



**VOICES AND DOMINANT EMOTIONS IN THE DIGITAL RHETORICAL ARENA:
FACEBOOK COMMUNICATION ABOUT AIRLINES
DURING THE COVID-19 CRISIS**

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Abstract

This article examines the digital rhetorical arena formed around three airlines, TAROM, Wizz Air, and Blue Air, in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath. While previous research on airline crisis communication has mainly focused on the messages produced by companies, this study shifts attention toward the broader online environment in which multiple actors participate in defining, amplifying, and emotionally framing the crisis. Drawing on Rhetorical Arena Theory and the Integrated Crisis Mapping model, the article analyzes Facebook posts collected through CrowdTangle, a Meta-provided service that was available at the time of corpus construction, using hashtags associated with the three airlines. The study focuses on two dimensions: the distribution of voices involved in the online conversation and the dominant emotions expressed in these messages. The findings show three distinct configurations of the rhetorical arena. TAROM is associated with a community-based and symbolic arena, shaped mainly by travel groups, diaspora communities, local pages, and supporter groups. Wizz Air is discussed mainly through a media-driven arena, dominated by mass-media mentions and travel-related commercial actors. Blue Air, by contrast, displays a concentrated organizational arena, where the company's own communication accounts for most of the identified mentions. Anxiety is the dominant emotion in all three cases, but its intensity is highest for Blue Air. Anger and sadness are more visible in the cases of TAROM and Wizz Air, where external voices participate more actively in the construction of the crisis. The article argues that emotions in digital crisis

communication should not be interpreted separately from the voices that produce and circulate them.

Keywords: *crisis communication; rhetorical arena theory; Integrated Crisis Mapping; airlines; Facebook; COVID-19; emotions.*

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic placed the airline industry under severe operational, economic, and reputational pressure. Flight suspensions, border closures, refund delays, route cancellations, health restrictions, and public uncertainty created a crisis environment in which airlines had to communicate quickly and repeatedly with passengers, authorities, media outlets, and wider online communities. In this context, social media became more than a channel for corporate updates. It became a public arena in which different actors interpreted the crisis, assigned responsibility, expressed emotions, and negotiated the public meaning of airline disruptions.

This topic remains relevant in the post-crisis period. Although the acute phase of the pandemic has passed, airlines continue to face reputational challenges related to operational instability, financial restructuring, labor shortages, and passenger expectations shaped by crisis experiences. The post-pandemic period is therefore not a return to normality, but a phase of reconfiguration in which past crises continue to influence public perception, trust, and communication practices. Understanding how digital publics construct and emotionally frame airline crises is essential for analyzing how reputations are rebuilt, contested, or transformed after major disruptions.

Airline crisis communication has been studied mainly through the messages produced by organizations, especially the ways in which airlines provide information, explain operational decisions, express empathy, or protect reputation (Amankwah-Amoah et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2023a; Kulkarni, 2019; Scheiwiller & Zizka, 2021). However, much of this research remains organization-centered. Less attention is given to the wider online space in which other voices, such as mass-media pages, political actors, travel groups, diaspora communities, local publics, influencers, and commercial actors, participate in shaping the crisis narrative.

This article addresses that gap by examining the voices that appeared in Facebook communication about TAROM, Wizz Air, and Blue Air, and by analyzing the dominant emotions associated with these voices. The selection of these three companies is theoretically

and empirically justified. TAROM represents the Romanian national carrier, strongly connected to public infrastructure, national identity, and diaspora mobility. Wizz Air represents a major low-cost airline with a strong presence in Central and Eastern Europe, characterized by high operational visibility and extensive media coverage. Blue Air represents a Romanian low-cost airline that experienced significant operational and financial difficulties in the post-pandemic period, making it a relevant case for examining crisis intensification and organizational communication dominance.

The Romanian context is useful for crisis communication research because it brings together three different organizational profiles within the same air travel market: a national carrier, an international low-cost operator, and a regional low-cost company affected by financial collapse. These profiles allow comparison between different forms of public visibility and emotional framing.

The study is based on Facebook data collected through CrowdTangle, a public content discovery and analytics service offered by Meta that was available at the time when the corpus was constructed. The analysis covers three periods: pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis. It focuses on the macro level of analysis, namely the structure of the rhetorical arena and the emotional profile of the online discourse.

The central argument is that the COVID-19 crisis did not produce a single type of rhetorical arena around airlines. Instead, each company generated a different configuration of public visibility. TAROM was discussed in a dispersed, community-based, and symbolically charged arena. Wizz Air was mainly framed through media and travel-related intermediaries. Blue Air was associated with a more concentrated arena dominated by organizational communication. These differences also shaped the visibility of emotions. Anxiety dominated all three cases, but anger, fear, and sadness varied depending on who participated in the online conversation.

The article is guided by three research questions:

RQ1. What are the main voices identified in online communication about TAROM, Wizz Air, and Blue Air on Facebook?

RQ2. What emotions dominate the online communication of these actors, and how do they vary across the three airlines?

RQ3. How can the distribution of dominant emotions be explained through the configuration of voices in the digital rhetorical arena?

Theoretical Framework

Rhetorical Arena Theory and Multivocal Crisis Communication

Rhetorical Arena Theory, developed by Frandsen and Johansen, proposes a multivocal understanding of crisis communication. From this perspective, a crisis is not communicated only by the organization directly affected. It opens a social space in which multiple voices interact, compete, support, criticize, or reinterpret the crisis (Frandsen & Johansen, 2010, 2017, 2023). The organization remains an important actor, but it does not fully control the meaning of the crisis.

This approach is useful for digital crisis communication because social media platforms make the multiplicity of voices more visible. News organizations, political actors, consumers, experts, activists, local communities, influencers, and other stakeholders can all participate in the same public conversation. Some voices initiate interpretations, others amplify them, while others remain marginal or absent. Identifying these actors is necessary for understanding how power, visibility, and legitimacy are distributed in a crisis arena (Raupp, 2019).

The revised version of Rhetorical Arena Theory (2023) also draws attention to subarenas, smaller communicative spaces within the wider rhetorical arena. Facebook groups, local pages, thematic communities, travel forums, and diaspora pages can function as such subarenas. They may not always dominate the general public debate, but they contribute to the circulation and reinterpretation of crisis messages. In the case of airlines, such subarenas are especially relevant because air travel is connected to mobility, family ties, migration, tourism, professional travel, and national infrastructure.

Diaspora as a Digital Crisis Voice

The inclusion of diaspora as a distinct voice is particularly important for the TAROM case. In many crisis arenas, diaspora communities are not simply audiences located outside national borders. They can become active participants in the online negotiation of public issues, especially when those issues affect mobility, identity, belonging, and connection with the home country.

Cmeciu et al. (2025), in their analysis of hashtag-based digital participation, show that diaspora groups can appear among the active voices in online arenas without necessarily becoming central

hubs. Their role is often one of amplification and intermediation. They circulate messages, connect geographically dispersed publics, and reinterpret institutional or public communication through the lens of their own community concerns. This distinction is important because it avoids overstating diaspora centrality while still recognizing its communicative relevance.

This insight is directly relevant for TAROM. For Romanian communities abroad, especially those that maintain frequent ties with Romania, the national carrier is not only a commercial operator. It is connected to access, return, family mobility, and symbolic proximity to the country of origin. In the analyzed corpus, diaspora is the second most visible voice category for TAROM, with 161 mentions, or 16.7% of all TAROM mentions. Its presence helps explain why the TAROM arena is not only operational, but also symbolic and community-based.

Integrated Crisis Mapping and Dominant Emotions

The second theoretical framework used in this article is the Integrated Crisis Mapping model, developed by Jin, Pang, and Cameron (2007, 2012). ICM proposes an emotion-based approach to crisis communication, arguing that publics do not react only cognitively to crises, but also emotionally. The model identifies emotions such as anger, fear, anxiety, sadness, guilt, and shame as relevant for understanding how publics interpret crisis situations.

In this study, ICM is used to code the dominant emotion expressed in each Facebook post. The model is appropriate because the airline crisis during and after the COVID-19 pandemic generated uncertainty, disruption, and perceived loss of control. Passengers and other actors had to deal with cancelled flights, unclear procedures, refund difficulties, travel restrictions, and changing rules. In such contexts, anxiety becomes a likely dominant emotion because it is associated with uncertainty, perceived threat, and limited control over future outcomes.

The combination of Rhetorical Arena Theory and Integrated Crisis Mapping allows a more precise reading of the data. Rhetorical Arena Theory shows who participates in the construction of the crisis, while ICM shows how these actors emotionally evaluate the situation. Used together, the two frameworks help explain not only which emotions are present, but also why they become more visible in some arenas than in others.

Methodology

Research Design and Corpus

The study is based on content analysis of Facebook posts collected through CrowdTangle. The broader research design included two stages. First, posts were extracted from the official Facebook pages of the three airlines, TAROM, Wizz Air, and Blue Air, for three periods: pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis. The broader dataset included 877 posts published by Wizz Air, 605 posts published by TAROM, and 996 posts published by Blue Air.

CrowdTangle was a public content discovery and analytics service provided by Meta for monitoring public content on Facebook and Instagram. It allowed users to search, track, compare, and export public posts from pages, public groups, and verified profiles, which made it useful for researchers, journalists, and civil society organizations interested in public communication flows. The tool did not provide access to private profiles or private interactions, and the present study uses only public Facebook content.

At the time when the corpus was constructed, CrowdTangle was available and could be used for academic data collection. This clarification is important for methodological transparency because the service is no longer available. Meta states that, as of 14 August 2024, CrowdTangle was discontinued and replaced, for eligible researchers, by the Meta Content Library and Content Library API (Meta, 2024). Therefore, the dataset should be understood as having been collected through a historical data-access infrastructure that was still active during the construction of this corpus.

Second, in order to identify the voices participating in the rhetorical arena, additional searches were conducted using hashtags associated with the three companies. The hashtags used in the collection process were #wizzair and #wizzyouwerehere for Wizz Air; #tarom and #wearotarom for TAROM; and #blueair, #IflyBlueAir, #euzborBlueAir, and #thebetterwaytofly for Blue Air.

The present article focuses on the hashtag-based dataset used to identify voices and dominant emotions in the online conversation about the three airlines. The analyzed corpus contains 3066 Facebook mentions/posts: 965 related to TAROM, 947 related to Wizz Air, and 1154 related to Blue Air. Each item was coded according to two dimensions.

Coding Categories

The first dimension was the category of voice. The coding scheme included 16 voice categories: airlines, governmental actors, governmental organizations, political actors, political organizations, public organizations, private companies, travel agencies, mass media, bloggers/influencers, artists, travel groups, supporter groups, diaspora, general public/local pages and groups, and others. The operational definitions and examples used for this stage of coding are presented in Appendix A.

The second dimension was the dominant emotion expressed in the message. Posts were coded according to the Integrated Crisis Mapping categories: anxiety, anger, fear, sadness, guilt, and shame. Each post was assigned one dominant emotion, based on the main affective orientation of the message. The full emotion coding scheme is included in Appendix B.

Analytical Procedure

The analysis is descriptive and interpretive. Frequencies and percentages were calculated for each company, and the results were interpreted in relation to the structure of the rhetorical arena. Percentages are calculated within the total number of mentions identified for each airline.

The method has two advantages. First, it allows comparison between companies exposed to the same general pandemic context but positioned differently in the market and in public perception. Second, it connects actor visibility with dominant emotions, showing how emotional patterns are shaped by the structure of the arena.

To keep the results section focused on empirical distributions, the detailed coding tables are placed in the appendices. Appendix A contains the scheme for identifying the voices of the rhetorical arena, while Appendix B contains the scheme for coding dominant emotions.

Results and Analysis

The Distribution of Voices in the Digital Rhetorical Arena

The three airlines generated similar overall volumes of mentions, but the internal structure of their rhetorical arenas differed substantially. TAROM had 965 mentions, Wizz Air had 947, and Blue Air had 1154. The number of mentions alone does not show the structure of the arena. The distribution of voices reveals that each company was discussed through a different type of public configuration.

Table 1. Distribution of voices by airline

Voice category	TAROM	Wizz Air	Blue Air
Airlines	62 (6.4%)	4 (0.4%)	860 (74.5%)
Governmental actors	15 (1.6%)	2 (0.2%)	0
Governmental organizations	6 (0.6%)	8 (0.8%)	0
Political actors	19 (2.0%)	9 (1.0%)	0
Political organizations	27 (3.0%)	5 (0.5%)	0
Public organizations	3 (0.3%)	3 (0.3%)	0
Private companies	6 (0.6%)	5 (0.5%)	115 (10.0%)
Travel agencies	50 (5.2%)	179 (18.9%)	0
Mass media	90 (9.3%)	495 (52.3%)	0
Bloggers / