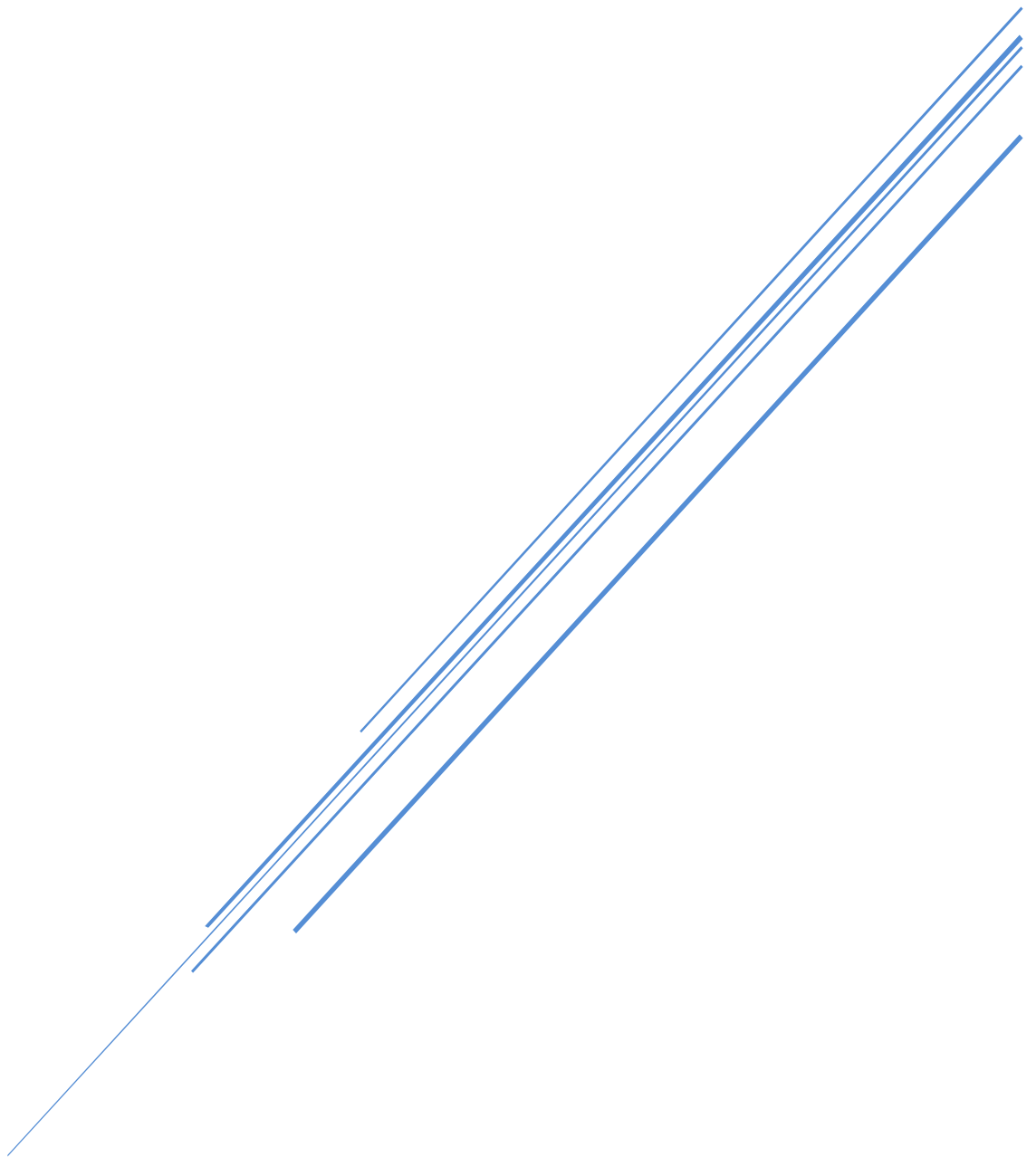


GOVERNMENTS AND SOCIAL MEDIA INFLUENCERS IN TIMES OF CRISIS



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Abstract

Problem: As the coronavirus spread across the globe, governments around the world received mixed critique for their communication to the public as some handled it better than others in public opinion. While the US government faced backlash over communication deemed woefully inadequate by the public, the Danish prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, received praise for her handling and communication with the public during the crisis, indicating that some governments were better at responding to the crisis. As numbers suggest that traditional media, like TV and newspapers, is dwindling in the US, the case appears to be the same in Finland, as claimed by the Finnish government. Such tendencies might suggest that this might be the case in other nations as well. In Finland, the government has therefore decided to communicate through social media and social media influencers by inciting them to share reliable information.

Purpose: This study not only seeks to discover how governments may utilize social media influencers in times of crisis, but also how social media influencers around the world are currently addressing the pandemic and what can be learned from social media and social media influencers during the pandemic.

Methodology: This study adopts a qualitative research approach with an exploratory design and will analyze Instagram posts addressing the pandemic, collected from social media influencers around the world in order, through a multimodal analysis to fulfill the above-mentioned purpose.

Conclusion: This study concludes that governments may, when a crisis occurs, choose among several crisis response strategies, depending on the crisis, and then base their communication to the public on the selected strategy. Communication may be done through social media and social media influencers and, from there, the message may spread far and wide digitally as social media allows users to easily share content among each other. Furthermore, the study found that social media influencers were already inciting community spirit and spreading awareness through creative solutions like social media challenges where users are incited to share content.

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1. Introduction

In 2020, the coronavirus swept across the globe and was declared a pandemic by the World Health Organization, bringing with it more than 2,500,000 confirmed cases of people falling ill to the virus (WHO 2020, BBC News 2020). A prominent example of the havoc caused by this virus can be seen in Italy. In the Southern European country, 59,138 cases of people falling ill to the virus was registered as of 23 March, making it the biggest outbreak of the coronavirus outside of Asia and ranking Italy as the second most infected country globally at the time (Duddu 2020). At one point, while the registered cases surged from hundreds to thousands, Italy even had the world's highest death toll of approximately 800 in a single day (Duddu 2020). The pandemic of the coronavirus caused massive changes around the world as more than 30 countries, including Germany, made face coverings mandatory outdoors for the public (Javid 2020). Other countries, like Italy, entered lockdown with the hope of decreasing the spreading of the virus. In other words, this meant that Italy ordered the closure of all businesses which were deemed non-strategic, meaning that they were not vital for Italy's supply chain (Duddu 2020).

While the World Health Organization (2020) set up basic protective measures against the coronavirus, entailing frequent handwashing, maintaining social distance, not touching one's eyes, nose and mouth and more, some national health authorities, like the Danish National Health Authorities also set up their own guidelines (Sundhedsstyrelsen n.d.). In Denmark, the prime minister, Mette Frederiksen, received praise by both political commentators and the CEO of Lead Agency, a communication bureau which also works with crisis communication, for her press conference through which she informed the nation about the crisis (Olsen 2020). However, in other nations, like the USA, the government's communication with the public has been less well-received as the president, Donald Trump, has seen health officials speak up against him when speaking about injecting disinfectant in an attempt to combat the coronavirus as he was already facing a backlash over suggesting anti-malaria medication for the very same purpose (Smith 2020).

In Finland, the government has been seen using several forms of communication in an attempt to best reach the public as the Finnish government states that it is aware that traditional media like television does not reach everyone. The government states that many, especially young people, get their news through social media today (POLITICO 2020). This appears to be the case for more nations than Finland as a report from the US showed that US consumers would spend more time with their phones in 2019 than they would watching television, and that amount of time was only predicted to grow (Wurmser 2019). Therefore, the Finnish government has begun to work with a social media influencer agency named PING Helsinki, thereby having the agency edit the government's messages regarding the coronavirus into social media-friendly formats and then share them with its network of about 1,500 influencers (POLITICO 2020). On their website, PING Helsinki writes that they invite all influencers to share reliable information and thereby prevent that false news are spread as they wish to secure reliable information in the time of crisis (PING Helsinki 2020).

To some, the notion of social media and influencers may be brand new. Over the last decade, social media has swiftly grown in importance, and it was even revealed in a study from 2019 that an estimate of 3,489 billion people are actively using social media, amounting

to 45% of the world's population (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). For clarity, the term 'Social media' refers to websites and applications (like those found on smartphones), which are designed with the intention of allowing users to share content with each other in real-time. Most people think of social media as solely being related to phones, but, social media started with computers. However, most people do access social media on their phones (Hudson 2019).

The fact that people are able to share photos, videos, opinions, events and much more in real-time has transformed contemporary society and the way that business is being conducted. Today, there are retailers who integrate social media as a key component in their marketing strategy and, from this, they usually see measurable results. However, social media should not be considered an addition to- but should be treated with the same level of care, respect and attention that a business would usually put into its general marketing efforts (Hudson 2019).

This rise in social media has paved the way for social media influencers. First, to understand the very concept of a social media influencer, one must first consider what an influencer is. An influencer is a person with the power to affect things like purchasing decisions of other people, due to his or her authority, knowledge, position, or relationship with their respective audience (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). Furthermore, an influencer also has a distinct niche that the given influencer actively engages with. The size of the influencer's following depends on the size of its topic of the niche (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020, Schomer 2019).

Now, a social media influencer (Henceforth called SMI) is a person that has built a reputation based on their knowledge and expertise on a given topic. SMIs usually share content about the given topic(s) through which they have built their reputation on a given social media. Thereby, they generate followings of people who are most often enthusiastic and engaged (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020).

When it comes to SMIs, there are several distinctions to go by. A common method is to go by followers but they can also be separated by types of content or perhaps the level of influence. Influencers can also be grouped in the niche in which they operate. This way, should an influencer appear low in one category, he or she may appear more influential when looked at in another way (Schomer 2019, Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). An example of this can be that of the SMIs belonging to a group called 'mega-influencers' (which will be explained in the following paragraph) may also be celebrities. Both of these groups, celebrities and mega-influencers, often have less influence on their audience because they lack expertise in a dedicated niche. 'Micro'- and 'nano-influencers' (terms which will be explained in this section), however, can often have a larger impact on their audience as they tend to be more engaged in their niche(s) (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). Again, there are several ways to distinguish between SMIs and an example of this can be in terms of the amount of followers that an SMI has. It can be seen when people divide SMIs into categories of mega-, macro-, micro- or even nano-influencers.

