Monster T. D., 2018a; Wallgren, 2018; Runnberg, 2018). The “election-fraud” narrative was highlighted to a great extent before, during and after the election (Svenska Institutet, 2018). Specifically, several events and happenings were placed within this narrative, where PostNord's incident constitutes one. PostNord commented on the incident in news media, claiming the delays were due to an increase in the number of advance votes. The explanation was provided at the same time as the news regarding the delays were published (Kleberg, 2018).

5.1.4 Leif Östling – “What the hell do I get for my money?”

In November 2017, the Swedish TV-show “Uppdrag granskning” revealed that the CEO for The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise, Leif Östling, avoided paying taxes in Sweden. In relation to this, he made a statement in the TV-show underlining that he did not think he did anything wrong by engaging in tax planning activities. Instead, Leif Östling highlighted that Sweden has the highest tax pressure in the world and that he did not think he received anything for the tax money he paid. Specifically, he asked “What the hell do I get for my money” (My translation)³ and underlined he was being egoistic when asked about the tax planning activities. The statement immediately raised a lot of criticism on social media. On twitter, people responded by answering Östling's question, underlining ‘what he gets’ for the money he pays (TT, 2017). At the same time, Leif Östling additionally received

³ My translation, original quote: ”Vad fan får jag för pengarna?”

support on Twitter, as people argued his question was legitimate. The statement therefore gave rise to a polarized debate regarding tax money and public spending (Sadé, 2017; K, 2017; Wallgren, 2018). In combination with other online statements, the incident led to his resignation as a CEO later that month (Ohlin, 2017).

5.2 Themes

5.2.1 *Providing Incoherent Narratives*

One pattern identified in the cases includes linking the organizational event together with unrelated happenings and news headlines. The identified technique was applied to a great extent in all cases. For instance, several accounts have posted the tagline “Travelers bring great ideas home” from SAS’s commercial together with news headlines and happenings about increasing levels of crime, immigration and terrorist attacks (Sahlström R. S., 2020a; Rat, 2020; Wagner, 2020b; Carlberg, 2020; Skarpheden, 2020; Henman, 2020; Hägglund, 2020; Grenstam; 2020; Baltimore i Uppland, 2020; A. J., 2020; Rhenman, 2020c). When doing this, actors often tag left-wing parties they perceive as responsible for these developments. The posts aim to demonstrate that SAS focuses on the wrong kind of ideas brought to Sweden through travels. Specifically, actors communicate that SAS’s argumentation is partly right, Sweden has no “Swedish culture” due to extensive amounts of immigration, which is argued to be the main reason behind increasing amounts of crime and other immoral behavior. The posts additionally aim to communicate the hypocrisy they claim exists among the Swedish elite, involving the elite only highlighting the good aspects of immigration but never the bad (A, 2020; Sahlström R. S., 2020; Rat, 2020; Wagner, 2020b; Carlberg, 2020; Skarpheden, 2020; Henman, 2020; Hägglund, 2020; Grenstam, 2020; Baltimore I Uppland, 2020; Rhenman, 2020c). As an example of this technique, one actor published the text “Today’s brutal laugh out loud” (My translation⁴) together with a picture of the tagline “Travelers bring great ideas home” and different news headlines concerning rape, abuse, gang violence and robbery (Sahlström R. S., 2020b). By doing this, the actor points

⁴ My translation, for original quote see; <https://twitter.com/ROGSAHL/status/1227587011554500609>

at the hypocrisy in the statement, by underlining the “great” ideas that the actor claims travelers have brought to Sweden.

In a similar vein, the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare’s brochure has been connected to news and happenings concerning religion and immigration (Jeppcountry, 2018; Morpheus, 2018; Bondesson, 2018). Specifically, some actors list various events they claim are proof of an ongoing ‘Islamization’ together with the brochure, including phenomena such as public prayer announcements, court orders and immigration related initiatives (Bondesson, 2018; Morpheus, 2018; Jeppcountry, 2018). One of these posts is used in order to generate support for the Swedish Democrats⁵ by applying the hashtag #SD2018 (Bondesson, 2018). The narrative has received relatively high levels of attention, with posts generating around 100 retweets and more than 300 likes (Jeppcountry, 2018; Morpheus, 2018). By doing this, the aim is to support the narrative that Sweden is undergoing an adaption to Islamic rules and ways of living:

“First came “Grandpa has four wives” then came “Advice to you who is married to child” and in between these developments a woman was convicted according to sharia law in a Swedish court. But it is me who is being racist when I talk about an islamization of Sweden?” (My translation⁶) (Jeppcountry, 2018).

As demonstrated in the example above, different unrelated happenings within the realm of the topic are connected to The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare’s brochure. Specifically, the actor refers to a children’s book called “Grandpa has four wives” and a court order to frame the brochure as part of an ongoing ‘Islamization’ of Sweden. Additionally, the heading of the brochure has been changed from “Information to you who is married to child” to “Advice to you who is married to a child” (Jeppcountry, 2018). Within this narrative, the elite is argued to be responsible for the ongoing ‘Islamization’ (Bondesson, 2018; Morpheus, 2018; Jeppcountry, 2018).

⁵ A Swedish right-wing political party

⁶ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/BondessonTed/status/979326879898521601>

Several English and Swedish posts communicate that the brochure includes “child marriage tips” and is proof of the Swedish government normalizing child marriage for minority groups. This is done by connecting the brochure to news regarding the Social Democrats voting against a prohibition of child marriage (Fornsvensk, 2018; svensk_fakta, 2018; Conservality, 2018; Hahne, 2018). In this way, the brochure is framed as part of a process aimed at ‘normalizing child marriage’ among minority groups.

The pattern was additionally identified in the case related to PostNord. Specifically, several actors mention PostNord’s incident together with other events and news concerning the election. The news often includes incidents such as missing ballots, potential sabotage or other ‘suspect’ behavior. Specifically, actors place PostNord’s incident together with mistakes and unrelated events in order to spread claims regarding a coordinated fraud. Specifically, several actors on Twitter claim the delays, together with other incidents, is proof of that the election was rigged (Sanning, 2018; Monster T. D., 2018a; Wallgren, 2018; Lustkvant, 2018a; Warmdo, 2018; Hall, 2018). Hashtags such as #valfusk2018 (#electionfraud2018), #val2019 (#election2018), or #Sverigebilden (#Swedensimage) are frequently applied together with information on PostNord’s incident (Sanning, 2018; Monster T. D., 2018a; Wallgren, 2018):

“PostNord, The National Election Board, hundreds of observations, confessions in social media from election workers, bribe scandals, lies provided in other languages, etc. And despite this, nobody has started investigating it further. Add the fact that nothing pointed at these results for the Social Democrats or the Swedish Democrats. #electionfraud2018” (My translation⁷) (Wallgren, 2018).

