The Double-Edged Sword of Social Media in the European Union Crisis Management: A Literature Review

La espada de doble filo de las redes sociales en la gestión de crisis de la Unión Europea: revisión de literatura

A espada de dois gumes das redes sociais na gestão de crises da União Europeia: uma revisão da literatura

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ABSTRACT. This literature review examines the evolving role of social media in crisis management within the European Union (EU). Building upon peer-reviewed articles published from 2013 to 2024, the study explores how social media platforms simultaneously facilitate rapid information exchange and amplify misinformation, shaping public opinion and policy outcomes. Key themes include the paradoxical nature of social media as a "double-edged sword": enabling real-time updates and grassroots mobilization while also fueling polarized discourse and disinformation. Through a thematic approach, the review highlights diverse crisis contexts —financial instability, migration surges, natural disasters, health emergencies, and political upheavals— and the ways in which social media magnifies complexity by uniting or dividing stakeholders. Special attention is paid to emerging trends such as digital activism, extremist propaganda, and the increasing reliance on algorithmic data for policy decisions. By outlining the benefits and risks of integrating digital platforms into crisis governance, this review underscores the critical importance of informed strategies and balanced regulation. It concludes that while social media holds promise for fostering resilience, transparent institutional communication and robust digital literacy efforts are essential for mitigating the downsides of misinformation and divisive narratives.

Keywords: social media; crisis management; misinformation; Europe; governance.

RESUMEN. Esta revisión de literatura examina el papel evolutivo de las redes sociales en la gestión de crisis dentro de la Unión Europea (UE). Basándose en artículos revisados por pares publicados entre 2013 y 2024, el estudio explora cómo las plataformas de redes sociales facilitan simultáneamente el intercambio rápido de información y amplifican la desinformación, moldeando la opinión pública y los resultados políticos. Los temas clave incluyen la naturaleza paradójica de las redes sociales como una "espada de doble filo": permitiendo actualizaciones en tiempo real y movilización comunitaria, pero también alimentando discursos polarizados y desinformación. A través de un enfoque temático, la revisión destaca diversos contextos de crisis —inestabilidad financiera, olas migratorias, desastres naturales, emergencias sanitarias y convulsiones políticas— y las formas en que las redes sociales magnifican la complejidad al unir o dividir a los actores involucrados. Se presta especial atención a tendencias emergentes como el activismo digital, la propaganda extremista y el creciente uso de datos algorítmicos para la toma de decisiones políticas. Al delinear los beneficios y riesgos de integrar plataformas digitales en la gobernanza de crisis, esta revisión subraya la importancia crítica de estrategias informadas y regulación equilibrada. Concluye que, aunque las redes sociales prometen fomentar la resiliencia, la comunicación institucional transparente y los esfuerzos robustos en alfabetización digital son esenciales para mitigar los efectos negativos de la desinformación y las narrativas divisivas.

Palabras clave: redes sociales; gestión de crisis; desinformación; Europa; gobernanza.

RESUMO. Esta revisão de literatura analisa o papel evolutivo das redes sociais na gestão de crises na União Europeia (UE). Com base em artigos revisados por pares publicados entre 2013 e 2024, o estudo explora como as plataformas de redes sociais simultaneamente facilitam o intercâmbio rápido de informações e amplificam a desinformação, moldando a opinião pública e os resultados políticos. Os temas principais incluem a natureza paradoxal das redes sociais como uma "espada de dois gumes": permitindo atualizações em tempo real e a mobilização comunitária, mas também alimentando discursos polarizados e desinformação. Por meio de uma abordagem temática, a revisão destaca diversos contextos de crise —instabilidade financeira, ondas migratórias, desastres naturais, emergências sanitárias e convulsões políticas— e as formas como as redes sociais ampliam a complexidade ao unir ou dividir os envolvidos. Dá-se especial atenção a tendências emergentes, como o ativismo digital, a propaganda extremista e o crescente uso de dados algorítmicos para a tomada de decisões políticas. Ao delinear os benefícios e riscos de integrar plataformas digitais na governança de crises, esta revisão destaca a importância crítica de estratégias informadas e regulação equilibrada. Conclui que, embora as redes sociais ofereçam potencial para promover a resiliência, a comunicação institucional transparente e os esforços robustos em alfabetização digital são essenciais para mitigar os efeitos negativos da desinformação e das narrativas divisivas.

Palavras-chave: redes sociais; gestão de crises; desinformação; União Europeia; governança.

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Introduction

Crises of varying magnitude and nature have always been a defining feature of human societies. They may arise from political conflict, economic downturns, socio-cultural tensions, or natural disasters —phenomena that all share the capacity to threaten stability, induce social anxiety, and challenge governance structures. Over the past two decades, the rapid development of digital communication technologies has irrevocably altered how such crises are managed, perceived, and understood. Among these technologies, social media platforms stand out as a transformative force, reshaping human interactions in both profound and paradoxical ways. They now serve as essential tools in periods of uncertainty, providing not only a channel for rapid information dissemination but also a venue where misinformation, biases, and polarizing sentiments can take root and spread at unprecedented speed.

Early expectations for social media hailed these platforms as democratizing tools. Scholars perceived them as fostering citizen engagement, strengthening community resilience, and serving as a bridge between authorities and the public. In theory, social media could offer real-time situational awareness during emergencies, mobilize volunteers, and enhance collective decision-making. Indeed, at their best, social media platforms facilitate transnational dialogue, expedite relief efforts, and encourage the formation of supportive communities across borders. Yet, embedded within these ideals is a contrasting reality. As Aharoni and Lissitsa (2022) point out, social media can be a "double-edged sword": while it enables new forms of public engagement and representation, it can also spark or magnify hostile sentiments. This dual aspect highlights one of the most complex dimensions of digital communication: the capacity to unite disparate voices for a common cause, yet also to fragment audiences into echo chambers where antagonistic agendas flourish.

Recent large-scale crises —such as the global financial crash of 2008, the refugee and migration surges in the mid-2010s, the Brexit referendum in 2016, and most prominently, the COVID-19 pandemic— have offered multiple case studies of how social media fundamentally alters public discourse and policy debates. The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, laid bare the strengths and vulnerabilities of a hyperconnected information space. Stieglitz and Ross (2022) underscore how, in times of global upheaval, misinformation can proliferate as fast as facts, a phenomenon sometimes referred to as an "infodemic." Distinguishing reliable sources from conspiracy theories becomes increasingly difficult when reams of content are generated every second, making discernment a challenge for the average user. Pandemic-related examples suggest that while social media might provide immediate channels for disseminating health guidelines and updates, the same platforms could also become breeding grounds for rumors, skepticism about official measures, and unwarranted panic.

Although these challenges are often cast as novel, they rest on a fundamental tension that predates the digital era: the balance between freedom of expression and responsible dissemination of information. Historically, mass media —from pamphlets to radio and television— have been central in shaping narratives during crises, but never before has the capacity for individual users to broadcast information been this immediate or widespread. This shift has led to a blurring of lines between professional journalism and citizen reporting. Aharoni and Lissitsa (2022) emphasize the significance of such a shift: audiences are not only exposed to faraway crisis events but also increasingly willing to engage with them, transcending geographic and editorial boundaries. The instantaneous nature of online sharing means that local crises can become global concerns, eliciting international sympathy or, conversely, fueling global hostility.

Crucially, these platforms' features —algorithmic curation, user-generated content, viral dissemination— are reshaping how policymakers and public institutions respond to crises. Poel et al. (2018) note that policymakers have begun recognizing social media data as a valuable resource. Traditional data-gathering methods, such as public surveys and face-to-face interviews, are often slow and expensive, rendering them less effective during acute emergencies. By contrast, public sentiment can now be tracked via tweets, posts, and comments in near real time, offering a window into collective moods and needs. The concept of "social listening" has thereby emerged, where governments and NGOs monitor keywords, hashtags, and trending discussions to gauge public concerns swiftly and accurately.

This real-time data acquisition, however, does not come without caveats. Poel et al. (2018) caution that while social media analytics may be more efficient and timelier than traditional channels, significant methodological and ethical

challenges persist. First, not all populations use social media equally, meaning certain demographics may be underrepresented or entirely absent. Second, the sheer volume of digital content can skew analyses if not approached with robust computational tools. Third, linking social media data with other data sources (for instance, from sensor-based technologies) raises questions around data privacy and the risk of governmental overreach. These concerns bring to the fore an important dimension: the regulation and governance of a space that simultaneously fosters free expression and circulates harmful or unverified information.

In contexts where the stakes are particularly high —such as the migration crisis that reached its peak in Europe in 2015— social media's role was not only to inform but also to mobilize. Platforms like Twitter and Facebook became sites of simultaneous empathy and hostility, revealing how societal divisions might intensify during crises. On the one hand, hashtags encouraging solidarity (e.g., #RefugeesWelcome) sparked grassroots campaigns that effectively pooled resources and organized support for displaced persons. On the other hand, xenophobic groups exploited the same digital tools to coordinate anti-refugee protests, amplify fear-based messaging, and perpetuate negative stereotypes. Aharoni and Lissitsa (2022) discuss how these online communities can coalesce around shared resentments, with large online publics constructing narratives grounded in hostility. When these sentiments reach critical mass, they can translate into real-world aggression or influence policy proposals that limit humanitarian aid.

This interplay between empathy and hostility exemplifies social media's broader paradox. Stieglitz and Ross (2022) highlight how crisis-induced instability may foster both collaboration and division, with digital media accelerating both processes. Indeed, some scholars liken social media's effects to a magnifying glass, intensifying whatever social forces preexist. In times of relative stability, this can lead to vibrant civic participation and cosmopolitan exchanges; in times of upheaval, however, it can result in heightened polarization, fake news, and a decline in social trust.

Such volatility underscores the importance of critical media literacy among users. Policymakers and educators alike are increasingly calling for the development of "digital resilience" —the capacity to verify sources, detect false information, and engage constructively in online debates. However, it is not only individual users who bear responsibility. Social media platforms themselves have come under scrutiny for their role in regulating online content, with critics arguing that laissez-faire approaches amplify harmful narratives, while overly aggressive moderation curtails free speech. The tension between these two approaches plays out in almost every crisis, revealing a profound ambiguity in the governance of digital spaces.

Against this complex backdrop, the European Union offers a particularly compelling context for examining social media use during crises. The EU is a multi-state polity with diverse languages, cultures, and political traditions. As crises —from financial instabilities to health emergencies— unfold, the European project is tested, raising questions about solidarity, collective identity, and national sovereignty. When crises strike, policymakers in Brussels and across member states often attempt to coordinate efforts, while an array of social actors —journalists, activists, NGOs, and everyday citizens— take to social platforms to share information, coordinate aid, or voice dissent. Understanding how such interactions evolve is central to analyzing not only crisis communication but also the EU's own trajectory in times of upheaval.

In these circumstances, social media can function as a conduit for pan-European solidarity. Citizens from different member states can engage in open dialogue about shared problems— be they economic, environmental, or humanitarian— cultivating a sense of collective destiny. But the same digital environment can also be a stage for Eurosceptic narratives, where hashtags and memes disparage transnational cooperation or contest the legitimacy of EU institutions. The correlation between large-scale crises, the ascendance of populist movements, and rising discourses of distrust in supranational governance speaks to social media's capacity to shape not just how crises are interpreted but also how they are leveraged politically.

Another dimension of social media in crisis settings lies in its ability to expedite or hinder policy decisions. Rapidly spreading grassroots movements can sway public opinion and compel politicians to act. In some cases, online petitions, viral hashtags, and coordinated campaigns have pressured local or national governments to adopt measures addressing pressing emergencies. Conversely, an onslaught of misinformation or divisive discourse can paralyze decision-making, as conflicting demands and controversies overshadow constructive debate. The tension

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that arises between the immediate, emotive engagements found online and the need for measured, evidence-based policy responses is a challenge that EU institutions, among many others, have yet to fully reconcile.

Moreover, the advent of advanced analytics and machine learning tools has ushered in new potentials for policy research and crisis governance. Poel et al. (2018) acknowledge that social media data linking is fast becoming a norm, enabling the synthesis of large-scale user-generated information with other datasets. This approach can reveal patterns in how crises unfold, identifying at-risk populations or measuring the impact of particular interventions. Nevertheless, this practice remains primarily descriptive. It outlines trends and hotspots but may struggle to unravel deeper causal mechanisms, especially within culturally and politically heterogeneous regions like the EU.

As technology continues to evolve, these interactions among technology providers, policymakers, and civil society will intensify. Analysts and practitioners alike see artificial intelligence as a potential ally in crisis communication, capable of detecting misinformation early or using sentiment analysis to better understand public reactions. Yet AI-driven censorship or data misinterpretation could also worsen distrust in institutions if citizens fear their voices are being suppressed or misread by opaque algorithms. Governance frameworks that address these concerns, balancing innovation with accountability, are therefore a key part of the evolving crisis communication landscape.

In sum, the topic of social media usage in crises encompasses a variety of interrelated issues: from the technological (i.e., platform affordances, data analytics) and political (i.e., governance, populism, policymaking), to the social-psychological (i.e., collective identity, empathy, hostility). Situating these interactions within the EU context reveals the complexities of a union striving to maintain coherence despite internal diversity. Stieglitz and Ross (2022) point out that while social media fosters cross-border communication, it can also amplify conflicting ideologies in times of stress. With each crisis, the EU navigates a delicate line between harnessing the unifying potential of digital networks and managing their divisive capacities.

Throughout this introductory chapter, several recurrent themes emerge. First, we see the vast transformative power social media wields over crisis discourse. Second, we find persistent concerns regarding misinformation and polarized rhetoric, problems that become heightened when an event threatens existential security, such as the pandemic or an imminent political crisis. Third, the synergy between policymakers and the public —both of whom rely on digital platforms for expression, data gathering, and decision-making— demands a careful calibration of strategies that respect rights while safeguarding the integrity of information. Finally, the unique characteristics of the EU, with its supra- and subnational layers, present a microcosm of the promises and pitfalls of social media in crisis settings.

This broad overview lays the groundwork for deeper analysis. The aim of overarching is to discern how social media platforms are used in EU crises and to chart the resulting effects on public opinion, policy, and sociopolitical dynamics. In the upcoming literature review, existing empirical evidence and theoretical frameworks will be examined in detail to illustrate the many ways in which social media has been leveraged for crisis response, the obstacles and risks inherent in such usage, and how these tendencies vary across diverse European contexts. By drawing on case studies from multiple disciplines —communication studies, political science, sociology, and data science— the subsequent discussion will seek to map the evolving role of digital communications in both mitigating and exacerbating crises.

Ultimately, a nuanced understanding of social media in crisis contexts must transcend simplistic assumptions that platforms are inherently beneficial or detrimental. As Aharoni and Lissitsa (2022) remind us, the emergence of "anti-publics" in online environments underscores how technology can augment social divides as readily as it unites them. Meanwhile, Poel et al. (2018) illustrate that while social media data may indeed inform public policy effectively, it can also present serious challenges around data reliability and privacy. Engaging with these complexities is essential for policymakers, scholars, and citizens who strive for more cohesive, equitable responses to emergencies. With each passing crisis —be it a pandemic, natural disaster, or financial meltdown— the stakes rise, reinforcing the urgent need for informed debate about how to harness social media's undeniable power responsibly.

By continuing to interrogate both the promise and perils of these platforms, we stand a better chance of refining crisis governance strategies that not only address imminent threats but also foster long-term resilience. The chapters that follow will explore the specifics of these processes,

delineating how social media usage manifests in real-world scenarios and extracting lessons that may be applicable across different European contexts and beyond.

This review contributes to the literature by offering a cross-sectoral and cross-crisis synthesis of how social media has been used in EU crisis management between 2013 and 2024. Unlike previous studies that focus on single case studies (e.g., COVID-19, migration, or political unrest), this article maps recurring themes across different crisis types and highlights structural tensions in digital governance. By integrating perspectives from communication studies, political science, and data analysis, it addresses the underexplored intersection between real-time digital participation and institutional crisis response across multilevel EU governance.

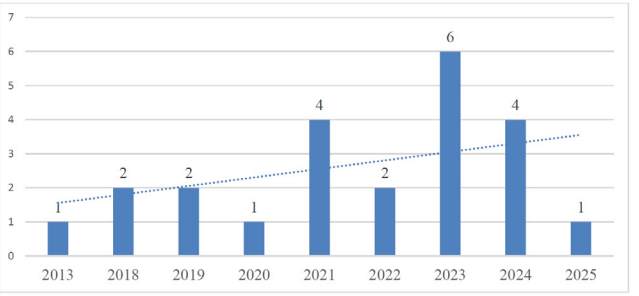
Moreover, this literature review contributes to a more integrated understanding of digital crisis governance by highlighting recurring tensions across crisis types and proposing a framework that bridges communication practices and EU multi-level policy challenges. It thus offers a meta-perspective on fragmented case-specific research.

Methodology of the literature review

This literature review followed a systematic approach to identify, select, and analyze scholarly sources on the role of social media in crises within the European Union, with a focus on Communication Sciences. The research was conducted through the Web of Science database using the keywords "social media," "crisis," and "European Union," filtered under the "Communication" category to ensure relevance. Only peer-reviewed articles published between 2013 and 2024 were considered, resulting in a corpus of studies that examine the dynamic relationships between digital platforms and various crisis scenarios.

A total of 23 peer-reviewed articles were identified and included in the final corpus, following a systematic search in the Web of Science Core Collection using the keywords "social media", "crisis," and "European Union," filtered by the "Communication" category. The articles retrieved were published exclusively between 2013 and 2024. This time frame was not pre-selected arbitrarily, but rather emerged as a natural result of the literature search: no relevant peer-reviewed studies matching these criteria were published prior to 2013. Consequently, the period reflects the actual evolution of academic interest in this topic, which intensified especially in the context of the refugee crisis, Brexit, and the COVID-19 pandemic. All sources are written in English, the dominant language in scientific communication on this topic (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Annual distribution of peer-reviewed articles on "social media", "crisis" and "European Union" indexed in Web of Science (2013–2024)



Following this initial selection, a co-occurrence analysis of keywords was performed using VOSviewer (Figure 2). The resulting visualization revealed how critical concepts (e.g., "social media," "crisis," "misinformation," "covid-19") interconnect within the literature. From these intersections, the main themes identified were the dual role of social media in crisis management, political extremism, migration, health communication during pandemics, responses to natural disasters, economic narratives, disinformation challenges, and local governance.

While this review includes a VOSviewer keyword co-occurrence analysis, additional visualizations—such as co-authorship networks, keyword evolution, or bibliographic coupling—were deemed beyond the scope of this article due to space and focus constraints. These analytical directions remain promising for future meta-analyses or systematic mappings that aim to assess the development of this research field over time.

These findings guided the thematic structure of the review, providing a robust framework for exploring how social media transforms crisis communication at different levels—public, institutional, and policy-related—within the European Union. The ensuing sections build on these core themes, offering a cohesive perspective on the ways digital platforms both facilitate and complicate crisis governance in diverse EU contexts.

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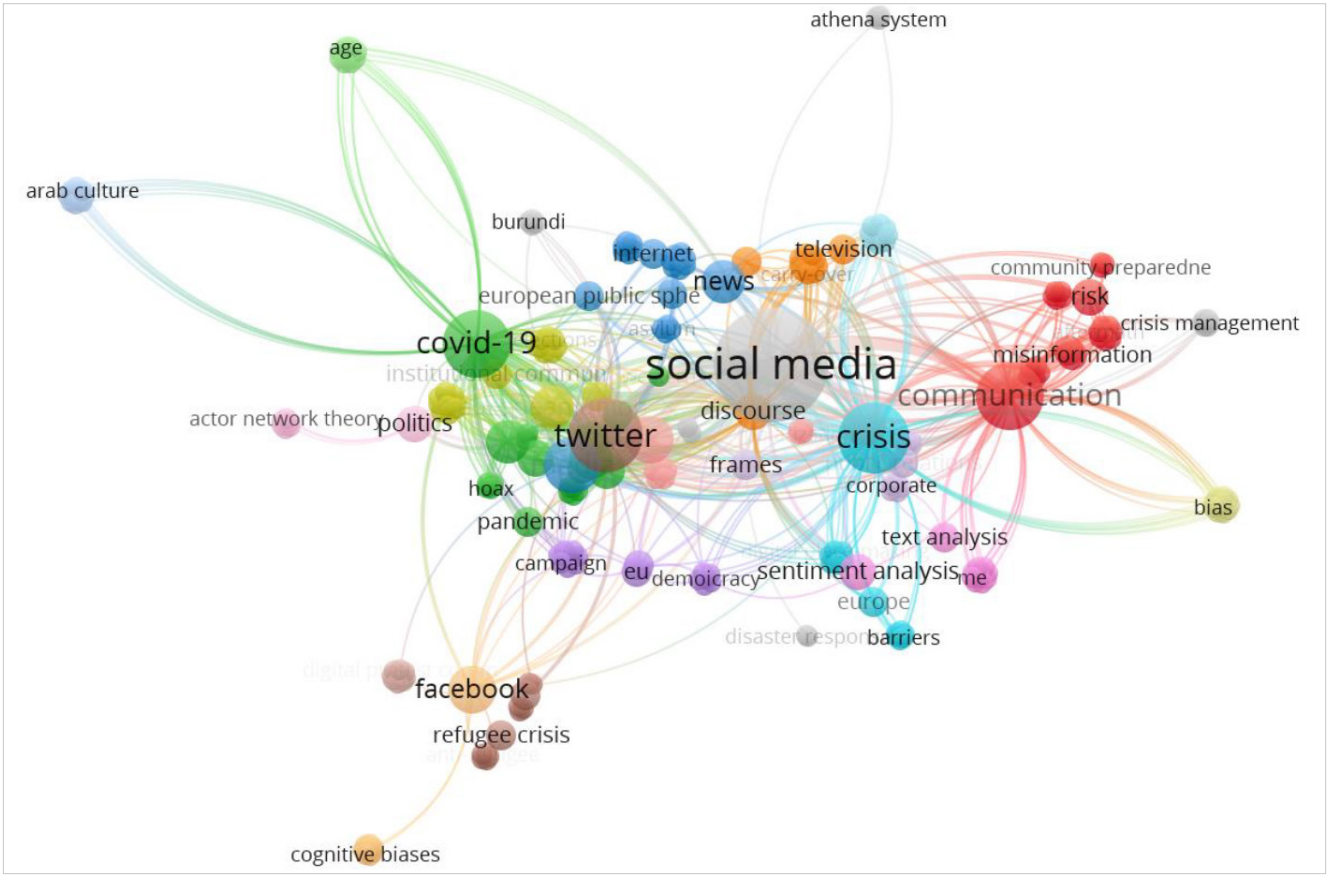
Figure 2
Keyword co-occurrence network generated with VOSviewer, illustrating thematic clusters in the reviewed literature on EU crisis communication



Although the initial inclusion criteria targeted the period 2013–2024, most of the articles meeting the relevance and peer-review standards were published from 2020 onwards. This concentration reflects the exponential growth of scholarly interest following the COVID-19 pandemic, during which social media use intensified, and new patterns of digital crisis communication emerged. Earlier studies, though present, were either context-specific or lacked the thematic depth required for cross-crisis comparisons.

Literature review

Social media occupies a central position in the contemporary communication ecosystem, especially when societies confront moments of tension, uncertainty, or catastrophe —what we broadly label as "crises." Over the last decade, researchers have offered extensive insights into how social platforms shape and reshape the communication processes of diverse stakeholders —from governments to civil society organizations, journalists, and citizens themselves— during such emergencies. In this chapter, the focus is explicitly on how social media is employed in crisis communication processes within the European Union (EU). While the contexts differ —ranging from migration crises to pandemics, political upheavals, and natural disasters— a unifying thread emerges: social media both amplifies the complexity of crisis scenarios and provides crucial channels for mitigating harm, clarifying uncertainties, and coordinating action.

The discussion proceeds in a thematic, structured manner. First, we explore the general dilemma of social media as a "double-edged sword" in crisis communication, whereby it can foster rapid information dissemination yet also propagate divisive or misleading content. Next, we examine the role of radicalization and extremism in online spaces, considering how uncivil or extremist groups exploit crises to spread hateful narratives. We then move

into analyses of migration and refugee crises, where social media often serves as both lifeline and lightning rod. Subsequently, the chapter inspects health emergencies —particularly the COVID-19 pandemic— and how platforms serve as crisis communication channels or as incubators of misinformation. Natural disasters present another domain in which user-driven content, crowdsourcing, and official announcements compete for attention. Political crises, populism, and online communication form a further line of inquiry, revealing how digital channels reshape public debates and intensify ideological fault lines. Throughout, we devote special attention to the phenomenon of misinformation and disinformation —an enduring concern in crisis contexts— and to the interplay of local governance, citizen activism, and supranational EU-level strategies. This leads us to reflect on emerging themes, best practices, and persistent dilemmas in harnessing social media for effective crisis communication.

Social media in crises: a double-edged sword

Social media platforms increasingly function as indispensable tools during crisis situations, enabling people to post updates, share resources, coordinate support, and voice concerns. Yet these same channels can intensify confusion if reliable information and robust moderation are lacking. Scholars have employed the metaphor of a "double-edged sword" to characterize the dual impact of social platforms on crisis communication (Aharoni & Lissitsa, 2022). On one hand, networks like Twitter or Facebook allow rapid, direct transmission of alerts, warnings, and guidelines. On the other, they facilitate the unfiltered circulation of rumors, xenophobic rhetoric, or conspiracy theories.

In ideal scenarios, social media empowers crisis communicators to reach vast audiences at once —sometimes circumventing traditional media gatekeepers (Abdel-Raheem, 2021). This potential is evident in acute emergencies such as terrorist attacks, earthquakes, or disease outbreaks, where updates must be disseminated promptly to ensure public safety. National authorities, local governments, and public health agencies benefit from the immediacy of digital channels, issuing guidance that people can share and amplify across networks. Thus, official information can go "viral" for constructive ends —reaching those in immediate need of instructions, clarifications, or reassurance.

In the context of crisis communication, social media's horizontal structure can also encourage participatory forms of content production. Citizens no longer passively receive crisis information; they create and distribute on-the-ground reports, photos, or videos. Particularly in large-scale crises where institutional channels struggle to keep pace, user-generated content becomes invaluable. For instance, real-time tweets or community Facebook posts can map out safe routes during floods, identify blocked roads, or alert responders to urgent needs, thereby complementing official sources.

While speed is essential in crises, it can also magnify the spread of unverified or incendiary claims. Aharoni and Lissitsa (2022) highlight examples where social media's informal discursive norms allow for unchecked expressions of hostility, scapegoating, and bigoted remarks. Similarly, Abdel-Raheem (2021) discusses how digital caricatures of complex geopolitical tensions, posted and shared widely, can oversimplify and dramatize crises, fueling animosities. When discussions deteriorate into echo chambers, partial truths and heated rhetoric may overshadow efforts at balanced, fact-based communication.

For crisis communicators —government officials, NGOs, media outlets— one persistent challenge is balancing timeliness with accuracy. The intense pressure to provide rapid updates can lead to unintentional errors; if these errors circulate widely, the institutional credibility of official communicators may be undermined. In turn, conspiratorial narratives or "fake news" sources can seize on mistakes, further eroding public trust. Hence, the tension between speed and veracity in digital environments underscores the double-edged nature of social media for crisis communication.

Political crises: extremism and uncivil discourse

Crises often constitute fertile ground for extremist groups, who exploit fear and uncertainty to amplify hate speech or divisive ideologies. Ekman (2018) illustrates how anti-refugee mobilizations across Europe, such as the Soldiers of Odin, harnessed Facebook networking to create rapid, transnational linkages among far-right activists. In crisis contexts —whether migratory surges, terrorist threats, or economic collapses— these groups frame their agendas as defensive, protecting "native" populations from alleged

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dangers. Unverified rumors, out-of-context images, and misleading claims proliferate, making social media a conduit for radicalizing individuals who might feel threatened or disillusioned.

Researchers have also scrutinized the effectiveness of platform moderation systems in crisis communication scenarios, particularly when extremist propaganda surfaces (Bouko et al., 2022). During a crisis, content volume escalates, placing added strain on human reviewers and automated filters. Extremist actors often adapt strategies to evade detection —for instance, using coded language or disguising messages as religious or cultural commentary. As a result, official crisis communication can become overshadowed in digital spaces by incendiary posts that sow confusion or incite violence.