The first category, 'mega-influencers', are people with a really large quantity of people following them. Even though there are no rules set in stone regarding the exact amount of followers that one should have to be deemed a mega-influencer (which is also the case for

other categories of influencers, as can be seen with e.g. micro-influencers later in this section) but there is a common view stating that mega-influencers have a following of more than 1,000,000 people on a single platform (Ismail 2018, Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). As mentioned, many mega-influencers are celebrities who have often started out become famous offline and then gained a large amount of followers after having made a profile on social media. There are, however, people who have accumulated this large amount of followers without having been a celebrity before creating a profile on social media. These influencers are expensive to work with and often cost \$1 million per post and are selective in terms of who they want to work with. Therefore, they are most often only approached by larger brands (Ismail 2018, Influencer Marketing Hub 2020).

Another category, 'macro-influencers', entail SMIs with a follower-base of 40,000 to 1,000,000 (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). Again, it should be noted that these rules are not set in stone and it depends on who you ask as others say 100,000 to 1,000,000 (Ismail 2018). This group often consists of two types of people. The first type is someone who is either a b-list celebrity who is less famous than some of those who would be deemed a mega-influencer, or they are an expert who has gained success online and thus accumulated a large number of followers. Overall, these influencers reach a lot of people with their content and hold the potential to raise a lot of awareness, thereby making them interesting for brands to work with (Ismail 2018, Influencer Marketing Hub 2020).

'Micro-influencers' is another category that entails everyday people who have gained a reputation based on their knowledge about a given niche. Because of this, they have gained a follower-base of people devoted to that niche. It is important to once again note that a level of influence can be measured not only by followers but also in terms of relationship and interaction between the given influencer and his or her followers (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). When it comes to micro-influencers, the number of followers seems a bit debated depending on who you ask, but some say they go from 1,000 to 40,000 (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020), 2,000 to 50,000 (Kelly n.d.) or even 1,000 to 1,000,000 (Anderson 2019) which overlaps macro-influencers. As the rules are not set in stone, this study will consider micro-influencers as having between 1,000 to 50,000 followers as these numbers seem to best correlate with the common perceptions and the idea of 1,000 to 1,000,000 followers simply overlaps other categories.

When it comes to working with brands, micro-influencers may not be aware of the existence of a given brand until the brand reaches out to the micro-influencer. Often so, should that be the case, the brand will have to convince the micro-influencer of its 'worth', so to say, as micro-influencers often have a closer and more personal relationship to their followers and, thereby, can feel obligated to uphold a higher level of integrity (Influencer Marketing Hub 2020, Schomer 2019). In fact, micro-influencers have been reported to have generated 85% higher engagement with their audience compared to influencers with 100,000 followers (Anderson 2019). Due to this high level of interaction between micro-influencers and their audience, micro-influencers reach their audience on a personal level and are more likely to be advocates for a brand, rather than being paid to post once a brand's products or services once and then forgetting about it, making them ideal for brands to work with (Anderson 2019, Kelly n.d.). Another factor that makes micro-influencers sought after is that they are often affordable in comparison to celebrities and mega-influencers while also generating higher

conversion rates. In fact, a study showed that 49% of consumers trust influencers when making purchasing decisions (Karp, 2016, Kelly n.d.). Today, micro-influencers are becoming more common and some have risen from being an average person to being as well-known as some traditional celebrities. A report showed that in 2018, the average person in the US would spend 3 hours and 10 minutes per day with their device and the amount of time spent only seemed to go up (Wurmser 2019). With Generation Z spending more time on their phones than they do watching TV, sports or movies, micro-influencers hold the potential to become celebrities of the future (Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020).

The last category to be mentioned here, nano-influencers, entails influencers with a small number of followers around or below 1000. They often tend to be highly specialized in their given niche and their followers are often really interested in their content. These influencers, however, are rarely of interest for brands to collaborate with, as their level of influence is just not sufficient in the eyes of most brands and, therefore, brands will need to collaborate with many nano-influencers to reach their target audience (Godwin 2018. Influencer Marketing Hub, 2020).

With the rise of SMIs, more and more brands are spending money on influencer marketing and brands are estimated to spend \$15 billion on influencer marketing by 2022. While partnering with influencers is not uncommon practice to many brands, social media pervades the lives of many people and takes on more functionalities than communication and has now expanded to shopping, thereby making SMIs key in establishing connection between consumers and brands (Schomer 2019).

As governments around the world have received different responds to their communication with the public in this time of crisis and social media seems to take over the role of traditional media in some cases, I wish to conduct a study about how governments may utilize SMIs to convey messages in times of crisis. As the social media Instagram is among the most popular (Schomer 2019), I will base my study upon content posted by SMIs on this platform.

When conducting such a study, I believe it is important to research content posted by several SMIs as this pandemic spans globally across nations and cultures. Just like I do not assume that everyone consumes the same traditional media, I dare make the assumption that not everyone follows the same SMIs. Therefore, I will base my research on data gathered from across nations.

Here, I believe it makes sense to briefly explain the structure of this paper. In the following section, the reader will find the problem statement and of this study. From there, the reader will be presented with the literature review of this study, entailing relevant theories and concepts for this study. Afterward, the methodology-section will be presented. This section includes an overview of terms and concepts, the philosophy of the science behind the study, the approach and design of the research, the collection of data and how the analysis will be conducted.

Afterward, the reader will find a section going in-depth with the empirical data and the gathering thereof. Then, once all the thoughts and processes behind the study have been presented, the reader will find the analysis and then the discussion thereof before the reader will be presented with the conclusion of this study.

2. Problem statement

With the global covid-19 pandemic of 2020, governments have sought towards social media influencers to communicate governmental guidelines with the hope of reducing the spreading of the coronavirus. This raises the questions of how may governments utilize social media influencers in times of crisis? How are social media influencers around the world currently addressing the pandemic? What can be learned from social media and social media influencers during the pandemic?

3. Literature review

In this section, I wish to present the reader with relevant theories, concepts and definitions which are central to the study that I am conducting. I will also develop a conceptual model based on the presented material in order to find out how governments may utilize SMLs during times of crisis. The material included in this section has been chosen due to it being related to the central key themes of the study. This section is also made with the intention of providing the reader with a deeper understanding of the research and the following results.

3.1 Strategic Communication

First of all, I must note that crisis communication, and thereby strategic communication, talks from an organizational standpoint but I will argue that a government may also be considered as an organization and instead of stakeholders, I argue that governments have the opinion of the public to consider. Furthermore, the work of crisis communication research is not only based on organizational contexts but has also been generated in public relations, marketing management and even psychology (Coombs 2015, 144). Therefore, I argue that this work is relevant for this study.

The field of strategic communication entails abundant literature on crisis communication which aims to identify effective and ineffective efforts in crisis communication. The field of strategic communication has identified a volume of crisis response strategies and the factors that determine whether or not these strategies are effective or ineffective (Coombs 2015, 141).

Coombs (2015, 141) argues that just because one communicates during a crisis, it does not mean that one makes the situation any better. He also says that crisis communication should be strategic and that efforts should be designed with the intention of improving the situation. It should be noted at the label 'best practices' will not be applied as this implies uniformity in a process. Crisis types and similarities can be identified, yes, but it is still misleading to assume uniformity in times of crisis, according to Coombs. The evidence-based crisis communication research behind strategic communication provides guidance in terms of what is typically effective and ineffective during times of crisis. This guidance may, however, assist leaders in making informed decisions in terms of strategic communication during times of crisis. (2015, 141-142).

In times of crisis, there are strategies called 'crisis response strategies' which represent the words and actions that may be employed by leaders when dealing with crises (Coombs

2007). Crisis response strategies may be considered as the options available to leaders when dealing with a crisis. These strategies are part of the larger field of crisis communication. Broadly speaking, crisis communication entails two strategies. The first of these is called 'managing information' and the second is called 'managing meaning'. The first, 'managing information', entails collecting and spreading crisis-related information. 'Managing meaning' entails efforts to influence how people perceive the crisis and/or the people involved (Coombs 2010). Crisis response strategies can be divided into three categories, namely 'instructing information', 'adjusting information' and 'reputation repair' (Coombs 2015, 142).

For a long-term threat, Coombs (2015, 145) recommends instructing- and adjusting information, along with compensation and apology. Therefore, the third crisis response strategy, 'reputation repair' will not be explained or used in this study. Compensation and apology will also not be included as I find it highly unlikely that governments will apologize and compensate citizens for a pandemic. However, I must note that I do not believe that these are fully irrelevant outside of this study as governments have faced backlash regarding their communication during the pandemic, as can be seen with the USA and their president, Donald Trump (Smith 2020).

Instructing information

Instructing information helps people protect themselves from a crisis in physical terms. Crises create victims that are negatively affected by the given crisis and using the strategy 'instructing information' helps to prevent people from becoming victims (Sturges 1994). Examples of this strategy can be warning people to e.g. not use a given product or to evacuate (Coombs 2015, 142). In this case, it WHO have made guidelines for people to practice social distance, wash hands frequently etc., which is another example of instructing information.

Adjusting information

In contrast to instructing information, adjusting information entails efforts to help people cope with a crisis psychologically (Sturges 1994). Expressions of sympathy, information about the given crisis in talk, counseling, and corrective action join together to form the variations of adjusting information. Crises can not only create anxiety, but they can also create anger (Jin & Pang 2010, Coombs & Holladay 2005). Information about the events of the crisis help reduce levels of anxiety as it reduces ambiguity. Expressions of sympathy help reduce anger, and counseling helps reduce anxiety (Coombs 2015, 142).

3.2 Social media

Over the course of the past ten years, social media has evolved to become an integral part of everyday life. With this, there have also come economic, political and societal implications. With the rise of social media, we have seen traditional media dwindle in use while social media platforms have been adopted globally at unprecedented speed (McCay-Peet & Quan-Haase 2018, 13).

Social media entails mobile and web-based technologies in order to create interactive platforms through which users in the form of individuals and communities are able to share, co-create, discuss and even modify user-generated content. As social media is a term with high exposure in contemporary popular press, it has been argued that we are experiencing a new landscape of communication (Kietzmann et. al. 2011, 241).

Currently, the ecology of social media sites is rich and diverse. Social media sites, however, do vary in terms of scope and functionality, depending on the given platform in talk. While some sites, like Facebook, are intended for the general masses, there are also sites like LinkedIn which are intended for more professional use. While Facebook started out as a private network for Harvard students, it has developed a hub for the masses. Other sites, like YouTube, MySpace and Flickr primarily serve the functionality of image- and video sharing. A trend that has been developed since the 1990's is weblogging, commonly referred to as 'blogs', which has become very popular as it is easy to create and maintain. The authors of such blogs range from everyday people to celebrities, as can also be seen on Instagram-influencers (Kietzmann et. al. 2011, 242, Influencer Marketing Hub 2020). Today, the result of this developed trend is the contemporary 'blogosphere' of more than 100 million blogs which serve as an important source of public opinion due to their interconnectivity (Kietzmann et. al. 2011, 242).

