# whathappened

Do we trust social media in situations of crisis?

Amanda Ehn
Abstract

Social media is widely used as a communication channel today, and especially in a crisis, information needs to be correct and reliable; it could mean the difference between life or death. However, social media also has another side; it brings people together after a crisis and gives people an opportunity to show solidarity and love to one another.

The aim of this thesis was to examine the relationship between social media usage and trust in situations of crisis, to shed light on the usage of social media in a crisis situation and whether the information retrieved from those platforms is trusted.

The thesis describes the theories behind trust, social media, and crisis communication in order to have a base to build the research on. The research focused on three questions: How was SoMe used by people affected by the attack in Stockholm 2017? Do those affected by the attack trust the information on social media? What are the greatest problems with social media in situations of crisis?

A single instrumental case study methodology was used to answer these questions, and the study itself was centered around the attack on Drottninggatan in Stockholm the 7th of April 2017. The participants in the study were either in Stockholm when the attack happened or had loved ones in the city. The study was conducted within a month of the attack.

The study revealed that not only was the information in a crisis trusted more than the general information on social media, it also described the usage of social media in a crisis and the factors that affected the reliability of the information shared on social media. It revealed the good and the bad aspects of social media during the crisis, and it revealed what the users think were the most
significant problems with using social media in a crisis.

The factors that may determine the reliability of the information itself were the source of the information, the content, and fake news. Fake news was also labeled as one of the major problems with social media in a crisis and, also the lack of sufficient source criticism. The participants called for more official statements on social media, however, the study also showed that fewer than half of the participants followed any key communicator on social media which also posed a problem.

The conclusions drawn from this study were that social media is a proper communication channel which reaches many people in a very short time. Social media shows the best sides of humanity through features such as the hashtag, which is largely used to show solidarity after a crisis. However, the problems still exist even if social media is largely trusted and works well – problems such as the amount of fake news and rumors that are spread through social media. These problems can be reduced by educating people on the importance of source criticism, how to recognize fake news and not to share them.

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1. Introduction

The world as we know it is in turmoil. Threats of terrorist attacks are becoming a part of our daily life. Attacks are so common in countries such as Syria and Israel that we no longer find them in our daily news, but what once happened 'over there' is closer to home than ever.

It was a typical Friday afternoon on the 18th of August 2017, when panic erupted in the market square in the middle of Åbo, Finland. It was four in the afternoon, and people were on their way home through town when a man, armed with a knife, stabbed ten people. Two women died in the attack, and eight others were wounded. There was much confusion regarding what happened, and the first reports received by the police only stated that people lay on the ground in the middle of the market square, possibly hurt and that bystanders were chasing a possible offender. (Ekstrand, 2017.)

The police shot the offender in the leg three minutes after the first emergency call and confiscated a knife. The attack was first treated as murder and attempted murder but was later upgraded and treated as a possible terrorist attack, the first in the Finnish history. (Ekstrand, 2017.)

The attack made international headlines and is the first attack reported in Finland, but there are plenty of other attacks that have made major headlines all over Europe: the bombing in Oslo and shooting on Utøya (22nd of July 2011), the attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris (7th of January 2014), the coordinated attacks in Paris on the 13th of October 2015, the bombing of Brussels Airport (22nd of March 2016) and the nineteen ton cargo truck that drove straight into the crowds on Promenade des Anglais in Nice (14th of July 2016) Multiple attacks made headlines also in 2017 and one of the largest in Europe was the suicide bombing at Manchester Arena, just as people left an Ariana Grande -concert on the 22nd of May. The youngest victim in that attack was only eight years old, while 21 others also died that night and yet another 116-people left injured. There have been many
other attacks in the last 17 years, and the deadliest of them all is the 9/11 attacks on World Trade Center, New York in 2001. (BBC News, 2017; BBC News, 2016; Johnston, 2017.)

We might never understand these attacks, but we want to know everything about them. It will take a long time before the Scandinavians forget the name of Anders Behring Breivik and his unforgivable bombing of Oslo and the massacre on Utøya. What stands out about this specific attack is the use of social media. It is not because the government or any other organization sent out any warning through social media, but because the victims alerted the public that something was happening on Utøya through their social media accounts. The first reports about shootings on the island surfaced on social media 12 minutes before the first news report to emergency services (Perng, et.al., 2013). Those who were on Utøya went online to their Twitter and Facebook accounts saying that someone was shooting and that this might be their last post. Sixty-nine people lost their lives on that island, and at least 110 were wounded. A total of 77 people died in the attacks, and 319 were injured. (Castillo, 2016; Nrk.no, 2017.)

There have also been situations where authorities or organizations sent out warnings through social media; the University of California in Los Angeles sent out a warning during an attack on their campus informing students that the whole campus was on lockdown through their ‘Bruin Alert’-page on Twitter. (Nrk.no, 2017; UCLA, 2017.)

Today, when something happens, what many of us turn to first is social media. Using hashtags to look for trending subjects or tweets posted in the area to receive more information about what happened. The ‘traditional’ media have always been our source for information, and we still use traditional media to gather information about an event, but sometimes the traditional media have just as limited information as we do, especially when the focusing event is still happening or when the news first breaks. The first reporters today are those who were there when it happened and then shared their experience on social media, not the reporters the news media send to the scene. (Ghersetti, 2015.)

‘Spreading like a wildfire’ is a good picture of social media during a crisis or disaster. In
recent years, social media has made a leap into our daily lives, almost to the point where many cannot live without their smartphones and the instant internet connection. Sometimes it feels as if the most significant every-day struggle is battery management, just to make sure that our all too important phone does not die on us halfway through the day, or way too early in the evening.

Social media is a new way of life; it is a tool that keeps us connected with our friends, a forum where we share pictures of our everyday life to receive likes and to show everyone how ‘perfect’ our life is. For example, many often publish pictures to show how healthy we are, how often we go to the gym, or to show off our perfect children or pets. However, this is not all; social media has proven itself to be a valuable asset in situations of crisis. For example, Facebook offered some relief for the relatives of people living in Brussels in the aftermath of the bombing when the social media site activated their safety check-feature. (Keim & Noji, 2011; Kraft, 2016.)

The question is, can we trust social media to give correct information about what is happening? Give it an hour or two, and all traditional media are running the story, and we can stifle our curiosity, but people want information immediately. What does it take to trust social media in a crisis? Social media is a great tool to spread information fast and to reach people who might be in danger. The question still stands, how do we reach the people who might be in danger in time, and can we rely on the message to be trustworthy?

1.1 Aim of the thesis

The aim of this thesis is to examine the relationship between social media usage and trust in situations of crisis, to shed light on the usage of social media in a crisis situation and whether the information retrieved from those platforms are trusted. The thesis includes earlier studies and the concept of social media, crisis communication and the theories of trust.

The thesis also includes a study conducted in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on
Drottninggatan in Stockholm, Sweden on the 7th of April, 2017. The platforms in focus in the study are the following social media (SoMe) platforms: Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, and Snapchat. The following chapter discloses the research questions of the study and an explanation of why these were chosen.

1.2 Problem statement and research questions

This research area is relatively new. Still, a great deal of research is currently taking place in this field, which will be discussed later in chapter 2.4.1. Studies already show that spread of false information in crises are a fact and since the user himself is responsible for what he publishes or re-publishes without anyone verifying the accuracy of the information, controlling the rapid news-flow is very difficult. Also, personal integrity is very hard to control, and other studies argue that information gathered on social media/social networking sites (SoMe) is generally accurate; suggesting that reports about misinformation are exaggerated. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, & Hughes, 2007.)

The question still stands, do we (the consumers) trust the content on SoMe in a crisis situation? This was one of the questions that stood as foundation when the idea if this thesis was born. That question is the cornerstone of the following study, and to see whether those affected by the attack on Drottninggatan in Stockholm, Sweden thinks the information put on SoMe during the crisis situation was trustworthy. From these thoughts, the following research questions were written: How was SoMe used by people affected by the attack in Stockholm 2017? Did those affected by the attack trust the information on social media? And; what are the greatest problems with social media in situations of crisis?

This study focuses on the lorry-attack on Drottninggatan, Stockholm, Sweden and the most used SoMe sites; Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat.
1.3 Disposition

This thesis is divided into five main chapters: introduction, theory, research design and method, results and lastly a concluding discussion. The first section stands as an introduction to the subject of the thesis and discusses why this subject is relevant and important to study today.

The second chapter defines the context, the theories the thesis is built upon. The chapter is divided into three main sub-chapters concentrating on each of the main subjects of the thesis: social media, crisis, and trust. The chapters discuss the subject in depth and stand as a foundation for the study in chapter four. Chapter three explains how the study was conducted, the theories used to gather and analyze the collected material. Chapter three also includes a presentation of the participants who participated in the study and how the material was collected.

Chapter four is divided into five sub-chapters and present the result of the study. Each sub-chapter is focusing on different aspects of the study and specifically answers the questions asked in the thesis. Lastly, chapter five concludes the thesis as a whole, the theories and the key results of the study. It also discusses the results, the limitations of the study and the possibilities for future studies. This thesis also includes a Swedish conclusion, chapter six.

1.4 Project RESCUE

This thesis is part of an international research project which started in 2014 and ends in October 2017. It is an international project funded by the SAMRISK II program of The Research Council of Norway. The name is an acronym standing for ’Researching Social Media and Collaborative Software Use in Emergency Situations’. (Project RESCUE, 2017.)

The project’s mission is to develop new knowledge by studying social media use in
different emergency cases. The project’s research question is:

*How do key communicators use, evaluate, and react to social media messages in emergencies, and how can their use of social media be improved to optimize their awareness of – and response to – the situation?*

(Project RESCUE, 2017.)

A tool is being created in the project to improve social media interaction in emergencies. The aim is also that this project will develop into recommendations and knowledge that can be used in the future. The project has five objectives:

1. To develop criteria and models for optimal and appropriate emergency communication tuned to the specificities of the emergency events Chosen.
2. Through three case studies analyze how key crises communicators and members of the public have used social media in the crises.
3. To understand the impact social media use may have on key emergency communicators and the public’s awareness of the situation.
4. To analyze the case study findings to identify strengths and weaknesses in usage patterns and assessment methods.
5. To develop tools and methods to evaluate social media information in order to adapt emergency communication and management to situations in which the premises and flow of information is increasingly determined by social media.

(Project RESCUE, 2017.)

The three main research emergency cases are; the terrorist attacks in Norway 2011, the flooding in central Europe May and June 2013 and the swine flu. Other case studies and researches will also be executed during the project. (Project RESCUE, 2017.)
2. Theory

In order to answer the research questions, one has to understand what the key concepts stand for and how they work. The purpose of this section, thus, is to clarify what social media, crisis communication, and trust are, and how they work. Understanding these theories and concepts are crucial when researching them.

This chapter is divided into four sub-chapters, each of them describing one subject in debt to provide the knowledge needed to conduct a study on these subjects. The last sub-chapter then merges the three theories in one – is social media trusted in a crisis situation – in theory. This final sub-chapter also includes earlier studies conducted on the subject.

The first sub-chapter discusses social media. To understand the trust put on social media one first has to understand what social media are – how they work, how they are used and why. This sub-chapter is then followed by theories on crisis communication and what aspects to consider when dealing with a crisis situation and how best to communicate. In order to research how a communication channel is used in a crisis, one first has to have some understanding of what a crisis is, how it works and how to communicate in a crisis. The research conducted later in the thesis is not focused on the communication itself, but rather, on whether the communication and information feed on social media is trusted by people affected by a crisis.

The third and final theory is trust, and chapter 2.3 explains how trust works. How it is generated, maintained, and the effects and causes of low or high levels of trust are explained.

2.1 Social media – the world at your fingertips

This chapter will define what social media is and describe its history from the new kid on the block to a given place in our lives. In the next chapter, we will go through some of the social media portals and how to get information from the previously mentioned social
media. After defining what social media is, I move on to the use of social media in different situations. In this thesis, I will focus on the usage of social media in journalism in the event of crises and disasters.

There are many definitions of social media, which stems from its constantly evolving and ever-changing nature. There are many definitions written by social media professionals, but there is not one general definition. The social media platforms also differ from one another, but all of them share a few characteristics: “…they enable creation, rely exclusively on audience participation relative to the production of content, and involve varying degrees of user engagement” (Schneider, 2016, p. 4).

Social media (or social networking sites as it is also called) serve as an overall term for all social sites on the internet, and can be defined as “web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211). This definition is broad, and I have therefore chosen to use this definition of social media in the thesis, and use the generally accepted shorthand; SoMe.

2.1.1 How does SoMe work?

The term ‘social networking sites’, or ‘SoMe’ includes Facebook, Twitter, Wikipedia, Instagram, Snapchat, YouTube, and blogs – to name a few. The difference between traditional media and SoMe can easily be described as one-way communication versus two-way communication. Meaning that traditional media (TV, newspapers, radio) goes from the distributor to the masses – while SoMe, on the other hand, is a network of contributors whose content can be published by anyone, but still be spread to the masses. (Dijck, 2013; Page, 2012.)

SoMe is a somewhat new phenomenon; Facebook was founded in 2004, Twitter in 2006 and Wikipedia as early as 2001. However, as SoMe entered our lives, it quickly became a
part of our everyday life and altered our way sharing information. Pictures of our children and pets, showing off our vacation-pictures, gossiping and checking in on the well-being of our friends and family used to be shared with only a few specific individuals, whom we trust. Today, SoMe has altered our way of sharing information about ourselves. These days, anyone can go to anyone’s profile on different social platforms and get to know the person and what that person does through pictures and status-updates that person has posted on his or her profile. (Dijck, 2013; Page, 2012.)

Every single SoMe platform is built on profiles and sharing information with each other, but how this information is shared might differ between platforms. Facebook, for example, is a multi-platform where you can share videos, text-statuses, and photos. Twitter, on the other hand, is a so-called micro-blog where the number of characters allowed in each ‘tweet’ is limited to 140 characters. You can also share pictures on Twitter with your text, and this does not affect the number of characters you may use in your ‘tweet’ – this has only recently been changed. Instagram is built on picture-sharing and is firstly an app for your smartphone. Here you can follow people, and when you do, all the pictures they publish will turn up on your feed. You can like and comment on your friends’ pictures, stories and so on. (Dijck, 2013; Facebook Newsroom, 2017; Page, 2012; Twitter Inc., 2017.)

Today, popular people get many followers and plenty of likes on their SoMe accounts, while fewer followers and likes equal to lower popularity. With the popularity of SoMe growing, a new form of celebrities has emerged: internet celebrities. Terms such as ‘instafamous’, ‘twitter-known’, ‘YouTubers’, ‘vlogger’ are today as common and highly regarded as regular Hollywood celebrities. These internet-celebrities might also be called ‘micro-celebrities’. (Marwick, 2015.)

By following people on each platform their ‘tweets’ (Twitter), pictures (Instagram) and statuses (Facebook) end up on your feed. The information put on these platforms stays there forever unless the owner takes it down. Another platform, Snapchat, is built on time-limited posts. Snapchat lets the sender choose which of the user’s friends the update is
sent to and for how many seconds the picture will show, unlike Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram where your friends/followers get your update in their feeds. The timeframe on Snapchat is between 1 and 10 seconds, and the user is free to choose the limit for each post. If the picture is published on the ‘My Story’ feature, which allows any one of the users’ friends to see the picture, it will stay there for the next 24 hours. (Facebook Newsroom, 2017; Snapchat, 2017; Twitter Inc., 2017.)

This example shows that every SoMe platform is a bit different from each other – some more than others – and sometimes, well-liked features on one platform gets mimicked by other platforms. For example, when Instagram launched their ‘stories’ feature, which is very similar to Snapchat’s 24-hour ‘My Story’ feature. These platforms are constantly updated, and now and then, a new feature is presented. Although the features themselves say a lot about SoMe, one has to look at the users to get the whole picture. (Instagram, 2017; Snapchat, 2017.)

Since the beginning, SoMe has gained popularity. Facebook alone has nearly 1 600 000 active users today, and it is no surprise that today everyone is talking about ‘social networking strategy’. SoMe today is not just a forum to connect with friends and share one’s life, SoMe has grown into platforms where news is shared, a channel for political activity, online gaming, a source of information in our everyday life as in situations of crisis. You can find nearly everything on SoMe today; such as your local newspaper, bakery, favorite café, bookstore, and workplace. (Ghersetti, 2015; Statista, 2016.)

Users of all ages use SoMe today, and the number of users is growing steadily. In one year, between 2015 and 2016, about 200 million new active users registered on one or more SoMe platforms – that is a rise of 10%. The percentage of SoMe users in the US alone have grown tenfold in the last decade. For instance, 10% of the US population used at least one SoMe platform in 2006 – today, 65% of the population is registered on at least one platform. Not surprisingly, most users are between 18 – 29 years old, but in recent years, when the growth of users has started to plateau, one cohort is still growing steadily: those over 65 years of age. (Global Web Index, 2016; Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016; Statista, 2017; Statista, 2016.)
While Facebook is the most popular site with 2,061 million active users, other common sites have a lot less active users. Instagram is a bit larger than Twitter with 700 million active users, while Twitter has 328 million active ‘tweeters’. The youngest of these platforms is Snapchat with 255 million active users. All of these, except for Facebook, has less active users than a handful of chat-platforms; such as Facebook-owned WhatsApp and the Chinese WeChat. WhatsApp has a whopping 1,300 million active users, and so does Facebook Messenger. These numbers are based on users worldwide and updated in September 2017, except for Snapchat which is based on numbers from 2016. (Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016; Statista, 2017.)

2.1.2 SoMe and journalism

SoMe has had an increasing role in emergencies and disasters in the last five years. More and more organizations, Universities, private sectors, various disaster- and emergency-related organizations, governments and many more use Facebook and other SoMe platforms to disseminate information and to communicate. What SoMe offers is a three-way communication; between organizations to coordinate activities, to and from emergency planning/exercises and between the organizations and the masses. (Lindsay, 2011.)

