

Emotional Impact and Moral Panic in Swedish Social Media during the COVID-19 Crisis

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Abstract : In spring 2020, the spread of coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) reached the epidemiological criteria to be declared a global pandemic. Global action was taken in order to stop the spread of the virus, such as, for example, restrictions regarding spending time outside of your home and, in several countries, periods of mandatory quarantine. Sweden's method of handling the pandemic has stood out among other European nations, and the tactic of relying on citizens' sense of civic solidarity, rather than enforcing legal restrictions preventing people from spending time outside, has been highly criticised in international news media. This situation has entailed a moral dilemma concerning the proper conduct of behaviour in everyday situations in Sweden, which is also reflected in public news media and social media. This media study focuses on Swedish social media debates and attitudes concerning moral dilemmas of handling this sense of civic solidarity. Comments on social media forums expressing outrage and anger regarding, amongst others, the actions of public media figures (such as celebrities, journalists, and bloggers) are analyzed. Drawing on a social psychological perspective on emotions, the study identifies ambiguities of moral disagreements and moral panics as ways of expressing that a moral norm has been violated. The findings suggest that social media is used in order to handle such ambiguities and make sense of the loosely defined norms of civic solidarity.

Keywords : COVID-19 crisis, moral disagreements, moral panic, social media, social norms, social psychology, Sweden

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