Social media also allows for users to communicate with other users, be they groups or individuals. Many social media sites are created with the intention of facilitating conversation among users. Conversation on social media sites can occur due to a wide array of reasons. People engage in communication to meet like-minded people, find love, build self-esteem or to keep up with new ideas and developing trends. Others consider social media as a way for them to be heard and get their message across in order to positively impact humanitarian causes, environmental problems or economic issues (Kietzmann et. al. 2011, 244)

Due to the rise of social media over the years, it appears that corporate communication has been democratized. It has been argued that power has been taken from those in marketing and public relations by the before-mentioned individuals and communities using social media to share, create and consume content; whether the firms behind brands want it or not, communication about them is taking place on social media (Kietzmann et. al. 2011, 242). This further emphasizes the role of social media as a source of public opinion. Today, one micro-blog, be it witty or clever, can be shared with hundreds of persons in an instant and thereby holds the potential to grow and grow; to snowball (Weber 2010).

Sharing is a large element of social media as social media allows users to exchange, distribute and receive content. On social media, sharing is a tool to interact with other users and this tool facilitates further conversation and can even build relationships, depending on the functional objective of the given social media in talk (Kietzmann et. al. 2011, 245).

Another element of social media is reputation. Reputation is considered as the extent to which users of social media can identify the standing of other users, even including themselves. The meaning of reputation may vary from site to site, but in most cases it may be considered as a matter of trust. However, such matters are highly qualitative as information technologies are not yet good at determining such traits (Kietzmann et. al. 2011, 247). Examples of users with a high level of trust can be SMIs. As SMIs are deemed

experts at their given niche and most often have a loyal base of followers, these may be deemed as users with a high level of trust from their audiences (Schomer 2019, Influencer Marketing Hub 2020).

3.3 Classical word-of-mouth and electronic word-of-mouth

The phenomenon that is titled classical word-of-mouth (Henceforth addressed as WOM) is a form of social influence and also one of the most established approaches in relation to product information. In the context of WOM, there is a level of subjectivity as WOM may be considered informal communication between people. Most often, WOM develops and spreads without the support without the aid of a company or an organization, meaning that information may spread rapidly to a vast quantity of people (Lis & Neßler 2013, 63). Studies have even proven WOM to be the most important source of influence for people when they make purchasing decisions (Katz & Lazarsfeld 1964).

Later, however, the internet paved the way for internet-based communication and provided WOM with new relevance, thereby allowing large volumes of information to be spread. WOM suddenly became digital and thus evolved into 'eWOM', meaning 'electronic word-of-mouth' (Lis & Neßler 2013, 63). As opposed to classical WOM, eWOM is situated on internet-based communication channels (Dellarocas 2003). This means that eWOM is situated in e.g. emails, online communities, blogs, chat rooms, discussion boards, corporate websites and social networks. The main reason for the development of eWOM is the fact that the use of the internet increased and, with this, there was a rise in new communication channels. The large availability of knowledge and information on the internet further increases the impact of eWOM. Characteristically, eWOM differs from classical WOM in the way that information is transferred. As eWOM is primarily conducted in the form of writing and over the internet, participants no longer have to be physically situated in the same location for communication to occur. Furthermore, information spreads much faster and can even be spread anonymously. Because of the potentially large number of recipients in the case of eWOM, eWOM is more effective than traditional WOM (Lis & Neßler 2013, 63).

With eWOM, experiences have the potential to reach global audiences as, in social networks, the exchange of experiences takes place with considerable speed and simplicity. In short, this is due to the fact that social network sites offer simple ways to easily share experiences between large quantities of people and the fact that they may be shared within hours (Lis & Neßler 2013, 64, Pfeffer et al. 2014, 118). The speed at which eWOM is spread in comparison to WOM is especially an important factor as social networking sites create a constant flow of communication. In the case of highly attractive information, many people can be reached within a short period of time and this can result in a temporal dominance of a single topic, which leads to much communication around the given topic in talk (Pfeffer et al. 2014, 120).

Another factor that affects the spreading of eWOM is called 'network clusters'. This entails the fact that social networking sites have local clusterings. This means that if 'Person A' is connected to 'Person B', who is connected to 'Person C', the chance that Person A is also somehow connected to Person C is increased (Pfeffer et al. 2018, 122).

3.4 Conceptual model

Here, I wish to present a conceptual model developed on the material which has been presented.

First, a crisis will have to occur. In this case, it is the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. From there, a given government will have to select what crisis response strategies it should wish to make use of. As mentioned, these are - for a long-term threat - instructing- and adjusting information, along with compensation and apology. As previously mentioned, compensation and apology will not be included in this study.

To summarize, instructing information helps people protect themselves from a crisis in physical terms and adjusting information entails efforts to help people cope with a crisis psychologically (See 3.1 Strategic Communication).

Once the selected strategy has been chosen, governments may reach out to social media influencers to communicate the strategy. It should once again be noted that the ecology of social media sites is rich and diverse and that social media sites vary in terms of scope and functionality. Again, as sharing is a large element of social media and social media allows users to exchange, distribute and receive content, and thereby facilitating further conversation, the way is paved for eWOM and WOM.

Through social media, eWOM has the potential to reach global audiences as a result of the considerable speed and simplicity through which exchange takes place online. It should also be noted how WOM can occur as a result of the exchange of eWOM, as people may still engage in real-life conversations about things that they have seen of social media. Therefore, a government's message may reach many in a short amount of time.

A model based on the presented material will look like this:



I would like to provide a summary and an explanation of the model by starting from the top of the model.

- **Crisis:** A crisis occurs. In this case, the pandemic.
- **Governments:** As a result of the crisis, governments will react and seek out crisis response strategies.
- **Crisis response strategies:** Having assessed the crisis, governments choose a crisis response strategy, which they then have to communicate to the public.
- **Social media (influencers):** The strategy must be communicated through a communication channel and, in this case, the government may communicate through social media and SMIs, like the government of Finland has done due to the dwindling of traditional media (See 1.).
- **eWOM / WOM:** As the government's message has been spread through a SMI, it may reach far and wide through eWOM and WOM.

Having presented the conceptual model, I will present the methodology behind this study in the following section.

4. Methodology

In this section, I will present the reader with the chosen methodology for this study by explaining the philosophy of science behind this study, the research approach, the research design, the method of data collection and the method of analysis. First, however, the reader will be presented with a brief overview of terms and concepts which are central to the study.

4.1 Clarification of terms and concepts

In this section, the reader will find a list of terms, abbreviations and more. Some of the terms, like social media influencer (SMI), have already been explained but they will also be included here and explained for the convenience of the reader.

Field: the topic of the text.

Followers - The people who follow SMIs on social media. Bases of followers can vary. Followers are part of determining the degree of a SMI, and whether they are a mega-, macro-, micro- or nano-influencer.

Instagram - One of the most popular social media platforms, allowing both text and images on posts, thereby making it a multimodal media.

Instagram Post - A post on the platform Instagram. These will make up the foundation of the empirical data. A post most often consist of both an image and/or video and a text in the form of a caption.

Mode: the way that words and sentences are connected.

Niche(s) - The niches that a given influencer operates within and frequently posts content about on their social media pages.

Represented participants - All things within an image, meaning people, objects, places etc., in accordance with the term presented by Kress and van Leeuwen (2004). Furthermore, 'represented participants' may sometimes be referred to as just 'participants'

SMI (Social media influencer) - A person on social media, much often an expert in a given niche, with a large base of followers.

Tenor: the relationship between the sender and the receiver of a given text.

Textual analysis - Central part of the analysis for this study. The multimodal analysis will elicit meaning from textual- and visual elements.

Textual elements - Also referred to as 'texts'. These are written elements and are, in this case, also called 'captions'.

Vector: Lines creating action in a image.

Visual analysis - Like textual analysis above, a central part of the analysis for this study. The multimodal analysis will elicit meaning from textual- and visual elements.

Visual elements - Also referred to as 'images' and are a key-element in this paper. Posting on Instagram allows for images to be shared on the platform.

Viewer - The viewer of an image in accordance with Kress and van Leeuwen (2004).

4.2 Philosophy of science

My adopted scientific philosophy is the way through which I will showcase the processes and schools of thought I conduct my research within. This helps me shape and argue the relevance and also the reasoning behind the approaches of this study. In this section, I wish to guide the reader towards understanding not just how I view the world but also how I will view the findings of this study. This study is concerned with manifestations of human action and interaction, namely SMIs posting content for their audiences of various sizes, depending on the number of followers, thereby making the science humanistic in nature (Collin & K ppe 2015, 11-14). Ontologically, within the sphere of humanistic sciences, I align with the view of the social constructivist approach.

As the social constructivist approach argues that perceptions are social constructs, and thereby man-made, one may seek to highlight, change or at least be critical towards some manifests (Collin & K ppe 2015, 420). One may do so, as some constructs might not be deemed productive or beneficial for society or the human race as a whole, thereby inciting an initiative of change. This is relevant to keep in mind as certain phenomena are not necessarily natural occurrences, but man-made constructs which might not be beneficial or perhaps relevant to pass on to others, and thereby reproduced by society in the future, as certain phenomena might cause issues for society (Collin & K ppe 2015, 420).

In this study, I will be looking at man-made constructs and deconstruct them, thereby showing that these are not natural occurrences. When deconstructing such constructs, social constructivism is concerned with the interaction between the sender and receiver of a message and also the sender's intention with the message in talk (Collin & K ppe 2015, 467). This is, however, not to be confused with the theory of 'deconstruction' by Jacques Derrida, which primarily entails the reader's knowledge regarding the author of a text and how this knowledge affects the reader's perception of the text (Collin & K ppe 2015, 467-468). Social constructivism, however, is concerned with the interaction between the sender and receiver of a given message, and also the reasoning behind it. They do, however, resemble each other in the way that they both agree that no perceived phenomenon can stand independent of its context, as this will cause a loss of meaning (Collin & K ppe 2015, 467). For this study, this notion of context is important, as the pandemic caused by the coronavirus establishes the context and creates the foundation for all the data. Furthermore, social constructivists will argue that this entire situation being a pandemic is a human-made construct in the way that it is deemed a pandemic around the world and thus put into words. It has also been argued that no perception or social construct can be considered independent of other influences, thereby creating the argument that achieved knowledge

does reflect a universal answer to a given question but instead reflects the context in which it is conceived (Collin & K ppe 2015, 443-444).