The American Red Cross did a study in 2009 where they found out that SoMe sites are the fourth most popular sites to access information in emergencies. It is a great tool used by the majority of people and many organizations to warn others of unsafe situations or areas. Another important tool in emergencies is the ability to connect with family and friends to inform that one is fine and even raising funds for disaster relief. The result and efficiency of SoMe is so good that it has spurred congressional discussion in the United States on how to use them as a tool to improve emergency responses and capability of recovery. The study by the American Red Cross is almost ten years old so that it may look a bit different today. However, it is interesting that already in 2009 when several SoMe platforms were only a few years old, they still were the fourth most popular sites in the study. (The American Red Cross, 2009; Lindsay, 2011.)
As mentioned earlier, social networks are built on communication between users – each platform a bit different from another in the manner of how this information is presented (pictures, microblogging, statuses and so on). That is why social networks can be an excellent tool for citizens to communicate with the government and other emergency organizations. Which possibly could alter the whole concept of emergency communications since the communication-flow now can go in multiple directions. (Lindsay, 2011.)

SoMe is considered to be a crucial source for fast updates on important news. Most people consider SoMe as platforms to keep in contact with friends and relatives, share information and receive information about friends and families, but many also turn to SoMe when something happens. Records show that the first ‘tweet’ about the bombing in Oslo was sent only 23 seconds after the explosion, and after the bombing in Boston, it took one minute for the first tweet to be published on SoMe. (Ghersetti, 2015.)

Most news media have an account on multiple platforms and sometimes even their own apps so that people turn to them to get fast updates. Usage of social networks is partly because it is a fast way to reach many people, but it is also a source where one might uncover news. Another strength in SoMe is the power of interaction – users ‘retweeting’ or sharing another user’s post for it to reach further. In a matter of minutes, thousands of people can know that something is happening – the regular user has turned into a reporter. (Ghersetti, 2015.)

It is not a secret that traditional journalism as we know it is changing – and has been changing the last years. Internet and SoMe has turned it all upside-down. Before, reporters would get leads to a story or go out to find one. Today, many of the stories are received through SoMe. Moreover, the term ‘news’ is changing – because, it happens more than ever that what we read in the paper, watch on the evening news, or hear on the radio is something that we have already read about on some of our SoMe platforms. (Alejandro, 2010.)
The term ‘I read it on Facebook/Twitter/Instagram’ is getting more and more common in our everyday lives. SoMe is a source of information, and if that information catches our interest, we might read more and follow the link the news media publishes on their SoMe-profiles. Also, sometimes, news media has no time to break the news to the world before SoMe bring the news across the world. For example, the case of the death of Michael Jackson where Facebook and Twitter users broke the story ahead of any major news network and spread like wildfire. This example shows how news media is consumed and disseminated on SoMe. (Alejandro, 2010.)

The news is no longer solely brought to the masses through traditional media (top-bottom) but from the bottom-up. The public has a say in which stories are interesting and relevant, and how they choose to react to the news. In 2014 research shows that 14% of SoMe users covered and shared news event themselves. The masses today have the power to choose how to react to news – to share them, publish their own opinion and give the masses another angle to a story that the major news networks are broadcasting or just ignore it. Silence on SoMe can be as powerful as any wildfire. (Alejandro, 2010; Anderson & Caumont, 2014; Greenwood, Perrin, & Duggan, 2016.)

2.1.3  **SoMe in crisis communication**

The use of SoMe might be our greatest asset when crisis strikes. Just as the tweets about someone shooting at the youth-camp on Utøya in Norway 2011, the Boston Marathon bombing, or someone reaching out on SoMe to get help after an environmental crisis. The power of people communicating has not been more eminent than in situations when SoMe has led to the rescue of people in distress. At the same time, SoMe can work as an assurance policy to relatives through services such as Facebook Safety Check. (Maron, 2013; Nrk.no, 2017.)

People are constantly tweeting what is happening to them, how they are and what is happening. Acar and Muraki (2011) researched the use of Twitter during and after the Japanese tsunami disaster. According to them, a disaster naturally affects the nature of the tweets sent from that area. Tweets from people directly affected tweeted about what they
saw, what happened and their uncertain situation while people close to the area tweeted about being safe or concerns for indirect consequences of the disaster – such as difficulty in transportation, communication, and potential hoarding by stranded residents. (Acar & Muraki, 2011.)

Before, communication came from the organizations or government distributed through the media to the masses. The media also provided the information flow on how the crisis event was unfolding – both during and after the event. The media is still to this day an essential source of information and especially when we want to find out why and how something happened (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). During an event, however, many people turn to SoMe to follow the event. Heverin and Zach (2010) have researched how Twitter is used during emergencies, and they found out that most “tweets” that are published during an event is one of three categories: repeated information, linked information on external websites and retweets (RTs). Other significant categories are emotion-related, situation updates and action-related.

In their article Twitter for crisis communication: lessons learned from Japan’s tsunami disaster, Acar and Muraki (2011) argue that SoMe can improve its capability as a communication tool in situations of crisis. They analyzed 200 tweets from randomly selected users, divided among users in disaster-struck areas and indirectly hit areas. Their findings do show that a crisis or disaster does (unsurprisingly) affect what users put in their tweets. In both disaster-struck areas and areas that were indirectly hit users mainly tweet about the same thing: warnings, environment reports, reporting on the self, concerns and help requests. Help requests were only tweeted by users in the directly hit areas. (Acar & Muraki, 2011.)

It is apparent that SoMe is changing the face of crisis communication, but we are not quite there yet. Tools to fully utilize SoMe in a situation of crisis has to be built, and we have to find out the best way on how to find and distribute information. How users can warn other users in their area, let friends and family know their situation during a crisis and, of course, alerting the media and organizations/governments of the situation. (Acar &
Acar and Muraki (2011) found out that the limitations of Twitter itself caused most problems, according to the users themselves. The users (participants of Acar and Muraki’s study) suggest, among other things, to create official hashtags, faster information from the government, limit the number of RT’s with hashtagged messages in an attempt to manage false and misleading information and creating a temporary disaster-page. However, a great many users said: “adding more features on Twitter or regulating it might make the service more complicated or difficult to use” (Acar & Muraki, 2011, p. 399).

Some of the information Lindsay (2011) discusses in her report Social Media and Disasters: Current Users, Future Options, and Policy Considerations Craig Fugates testimony before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery, and Inter-Governmental Affairs. Fugates, the administrator of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), had had a meeting with representatives from a range of SoMe platforms; such as Facebook, Twitter, Google and the corporations behind these and a few others. The subject of their meeting was discussing the possibility of harnessing future applications including smartphone-friendly versions of FEMA websites. Which would allow users to request assistance in an emergency, and more importantly access information and foster communication between the citizens, emergency responders, organizations, and the government. (Lindsay, 2011.)

Another tool used by most SoMe platforms is the hashtag (#). Each user can put one or more hashtags to their post and by doing that linking their post to thousands of others who already use the same hashtag. For example, during the coordinated attacks in Paris, the hashtag ‘#PatisAttacks’ surfaced and were used during the attacks. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Mills, 2015.)

Information about the attacks spread this way across SoMe and users from all over the world could read in on what was happening, live, thanks to the hashtag. After the attack, another hashtag ‘#PrayforParis’ surfaced, and now it was the world who showed their
support for Paris. Condolences and well-wishes were posted on SoMe alongside pictures of famous buildings across the entire world with the colors of the French flag projected upon them. For example, buildings such as the One World Trade Center in the USA, London Eye in London, Christ the Redeemer in Brazil, and the Opera House in Australia were shown in the French colors. (Mills, 2015.)

One difficulty with SoMe may be choosing a hashtag. When something first happens a number of hashtags may be used before one of the alternatives is established as that event’s hashtag. Such as using different languages and synonyms, for example: ‘#jesuisParis’ or ‘#PrayForParis’. However, as soon as one or a few hashtags are trending, more tweeters will use that hashtag, and the wildfire has started. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Mills, 2015.)

Another trend that started soon after the attacks on 13 of November 2015 in Paris. After the attacks, police issued a lockdown of Paris and many people were stranded and were not able to get home. The hashtag ‘#PorteOuverte’ was used by stranded people looking for a place to stay or by people offering a haven and place to stay for people stranded on the streets. So, social networks have an enormous power of reaching the masses and for the masses to reach out in times of need. (Mills, 2015.)

However, there is a downside to the raging wildfires of SoMe. People are not always very critical of the sources from which the information comes, leading to the spread of truthful information entwined with false information. Sometimes the false information may sound better than the truth, but even if it is true or not – it is challenging to stop the information spreading once it is caught in the wildfire of SoMe. So, how do we trust what we read on our SoMe feeds? And can we afford not to trust any information we get? Especially in a crisis situation?

2.2 Crisis situations

Before understanding how to communicate appropriately in crisis situations, one has to define what a crisis is. There are multiple official definitions of a crisis, but the term is
frequently used both in the academic world and by practitioners. Perry (2006) chose to define crisis as ‘a breakdown within a system that creates shared stress’.

This definition of a crisis is broad and can be applied to a large variety of events. The Merriam and Webster online dictionary defines crisis as “a difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention” (Merriam-Webster, 2017). This definition also includes disasters – the difference between disasters and crises is that disasters are seen as natural, such as floods, tsunamis, earthquakes; while crises occur through actions of actors or organizations. However, both of these events have the same impact on SoMe today. (Birkland, 2006; Merriam-Webster, 2017.)

Researchers’ opinions on how to define the difference between a crisis and a disaster differ – some say that man-made events are disasters and some argue that it a crisis. A disaster can also be related to technique, such as plane crashes or nuclear accidents. The concept of disasters and crises does also include intentional disasters created by humans, such as terrorism and environmental hazards. It also includes unintentional actions – accidents, caused by human actions. (Birkland, 2006; Coombs, 2015; McEntire, 2001; Saylor, Cowart, Lipovsky, Jackson, & Finch, 2013.)

This thesis defines all of these events as a crisis. The core-definition of a crisis is broad and allows the use of crisis as an overall term for any event that is difficult and/or dangerous and needs serious attention from the society. A crisis demands media-attention and often, depending on the event, leads to political change. Many of the more significant crises or disasters in history have one thing in common: change. Each event has forced politicians and/or stakeholders to make a change. For instance, no cockpit door was ever locked before the hijacking of the planes on 9/11 – some pilots even preferred to have the door open so that passengers could see that there were humans flying the plane. New requirements and regulations are in place today to ensure cockpit security and no door is allowed to stay unlocked during flight after 9/11. (Birkland, 2006; Coombs, 2015; International Air Transport Association, 2011.)
2.2.1 Crisis communication

How does crisis communication work today? It is traditionally the organizations, journalists/media and the public who are the three prominent communicators in crisis communication. There are also other stakeholders whom all have a part in the crisis communication, such as rescue organizations and different agencies.

The three prominent stakeholders communicate with each other: The key communicators (public organizations and authorities) communicate with the media, and they both communicate with the public. The key communicators may give statements to the media, but they also relay information via their web-pages or other communication channels to the public. This way of communication works, and we trust these stakeholders to give us the information we need in different situations. Now, there is a new channel challenging the way of crisis communication: social media (SoMe). (Reich, Bentman, & Jackman, 2011; Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

Figure 1. Crisis communication with social media (own illustration).

The figure above is an illustration of how crisis communication works based on the earlier description (Reich, Bentman, & Jackman, 2011; Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). The black arrows represent the ‘old way’ of crisis communication, namely the media and the key communicators communicate with each other and that communication is then conveyed.
down to the public. However, with SoMe entering the communication channels as a communicator, the old top-to-bottom, one-way communication, is suddenly a two-way-communication. SoMe offer a ‘backchannel’ to the key communicators and the media, both the media and key communicators cannot only communicate via SoMe to the public – now the public have a channel to communicate directly with both the media and the key communicators. (Reich, Bentman, & Jackman, 2011; Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

Since the definition of a crisis is so broad, it means that a crisis can be anything from a plane crash and an earthquake to saving actions and layoffs within a company. The response and communication required differ depending on the crisis, and there are plenty of literature and manuals for crisis communication – how to prepare and how to communicate during crises. However, every crisis is unique, and key communicators need to be prepared and able to adjust their response according to what the specific type of crisis requires. (Reich, Bentman, & Jackman, 2011.)

2.2.2 Crisis communication lifecycle

The most important thing to know about crisis communication is that every crisis evolves in phases, and therefore, so must the communication. This sub-chapter is dedicated to describing the different phases of a crisis and explaining what each phase demands regarding communication (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014). As Reich, Bentman and Jackman (2011) already stated; no one crisis is identical and therefore, neither is the communication – but instead, each crisis demands different ways of communication and types of information.

The five phases of a crisis are together called ‘a lifecycle’, and each of the phases is explained in the figure below. Depending on the triggering event (what triggered the crisis), level of harm and the intensity of the crisis, these phases will vary in length and intensity, which creates different demands on the required resources. (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

It is crucial for any key communicator to realize that it is too late to start building trust
when a crisis occurs, because, the only thing that a crisis can do to the level of trust in something is to decrease it. If, for example, the communication in a crisis is handled poorly or false information is shared by the key communicators that will have a negative impact on the level of trust that key communicator had before the crisis. Key communicators, therefore, need to establish a level of trust and credibility before the crisis occurs. (Reich, Bentman, & Jackman, 2011.)

Figure 2. Crisis communication lifecycle, described by Reynolds and Seeger (Reynolds and Seegers, 2014, Figure 1-1, p 9).

The content and emphasis of these phases may vary depending on the researcher/editor/author of the crisis communication plan, and it may also vary depending on what crisis the author uses as an example. The crisis communication plan used in this thesis and described in this chapter is the Center for Decease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) manual called “Crisis and Emergency Risk Communication – 2014 Edition”, (CERC Manual) authored by Reynolds and Seeger (2014).

The first phase is called ‘pre-crisis’, and it is where the essential planning should be made. Evaluate the risks of different crises and create crisis plans accordingly. Proper preparation and planning do not ensure successful crisis management, but the lack thereof
creates a significant disadvantage when a crisis is triggered. Plan for the crisis, prepare checklists and foster alliances to ensure communication between agencies, spread knowledge of whom to contact and make sure that when the crisis occurs, all experts and spokespersons speak with one voice. (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

The second phase, called ‘the initial phase’, can be characterized as chaotic – much uncertainty, significant media interest, information pouring in from all directions, even some misleading and incomplete information. The decisions made in this phase are critical, they have severe implications and offer few second chances to get the information right. The communicator should in this phase collect information about what happened, interpret and separate information from rumors, determine the best communication response, coordinate with responders, and respond agencies to verify the magnitude of the crisis as soon as possible. It is not a small task, but very time-sensitive and critical. (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

It is important to correctly and merely explain and inform the public of the event, show symphony, establish credibility, and have continuity in the information flow. A crisis does always create uncertainty, and the communicator’s job is to establish credibility, update information as it is demanded and offer insurance that something is being done about the situation. However, the communicator needs to make sure that the information is correct and clarify the information if it is easy to be misunderstood before releasing it to the public. Only give the facts, say what is being done, be honest about the crisis and let people know that answers to all questions do not exist at this time since the crisis is still unfolding. (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

Maintenance phase, or the third phase, begins when the direct danger is over, the intensity of the crisis subsides, and the public has time to stop and reflect on what happened during this phase. During this stage of the crisis, experts and others not associated with your organization or directly involved in the crisis communication, will publicly give their opinions on and start to comment, contradict, and misinterpret your messages published during the previous phases. They will criticize how the situation was – and is – handled
and it is vital to stay on top of the information flow even now. It is also essential to maintain communication with rescue personnel/organizations, stakeholders, and the public. (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

The line between phase three and phase four is blurry, but the resolution (fourth) phase starts when the crisis calms down further. This phase is longer than the two previous phases as the details of the event and responsibility may take time to determine. It is when things start to turn back to normal, even if is a ‘new normal’. In some cases, complete recovery can take years, but at least the recovery systems are in place. The phase is also characterized by a decrease of both media- and public interest, but some intense scrutiny by the media may still require responses. It is useful to at this stage start collecting information about the crisis response and establish plans on how to prevent similar events in the future, learn from the event itself and how to improve responses and crisis communication. (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

Lastly, phase five, or the evaluation phase is as important as any of the other phases. The organization reviews their response during this phase, evaluate the communication plan, discusses the lessons learned, and document everything. Specific plans on how to improve existing plans and responses are discussed, and the lessons are implemented into pre-crisis activities. (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

An existing plan for crisis communication might not ensure an excellent crisis management. However, a poorly planned response in the event of a crisis can – and often will – lower the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of your key communicator. Any crisis brings uncertainty, but the purpose of crisis communication is to relay information to the public, to ensure their welfare and “enable survival of the crisis with the least damage” (Reich, Bentman, & Jackman, 2011, p. 6).

2.2.3 The possibilities of social media as a tool

Even though more and more research is being done in this area, the answers on how to best utilize SoMe as a tool in situations of crisis are not yet clear. It does not mean that
SoMe is not used – quite the contrary. However, crisis communication cannot either follow a step-by-step rulebook because each crisis is different and requires different actions and responses. One common component, on the other hand, is the importance of communication – and this is where SoMe comes in and is revolutionizing the way of communication. (Coombs, 2015.)

Some of the most prominent organizations in emergency response and crisis management, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) had already taken one step in the right direction when Craig Fugates, FEMA’s administrator, had a meeting with some of the most significant SoMe platforms and smartphone manufacturers. Crisis management is on the agenda, and researchers hope that this kind of discussions, with research findings as support, will shape the future crisis communication. (Lindsay, 2011.)

