Introduction

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Chapter 1

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Abstract

Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden are generally praised for their performance in terms of political and economic governance. The Nordic model, defined as a stable democratic welfare state, has been considered a role model internationally, but also used as a framework for research interpreting political communication, the media systems, as well as crisis management of Covid-19 in the Nordic countries. This edited volume takes the Nordic model as a point of departure, and scholars in crisis communication, media, journalism, political science, and rhetoric explore crisis communication in the Nordics during the Covid-19 pandemic. The chapters compare experiences of strategic communication, media coverage, media use, and citizen response and point out both differences and similarities among the five countries. In this introductory chapter, we present the backdrop against which the empirical analyses can be understood. We discuss the Nordic model, give a brief overview of the Nordic experiences of Covid-19, and highlight the immense field of crisis communication research on Covid-19. In addition, the normative function of crisis communication during a pandemic is discussed, and also how to understand the specific risk culture in the Nordic countries. In the last part of the introduction, we give a short overview of the chapters of the book.

Keywords: Nordic crisis communication, the Nordic model, Covid-19, risk cultures, pandemic

Introduction

In this book, we focus on crisis communication and what was arguably the most dramatic global event since World War II: namely, the Covid-19 pandemic. We study how Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden met this challenge through specific crisis communication strategies. The Nordics provide an excellent opportunity to study this form of communication given their relative similarity and the fact that one of them – Sweden – chose a different route to manage the pandemic than the others. In terms of similarities, the countries are said to rely on the so-called Nordic model, characterised as a combination of a social welfare system and market economy. The book sets out to investigate different aspects of how crisis communication was carried out in the Nordic countries and explore whether a Nordic model of crisis communication exists.

The volume mainly deals with crisis communication during 2020, which includes the first and second waves of the Covid-19 pandemic. However, some chapters apply a longer perspective, also focusing on the period until early 2022, when the pandemic, for all practical purposes, was declared over in the Nordic countries.

Throughout the book, we study strategic communication from governments, public health authorities, lobbyists, interest organisations, as well as corporations. The empirical material for the chapters includes speeches, press conferences, information campaigns, interviews, surveys, as well as social media activity. We also explore the media's coverage of the pandemic and how journalistic ideals were debated. Furthermore, we apply a citizen perspective, analysing information-seeking and reactions to the situation caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Two introductory chapters (of which this is the first) provide the background by discussing crisis management from an administrative and communicative approach. In the present chapter, we present the structure of the book, briefly discuss crisis communication as an academic field and use broad strokes to paint a picture of the wealth of literature that has been published on crisis communication and Covid-19. First, however, we give a brief overview of both the so-called Nordic model and how it relates to crisis communication and Covid-19 as a global phenomenon.

The Nordic model and crisis communication

The Nordic countries' performance on different indicators (economic and social) has led to attempts and debates about the so-called Nordic model (Bengtsson et al., 2014; Ervasti et al., 2008; Hilson, 2008; Skogerbø et al., 2021). Three main components have been identified: first, a type of economic policy where the state is active, tax revenues are high, and open trade is emphasised; second, organised work life coordinating wage setting; and third, a social security net

provided by the welfare state (Fløtten & Trygstad, 2020). The welfare state is generous, but is accompanied by high work effort, small differences in wages, and high productivity (Barth et al., 2015). There has been a consensus around the Nordic model, where the state plays a central role and where principles of universalism and equality are key values (Arter, 2016). Another characteristic of the Nordic model is the corporatist tradition, in which interest groups are key players in the preparation and implementation of public policies (Christiansen et al., 2010). Moreover, a hallmark of this model is the three-way cooperation between employers, trade unions, and employer associations, which has been important, not least in limiting workplace conflict (Brandal et al., 2013).