In terms of epistemology, this study entails interpretivism. Interpretivism holds the view that the subject matter of social sciences, namely people and their institutions, is fundamentally different from the view of natural sciences. In short, interpretivism requires that a social scientist grasps the subjective meaning of social action. When adopting an interpretative stance, one does not simply seek to reveal the way that members of a social group interprets the world around them. However, one seeks to place interpretations which have been elicited into a social frame. By doing so, there is a double interpretation as the researcher provides an interpretation of others' interpretations. Actually, a third interpretation will occur as the researcher's interpretation will have to be interpreted in terms of concepts, literature and theories of a given discipline (Bryman 2016, 26-28).

Though I deem this scientific positioning the best suited for this study, it has certain limitations which will be explained in the following section.

4.2.1 Limitations to positioning

I am aware that, because of the nature of the social constructivist approach, my findings in this study might differ from those of others, should others apply this approach to another context or even the same. To social constructivism, there is subjectivity in relation to the pandemic, depending on how people perceive and approach it. While some might not consider the pandemic a larger issue and reason of concern, others might be really worried about how this will affect themselves, their relatives, the economy etc.. However, though the results might vary, depending on the data and even the analyst, I argue that this approach is best suited for this study as I will be looking at human interaction based on the human-made construct that is the spreading of the coronavirus being a pandemic.

4.3 Research approach

Qualitative research is a an approach which intends to provide contextual knowledge of the phenomenon that is being studied (Byrne 2001). This study will adopt the qualitative approach. Broadly speaking, this approach emphasizes words instead of numbers, thereby seeking to separate itself from the quantitative approach and natural sciences. With a qualitative approach, the study is based on the accounts of perceptions and experiences of humans (Collin & K ppe 2015, 537-540), or human-made constructs, one might say.

Furthermore, this approach will be of inductive nature, meaning that the approach stems from specific examples and - from there - seeks general theory (O'Leary 2007). This study entails interpretivism, which commonly uses the inductive approach as a stepping stone. This approach is centered around the notion of the collecting of data and is thereby followed by a theory based on an analysis of said data (Saunders et al. 2015). This approach is less concerned with the need to generalize but, instead, emphasizes the collection of qualitative data. An inductive approach is especially appropriate when the research is new and not significantly developed (Saunders et al. 2015). Through the use of smaller samples, new general data will be accessible - which is emphasized by the inductive approach (Collis & Hussey 2014).

4.4 Research design

The research design for this study will be exploratory. An exploratory research design aims to secure in-depth qualitative information from a small sample. The point of this is to gain an understanding of an environment, perhaps in order to generate hypotheses or appropriate courses of action (Erickson 2017, 30).

With an exploratory research design, however, a researcher will not be able to paint the full picture as this type of research design entails a smaller sample than other types of studies. Instead, the researcher goes in-depth with a smaller sample, rather than painting a broad and perhaps superficial picture of a situation (Erickson 2017, 32-33). I go even more in-depth with this smaller sample size in section 4.5.2.

4.5 Method of data collection

To gather sufficient data to conduct this study, I will attempt to find Instagram-posts by SMIs addressing the coronavirus. For this study, I will make use of what is called 'purposive sampling'. Purposive sampling is a non-probability form of sampling, meaning that the researcher does not seek to sample research material on a random basis. The goal of this form of sampling is to sample participants in a strategic way, in order to collect relevant material (Bryman 2016, 408). I will attempt to find posts from several types of SMIs, meaning mega-, macro-, micro- and nano-influencers. Furthermore, I will try to find influencers of various niches and demographics. The separate posts and the SMIs behind them will be presented in section 5. I will try to find content across SMIs based on followers and niches as there are many things to be kept in mind. First of all, as discussed earlier, micro-influencers have higher engagement rates so their dedicated follower bases might be more inclined to absorb the message, so to say. However, a mega-influencer has the potential to spread their message across a wider array of people. Furthermore, the niche might affect how the message is conveyed in a multimodal context. Say, if a SMI's niche entails sport cars, he or she might talk about how one should disinfect their car. In this study, I will also include content from SMIs that I know personally and from my everyday life of browsing social media. I will do so, as I believe this affects the text-external elements of the analysis. I will present these first and be explicit about this knowledge in the section for empirical data. The data will only be in English as I do not speak, say, Finnish. I further address the choice of solely analysing English content in 4.5.2.

4.5.1 How the data was collected

In this section, I will talk about how the data was collected in more practical terms.

By making use of the sampling method purposive sampling, which I explained in the previous section, I was certain about about the data that I was attempting to collect. I wanted to find SMIs addressing the coronavirus around the world in some form or another. Please note that I will talk about the collection of data in this section and further address the content of the data in section 5., as mentioned in the previous section. To start, I knew from my own everyday life of browsing social media that the Canadian actor and entrepreneur Ryan Reynolds has addressed the coronavirus on his Instagram, so there was the first selection

for the data. Secondly, a Malaysian SMI and personal friend of mine, Nicole Chen, has addressed the movement control order in Malaysia as a result of the coronavirus. From there, I went on the popular search engine Google and searched for 'influencers spreading awareness of covid-19' on the date of 14/05-2020. The search provided me with an article by Stephen Desaulniers (2020) called 'How Instagram influencers are trying to slow the spread of coronavirus' which listed SMIs from both Bangladesh and the US who addressed the coronavirus. I also emailed the organisation mentioned in the introduction of this paper, PING Helsinki, about some of the SMIs that they work with and they were kind and provided me with a few names. Being unable to speak Finnish and not trusting automated translations to be adequate for this study, I decided to go with content posted by Kira Kosonen as this was posted in English. Overall, I set out to find data from around the world and by yielding data from Canada, the US, Finland, Bangladesh and Malaysia, I will argue that I succeeded in doing so.

I also wish to be clear and state that at the time of collection, this data was publicly available. I cannot ensure that this data becomes unavailable in the future. I will refer to the appendix of this study where the data, date of collection, link to the Instagram-post etc. is available.

4.5.2 Limitations to the method of data collection

When addressing the limitations for this method of data collection, it should be noted that the selected posts and SMIs affect the results. When searching, I am bound to find certain results while another researcher, should they decide to conduct this study themselves, might find other posts, thereby producing a different result than the one I will end up with. I also include data from SMIs who come to mind based on my personal everyday use of social media, which also affects the notion of a possibly varying result of this study. These SMIs are, however, still just as good for this study as any other as they suit the criteria. Another limitation is that I am unable to find and analyze every bit of content regarding the coronavirus pandemic from SMIs single-handedly. Even if possible, it would require a tremendous amount of work and time for one man. However, I still argue that with fewer samples, this study will still be able to adequately address the problem statement as it samples content from across SMIs as mentioned in the previous section. It should also be noted that data yielded from the use of search engines like Google may vary, depending on the time of searching and what one searches for. Furthermore, I believe my choice of only working with content written in English affects the text-external elements in the way that makes the content appear tailored for an international audience rather than a closer and more local audience when, say, a SMI from Finland posts content in English and not in Finnish. I do, however, argue that this should not affect my findings to an extreme point, if at all.

Having explained my method of data collection, I will go on to present my method of analysis in the following section.

4.6 Method of analysis

In this section, I will explain the method through which I will conduct the analysis for this study and the thoughts behind it. The analysis for this study will be a multimodal analysis that aims to elicit meaning from both textual- and visual elements.

'Multimodality' is a term that was introduced with the intention of highlighting the importance of taking semiotics into account and not only focus on language. Examples of semiotics in this context can be images and gestures (Iedema 2003, 33). Furthermore, meaning can even be created through interaction, which Norris (2011, 2) defines as every action which an individual may produce with tools, the environment and even other individuals. As it does not solely focus on language, multimodality attends to the full repertoire of resources which are used by people to communicate and represent phenomena and experiences (Norris & Maier 2014, 127). It has been argued that people of today are exposed to sounds, images and films through both traditional media and the internet to a much larger degree than before, which has had a large influence on not only the interest in - but also the development of - multi-semiotic complexity of the representations which are present in contemporary society (Iedema 2003, 33). As stated earlier, we also see a shift in tendencies, favoring the internet-based media rather than the traditional media (Wurmser 2019). This trend towards multimodal meaning-making shows the involvement of two particular topics. The first of these topics is changing the way that language is deemed the favoured way of meaning-making. The second of these topics is to blur the lines between the roles of elements like language, image, layout, page and document design respectively (Iedema 2003, 33). Therefore, language should not be considered as the given starting point or anchor for meaning-making (Norris & Maier 2014, 127). Multimodal analysis is a method that allows an analyst to break down compositions into their most basic components and, thereby, allow for the understanding of how these work together in order to create meaning (Machin 2016, 8).

What I argue makes this approach relevant for this study is the way that it may be used to figure out whether or not an autonomous element like an image or a text disrupts the message that the sender is trying to convey by not reinforcing the other elements, or if it adds to the message being coherent. Furthermore, it is valid for this study as Instagram is a multimodal media where a post often consists of both images and texts.

For the analysis of visual elements, which will henceforth be addressed as 'images'. I have decided to base my work on the book 'Reading Images' by Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2004). I will do so, as I believe the toolset provided in this book allows for a thorough and in-depth analysis of any given image and how it creates meaning. I find it important to mention that I will not be using every tool from the book's inventory as not all are relevant for the context of this analysis. I will include the most important tools of analysis, which I acknowledge is a matter of subjectivity.

To analyze the textual elements, henceforth addressed as 'texts' or 'captions', I will utilize the method called 'Text Analysis' by Lone Albrecht (2015). This method is concise and allows me to elicit meaning through a number of analytical tools. As Instagram posts most often have short captions, I argue that there is less of a need for a textual toolset as thorough and elaborate as the one presented by Kress and van Leeuwen. I will explain this method in the following section.

4.6.1 Method for textual analysis

Text analysis is a method which seeks to generate a profile of a source text. Text analysis provides a given analyst with the possibility of observing the conventions of language, genre, text-type and register of text that he or she is presented with. To procure a detailed understanding of a text, there are a number of analytical and strategic insights required (Albrecht 2005, 113-114).

When one seeks to analyse a given text, one must consider several elements. The first of these elements are the text-external elements.