Keim and Noji (2011) say in their article Emergent use of social media: A new age of opportunity for disaster resilience that “social media are changing the fundamental organizational structure of disaster response itself” (Keim & Noji, 2011, p. 4) – and this is already happening. Not only is SoMe giving the opportunity for people to reach out and warn other people of an imminent crisis or make others aware of a crisis communication, but SoMe also offer disaster-affected areas another means to adapt to new environmental conditions, absorb disaster impact and recognize into more effective approaches to risk reduction. (Keim & Noji, 2011.)

As in the aftermath of the coordinated Paris attacks in 2015 when the residents of Paris turned to SoMe to provide shelter to people stranded on the streets of Paris, unable to get home when all public transports were shut down in fear of more attacks. (Mills, 2015.) Using the hashtag #porteouverte, people stuck on the streets could make other people aware of someone in need of a place to say and in which area they were in, or people just offering their places to the people on the streets unable to get home. Similar to this, people in Boston used SoMe to provide hot showers and a place to stay after the Marathon Bombings in 2013. Additionally, they used Google Documents to create a list of people offering their homes as a safe haven after the attacks. (Maron, 2013; Mills, 2015.)
All the stories on SoMe during situations of crisis tell their own story; in the days of the online-world people still care about other people and SoMe can – and is – a great tool to reach out, and people are already doing it. The attacks in Paris, Charlie Hebdo, Brussel airport, London bombings, Hurricane Katrina, the tsunami in Japan, Oslo bombing and shootings on Utøya, all these stories have a chapter forever written on SoMe. Stories told of people stuck in the situation, of people close by and, of course, the whole world rallying to support those affected. (Coombs, 2015; Keim & Noji, 2011; Maron, 2013; Mills, 2015; Nrk.no, 2017; Schwartzman, 2013.)

Keim and Noji (2011, p. 3) use the earthquake in Haiti as an example:

> During the immediate quake aftermath, much of what people around the world were learning about the Haiti earthquake originated from social media sources. Although most online consumers relied on traditional media for quake coverage, these consumers then turned to Twitter and blogs to “share” information, to “react” to situations, and to rally “support”. Thus, social media became the new forum for collective intelligence, social convergence and community activism related to the Haiti disaster.

More of this in the next chapter when I will look closer on SoMe and its potential as a tool in different areas, for example in journalism and crisis communication.

### 2.3 Trust in crisis situations

In a crisis or disaster, trust plays a significant role. Trust determines where we turn to for help. After the Wenchuan earthquake in 2004, Peilin and Roulleau-Berger (2016) saw an evident change in social trust towards strangers after the earthquake. They argue that one possible explanation is remembering the generous help residents in the affected areas showed towards each other.

Our trust-levels depend on the response to the crisis or disaster. In times of a crisis or disaster, we trust emergency responders to help us, and we trust the court to hold whoever is responsible for the crisis accountable. We trust the government to help us cope or rebuild when the aftermath settles the recovery begins. (Peilin & Roulleau-Berger, 2016.)
Depending on crisis or disaster, the event itself may negatively affect our trust, even for just a moment. The best example of this is the fact that Anders Behring Breivik dressed as a policeman during the massacre at the Labor Party Youth Camp at Utøya outside Oslo, Norway on the 22 of July 2011. In interviews with the survivors, the world stood by horrified in hearing these stories. The fear these teenagers faced when escaping the terrorist, believing he was a policeman, just to encounter more police officers once they managed to get off the island and onto the mainland. One of the survivors actually said to the police ‘are you going to kill us now?’. Another survivor, Elise Myhrer, says in an interview for Dagens Nyheter that she lost all her trust. How could she trust that the people on that island meant what they said? That the man who was driving the boat that brought her to safety was not in miscopy with the murderer? (By, 2011.)

In the aftermath of the attacks, researchers have found an increase in interpersonal trust and institutional trust. Scientists in the study After Utøya: How high-trust society reacts to terror – Trust and civic engagement in the aftermath of July 22 (Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johsen, & Ødegård, 2012), based their theories on the fact that terrorist attacks have been found to have an (to an extent) effect on civic attitudes and behavior. Norway has a proud history of being the highest-ranking nations in cross-national surveys of trust and/or civic engagement going back 30 years. Their study shows that Norway has not become less trusting after the attacks. (Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johsen, & Ødegård, 2012.)

The data shows that, in total, 52% show greater social trust after the attack than before. Meaning that Norwegians place themselves closer to the ‘most people can be trusted’ option than they did before the attacks, and 23% actually showed less trust than before the attacks. The researchers also wanted to look closer on the impact of the attacks on young people’s trust, since the attacks were aimed specifically at them, and the fact that young people are more penetrable than the older generations. (Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johsen, & Ødegård, 2012.)

It means that researchers expected to see a stronger effect in the young generation’s level
of trust than among the other generations. Their study proved this, a higher level of young adults changed their position on the trust-scale than the other respondents after the 22 of July. Within the young adult’s group itself, however, the result is more polarized than ever; there is a net increase of trust, but there are also those within the age-group that has become more skeptical of other people since the attacks. (Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012.)

In agreement with Sander and Putnam’s (2010) findings after the attacks on World Trade Centre in 2001, the Norwegian researchers came to the same conclusion; in the aftermath of a terror attack the civic level of trust increases. Nevertheless, Putnam found that these elevated levels of trust soon decreases as things go back to normal after the event. (Sander & Putnam, 2010; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012.)

Many have pointed out that the institutional trust (trust in local authorities, Parliament, the courts, government, emergency responders, police, and public administration) is dependable in their actions during and after the crisis or disaster (Coombs, 2015; Peilin & Roulleau-Berger, 2016; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012). Doing well in the aftermath and taking the right decisions according to the public can go a long way.

In the book Ongoing Crisis Communication – Planning, Managing and Responding by W. Timothy Coombs (2015), Coombs argues that the perfect strategy and preparedness can go a long way when a crisis strikes. Knowing how to tackle an event is key, meaning that there should be strategies on how to react to the event, gather information, make decisions, and communicate. The result of the surveys made in both Norway and China shows an increase of institutional trust. (Peilin & Roulleau-Berger, 2016; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012.)

2.3.1 Trust

Trust is something we are all capable of, and whether we are aware of it or not, we depend on it in our everyday life. Trust in our society, and the people around us enables us to
leave our car unlocked when we are at home. Likewise, lack of social trust makes us double check that we actually locked the car before we left it. Trust needs a context and cannot be transferred from one context to the other. For example, I might not think twice about leaving the car unlocked at home – but whenever I go into the city, I consider locking the car as a matter of course.

This chapter will review the theories of trust, what it is and how it affects us and our society. Social capital is as real as economic capital, but very few of us actually realizes that this capital might be one of the most important capitals for us. Trust is one of the key components of social capital, and later in this chapter, I will explore how trust works and the complexity of it all. Without social capital and trust, our society would not be the same as we know it to be. (Putnam, 2000; Starrin, 2011.)

Social capital is a resource, just as the economy is a resource. If social capital makes our society work and brightens our society and lives as individuals, then trust is the glue that holds it all together. Social trust spreads into all dimensions of life and across many different disciplines, such as including economics, political science, history, philosophy, and health. One definition of trust is, according to Newton, “the belief that others will not, at worst, knowingly or willingly do you harm, and will, at best, act in your interests” (Newton, 2013, p. 2) and another, according to Georg Simmel, is that “trust is one of the most important synthetic forces within society” (Simmel, 1950, p. 326).

In almost all our everyday life we assume that we can trust people (Putnam, 2000). If we did not trust other people and the institutions of society, then most of us would not go out in traffic, use the public transports, or drop our children off at kindergarten or school. We also exercise our trust when we shop for groceries or go to the local restaurant. Our society does not work without some level of trust. (Putnam, 2000; Uggla, Ruter, & Wijkström, 2012.)

There has to be some level of trust for us to cooperate with others, but it would at the same time be very naive to trust other people blindly. Trust is contextual, meaning that we can
have low and high levels of trust at the same time, depending on our experience and situation. Even though watching out for naive gullibility, most political scientists, psychologists, sociologists, and other researchers agree that social trust is the glue that keeps families, businesses, organizations, and society together. (Putnam, 2000; Uggla, Ruter, & Wijkström, 2012; Trägårdh, 2012.)

Trust can be divided into social trust (trusting people) and social confidence (trusting an organization, the state, etc.). Social trust (horizontal trust) is between people while social confidence (vertical trust) is between the individual and the state or, e.g., organization. Together they form a so-called trust capital (or repetitional capital). In this thesis, both trust in other people and trust in organizations and the government will be dealt with and, therefore, the term ‘trust’ will be used to include both distinctions. (Newton, 2013; Uggla, Ruter, & Wijkström, 2012.)

It is debated whether it is trust that provides social capital or whether it is a part of social capital (Putnam, 2000; Rothstein, 2008; Starrin, 2011). Newton (2013) argues that social trust is a core component of social capital and the single indicator of social capital. In this thesis, social trust is defined according to Putnam and Newton. It is difficult to live in a society where we depend on the behavior of others without mutual trust. It would be impossible to build social networks – the arenas where social capital is developed and utilized. Trust is a valuable asset to our society, but it is vulnerable. Trust is easily lost and difficult to recover. (Starrin, 2011; Trägårdh, 2012.)

Trusting other individuals or stakeholders will always include elements of risk. Trusting another means that it is impossible to know whether that person or stakeholder will honor that trust in return. Trust depends on the information an individual has – or thinks he has – on the other’s reliability. Trust, therefore, is linked to moral dimensions such as credibility and reliability. Which, in turn, means that social relations where trust does not exist will be a burden instead of an asset. (Rothstein, 2008.)

Just as social capital is dependable in situations and contexts, trust is also dependable,
meaning that trust is bound to situations and context. Thus, trust capital is not abstract, but an asset we depend on. Because trust is bound to situations and context, it can vary between nations and cultures. There are countries that have a very high level of trust, just as there are countries with low levels of trust. The Scandinavian countries have a reputation amongst researchers of having a proud history of being high trusting communities. Since trust varies and is bound to specific contexts, it is essential to learn about the conditions and opportunities of trust. (Uggla, Ruter, & Wijkström, 2012; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012.)

One can easily think that trust is unambiguous and straightforward. However, it can be tricky to move between the theory and practice of trust, due to the different interpretations between the agents. Thus, there is an ambiguous logic in how trust is expressed: rules, control, traditions, and modernization of the transitions can have an ambiguous impact on trust and vary between cultures and nations. What Scandinavians interpret as a sign of trust can in fact, in the worst of cases, be a sign of mistrust in another culture. Consequently, depending on the follow-up between the parties, cultural differences can cause misunderstanding and therefore undermine trust, or understanding leading to strengthening the trust between the parties. (Uggla, Ruter, & Wijkström, 2012; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012.)

As an example of this, Uggla, Reuter, and Wijkström (2012) visited a university in the USA to establish collaboration. During their visit to the university, they had a series of excellent meetings and recreational activities in good spirit, and they came home with high hopes for the future collaboration. A few weeks later, it all changed when a long draft of a contract landed in their mailbox, filled with paragraphs of obligations and commitments. The Swedes saw this as a sign of disbelief from the Americans. A while later they received a call from the Americans who were surprised and wondered why the Swedes had not answered. This is where the cultural differences are shown. In Scandinavia, we consider bilateral discussions, and a handshake as an acknowledgment of mutual trust, while a contract is considered as distrust. In the US, however, a contract is proof of mutual trust. (Uggla, Ruter, & Wijkström, 2012.)
Our world is characterized by relations crossing borders and cultures, and that is why it is essential to be aware of the complexity of trust. Uggla, Reuter, and Wijkström (2012) demonstrate that it is essential to remember that the opposite of trust is not always distrust or suspicion. Instead, they argue that it would be naive and even devastating to trust other people in all situations we encounter blindly. A living culture of trust has to be seen as an apparent part of the reflective trust, meaning that trust in itself is self-critical, so that trust includes an element of criticism, control, and revision. (Uggla, Ruter, & Wijkström, 2012.)

2.3.2 What are the reasons for differences in social trust?

Researchers have found that social capital and social trust are decreasing, at least in the US. The generation that today are young adults are the least trusting by far, and Putnam (2000) argues that one of the reasons for this is the changes in technology and media in a society where the world becomes even smaller, and what happens ‘over there’ is soon on our doorstep. As an example could be taken the stream of refugees crossing all of Europe hoping to find a better future for themselves. (Clark & Eisenstein, 2013; Putnam, 2000; Robinson & Jackson, 2011.)

According to Rothstein (2008), there is a higher probability for highly educated, financially prosperous, healthy, and tolerant people to show a higher level of social trust. On the other side of the spectrum are the unemployed, sick-listed (people on long-term sick leave), disability pensioners, less educated and those generally dissatisfied with the democracy who are prone to have a lower level of social trust. What Rothstein has not found, however, is a significant connection between levels of interpersonal trust and gender. (Rothstein, 2008; Rothstein, 2005.)

A fundamental question in researching social trust is why trust varies so much between nations. Since we know about the variations, we can overcome them, but the researchers still want to know why. Studies show that nations in which there is widespread corruption have lower levels of trust, while nations with low levels of corruption show a higher level of trust and social capital. Reports show that reliable, impartial, non-discriminatory, and
uncorrupted authorities have a positive effect on the level of trust in its society. If the authorities are corrupted, ‘other people’ are forced to behave dishonestly – whether they like it or not – and this makes them, per definition, untrustworthy. (Kumlin & Rothstein, 2005.)

What if we then turn this key question inside out? Does the level of social trust vary within nations? A country or society where there is a gap between rich (or just well-set) and poor people lack a platform where these people meet, and the result of this shows up in the statistics. The poor people have low trust in “those on the other side” and vice versa. The levels of general trust in other people are also affected by the gap between rich and poor. Having a job is essential, just as a high education leads to feeling connected to the society and this can, in turn, lead to higher levels of trust. (Rothstein, 2008.)

Another way of looking at this question of why trust levels vary is to look at the parents and, more importantly, at where the parents are raised. An American study showed a link between people having roots in Scandinavia and higher levels of trust. There are also other studies that show a connection between those with a parent from Scandinavia and higher levels of trust. However, this is far from the whole truth – studies also show that our social circumstances have a more significant impact on our levels of social trust than our inherited trust. This is why both inheritance and environment are interpreted as having an impact on social trust. (Rothstein, 2008; Starrin, 2011; Uslaner, 2002.)

According to this, it would mean that one’s trust in a new society depends on the trust structure one comes from, but as previously shown, trust is also dependable on education and level of education – so trust can be learned. Moreover, studies show that societies with a high rate of individuals with high levels of interpersonal trust are most likely to be democracies. However, it does not stop there; these societies are most likely to have a higher economic growth, equality, less corruption than their counterparts – societies with lower levels of social trust. (Rothstein, 2008; Starrin, 2011.)
2.4 Trusting SoMe in a crisis – in theory

Trusting SoMe is a question of common sense and source credibility. In the previous chapters, we have learned that information can 'spread like a wildfire' on SoMe. This goes for both accurate information and false information. So how do we know what information to trust? And more importantly – in a situation of crisis; can we afford not to trust the information we get through SoMe? This short chapter represents a summation of the previous chapters where all these theories are drawn into one.

The first chapter defined SoMe, presented its short history and how it works and is used. Having a good picture of how SoMe is used comes in handy when studying how it is used in a crisis situation. For example, knowing how to search for information on SoMe and already have knowledge of trustworthy sources on SoMe platforms come in handy when a crisis starts. The second sub-chapter described what a crisis is and how to best communicate in one. Each crisis is different and demands different actions and responses. Responses which are pre-determined by, or guided by the crisis lifecycle. (Ghersetti, 2015; Lindsay, 2011; Reich, Bentman, & Jackman, 2011; Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

Trust, as we learned in the previous sub-chapter, is dependent on a network Trust in a crisis cannot be built once a crisis starts – trust can only decrease during a crisis. However, a good crisis response may increase trust in the organization or communicator in the aftermath of a crisis, depending on how they handled the crisis. (Peilin & Roulleau-Berger, 2016; Putnam, 2000; Reynolds & Seeger, 2014; Starrin, 2011.)

So, with more and more people turning to SoMe to get information in situations of crises, how can we trust what we read? And how do I create credibility in what I publish onto SoMe? Since this area has not been much researched in this area, it is hard to say, but credibility and trust are in the eyes of the reader. Backing up your information with links to other websites that emphasizes what you put in your tweet/status creates credibility. Another way to create credibility may be to prove that you are there; pictures that show you are at the scene. In this case, ethical principles may play a role in how which picture
you choose to publish, depending on the crisis event. A third way to maybe emphasize credibility is to retweet official organizations that comment on the crisis or crisis development, to keep updating on your situation as it progresses. (Keim & Noji, 2011; Lindsay, 2011.)

The power of SoMe is evident, but exactly how to utilize this power and how to use it to its full potential is unclear. SoMe need to be a natural part of crisis communication, and the guidelines on how to do that need to be established. Both for the organizations responsible for crisis communication, response, and the government, but also for the public to know how to draw attention to a possible crisis situation and spread warnings to those in the surrounding areas. Social networks are already used to an extent today in crises and are increasing; we just lack the information and framework on how to best use social networks as a crisis communication channel. (Keim & Noji, 2011; Lindsay, 2011.)

I have found a few studies researching how businesses or organizations’ presence on SoMe affects them. The research shows that it actually creates trust in that business/organization as well as authenticity by existing on SoMe and communicating with the online world. More and more research is made in this area, and one of the keys to creating credibility on SoMe during a crisis is to back up the information with an external source. For example, all media-houses use this ‘trick’ when they turn to SoMe to share their news. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Coombs, 2015; Lindsay, 2011.)

During Hurricane Sandy in the USA in 2012, false information was trending on Twitter about sharks in the subway system. However, people did not trust any information on SoMe, so FEMA opted to benefit from the level of credibility their website www.FEMA.gov had and published a rumor control onto SoMe through their official accounts on SoMe with links to their official website to increase credibility. (Schwartzman, 2013.)