Such dynamics underscore the need for agile, crisis-focused moderation practices. Real-time detection of harmful content can impede the viral spread of hate speech or disinformation that exploits an ongoing emergency. Yet moderation raises thorny questions about free expression and potential overreach, especially if algorithms mistakenly flag legitimate concerns or critical voices. Consequently, crisis communication scholarship stresses the importance of transparent moderation policies and cross-platform collaborations, so that extremist networks do not simply migrate from one digital service to another.

Even absent explicit extremism, crisis debates often devolve into incivility on social media. Aharoni and Lissitsa (2022) describe social media comment sections brimming with xenophobic barbs or calls for punitive responses against refugees. The anonymity or perceived distance of online spaces can embolden aggressive language. This dynamic presents an obstacle to more constructive crisis communication, wherein diverse stakeholders might otherwise engage in nuanced conversations about solutions.

For professionals in crisis management —be they local officials, humanitarian workers, or journalists— the heightened emotional tenor of social networks complicates outreach efforts. Attempting to provide balanced, empathetic messaging in an environment of vitriol may be difficult. The net result can be a narrowing of the public sphere, where reasoned and empathetic voices recede amid hostility. Some scholars advocate for more robust digital literacy campaigns to mitigate these tendencies, arguing that crisis communication should not solely rest on official channels but also empower everyday users to identify manipulative, extremist tactics (Ekman, 2018).

Migration crises: social media as lifeline and lightning rod

Perhaps no phenomenon captures the complexity of social media's role in crisis communication better than the European refugee crises beginning in 2015 (Avraamidou et al., 2021; Ekman, 2018; Aharoni & Lissitsa, 2022). During this period, social networks were simultaneously sites of empathy and xenophobia, bureaucratic coordination and populist agitation, altruism and radicalism —underscoring how digital platforms can host dramatically different interpretations of the same crisis.

Social media significantly aided those seeking asylum and those helping them. On-the-ground charities, volunteers, and refugees themselves used platforms to share route information, border updates, and humanitarian resources. Hashtags like #RefugeesWelcome, which Avraamidou, Ioannou, and Eftychiou (2021) mention, facilitated online mobilizations that transcended national boundaries. Twitter threads offered real-time intelligence on safe pathways, while private Facebook groups served as hubs for exchanging practical tips about asylum procedures.

In this sense, crisis communication is not merely top-down; refugees themselves exercise communicative agency, verifying rumors, warning peers about potential risks, or debunking fake news (Sanchez-Querubin & Rogers, 2018). For NGOs and local authorities, these user-driven networks became crucial partners in extending assistance. Sharing official guidance on legal rights or quarantine requirements, for instance, gained more traction when credible community leaders or established activists amplified the message.

While many social media initiatives fostered solidarity, others actively promoted hostility, fueling populist and nationalist agendas. As described by Ekman (2018), groups like PEGIDA and Soldiers of Odin spread alarmist narratives about an "Islamization" of Europe. These narratives thrived online thanks to the virality and emotional resonance of images depicting alleged criminal acts or cultural clashes attributed to refugees. Anti-refugee slogans became rallying points for digital activism, connecting individuals with radical leanings across Europe.

From a crisis communication standpoint, this polarization obstructs efforts at balanced dialogue and policy coherence. Misinformation about refugee involvement in crimes often circulates faster than factual corrections. In states facing electoral pressures, politicians sometimes harness or echo these sentiments to curry favor with segments of the electorate, further complicating crisis management. Aharoni and Lissitsa (2022) point to social media's capacity to politicize crises quickly, making them flashpoints in broader culture wars.

The refugee crisis highlights the ethical complexities of platform governance in crisis communication contexts. Should companies like Facebook or Twitter actively intervene to remove hateful content targeting vulnerable groups, or risk claims of bias and censorship? If they remain hands-off, do they enable the spread of incendiary posts that hinder effective humanitarian responses?

Further complicating matters, the interplay of local laws, EU regulations, and global platform policies is rarely consistent. National-level hate-speech statutes may conflict with corporate guidelines, while international organizations may push for unified codes of conduct. Crisis communication researchers thus often see migration-related tensions as test cases for broader conversations about accountability, free expression, and the shaping of public discourse in digital arenas.

Health crises: managing pandemics through social media

The global COVID-19 pandemic stands as a quintessential case of a prolonged, multi-sited crisis in which social media was integral to public messaging, behavioral guidelines, and community-level support (Biernacka-Ligieza, 2021; Drylie-Carey et al., 2020; Galik & Galikova Tolnaiova, 2022; Herrero-Diz and Perez-Escolar, 2022; Ufarte-Ruiz et al., 2020). This health emergency disrupted normal life across EU member states, prompting unprecedented use of digital channels by governments, journalists, and citizens alike.

Early in the pandemic, uncertainty was high: virus transmissibility, mortality rates, and recommended protective measures were in flux. As a result, crisis communication via social media became an immediate necessity. Biernacka-Ligieza (2021) notes that municipalities in Poland, the UK, and Italy employed Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and local media websites to share updates on testing locations, quarantine protocols, and local infection rates. Real-time data sharing was critical to maintain public trust, although inconsistencies sometimes arose due to rapidly changing information or differences among local, regional, and national authorities.

By allowing direct interactions with constituents, social media also transformed public officials into visible spokespersons. Some mayors and governors held daily Facebook Live Q&A sessions, where citizens asked about everything from mask mandates to social welfare provisions. This "horizontal" communication approach could foster intimacy and a sense of transparency —key assets in building and maintaining trust during a crisis. However, it could also prompt a deluge of questions that local governments struggled to answer quickly or comprehensively.

In parallel to beneficial uses of social media, health crises often spawn "infodemics" —a term Galik and Galikova Tolnaiova (2022) apply to the overwhelming circulation of fake news, rumors, and conspiracy theories about the pandemic. Without editorial filters, unsubstantiated posts claiming supposed COVID-19 cures or perpetuating hoaxes about governmental conspiracies attained significant reach. Misinformation, once released, was difficult to retract —even if subsequently debunked by official sources.

Herrero-Diz and Perez-Escolar (2022) demonstrate how early in the COVID-19 crisis, thousands of Spanish-language Twitter accounts peddled disinformation about infection sources and prophylactic "remedies." People's fears, combined with the novelty of the virus, created an ideal environment for sensational claims. In such circumstances, crisis communication strategies faced an uphill battle. Government press releases and WHO guidelines, though scientifically sound, competed for online visibility with viral posts that offered simplistic or emotionally charged explanations.

Ufarte-Ruiz et al. (2020) discuss the European Commission's active response, which included the formation of dedicated disinformation-monitoring units and the push for collaboration with major social media companies. These efforts highlight how crisis communication extends beyond simply broadcasting accurate information; it also

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involves the vigilant detection and refutation of digital falsehoods. Yet results remain mixed, reflecting the magnitude of the challenge: the Commission's fact-checking resources struggle to match the speed and volume of user-generated misinformation.

Amid the negative aspects of COVID-19 communication, many communities used social media to provide emotional support and sustain social ties while physically isolated. Biernacka-Ligieza (2021) underscores the role of local Facebook groups in coordinating volunteer help for neighbors, delivering groceries to the elderly, or organizing online cultural events to uplift morale. Hashtags like #StayHome or #AloneTogether became rallying cries, encouraging a sense of collective responsibility.