The Nordic countries are small, and the power distance is relatively low, with open political systems. The level of political conflict is low; for example, violent strikes and other forms of spontaneous protests are rare, and even organisations criticising the state receive public funding and membership in public committees (Bortne et al., 2002; Christensen et al., 2002). Pragmatic policy-making and consensus solutions characterise the Nordic model (Lewin, 1998), and a vital civil society is a result of how the Nordic institutions work (Christiansen & Petersen, 2001; Rothstein, 2001). High levels of trust and social capital are explained as an effect of "(a) the high degree of economic equality, (b) the low level of patronage and corruption, and (c) the predominance of universal non-discriminating welfare programmes" (Rothstein & Stolle, 2003: 1). However, this description of the Nordic model has been under debate, and it is sometimes argued as being almost a myth driven by journalists (Arter, 2016). Others claim it leads to an unjustified idea of exceptionalism (Bengtsson et al., 2014). Another opinion concentrates on a development with larger differences between the countries over time, which makes it difficult to talk about a Nordic model (Calmfors, 2014). Even so, high levels of institutional and interpersonal trust differentiate the Nordics from other parts of the world. The European Social Survey and other surveys consistently show the Nordic countries at the top of rankings (European Social Survey, 2018). Even if the causality can be questioned (whether the societal traits discussed are sources or consequences of societal trust), the traits can be considered to create positive effects (Ihlen et al., 2022). In addition to these societal traits, a relative homogenous society in terms of ethnic and linguistic similarities contributes to explaining high levels of trust in the Nordics (Andreasson, 2017; Fukuyama, 1995). Thus, the political arrangements of the Nordic model are not the sole explanation for the high levels of trust.

The high levels of trust provided a good starting point for successful crisis communication when the Covid-19 pandemic hit the Nordic countries in 2020. Many studies show a strong relationship between institutional trust and compliance with following recommendations and protective behaviour during crisis (Johansson et al., 2021; Siegrist & Zingg, 2014). The difference in trust

between societies has also led to the integration of trust in the framework to understand risk cultures. According to Cornia and colleagues (2016), a risk culture consists of disaster framing (how disasters are framed), disaster blaming (who is responsible for the disaster), and trust context (understood as trust in authorities).

Using focus group informants, three ideal types of risk cultures were identified: individual-oriented, fatalistic, and state-oriented. In an individual-oriented risk culture, people strongly rely on themselves to manage a crisis. Even if a crisis is unavoidable, consequences can at least be minimised with preventive measures, and individuals are themselves considered responsible for risk prevention. The role of the state in this case is to provide information before and during a crisis, but citizens cannot only rely on authorities for receiving information: They must seek information and manage their own life.

In the fatalistic risk culture, crises and especially disasters are not believed to be preventable. Disasters are perceived as unpredictable and unavoidable, since they are framed as an act, or punishment, of an external power: God, nature, or even fate. Low trust in authorities makes people disbelieve in their ability to manage the crisis, and individuals are not considered capable of handling the situation. Instead, there is a feeling of abandonment, powerlessness, and unpreparedness. Cornia and colleagues (2016) interpret this as a result of previous failures of crisis management – in other words, fatalism emerges when solutions focusing on state intervention or self-reliance appear to be ineffective.

In a state-oriented risk culture – just as in the individual-oriented risk culture – crises are believed to be preventable. However, in this culture, the state is the main actor to deal with risks and crises and is responsible for emergency management. People believe they are heavily dependent on the state, and self-reliance is not the central value. In this culture, trust in authorities as well as trust in public news media are high, and preparation for an emergency is attributed primarily to the state and not seen as a primary task of the citizens. In terms of crisis communication, information on how to handle the risk is a responsibility for experts and authorities, and the citizens' role is to comply according to the information provided.

Cornia and colleagues (2016) define Sweden as representative of the state-oriented risk culture, and due to the similarities described above, all Nordic countries could be considered as belonging to the state-oriented risk culture.

The Nordic countries also have many similarities in the transformation of the media system to a high-choice media environment, where citizens can use multiple sources to inform themselves about contemporary issues, like Covid-19. This new media society is sometimes also described as a hybrid media system, where social media and alternative media have become important parts of the media system, and where online and mobile communication has become the main channels for news consumption (Nord et al., 2021). Still,

the Nordics are characterised as having rather low levels of polarisation and populism communication, but with high levels of media trust and shared news consumption and strong public service media (Nord et al., 2021). So, despite the changes in the media system, the Nordic countries can still be considered as a rather stable communication environment, as some sort of "media welfare state" (Syvertsen et al., 2014; see also Lindell et al., 2022) relying heavily on legacy media (public service and daily press) for disseminating news. During the Covid-19 pandemic, journalists also emphasised the information function of the news media, taking responsibility for disseminating information from the authorities to the public (Johansson, 2021; see also Ghersetti et al., Chapter 10; Blach-Ørsten et al., Chapter 12).