As evident in the example above, events and happening within the realm of the topic are listed together with PostNord’s incident. In this way, the incident is framed as part of a coordinated fraud. In support of the narrative, actors highlight the fact that the Swedish Democrats were supposed to receive a higher number of votes (Monster T. D., 2018b; Lustkvant, 2018a).

⁷ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/chrwallg/status/1039024257915920385>

Finally, Östling's statement "What the hell do I get for my money?" has been connected to various news and events surrounding tax money expenditures (Ekberg, 2017; Sadé, 2017; K, 2017). Specifically, the statement has given rise to two hashtags applied to spread information about Sweden's deteriorating welfare, these hashtags include: #vadfanfårjag (#whatthehelldoIget) and #vadfanfårjag-förpengarna (#whatthehelldoIgetformymoney). The hashtags are mainly used to connect the statement to news within the realm of the topic in order to demonstrate how tax money are wasted on various things which is argued to not give added value for Swedish people. Specifically, several actors connect the statement together with news regarding social security expenditures and immigration related costs (Ekberg, 2017; Sadé, 2017; K, 2017). In this way, the statement is used to argue that the state is wasting tax money on immigration related expenditures. As an example, one actor has published the text "There are no limits to the insanity in this country #swpol #migpol #whatthehelldoIget" (My translation⁸) together with a news article with the heading "unaccompanied children can receive compensation" (K, 2017). The news article provided together with the text concerns age assessments of refugees. Specifically, that the migration authority might be required to offer compensation to refugees for providing wrong information in relation to age assessments. The example post has generated relatively high levels of engagement, with 45 retweets and 111 likes (K, 2017). In this way, Östling's statement is connected to happenings related to immigration and welfare expenditures.

Besides linking the statement to news concerning immigration, actors connect the hashtags related to Östling's statement to the health care system, the military defense, the police force and crime (Wilke, 2017; Bergqvist, 2017; Monster T. D., 2017a; Wagner, 2017). Some of these posts connects the statement together with news about people's experiences related to the welfare system, such as injustices related to different welfare services (Monster T. D., 2017a; Lundgren, 2017). In this way, actors argue Östling should not be criticized for 'telling it like it is'. As an example, one actor published "And media attacks Leif Östling for being brave and

⁸ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/MickeK69/status/929991464007938048>

honest and telling it like it is. This is a scandal! #whatthelldoIget” (My translation⁹) (Monster T. D., 2017a). The information is provided together with a picture of a news headline stating; “Was denied bed at the hospital: “This is not working”. Jennifer, 23 had to give birth in the Garage” (My translation¹⁰) (Monster T. D., 2017a). In this way, the actor underlines that Östling’s question was legitimate since the welfare system is deteriorating. Specifically, the actor uses the health care system as an example of this development. The accounts are often connected to right-wing parties, evident in the link between the accounts and engagement in such material (Wilke, 2017; Monster T. D., 2017a; Bergqvist, 2017). The technique was additionally applied by actors connected to left-wing parties. Specifically, one actor lists events together in order to construct a positive narrative about Sweden (Mattson, 2017). In this way, demonstrating what Östling ‘gets’ for the tax money he pays.

The pattern demonstrated in the posts above includes giving life to different myths by offering incoherent narratives. This is done by linking the organizational crisis to other unrelated news and happenings within the realm of a specific topic. The posts are instances of prototypical narration. Specifically, they offer a world disruption (deterioration of Swedish society) which is situated in a specific context (political topics), and a sense of what it’s like to live through the disruption. However, the posts do not offer event sequencing or an explanation of the relationship between the events (Herman, 2009). The incoherent information provided in the posts contributes to interpretations of the information according to established information modules. Specifically, the posts contribute to interpreters constructing a coherent narrative based on their already established beliefs (Barthes, 1973; Bjola & Pamment, 2018). In this way, the modularity-principle is exploited. Specifically, actors take advantage of the fact that people have a tendency to interpret new information in accordance with old information modules. As a result, the narratives become appealing as they confirm stakeholders’ already held perception of the world.

⁹ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/pissedfather666/status/928148607026499584>

¹⁰ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/pissedfather666/status/928148607026499584>

Additionally, the pragmatic principle is exploited. Specifically, actors take advantage of the fact that people tend to use cognitive shortcuts, and consequently not thoroughly read, or fact-check, the material (Bjola & Pamment, 2018). For instance, by linking The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare's leaflet and SAS's commercial to happenings and news related to immigration and crime, the post give life to the myth about "the others" and cultural exotification (Barthes, 1973). The myth fulfils a sociological function, as it validates a shared understanding of specific moral codes (Bjola & Pamment, 2018). Specifically, the moral codes include understandings of what is considered right and wrong and the desired state of Swedish society. The posts additionally signify that criminality and immoral behavior are brought by people that belong to external civilizations, separated from the norms established in the 'West' (Barthes, 1973). By doing this, the myth has a pedagogical function, as it communicates and establish patterns of desired behavior among the ingroup (Campbell, 2008). Specifically, that the ingroup should not commit crime, as this is not a desired behavior if you are a Swede. As a result of signifying that crime is brought to Sweden by external people, the posts contribute to creating a perception of an external enemy. Engagement in the myth therefore contribute to identity-building processes by mobilizing different polarized national and ethnic identities (Bjola & Pamment, 2018). Specifically, people who engage in the material establish their positions within a specific social and political group (Campbell, 2008). The myth additionally preys on the reality-principle as it takes advantage of issues that people are concerned about, such as crime and immigration (Bjola & Pamment, 2018). Actors therefore increase the chances of high engagement in the material by getting others to express their concerns regarding the state of the Swedish society.