4.6.1.1 Text-external elements

According to Albrecht (2005), any given text is situated within a social context. This context may also be called 'the extra-textual' setting of the text. Text-external elements are, in everyday talk, referred to as the sender, the receiver, time and place of publication etc.. To form an impression of a text, a researcher may begin by outlining the text-external elements of the text (Albrecht 2005, 115).

For this study, I will create an overview of the SMIs included, in order to properly present the empirical data in section 5. Therefore, the analysis will not emphasize the text-external elements as these will already have been presented. I must mention that one text-external element that the SMIs behind the content of analysis all share is that they are situated in the social context of the world going through a pandemic due to the spreading of the coronavirus. The analysis will focus on another element of text analysis which is the 'text-internal elements'. These will be explained in the following section.

4.6.1.2 Text-internal elements

Albrecht (2005) argues that any social context draws upon a set of linguistic features. Because of this, communication between, for example, a doctor and a patient will be constructed along the lines of certain implicit conventions that might not be well-suited for other contexts (Albrecht 2005, 116).

A text might be considered as a series of transparent layers, stacking on top of each other. The first of these layers is the 'field' which refers to the topic of the text. To form an impression of the field, an analyst may look at which 'participants' are participating in 'processes' under given 'circumstances' (Albrecht 2005, 117). These terms can be described as follows:

- Participants: Persons or objects participating in the processes. These can be actors or goals (Albrecht 2005, 118). These should not be mistaken with the 'represented participants' of the visual analysis. See 4.6.2 for more on this subject.
- Processes: What is happening in a sentence (Albrecht 2005, 119).
- Circumstances: Serve to illuminate the manner through which a given process is conducted (Albrecht 2005, 120).

The second of these layers is called the 'tenor' and refers to the relationship between the sender and the receiver. Such relationship can be seen when considering things like the whether the text is polite. The third layer is called 'mode' and refers to the way through which words and sentences are connected in order to create meaning, like if the language of the text is complex or simple. These three layers are conceived simultaneously by the reader of a text. (Albrecht 2005, 117).

I argue that this toolset is more than capable of providing what I need for my analysis as it allows for meaning to be elicited from a text while also looking at topics like the relationship between the SMIs and their audiences. In the following section, I will explain the toolset for the visual analysis.

4.6.2 Method for visual analysis

Grammar of a given language describes how words combine in clauses, sentences and texts. Just so, people, living beings, places and things can be combined in statements of complexity, be it greater or lesser. Kress and van Leeuwen have established a larger inventory of major compositional structures in their book 'Reading Images' (2004, 1) and argue that these structures have been established as conventions over the course of the history of visual semiotics.

In this section, I will explain the analytical tools of the inventory presented by Kress and van Leeuwen. I will do so concisely and also present these in a manner which is easy to grasp for the convenience of the reader. The first analytic tool I will talk about is 'vectors'.

4.6.2.1 Vectors

In an image, the actions and interactions between represented participants is represented by vectors. Vectors are straight lines which emanate from any given participant and portrayed in an image, thereby representing its relation to the world in which it is situated. Whenever vectors emanate from a represented participant, the participant is addressed as 'the actor' while the represented participant to which the vector is directed is addressed as 'the goal' (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 46). Now, imagine an image where a man is pointing at another man. This can be an example of vectors displaying action as the man is pointing at the other man or, rather, the actor is pointing at the goal.

Vectors can present different processes. These processes are called 'action processes'. There are three types of action processes and these are as follows:

- Non-transactional
If a vector emanates from a represented participant and not have a goal, the vector creates a non-transactional action process. This means that the action creating the vector is not 'done to' another participant (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004,62). An example could be of a man pointing at nothing
- Transactional
If a vector connects two represented participants, the action process becomes transactional. This means that a given action is directed towards, or 'done to', another represented participant (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 63). An example of a transactional action process has already been made with the man pointing at the other man.
- Bidirectional
This action process occurs when represented participants are acting as both the actor and the goal (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 63). An example of a bidirectional action process can be an image where two represented participants are seen shaking hands.

Vectors may also form reactional processes that occur whenever a vector emanates from a represented participant's eyes or glance. In such cases, the represented participant from which the vector emanates will no longer be referred to as the actor but 'the reactor' and the goal is now 'the phenomenon'. The phenomenon may be another represented participant or an action process. It should be noted that there does not have to be a visual phenomenon for a reactional process to occur, as reactional processes can also happen in images where a represented participant looks directly at the viewer (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 64-67).

While having vectors in an image can create relations between represented participants, the lack of thereof can make represented participants redundant to the meaning of an image. These are what Kress and van Leeuwen call 'circumstances'. Under circumstances, we find the terms 'setting', 'means' and 'accompaniment'.

Circumstances

These are explained by Kress and van Leeuwen (2004, 71) as represented participants that can be excluded from an image without affecting its basic meaning. However, this would imply a degree of informational loss.

- Setting
In everyday speech, this is commonly referred to as the background. The setting of an image can be left out in circumstances where, for example, a represented participant in the foreground of an image overlaps or obscures the setting (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 71).
- Means
This term refers to tools that are used in action. When represented as a circumstance, these tools will have no clear vector between the tool and the represented participant using it. An example of this can be a person's hand (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 72)
- Accompaniment
When there are no vector relating represented participants, but it is clear that they are related, the circumstance called 'accompaniment' occurs (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 72). An example of this can be an image in one participant is depicted as a pet and the other is depicted as the owner; there might not be vectors relating them but it is clear to the viewer that they are related somehow.

In the following section, I will explain the techniques which the producer of a given image may use to create relations with the viewer.

4.6.2.2 Representation and interaction

While the represented participants have been explained, an explanation of 'interactive participants' is due. In an image, the interactive participants are the producer and the viewer(s). Kress and van Leeuwen argue that meanings are visually encoded in manners which are dependant on certain competencies shared by the interactive participants. The fact that the interactive participants are separated means that social interaction is represented through an image and not physically enacted. Such an example of this interaction between the represented participants taking place can be put in relation to face-to-face communication. In such circumstances, people are often met with a greeting or a smile. In this situation, where such interaction is merely represented, a response from the viewer is not mandatory but they understand a greeting if they see an image where a represented participant is smiling and waving their arm at them (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 120-121).

This manner of interpersonal relations can be created in several ways, which will be explained in the following section.

The image act and the gaze

There is a difference between images in which one sees a represented participant looking directly at the viewer and images where the represented participants do not. When looking directly at the viewer, vectors which emanate from the eyes of the represented participant create an imaginary contact - or relation - between the viewer and the represented participant. The use of gestures is also a manner through which such contact can be established (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 122).

Not only the gaze from a represented participant, but also the 'distance' between a participant and the viewer plays a role in showcasing the kind of relationship there is between the viewer and the represented participant, as will be explained in the following section.

The size of the frame and the social distance

When producers create images, they must decide the distance there is between the viewer and the represented participant(s) of the image. By doing so, they decide whether the viewer and the represented participants are close or far from each other, as this suggests different relations between the viewer and the participant (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 130). The distance is decided by selecting whether to use 'close-ups', 'medium shots' or 'long shots'. These types of shots are described as:

- **Extreme close-ups:** Shows anything less than the head and shoulders of a represented participant.
- **Close-up:** The head and shoulders of the represented participant are in the frame.
- **Medium close shot:** Shows the represented participant as cut off approximately at the waist.
- **Medium shot:** Shows the represented participant as cut off approximately around the knees.
- **Medium long shot:** The represented participant's full figure is visible in the image.
- **Long shot:** The full body of the represented participant takes up half the height of the frame.
- **Very long shot:** The represented participant's full body takes up beyond half of the frame.

(Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 130)

In everyday interaction, the distance which people keep between them is determined by social relations. 'Close personal distance' is a term which entails the distance where people are able to hold each other and also the distance for intimate relationships. Close personal distance is a distance at which non-intimates are not allowed and coming this close can be considered an aggression. 'Far personal distance' is a term regarding the distance where it is no longer easy for people to touch each other, and topics entailing personal interest and involvement can be discussed (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 130).

The distance is but one factor which determines social relations. Another factor is the perspective from which the viewer sees the image. The perspective and its functions will be described in the next section.

Perspective and the subjective image

The perspective of an image holds the potential to express attitudes toward the represented participant which are socially determined (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 135).

Involvement and the horizontal angle

An example of a horizontal angle can be a photograph where the photographer is not directly facing the represented participants when taking the picture. In such an image, the photographer decided to photograph the represented participants from the side. When doing so, the photographer takes the picture from what is called an 'oblique angle'. It should be mentioned that such an angle is not solely linked to photographs (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 140).

The difference between a frontal angle entails detachment and involvement. The horizontal angle decides whether the viewer is 'involved' with the represented participants of an image. When looking at an image which is taken from an oblique angle, the viewer acts as an observer of the world of the represented participants. If the viewer looks at an image that is taken from a frontal angle, the viewer acts as a part of the world of the represented participants (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 143).

Power and the vertical angle

The vertical angle decides whether or not the viewer is put in a position of superiority or inferiority in relation to the represented participant. Should the represented participant be seen from a low angle, the participant automatically appears larger and thereby holds power over the viewer. In other cases, the represented participant might be presented from a higher angle, making the viewer hold power over the participant as he or she becomes the superior. Should both be at eye-level with each other, there is equality (Kress & van Leeuwen 2004, 146).

5. Empirical data

In this section, I will explain the empirical data that was collected for this study and is to be analysed in the following section. The material here, along with the date of access, links etc. will be available in the appendix for this study. In the appendix, the reader will also be able to find larger version of the images along with the full caption. As mentioned in 4.5.1, there are SMIs here whom I know personally and some I know from my everyday use of social media. I believe this affects the text-external element of the analysis that I know more about some of the SMIs and less about others, as I imagine is the case for any or most users of social media with regards to whomever they follow on social media. As mentioned, I will be explicit about which of the SMIs I dare say about whom my knowledge of is greater than the rest.

Appendix 1: Ryan Reynolds, @vancityreynolds



(App. 1.1)

Followers (as of 05/16-20): 35.9m.

Ryan Reynolds is a Canadian actor and entrepreneur. He is the owner of the companies Mint Mobile and Aviation Gin. Ryan Reynolds is a SMI whom I follow on social media and therefore have more knowledge of, compared to some of the other SMIs appearing in this study.

Appendix 2: Nicole Chen, @thenictionary



(App. 2.1)

Followers (as of 05/16-20): 16.1t.

