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## Rumour mining

### A mixed method-project about vaccination hesitancy in digital forums

Hammarlin, Mia-Marie; Miegel, Fredrik; Kokkinakis, Dimitrios; Borin, Lars

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LUND UNIVERSITY

PO Box 117  
221 00 Lund  
+46 46-222 00 00

Mia-Marie Hammarlin  
Associate Professor in Ethnology  
Senior Lecturer in Media and Communication Studies  
Department of Communication and Media  
Lund University  
Sweden  
[mia-marie.hammarlin@kom.lu.se](mailto:mia-marie.hammarlin@kom.lu.se)  
+46730871460

## **Digital Truth-Making: Ethnographic Perspectives on Practices, Infrastructures and Affordances of Truth-Making in Digital Societies**

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Abstract: 296 words

The aim of this presentation is to introduce a new 4-year research project (2020–2023), independently financed by the Bank of Sweden Foundation (Riksbankens jubileumsfond), with the goal to investigate the role and importance of rumouring for the vaccination skepticism growing on the internet, and how it can be understood as an expression of civic engagement in the present digital times. The increase of vaccine hesitancy is singled out by WHO as one of the ten most important and urgent threats to global health (<https://www.who.int/emergencies/ten-threats-to-global-health-in-2019>). Diseases like measles are returning in different parts of Europe, partly as a result of the activities of the anti-vaccination movement. The herd immunity in most Western countries is high but even a small decrease in vaccination would have immediate negative effects for the population. Sweden offers a perfect site for future anti-vaccination studies due to its high vaccination covering. A decline in the numbers of children vaccinated has had immediate effects. For example, the incident rate in the country of pertussis rose from 700 cases to 3,200 cases per 100,000 children in 4 years due to a rather small decrease in vaccinations.

Theoretically, the project draws upon, and develop, media researcher Dahlgren’s work on civic culture and folklorist Kitta’s studies of so called anti-vaxxers. The project will offer an understanding of how everyday interaction in the form of the spreading of rumours on the internet has a powerful impact on and may challenge democratic, collective solutions, such as the established vaccination programmes. The project, which is run by an ethnologist (Hammarlin), a sociologist (Miegel), and two Natural Language Processing (NLP)-technologists, also has a methodology developing goal, using both qualitative and quantitative methods to fulfill the aim, and contribute with new possible ways to study folkloristic expressions in online environments.