In a similar vein, connecting PostNord's incident to other 'suspicious' unrelated events related to the general election gives life to a conspiracy myth (Barthes, 1973). The conspiracy myth refers to a plan organized by the "elite" to rule the world against the people's will. Actors take advantage of the fact that the incoherent narrative provided in the posts are interpreted according to the belief that the Swedish Democrats should have won the election. In this way, the modularity-principle is exploited. Specifically, people are inclined to interpret the material according to the information that the party would receive a higher number of votes (Bjola &

Pamment, 2018). In this way, actors increase the chances of interpreters believing and engaging in the narrative. In a similar way, the posts related to Östling's statement gives life to the myth "man against society" (Barthes, 1973). Specifically, posts applying the hashtag #vadfanfårjag (#whatthehelldoIget) connects it to news about encountered injustices related to the welfare system. In this way, Östling's statement is used to support arguments about 'the little guy's struggle against the elite/society'. The posts construct a narrative about how social norms and values, such as political correctness and left-wing politics, contributes to tax money being wasted on unnecessary things, which in turn hinders the well-being for individuals in society. In relation to this myth, counter narratives were identified. Specifically, one actor fed into the assumption that high tax expenditures are inherently good. In both the case related to PostNord's incident and Östling's statement, the reality-principle is exploited, as actors take advantage of topics that people have concerns about, such as tax money expenditures and the voting system (Bjola & Pamment, 2018).

5.2.2 *Inflicting Victimhood Status*

Another pattern identified in the cases includes increasing feelings of marginalization among the target group. The technique was applied to a great extent in relation to SAS's commercial. For instance, several actors claim SAS's commercial is racist against Swedes (Ringles, 2020; Nilsson, 2020; Anders, G., 2020; Kasselstrand, 2020). It is claimed that this type of racism is relatively hidden, and ignored, but becomes visible through the commercial (Nilsson, 2020; Ringles, 2020). The posts therefore aim to demonstrate how Swedes are victims of reversed racism caused by an elite aiming to further interests of marginalized groups:

“Well @Nystromhockey I agree on the fact that more people should raise their voices against racism and xenophobia, specifically towards the Swedish people. Other types of racism are frequently on the agenda. This development is precisely what SAS is taking part in. This is why people get angry. It is humiliating to deny our identities” (My translation¹¹) (Nilsson, 2020).

¹¹ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/JennyNilssonGV/status/1228122032698773504>

The example provides the text above together with a retweeted post, aiming to question those who are offended by the commercial. The example signals that racism directed towards Swedes is a serious issue, which SAS is taking part of. By stating “Other types of racism is frequently on the agenda”, the post argues that minorities’ interests are often prioritized before “the people’s” (Nilsson, 2020). As a response to this injustice people are encouraged to boycott SAS until they apologize (Rhenman, 2020b; Whig, 2020). The word “woke” and the hashtag #gowokegetbroke is sometimes applied in support of this argument (Whig, 2020; Janouch, 2020; Baltimore I Uppland, 2020). By using the word woke, the commercial is connected to a narrative about systematic oppression of Swedish people inflicted by the elite. Additionally, several posts aim to demonstrate the hypocrisy they claim exist among left-wing sympathizers (Henke, 2020; Wagner, 2020a):

“Have you thought about how the reactions surrounding SAS is different in comparison to other norms? Normally, it is enough that “Stina 37” is offended by a print on a sweater in order for H&M to beg on their knees and burn the entire collection” (My translation¹²) (Wagner, 2020a).

In the example above, it is underlined that left-oriented people are hypocritical, as they accept racism directed towards Swedes, but not towards minority groups. Additionally, the post above communicates that certain political opinions are accepted and considered legitimate while others, often connected to right-wing values, are ignored or ridiculed (Wagner, 2020a). One actor highlights that if SAS would replace “Scandinavia” with “The middle east”, left-party sympathizers would strongly oppose it (Henke, 2020). In relation to this, several actors claim that the high degree of political correctness contributes to silencing certain groups, which are not allowed to voice their opinion regarding the commercial (Dahlberg, 2020; Safursey, 2020; Ekström, 2020). As an example of this, one tweet highlights “Tonight, TV4’s channel seven is showing SAS’s commercial. That is OK, but The Swedish Democrats would never get their commercial on air. Because everyone is of equal worth” (My translation¹³) (Safursey, 2020). In this way, SAS’s commercial

¹² My translation, for original quote, see: https://twitter.com/Sharps_Wagner/status/1227608166990589953

¹³ My translation, for original quote see; <https://twitter.com/safursey/status/1230231458444382208>

is used to demonstrate how media institutions are silencing certain political groups. In relation to this, some actors additionally argue they are tired of being ridiculed and of being portrayed as ‘bad people’ (Doktorinnan, 2020; Grishnackh, 2020). One actor claims the commercial is proof of that left-oriented people are used to ‘getting away with lies’, since they claim the commercial do not deny the existence of anything Scandinavian (Wallgren, 2020a). In this way, the actor communicates that the commercial is proof of that the left-oriented elite can behave however they want, while other political groups are silenced or criticized based on their opinions (Wallgren, 2020a). Hence, actors use SAS’s commercial to communicate about an elite which engages in systemic oppression of certain opinions, often connected to right-wing supporters. The commercial additionally received international and national coverage one to two weeks after the campaign launch (Vesterli, 2020; Tyler, 2020; Jensen, 2020). Several of these posts involve calls to action, such as signing petitions in order to demand an apology from SAS, or reminders of continuing to boycott SAS until they apologize (Tyler, 2020; Jensen, 2020; Rhenman, 2020a).

In a similar way, Östling’s statement “What the hell do I get for my money?” has been used to demonstrate how certain political voices are silenced in public service. It is argued that Swedish media institutions propagates a left-oriented agenda, evident in the way they condemn Östling’s statement (Lindberg J. , 2017; Monster T. D., 2017b; Lustkvant, 2017b):

“SVT must be happy now that Östling leaves The Confederation of Swedish Enterprise. Apparently, it is not enough to follow the law, you have to be even better, otherwise things will go bad. To tell the truth, “What the hell do I get for my money?”, is not allowed according to SVT” (My translation¹⁴) (Lindberg J. , 2017).