Nicole is a personal friend of mine, so my knowledge of her and her content is greater than my knowledge of other SMIs in this study. Nicole is from Malaysia and her content usually entails dancing, makeup tutorials humorous content from her everyday life. She often engages with her followers.

Appendix 3: Kira Kosonen, @kira_kosonen



(App. 3.1)

Followers (as of 05/16-20): 27.6t.

Kira is a woman from Finland. I heard of her when I reached out to the organization PING Helsinki (see section 1.).

Appendix 4: Al Fahad Bari, @alfahadbari



(4.1)

Followers: 7,172.

Al Fahad Bari is a 22 year old content creator, photographer and fashion model, as he puts it on his profile, and is based in Bangladesh. I came across the profile of Al Fahad Bari through the article by Desaulniers (2020).

Appendix: 5: Fabi, @Fabilamode



(App. 5.1)

Followers: 38,1t.

Fabi is a SMI from California, posting lifestyle and fashion content. I found her profile through the article by Desaulniers (2020).

Having elaborated on everything from the methodology to the empirical data, I will conduct the analysis for this study in the following section.

6. Analysis

In this section, I will conduct an analysis of the data presented in section 5 in order to find out how SMIs are currently addressing the pandemic caused by the coronavirus. I will start with Appendix 1: Ryan Reynolds and work my way through the Instagram posts (see 4.5.1 and 5).

6.1 App. 1: Ryan Reynolds

Caption

*Until May 1st, for every bottle of Aviation ordered online, we'll donate 30% of proceeds as a tip to your bartenders - who REALLY miss you btw. LINK IN BIO. [#TipYourBartenders](#)
[#StayHomeSaveLives](#)*

(App. 1.3)

When looking at the first layer, or the 'field' (see 4.6.1), the participants of the text are "every bottle", "proceeds", "we", "your bartenders" and "you". In this case, "we" means Ryan Reynolds' company, Aviation Gin, which is not explicitly expressed in the text. Yet, it is implied through the text-external element (see 4.6.1.1) of knowing that Ryan Reynolds, the sender of the text, is the owner of the company (see 5 and 4.5.1). Furthermore, one may argue that the knowledge of "we" being the company Aviation Gin may be hinted at through Ryan Reynolds writing for every bottle of Aviation ordered. Though short, the caption actually holds a large value of processes when considering the capacity of the text. The first process (see 4.6.1.2) is found in the bottles being sold, thereby generating the participant "proceeds" which are then donated by "we", or Aviation Gin, to "your bartender", which are also conducting the process of missing "you", the reader. The circumstances (see 4.6.1) here link together the participants of the text like a snowball effect, when looking at bottles being sold so that proceeds are made in order for Aviation Gin to donate them etc.

The text also has a call to action in the form of "LINK IN BIO", hinting at what a link in the biography-section of Reynolds' profile for the reader to purchase gin, should they be interested.

The language of the text, or the 'tenor' (see 4.6.1), shows an informal language between Ryan Reynolds and the reader through the use of abbreviations like "we'll" and "btw", which is something one might write in a text to a friend and not a formal document, which can indicate a close and thereby informal relationship, unlike in e.g. a business environment. Here, there is room to be calm and casual. This goes hand in hand with the 'mode' (see 4.6.1), showing that the text is not complex in any way, but rather straightforward and to the point. However, though there is room to be calm, Reynolds can still be seen writing "REALLY" in capital letters which one usually relates to the action of shouting, thereby contradicting the calm element, but in this context it works to emphasise that your bartenders miss you.

Overall, the text has an aspect of community spirit when considering the many participants in the text, even though two of these, namely "every bottle" and "proceeds" are inanimate entities. However, they still go together with the other participants to create this chain of event through which caring and support is shown through tipping bartenders and missing the reader. Furthermore, the hashtags of the text, "[#TipYourBartenders](#)" and "[#StayHomeSaveLives](#)",

increase the aspect of community spirit of the text by showing how people may stand together - separately - through social distancing and staying home to prevent the spreading of the coronavirus. Yet, it also adds to the aspect of community spirit with the notion of tipping your bartenders in these troublesome times. - By purchasing Reynolds' products, of course. So, there is an agenda of selling gin, but the aspect of community spirit is still highly present in this text.

Image



(App. 1.2)

In this image, there are several represented participants (see 4.6.2) but the most prominent and arguably most important is Ryan Reynolds, situated almost in the middle of the image. From the elbow of Ryan Reynolds and throughout his arm, all the way to his hand, a vector (see 4.6.2.1) emanates and is directed upwards and out of the image, thereby generating a non-transactional action process (see 4.6.2.1). This non-transactional action process utilizes the glass in Reynolds' hand, making it a tool (see 4.6.2.1) in creating the action of a greeting. Even though the vector from the elbow is aimed outside the image, it goes along with the reactional process (see 4.6.2.1) created by the vector emanating from the eyes of Reynolds, creating a reactional process with Reynolds as the reactor and the viewer as the phenomenon. Through the gaze of Reynolds, interaction with the viewer is established. As a result of these events, the viewer is greeted by Reynolds and is welcomed into the setting (see 4.6.2.1). This welcoming is also emphasized by the fact that the viewer is situated at a frontal angle (see 4.6.2.2) and is, thereby, involved in the image.

When considering the setting, the image is situated in a room at what appears to be evening or night. The room is dimly lit and Reynolds is wearing a coat, creating the notion of him having recently been outdoor. It seems as if the only sources of light in the image come from

a dim lamp and perhaps a TV, due to the fact that one light is warm and the other is cold. When looking at the represented participant that is the bottle of Aviation Gin, one can find an example of accompaniment. Though there are no clear vectors connecting the bottle and Reynolds, it can be seen through the glass of clear liquid in his hand, which is most likely content from the bottle of Aviation Gin.

When looking at the distance between Reynolds and the viewer, it can be seen that they are at a close personal distance (see 4.6.2.2), as the image is taken from a medium close shot (see 4.6.2.2). This shows that Reynolds and the viewer are close, indicating that these are, in this context, not strangers to each other but instead familiar with each other. When looking at the angle of the image, the viewer is situated a little higher than Reynolds. Even so, it does not create the idea of the viewer being in a position of superiority. Rather, it creates a notion of the viewer having just entered the room while Reynolds has been there for a while. The viewer is then greeted and implicitly asked to partake in the setting.

When considering the text and the image, there is an aspect of community spirit through both the emphasis on Reynolds greeting the viewer, but also when considering the fact that the text emphasises standing together - separately. There is a mismatch in the presented narrative when considering the text's emphasis on staying home, through the hashtag *#StayHomeSaveLives* and the fact that Reynolds is meeting and greeting the viewer. However, it can be argued that the image stays true to the text's notion of standing together separately as there are no other people with Reynolds in the image. The text indicating that your bartenders miss you, indicating a close relationship between you and your bartenders, and Reynolds having a close relationship to the viewer in the image also creates a notion of solidarity, like Reynolds acknowledging the fact that the current situation of the pandemic and both you, Reynolds and your bartender having to stay home is tough, but we will get through it together. The idea of staying home is emphasized through its use of what might be a turned on TV in the setting of the image, indicating that Reynolds is perhaps watching TV in his living room. It might be argued that Reynolds wearing a coat disrupts this notion as he appears ready to live. However, he is sitting down and holding an almost full glass of gin, thereby creating the idea that he just entered the room, turned on the TV and poured a glass of gin, like he came from outside and was eager to get back home.

Overall, the post lets Reynolds' followers know that we are in this together and thus creates a notion of solidarity and sparks incite to stay home in order to save lives. While still conducting business, Reynolds and Aviation Gin further spark the notion of solidarity by letting the followers know that they can still support - or *tip* - their bartenders while enjoying a glass of gin from the comfort of their own living room.

6.2 App. 2: Nicole Chen

Caption

It's day 26, and today, I really wanted to give a shoutout to local eateries that need your help and support in these times! ☐☐♥

...

So here's one for [@knowherebangsar](#) [@knowherebangsar](#) [@knowherebangsar](#) 😊 I tried their al funghi mushroom pizza, and carbonara but the HIGHLIGHT of my meal was the Butter Burnt Steak and Smoked Duck Tapas! 😊

...

They also did the best thing by giving out 19% discount using code 'NICTIONARY19', so please guys, treat yourselves to some good food, take care of your body, and let's lend help support our local businesses like [@knowherebangsar](#)! ♥😊

...

These people have been working overtime to supply us with some amazing food, so spare a meal of the next 14 days to help 😊 It's a small kindness we can pat ourselves on the back for by the end of today heh 🙌

...

[#knowherebangsar](#) [#sapotlokal](#) [#supportlocalbusiness](#)

(App. 2.3)

In the field of this text, there are two prominent participants. These are Nicole Chen and the eatery Knowhere Bangsar. There are other actors as well, namely the many dishes mentioned; pizza, carbonara, steak and tapas. However, the important participants in terms of the overall meaning of the text are Nicole and Knowhere Bangsar.

The first process of the text can be seen with Nicole giving a 'shoutout' to local eateries needing helps as a result of the movement control order, thereby directing attention to these. The example Nicole provides of a local eatery in need of help is thus an eatery Knowhere Bangsar.

Another process is Knowhere Bangsar providing Nicole's audience with a discount code, thereby creating further incite the Nicole's audience to purchase food from them.

The most prominent circumstance in this text is the manner through which the people behind Knowhere Bangsar are working, namely that they are working overtime, which is most likely a result of the text-external element that is the crisis.

The tenor of this text entails a language which is informal and therefore indicates communication on a more personal level between Nicole and her audience. This makes the incite to support local eateries appear as a personal appeal and also a key issue to Nicole during this time of crisis.

The mode of the text sees a simple language which goes well with the informality and personal touch it has. Rather than presenting advanced facts and figures, Nicole is straightforward with her intentions of directing attention to local eateries which are struggling as a result of the crisis.

Overall, the caption of the post holds notions of solidarity and standing together. It does so, as it incites supporting local businesses in a time of crisis. Furthermore, Nicole wishes for her audience to take care of themselves, in this case with what she deems proper food.

Image



(App. 2.2)

In this image, there are several represented participants, some more important than others. When looking at the setting, this image sees Nicole, the most important participant, in an outdoor and garden-like setting with many plants on what appears to be a warm day. As there are no other people around, this is presumably situated in Nicole's garden.

There are other important participants in the image, namely the food items which for now will be considered as one unit and thus addressed 'the food'. Though there are no vectors emanating from the food, it is connected to Nicole and adds to the meaning-making of this image through accompaniment.