In crisis communication literature, these grassroots, peer-to-peer exchanges are viewed as potent instruments for sustaining resilience (Drylie-Carey et al., 2020). Rather than relying solely on official communiqués, citizens can form support networks that bolster adherence to guidelines and mitigate the psychological toll of lockdowns. However, this beneficial dimension does not negate the parallel growth of anti-lockdown communities or conspiratorial subcultures. As always with social media, beneficial and detrimental uses coexist, shaped by how people harness digital tools in times of turmoil.

Natural disasters: real-time communication and citizen input

Natural disasters —earthquakes, floods, wildfires— are highly time-sensitive crises in which immediate access to accurate information can save lives. Historically, official communication channels such as radio broadcasts or SMS alerts have been central, but social media now often supplements or even supersedes those methods. Fallou, Bossu, and Cheny (2024) document how digital platforms amplified public anxiety following earthquakes in Albania and Turkey, yet also provided tools for authorities to counteract misinformation.

When aftershock predictions or quake-related rumors circulate unchecked on social media, panic can ensue (Fallou et al., 2024). In the Albanian Earthquake case, sensationalist online articles provoked mass departures from Tirana. Because official channels did not respond rapidly, rumors became widespread before corrective information could gain traction. Such scenarios underline the importance of real-time "prebunking," a proactive approach in which experts or governmental agencies anticipate and refute likely rumors before they escalate.

In some contexts, the public does not merely consume crisis information but actively produces it. Fallou et al. (2020) illustrate this phenomenon in Mayotte, France, where repeated seismic activities and a perceived lack of official transparency led residents to establish a grassroots group named STTM on Facebook. Acting as a "citizen seismology" hub, the group featured over 10,000 members who posted personal observations, user-collected data, and supportive messages.

While official seismologists were initially absent from these forums, the user-led nature of STTM filled a communication gap by allowing locals to share experiences and reduce anxiety through mutual support. From a crisis communication perspective, this exemplifies a bottom-up approach that can complement or even substitute for traditional top-down announcements. However, Fallou et al. (2020) also caution that without expert guidance, misinformation, conspiracy theories, or panic-inducing speculation can proliferate within such spaces. Crisis communication, therefore, requires a hybrid model in which trained professionals and local community figures collaborate to validate or clarify emerging information.

Firmansyah et al. (2023) explore how humanitarian organizations leverage social media posts —particularly geotagged images— to gauge damage in the immediate aftermath of disasters. Platforms like Twitter or Instagram can provide extensive visual data about affected sites, enabling faster allocation of rescue teams or resources. Crowdsourcing initiatives coordinate volunteers worldwide to analyze social media images or statuses, labeling them with relevant metadata and thus helping relief organizations build a more comprehensive situational map.

Such practices demonstrate a shift from passive reception of crisis information to participatory, crowdsourced intelligence. Although valuable, crowdsourcing is not without pitfalls. Misinformation or erroneous geotagging can lead to misdirected responses, especially in

chaotic scenarios. Scholars thus stress rigorous protocols for verifying user-uploaded content and the necessity of supportive digital infrastructures that can facilitate large-scale collaboration without overwhelming volunteers.

Economic crises: populism and narrative framing online

Crises in the political domain —such as bailouts, referendums, and populist rebellions— demonstrate how social media can reshape not only the tone but also the substance of discourse. Traditional gatekeepers (mainstream media, party elites) have seen their power wane as political actors and citizens use Twitter, Facebook Live, and other digital tools to deliver messages directly to the public (Haenska & Bauchowitz, 2019).

During times of financial turmoil or major policy disputes, official crisis communication from governments or EU institutions strives to present coherent narratives. However, social media frequently disrupts these narratives by providing a platform for alternative voices to challenge, ridicule, or misconstrue official statements. The relative openness of these spaces intensifies the contestation of legitimacy and policy direction, making crisis communication an ongoing, digitally mediated negotiation of meaning.

Populist leaders often excel at leveraging social media's affordances: they speak a direct, emotive language that resonates well on platforms driven by virality and user engagement (Kluknavska et al., 2024). In a crisis, populist figures can seize the moment to portray establishment opponents as deceitful or inept. For instance, during the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak, many populist politicians in Eastern or Central Europe took to Facebook to cast doubts on scientific data or to blame external actors for domestic problems.

As Kluknavska and Mackova (2024) describe, these rhetorical strategies can polarize public opinion further. Instead of fostering collaborative crisis responses, populists use social media to amplify distrust in formal institutions or to rally supporters around nationalist or isolationist stances. This not only complicates immediate crisis communication efforts but can also have a lasting negative impact on social cohesion and trust in government.

Even though political crises typically revolve around national decisions, Haenska and Bauchowitz (2019) show that social media can catalyze "Europeanization" of debate. The #ThisIsACoup campaign, sparked by Spanish activists during the Greek bailout negotiations, rapidly gained traction across Europe. Citizens from multiple member states joined a common conversation, forming a transnational public sphere that overshadowed formal EU communication streams.

For crisis communicators in Brussels or national capitals, such transnational digital mobilization presents opportunities (to gauge public sentiment and unify calls for systemic reforms) but also challenges (when messages run counter to official positions and incite discontent). Crisis communication strategies that ignore this cross-border aspect of social media risk missing a crucial dimension of how narratives diffuse in contemporary Europe.

Disinformation crises: misinformation and infodemics

In times of crisis, misinformation can arise innocently —from speculation or rumor— but disinformation, in contrast, involves deliberate falsehoods aimed at manipulating public opinion (Galik & Galikova Tolnaiova, 2022). Digital platforms facilitate both phenomena, allowing false claims to go viral within hours. Because crisis situations often lack immediate clarity or robust fact-checking, misinformation can fill the vacuum, hindering effective communication.

Herrero-Diz and Perez-Escolar (2022) observe that social media fosters "toxic" environments during crises like the coronavirus pandemic, as conflicting narratives battle for users' attention. The prevalence of alarmist headlines and conspiratorial content can overshadow official advice, especially if the latter is slower to arrive or couched in technical jargon. The user-driven nature of social media means anyone can produce or amplify content, blurring lines between expert voices and novices.

Recognizing these dangers, the European Commission has engaged in multiple initiatives to track and counter online falsehoods (Ufarte-Ruiz et al., 2020). Platforms like EUvsDisinfo systematically identify disinformation narratives, while certain governments collaborate

with private-sector actors to remove or label misleading content. In the context of crisis communication, these efforts can be essential to preserving public trust in official channels. If citizens repeatedly encounter contradictory or false claims online —especially regarding life-and-death matters— they may lose faith in governmental competence.

Recent developments —such as the implementation of the Digital Services Act (European Commission, 2022) and the European Democracy Action Plan (European Commission, 2020)— have expanded the EU's regulatory toolbox for combating disinformation during crises. These frameworks require social media platforms to increase transparency, cooperate with fact-checkers, and limit algorithmic amplification of harmful content. Their inclusion reflects a growing institutional commitment to counteract crisis-related information disorders in real time, particularly when public health or security are at stake.

However, crisis communication experts caution against overreliance on takedown policies or censorship measures. When official agencies or social media companies ban accounts or delete content, allegations of suppression or elitism may surface. A more balanced approach involves media literacy programs, real-time fact-checking resources, and transparent disclaimers that highlight potential inaccuracies. By equipping users to recognize manipulative tactics, crisis communication can be more resilient and inclusive.