As evident in the example above, the actor highlights that Östling only communicated the “truth”. In this way, Östling’s statement is used as evidence of how public service is silencing opposing opinions and covering up the “truth” (Monster T. D., 2017b; Lindberg J. , 2017; Lustkvant, 2017b). In relation to this, it is argued that the elite is hypocritical as they do not condemn other socialist political actors who

¹⁴ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/jingezon/status/933383339477626880>

has committed tax fraud but are very fast to condemn the actions of Leif Östling (Tommy, 2017; Lustkvant, 2017b). Such posts often portray a picture of Mona Sahlin, Former Swedish Social Democrats leader, together with information related to tax fraud. These posts have generated relatively high levels of engagement, generating up to 65 retweets and 200 likes (Tommy, 2017; Lustkvant, 2017b). As a response to the claimed injustice, Östling's statement has been used to urge people to stand up for their values and be more critical towards the tax system. These posts have received relatively high levels of attention, generating up to 283 likes (Lundgren, 2017; Fnordspotting, 2017; Krassén, 2017).

The pattern involving increasing feelings of marginalization was additionally identified in the case of PostNord. Specifically, supporters of the Swedish Democrats were referred to as victims of an election fraud, in which the incident related to PostNord was placed (Sanning, 2018; Monster T. D., 2018a; Wallgren, 2018; Anders B., 2018b):

“Sweden is lost, an alliance with support from SD might change a total obliteration of the country. SCANDALOUS ELECTION FRAUD BY S HAS OCCURRED... DISGRACE AND SCANDAL, THIS COUNTRY HAS TURNED INTO A NEW DDR, Swedish people are on their backs allowing themselves to get raped by the left-wing mafia, like a scared dog” (My translation¹⁵) (Anders B., 2018b).

As evident in the example above, it is claimed that the left-oriented elite engaged in intentional acts to deny The Swedish Democrats power by depriving voters of their democratic rights. The post additionally underlines how vulnerable right-wing supporters are claimed to be against injustice inflicted upon them by a left-oriented elite (Anders B., 2018b). In this way, several actors argue the elite is taking part in a systematic attempt to silence the supporters of the Swedish Democrats (Sanning, 2018; Monster T. D., 2018a; Wallgren, 2018; Anders B. 2018b). As a response to the conspiracy myth, anti-elite rhetoric is applied, where actors take on the role as whistleblowers. For instance, actors have uploaded information regarding suspicious behavior and encouraged other people to report potential sabotage and fraud

¹⁵ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/essob3/status/1040272817680510978>

(Tankar, 2018). Moreover, the incident is mentioned together with information on how people can take action against the injustice, such as through joining demonstrations or demanding a reelection. Hashtags such as #omvalNU (#reelection-NOW) and #omval (#reelection) are frequently applied together with such calls to action (Friden, 2018; Sverige F. , 2018).

The pattern was not identified to a great extent in the case related to The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare's brochure. However, instances of the pattern were discovered (Sellei, 2018; Törn, 2018). As an example, one actor has highlighted the fact that Swedish media institutions ridicule those who are offended by the brochure (Sellei, 2018):

“According to Aftonbladet¹⁶ culture, The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare's brochure is good as it demonstrates that The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare interacts with reality and enables dialogue with criminals. Only vote-fishing immigration focused idiots are offended!” (My translation¹⁷) (Sellei, 2018).

In the example above, sarcasm is applied in order to showcase that Swedish media institutions are biased and ridicule opposing opinions related to the brochure. In this way, the brochure is used to communicate that high levels of political correctness within Swedish media institutions results in marginalization of certain political groups (Sellei, 2018). Additionally, the brochure has been mentioned together with appeals to external third parties (Schörling, 2018; PeterSweden, 2018). Specifically, one actor has posted information in English regarding the horrible situation in Sweden while asking for help from news sites based outside Sweden. However, the post has not received a lot of attention or generated a lot of engagement online (Schörling, 2018).

As a response to the uprising against The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare's brochure, some people attacked the actors condemning the brochure by

¹⁶ A Swedish daily newspaper

¹⁷ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/PeterSellei/status/979363283479269377>

¹⁷ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/lindbergpolemik/status/983034181868498945>

arguing that they are ridiculous (Esserlöv, 2020). For instance, one actor argues that the right-wing supporters are hypocritical, who believe that immigrants should adapt to Swedish culture, at the same time as they condemn providing them with vital information. The account attacking the right-wing supporters' logic is connected to a left-wing party (Esserlöv, 2020). In a similar way, the uprising against SAS gave rise to actors attacking the right-wing supporters who condemned the commercial, claiming they are hypocritical and sensitive (Finis_Malorum, 2020; Operibus, 2020; An(ime)Come, 2020; Muhindo, 2020). For instance, one actor published a meme that demonstrates how ridiculous the right-wing supporters condemning SAS are (Finis_Malorum, 2020).

The technique identified within this pattern puts emphasize on communicating “what it is like” to live through an experienced world disruption (Herman, 2009). Specifically, the posts communicate what it is like to be marginalized (disruption) by a left-oriented elite. Together, the posts construct a narrative about Sweden as a country ruled by an elite which suppress and silence opposing opinions. Specifically, the technique involves communicating that high levels of political correctness and left-oriented values contributes to marginalization of certain political groups. The technique often entails demonstrating that public service is silencing certain political views. In this way, the reality-principle is exploited, as actors prey on a topic which people have legitimate concerns about, such as a potential left-oriented bias of public service (Bjola & Pamment, 2018). By communicating that the group is subjected to injustice, the posts attribute the target group victimhood status. In this way, actors have adopted the strategies applied within victimhood culture. The posts resemble the rhetorical techniques applied during microaggression campaigns, as they aim to gather public support by highlighting the complainant's victimhood together with information on actions people can take against the experienced injustice (Campbell & Manning, 2018). Hence, the information in the posts underline the target groups' claimed marginalization in society, which is often combined with different calls to action. By communicating about systematic injustices as well as providing information on actions the target audience can take against the injustices, actors increase the chances of high engagement in the material (Campbell & Manning, 2018). Specifically, it increases the chances of the target audience engaging in competitive victimhood as a strategy since people are more inclined to

engage in this strategy if they believe they might lose power or privilege. The posts take advantage of this fact by claiming the elite is depriving certain political groups of their democratic rights. Engagement in the material might therefore represent a strive to maintain power or gain access to different resources (Kahalon et al., 2018). In this way, actors exploit a basic human tendency, involving that people strive to maintain their social position and power (Bjola & Pamment, 2018).