In this type of media environment, crisis communication about Covid-19 centred around the daily press conferences held by the government and government authorities (see Kjeldsen, Chapter 5). The focus on press conferences was a bit surprising, as they represent a rather old channel for strategic communication, far from the networked twenty-four/seven flow of communication.

The daily press conferences, broadcasted on television and online news sites, informed the public about the development of the Covid-19 pandemic, the measures taken, and how to act in order to mitigate the spread of the virus: first about travel restrictions, social distancing, and the use of face masks, and later, when the national vaccination programmes were rolled out, the need to get vaccinated. Low political polarisation, high trust in authorities, and the importance of traditional news media for dissemination of news is a common trait among the Nordic countries, and it against this backdrop that the crisis communication of Covid-19 took place.

Covid-19: A global pandemic

The first reports about Covid-19 that reached the Nordic countries in December 2019 were short news stories about how a new disease was spreading from Wuhan, China. At this stage, nobody mentioned the word pandemic: It was seen as a local outbreak of a serious variant of pneumonia.

More worrying news arrived from Italy in February 2020, with stories describing overcrowded hospitals and reports about high death tolls. In the beginning of March, everything changed quickly. When the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a pandemic on 11 March 2020, the Nordic governments also changed their strategies. Until that point, the measures to handle the pandemic had focused on testing, isolation, contact tracing, and quarantine for international travellers, but the Danish government chose to shut down the country the same day that the World Health Organization declared Covid-19 a pandemic, with Norway following suit the day after. A

lockdown was imposed with the introduction of strict measures, such as closing many shops, schools, and leisure activities. Borders were closed, and people entering the country needed to follow self-quarantine regulations (Ihlen et al, 2022). Similarly, the Finnish government declared a state of emergency in mid-March, closing schools and public facilities. In addition to restrictions for the national borders, Finland also closed the borders of the Uusimaa region (the capital region with the most confirmed cases) for three weeks. Iceland chose a somewhat different path: No lockdown was imposed, but some businesses were closed (e.g., gyms, hair salons), while others remained open with strict restrictions. Heavy testing and tracing were introduced as well as mandatory self-quarantine and testing for everyone entering the country (Ólafsson, 2021). The closed borders between countries were not only a drastic measure in relation to EU regulations (the Schengen Agreement), but even more to the Nordic passport union, which permits Nordic citizens to travel and reside in another Nordic country without any travel documentation. Closed borders between the Nordic countries created tensions and major problems for the many citizens commuting between the Nordic countries.

Sweden chose a different path to fight the pandemic. Borders remained open and the declared strategy was to meet the crisis with recommendations instead of regulations and trusting citizens' sense of responsibility, and society therefore to a large extent remained open (Johansson & Vigsø, 2021; Pierre, 2020). However, restrictions on audience participation kept sports and cultural events to a minimum, even though stores, restaurants, gyms, and schools remained open (with remote teaching for older students). Instead of following recommendations from the World Health Organization to use face masks, Swedish authorities only recommended physical distancing, which became a major debate in Sweden and internationally created an image of Sweden as an outlier in terms of pandemic management (Johansson & Vigsø, 2021; Johansson et al., 2021). Even if the Swedish strategy became more like the other Nordic countries' strategies over time, the crisis management is referred to as the "Swedish experiment" (Esaiasson et al., 2021; Lindholm & Högväg, 2021).

In comparison with many other countries, all Nordic countries remained more open: No curfew was imposed, and even if borders were closed, it was possible to travel domestically (with some restrictions). During early 2020, Covid-19 was spreading throughout the world, but some countries were more affected than others. Comparing the rising levels of infected people, and not least the death tolls in different countries, became an indicator of the success or failure of the chosen strategy to fight Covid-19. Many European countries experienced high death tolls from Covid-19: Italy was one of the worst affected, where more than 33,500 died 1 March–31 May 2020. During the same period, France and Spain had approximately 29,000 deaths. However, all three were exceeded by the situation in the UK, where more than 36,000 died. The Nordic

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numbers were significantly lower: At the end of May 2020, Denmark had 577 deaths (population of 5.8 million), Finland 305 (population of 5.5 million), Norway 236 (population of 5.4 million), and Iceland only 10 (population of 367,000) (ECDC, 2022).