Today, most traditional response agencies have negative assumptions about SoMe and assume that the accuracy and utility of information obtained from SoMe are off. They
view SoMe as having a strong potential to spread misinformation and rumors – and by doing that threaten public safety. However, with each new crisis, SoMe grows as means of supporting additional dissemination of information to the public. This information is also often critical and accurate, claims Keim and Noji (2011). They also add that more and more traditional news media rely on information obtained from SoMe.

Studies done with SoMe accuracy have found that old, outdated information has been disseminated via SoMe during crises. Just as false and inaccurate information, in some cases, the location of the hazard or crisis have been inaccurate. In the example of the Japanese tsunami, as discussed before, requests for assistance were ‘retweeted’ long after the victims had been rescued. Other studies argue that information gathered on SoMe is generally accurate – suggesting that reports about misinformation are exaggerated. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, & Hughes, 2007.)

However, that does not mean that misinformation and lies are not spread on SoMe during a crisis and may be an inherent problem. At the same time, new vulnerabilities have come to light as SoMe is growing its' influence on crisis communication. There may be people or organizations who intentionally spread misinformation on SoMe as a prank or act of terrorism. The spread of misinformation may cause real danger for first responders and/or people in need of help from the first responders. (Lindsay, 2011.)

Schemers turn to SoMe and take advantage of helpful people and vulnerable people to make donations to fake charities. And since the content of SoMe is not checked by anyone, privacy rights violations are possible. Since no one regulates what is published on SoMe, people are ‘free’ to describe personal tragedies connected to a crisis event and publish them. This issue was raised to awareness following the shootings at Virginia Tech in 2007 when infractions on individual privacy were made when news media used posts on SoMe to contact students who were there at the shootings. (Keim & Noji, 2011; Mayerowitz, 2007.)

On SoMe today, every user is responsible for the credibility of the information they
publish or shares on social networks. No one regulates the flow of information, just the
users themselves – we are responsible for the information we share. The power of the
masses is also apparent when misinformation is corrected by the users and then spread by
the users. Precisely what determines a source as credible and what makes information on
social networks trustworthy requires more research. (Keim & Noji, 2011.)

Studies already show that SoMe (social networking platforms) is used as a means of
communication in different emergencies and disasters – and that role has increased in the
last five years (Lindsay, 2011). What SoMe offers is a three-way communication between
organizations, emergency services, and the masses. In 2009, The American Red Cross
found that SoMe was the fourth most popular site to access information. No doubt, that
number has increased in the past years. (Coombs, 2015; Lindsay, 2011; The American
Red Cross, 2009.)

Meaning that SoMe not only works as a service that provides information, but the user
itself can also provide information to SoMe. They also found out in their study that
traditional media (newspapers, TV, and radio) are still valuable sources of information,
but people often turn to SoMe when something just occurred and they want immediate
information about that occurrence. (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014; The American Red Cross,
2009.)

Many assume especially organizations and emergency response agencies that information
on SoMe is not accurate and therefore the information on SoMe cannot be used. However,
as knowledge about the situation and development of SoMe continues, SoMe is growing
and is today seen as means of supporting additional dissemination of information to the
public, Keim, and Noji (2011) claim that the information on SoMe is often critical and
accurate. Even more, traditional media has started to rely on information obtained through
SoMe.

Though information on SoMe has become better and false information are handled better
and better, it does not mean that false information is not spread through SoMe. However,
researchers say is that the information generally is accurate. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, & Hughes, 2007.)

With these theories as a foundation and stepping ground to construct and understand the following study done in the aftermath of the attack in Stockholm on the 7th of April, 2017. Next section will describe the methodology and the research itself before section four will attempt to answer the previously asked research questions based on the answers retrieved in the study: How was SoMe used by people affected by the attack in Stockholm 2017? Do those affected by the attack trust the information on social media? And, what are the most significant problems with social media in situations of crisis?
3. Research design and method

This chapter will present the design and method of the study conducted on the subject explained in the previous section.

The aim of the thesis is to examine the relationship between social media usage and trust in situations of crisis and shed light on the usage of social media in a crisis situation and whether the information retrieved from those platforms are trusted. The research questions are; how was SoMe used by people affected by the attack in Stockholm 2017? Do those affected by the attack trust the information on social media? And; what are the greatest problems with social media in situations of crisis?

3.1 Method

The method used in this study is a single instrumental case study, as described by Stake (1995). There are many advantages in using case studies as the methodology, such as offering in-depth analysis and understanding of complicated issues or situations. The method is recognized as a good research tool in many social science studies and often studies issues tied to the community. One definition of a case study is, mouthed by Yin (1984, p. 23), “as an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident; and in which multiple sources of evidence are used”. (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984; Zainal, 2007.)

This methodology is often considered when seeking to answer the questions how and why, and when the context is important to the phenomena under study. The specific type of case study used in this thesis is the instrumental case study, which is used when examining specific behavioral-patterns through selecting a small group of individuals. The instrumental case study is defined by Baxter and Jack (2008) as “used to accomplish something other than understanding a particular situation. It provides insight into an issue or helps to refine a theory. The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role,
facilitating our understanding of something else. The case is often looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinized, its ordinary activities detailed, and because it helps the researcher pursue the external interest. The case may or may not be seen as typical of other cases.”. The description is based on Stake’s instrumental-type of the case study. (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Zainal, 2007.)

The study is conducted on a single case, hence the description of the methodology as a single instrumental case study. The case study methodology has received numerous criticisms, but to achieve a credible and trustworthy study one simply has to follow a few key elements; provide enough detail in the description of the whole process of the study so that readers can assess the credibility and validity of the study. Other key elements are clear research questions, appropriate case study design, systematic data collection and management; and correct data analysis. (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, & Guyatt, 2005.)

The selection of participants is non-representative to the population in Stockholm, and since the study is also a single instrumental case study, it is impossible to draw any general conclusions from the study.

3.1.1 Choosing a case to study

In order to answer the question if we can trust the information on social media in situations of crisis, the first step is to find out how to get the answers and from whom. It was clear from the beginning that somewhere along the way I had to find a crisis to study, which was not a simple choice since it first had not been a crisis that was not too far away, and secondly, it could not have gone too much time since the crisis.

Initially, the choice fell on the refugee crisis. It had, at the time, been a year since the crisis landed in Vaasa and the plan was to interview a handful of people from two cities; Vaasa and Pietarsaari about the crisis. More specifically how they heard about the crisis, how they obtained information about the refugee crisis landing in their city and if they posted anything on social media about the crisis themselves.
This was not an ideal crisis to study since the characteristics of this crisis and a crisis
developed by an attack or natural disaster are very different. The refugee crisis was a
prolonged crisis, progressing for months and it was not either sudden – there was plenty
of time to prepare, and the authorities knew when the crisis was to reach Vaasa. Due to
this, the flow of communication would be different, and there was no critical time-frame
and so on. The time-frame would also be an issue since it at the time was a year since the
crisis came to Vaasa – and there would be a high risk of people not remembering how, or
if, they used SoMe during that time.

Then, as the breaking news reached us about the attack in Stockholm, we knew that we
had to change the direction of the study – this was the crisis we needed to study. The main
reason for the change this late was the different types of crises they represented. From the
outset of the study, my supervisors and I knew that it would be difficult to get good results
studying the refugee crisis because the crisis was ‘a slow crisis’. The crisis stretched over
several months, and everyone knew when the crisis would reach Ostrobothnia. Communication in this sort of crisis is a lot different from a sudden and rapid crisis – just
like the attack in Stockholm. The attack happened on a Friday afternoon, and I
immediately contacted my supervisors. It was evident to all of us that changing crisis was
the right choice.

Choosing to study this particular crisis meant that it was a recent event and that the
participants in the study would have good recollection to their use of social media, as well
as their reactions to the content on social media. We would also be able to study a rapid
and an unexpected crisis that affected many people and made headlines across the world.

3.1.2 Case study: The attack on Drottninggatan, Stockholm

It is Friday afternoon in Stockholm City; the first alarm comes to the police at 2.53PM –
a vehicle has driven into a crowd in central Stockholm. A truck was hijacked and then
driven at high speed along Drottninggatan – a pedestrian street in the heart of Stockholm.
The truck hits multiple people along the way in, and the 570-meter-long journey down
Drottninggatan ends when the truck drives into Åhlens, a department store. (DN, 2017;
Ekot/TT, 2017.)

The subway is closed down in order by the police, and the rest of the public transports are shut down in the immediate vicinity of Drottninggatan. People are ordered to stay away from downtown Stockholm, and people in the adjacent buildings are kept inside. The telecommunications network is overloaded, and people are encouraged to use SoMe to contact loved ones. (DN, 2017; Ekot/TT, 2017.)

Rumors circulated bot on SoMe and traditional all afternoon about shootings in different areas of Stockholm, and various malls and department stores were evacuated as a precaution. Theatres and cinemas closed for the day in downtown Stockholm and it takes several hours before information about how many were killed or wounded in the attack – rumors flourished in the aftermath of two or three dead, but it took five-six hours before any number were confirmed: four dead and fifteen wounded. (DN, 2017; Ekot/TT, 2017.)

All public transports are re-opened around eight o’clock in the night. Due to so many being stuck at work and unable to get home, people opened up their homes, offered carpools and support for each other. The hashtag #openstockholm was widely used, and people came together through SoMe. (Fallenius, Sehlin, & Cosar, 2017.)

The reason I chose to study this particular case was due to multiple factors. First of all, it was a recent event, and people’s reactions, thoughts, and actions were still in their memory. Another, important reason to choose this particular event was the amount of activity on SoMe. The telecommunications network was down, many people were affected and due to that people took action, opened their homes, or offered car rides – and it was all coordinated those efforts through SoMe.

Another reason for this to be relevant for this research is the number of rumors circulation on SoMe and even on traditional media. So, there was plenty of information circulating alongside unconfirmed rumors and efforts to bring Stockholm together after the attack through the solidarity shown through the hashtag #openstockholm. Those were the reasons
why this case is relevant to research on.

3.2 Method of collecting data

The data was collected through an open-ended survey, a questionnaire was sent out to all participants, and more information about how the participants were selected is described in the next sub-chapter.

The drawbacks using an open-ended questionnaire is that the information gathered is not as detailed or exhaustive as compared with in-depth interviews. Therefore, all participants agreed to be contacted again if follow-up questions emerged. It was possible since all participants agreed to submit their email address at the end of the questionnaire for this purpose. After all, answers were submitted, and the first read-through was completed, all contact-information was deleted to ensure anonymity in the analyzing stage.

The questionnaire was sent out three weeks after the attack on Drottninggatan, at the beginning of May 2017, and the last answer was submitted two weeks later, on the 17th of May, 2017. The choice of using a questionnaire instead of interviews meant that more participants could participate in the study, and the choice was based on time-sensitivity and availability of the participants.

One participant was selected to do a test-run of the clarity, length, and the general level of the questionnaire. A few changes were made to clarify some questions, and then the questionnaire was tested yet another time with a second participant before sent out to the rest of the participants. Both of these tests are included in the analysis and the questionnaire in its entirety can be found in the appendix.

The questionnaire itself is loosely based on each of the chapters in section two of the thesis, but it is also based on the research questions of the whole thesis. The questionnaire is divided into four main sections: SoMe, trust in SoMe, SoMe in crisis situations and the Stockholm attack. Another two sections complete the questionnaire; basic information and
definitions at the beginning of the questionnaire and concluding questions in the end.

The first section includes a short greeting for the participant explaining the purpose of the study and definitions of keywords to avoid misunderstandings. This section also covers the basic information needed from the participants, including age and gender. Most of the questions in the entire questionnaire are open without response options in the hope of getting as honest and exhaustive answers as possible. There was also a conscious decision made to ask similar questions multiple times to exhaust even more information.

The first main section aims to define the participant’s general usage of SoMe, which platforms they visit, how often they publish own content (e.g., statuses) and how they use SoMe; is it for fun, for information, or for another reason? This section also includes questions about their opinion on key communicators being on SoMe. The purpose of this section is to gain information on the participant’s habits on SoMe and their general view on SoMe. This section will act as a base for the rest of the information gathered later on in the questionnaire.

Section two examines the general trust in SoMe; if they trust it and why, what does it take to trust and different factors that may affect the level of trust. For example, the participants were here asked that if the information is published by a friend, does that automatically make that information even more trustworthy? These questions link to chapter two, and the way trust is built and if a person’s social network matters when trusting information on SoMe platforms.

Next section is all about SoMe and crisis situations. Asking about the participant’s habit of and opinion on SoMe in a crisis – is it valuable? Worthless? Does the participant even use SoMe in a crisis? If so, then how? This section ties to chapter three and crisis communication. Questions about the different time cycles of a crisis and whether they affect the way SoMe is used in the crisis.

The last main section is focused on the specific case study. Beginning with establishing
questions again – such as where the participant was and how they were affected. Then ask questions about the hashtags that went viral and got plenty of publicity in the aftermath of the attack. Then again focusing on their SoMe usage during the crisis, their thoughts on credibility, timeframes and what they think could be done to make SoMe even better in a crisis. Questions about fake news were also asked in this section of the questionnaire, and these questions were motivated by the debate about fake news that circulated on traditional media in the aftermath of the attack. Fake news merely is defined as “false and sometimes sensationalist information presented as fact and published and spread on the internet” (Collins Dictionary, 2017).

Lastly, the participants were again asked if they trusted SoMe, and this time specifically in the Stockholm event. Then they had to clarify why they did or did not so.

### 3.3 Selection of participants

Due to the late change of crisis to study, a slight shift in methodology had to be done. Instead of face-to-face interviews with the respondents – chosen through self-selection and snowball sampling (participants engage others within their network) (Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Towns, & Wångnerud, 2017) – an electronic questionnaire was sent out to all participants, as described in the last sub-chapter. It was written in Swedish so that all participants could answer in their language. Therefore, all citations in the following section are translated into English.

The material used in this study was collected in the aftermath of the attack on Drottninggatan in Stockholm, 2017. Thirteen out of the nineteen participants were in Stockholm at the time of the attack, and out of those thirteen, eight were in Stockholm City. Many of those in the city center were in some way or another affected by the attack.

*I was stuck at work for a few hours after the attack and then had to walk one mile home [due to the public transports were shut down].*

- Participant #3

*I could not get home until late at night when the subway re-opened.*
A few others were also stuck in the center of Stockholm when public transport was shut down or opted to walk home. One of the participants had their car and told about offering rides to colleges stuck at the office.

The selection of participants was based on the requirement that the participant had to have been in Stockholm and close proximity to Drottninggatan when it happened. Since the interest in the survey was more significant than anticipated from people outside of Stockholm, a handful those individuals were granted access to the questionnaire and therefore the survey may also answer the question whether there is a difference in trust in and usage of SoMe in a situation of crisis depending on the user’s location.

The participants were first and foremost relatives, friends, or colleagues of people I know. I had a few former colleagues, friends, and relatives living in, or near Stockholm, and these were the first to be contacted. With their help, I got in contact with people who were willing to participate in the study, and even a few of my contacts participated in the study. The study got a bit of attention, and therefore a public request for participants was published on two Facebook Groups; one for college students in Stockholm and another for Swedish journalists.

I had personal contact with all of the participants through email, and all participants had to agree to be contacted again if there were any follow-up questions. In order to maintain anonymity, contact-information was kept separate from the answers, and any means of connecting answers to a specific precipitant were cut after an initial read-through of the questionnaire-answers, and possible follow-up questions were answered. This way, no connection can be made between a specific participant and their answers in the analysis. The questionnaire took about 40 to 50 minutes to answer. The goal was twelve participants, and in the end, a total of 19 participants filled out the questionnaire.

Participating in the study were twelve women and seven men. Fourteen were 35 years old
or younger, and the rest (five) were 36 years old or older.

3.4 Data processing and analysis

In the analysis of the collected material, I will go through the method of qualitative content analysis using an inductive approach. The actual interpretation of the collected material within the analysis is made by systematic categorization of patterns and themes. Namely, the text must speak freely to itself and create themes and categories describing the content. In other words, the content controls the analysis. This choice comes down to, similar to choosing case study and survey (the questionnaire) methodology, the subject is relatively new, and it is difficult to fully understand and correctly pre-define clear categories that will fit the collected material. (Bergström & Boréus, 2005; Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Towns, & Wängnerud, 2017.)

Content analysis is a method that analyzes content in different types of materials. It interprets the message, its intentions or sentence-structure in different textual sources and can broadly be divided into quantitative and qualitative content analysis. (Bergström & Boréus, 2005.)

The qualitative content analysis is based on subjective and holistic interpretation of the text's parts and context while applying specific rules for the actual coding. Interpretation takes place through systematic categorization of patterns and themes. The difference between quantitative and qualitative content analysis is, among other things, that the qualitative puts more emphasis on the whole and context. Interpretation and measurement often go hand in hand, and both use pre-determined systems for coding the analysis and following similar rules for reliability. (Bergström & Boréus, 2005; Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Towns, & Wängnerud, 2017.)

Hsieh and Shannon (2005) have three different ways to differentiate the job's approach when working with qualitative content analysis: inductive approach, deductive approach, and summative approach. In the first approach (inductive approach) – which I use – the
text may speak freely to itself and create themes and categories that may describe the content. The managed approach (deductive) has a predetermined coding scheme from which the text is interpreted. So finally, the summative approach uses mapping of word-usage in the material to get an overview of the text.

3.5 Reliability, credibility, and ethical aspects

The quality of the analysis should always be assessed by credibility, transparency, reliability, and transferability. In other words, does the result describe the message of the text? Is the result replicable? Is the result reliable and can the results be compared to other contexts/groups? (Bergström & Boréus, 2005; Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Towns, & Wängnerud, 2017.)

The disadvantages of the choice of the methodology are that it can be a matter of reliability and validity. Is the collected material sufficiently exhaustive and broad to achieve high reliability? The risk is also a significant loss, or the respondents are not representative of the population. The advantages are that the material is allowed to speak freely, it determines the categorization, and in this way, the material has the highest chance of telling as much as possible and as a result, hopefully, reach new intriguing insights about the use of SoMe in a crisis situation. (Bergström & Boréus, 2005; Esaiasson, Gilljam, Oscarsson, Towns, & Wängnerud, 2017.)

