# Communicating security threats: Emergency politics, the media, and the role of the public

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The way security threats are communicated, constructed, and shaped by the media plays a crucial role in empowering particular actors and maintaining or changing the discursive power dynamics and relations within societies. Worldwide, a series of topics are presented in media as threats, demanding and necessitating emergency actions to address them, such as migration (Huysmans & Squire, 2009), minority rights (Prina, 2020), disinformation (Mareš & Mlejnková, 2021), and natural disasters (Lele, 2008). In recent years, especially with the problems related to the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a lively academic discussion about emergency threats becoming a political tool for realizing ambitions and how emergency politics and strategic narratives tend to become the status quo, leading to a decline in the public's freedom, harming democracy (De La Peña, 2021; Guasti, 2020; Heupel et al., 2021; Honig, 2014; Karyotakis, 2024).

As scholars have pointed out in the past (Honig, 2009; Lührmann & Rooney, 2021), democracies should not implement emergency politics that centralize power, as such practices alienate the public and harm the country's unity. Indeed, the power holders may present different issues as security threats, following the public's needs, or making the public keen on accepting controversial actions, such as fake news laws, restriction of minorities' rights, centralized political power, environmental destruction, and severe societal division. Unsurprisingly, countries that implemented such approaches and were previously considered democracies have turned into more autocratic regimes worldwide (Chowdhury & Keane, 2021; Keane, 2020). Instead, the power holders could promote different approaches that empower civil initiatives, creating opportunities for more robust democratic development (Honig, 2009; Lührmann & Rooney, 2021).

Democratic development over the last twenty years is closely tied to the rise of new media and their impact on societal content (Coleman, 1999; Jenkins

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et al., 2004). The academic discussion on the online world revolves around the powerful social media platforms that can manipulate information, the declining role of traditional journalism, and the importance of disseminating accurate information in real-time (Caled & Silva, 2022; Marwick & Lewis, 2017; Newman, 2009). As a result, this special issue examines audiovisual content (TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube) alongside traditional journalism, including that from legacy news media. Thus, the special issue demonstrates how, in today's world, a range of platforms can be used by diverse actors – including governments, audiences, influencers, and journalistic institutions – and highlights the (often hidden) discursive power of media content in contexts of disaster, war, and crisis.

The current special issue examines these concerns as an outcome of the research presented in the Crisis, Security, and Conflict Communication working group at the 2024 International Association for Media and Communication Research (IAMCR) conference in Christchurch, Aotearoa New Zealand. The special issue enhances the relevant scientific literature by providing insights into how security threats are communicated by the governments, media, and public, focusing on both online and offline spaces through the study of diverse regimes from the Northern and Southern Hemispheres such as Australia, Brazil, Chile, Greece and the UK. Including less-studied cases of the communication field that belong to the Global South (Demeter, 2020). Additionally, it offers insights into the communication field through various theoretical and methodological tools. In theoretical terms, it includes the study of Strategic Narratives, Dramatic Action Theory and Securitization Theory, and IDEA (Internalization, Distribution, Explanation, Action). Regarding methodological terms, we had cases of content analysis of TikTok and Instagram, and various online news media, as well as discourse analysis of YouTube videos. By examining worldwide cases that encompass various security threats, including wars, natural disasters, and the contentious concept of securitizing different societal objects, which often benefits those in power, the special issue reveals multiple aspects of security threats and how the media covered, disseminated, or critiqued these events.

Our first article examines the geopolitical discourses that emerge in Brazilian social media influencers' YouTube videos as part of the narrative battle between Ukraine and the so-called West, and Russia, in the context of the Russian war in Ukraine, and how these discourses connect to Brazilian national identity. In "YouTube as a narrative battlefield – Brazilian social media influencers and the Russian war in Ukraine," Nuppu Pelevina and Virpi Salojärvi demonstrate the significant role that YouTube influencers play in emergency politics and the dissemination and construction of security threats, such as the war in Ukraine. The manuscript focuses on Brazil, one of the leading countries of the Global South. With a Foucauldian-inspired discourse approach, Pelevina and Salojärvi examine four popular influencers

from diverse ideological backgrounds, revealing that through their content, the influencers engage in the narrative war by drawing on a multitude of historical trajectories and sources. The article demonstrates that influencers blur the lines of what defines the Brazilian national identity, presenting the country either as representative of the Global South, which was exploited by Western Powers (i.e., US imperialism and European colonialism), or as part of the Western World. Thus, the influencers' role may be connected to propaganda, soft power, or even memory diplomacy, influencing Brazil's political and social debate.