If Sweden had been seen as an interesting, but maybe dangerous experiment at the beginning of the first wave, the country's strategy of not closing borders and keeping restaurants, malls, and schools open now seemed reckless (Andersson & Aylott, 2020; Johansson & Vigsø, 2021), mostly because the death tolls rose dramatically during April and May, where the goal to protect the elderly living in care homes seemed to have failed. Sweden's death toll from Covid-19 was at the time much higher compared with the other Nordic countries. So, even though Sweden has a larger population (10.3 million), the pandemic hit the country much harder in comparison. At the end of May 2020, more than 4,500 people had died of Covid-19 in Sweden.

The evaluation of the Swedish Covid-19 strategy is still under debate. Some claim Sweden failed to handle the pandemic appropriately, and the Swedish Corona Commission pointed out several shortcomings, especially that the implemented measures were too limited and too late. The Swedish government was also criticised for relying too much on expert authorities like the Public Health Agency [Folkhälsomyndigheten] and not following recommendations proposed by the World Health Organization (SOU, 2021). Crisis communication was also evaluated as having deficits: being contradictory, lacking transparency, and being unprecise in recommendations (Rasmussen, 2022). But there is another story, where it is pointed out that some Swedish decisions seem to have been quite successful, for example, keeping schools open, and figures show that two years after the outbreak, Sweden came out as one of the least affected by Covid-19 from a European perspective when measuring excess mortality (Eurostat, 2022). However, in relation to the other Nordic countries, Sweden stands out; more than 20,000 people died of Covid-19 in Sweden, which is more than all the other Nordic countries combined. Thus, compared with the other Nordic countries, the Swedish Covid-19 strategy was probably less successful, but seen from a global perspective, Sweden did fairly well.

In general, crisis management of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Nordics was characterised by high trust in both government and government agencies, but a trustful relationship between institutions is also a common trait. Disputes were put aside between and inside organisations in order to handle the difficult situation (Brorström et al., 2021). The levels of public trust in the health institutions were remarkably high, especially during the early phases of the pandemic (Ihlen et al., 2022). When looking at political polarisation between government and opposition, it was, at least in the beginning of the pandemic, rather low. Government decisions in handling the pandemic were generally undisputed by the political opposition; over time, however, there were some

political controversies. In Sweden, these arose as the death tolls were rising. Still, due to the shared responsibility in Sweden's political system, where regions are responsible for healthcare and municipalities for elderly care, accountability work became fragmented (see Sandberg, Chapter 2). In Norway, it would take until the later phases of the pandemic before political skirmishes of significance were visible and political actors accused each other of trying to capitalise on the crisis. In Finland, the prime minister, Sanna Marin, was heavily criticised for going to clubs after being exposed to Covid-19 infection in December 2021. Later, it became known that two male ministers had also taken part in different events, but they escaped similar criticism. The discussion on gender and age was often present, since when Marin took office in December 2019, she was the world's youngest prime minister, and the Social Democrat–led coalition came to be led by five women mostly in their thirties. In Denmark, a crisis of trust arose in November 2020, when the government decided to euthanise all mink due to a risk assessment by the Statens Serum Institut, which concluded that the mink industry posed a serious threat to national health (Boswell et al., 2021). However, this decision turned out to be without legal basis, resulting in a scandal that led to both the exit of the minister of Food, Agriculture and Fisheries, who was held responsible for the lack of legal basis, and to a drop in the overall trust in the governments' handling of the Covid-19 pandemic (Berlingske, 2022). It also led to a commission report scrutinising the decision to kill the mink, which ended up with heavy criticism of a number of top civil servants. The report also criticised the prime minister but put most of the blame on the civil servants (Parliament of Denmark, 2022).