Regarding the ethical aspects of the study, four concerns were raised: protecting the participant’s information, reducing risk of unanticipated harm, reducing the risk of exploitation, and lastly, efficiently inform the participants about the nature of the study (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The purpose and nature of the study were repeated to the participants on multiple occasions; when they first were contacted and asked if they were interested in participating, and again before filling out the questionnaire. The participants could at any time withdraw their participation in the study, and they were also given the opportunity to read the study when finished if they wanted to.
To reduce the risk of unanticipated harm to the respondents I deliberately chose to wait until it had been one month since the attack before sending out the request, due to sensitivity of the attack and giving those the request was sent out to a chance to digest and process what actually happened. The risk of exploitation was low considering that all respondents participated voluntarily in the survey and had the possibility to withdraw from the study at any time.

Lastly, the participants were promised anonymity in the study and therefore all information that could identify the participants was removed from the analysis of the data. The only personal information that was used in the study was age-group and gender of the participants. All quotes in the results are gender-less to ensure anonymity further, and the number each participant was given in is random and not based on when the questionnaires were submitted.
4. Results

This section is divided into four main sub-chapters, each devoted to one of the research questions; how was SoMe used by people affected by the attack in Stockholm 2017? Do those affected by the attack trust the information on social media? And; what are the greatest problems with social media in situations of crisis? Each of the chapters will then answer that research question through analyzing the results of the case study. The first sub-chapter, however, will describe how the participants’ use SoMe on a regular basis.

These three sub-chapters are based on each other – understanding how SoMe is used in a crisis will help understand people’s trust (or lack thereof) in SoMe in that crisis. So only after understanding their level of trust is it possible to understand what the participants think are the most significant problems with SoMe in a crisis.

4.1 SoMe usage by the participants

This section focuses on the participants’ average usage of SoMe, which platforms they regularly use and what their purpose is to using SoMe, in order to establish some background to the participants’ usage and views of SoMe.

According to the figure below, the most popular SoMe platform used by the participants is Facebook – actually, all participants in the study answered that they use Facebook daily. The second most used platform is Instagram, which is used by almost three-quarters of the participants daily. Instagram is closely followed by WhatsApp or Facebook Messenger (chat-based platforms), which are used by 13 out of 19 participants.
Figure 3. The number of SoMe platforms used daily by the participants.

Figure 4. Distribution (%) of the number of SoMe platforms used daily by the participants.

This result shows that almost all participants use more than one SoMe platform daily, and about two-thirds of the participants in the study uses four or more platform each day.

Usage of SoMe is one thing and as the results show, quite high – but how about publishing new content to SoMe? As seen above, most participants are found publishing once a day to a few times a week. However, the results also show that the participants of this research represent each of the alternatives, with the fewest number of participants who either
publishes multiple times per day or more rarely than a few times a month.

![Figure 5](image.png)

**Figure 5.** Distribution (%) of the frequency of publishing new material onto SoMe by the participants.

Knowing the statistics of how often someone uses SoMe is one thing, but knowing why someone uses SoMe is also important, just as knowing how they would describe their usage of SoMe. As the name suggests, SoMe is meant to be social, and about three-quarters of the participants state that their primary reason for using SoMe is to keep in touch with friends and relatives and see what is happening in their lives.

*I use SoMe because it is the best way to keep in touch with people and it is always through SoMe I get the first news.*

- Participant #18

Looking at the answers, most state that there is not one single reason to use SoMe, but multiple reasons. Three of the nineteen participants only state that they use SoMe for the sake of keeping in touch or to express themselves, just as Participant #18 who uses SoMe both for keeping up with friends and to receive the latest news. He/she is not the only one either who states that they use SoMe to get information, but no less than 13 out of nineteen states this as a reason.

Other reasons that are mentioned are for example boredom, or just keeping up with interest, share articles, to express oneself, to discuss different subjects with other people
or because of work. Even if the reasons behind the participants’ usage are – to some extent – quite similar, that is not the case when it comes to describing their usage.

Someone says it is entirely personal, or that he or she consumes more content than he or she publish themselves. Some describe their usage as frugally, consciously, too much or generation bonded.

4.2 How is SoMe used in a crisis situation?

Earlier research already shows that the usage of SoMe in a crisis has increased in the past years (Coombs, 2015; Lindsay, 2011; The American Red Cross, 2009). Although this knowledge is valuable, in order to improve communication on SoMe, we first need to know how people use SoMe in a crisis. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to find out how people used SoMe in a crisis, especially during the attack on Drottninggatan in April 2017.

In analyzing the information gathered through interviews, three different themes emerged connected to how SoMe is used in a crisis situation; search for information, solidarity, and timeframe. Meaning that, people turn to SoMe to get information about what is happening, they try to locate their loved ones whom might be affected. Try to help those who are affected by spreading love and kindness, and as time passes, people usually turn to traditional media rather than SoMe. More of this in the following sub-chapters.

The study reveals that when something happens somewhere else, the participants usually learn about it through SoMe or traditional media. However, the study also shows that those who were in Stockholm City at the time of the attack mostly learned about the attack through friends or family who contacted them and were worried. SoMe and traditional media were then equal in how the other participants found out what happened on Drottninggatan.

Of the participants who were in Stockholm, all marked themselves as ‘safe’ on Facebook
Safety Alert to calm relatives and friends down.

*I marked myself as safe through Facebook due to so many of texted or contacted me on SoMe to see if I were OK.*

- Participant #10

*I marked myself as safe and wrote where I was because it was the easiest way to reach friends and family.*

- Participant #15

Many used SoMe to check if their friends were all right or to contact them directly when some news stated that the phone network was overloaded.

*I contacted my friends on Facebook and marked myself as safe. I then used Facebook Messenger instead of regular SMS since a key communicator reported that the phone network was overloaded.*

- Participant #5

Very few of the participants chose to publish anything other than that they were safe during the crisis, but those who did state that they did so to help others.

*I only shared what others already had shared in an attempt to help.*

- Participant #9

*...there was no panic, but it rather soon turned to ‘now, let’s help each other out.*

- Participant #18 on his/her thoughts about SoMe during the attack

However, when the participants learned about the attack, many turned to SoMe to get immediate information about what was happening.

### 4.2.1 Search for information

A few more than half of the participants say that they use SoMe and traditional media side by side when trying to get information about what is happening. Many who used SoMe to get information used the platforms as a bridge to other sources – often traditional media.
Although most participants also agree that SoMe is very important in getting the information out there.

*At first, I go to SoMe where I can find hundreds of links to different information sources...*

- Participant #11

*I often search for information on SoMe first where I can find links to a news page with a live feed...*

- Participant #1

...When it is something that just has happened or is still happening, then I turn to SoMe to get a picture of what is happening on the spot.

- Participant #13

*Because everyone can share information on SoMe, it is both better and worse since SoMe started to play a role in crisis situations. However, better it exists with some fake-news, then important news or messages from key communicators not reaching as many in a crisis situation.*

- Participant #2

This shows that SoMe is used as a ‘bridge’ to traditional media or other sources for information about the crisis. SoMe has also presented the public with the opportunity to directly follow journalists on SoMe and receive information about what is happening through their private accounts.

*I usually retrieve information from ... [lists multiple media houses] ... and individual journalists who are on the scene.*

- Participant #14

*It is often the major media house’s journalists who share the best info onto SoMe...*

- Participant #13

In summary, SoMe is used as what you could call an ‘information bank’ which the users use to find information published by media houses, key communicators or journalists themselves. Although, most agree that SoMe is an important communication channel.
I think that it is relevant in today’s society to share information on SoMe, it is a fast way of communication that reaches a lot of people...

- Participant #1

4.2.2 Time as a factor

The results also show a pattern in how and where the participants search for information. The participants state that time affects how they search for information. Meaning that when something is happening or just occurred, they state that there is more information on SoMe than on traditional media.

SoMe is widely used as the first source of information, but as time passes more and more dependent on traditional media to deliver information about what happened and why.

At first, I checked SoMe a lot and a live-update on a public-service news broadcast on TV, but when it had been a few hours, I started reading articles instead.

- Participant #19

...as more time passes I tend to go to slower media-sources. Also, I prefer weekly magazines when everything has calmed down – there is a lot of guessing the first 24-hours.

- Participant #11

I think that papers and radio have the most information and best updates the day after it happened.

- Participant #13

One gets the most information about what is happening now on SoMe, and also on other media sites. It might not always be correct information since it is the speed that counts on there. Deeper analyzes and follow-up is found on 'traditional media'.

- Participant #18

The study conducted shows that people still depend more on traditional media to deliver information about what is happening, but half of the participants state that they think SoMe is best at delivering fast information as things happen. However, as time passes, all participants turned to traditional media to get more information, updates, and answers.
Additionally, as discovered in the previous sub-chapter, almost every participant used one or more SoMe platform to either contact loved ones, mark themselves as safe on Facebook or to search for information. This shows that the participants value SoMe and its use in a crisis and most thought that SoMe worked well or relatively useful in this specific crisis.

*I think SoMe worked very good, I quickly got access to information from the public sector and reliable sources, even if I did not follow the origin profiles.*

- Participant #2

*I think it was relatively good, everything is unfiltered, and many were scared, and that makes weird information that is quickly spread. But to mobilize the civil society and #openStockholm, it worked wonders!*  

- Participant #15

*...I think that on the whole, it worked well. There was no panic [on SoMe despite false news about shootings], but it turned very quickly into ‘now let’s help each other’. That feeling would never have been without SoMe.*

- Participant #18

### 4.2.3 Solidarity through a hashtag

The third pattern that emerged was the use of hashtags. Both as a mean of finding information about what happened, but also concerning solidarity. A meaning of showing that one stand together with the affected – both locally and globally.

What quite a few of the participants bring up multiple times is the possibility SoMe stands for.

*The role of SoMe in a crisis is essential, just look at how the hashtag #openStockholm was used – no other channel could have conveyed that so fast.*

- Participant #15

SoMe offer a possibility like no other channel to mobilize civil society, for people to reach out to those affected and offer help. One of the participants in the study used the hashtag #openStockholm to invite people who were stranded at his/her home. Others shared
information and the hashtag so it could reach further.

*I discovered the hashtag when friends of mine opened their home to others.*

- Participant #13

*...a friend of mine posted an entry where she celebrated the openness and love it expressed.*

- Participant #1

*I helped by spreading hashtags like #openStockholm so it would reach further and those affected could get help.*

- Participant #14

*I did not personally use the hashtag, but I offered my colleague who could not get home to come to my house since I lived not too far away.*

- Participant #17

This solidarity was shown locally with numerous people opening their homes or offering rides to people stuck downtown Stockholm since the subway was shut down. Although, it could also be seen globally through the hashtag #prayforStockholm which started to spread on SoMe soon after the attack with people from all over the world showing that they stand with Stockholm in this.

Many states that this is what makes SoMe so great – the possibility for people to express love towards one each other in times of need.

*...it turned very quickly into 'now let's help each other'. That feeling would never have been without SoMe.*

- Participant #18

### 4.3 Is SoMe trusted in a crisis?

The last chapter analyzed how SoMe is used in a crisis and specifically in the attack on Drottninggatan in April 2017. As it is now known how the participants use SoMe in a crisis, we can see if they trust the information gathered on SoMe during and after the crisis.
Earlier research shows that although misinformation is spread on SoMe, studies argue that information gathered on SoMe is generally accurate and reports on false and misinformation on SoMe are exaggerated. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, & Hughes, 2007.)

The studies also show that misinformation and lies are spread on SoMe in a crisis and pose as a threat since it can cause real danger to, for example, first responders (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, & Hughes, 2007). The participants in this case study stated that they mostly use SoMe in the early hours of a crisis and mainly use it to either communicate with loved ones or getting information about the crisis. When searching for information they often use SoMe as means of finding other information sources. For example, reading shared information that is linked to a trusted information source such as a traditional media-, authority- or public service websites. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, & Hughes, 2007.)

This chapter focuses on whether the information retrieved from SoMe is trusted and what it takes to trust that information. In analyzing the results from the study, three different themes emerged here as well; the content itself, source criticism and fake news. The fake news will only be discussed briefly in this chapter since it is what the participants stated being the most significant problem with SoMe in a crisis – which is the subject of the next chapter.

The participants stated that trust in SoMe is not an easy answer, multiple factors come into play when deciding whether to trust or not trust the information on SoMe. From that place, the three themes presented in this chapter: content, source criticism, and fake news. When it comes to source criticism, two more themes emerged: who posted the content and where is the content coming from (globally/locally)?

When the participants were asked if they trusted the content on SoMe in general, three said no, while the rest of the participants were split in two: eight state that they partially
trust SoMe, while the other eight claims that it all depends on the source. When asked about trusting SoMe during the Stockholm attack – all but two stated that they mostly or at least partially trusted the information. This means that the level of trust in the information was a little higher during the Stockholm attack than it is in general.

When asked why some participants stated that it was because they already knew the sources the information came from and therefore trusted them. Some stated that they trust Swedish sources and therefore trusted the information in this case. However, trust is complex, and many participants claim that any information in a crisis is hard to trust. Meaning that even if they somewhat trust the information, it is taken with ’a grain of salt’. At least until a key communicator has confirmed the information, until then there are only rumors, speculations and plenty information being spread in a small amount of time.

*I mostly trusted the information [on SoMe during the crisis], but I also trusted that false information would be spread at the beginning of an attack. I have more trust to the information 24-hours after an attack than the information spread when it happens. However, I still do trust that something has happened, maybe because I know it is not something that would be spread as a joke [that the attack happened].*

- Participant #1

*I had a hard time trusting the information since the information was being updated so rapidly, but then again, I mostly did trust the information, yes, because the information came from Swedish sources.*

- Participant #6

General trust in information gathered on SoMe is lower than in a crisis, partly because of the same reason participant #1 described above; he/she trusted that something had happened because of the amount of information about an attack – he/she did not trust everything to be true about the attack in the first hours, but he/she did not doubt the attack itself. Although, when talking about trust in SoMe in general, much different information is spread about a million different subjects. One cannot as quickly say what is true or not. Therefore, it might be easier to trust information about a single subject/attack since the information is ’pointed’.
Everything can be reduced or angled. I trust certain signatures, others not so much. With that said, angled content can be as valuable as objective content; I just trust certain writers more than others.

- Participant #9

...I still trust that something has happened, maybe because I know it is not something that would be spread as a joke [that the attack happened].

- Participant #1

There is so much rubbish and untrue nonsense being written by many different people, content that is being spread by other people who does not know better. That is how false information/content is spread widely. However, also useful, and correct information/content is obviously spread.

- Participant #2

So, the participants have a few thoughts about trusting the information on SoMe, both in general and in the Stockholm-crisis. What do they then think about the information they themselves put on SoMe? Did the participants think about the reliability of their own content?

4.3.1 Content

When reading updates and information on SoMe, two things come to play; the content and the source – who posted it and where did the information come from. This section will discuss the content, while the next chapter is going to discuss the source.

Just as previously described, content plays a vital role in the decision whether information on SoMe is reliable or not. Most participants stated that they think their own content is reliable and most do in fact think about the reliability of their content before sharing the information on SoMe.

Interestingly enough, while half of the participants state that they do think about it, one-fourth of them state that they ‘do not need to’.
Have not thought about it, but I do not think I have ever published something worth thinking about either.

- Participant #5

It does not matter for me since I only want to express myself unpolitical.

- Participant #7

Most participants answered that they did think about their content credibility and most of them state that it is because they want to be sure that what they publish is the truth. Some also state that the level of criticism depends on the content published.

I only share articles from sources I know and whose source criticism I trust. If I share something just to make someone happy – a cat video for example – I am less critical since it is not of equal importance.

- Participant #1

The research also shows that the participants think even more about the reliability of their own content when sharing information in a crisis. While only half of the participants thought about reliability in their own content generally, all but two participants did so during the attack.

Yeah, I thought about the reliability of the content, therefore did I not re-publish anything.

- Participant #18

The participants in this study argued that content can swing the ball both ways – either it makes the information more or less reliable. This means that a very emotional or provocative content may lower the credibility.

I rarely trust the content on SoMe because many use a lot of emotionally charged words and exaggerate – just to get clicks. They seldom extract the core of the information, but rather the juicy parts that are unessential.

- Participant #6

Yes, I have published links to […] satire that people have seen as true. I had to stop since a lot
of people have difficulty understanding satire.

- Participant #18

One of the participants used to publish satire but does not anymore due to credibility. Leading to the fact that anyone can say anything on SoMe. The content on SoMe is generated by the users and not monitored.

We all play with image-building on platforms like Instagram; more or less, and as long as it is based on truth, it is okay. Then again, everything is angled, which one has to remember when scrolling through SoMe feeds. We live in a visual culture where everyone can create his or her online-person in whichever way he or she wants – but it does not show the whole truth.

- Participant #9

However, if the information is repeated and comes from multiple sources, then the participants are more likely to trust that information – even if, as they state ‘anyone can publish anything’.

I trust the information if the source seems trustworthy and if it concerns information that affects me in some way – and that I can find the same information through other sources or channels.

- Participant #1

I trust the information if it is a credible rumor if it is easy to stress the information with additional information from other places on the web.

- Participant #16

Anyone can publish anything, so for me to trust the content, it needs to come from a reliable source.

- Participant #14

Which then leads to fake news and source criticism; but before going into the latter in the next sub-chapter, a few words on fake news. Fake news is a significant factor in reliability, and the study shows that this was on the participant’s minds when reading information on SoMe and often led to lower credibility of the information.

Throughout the interviews, the participants kept bringing up fake news and source
criticism as factors in the ability to trust the information on SoMe – both generally and in a crisis. They go hand-in-hand when it comes to trusting the information – if the source is not trustworthy then there is no trust, and often when it comes to a questionable source, it is about fake news.

