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Risk and Crisis Communication: Opportunities and Challenges of Social Media

## Policy round table

### Risk and Crisis Communication and the new social media: Opportunities for international cooperation

*Ulf Bjurman*  
Senior Advisor

- How can the experience of tools such as crowd sourced crisis mapping help to improve the reliability of information sources? What policy challenges might this raise?
- Are crisis communication strategies losing some degrees of freedom because of pre-emption by social media, either domestic or international?
- Is there a benefit to be gained by establishing a national crisis communication platform to coordinate messaging when risks involve the competence of multiple public authorities and other actors? How should such platforms be coordinated with regional, international partners?

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## Risk and Crisis Communication to-day

- Channels and modes of communication have changed and are under dynamic development and change which can be expected to continue
- Authorities are using new communication channels including social media regularly – the public use them according to their own choice, age, social conditions, etc., also for crisis communication
- The pressure is strong on authorities to change and adapt themselves to the new media landscape and changing communication channels and more transparency
- Within crisis communication there is an immense on-going paradigm shift and move away from only using the traditional channels and methodologies to two way communication including use of new media and channels
- Attention must be given to how to use new media, including social media, beneficially in a national and international perspective without overburdening the emergency and crisis communication and management
- From communication in recent major crises, also with an international dimension and using new media with an "all-hazards approach", there are some important practical experiences and useful lessons to learn

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## Definition and main uses of social media

- Social media are new and under constant change/development - however the peoples' general understanding of "social media" is as a rule insufficient
- It is necessary to promote better understanding but also to adopt a clear definition

### Social media in risk and crisis communication:

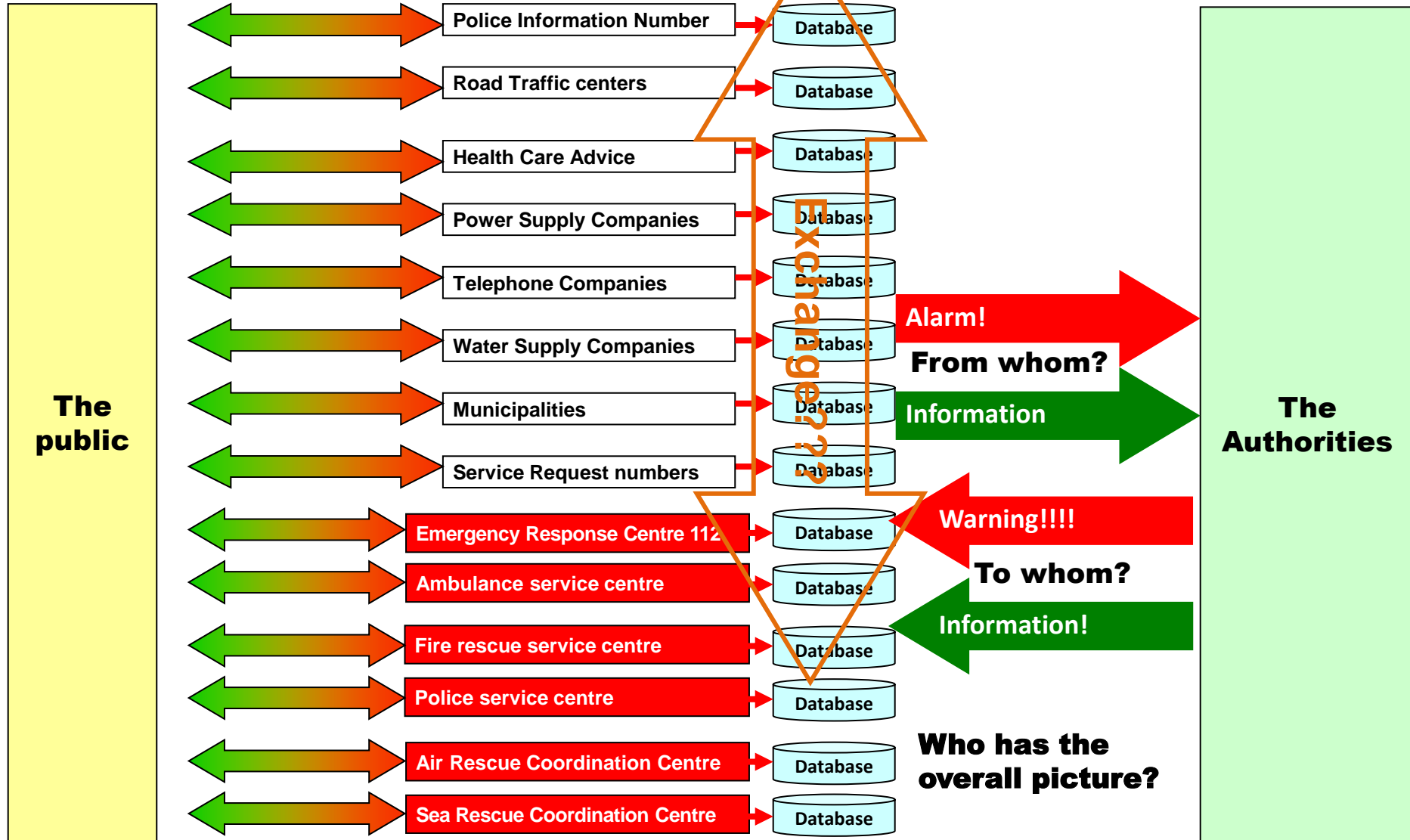
- Supplement other communication channels, i.a. enabling two way communication, and are used by both the public and authorities/other actors
- Provides a source for gathering information/data which can be demined , analyzed and fused and the "harvest" can improve situation awareness