The second article in the Special Issue analyzes crisis communication by examining the interaction between official governmental messages and the emergence of TikTok as a source of information during times of crisis. In "Balancing tradition and technology. The evolving role of crisis communication during Tropical Cyclone (TC) weather events," Susan Grantham, through a case study of the official media briefings and 100 TikTok videos for TC Jasper and TC Kirrily in Queensland, Australia, and the use of IDEA (Internalization, Distribution, Explanation, Action) model demonstrates that there is a need for more reliable information during times of crises, such as natural disasters. As Grantham argues, the integrated crisis communication approach should utilize traditional and emerging media platforms, such as TikTok, to disseminate clear, actionable information to all demographics during emergencies. In addition, governmental officials must receive training in the dissemination of information on these new media platforms to be proactive and effectively deal with misinformation on the spot. In this way, communities will be more informed, and there will be more effective and up-to-date communication between all parties during natural disasters. Ultimately, a well-rounded and flexible strategy is essential for fostering public confidence, enhancing adherence to safety guidelines, and bolstering resilience during times of crisis.

Similarly, the third paper in the Special Issue focuses on natural disasters, specifically the 2024 Chilean forest wildfire in Valparaíso. In "I want to help too! What are the information demands on Instagram during the media coverage of the 2024 Chile mega-fires," Constanza Ortega-Gunckel conducted a qualitative analysis on 773 Instagram posts and 55,983 comments from the audiences of the 12 most-followed media outlets in Chile through the adoption of a theoretical framework based on Dramatic Action Theory. The findings indicate that the media's coverage predominantly focused on descriptive aspects, particularly the initial disruption triggered by the wildfire. Meanwhile, in the later stages of the crisis, accountability, recovery, and prevention received insufficient attention. The nature of public engagement evolved over time, moving from immediate updates to deeper concerns regarding responsibility, long-term effects, and preventative measures. However,

a disconnect was noted between public concerns and media narratives, as essential inquiries from the audience – such as identifying those responsible and outlining recovery strategies – were not adequately addressed. These results underscore the need for a more organized and proactive approach to reporting during times of threats coming from natural disasters. Enhancing the alignment between media content and the public's information needs could lead to a more efficient and responsive framework for crisis communication, ultimately improving preparedness for future emergencies and addressing controversial emergency political actions that might alienate the public, causing increased distrust and confusion.

The final paper takes us to Greece and the portrayal of hooliganism as a security issue, focusing on how the administration of Kyriakos Mitsotakis and the media presented football hooliganism after the death of the 19-year-old, Alkis Kampanos (February 2022). In "Securitizing the Greek football? Communication, Hooliganism, and Lessons Learned from the United Kingdom," Minos-Athanasios Karyotakis and Chung Ming Zen, utilize the persistent issue of hooliganism in Greece as a local context through the theoretical lenses of Securitization Theory and contrast it with its international equivalent in the United Kingdom, which serves as a notable example of how to communicate and manage hooliganism issues, according to the Greek public discourse. Through a qualitative content analysis of various media sources (including news articles, interviews, and press statements) related to two case studies – namely, the aftermath of the Heysel Disaster in England and the aftermath of the Kampanos Death in Greece – the analysis demonstrates that while effective securitization captures public interest, it does not necessarily lead to success in addressing hooliganism. Furthermore, it illustrates that although hooliganism has been portrayed and accepted as a significant threat, the effectiveness of the UK's methods in eliminating such behavior remains questionable, thus rendering the application of similar strategies in Greece a contentious issue. The threat of hooliganism is used as a tool for implementing emergency political measures that restrict personal freedoms and empower societal inequality. The paper posits that hooliganism in the UK continues to persist, which may explain why Greece is still facing challenges in this area.

This special issue brings together diverse perspectives to deepen our understanding of how security threats are constructed and communicated across different media ecosystems and political contexts. By analyzing cases from both the Northern and Southern Hemisphere, it highlights the complex interplay between media narratives, governmental strategies, and public perception. The contributions not only expose how emergency politics can be leveraged to erode democratic norms but also explore alternative communicative practices that support civic engagement and democratic resilience.

Through innovative theoretical and methodological approaches, the issue opens new avenues for research into the evolving role of media in shaping security discourses in times of crisis.

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