In two of the selected cases, the feelings of victimhood among the target group were amplified by the polarized media landscape. Specifically, in the case of SAS's commercial and The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare's brochure, left-wing accounts aiming to ridicule the right-wing supporters who are offended by the events were identified. The attacks contribute to inflicting victimhood status among the target group by increasing feelings of marginalization. In this way, accounts of opposing opinions contribute to triggering the conflict and thus engagement in the narrative (Campbell & Manning, 2018).

5.2.3 Generating a Backlash Against Victimhood Morals

In all cases, efforts to create a sense of urgency to react against irresponsible and destructive actions among the Swedish elite were identified. For instance, PostNord's incident has been used to demonstrate how bad Swedish authorities and organizations function. Specifically, some actors claimed that it was not surprising that PostNord could not deliver the votes on time, since no authority in Sweden functions properly (Johansson, 2018; Björkqvist, 2018; Erik, 2018):

“The election is over. The National Election Board's website collapsed and PostNord did not succeed with its mission to deliver the votes on time. But why would it work, Björn Björkqvist wonders. Nothing else that the society is supposed to run works (My translation¹⁸) (Björkqvist, 2018).

¹⁸ My translation, for original quote see; <https://twitter.com/BjornBjorkqvist/status/1041372646997454848>

Together with the information offered above, a link to a news article from svegot.se¹⁹ with the headline “An election worthy of the Social Democratic Sweden” (My translation²⁰) is provided. The incident is, in this way, used to demonstrate how poorly Swedish authorities function in general. The reason offered for the ongoing deterioration of such services is the political left-oriented agenda, which is claimed to prioritize financing of other less important areas (Björkqvist, 2018). The posts identified within this theme related to the case have, however, received limited amounts of attention online (Erik, 2018; Björkqvist, 2018; Johansson, 2018).

International posts that condemn The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare’s brochure use taglines such as “latest insanity from Sweden”, “This is Sweden 2018” and “PC²¹ gone mad” (Aurelius, 2018; Jeenifer_stands_for_Jewishness, 2018; totuus, 2018, Conservativity, 2018). This additionally resonates with Swedish posts, using taglines such as ‘only in Sweden 2018’ while referring to the leaflet. Specifically, the twitter account “Experiment Immigration” (My translation²²) underlines that “The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare withdraws the brochure about child marriage...Only in Sweden 2018” (My translation²³) (Invandring, 2018). In relation to this, the brochure is combined with information claiming the high degree of political correctness is the main reason behind the deterioration of Swedish society (Wernborn, 2018; Invandring, 2018; Anders, B., 2018; Noterad, 2018; Hellgren, 2018; Jonasson, 2018; Lernö, 2018; Nettle, 2018):

“PC²⁴-ism penetrates everything in Sweden. This would never be allowed if the girl was a native Swede. This is horrible, but not surprising! The Swedish national Board of Health and Welfare distributes the folder “To you

¹⁹ Swedish alternative news site

²⁰ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/BjornBjorkqvist/status/1041372646997454848>

²¹ Short for: Political correctness

²² My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/Janne5/status/979401900985671680>

²³ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/Janne5/status/979401900985671680>

²⁴ Short for political correctness

who is married to a child”. Sweden is sick (My translation²⁵) (Wernborn, 2018).

As evident in the example above, it is argued that political correctness leads to deterioration of Swedish values, which has devastating consequences (Wernborn, 2018). In support of this argument, actors claim the brochure is proof of Sweden judging people differently depending on cultural background (Lindberg M., 2018; shadowbanned, 2018). In this way, it is argued that immigrants’ interests are furthered above “people’s”. The majority of posts apply the taglines and arguments together with a picture of the front page of the leaflet or the text “Information to you who is married to a child” (Wilke, 2018; Grundberg, 2018; Hertonsson, 2018; Persson, 2018). By only forwarding the front page, information explaining that child marriage is prohibited in Sweden, existent on page two, is ignored. The heading of the leaflet has been altered in several memes, including the phrase “Information to you who wonder what the hell has happened with your country”, among other versions (Monster T. d., 2018c; mcr, 2018; Roland, 2018). In relation to this, several actors underline they never thought such a folder would be needed in Sweden in 2018 (Lindgren, 2018; Uggla, 2018; Widow, 2018; PeterSweden, 2018). Together, the posts related to the leaflet communicate that the brochure is representative for Swedish culture and immigration politics. Often, hashtags such as #Sverigebilden (#Sweden’s image) and #Sverige (Sweden) are applied together with information related to the brochure (Monster T. d., 2018c; Lindgren, 2018; Noterad, 2018; Åberg, 2018). Together, the posts point at high levels of political correctness and left-oriented values at the main cause behind the current deterioration of Swedish values, which the Board is taking part in by distributing the brochure.

The pattern was additionally identified in posts related to SAS’s commercial. Specifically, several accounts have posted information regarding SAS’s commercial being “typically Swedish”. The posts suggest that the self-hatred demonstrated in the commercial is typically Swedish (Nordén, 2020; Heeger, 2020; F, 2020; Emoll, 2020; Strävan, 2020; Clark, 2020):

²⁵ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/olofborn/status/1070919850833399808>

“You can say whatever you want about SAS’s commercial, but it is truly as Swedish as it gets. There are no other people who are as self-hating and who wish to erase both its history and culture as progressive Swedish people. But people are tired of extreme political correctness. #BoycottSAS” (My translation²⁶) (Emoll, 2020)

As demonstrated in the example above, it is claimed that this type of ‘typical Swedish behavior’, which SAS is taking part in, contributes to the eradication of traditional culture and values (Emoll, 2020). In a similar way, several actors claim that SAS is part of propagating a feminist left-oriented agenda, which is representative for Swedish politics (F, 2020; Nordén, 2020; Hägglund, 2020; Harrison, 2020; Suidlanders, 2020). The engagement surrounding these posts is high, generating up to 137 retweets and 886 likes (Nordén, 2020). In relation to this, one account refers to an ongoing culture war between the feminist left-oriented elite and the ‘people’, who represent traditional and healthy gender values. The post aim to portray the critical state of Swedish society, where a war against left-oriented values is taking place (Wallgren, 2020b). SAS’s commercial has additionally generated a relatively large number of twitter posts in English. These posts resonate rather well with the Swedish narrative, highlighting that the commercial never would have been accepted in other countries, or that the commercial is ‘typical Swedish propaganda’ (Alex, 2020; Goode, 2020; Ramzpaul, 2020; Express, 2020). These posts have generated high levels of engagement, with 1000-3000 likes and around 200-700 retweets (Ramzpaul, 2020; Goode, 2020). In this way, ‘Swedish propaganda’, in the form of a left-oriented agenda aiming to further minorities’ interests, is argued to be the main cause behind the claimed deterioration of Swedish society.

Finally, instances of the pattern were identified in the case related to Östling’s statement. Specifically, Östling’s statement has been connected to information about the health care system, immigration and the military defense (Wilke, 2017; Larsson, 2017; Putilov, 2017):

²⁶ My translation, for original quote see; <https://twitter.com/Emilpolitik/status/1227486537635581952>

“Leif Östling is right to ask what the hell we get for our tax money. NEWS-FLASH: the social contract is broken. None of the core institutions work properly, including the health care system, the police force, the military defense, the school system, the justice system, infrastructure. This is a massive failure!” (My translation²⁷) (Wilke, 2017).

As demonstrated in the example above, Östling’s statement is used to support arguments regarding a deterioration of the Swedish society. Specifically, Östling’s statement is highlighted as legitimate in light of the claimed developments. In the commentary section, the actor argues that Swedish left-oriented propaganda is to blame for these developments:

“What we get instead: tax-financed left-oriented propaganda from ‘independent’ public service including different nonsense-programs, limitless financing of people who are here illegally, collective burden and art related to women’s period via postmodern nonsense, polarization” (My translation²⁸) (Wilke, 2017)

In this way, left-oriented propaganda and politics are argued to be the reason behind the claimed deterioration of different welfare services and essential institutions. By stating that Sweden spends limitless amounts of money on supporting illegal immigrants, the actor demonstrates a resistance against an elite which is claimed to prioritize minorities’ interests instead of financing other vital systems. The example post has received relatively high levels of attention, with 153 retweets and 436 likes (Wilke, 2017).

The pattern identified the posts above involves increasing feelings of resistance against the behavior among the Swedish elite, which is demonstrated to varying degrees in the different cases. By applying Campbell’s and Manner’s theory on moral conflict (2018), it could be argued that the technique generates high levels of engagement by creating a backlash, and feelings of resistance, against victimhood morals. Specifically, the material feeds into established feelings of an elite which is claimed to prioritize minorities’ interests above people’s, which the organizations

²⁷ My translation, for original quote see; <https://twitter.com/Zeilon/status/928043937440428042>

²⁸ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/Zeilon/status/928043937440428042>

are framed as part of. In this way, actors generate engagement in the narrative by increasing feelings of resistance against victimhood morals. Specifically, feelings of resistance against an elite which is claimed to put extensive focus on attributing victimhood status to minority groups in order to further these groups' interests (Campbell & Manning, 2018). As a result, engagement is additionally generated by feeding into feelings of fear of losing power when other groups' interests are furthered (Kahalon et al., 2018). In this way, actors take advantage of a basic human tendency, being that people wish to maintain their power and social position (Bjola & Pamment, 2018). By generating a resistance against victimhood morals, actors prey on the tensions that exists between the two moral cultures (Campbell & Manning, 2018). By doing this, the technique additionally preys on the identity-principle (Bjola & Pamment, 2018). Specifically, actors often point at left-oriented values, with its focus on furthering minorities' interests, as the main cause behind the claimed deterioration of different welfare services in Sweden. Engagement in the material therefore fulfils an important sociological function, as people establish their position within a specific political sphere by sharing, commenting or retweeting the material (Campbell, 2008). In this way, engagement in the material contribute to identity-building processes (Bjola & Pamment, 2018).

5.2.4 Framing and Ignoring Organizational Responses

All cases are defined by low engagement in the organizational responses to the conflict. The pattern entails that actors do not engage to a full extent in organizational responses. As an example, SAS responded to the conflict by claiming they were attacked by trolls who aimed to spread disinformation (SAS, 2020):

"We are proud of our Scandinavian heritage. We are a company that takes travelers to/from and within Scandinavia and we stand by the message in the film, which shows that we are good at integrating good ideas and make them even better. We think that this is worth highlighting. While analyzing the pattern and volume of the reactions, we have reasons to suspect an online attack and that the campaign has been hijacked. We do not want to risk becoming a platform constituting of views that we do not share. We have

therefore temporarily removed the film from our channels, and we are currently evaluating the next step” (My translation²⁹) (SAS, 2020).

Certain parts of the organizational response generated high levels of engagement online. Some actors attacked SAS for claiming the commercial was hijacked by trolls, by arguing that it is proof of SAS being part of a fascist, left-oriented, elite (F, 2020; Andersson J. , 2020; Chris, 2020; Dahlqvist, 2020). In relation to this, memes have spread aiming to ridicule the claim made by SAS (Andersson J., 2020; Still got the blues for you, 2020). One of these memes contain the text “Damn Putin” together with a man figuring in different everyday situations, such as falling off his bike (Andersson J. , 2020). The narrative has generated a lot of engagement, with one post receiving up to 94 likes and around 565 retweets (F, 2020). Additionally, actors condemned SAS’s statement by arguing it is embarrassing to claim the commercial was hijacked and that SAS show lack of understanding towards those who were offended by it (Aksoy, 2020; Wallgren, 2020c; Suntoucher, 2020; Norna, 2020; Lundgren, 2020). Additionally, it has been argued that SAS is trying to re-frame the situation so that it becomes beneficial for them, by portraying themselves like the victims (Dahlqvist, 2020). At the same time, several actors criticized SAS for withdrawing the commercial, arguing that the organization should not adjust their behavior based on interests of people at the fringes of politics (Beelzebjörn, 2020; Shawty, 2020; Seid, 2020). As an example, one actor writes that it is “Inauspicious that @SAS adjust so easily to fascists!”(Seid, 2020). In this way, actors condemn SAS for adjusting to the criticism, at the same time as they ridicule those who are offended by the commercial (Seid, 2020; Shawty, 2020; Beelzebjörn, 2020). Such accounts are often connected to left-wing parties (Beelzebjörn, 2020; Seid, 2020). Not long after withdrawing the commercial, SAS uploaded a shorter version of it, arguing they stand behind the key message and that the selected parts in the shorter version communicates the overall message more clearly (Ekblom, 2020). However, some actors condemned this action, arguing it is repulsive or referring to it as a fiasco (Sverigebilden, 2020; Berggren, 2020).