### Caveats (besides etic and integrity concerns which require more attention):

- Social media are subject to intensive and dynamic change/development and serve a wide range of purposes: communication in different groups depending on age, social background, etc. and for instance for communication with people with hearing impairment, within care of elderly
- Use will differ between communication in
  - Strategic crisis management within political and massmedia arenas
  - Operational crisis management – differently for national security/police, local level rescue and ambulance/health care and infrastructure providers, etc.
- Central level must support and
  - provide operational intervention commanders user friendly access to information/data
  - assist in the dissemination of coordinated information and messages through social media and other channels to the public and massmedia

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Risk and crisis communication is complex  
different channels including social media are used  
the information nearly always remains with each actor in his database



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identified requirements for crisis communication

examples of applicable communication channels including social media

**Speed:** Fixed telephony, Mobile (speech and CB), Radio and TV

**Priority:** Fixed telephony, Radio and TV

**Capacity:** Mobile (CB), Radio, TV and Internet (E-mail, IP telephony, Website, RSS feeds, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube)

**Geographic precision:** Fixed telephony and Mobile (Speech, SMS, MMS and CB)

**Numeric precision:** Fixed telephony, Radio and TV

**Individuals or groups of people with particular needs:** All channels

**Security as regards delivery:** Radio, TV, Fixed telephony and Mobile (CB)

**Security as regards authentication (SPAM):** Mobile (CB), Internet (Website, RSS feeds and Facebook), Radio and TV.

**Robustness as regards electricity supply and other disturbances:** Fixed telephony, Radio, TV and Internet (E-mail, IP telephony, Website, RSS feeds, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube)

**Traceability:** No channels fulfil this service requirement.

**Availability:** Radio and TV.

**Ability of reaching many people:** Mobile telephony (CB), Radio, TV and Internet (Website, RSS feeds, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube).