The relationship between government and public health authorities could also generally be described as good in all the Nordic countries. Roles and responsibilities were defined and respected, and only in Denmark did a dispute arise between the Office of the Prime Minister and the health authorities. While the Danish health authorities hesitated to engage at the beginning of the pandemic, the government and the prime minister wanted a stronger, proactive strategy with more testing. The differences in strategies led to behind-the-scenes conflicts and to communication from the prime minister stating that different actions, such as imposing lockdowns, were taken due to advice from "authorities", when in fact it was mostly a political decision (Parliament of Denmark, 2021). No similar conflicts could be found in the other Nordic countries, although there were instances when the governments opted to ignore the advice from the public health authorities.

In retrospect, the Covid-19 management in the Nordic countries was for the most part evaluated positively. Finland, Iceland, and Norway had no serious controversies related to how Covid-19 was dealt with, and the change of government in Norway was not related to mismanagement of the pandemic. Even if the Norwegian Corona Commission chastised the government for its

lack of preparedness, their first report concluded that the Norwegian authorities had handled the Covid-19 pandemic well (NOU, 2021). A later evaluation report, which also addressed communication, again gave praise, with the exception of communication with minority groups (NOU, 2022) (see Backholm & Nordberg, Chapter 15, for a discussion of how minority language groups experienced pandemic communication from authorities). Similar conclusions of how the pandemic was handled can be found in Finland and Iceland, but also in Denmark (Olagnier, & Mogensen, 2020; Stenvall et al., 2022).

Overall, the Nordic countries were less affected by the Covid-19 pandemic compared with many other countries, both globally and from a European perspective. Even Sweden, with much higher death tolls than its Nordic neighbours, seems to have been more successful in managing the pandemic in comparison with many other countries. The polarisation in the Nordic societies was low – between institutions and citizens – when entering the crisis, and it more or less remained that way, even if there has been criticism concerning the handling of the pandemic as well. In Norway, a handful of medical experts were vocal about what they called the need for stronger measures to combat the pandemic – that is, they were arguing for stricter lockdowns, criticising the health authorities for not taking the challenge of the pandemic seriously enough (Kjeldsen et al., 2021). Similar discussions and critique were heard in the other Nordic countries. In Sweden, the debate about the use of face masks was a recurring issue, as the use was not mandatory or even recommended (Johansson et al., 2021). Still, large surveys indicate that the Nordic population for the most part was content with the management of the pandemic.

Crisis communication in a pandemic

There have been global crises long before Covid-19. Pandemics like the Spanish flu, HIV, and the Swine flu are all examples of diseases on a global scale. However, Covid-19 spread so quickly and was accompanied by high death tolls, and crisis responses from governments around the world were forceful. Things we have learned to take for granted were changed from one day to the next. Travel, or even going outside our own homes, became a matter of dispute, and personal integrity was no longer self-evident as surveillance of citizens increased. Prerequisites for crisis communication also changed in relation to previous global crises. The contemporary high-choice media environment, with an almost infinite amount of information sources available twenty-four/seven, is one such difference. Covid-19 stories saturated the public sphere in a way we never experienced before, and Covid-19 was the "only" news story for months as the entire society was affected by the crisis (see Ghersetti et al., Chapter 10). Another side of this infodemic focuses on the "post-truth society",

where facts and scientific findings are contested and conspiracy theories flourish. The rise of social media and alternative news sites seem to have speeded up this development to a global level.

This societal or even global perspective of Covid-19 has accentuated the need to view crisis communication from a broad perspective as containing of number of subfields, where public crisis management focuses on public safety, political crisis management deals with political power, and corporate crisis management focuses on corporate reputation and stakeholder interest (Frandsen & Johansen, 2020; see also Frandsen & Johansen, Chapter 8). This division of the field of crisis communication mirrors the roots of crisis communication in different academic disciplines, such as risk communication, emergency management, political communication, political science, organisational communication, corporate communication, and others (Auer et al., 2016; Rogers & Pearce, 2016; Roux-Dufort, 2016; Schneider & Jordan, 2016; Voss & Lorenz, 2016). When studying the Covid-19 pandemic, all three subfields are relevant, and all three perspectives are represented in chapters in this book.