²⁹ My translation, for original quote see: <https://www.sasgroup.net/newsroom/press-releases/2020/sas-commercial-what-is-truly-scandinavian/>

On the 29th of March 2018, The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare decided to withdraw the brochure “Information to you who is married to a child”. Specifically, The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare agreed the brochure needed to be revised in order clarify Sweden’s stand on the issue of child marriage (Svensson & Mokhtari, 2018). Overall, the online engagement related to the organizational action was low. However, the responses identified on Twitter involve applying sarcasm in order to ridicule The Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare. Specifically, some actors underline the real reasons why the brochure was withdrawn, involving the need to add additional sections (B.Trusz, 2018; Breitner, 2018):

“This is the real reasons why the brochure “Information to you who is married to a child was withdrawn. Absence of norm criticism. No information regarding the form COCW (care of child wife)” (My translation³⁰) (Breitner, 2018).

In the example above, the information is published together with a picture explaining the claimed reasons behind the decision to withdraw the brochure. In this way, actors ridicule the organizational response at the same time as they argue that the elite has a hidden agenda. The posts have, however, received a limited amount of attention in terms of retweets and likes (B.Trusz, 2018; Breitner, 2018).

PostNord provided an explanation for the delayed votes in the same news article which announced the delays. The explanation provided in the article highlighted that it was due to a higher number of advance votes in comparison to previous years. Specifically, the communication manager Emma Riblom stated: “We have a one to two hour delay due to it being so many people that have voted in advance. But everything should be handed in by now” (My translation³¹) (Kleberg, 2018). In addition, it was highlighted that the delays were due to the fact that PostNord did not have enough staff on site to sort and distribute the high number of votes (Kleberg, 2018). The explanation generated a limited amount of engagement. However, some

³⁰ My translation, for original quote see: <https://twitter.com/LenaBreitner/status/979667163815563264>

³¹ My translation, for original quote see: <https://www.svt.se/nyheter/val2018/fortidsroster-for-senade-postnord-varit-sa-manga>

actors reacted to the explanation by arguing that PostNord only used it as an excuse to cover up for a fraud. Specifically, a post published by the Twitter account valfusk2018 (electionfraud2018) questioned whether the delays were unintentional by retweeting the incident together with a news article from the alternative news site “samnytt”, claiming that activists working for PostNord had been seen throwing away votes (valfusk2018, 2018). Additionally, the explanation provided by PostNord was questioned by another actor arguing that the increase in the number of advance votes was lower than PostNord claimed it was (Anders, 2018).

Östling responded to the conflict by apologizing for the statement in a news article, underlining that it was clumsy (Östling, 2017). However, Östling additionally highlighted that tax planning activities are not a crime and should not be regarded as such. Overall, the engagement in Östling’s response was low. No reactions representing malign rhetoric were identified.

The pattern demonstrated in the posts above includes low levels of engagement in the organizational responses. The engagement identified includes ridiculing the organizational response/action or only highlighting certain parts of it. As an example, SAS’s statement generated relatively high amounts of attention on Twitter. However, the reactions were mainly concerned with ridiculing SAS for claiming the commercial was hijacked by trolls. In this way, certain parts of the statement generated engagement, while other parts were ignored. The fact that certain part of the organizational statement generated engagement could be due to that individuals aimed to reestablish their reputation by engaging in acts to defend themselves against the claim. Specifically, actors aim to reestablish their reputation by showcasing that they are not trolls and should be taken seriously. This is done through attacking SAS by applying honor moral tactics, involving rough and violent language (Campbell & Manning, 2018). Actors additionally highlight the fact that SAS claimed victimhood status, which is argued to be a strategy to divert attention from SAS’s wrongdoing. Engagement in the narrative could therefore represent a resistance against the fact that SAS claimed victimhood status (Campbell & Manning, 2018).

Applying sarcasm in order to ridicule the organizational response was a method identified in two of the cases. Specifically, in the case related to SAS and the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare. The organizational responses were attacked through the use of pictures and memes. As noted in the literature review, sarcasm can be used as a strategy to divert attention (Pamment et al., 2018). Specifically, different aspects of the organizational statement are drowned in the information environment, which strictly focuses around certain highlighted aspects. In this way, ridiculing the organizational responses contributes to polluting the information environment and, as a consequence, it diverts attention from other parts of the organizational act.

In the case of SAS's commercial, some responses additionally involved condemning SAS for adjusting to the wishes of people at the fringes of politics. In this way, the organizational response is used to trigger the conflict. Specifically, different political identities are mobilized through triggering opposing opinions, which increase the chances of higher engagement in the material (Campbell & Manning, 2018; Bjola & Pamment, 2018).

In the case of PostNord, the organizational explanation was to a large degree ignored. The responses that were identified included questioning the facts and legitimacy of the statement. Similarly, Östling's response did not generate engagement online. The fact that actors do not engage to a full extent in the organizations' responses, which is a pattern identified in all four cases, demonstrate an unwillingness to solve the conflict. It could therefore be argued that these actors lack an interest in the organization. Specifically, the main interest lies in framing, or to a large extent ignoring, the organizational responses in order to further specific narratives.

6 Concluding Discussion

This thesis aimed to study the influence techniques applied when hijacking an organizational crisis in order to construct a narrative about Sweden. Specifically, it sought to examine the narrative techniques applied during an organizational crisis in order to highlight different narratives about Sweden. By applying the concepts of narration, mythical speech and moral cultures, the study examined which narrative techniques are applied to connect the organizational crisis to a larger narrative. In relation to this, four patterns were identified, including: *providing incoherent narratives, inflicting victimhood status, generating a backlash against victimhood morals as well as framing and ignoring organizational responses*. The patterns highlight the emergence of a *third party* which uses organizational crises to further political agendas. This is done by applying narrative techniques which take advantage of different cognitive vulnerabilities and human principles. By doing this, actors aim to impact how the audience perceive the specific event.