**Confirmation and provision of a response message:** all two way channels can manage this requirement.

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## General background to use of social media in crisis communication

- Risk and crisis communication are natural and necessary components of emergency and crisis management.
- Public authorities need to coordinate their crisis communication and in general enhance transparency.
- Central government needs to assist operational local/regional services with common systems for
  - alarming/dispatching and two-way exchange with the public and common operational crisis communication between crisis management actors
  - providing information and data, gathered and compiled from communication with the public through different channels and other sources, for situation awareness
  - making available information and messages, coordinated across administrative sectors, on the national crisis portal
- Decisions on which communication channels including social media are appropriate to use in different national and international crisis communication situations are made on central, regional and local levels respectively
- Policies related to ethical and private integrity matters in crisis communication through social media should be developed urgently

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## **Ensuring the reliability of the information**

Basic information, more specifically for certain risk objects, is available for the incident commander in the intervention planning of the service and the decision support system.

Actual information is provided through emergency calls and can

- be gathered from emergency calls (where the positioning of calls can be made and with many calls an affected geographical area can be defined) and other two way communication with the public
- come from different emergency or public services including their observations

Additional information/data can be provided through social media or extracted from communication on social media and will be of significant importance in more complex situations

Supplementary information, received from the emergency call and dispatching system and gathered from other sources, is integrated into the decision support and command and control system and in this way provided or communicated to the intervention command

The incident commander makes the assessment of the situation and sets operational priorities and makes tactical decisions. From available information and data, the incident commander as a rule gets a good overview of the situation. Incident commanders must however have sufficient education and professional training and operational experiences from service and exercises.

The questions related to the unreliability of certain information haven proved to be a minor problem, and there are indications in recent research that these problems seem to have been exaggerated

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## **crisis communication strategies**

- The role and responsibility of authorities is to provide as far as possible verified information to the public, not to compete with massmedia
- The strategies must be adapted to the conditions and culture/attitude in each country including what means of communication that are available and in use
- Social media provide additional means of communication and also give access to more information which can be important for the crisis management to have access to
- Problems are related to the beneficial and necessary use and integration of social media without overburdening of the communication systems and the emergency and crisis management are necessary to resolve
- Emergency and crisis management including crisis communication need to be executed professionally nationally, in cross border and international collaboration
- The strategies cannot be seen as losing their freedom they always have to be adapted to societal needs and conditions!



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## **national crisis coordination platform for messaging and dissemination of information**

Norway and Sweden have platforms i.e. pro-active crisis portals managed by DSB and MSB and supported by committees consisting of the crisis management actors

In recent crises, MSB implemented this approach for coordinated messages, information and Q&As used by operators responding to calls from the public

The EU MASSCRISCOM Project proposed a model for crisis communication:

- included a platform for coordination with an "editorial office" (EO) cooperating with the affected competent authorities should see to it that information is compatible and ensures that messages are coherent or similar
- the EO should also be responsible for the national crisis portal disseminating common information to the public

MASSCRISCOM also proposed and noted that

- Competent authorities should have access to the same information to create a common situation awareness
- improved cooperation horizontally across sectors and an ability to share information
- Media publish quickly information when a crisis occurs - often not verified and misleading, exaggerated or completely wrong
- New social media systems are now established and used for sharing information also on crises
- Social media lead to many people starting to communicate with each other also at an early stage of such events

MASSCRISCOM concluded that the authorities must therefore act with speed and disseminate correct information to the public – to indicate their involvement and avoid as far as possible the public's picture of the crisis from being incorrect

# MASSCRISCOM Project Results

1. Analysis of requirements on the communication system for handling one way or two way crisis communication between authorities and the public
  - providing an information number service to avoid overburdening 112
  - capability for disseminating warning, information and guidance messages also within a particular limited geographical area and communication with individuals who have particular needs and/or the language aspects
  - reaching the set general requirements on robustness and functionality
  - providing examples on what communication channels that can fulfil these identified requirements
2. Presentation of a coherent and generic "all-hazards approach" crisis communication model
  - to be based on an all-hazards approach and existing conditions
  - to improve two way communication with the public and media
  - to reduce the burden on the European 112 Emergency Call Number
3. Proposal to introduce a special and devoted Crisis Communication Centre (CCC) network