A somewhat different way to map the field is to divide between organisational and societal perspectives on crisis communication, where the first one includes the political and corporate crisis management subfields mentioned above. Crisis communication is, seen from this viewpoint, mainly occupied with the survival of organisations (public or private) and its relation to different stakeholders. Both political and corporate crises are therefore examples of organisational crises. The societal perspective on crisis communication can also study organisations, but then not from a management perspective. Instead, organisations are seen from a system perspective, where, for example, a political crisis and its impact on the political system, or whether a government agency succeeds in informing the public, is analysed. Crises as societal issues are clearly related to public crisis management, mentioned above. Another aspect of the societal perspective is applying an audience perspective to crisis communication (Fraustino & Liu, 2018), where one strand of research highlights the relationships between organisations and its publics in order to formulate crisis response. The second perspective focuses on understanding and segmenting audiences. Finally, the third strand of research emphasises the public's emotions and coping strategies

When an audience perspective is proposed in the literature, it is sometimes done – implicitly or explicitly – with the purpose of communicating more effectively by having better knowledge of the target group or audience. Sometimes, the research is conducted from a bottom-up perspective, having citizens' rights and justice as a point of departure (Sellnow & Seeger, 2020).

Normative aspects like "rights" and "justice" can be applied both to organisational and societal aspects of crisis communication. An example is the principle of responsible communication, where an organisation that causes harm is responsible for the consequences, even if not intended. Such a framework can

of course challenge many other theories of crisis communication, as they are designed to avoid or distort accountability processes. A more societal normative perspective is the precautionary principle, which poses not to engage in risky (communication) behaviour when information is scarce or conflicting,

Moving to the audience perspective, normative approaches are also more or less outspoken. If applied, they mostly focus on citizens' right to information, where, for example, the significant choice perspective highlights a citizen's need for information that can help them make informed decisions, which can be in conflict with other citizens' right to privacy. Sellnow and Seeger (2020) also mentioned justice as an important ethical perspective on crisis communication, claiming that everyone should be treated in the same way (fairness), but also social justice, meaning everyone should have the same obligations and opportunities; distributive justice, defined as equitable distributions of resources; and restorative justice, where victims should receive justice and be publicly recognised and those responsible held to account. The ethics of justice is, as described above, not limited to communication aspects; rather, it also includes crisis management.

A framework which – from a citizen perspective – combines these normative citizen perspectives is the CCC model (Citizen Crisis Communication) (Odén et al., 2016). Central to the CCC model is the concept of capability, which is inspired by Nussbaum's work (1995), and the model stresses functions that citizens need as members of a society and how crisis communication can help strengthen these capabilities. The CCC model identifies three functions by which crisis communication enhances capabilities. The first one is to strengthen survival capabilities: Crisis communication should supply relevant, trustworthy, and understandable information about the situation, which is required for citizens to take appropriate action. Following this function, crisis communication should answer several questions: What has happened? Am I or my loved ones affected? What am I supposed to do? This function is often a central task for government and government agencies. This said, from a citizen perspective, it is not important who provides the information, as long as it is provided. News media, social media, friends, and family are also important suppliers of information that can improve citizens' survival capabilities.

The second function is connected to accountability and is named democratic capability, as citizens need information about who is responsible for causing the crisis and responsible for managing it, and to what extent the crisis management is appropriate and effective. This function is often connected to the journalistic norms of being a watchdog and doing accountability work. Journalism is crucial to this function, but just as for survival capabilities, other actors and sources, such as nongovernmental organisation, evaluating commissions, and ordinary citizens, can be important for accountability work.

The third function is social capabilities, which more precisely relates to information that publicly recognises the experiences of those affected by the crisis. Communication promoting social capabilities can also be about communicating hope, enhancing crisis preparedness, and strengthening interpersonal and societal trust. This type of communication can include everything from speeches by political leaders to hashtags on social media, where people are organising help for and solidarity with those affected by the crisis. News media stories can also fulfil this function by telling stories about communities "coming together". These stories can be found in the pre-crisis phase as the community is preparing for a crisis, during the crisis when there are imminent problems to solve, and also in the post-crisis phase when recovery, renewal, and searching for a "new normal" is crucial for a community.