6.1 Contributions of the Study

By answering the research question: “*Which narrative techniques are used on Twitter in order to connect the organizational crises to specific narratives about Sweden?*” the study has demonstrated the different narrative techniques used to frame the organizational events as part of a larger narrative. The contribution of this study includes the four patterns relating to narration techniques which were identified, involving: *providing incoherent narratives, inflicting victimhood status, generating a backlash against victimhood morals and framing and ignoring organizational responses*. The techniques identified were applied to different degrees in the various cases. However, it is important to acknowledge that other aspects relating to the cases, which are not considered in this study, might affect which techniques are applied. This means further research is needed to investigate whether the techniques

identified in this thesis are established influence techniques. The identified techniques take advantage of cognitive vulnerabilities and human principles in order to generate engagement in the material.

Providing incoherent narratives is one of techniques identified. It includes linking the organizational crisis to unrelated happenings and news. In turn, this contributes to the process of default assumptions where the interpreters of the information ‘fill in the blanks’ themselves. In this way, the target group construct their own coherent narrative according to already established information modules. By applying socio-demographic targeting (Pamment et al., 2018), the technique can be an effective measure to raise attention to a broader topic. By directing the material towards specific social and political spheres, the technique contributes to giving life to various myths already established within the group. In several of the cases, this technique was applied in order to raise attention to issues surrounding immigration and crime. In this way, incoherent narratives can generate high levels of engagement by offering the opportunity for target audiences to confirm established worldviews.

Inflicting victimhood status entails strengthening feelings of victimhood among the target audience. Specifically, by applying this strategy, actors strengthen the target audience’s feelings of marginalization by communicating that their opinions are silenced in the political debate. In this way, the posts feed into, and strengthens, established feelings of marginalization. By doing this, a basic human tendency is exploited, including the strive to maintain one’s power and privilege in a social sphere. In turn, chances of generating high levels of engagement in the material increases. Related to this, a technique which includes to *generate a backlash against victimhood morals* was identified. Within this technique, Swedish society is presented as falling apart. Specifically, left-oriented politics and values, with a focus on furthering minorities’ interests, is argued to be the main cause behind the deterioration. As a result, the posts generate feelings of resistance against victimhood morals and related actions aimed at furthering minorities’ interests. The findings of these two patterns suggest that engagement in disinformation narratives goes beyond aiming to further specific malicious agendas. Specifically, engagement could represent basic human tendencies to maintain social power as well as expressions of concerns about the state of society.

The final technique involves *framing and ignoring organizational responses*. Specifically, the cases are identified by low engagement in the organizational responses. In the case of SAS, certain parts of the organizational response generated engagement. In relation to the other cases, however, actors did not engage in the organizational response to a large extent. It is, however, important to acknowledge that other aspects not considered in this study might impact the reactions to the organizational responses, such as other newsworthy events. Therefore, further research is needed in order to examine under which conditions this indicator operates and possible aspects that might influence it. However, the finding suggests that the actors do not have an interest in the organization per se. Instead, the main interest, as identified in the selected cases, is to further the specific narratives.

The findings above suggest the emergence of a third party which uses the organizational crisis to further political agendas. This third party stands outside the relationship between the stakeholders and the organization but can impact key stakeholders' perception of the event. Specifically, the findings demonstrate that this party might influence stakeholders' perceptions of the event by using various techniques which exploit cognitive principles and human tendencies. In this way, the organizational incident is placed within a larger narrative. By exploiting different principles, the narratives become appealing as they confirm established beliefs and fulfil different important functions for the target audience (Bjola & Pamment, 2018; Campbell, 2008). The identified patterns point at the increasing complexity within the field. In turn, the findings challenges the dominant perspective on how social media platforms can be used "as effective tools for strategic communication in times of crisis" (Eriksson, 2018, p. 526). Specifically, it challenges the assumption that broad and honest communication about the event is the most effective response in these situations (Maal & Wilson-North, 2019; Ngai & Falkheimer, 2016; Veil, Buehner, & Palenchar, 2011; Wang, 2016). As highlighted by Mills and Robson (2019), a potential organizational response could be to build compelling counternarratives, such as brand stories, which could be directed towards key stakeholders in order to protect them against such attempts. However, further research is needed on response strategies aiming to protect stakeholders from these actors. The findings, however, demonstrate the importance of an integration of this third party in strategic planning and crisis prevention plans.

6.2 Suggestions for Further Research

The patterns identified in this thesis have implications for further research within the field. Specifically, research aiming to test whether the patterns identified in this study are established techniques is needed. Additional case studies aiming to analyze influence attempts directed towards organizations in order to make a case about Sweden are needed. Additionally, research aiming to analyze the potential impact of these new actors on stakeholders' perceptions of organizational events is needed. This could be done by mapping stakeholders' perception during a crisis where influence attempts have been identified. By doing this, the treat these actors pose against the organization could be more thoroughly analyzed. In relation to this, studies aiming to analyze potential response strategies to such attempts, depending on setting and situation, would be of value. Specifically, narratives and myths are context specific, which means that related influence techniques applied to give life to such narratives and myths might be context specific. Studies aiming to compare various narrative techniques would be of interest in order to equip communication professionals in different settings with relevant conceptual tools to understand the complexity of the phenomenon. For instance, case studies from different countries could be compared in order to discover whether the techniques are different depending on what myths actors aim to construct.

6.3 Concluding Remarks

Crisis communication research and research within the field of disinformation are often treated as separated from each other. However, the findings of this thesis suggest the emergence of a third party, with the potential aim to use organizational crises for malign purposes. This party can have an impact on stakeholders' perception of organizational events. Understanding the increasing complexity with regards to how organizational crises develop is vital in order to be able to use social media platforms as means for strategic communication during a crisis. This thesis highlights the need for further research on plausible influence techniques directed towards organizations during a crisis, which is an area that has been relatively by passed in crisis communication research. The goal is therefore to inspire further integration of the two research fields, in order to meet the increasing complexity.

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