*I do not fully trust SoMe because there are so many fake sites, sites that publish populist and fake news et cetera.*

- Participant #3

*I read everything on SoMe very critically because of the amount of fake news being spread on Facebook.*

- Participant #11

More on fake news and what the participants further said about it can be found in chapter 4.4. What are the most significant problems with SoMe in a crisis?

#### 4.3.2 Source criticism

While the content itself can make a person trust or not trust the information; what tips the scale on whether to trust or is not the source of information. Even if the content itself may be hard to believe, a trustworthy source can make doubtful or hard-to-believe information more credible.

When specifically asked what it takes for the participants to trust information on SoMe, everyone answered that it depends on the source. Sixteen out of nineteen stated that a dependable and reliable source is key to trusting the information provided on SoMe.

*To trust the information, it needs to come from a trustworthy consignor, a person I know or official authorities, media, or organizations with (according to me) high credibility.*

- Participant #17

*To trust the information, it needs to come from a legitimate sender, for example, public service media.*

- Participant #8
To trust the information, it needs to come from established media houses and/or public service.
- Participant #10

I was very critical of what was written [on SoMe] about shootings in Stockholm, for example on Fridhemsplan, since there were no reliable sources of that information. However, I trusted what had happened on Drottninggatan since there were so many reports from the location.
- Participant #19

To trust the information, it needs to come from a trustworthy source.
- Participants #15

The source of the information needs to be trusted for the information to be trusted. Many of the participants stated that a ‘trusted source’ is either someone they know and therefore know their ‘agenda’ and values, or an established media organization, key communicators, or public service organ. The result reveals that almost all participants in this case study are vigilant and remain critical to any information read or retrieved from SoMe.

I think that the same principles for source criticism apply to SoMe as any other source or material.
- Participant #15

I rarely trust information on SoMe: if I did, it would come from a source I really trust because I do not blindly trust anything I read.
- Participant #2

Trust on SoMe completely down to the sender – and how likely it is to really origin from the sender it seems to come from. I do not trust ‘SoMe’, but I trust a lot of the content and the people on there.
- Participant #15

As previously stated, trust does not come easy, and it is not black-or-white. Even if the source of the content and the content itself play significant roles in deciding whether to trust the information or not, it is still not that easy. Just because the source seems reliable enough and the content is seemingly trustworthy does not make the information true.
There is so much rubbish and untrue nonsense being written by many different people, content that is being spread by other people who does not know better. That is how false information/content is spread widely...

- Participant #2

Everything on SoMe is not true.

- Participant #18

I somewhat trusted the information spread on SoMe during the crisis, but I was well aware that right-wingers take any opportunity to demonize.

- Participant #12

During the attack [on Drottninggatan] there was false information spread about shootings on both Twitter and established media sites.

- Participant #10

Once again ’fake news’ come into play and most of the participants actually state that fake news is a significant problem and a reason why SoMe rarely are reliable. However, the participants also stated that if the information comes from trusted sources – such as key communicators (authorities such as police or organizations such as The Red Cross) or media houses – and are linked to official statements or longer articles, then they trust the information.

I mostly trusted the information on SoMe because I mostly read information released by police or another key communicator, even if it was distributed by news sites.

- Participant #2

I think SoMe is good to keep oneself updated in a crisis, but one gets the truth only when the info is confirmed by established media houses. I worked at an editorial during the attack on Drottninggatan, and we did of course comb through the rumors on SoMe – but it was only when they were confirmed they become truths and only then could we build on that information.

- Participant #9

If the information is linked to an article written by a newspaper whose source criticism I trust, then I trust that I can also believe in the content. However, if it is a source I am not familiar with, that I have not heard of and seems unreliable, then I turn to ’almighty Google’ and/or Twitter
where I follow multiple news sites.

- Participant #1

4.3.3 Who posted it?

The source of the information – the publisher or writer in this case – have an impact on whether the information is trusted or not. This has such a significant impact on reliability; it seemed necessary to dig a little deeper since the study shows that the reader is a bit biased when it comes to the source. Here, in this sub-chapter, the writer of the content will be analyzed – because it turns out that the participants state that friends are more reliable than strangers.

The participants were asked if a key communicator or a private person on SoMe were more trustworthy and if a friend is more trustworthy than a stranger. The participants were not unanimous, but a few intriguing things surfaced in the analysis. It was made pretty clear in the previous chapter that key communicators are more trusted than private people.

*The information needs to come from established media houses of public service if I am to trust it.*

- Participant #10

*I trust the information if it comes from a legitimate sender, such as key communicators like public service media.*

- Participant #19

*I trust the information either if I know the person well, or either it comes from a key communicator or media house – like SVT, DN and so on.*

- Participant #5

This means that the participants value information from key communicators, but quite a few of the participants also stated that if they know the person who published the information, then they trust the information as well. On the other hand, what do the participants think about friends versus strangers – the reader knows the friend’s agenda and values, but not a stranger’s – leading to more reliability in the friend.
Of course, it matters – due to information about their viewpoint. Friends angles are easier to judge; strangers are strangers.

- Participant #10

There is a big difference because since I know my friends, it is a lot easier to check if the content is true or not.

- Participant #2

It makes all the difference. I can judge the person I know based on what I know about them. However, I do not trust unknown senders unless someone I trust know them, or the information can be confirmed in another way. Alternately, if there are sources I trust linked to the information.

- Participant #15

The result of this question might not be so shocking, but rather understandable – but it still matters. The participants state that since they trust their friends, the information spread by them can therefore also be trusted. Although, not even here do the participants swear by their friends’ truth – some information shared by friends still needs to be checked.

I know my friends and know which of them pay attention to the truth. Unknown people’s updates require more fact checks.

- Participant #16

4.3.4 Global versus a local source

There being a difference in reliability between friends and strangers are just about given, but how about reliability in sources that are local versus global? In this case study about the attack on Drottninggatan, all participants used Swedish, meaning local, sources for their information. However, since the question was worth asking, the participants were asked to think about another attack, for example, the attack on Westminster Bridge in London the 22nd of March 2017.

This time, only half of the participants stated that there is a difference in reliability whether the source is local or global. However, they admit that it is a difficult question to answer and may depend on what it is about.
I think it depends on what the report is about. If it is about the situation in Asia, I might trust a person who is on the scene more. However, it is at the same time easier to read the information from a Swedish profile since it is culturally closer to me and more accessible.

- Participant #6

I think there is a difference. I am always more critical when it comes to global sources. I have more trust in what is close to me.

- Participant #19

Sure, it does. I can check the information faster through local sources since I know how to get multiple aspects of the story. I would say that I am more prone to face value with a global story – out of laziness and that it seems so far away from me.

- Participant #10

Also, the closer an event is to us, the more we care and the more information we tend to want about the event itself. Then again, nine of the participants state that they see no difference in local versus global source. However, the other’s state that the person who is closer to the event has more knowledge about the event itself, even if the same principles still stands: source criticism.

I think I would rely more on the person closest to the event. For example, if something happened in Sweden, then I would trust Swedish sources more than others.

- Participant #7

4.4 What are the most significant problems with SoMe in a crisis?

The last sub-chapter analyzed whether SoMe is trusted or not in a crisis, and what it takes for the participants of this case study to trust the information – or make the information more reliable at least. This sub-chapter will continue on that same theme but change perspective; what is the problem with SoMe in a crisis situation. Sub-chapter 4.3.1 already brought up fake news as a significant factor to why the trust to SoMe is so low, and this will further be analyzed in this sub-chapter.
Other problems that emerged during the case study were that many of the participants did not follow key communicators on SoMe. This sub-chapter will also analyze why that is, and what the participants think about key communicators’ presence on SoMe. Lastly, I asked what the participants thought could be done about reliability in SoMe during crisis situations.

This sub-chapter aims to identify the factors that the participants think are behind a low reliability in SoMe in crisis situations. As previously discovered in the latest chapter, trust is complex, and so is the solution to low levels of reliability. However, even if the credibility in the information spread on SoMe during and in the aftermath of the attack on Drottninggatan in Stockholm were a bit low, the participants still state that the role of SoMe in a crisis is here to stay. With that said – the participants’ level of trust in the information retrieved from SoMe was higher during the attack than their general trust.

*The role of SoMe in a crisis is essential, just look at the way the hashtag #openstockholm was used – no other medium had been able to convey it so fast.*

- Participant #14

*The role of SoMe in a crisis can be super valuable both to spread important news and to mobilize civil society. However, it can also cause significant damage through the spread of fake news.*

- Participant #15

*I think that SoMe worked pretty well in this crisis [the attack on Drottninggatan], many media houses were sure to report that they did not have the full picture of the situation, but still reported. Many did also publish on SoMe not to spread fake news and sensitive pictures from the attack.*

- Participant #19

*It was OK, but I did not like the widespread of the rumors about shootings – which was unconfirmed information.*

- Participant #16

The lessons from the previous chapter still stand; the spread of rumors and fake news lower the reliability. Anyone can publish anything and the fact that everyone wants to know everything now.
The problem lies with established media houses that want to spread information as quickly as possible without the information being verified by police.

- Participant #19

The following sub-chapters will tackle two causes to low reliability in SoMe during a crisis: not following key communicators on SoMe and fake news. Lastly, the final sub-chapter will focus on the participant’s thoughts on how to make SoMe better in a crisis – if there is something that can be done.

4.4.1 Not following key communicators on SoMe

The previous chapter about trusting SoMe in a crisis noted that source criticism was one of the keys to trusting the information retrieved from SoMe, and one of the most trusted sources on SoMe were just key communicators or established media houses. The case study also reveals that only one-third of the participants follow key communicators on SoMe (media houses not included).

Only four participants follow the police on SoMe, and other authorities that some participants follow are help organizations, parliament, and foreign authorities. This means that only one-fourth of the participants in this study follows an authority that shares warnings on their SoMe accounts (the police and parliament). However, that does not necessarily mean that the warning will not reach users that do not follow that authority.

Even if you do not follow any authority yourself, they sometimes pop up on your feed by gaining popularity or through sharing. I think that it is good that they [authorities] are on SoMe – public information feels most pure coming from these sources.

- Participant #2

Although few of the participants follow any authority on SoMe, most agree that their presence on SoMe is a good thing. Naturally, a few have no opinion about the authorities’ presence on SoMe, or would not know since they are not following any on SoMe, although others say it is obvious that they should be on SoMe.
They need to show that they exist, they need to be noted and it is good that they can spread essential information when the situation requires.

- Participant #14

I see them more and more on SoMe, which I think is good.

- Participant #19

Their presence on SoMe feels rather important – everyone else is there, why should they not be?

- Participant #1

While the authorities’ presence is evident to some participants, three-fourths agree that their role on SoMe is to inform, communicate and spread awareness.

To communicate quickly on platforms where the modern person frequents.

- Participant #13

To create awareness about their operation, what they do and to give public information. It is also nice when you, for instance, see the police publishing funny posts on SoMe of what a typical day contains or about something funny they encountered on duty.

- Participant #2

Their role should be to create a platform where people can turn for answers and feel informed.

- Participant #13

Moreover, some participants, just as participant #2 above, highlight that SoMe offer an opportunity to break bias against specific instances of society, to visualize themselves and to create a platform where people can turn for questions. However, a few also argue that they have no role on SoMe, or that it is ridiculous when some authorities try to cheat on it by making funny videos.

...an authority is still an authority, maintaining a certain tone in communication, no matter on what platform, is important for credibility.

- Participant #9

Many official authorities on SoMe publish warnings and updates on their SoMe accounts
when needed, and most of the participants also agree that that is a part of their role on SoMe. On this specific subject, more than two-thirds thought that it is a good thing that authorities publish warnings on SoMe. Especially one answer was rather thought-provoking.

* I think it is good, especially since I have impaired hearing and therefore do not listen to the radio and seldom watch TV.*

- Participant #18

Meaning that SoMe offer another channel to distribute warnings and information to people with impaired hearing. Other comments about the authorities publishing warnings on SoMe were that it is relevant, a quick way to spread information and since the warning comes from a public source, more objective and concrete about what the public can do to deal with the situation. Another comment was made about the fact that SoMe cannot be the only channel through which information is spread – it is an important channel, but not the only channel.

* I think their presence on SoMe is good depending on channel and purpose. Organizations want to spread their message and therefore needs to exist on different channels. Authorities can use SoMe as channels to spread fast messages, but the need to check the truth in their message increase because of the risk of lower credibility in the information.*

- Participant #10

A third of the participants have previously had use of a warning seen on SoMe; most were environmental warnings. Warnings such as keeping inside due to smoke in the air from a fire or problem with the water supply. Others include information about a crisis.

* I read about a fire in another city where my daughter lived, and they had issued a warning to everyone living there to stay inside. I forwarded the warning to my daughter who had not seen it.*

- Participant #8

### 4.4.2 Fake news

When asked, all the participants stated that they think that fake news and rumors are a
problem on SoMe in a crisis. This was also seen as a significant stumbling block when the participants got to evaluate SoMe during the Stockholm attack. However, it was not all bad – the participants also had plenty of praise to the solidarity shown on SoMe through hashtags such as #openstockholm and #prayforstockholm.

Fake news lowers the credibility of the information on SoMe, and according to the participants, it might also pose a threat to safety. That, and playing into the hands of prejudices and increasing the gaps in society.

Yes, fake news is a problem because it can fool people to do wrong things at the wrong time and act non-optimally. And at the same time, it lowers trust in SoMe when fake news is embedded in the feed.

- Participant #1

Yeah, it is a problem. It creates an unnecessary snowballing effect that may obstruct police work. Everyone has a responsibility to think, manage their role and not making it worse by spreading fake news online which then become ‘truths’.

- Participant #9

It can have big consequences on what people think and their opinions. It creates ambiguities, increases gaps and reduces interpersonal trust.

- Participant #14

The participants of the case study have many opinions about fake news and why it is such a problem on SoMe. Not only does it lower trust in the information on SoMe and in some cases even to other people – according to the participants. Fake news can also increase gaps in society, spread fear and cause minorities to be falsely accused or harassed. However, the participants also think that better source criticism and general knowledge amongst people could decrease the amount of fake news on SoMe.

Yeah, it is a problem because in general, people are not as critical to the source as needed but rather spread it further without any other reflection.

- Participant #13

Yes, I think fake news is a problem, but maybe less so in a crisis situation when the speed is most
important. I want to believe that in time, most people will find out the truth.

- Participant #11

I think that the problem rather lies in established media houses that also wants to spread information as quickly as possible, but without verifying the information with the police.

- Participant #9

During the crisis in Stockholm, most participants stated that spread of rumors and fake news were a reason to why they did not wholly trust the information on SoMe.

I mostly trusted the information, but I had a bit of a hard time trusting all of the information because of the constant and rapid updates – but then again yes, I did trust it because it came from a Swedish source.

- Participant #6

I trusted most of the information because there was a lot of information which later was or was not confirmed by police.

- Participant #13

I did not really trust the information on SoMe during the crisis because it was not consistent with what was reported by media.

- Participant #9

The study revealed that many of the participants – as previously stated, argue that better source criticism can improve the level of trust to SoMe. When asked about what the user can do to recognize fake news, the participants answered with classic source criticism and stressed that more people need to be more critical of what they read.

Check the sources – all the time. Question the ones spreading so-called fragmentary truths.

- Participant #10

Source criticism, source criticism, source criticism. Everyone should think it through one more time and please search for a second source in the case of events such as the terrorist attack in Stockholm.

- Participant #8
Use google and search for other sources. Think; ‘if it is too good to be true, it usually is’.

- Participant #17

So, in the case of discovering fake news, the participants plead that that information would be shared.


- Participant #16

Check if there are reliable sources in the news and do your own research regarding the news. You can stop them by not sharing them and instead acknowledge that they are fake.

- Participant #19
5. Concluding discussion

The previous section presented the result of the study, and this section and chapter aim to conclude all the results and discuss what these results mean. This section also includes a sub-chapter where the limitations of the conducted study and thoughts about future studies on the subject are discussed. Finally, this section also includes a Swedish conclusion on the whole thesis.

The questions asked at the beginning of the thesis and which stood as a foundation of the study was as follows; How was SoMe used by people affected by the attack in Stockholm 2017? Do those affected by the attack trust the information on social media? And; what are the greatest problems with social media in situations of crisis?

The purpose of this thesis was to examine the relationship between social media usage and trust in situations of crisis, and shed light on the usage of social media in a specific crisis and whether the information retrieved from those platforms are trusted. In order to find this out and answer the research questions stated at the beginning of the thesis, a study was conducted in the aftermath of the attack on Drottninggatan, Stockholm the 7th of April, 2017.

It has been about a year since the work begun on the thesis, and during that time, multiple crises have occurred across the world – one which directly affected the thesis itself. Namely, when it was decided that the case on which the study is based on would be changed from the nearly ‘outdated’ refugee-crisis (meaning that it had almost been too long ago to get any valid results from the study) to the attack on Drottninggatan. The media has reported different uses of SoMe during more than a handful of crises. Especially the positive impact of SoMe and the outpour of solidarity in times of need. Take the earthquake in Mexico for example where relief efforts were directed on SoMe. (Dorell, 2017.)

Even if the tools and framework on exactly how to utilize social networks in situations of
crises are not in place, SoMe is already being used. It only took 23 seconds for the first
tweet to be posted after the bomb blasted in Oslo, 2011 and after the coordinated attacks
in Paris, people turned to social media to help stranded Parisians to shelter for the night
when police issued full lockdown (Mills, 2015; Nrk.no, 2017). The key is knowing what
information to trust according to previous studies. Plenty of misinformation and rumors
are spread on social networks, and they are hard to stop, one way to ensure credibility is
to underline the message published onto SoMe with references to other sites that already
have established credibility. (Lindsay, 2011.)