All three functions can be applied to crisis communication and Covid-19 and can also be found in different chapters in this book. In the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, focus was quite naturally on communicating to strengthen survival capabilities, since citizens needed information on how to protect themselves from the virus. Democratic capabilities became more visible after the first wave of the pandemic, and communication about how the pandemic was handled became more visible, where both governments and government agencies were criticised by both politicians and the news media. Communication that strengthens social capabilities could be found early on, as political leaders gave speeches to enhance society's resilience.

Research on Covid-19 and crisis communication

Epidemics and pandemics have been previously studied by communication scholars, focusing on the historic event of the Spanish flu (Aassve et al., 2020) but also more recent incidents like SARS (Tyshenko, 2010) and the Swine flu (Bjørkdahl & Carlsen, 2019; Caduff, 2015; Kim & Liu, 2012). Norwegian risk communicators learnt several lessons from the Swine flu crisis, for instance, how disagreement about communication of uncertainties created public confusion (Brekke et al., 2017). Other previous research has given practical advice on, for instance, how to use social media during pandemics and other crisis situations (Hornmoen & Backholm, 2018).

Turning our attention to Covid-19, at the time of writing, a simple search in Google Scholar with the terms Covid-19 and communication yielded close to 3.3 million hits. It is a likely hypothesis that never before have researchers published so much on a particular topic in such a short period of time. To give a brief illustration, a handful of monographs have used approaches from, for instance, risk communication (Lazris & Rifkin, 2021), trust research (Robinson et al., 2021), and governance (Sinha, 2022). Anthologies have similarly drawn

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on political communication (Lilleker et al., 2021b; Van Aelst & Blumler, 2022), risk communication (Wardman & Löfstedt, 2023), strategic communication (Tench et al., 2022), government communication (Maarek, 2022), argumentation (Oswald et al., 2022), science communication (O'Hair & O'Hair, 2021), media theory (Pollock & Vakoch, 2022), as well as the communication field in a broad sense (Kuypers, 2022; Lewis et al., 2021; Price & Harbisher, 2021). In addition, a host of special issues have been launched:

- *International Journal of Strategic Communication* (Meng & Tench, 2022)

- *Health Communication* (Nan & Thompson, 2020, 2021)

- *Journal of Health Communication* (Ratzan, 2020)

- *Journal of Risk Research* (Wardman & Lofstedt, 2020)

- *International Journal of Crisis and Risk Communication Research* (Jin et al., 2021)

- *Journal of Business Communication* (Mayfield & Mayfield, 2022)

- *Journal of Communication Management* (Ruck & Men, 2021)

- *Digital Journalism* (Quandt & Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021)

- *Howard Journal of Communication* (Sun, 2021)

- *Philosophy & Rhetoric* (Doxtader, 2020)

Add to this that the Covid-19 pandemic is a focus in several textbooks (e.g., Matusitz, 2022) and for journalistic investigations (e.g., Anderberg, 2021). Furthermore, key political players have also published books providing their own accounts of the events. Among the latter, in Norway, there are books from the former minister of health and care, as well as the general director of the Norwegian Institute of Public Health [Folkhelseinstituttet], and a vice director of the Norwegian Directorate of Health [Helsedirektoratet] (Høie & Litland, 2022; Nakstad, 2021; Sølhusvik & Stoltenberg, 2021). In addition, journalists and various kinds of experts have given their view on the pandemic (Manzoor, 2021; Simonsen, 2022).

Suffice to say, it is an arduous task to provide a thorough review of all this literature. Particular aspects of the research are instead highlighted in the chapters of this volume; for example, we discuss how the rally-around-the-flag effect (Van Aelst & Blumler, 2022) fared in the Nordic countries (see Johansson et al., Chapter 13).

A second example is culled from the speedily published *Political Communication and COVID-19* (Lilleker et al., 2021b), which contained quick analysis from 27 countries. This volume seemed to confirm the importance of media-

tisation for effective communication strategies, as well as how personalisation provided the opportunity to deliver unifying messages (Lilleker et al., 2021a). We explore this further in the chapters in section 2.