In this image, there are two prominent vectors creating meaning. The first is the one that emanates from Nicole's sleeve on her right arm and is directed upwards, through her hand, and out of the image. Along with this, Nicole is holding a glass in her hand and thus the glass becomes a tool in the non-transactional process that is Nicole raising the glass. The other vector emanates from the gaze of Nicole and is directed towards the viewer. As a result, this becomes a reactional process with Nicole as the reactor and the viewer as the

phenomenon. Through this reactional process, a relation with the viewer is established. It is further emphasised by Nicole's smile.

Another vector emanates from Nicole's left elbow and, just like the other, goes upwards and out through her hand. In contrast to the first, however, this vector creates a transactional action process (see 4.6.2.1) as it creates the action of Nicole keeping her hair away from her face, most likely in order to not be disrupted by it when either drinking from the glass or smiling at the viewer.

The image is taken from a medium close shot (see 4.6.2.2), thereby generating an image where the viewer and the primary represented participant, Nicole, are at close personal distance and are almost able to metaphysically touch each other. Actually, it is as if the viewer is seated at the table, opposite Nicole. The image is also taken from a frontal angle, thereby situating the viewer in the image. Furthermore, the image is taken from a height which puts Nicole and the viewer at an even level, thereby creating equality between the two.

Overall this post sees Nicole greeting - and establishing a relation with - her followers. This greeting is further emphasised by Nicole's smile, making the image welcoming in nature and it is as if the viewer is invited to partake in the setting around the table with all the food. This goes well with the caption as it incites people to support local eateries. Through the greeting of the image, this post becomes an invitation and thereby creates incite for Nicole's audience to collectively support local eateries as these are struggling during the crisis. The idea of this being an invitation to partake in supporting local eateries is further emphasised by the fact that the viewer is metaphysically seated at the table and simultaneously greeted, and the caption saying *let's lend help and support*, it is not solely Nicole or solely the reader but both of them. The image also brings the words of the caption to life, so to say, as the articles of food listed in the caption are now visually presented, showing one example of how these dishes may be enjoyed, namely in the warmth of your own garden. Both the image and the text create notions of solidarity through the greeting and the incite to show support.

6.3 App. 3: Kira Kosonen

Caption

10 things that are keeping me sane ATM.

•

1. Routines → *Waking up early and maintaining a healthy sleep rhythm.* •

2. Working → *I'm lucky to have the chance to work from home, create content and spread aweranness in this situation.*

•

3. Exercise → *My screen time is through the roof, but exercising keeps me balanced*

•

4. Cooking → *Having 3 main meals a day (breakfast, lunch and dinner) helps to maintain daily routines.*

•

5. Humor → *It's a serious situation, but memes etc. can take the edge of a bit. Also a big thanks to my man for making me laugh.*

•

6. Planning the future → *Some day this will be over. I'm trying to keep my dreams at float. You should too.*

•

7. Cleaning → *When I feel frustrated and start to panic.. I clean. It's the easiest way for me to clear my mind.*

•

8. Cutting down news → *It's enough to read the news once a day to keep yourself informed.*

•

9. Social support → *FaceTime is THE BEST thing atm. Talking with family and friends about everything has kept me sane.*

•

10. Helping others → *We are all in this together and I have found huge purpose to everything by trying to help. Even the smallest things make big differences now. I can assure that by helping others you are going to feel better too. 🙌👊*

(App. 3.3)

When looking at the field of this text, there are several participants but the most important is the sender, Kira Kosonen. The other participants are minor and of less importance, but they all go together to create the overall meaning of the text. An example of such a participant can be “exercise”. In this text, Kira acts as the goal while the many participants are actors. Overall, the primary process of this text is keeping Kira sane. The processes, of which there are several, are listed and they all combine to create the things which are keeping Kira sane. Though not explicitly stated, one may assume that the need to be kept sane arises from the text-external element of the pandemic and the ‘stay at home’-initiatives, movement control orders etc., which may be taxing to some people. The circumstances of this caption all serve the same purpose of highlighting how the processes of the many participants are keeping Kira sane. An example of this can be how Kira states that exercise keeps her balanced, as staying home results in much more time spent in front of screens, be it TV, computer or her phone.

The tenor shows Kira having a rather neutral and informal relationship with her audience through the use of abbreviations, thereby writing like one would speak in everyday talk with, say, their friends or family. This makes the text relatable in the way that this could as well be a friend elaborating on how they are currently handling the crisis and the issues of social distancing.

When looking at the third layer of Kira’s caption on her Instagram-post, it is presented as a list. This has a very tangible and informative nature to it, making it the content and its many points easy to grasp and process as a reader.

She does not only present the things which help her through this struggle but she also explains why and how they help her. Furthermore, she does so as a friend or at least one with whom the audience may feel a personal relation. She also addresses her emotions during this time of panic, giving the text a notion of expertise as she herself feels frustration and does not just provide this information with no experience regarding this subject. She also incites community spirit by stating that *we are all in this together*, thereby standing with her audience instead of separating herself by e.g. saying “you can do this”.

Image



(App. 3.2)

In this image, there is very little action. The most prominent participant is Kira who is situated in what appears to be a living room.

The little action there is in the image is created from vectors throughout both of Kira's arms and towards the magazine, creating the transactional action process of her holding the magazine in front of her head. Though her eyes are not fully visible, her gaze being directed towards the magazine creates a reactional process with her as the reactor and the magazine being the phenomenon. These processes, the transactional action process and the reactional process, go together to create scenario in which Kira is reading the magazine, making the magazine a tool in this process. Apart from that, there is no more action to be seen in this image. Kira is not engaging with the viewer in any way and the image is taken from an oblique angle (see 4.6.2.2), thus making the viewer an observer of what is happening in the image. Furthermore, no important participants in the image are connected

through accompaniment. It may, however, be argued that several of the participants, e.g. the couch, go together to create the setting of this being a living room.

As there is little action taking place in the image, the image emphasises the notion of being alone in a room, as is the case with Kira. The foundation of the post's caption is the very notion of being alone and how one can handle this. It may be argued that, as Kira talks about in the text as well, she is cutting down on news in this image and perhaps reading a magazine for inspiration on how to plan her future. The image and the text go well together, creating notions of not just community spirit through social distancing, but also supporting each other through these tough times, as she provides tips with examples of how her followers themselves may handle the crisis.

6.4 App. 4: Al Fahad Bari

Caption

Hello to all my Instagram Family members. Hope you all are doing well and staying at your home.

We will always remember 2020 as the most terrible year of our life. Because in this year what we are facing no one has seen before and hopefully will not see again. I know we all miss being together, we all miss seeing each other, but at this time we have to protect ourselves. We have to stay home to keep us and other people safe.

We all always wanted to be a superhero. It was always our dream to be one. Trust me this is the time. COVID 19 is the BAD GUYS. You don't need to do any superhero works like jumping from a building,

climbing a tower, jumping into the fire or fighting with villains, all you have to do is to STAY HOME.

This is the best way to be a superhero and to save your family. And this may save other families too.

It's not just staying home, we have to stay home and stay hygienic. If you ever feel like going out for any important work never forget to wash your hands and follow all the necessary steps after returning home. I suggest everyone to do so.

Spread positivity and safety. STAY HOME and save people and your family.

Be sure to visit <https://bit.ly/WHOCovid19BD> or follow [@WHO](#) for more information on how to keep you and your family safe during this rough time!

Honoured to be a part of the social leader awareness campaign supported by the [@lctdivision](#) and [@nationalbanklimited](#).

[#CalmCovid19](#) [#EducationOverFear](#) [#safeathome](#) [#istayhomefor](#)
[#TogetheratHome](#) [#FlattenTheCurve](#)

(App. 4.3)

When looking at the first layer of the the caption, there are several participants present in the text. The most important are Al Fahad Bari, his followers, covid-19 and WHO. The overall processes and circumstances entail remembering childhood dreams, wanting to be a superhero and staying home to prevent the spreading of covid-19.

The tenor sees Al addressing his followers as family. The language itself is very inclusive and on a personal level. Throughout the text, Al writes “we” and not only “I” or “you”. Through this, it can be argued that Al and his followers almost one single participant. Al is also very inclusive in the way that he groups himself and his followers as those who now have to step up and be superheroes while distancing them from covid-19 as the disease is addressed as the villain, thereby creating a ‘them and us’ mentality and separating himself and his followers from the disease. The notion of community spirit is emphasised by Al using the hashtags #istayhomefor and #TogetheratHome, indicating that even though him and his followers are not physically situated together, they are mentally standing together by staying home and thereby reduce the spreading of the virus or, as he puts it, “save people and your family”. - Instead of being heroic by jumping into fires and fighting villains, Al states that he and his followers should stay home.

When looking at the mode of the text, it is simple and emphasises a personal approach and an inclusive element, primarily through Al stating that “we” have to do so. When looking at the structure of the text, it can be seen how Al structured the caption of this Instagram-post like a funnel in the way that he started with a broad approach, first of all greeting his followers as family and talking about how people miss each other, thereby talking about their childhood dreams of being superheroes and then addressing covid-19 and the stay at home initiatives.

Near the end of the caption, Al redirects his followers to a link with information on how to keep friends and family safe from covid-19 and states that they may follow WHO on Instagram, thereby spreading awareness and information about the guidelines.

Image



(App. 4.2)

In this image, there are two prominent participants. There is a third participant but this one acts as a tool in a process and will be explained further. First, however, the two most prominent participants are Al Fahad Bari and his cat. There is not a lot of action to be seen in this image. However, there is a vector emanating from Bari's fingers on his right hand, going out through his fingers and towards the sign to create the transactional action process of him holding the sign, or the previously mentioned tool.

In this image, Bari and his cat are connected through accompaniment and they are both reactors performing a reactional process with the viewer as the phenomenon, as they are simultaneously looking directly at the viewer. Combined with the frontal angle and the distance from which the image is taken, a medium shot (see 4.6.2.2), a close and personal relation is established between the viewer and the participants of the image.

The two processes, the transactional action process of Bari holding the sign and the reactional process of him looking directly at the viewer go together to create the notion of him showing the sign to the viewer, thereby advocating its message. When looking at the vertical angle, the image is situated at a point where there is equality between the viewer and the participants, thereby creating a situation in which communication between equals is taking place. This makes the communication appear more along the lines of a kind request, rather than a demand from a superior.