Beyond technical solutions, researchers consider the psychological factors behind why misleading claims resonate. During crises, fear, confusion, or anger can lead users to uncritically accept simple "explanations" or scapegoats (Galik & Galikova Tolnaiova, 2022). This emotional dimension underscores the importance of empathetic crisis communication that not only provides data but also addresses underlying anxieties. Health agencies, local governments, and NGOs might adapt their messaging to acknowledge these emotional responses, striving to connect with the public on a human level.

Local crises: governance, activism, and community resilience

The role of local governance in crisis communication is increasingly evident in social media scholarship (Biernacka-Ligieza, 2021). Local authorities are often the first line of response, particularly in smaller-scale crises —floods, power outages, or local outbreaks of disease. By using social media pages and local media platforms, municipalities can directly inform residents about safety measures, resource distribution, and emergency protocols. These local channels can be more responsive and personally relevant than national-level communications, fostering higher trust.

However, Biernacka-Ligieza (2021) demonstrates that not all municipalities possess equal digital capabilities. Some have well-organized teams who produce graphics, videos, and live streams, while others lack trained personnel or technical infrastructure. This variance can lead to a patchwork of crisis communication quality, where residents in certain areas receive prompt, engaging updates while others are left uninformed or reliant on rumor-prone forums.

Social media also empowers citizens to articulate concerns, organize neighborhood watch efforts, or coordinate local volunteering initiatives. Gibson et al. (2015) note that, during floods in Central Europe, social media became a forum for mapping inundated zones, collecting donations, and coordinating rescue operations. These citizen-led actions often complement top-down crisis communication by filling in real-time data gaps. Locals post photos of rising water levels or damaged infrastructure, creating "situational awareness" that helps first responders prioritize interventions.

For crisis communicators, such bottom-up activism can be both an asset and a challenge. On one hand, it decentralizes data-gathering and fosters community ownership of crisis response. On the other hand, the sheer volume of user-generated input can overwhelm official channels, and verifying the veracity or relevance of each post demands consistent monitoring. Nonetheless, harnessing user-generated content for positive ends —such as crowd mapping or open data initiatives— stands out as a promising avenue for crisis communication.

The patchwork nature of local crisis communication underscores the importance of digital literacy. If residents cannot differentiate official statements from rumor or identify credible community leaders, misinformation thrives. Some studies propose that municipalities and NGOs invest in ongoing media literacy projects, so the population is better prepared to evaluate online crisis-related claims (Biernacka-Ligieza, 2021).

This communal perspective aligns with theories of resilience, which argue that well-informed local networks can adapt and recover more swiftly when crises strike. When social capital —mutual trust, collaboration, shared norms— translates into online engagement, communities can effectively crowdsource solutions, promptly isolate falsehoods, and maintain solidarity even under severe stress.

EU crises: transnational challenges and social media dynamics

The European Union's complex governance architecture adds another layer of intricacy to crisis communication. During major disruptions —be they financial crises, public health emergencies, or geopolitical tensions— the EU is expected to coordinate cohesive strategies among diverse member states. However, social media can magnify national differences, as each government, party, or interest group employs its own digital messaging.

Labio-Bernal and Taboada-Castell (2023) analyze the EU Parliament's Virtual Press Room, finding that EU institutions often attempt to present unified narratives about crises. Yet the degree of resonance varies significantly, as national media outlets and local social media conversations may align with or diverge from Brussels-based messaging. In moments of peak tension, dissonances between local and EU-level frames can create confusion or mistrust among citizens.

Social media's transnational character can foster what Haenska and Bauchowitz (2019) call a Europeanized public sphere. Hashtags, viral videos, or memes about crises transcend national borders, allowing citizens of different states to engage in the same debate, albeit from distinct vantage points. This phenomenon can sometimes unify Europeans around shared concerns (e.g., solidarity for Greece during the bailout negotiations or empathy for refugees crossing the Mediterranean) and, on other occasions, fuel pan-European polarization (e.g., during Brexit or controversies over migration quotas).

Tuñón-Navarro and Carral-Vilar (2021) note that the COVID-19 pandemic prompted new interest in how the EU might improve cross-border communication. At times, the European Commission sought to shape narratives around vaccine procurement, travel restrictions, and economic recovery packages, using social media to highlight cooperation among member states. Yet critics argue these efforts lacked a coherent brand, facing competition from national leaders' messages, populist accounts, or even foreign disinformation campaigns.

Crises inevitably put institutions on trial. When the EU's crisis response is perceived as slow, opaque, or misaligned with local needs, social media amplifies critiques, from everyday citizens to prominent political figures (Rivas-de-Roca & Garcia-Gordillo, 2022). Populist actors, in particular, harness narratives depicting Brussels as an aloof, bureaucratic entity imposing burdens on member states.

From a crisis communication perspective, the EU thus confronts the perpetual need to demonstrate unity, empathy, and effectiveness in the digital sphere. If platforms such as Twitter erupt with discontent —accusations of corruption or inefficiency— EU spokespeople must address these sentiments in real time. Conversely, success stories or improved collaborations can quickly spread if they resonate with audiences seeking hope and stability. This interplay underscores the dynamic, high-stakes nature of crisis communication at the supranational level.

Case Studies and Emerging Lessons

The case studies presented below illustrate how the theoretical insights discussed throughout this review materialize in real-life scenarios. These examples are followed by a synthesis of emerging patterns and challenges in crisis communication.

Reilly and Vicari (2021) explore how citizens employ hashtags to facilitate decentralized crisis communication during terror incidents. After the Paris attacks in November 2015, #PorteOuverte ("open door") emerged spontaneously, encouraging Parisians to offer shelter to those stranded. Reilly and Vicari (2021) emphasize the altruistic dimension of such online mobilization, which recurred in subsequent attacks in Brussels and Nice. By analyzing tweet content and retweet patterns, researchers gained insight into how quickly and organically these supportive networks formed, circumventing official channels entirely.

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From a communication standpoint, these initiatives exemplify "bottom-up" crisis messaging: ordinary users become micro-broadcasters of assistance and solidarity. Although the direct life-saving impact may be modest in certain instances, the symbolic effect fosters communal resilience, showing that social media can unify city dwellers against fear and chaos.

Another emblematic crisis is the Brexit referendum and its aftermath, which Rivas-de-Roca and Garcia-Gordillo (2022) depict as a pivotal event linking populist political rhetoric with EU-level controversies. On social media, pro-Leave campaigns centered on reclaiming national sovereignty and halting immigration —messages that found fertile ground in local communities grappling with socio-economic insecurity.

For the Remain side and EU institutions, crisis communication entailed highlighting the risks of exit: economic, social, diplomatic. Yet the potency of grassroots, emotive messaging —spread by outspoken influencers and repeated through local Facebook groups— often overshadowed official statements. Hence, Brexit illustrates the capacity of social media discourse to reshape national crises into broader ideological clashes about European identity.

Ruiz-Incertis and Tuñón-Navarro (2024) address how the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 generated multiple communication challenges for the EU. Social media again became a battleground, with disinformation campaigns targeting Western audiences to erode sympathy for Ukraine or to question the utility of sanctions. EU officials, NATO representatives, and national leaders responded with coordinated messaging.