Thirdly, *Journal of Risk Research* was also extraordinarily early when it published its special issue on Covid-19 in December 2020. Here, the editors were writing about different perspectives of risk and disagreement about the acceptable levels of harm (Wardman & Lofstedt, 2020). This aspect is addressed by Rasmussen, Ihlen, and Kjeldsen in Chapter 4, as it turned out to be a deciding factor in the strategy choice of the public health authorities in the Nordic countries, with Sweden, as noted, setting itself apart.

Finally, in a chapter in the edited volume *Strategic Communication in a Global Crisis* (Tench et al., 2022), we have also pointed to the importance of the Nordic model, since it provides a fertile ground for trust and in turn resilience (Ihlen et al., 2022). As already mentioned, this is an aspect we return to throughout the book and in the concluding chapter.

These are but a few of the topics covered in the large amount of literature mentioned above, a literature that is likely to grow even more in the years to come, as exemplified by the present volume.

Structure of the book

This book is structured in five sections, with the first, as mentioned, providing context. This introductory chapter has provided brief overviews of the Covid-19 pandemic in the Nordic countries, as well as crisis communication, research on Covid-19 communication, and crisis communication relying on the Nordic model. Chapter 2, written by Siv Sandberg, provides an overview of the administrative organisation of crisis management in the Nordic countries.

Section II of the book turns to how politicians and government agencies have operated as crisis managers and communicators. In Chapter 3, Lars Nord and Eva-Karin Olsson Gardell discuss government communication during early 2020 in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. This is followed by a chapter written by Joel Rasmussen, Øyvind Ihlen, and Jens E. Kjeldsen, which focuses on differences in the communication of public health authorities in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, we witnessed the return of press conferences as an important event. In Chapter 5, Jens E. Kjeldsen analyses the multimodal rhetoric in use by both public health authorities and political leaders in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden.

A second important vehicle for communication during the Covid-19 pandemic was public campaigns. In Chapter 6, Pernille Almlund, Jens E. Kjeldsen, and Ragnhild Mølster analyse similarities and differences between Covid-19 campaigns in Scandinavia.

The notion of infodemic has been tied to the Covid-19 pandemic, not least since social media was replete with related content. In Chapter 7, Jenny Lindholm, Tom Carlson, Frederike Albrecht, and Helena Hermansson analyse how social media was utilised by Nordic health authorities and prime ministers.

The two final chapters in section II turn attention to the corporate sector: Finn Frandsen and Winni Johansen research how corporations and industry associations dealt with Covid-19 in the Scandinavian countries. Wiebke Marie Junk utilises interest-group literature to survey the question of lobbyists' access to politicians in Denmark and Sweden during the pandemic.

Section III contains three chapters on media coverage and discussion during the Covid-19 pandemic. Chapter 10, written by Marina Ghersetti, Jón Gunnar Ólafsson, and Sigrún Ólafsdóttir, interrogates the Icelandic and Swedish news coverage with regard to the informative and investigative roles of the media in a democratic society. In Chapter 11, Jannicke Fiskvik, Andrea Vik Bjarkø, and Tor Olav Grøtan delve into the discourse on Twitter and Facebook in Norway during the pandemic.

In the final chapter in section III, Mark Blach-Ørsten, Anna Maria Jönsson, Valgerður Jóhannsdóttir, and Birgir Guðmundsson analyse the conditions in Denmark, Iceland, and Sweden for investigative reporting during a time period when much of society was closed down.

Section IV introduces the citizen perspective. Bengt Johansson, Jacob Sohlberg, and Peter Esaiasson rely on survey research to explore how trust developed in the Nordic countreis in Chapter 13. In Chapter 14, Brita Ytre-Arne and Hallvard Moe analyse patterns in citizen's news use in Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden during the Covid-19 pandemic. And finally, Chapter 15 is devoted to the issue of pandemic communication to vulnerable language minorities. The authors, Klas Backholm and Camilla Nordberg conduct a secondary analysis of relevant research from Finland, Norway, and Sweden.

The final section of the book, Section V, contains only one chapter, written by the editors, where we summarise and extrapolate on the research findings in the previous chapters. Again, a driving question is whether a Nordic model of crisis communication can be said to exist or not.

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