When looking at the sign, and hereby taking Albrecht's toolset into account so as to not confuse 'participants' with 'represented participants' by Kress and van Leeuwen (See 4.6.1 and 4.6.2 for more on this), the participants are Bari and his follower, as he writes "let's" and/or the viewer of this image. The process of this text is inciting the conduction of a superhero's work by, in this case, staying home and thus staying safe from the spreading of covid-19. The language here is informal, casual, straight forward and thereby easy to grasp.

When looking at the setting, Bari is alone with his cat in what appears to be a living room. This goes well with him stating that people should stay home as there are no signs of him having visitors in the image. Both the text and the image go well together to create a message of the importance of staying home through the references to superheroes which are characters known to often save the world. Overall, Bari makes use of intertextuality in several ways through him referencing superheroes and also linking to other types of content with information regarding the coronavirus.

6.5 App. 5: Fabi

Caption

I hope you are all practicing self-care while looking forward to brighter days ahead. I know that this is a difficult and uncertain time and I just want to remind you all that you are never truly alone
♡

•

During these last few weeks of social distancing, social media has played such a huge role in keeping us connected. From Instagram Story challenges, to Instagram Live workouts, I have seen this online community coming together to foster a sense of hope and positivity while reminding all of us that we're in this together 🌍 •

As you guys know, I'm obsessed with all of these Instagram challenges and have asked you guys to tag me in as many as you can (except for the push-up challenge plz don't tag me in those lol) •

But now, I want to challenge you guys to virtually reach out to your friends and loved ones as well by posting a similar photo and using the hashtags [#TogetherAtHome](#) [#CalmCovid19](#) and [#GlobalHighFive](#)

•

[@arika](#), [@thishanabee](#), and [@makeuphuney](#) will you accept this challenge?

(App 5.3)

In this text, the primary participants are Fabi, her followers (addressed as “you”) and social media with Instagram being emphasised. Overall, the primary process taking place here is interaction. Interaction happens between Fabi and her followers through social media, having social media acting as a circumstance simultaneously.

Here, the relationship between Fabi and her followers is also very calm and casual. This post is, to a large degree, a plea to her followers. The language of this text is also simple and straightforward, making the message clear and easy to understand. What Fabi actually does in this text is that she addresses the current situation, showing empathy and solidarity for her followers, while still reminding them that things will get better. Furthermore, she addresses how she believes that her community has come together during the crisis, thereby fostering positivity and more solidarity.

She goes on to proclaim her love for Instagram challenges in which people post content of themselves doing a given task and then publicly challenges other people to do it. From here, Fabi goes on to challenge her followers to post images similar to the one she has posted here. She also tags three other Instagram-users. Through this, she does not only reach out to her followers, and thereby spread awareness, but she also pervades other profiles who then, should they also post similar content, spreads awareness to their base of followers. Through such action, there is the possibility of creating an ‘echo’(see 3.3) of people sharing Fabi’s message. An example of this echo can be seen in App. 4 where Bari uses the same hashtag, “#TogetherAtHome”, as Fabi encourages her followers to share.

Image



(App. 5.2)

In this image, there is one participant of importance, namely Fabi herself. The setting and other participants, like the fridge in the background are of no importance to this image and can easily be left out without entailing a loss of meaning. However, it should be noted that the lack of other living participants does hold relevance for the image as Fabi is portrayed as being alone, which relates to the caption talking about social distancing during the crisis.

In terms of action in the image, there is a vector emanating from the shoulder of Fabi, going all the way out through her stretched arm and hand, making the non-transactional of Fabi reaching out for something. When looking at the eyes of Fabi, a reactional process with Fabi as the reactor and the viewer as the phenomenon can be seen. This reactional process can be linked to the previously mentioned action process, thereby making Fabi reach out to the viewer. This notion is further emphasised by the frontal angle of the image which metaphysically situates the viewer in the image. In terms of the vertical angle, there is equality between Fabi and the viewer, making this a situation in which the represented participant is interacting with what is most likely a friend or family. Fabi's smile and the fact that she is smiling almost becomes an invitation. Not to participate in the setting as the text emphasises social distancing, but rather to participate of the challenge about posting similar images. Through this, Fabi becomes a guide or a leader, which fits the notion of her inciting people to partake in this challenge in order to spread awareness. Overall the caption and the image create a post in which incite to spread awareness is sparked, having Fabi inviting

people to partake in the challenge, presumably with the intention of the challenge reaching far and wide by being shared throughout Instagram.

7. Discussion of findings

Having conducted the analysis for this study, I will use this section to present the reader with a discussion of the findings, in which I compare my findings with the presented theory and conceptual model of section 3.

From the analysis, it can be seen that SMIs are already sharing content which appears along the lines of the already established crisis response strategies. To refresh, the first crisis response strategy, instructing information, which entails instructing the intended audience to protect them in physical terms. The other, adjusting information, seeks to conduct efforts in order to help the intended audience cope with the crisis psychologically.

When comparing the findings to the strategy of instructing information, it can be seen how SMIs may provide proper guidance by sharing relevant and valuable information, as is the case with Al Fahad Bari (App. 4), who shared a link to WHO's website and suggested that his followers should follow WHO on Instagram. A thing which all the images had in common was that there were no other people in the images, but only the SMIs. This helped presenting the message of social distancing as there was no disruption caused by a mismatch due to the combination of the notion of social distancing and an image packed with people. When looking at Kira Kosonen's content (App. 3), she presented a large amount of information in a way which was tangible, making vast amounts of information easy to process. The content she presented, however, was more related to the other crisis response strategy, 'adjusting information'. Yet, it still shows how a lot amount of information may be presented in a tangible way through social media.

In terms of adjusting information, however, it can be seen that all of the SMIs are in one way or another spreading notions of solidarity through the crisis, emphasising how we are all together, so to say. Community spirit makes up a large part of the content, as many are addressing how their followers should stay safe and take care, while others also spread awareness of the fact that businesses are struggling, like Ryan Reynolds and Nicole Chen. It should be noted, however, that Ryan Reynolds was promoting his own company and Nicole's content was most likely a paid advertisement even though her post does not explicitly state it. Even so, it still shows how attention may be brought to struggling businesses during a time of crisis.

Kira Kosonen (App. 3) also posted content that can easily be related to the strategy of adjusting information, as she addressed the concern of having to stay home which has been crucial throughout the crisis in order to prevent the spreading of covid-19. She did so by posting a large list with examples of things helping her throughout the crisis, indirectly suggesting that her followers could do the same if they are struggling with having to stay home during the crisis. Another thing which has played a part in four out of five posts has been the gaze of the represented participants. They have created an interpersonal relation to their viewers by posting images wherein they look directly at the viewer from a close

distance, creating notions of friendliness and openness, which can be argued helps when helping people cope with a crisis.

When holding the findings up against the theory of eWOM and WOM, it can first be assumed that the content may be shared among people, thereby spreading its reach. Furthermore, there is also the idea of challenging people to spread awareness, as is the case with Fabi (App. 5) who not only challenged three other Instagram-users to spread awareness but also all of her followers, thereby potentially creating large quantities of eWOM. In terms of eWOM spreading throughout social media, it can also be seen that Bari (App. 4) and Fabi use the same hashtag, #TogetherAtHome, which creates a level of intertextuality, connecting these two posts as people may find both of these posts when searching for the hashtag. This means that a follower of Bari may stumble upon Fabi and thus find her challenge, potentially then spreading awareness themselves, thereby showcasing how an echo may occur throughout social media. It should be mentioned that Bari and Fabi are found through the same article by Desaulniers (2020) who may have browsed content with the hashtag #TogetherAtHome to find these two. Apart from that, it should also be mentioned again that these two are from Bangladesh and the US respectively, so it seems that their only relation is through that very same hashtag. Nonetheless, they do display how an echo may be created on social media, thereby spreading awareness in a time of crisis.

Having discussed the findings, the conclusion of the study will be presented in the following section.

8. Conclusion

This study set out to find out how governments may utilize SMIs in times of crisis, but also to get an idea of how SMIs around the world are addressing the pandemic and what can be learned from SMIs and social media during a time of crisis.

In conclusion, this study has found that, when a crisis occurs, governments may react accordingly through an array of crisis response strategies. In this study, however, only two of those were addressed as they fit the current situation (see 3.1). Having chosen what crisis response strategies to utilize, governments may communicate their message through social media and SMIs. From there, it holds the potential to not only reach a wide audience, depending on the follower base of the SMI alone. Due to social media making it easy for users to share content, the message may reach even further and thus echo throughout social media, allowing a government's message to reach even further.

Drawing upon knowledge from before the study was even started (see introduction), a SMI with a large follower base, say a mega-influencer, will have the ability to reach a large audience before his or her followers even begin to share a government's message and may potentially create larger echoes from the start, depending on how many are sharing his or her post. A micro-influencer with less followers but higher engagement rates, however, may be more likely to answer questions from their followers, should any of these be confused about how to e.g. stay safe from physical harm when a SMI is sharing a message based on the crisis response strategy of instructing information (see 3.1).

The study found that, around the world, SMIs are addressing the pandemic in different ways. A pervasive element of the analysis showed that many SMIs are spreading notions of solidarity and empathy by e.g. addressing that they themselves are aware of the struggle it can be to have to stay inside and practice social distancing while also providing their personal tips of how they cope with the situation. Others spread community spirit by inciting that their follower base did 'superhero work', thereby motivating their followers to stay inside. The study also found that, in one way or another, be it through their gaze and distance in an image or perhaps through the way they communicated in text, SMIs addressed their followers as if they had a personal relation which may also help followers better cope with the situation as information, motivation, empathy etc. is shared in a personal manner and not through means of authority. These methods relate to the crisis response strategy of adjusting information as, again, the strategy aims to help people cope with a crisis psychologically.

The study also found that while still inciting community spirit and motivating people to stay at home, SMIs may also spread links to sites containing important information and redirect the attention of their followers towards Instagram-profiles like those of the WHO or others that might be relevant during a time of crisis. Doing so is related to the crisis response strategy of instructing information (see 3.1) as it seeks to protect the audiences of the SMIs from physical harm during the crisis.

SMIs were also shown to be creative in terms of how to spread awareness and a sense of solidarity, through the use of challenges. By creating a post which emphasised these elements and then tagging (and thereby challenging) other people to do the same, the challenge (and thereby the message that it seeks to spread) holds the potential to reach far and wide as they echo throughout social media. Another way that SMIs were found to address the pandemic also had a monetary background as, while addressing the pandemic and that businesses were struggling as a result, they also managed to promote their own or other businesses. However, the message that businesses in general were struggling still came across, not only creating the idea that the businesses they were promoting were struggling.

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