Amid the onslaught of war-related content, crisis communication strategies attempted to clarify policy stances, underscore support for Ukrainian sovereignty, and warn about manipulated or doctored footage. Researchers highlight how digital literacy among EU populations became critical, since well-crafted Russian propaganda posts could appear credible to underinformed readers. Social media platforms strengthened their content moderation policies for war-related disinformation, but the fluid nature of the conflict meant new narratives emerged daily.

A recurring theme is the tension between urgency and credibility in crisis communication. Platforms reward instant engagement, often penalizing slower, more deliberate messaging. While quick intervention can preempt panic, inaccurate or partial statements can backfire (Ruggiero & Vos, 2014). This dilemma leads some to propose hybrid systems where official agencies quickly release preliminary alerts, followed by updates as data solidifies. Maintaining public trust requires explicit acknowledgments of uncertainty and swift corrections of any missteps.

Digital communication infrastructures often reinforce echo chambers, as algorithms serve users content aligning with their existing views (Ekman, 2018; Aharoni & Lissitsa, 2022). During crises, such polarization can block consensus on fundamental facts —be it the seriousness of a pandemic, the culpability for a natural disaster's impact, or the best policy to manage refugees. Crisis communication scholars suggest bridging strategies like dialogue forums, community-based fact-checking, and cross-group social media campaigns to reduce insular thinking.

Many studies highlight that crisis communication today is not purely top-down. Citizen-driven or grassroots efforts can fill informational voids or challenge institutional narratives. Whether forming "citizen seismology" networks (Fallou et al., 2020) or providing crowdmapped flood reports (Gibson et al., 2015), these local or volunteer-based projects reveal a shift toward more participatory paradigms. Crisis communicators must either incorporate or collaborate with such grassroots efforts, ensuring consistent fact-checking and alignment with official guidelines where possible.

In attempts to suppress harmful misinformation or extremist propaganda, authorities may engage in surveillance or demand robust content removals. This raises ethical and legal complexities around free speech and privacy. The EU's stance, in collaboration with major tech firms, is still evolving. Scholars argue that in crisis contexts, heavier-handed moderation might be necessary to prevent harm; others worry about setting precedents that curb legitimate dissent (Bouko et al., 2022). Balancing these concerns remains a core challenge in EU crisis communication.

Crises can catalyze innovations in digital communication that outlast the emergency itself. The adoption of new technologies for telemedicine during COVID-19,

local volunteer networks forming around flood relief, or Pan-European hashtag campaigns —these developments shape how communities interact in non-crisis times too. Some scholars advocate that crisis communication planning should integrate post-crisis reflection, ensuring that lessons learned about misinformation, collaboration, and empathy are institutionalized in everyday policymaking (Biernacka-Ligieza, 2021).

Limitations and Future Research

This review is limited to English-language peer-reviewed articles indexed in the Web of Science database. Grey literature, national reports, and policy briefs were excluded, which may have reduced the scope of practical insights. Additionally, while this study focuses on the EU, it does not systematically compare findings with non-European contexts. Future research could incorporate comparative designs, mixed methods approaches, or real-time social media monitoring during crises to complement the existing knowledge base.

Conclusions

Throughout this literature review, a multifaceted picture of social media in crisis communication emerges, underscoring how platforms simultaneously enable and complicate the exchange of information in precarious moments. Social media's potential is vast: it can rapidly spread crucial alerts, empower citizen-driven relief, and cultivate solidarity across borders. Conversely, it can exacerbate confusion, facilitate extremist recruitment, and bombard the public with unverified claims. Reconciling these opposing forces is at the heart of crisis communication strategies in the European Union and beyond.

Three broad insights crystallize. First, the speed of digital platforms is both asset and liability. Timely announcements are invaluable in acute disasters or outbreaks, yet they must be balanced with thorough verification. Effective crisis communicators learn to manage iterative messaging: releasing preliminary information with disclaimers about its provisional status, then updating the public once new evidence emerges. This transparency can mitigate the risk of fueling rumor mills and protect institutional credibility.

Second, social media reduces barriers between traditional authorities and everyday users, shifting crisis communication from a one-way process to a multi-directional conversation. While this fosters greater inclusivity and potentially harnesses citizen expertise, it also places heavier demands on monitoring and moderation. Institutions that fail to monitor digital channels risk allowing misinformation or panic to flourish unchecked. At the same time, empowering volunteers or community leaders can significantly amplify the reach and relevance of official messaging.

Third, crisis communication in the EU context inevitably intersects political, cultural, and linguistic diversities. Migration crises highlight how social media can be weaponized to accentuate xenophobia or, conversely, to galvanize humanitarian responses. Health emergencies like COVID-19 reveal an "infodemic," where conspiracies and confusion swirl alongside official guidelines. Natural disasters illustrate how user-generated data can transform crisis management. And political upheavals —whether bailouts, referendums, or invasions— demonstrate the resilience or vulnerability of shared European identity. In all these cases, the EU's multi-level governance structure magnifies communication challenges but also opens the possibility for cross-border solidarity.

Looking forward, scholars propose several strategies to strengthen social media's constructive role in crisis communication. Investing in digital literacy ensures communities are equipped to differentiate credible sources from manipulative ones. Designing more user-centric official channels —rich in visuals, responsive in real time— can keep the public informed without overwhelming them. Collaboration with technology firms can refine algorithms that inadvertently amplify divisive content. Equally crucial is the engagement of civic-minded influencers —local activists, journalists, or respected public figures— to bridge official announcements and the grassroots domain, building trust and shared understanding.

Moreover, crisis communication must evolve with emergent technologies. Artificial intelligence (AI)-based tools may enhance real-time rumor detection or automate translation across EU languages, though each innovation brings fresh ethical considerations. The future likely holds more, not fewer, moments of crisis, be they

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related to climate change, security threats, or global health. Under these circumstances, social media will remain a defining element of how societies respond, learn, and adapt.

In sum, the literature underscores that social media has become indispensable in Europe's crisis communication landscape, offering channels for both official directives and grassroots expression. Its impact depends largely on how skillfully it is managed: whether rapid corrections and empathetic engagement can outpace hostile or misleading narratives, whether institutional transparency can overcome cynicism, and whether digital communities can strengthen rather than corrode social bonds. Crises illuminate these challenges and possibilities in stark relief. By heeding the lessons gleaned from refugee arrivals, pandemics, natural disasters, and political strife, EU stakeholders —policymakers, media professionals, NGOs, and citizens— can aspire to leverage social media as a force for collective resilience rather than division.

One limitation of this review is the exclusion of grey literature, policy briefs, and practitioner reports, which may offer complementary insights into operational crisis communication strategies. Moreover, while this study focuses on the European Union, its findings may not be fully generalizable to non-European or authoritarian contexts. Future research could adopt comparative designs - examining responses in EU and non-EU countries - or longitudinal approaches to assess the evolving role of AI, sentiment analysis, and algorithmic curation in the next generation of crisis communication.

Ultimately, crisis communication on social media will always involve balancing rights of expression with communal well-being, real-time urgency with factual accuracy, and local autonomy with broader solidarity. The scholarship surveyed here underscores no single formula can guarantee success. Yet as crises continue to evolve, so too must the adaptive, reflective strategies that integrate digital tools, thus ensuring that the potential for good outweighs the hazards that inevitably accompany it.

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