5.1 Concluding and discussing the results

To stay on track with the central theme of the thesis and researching what was intended to
be researched by the study and thesis, I chose to always now and then go back to the origin
of the thesis, think about the purpose and aim of the thesis. So, when designing the
questionnaire and disposition of the results-section, I had this in mind. Just as they will
play a role in the disposition of this sub-chapter where it all is to be tied together and the
key elements of the result is to be presented and discussed.

The first research question to be answered is ‘how was SoMe used by the people affected
by the attack in Stockholm 2017?’ The theories tied to this question can be found in both
the chapter about SoMe and crisis communication; specifically, in chapter 2.1.3 and 2.2.3
where the possibilities of SoMe as a tool in journalism and crisis is presented. This
question was mainly answered in the third section of the questionnaire, and its result was
presented in chapter 4.2; how is SoMe used in a crisis situation?

The theories say that SoMe is considered a crucial source of information in a crisis and
multiple news-media houses have their accounts on multiple SoMe platforms. The usage
of this information-channel is partly motivated by the fact that many visits these platforms
daily and often multiple times daily (Ghersetti, 2015). Another possibility the SoMe
platforms offers are the possibility for the public to inform media about an unfolding event
– meaning communication bottom-up instead of only top-bottom. (Alejandro, 2010.)
Earlier research also shows that SoMe is more and more being used in crisis situations, and name slow information from key communicators and significant amounts of false information as the most prominent problems with SoMe during a crisis (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Coombs, 2015). Earlier studies also mention the ‘great achievement’ of SoMe, namely the hashtag and the solidarity it represents in the aftermath of a crisis. The power of goodwill in society and solidarity of our fellow citizens is best distinguished through hashtags. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Coombs, 2015; Keim & Noji, 2011; Lindsay, 2011.)

Earlier research and the theories also mention that every user is responsible for the content they put on SoMe, both in sharing misinformation or correcting misinformation, as well as putting the truth out there or offering help for those affected. No one is monitoring the information on SoMe, and there is, therefore, a major risk of great spread of false information (fake news). (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Coombs, 2015; Keim & Noji, 2011; Lindsay, 2011.)

Just as the earlier studies show, similar results are found in this case study as well; three themes emerged in the results regarding the way those affected use SoMe in a crisis. Namely, they use it to search for information – however, the results also show that time is a factor, meaning that it was most widely used directly after or during the attack. The more time has passed, the more traditional media is used by the participants. When looking at the crisis communication lifecycle, SoMe is mostly used in the initial phase of the crisis – when the crisis is still happening, as well as at the beginning of the maintenance phase when the direct danger is over. From this point on, the more time that passes, the more likely are the participants to use traditional media. (Reynolds & Seeger, 2014.)

The participants also use SoMe to tell loved ones that they are all right or to get in contact with loved ones to see if they are all right. The third theme which emerged was the hashtags and the way they were used to show solidarity and love. For example, #openstockholm and #prayforstockholm, and many stated that this is what makes SoMe great in a crisis – nothing like it would have been possible without SoMe.
This result gives the traditional media some hope since all of the participants preferably turned to traditional media when they wanted information on the crisis. Retrieving that information from traditional media might have gone through SoMe, but it still counts. It means that traditional media is not dead – but it also means that SoMe really has made an impact on crisis communication. Because when no information was available on traditional media, the participants turned to SoMe to get information from there.

The results also show the positive attitude towards features such as the Safety Check on Facebook which almost all of the participants used. There were really no surprises in the results and answers to the first research question.

The second research question was ‘do those affected by the attack trust the information on SoMe?’ The theories tied to this question can be found in chapter 2.3; Trust and 2.4; Trusting SoMe in a crisis – in theory. In the questionnaire, this research question is touched on in both section two (general trust), four (SoMe in the Stockholm attack) and in section five – trusting SoMe in the Stockholm crisis. The results were presented in chapter 4.3 – is SoMe trusted in a crisis?

The research proves that information on SoMe is generally accurate and all the reports of false information and misinformation are exaggerated. It does not mean that fake news does not exist on SoMe, but rather that there are many truths out there as well. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, & Hughes, 2007.)

Earlier studies and the existing theories on the subject argue that SoMe become even better at disseminating information and that information also being accurate. The threat of fake news and misinformation is still there, but more and more key communicators and media houses also use SoMe as a channel of communication. One way of confirming the accuracy of information put on SoMe is by linking the information to trusted, external sources. For example, websites of key communicators established media houses or official statements. (Keim & Noji, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Schwartzman, 2013.)
Again, three different themes emerged in this study when asked if the participants trusted the information on SoMe during the crisis. Here are the factors that decide whether it is trusted or not: the content, source criticism, and fake news. Two of these were brought up earlier in the theories and mentioned in earlier studies – source criticism and fake news. The results show, and the participants stated that trust is not black-or-white, multiple factors come to play when deciding if one trusts the information or not.

The participants argue that the content may be a significant giveaway if it is true or not, meaning that if it is too good to be true – it probably is. Then there is the most significant decider of the three themes; source criticism. The information needs to come from a (to the participant) reliable source to be trusted. The results also show that information posted by friends is easier to trust than information from strangers. Also, that local sources are slightly more trusted than global.

Some participants even argue that because of some people’s lack of thorough source criticism, fake news and misinformation gets widely spread. Leading to fake news; also, the answer to the next research question – what are the most significant problems with SoMe in a crisis? The participants agree that fake news is one of the most significant problems with SoMe in a crisis and has an impact on choosing whether to trust the information or not.

Again, the answers in this study are in agreement with the results from earlier studies (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Keim & Noji, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Palen, Vieweg, Sutton, Liu, & Hughes, 2007; Schwartzman, 2013), but this study also brings something new to the table. The fact that the participants argue that the content itself may be a good indicator whether the information is true or not; an intriguing fact, but maybe not that surprising? Meaning that everyone has probably read headlines that seems 'too good to be true' or too ridiculous.

It is interesting that so many participants talked about the importance of good source criticism and stated that it was an issue where the information came from in order for them
to trust the information itself. At the same time, there were many comments about people not being critical enough, and therefore fake news and misinformation could be so widely spread on SoMe. It was equally impressive to find out that the trust in information gathered from SoMe in a crisis was more trusted than the level of general trust in SoMe. Even if some of the information was doubted during the crisis – no one ever doubted that it had happened.

Lastly, the third research question was: what are the greatest problems with SoMe in situations of crisis? The theories to this can be found in almost all the theory-chapters, but mainly in chapter 2.1 and 2.2. The question is answered in both section three and four of the questionnaire, and the result is presented in chapter 4.4.

As previously mentioned, fake news is brought up as a major problem in earlier studies on the subject. One of the reasons is the fact that it is the users that create the content on SoMe and that content is not checked by anyone. Another vulnerability is people, schemers trying to take advantage of a crisis for their benefit (such as setting up fake donations to get the money for themselves) or for example, organizations intentionally spreading misinformation to blame a specific group in society or spread fear. (Keim & Noji, 2011; Lindsay, 2011.)

The results which the study shows are again divided into three themes; not following key communicator, fake news, and lousy source criticism. Source criticism was presented with the previous question, but regarding key communicators and fake news, the participants stated that they both have a significant impact on the reliability of the information.

The results show that most of the participants think it is a good thing that key communicators are represented on SoMe and that their purpose there is mostly to communicate seeing as SoMe is such an important communication channel today. Although, it may be a problem that very few of the participants do not actually follow any key communicators.
However, the participants might not have seen this as a major problem, more of an inconvenience. They state that fake news is the problem, just because of the threat they may pose and the fact that they lower credibility in the rest of the content on SoMe. Not only that, the participants claim that fake news might even increase gaps in society, put the blame on an entire ethnicity-group which leads to harassment, and so on.

Rumors circulating in the aftermath of the Stockholm attack lead to lower credibility in the rest of the information. This also sparked a discussion what could be done about fake news – and this is where source criticism comes in. However, it is ultimately, up to each and every one to check the information before sharing and not to share false information – or even better, inform that the information in question is false.

The results of the research and the suggestions proposed by the participants are not that difficult to realize. It is all about education, educate people about their responsibilities, the consequences and how to be more critical. Educate people about the importance of efficient source criticism and recognizing fake news – and not sharing fake news but preferably call it out for being false. The results are also in harmony with previous studies regarding the fake news (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Castillo, 2016; Ghersetti, 2015; Keim & Noji, 2011; Lindsay, 2011; Perng, et.al., 2013; Schwartzman, 2013). However, a few new factors surfaced, and I think that all the lessons learned from this study can make a difference.

To put it more simply, the short answers to the research questions are that SoMe is mainly used for three reasons by people affected by an attack: 1) Get information about the attack, 2) tell loved ones that they are all right or see if loved ones are all right, and 3) to show support and solidarity with the use of hashtags such as #openstockholm. The information retrieved from SoMe in a crisis is mostly trusted, while factors such as content, source and amount of fake news circulating in the aftermath of an event can have an impact on that level of trust.

Lastly, the results show that the most significant problems with SoMe in a crisis is fake
news, not following key communicators and lack of source criticism by the users. The good news is that this is all something we can do something about and as previously stated; it is all about educating the users and learn from previous crises and look forwards. Even though there are problems, SoMe work wonders as a communication channel – just look at the impact of the solidarity shown through hashtags such as #openstockholm and #porteouverte.

5.2 Concluding and discussing the method

Chapter three presented the design and method used in the study, and I opted for a single instrumental case study, described by Stake (1995). There are many advantages in using case studies as methodology, such as offering in-depth analysis and understanding of complicated issues or situations. (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1984; Zainal, 2007.)

This methodology is often considered when seeking to answer the questions how and why, and when the context is essential to the phenomena under study. The specific type of case study used in this thesis is the instrumental case study and is used when examining specific behavioral-patterns through selecting a small group of individuals (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Stake, 1995; Zainal, 2007). The study was practically conducted through an open-ended survey, a questionnaire. The reasons for choosing a written questionnaire instead of interviews were practical.

For one, the questionnaire saved time both in the stage of collecting and analyzing the material. Secondly, for logistical reasons – it would have been difficult to travel to Stockholm and schedule all interviews for that time. Arguably, it would have been possible to conduct the interviews via the internet, i.e., Skype, but ultimately a survey was chosen because of time-sensitivity. A questionnaire would mean that more participants would be able to participate in the same amount of time and time would be saved in not having to transcribe the interviews. This choice was also made more viable when the possibility for follow-up questions was designed into the questionnaire.
The questionnaire was based on the research questions, and when analyzing the results, I am satisfied with the results gathered by the surveys. Looking in hindsight, if I had more time and maybe were closer to Stockholm, then I would have gone there and done interviews instead of a survey because the answers are generally more in-depth in interviews than in a survey. However, I am delighted with the content of the questionnaire since I argue that I got the answers I was looking for and most were actually rather exhaustive. After doing the analysis, it emerged that it would have been interesting to know – since one of the most significant problems stated by the participants were the lack of confirmed information on SoMe, and following key communicators would solve that – whether the participants chose to start following any of the key communicators represented on SoMe after the crisis. Because the study did also show that only a handful of them did follow any key communicator.

The selection of participants was based on self-selection, meaning that people who had been in Stockholm all qualified as participants. They were all contacted through my contacts in Stockholm and official requests for participants on two Facebook Groups.

I chose to describe the crisis event in Stockholm in this section further to give a good picture of what happened that day and what the participants were experiencing. For example, that a significant amount of information and rumors were circulation but very few confirmed information in the first few hours. I also described why this particular crisis was a great case to study – for example, the fact that it was so recent.

5.3 Final conclusions

More and more studies, articles, and books are surfacing on how to utilize SoMe. It is evident that SoMe is also used in situations of crisis, the research I have used in this thesis is only a fraction of the material available; Coombs (2015), Keim and Noji (2011), Acar and Muraki (2011), Lindsay (2011). Even the most prominent organization in emergency response and crisis management, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA, 2017) has already taken one step in the right direction when Craig Fugates, FEMA’s
administrator, had a meeting with some of the most significant social media platforms and smartphone manufacturers. Fugates then testified before the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Disaster Recovery and Inter-Governmental Affairs about the result of the meeting and how to best corporate SoMe in crisis communication and rescue responses. (Lindsay, 2011.)

The most important lesson learned, or result, from this research, is that SoMe is widely used in a crisis, especially during and in the immediate aftermath of the crisis. It is primarily used as a means of communication with loved ones, for example, via the Facebook Safety Check. Moreover, the participants of the study state that the best of SoMe in a crisis is the extensive use of hashtags to mobilize civil society and show solidarity and love in times of need.

The latest news is that Google has, as of July 2017, launched a tool – SOS Alerts – to aid communication in crises. They aim to “make emergency information more accessible during a natural or human-caused crisis. We bring together relevant and authoritative content from the web, social media, and Google products, and then highlight that information on Google products such as Search and Maps…” (Google, 2017). “…work with local authorities and first responders to provide access to critical information and resources when people need them the most.” (Google, 2017).

The tool, or service, has been developed in cooperation with both the Red Cross and FEMA. The service is meant to provide information about what had happened, how to seek shelter, phone numbers activated as a result of the crisis (hotline numbers) and even the possibility to donate money. The service/tool is also a means to broadcast public alerts and warnings to people in a specific area and gather official information and statements in one place to easily access correct information. (Google, 2017.)

The tool is a welcome addition to the means of relay accurate and reliable information to the public. The study conducted in this thesis was done before the launch of this new tool, so therefore no questions were asked about it.
The information retrieved from SoMe in a crisis is trusted more than the general trust in SoMe according to the participants, and they also stated that they mostly trusted the information on SoMe during the crisis. The primary culprits were fake news and the lack of source criticism, but, overall the participants state that it is good and works well in a crisis. There are improvements to be made, but just educating the users in source criticism and the impact their sharing can have can already be a significant improvement.

5.3.1 What can be done to make SoMe in a crisis more trustworthy?

When specifically asked about their thoughts on what could be done to improve the information feed on SoMe during a crisis and who is responsible, the participants did not have that many new thoughts. They did, however, discuss source criticism and that everyone is responsible for what he or she publishes.

The case study has revealed a few patterns pointing to what it takes to trust SoMe in a crisis and what the problems are. The participants are united in these apparent patterns; source criticism and fake news. Then, what can be done about increasing trust, decreasing amounts of fake news, and make people aware of the need of basic source criticism on SoMe? According to the participants can the two latter questions be seen as an answer to the first question; what can be done to increase trust? Meaning that a decrease of fake news and users with better source criticism makes SoMe more trustworthy.

Which leads to the fact that following key communicators on SoMe is essential when it comes to verifying information gained on SoMe. The participants mostly agree that the presence of key communicators on SoMe is good and one of their most important tasks is to inform and communicate on SoMe. Moreover, the study also reveals that even if the participants state that this is important, only a handful follow key communicators on SoMe.

Regarding the effort to decrease the amount of fake news on SoMe, some participants argue that the key communicators need to be faster and share more info on how to handle information in a crisis. However, they agree that no authority or SoMe platform
themselves can do much about decreasing the amount of fake news.

This means that source criticism may be an answer to how to make SoMe more trustworthy. Because the participants argue that a decrease in the amount of fake news makes SoMe more trustworthy since they labeled fake news as a major stumbling block in trusting SoMe. Meaning that source criticism makes the spread of fake news decrease, then source criticism itself must be the answer to increasing trust in SoMe?

Well, as learned earlier, the answer is not that easy. Source criticism is not one-facetted, and as seen in chapter 4.2.2, key communicators and their information is trusted, but then again so is the word of our friends. If the information is local or global also matters. The participants also stated that while they view themselves as rather source critical individuals, they often argue that ’people’ should be more critical to the source.

Above all, most of the participants do actually state that SoMe was great in the Stockholm crisis and was a swift source of information – information they could confirm since it was linked to other, trusted, sources. Also, the fact that the participants agree that the role of SoMe in a crisis is here to stay and is, in fact, necessary, even if there are risks.

Does this result reflect back and fulfill the aim of the thesis? The aim was to examine the relationship between social media usage and trust in situations of crisis and to shed light on the usage of social media in a crisis situation and whether the information retrieved from those platforms are trusted. I would say that the aim has been fulfilled and the questions answered; the information retrieved from SoMe in a crisis is most trusted, and I have described the usage of SoMe in a crisis. Regarding the relationship between social media usage and trust in situations of crisis, I would say that it is down to the individual. Each and everyone uses SoMe slightly different and trust is also independent of the person. This thesis has presented factors which can affect the level of reliability in the information on SoMe and factors that decide how SoMe, in general, is used during and after a crisis.
The most significant surprise for me was the level of trust in SoMe during the crisis – I expected it to be lower after all media attention on fake news and so on. However, this is also a good thing, and I think the boundaries of SoMe and the usage of it in a crisis is wholly down to the users. They – we – have the power to turn something terrible into something good – all through SoMe.

5.3.2 Limitations and future studies

This thesis does not hold all of the answers, and there are limitations of the thesis. This thesis only reflects back on one crisis; the attack on Stockholm in April 2017 and the number of participants are not representative. To collect better and more general answers on how SoMe is used, trusted, and what the problems are, then more studies on multiple crisis situations needs to be done. Also, this is a rather small study since it is only a Master’s thesis – so to get more reliable answers and a higher level of credibility in the results, more participants need to be part of the study.

With that said, the level of this study and its reliability is good. The study fulfilled its purpose, and there was no loss when the data were collected, all participants sent in their answers. The results are in harmony with previous studies, which shows consistency and the reliability in this study.

As future studies go, reports of misinformation were on occasion a problem as well during the attack in Stockholm, which is indicating the importance of more research and discussions on what can be done about SoMe in a crisis and how to make the information more reliable. Thus, this thesis and the whole project, Project RESCUE is exactly in time, and many lessons can be learned from all of the studies conducted during the four-year-long project.

I hope that this thesis will be of use in future studies and help in understanding how to improve information and spreading of information in situations of crisis. It is more important than ever to get correct and trustworthy information across to people during such a situation. Due to today’s widespread usage of SoMe, where news and fake news
are spread fast, we need to know how to spread correct information – but also how to retrieve such information if needed.

It is a somewhat new field of research, and a lot is being done at the moment. I expect more studies being released shortly, and since there is not much known about these phenomena, there are still studies that need to be conducted. New tools and features are presented every now and then by various SoMe platforms, and the impact and usage of these need to be tested and studied. Crises will not stop occurring, but knowing how to communicate better and reaching out is a significant help and step forward.

It is my sincerest hope that this thesis and the other studies conducted on the subject and in Project RESCUE can bring knowledge and in the future maybe even save a life. Because when a crisis occurs, fast and accurate information can be the difference between life and death.
6. Svensk sammanfattning


Avhandlingen skrivs inom ett internationellt projekt som startades i Norge 2014, nämligen Project RESCUE, grundat av SAMRISK II-programmet i Norges forskningsråd. Projektets uppdrag är att föra fram ny kunskap genom att studera hur sociala medier används i olika krissituationer. (Project RESCUE, 2017.)
Krissituationen som undersöks i den här avhandlingen är lastbilsattacken på Drottninggatan i Stockholm den 7 april 2017. Orsaken till att just denna kris används som fall i undersökningen är att det inte är för länge sedan det skedde och det faktum att den är geografiskt nära Vasa och Österbotten. En annan orsak är att det var mycket publicitet kring den solidaritet som visades på sociala medier under och efter attacken, samt att det inte var svårt att komma i kontakt med möjliga deltagare till själva studien. (Fallenius, Sehlin & Cosar, 2017.)


Hur fungerar då tillit? Tillit kan bland annat definieras så här: ”tillit är en av de viktigaste syntetiska krafter inom samhället” (Simmel, 1950, s. 326) och som ”tro på att andra inte, i värsta fall, medvetet eller villigt skada dig utan i bästa fall agerar i dina intressen” (Newton, 2013, s. 2). Det vill säga: tillit är att lämna bilen olåst och lita på att ingen tar den.

Tillit är kontextbundet till skillnad från till exempel ekonomiskt kapital. Tillit kan inte överföras från en kontext till en annan och samtidigt behålla sitt värde. Det vill säga att om en person litar på att bilen står kvar om han lämnar den olåst utanför sitt hem på landsbygden, betyder inte att samma person litar på att bilen står kvar om den lämnas olåst i en storstad. Därför kan tillit också variera mellan olika kulturer och länder, exempelvis så är de skandinaviska länderna kända för att ha höga nivåer av tillit, medan mer korrupta länder har väldigt låg nivå av tillit. (Uggla, Ruter, & Wijkström, 2012; Wollebæk, Enjolras, Steen-Johnsen, & Ødegård, 2012.)

Följande teori handlar om krissituationer och kriskommunikation. I avhandlingen användes en mycket bred definition av kriser som också inkluderar katastrofer: ”a
difficult or dangerous situation that needs serious attention” (Merriam-Webster, 2017). En kris kräver också medieuppmärksamhet och kan många gånger leda till politisk förändring. Sociala medier har de senaste åren tagit sig in på kriskommunikationsarenan och har rört om en hel del.


**Figur 6.** Kriskommunikation med sociala medier. (Keim & Noji, 2011.)
Något som speciellt fått en stor inverkan på sociala medier är just solidariteten och hur människor kommer samman efter en kris och hjälper varandra – ofta genom olika hashtaggar som till exempel #prayforparis och #porteouverte som började cirkulera efter de koordinerade attackerna i Paris 2014. (Mills, 2015.)

Ett tredje viktigt begrepp är sociala medier, och eftersom det är ett så pass nytt fenomen finns det inte en enda definition, utan det har använts flera. Dessutom utvecklas de sociala medierna konstant så det är svårt att ha en definition som täcker dem alla och den konstanta utvecklingen som sker. Vad alla sociala medier däremot har gemensamt är några karaktärsdrag: ”…they enable creation, rely exclusively on audience participation relative to the production of content, and involve varying degrees of user engagement” (Schneider, 2016, s. 4).

För att täcka alla olika former av sociala medier som finns har en definition använts och en generellt accepterad akronym i engelskan: SoMe. Definitionen lyder: ”web-based services that allow individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system. The nature and nomenclature of these connections may vary from site to site” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, s. 211).

Forskning visar att sociala medier har ett allt större inflytande på kriskommunikationen, och en studie från 2009 visar att redan då var sociala medier den fjärde största källan för information i en nödsituation (Lindsay, 2011; The American Red Cross, 2009). Allt fler mediehus finns idag representerade på olika sociala medieplattformar och så även nyckelkommunikatörerna. Sociala medier används i allt större utsträckning som en källa för information och nyheter och det har påverkat sättet man ser på traditionella medier. (Alejandro, 2010; Ghersetti, 2015.)

Det som tidigare forskning visat inom området är att många nyckelkommunikatörer och medieorganisationer använder sig av tilliten som finns för deras webbplatser och använder
den när de delar information på sociala medier. De bifogar alltså en länk till sin webbplats där samma och mer information finns som den man skrev i sin status eller tweet och så vidare. (Acar & Muraki, 2011; Coombs, 2015; Lindsay, 2011.)


Enkäten utformades på basis av forskningsfrågorna och delades upp i olika sektioner. Första sektionen frågade efter grundinformation om deltagarna själva och deras


Sociala medier användes dessutom för att kontakta nära och kära, och markera sig som säker via Facebooks Safety Check (säkerhetsstatus). Deltagarna ansåg att sociala medier var ett enkelt och smidigt sätt att nå sin familj och sina vänner, eftersom det i den här krisen även kom rapporter om att telefonnätet låg nere. Förutom att direkt kontakta anhöriga och markera sig som säker var det nästan ingen av deltagarna som publicerade
något på sociala medier. Någon enstaka respondent delade information om vikten av att vara källkritisk och några delade vidare tweetar med hashtagggen #openstockholm.

Ovanstående leder in på det tredje temat som framkom av analysen, nämligen användningen av hashtagggar som #openstockholm och #prayforstockholm. Många deltagare hade många lovord att ge angående hur bra sociala medier fungerade för att just hjälpa de drabbade, visa stöd och solidaritet. Faktum var att inget annat medium hade fungerat lika bra eller åstadkommit något ens i närheten av det som hastagggen #openstockholm gjorde.


Det andra temat, nämligen källkritik, fick många kommentarer av deltagarna, och många sade att folk är för dåliga på att vara källkritiska. När de frågades om de litade på källorna vid Stockholmsattacken påstod de att de ofta gjorde det, till stor del för att de redan innan kände till källorna och hade tillit till dem, t.ex. Aftonbladet och Dagens Nyheter. I undersökningen gjordes också en specifik förfrågan om det var någon skillnad om en vän publicerade information eller en okänd – likaså om det fanns en skillnad mellan lokala eller globala källor. Deltagarna i undersökningen påstod att vänner är mer tillförlitliga än
obekanta. De påstod att det var dels för att man kände personen, och dels för att man kände till deras åsikter och ”agenda”. Det var inte lika många som påstod att källans ursprung hade någon betydelse i fråga om lokal eller global källa, men i viss mån hade de lokala källorna högre tillförlitlighet än de globala. Det konstaterades ganska fort att frågan om tillit inte var svart eller vit, utan att det handlar om en gråzon. Det framkom ingen exakt formel på vad som gör information tillförlitlig eller inte, men deltagarna hävdade att det hjälper om innehållet i sig verkar trovärdigt, sannolikt och att källan i sig är trovärdig. Som trovärdiga källor nämnades bland annat etablerade medieorganisationer och nyckelkommunikatörer.

Till sist hävdade deltagarna att även rykten och falska nyheter har en inverkan på tilliten till informationen. De sade att när en kris sker så är det ett faktum att det kommer att cirkulera falska nyheter och rykten – frågan är vad man kan lita på. Några av deltagarna påstod att man oundvikligen kommer tro på någon osanning de första timmarna, eller så väljer man att inte tro på något förrän informationen bekräftats. Samtidigt ansåg många att det var bättre att ta det säkra för det osäkra – i det här fallet tro på att det var skottlossning runtom i Stockholm, hellre det än att råka illa ut.

Falska nyheter och rykten ansågs också vara ett av de största problemen med sociala medier i krissituationer, vilket också svarar på den tredje forskningsfrågan. De ansåg att det inte finns så mycket att göra, eftersom falska nyheter nästintill är oundvikliga. Det de däremot ansåg att man kunde göra var att lära människor bättre källkritik och att känna igen falska nyheter – och om man kom över någon sådan att man då borde dela med sig och upplysa att det rör sig om just falska nyheter.

Riskerna med falska nyheter är däremot stora, och deltagarna ansåg att det kan vara en fara för folk om sådana nyheter sprids och de uppfattades som sanning. De sade att det kan leda till att människor gör fel saker av fel orsaker, och som resultat av det eventuellt försätta sig själva eller andra i fara. Falska nyheter var ändå inte det enda problemet – även om det är ett av de större. Att inte följa nyckelkommunikatörer kan också vara ett problem; deltagarna var överens om att det är bra att de finns på sociala medier och ska

Det sista problemet som deltagarna i undersökningen lyfte fram var bristfällig källkritik. Trots allt tyckte ändå deltagarna att sociala medier fungerade relativt bra i den här krisen, och det fanns vissa guldskott – exempelvis Facebooks säkerhetsstatus samt solidariteten som visades genom hashtagggen #openstockholm. En av lärdomarna från det här är att falska nyheter är oundvikliga, men att det ändå inte betyder att man inte kan göra något åt dem. Deltagarna föreslog att man bör bli bättre på källkritik och dessutom lära sig konsekvenserna av otillräcklig källkritik och att dela falska nyheter.

Studien visade även att sociala medier har kommit en lång väg när det gäller kriskommunikation och redan har en självklar position i kommunikationsnätverket vid en kris. Deltagarna i denna undersökning visade att de flesta har tillit till informationen som de läser på sociala medier i en kris, och att sociala medier också är den första informationskällan man vänder sig till i en kris.

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Litar vi på sociala medier i en krissituation?

Sociala medier har blivit en viktig del av våra vardagliga liv och en viktig informationskälla för många. Samtidigt fylls nyheterna allt mer med rapporteringar om terrordåd och de kommer allt närmare oss själva - tills det till sist kom till Stockholm. Men hur gör vi? När det händer, varifrån söker vi information om det som händer, och när det kommer till sociala medier; litar vi på informationen vi får därifrån?

Ja, just det här skriver jag om i min master och tack vare din medverkan kan vi tillsammans svara på frågan; litar vi på sociala medier i en krissituation? Och krissituationen jag syftar på i denna enkät är terrordådet i Stockholm fredagen den 7 april 2017. Enkäten tar ca. 30-45 minuter att fylla i och jag ber er att ta er tid och besvara frågorna utförligt, inte för min skull utan för ett bättre resultat som vi kan använda i framtiden.

Deltagandet är absolut anonymt och riktar sig till er som befann sig i eller i närheten av Stockholm vid tiden för dådet. Även om deltagandet är anonymt ber jag er vänligen fylla i er mail så att jag kan kontakta er ifall jag vill ställa några följdfrågor. Dessutom ger det här möjlighet till att skicka resultatet till er ifall ni är intresserade av att ta del av forskningsresultatet och/eller min avhandling. Min avhandling ingår också i ett internationellt projekt, så jag tror verkligen att resultatet kan bidra till större kunskap och förbättring för framtiden!

Tack för ert deltagande!

PS. Har du frågor ang. ditt deltagande, min masteravhandling eller annat så kan du kontakta mig via aehn92@gmail.com

*Obligatorisk

1. E-postadress *

2. Ålder *
   Markera endast en oval.
   - 25
   - 26 - 35
   - 36 - 45
   - 46 - 55
   - 56 -

3. Kön *
   Markera endast en oval.
   - Man
   - Kvinna

Definitioner

Sociala medier: (SoMe) "...de möjliggör kreativt skapande, förlitar sig uteslutande på användarnas deltagande när det kommer till att skapa innehåll, och olika plattformar har olika grader av engagemang från användarna och olika sätt som innehållet framställs."
Sociala medier
Jag ber dig ta din tid när du svarar på frågorna och eventuellt också går tillbaka och ser igenom dina SoMe-flöden (SoMe= sociala medier) från den dagen och dagarna efteråt. Enkäten (minus inledningen) består av fem sektioner och jag hoppas du svarar så utförligt som möjligt på alla frågor.

Tack!

4. Hur ofta är du aktiv på sociala medier?

Markera endast en oval.

- Är i princip konstant inne på sociala medier
- Flera gånger i timmen
- 1-2 ggr per timme
- Kollar flödet på morgonen (eventuellt under lunchen), men sedan först efter jobbet/skolen och mer aktiv under kvällen
- Flera gånger per dag, men inte varje timme
- Några gånger per dag
- Mer sällan

5. Vilka sociala medier använder du dagligen?*

*Finns även andra sociala medier, men har i avhandlingen främst fokuserat på dessa alternativ

Markera alla som gäller.

- Facebook
- Twitter
- Instagram
- Snapchat
- Youtube
- Blogg
- WhatsApp, Messenger el. annan chat-app
- Övrigt:________________________

6. Hur ofta publicerar du själv nytt material på sociala medier / återpublicerar någon annans innehåll?

Markera endast en oval.

- Publicerar nytt innehåll (status/tweet/bild/story) flera gånger per dag
- Publicerar nytt innehåll (status/tweet/bild/story) ca en gång per dag
- Publicerar nytt innehåll (status/tweet/bild/story) några gånger i veckan
- Publicerar nytt innehåll (status/tweet/bild/story) ca en gång i veckan
- Publicerar nytt innehåll (status/tweet/bild/story) några gånger i månaden
- Mer sällan
7. Hur skulle du själv beskriva ditt användande av sociala medier?

8. Varför använder du sociala medier?

9. Följer du någon myndighet på sociala medier och vilken/vilka i så fall?
   Till exempel polisen, röda korset, brandförsvaret mm.

10. Vad tycker du om myndigheters och organisationers närvaro på sociala medier?

11. Vad är myndigheternas / organisationernas roll på sociala medier enligt dig?

12. Vad anser du om att myndigheter publicerar varningar och sprider information till allmänheten via sociala medier?
13. Har du själv haft nytta av en varning/information en myndighet/organisation publicerat på sociala medier?
   Markera endast en oval.
   
   □ Ja
   □ Nej
   □ Kanske
   □ Övrigt: ____________________________

14. Hur i sådana fall?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

Tillit till sociala medier

15. Litar du på innehållet i sociala medier?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

16. Varför / varför inte?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________

17. Vad krävs för att du ska lita på informationen via sociala medier?
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
   ______________________________________
18. Är det någon skillnad på om innehållet (på SoMe) publicerats av en vän eller en okänd? Varför / varför inte?

19. Är det någon skillnad på om innehållet (på SoMe) berör det lokala eller det globala? Varför / varför inte?

Dvs. Litar du mer på information om något som händer nära dig i Sverige än något som händer i t.ex. Asien. Eller är det t.ex. enligt dig skillnad på om du läser informationen via en svensk/skandinavisk profil jämfört med en utländsk profil?


21. Fejk-news har varit på tabellen ett tag och de sprids lätt via sociala medier - vad kan den vanliga användaren göra för att känna igen osanna nyheter och stoppa dem?

Sociala medier i en krissituation
22. Varifrån hämtar du oftast information om nyheter eller olika händelser?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

23. Vad är din åsikt om sociala mediers roll i en kris situation?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

24. Det har varit flera dåd och katastrofer de senaste åren, hur har du oftast fått reda på att något hänt?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

25. När något hänt (en kris) var söker du information?

Markera endast en oval.

☐ Via radio- & TV-nyheter eller mediehusens nyhetssidor på nätet
☐ Via sociala medier
☐ Via både sociala medier och radio- & TV-nyheter eller mediehusens nyhetssidor på nätet
☐ Övrigt: __________________________

26. En kris har olika skeden (det händer nu - det hände för någon timme sedan - det hände igår - det hände för ett tag sedan). Var anser du att du får mest information i de olika skederna?


________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
27. Kommentar, tillägg till de tre senaste frågorna?


Dådet i Stockholm
Dessa frågor handlar specifikt om ditt agerande och din uppfattning kring sociala medier i samband med dådet i Stockholm.

28. Var befann du dig när lastbilen körde längs Drottninggatan? *

Markera endast en oval.

☐ På Drottninggatan / I närheten av Drottninggatan
☐ City
☐ Utanför City
☐ Utanför Stockholm stad
☐ Övrigt:


29. Hur fick du reda på att något hände?


30. Påverkades du på något sätt av det som hände?


32. Publicerade du själv något på sociala medier ang. vad som hände? Vad och varför? *

33. Tänkte du på tilliten i det innehåll du publicerade/åter-publicerade/ läste på sociala medier? *

34. När upptäckte du #openStockholm?

35. Använde du själv #openStockholm? Hur? *

36. Varifrån fick du mest information om det som skedde? *

37. Hämtade du information om det som hände från olika platser (sociala medier/ nyhetssidor) beroende på hur länge sedan det hände? Förklara
38. Hur fungerade de sociala medierna som informationskälla enligt dig i den här krisen? *


40. Vad kan man göra för att förbättra informationsflödet på sociala medier i en kris och vem ska göra det? *

Avslutande frågor

41. Har du någon annan erfarenhet av sociala medier i en krissituation?

42. Litade du på informationen från sociala medier i samband med dådet i Stockholm? *
Markera endast en oval.

- Ja
- Till stor del
- Till viss del/ilen del
- Nej
43. Varför / varför inte? *


44. Något du vill tillägga?


45. Vill du ta del av resultatet av forskningen? *

Markera endast en öval.

☐ Ja
☐ Nej
☐ Kanske
☐ Övrigt

☐ Skicka en kopia av mina svar.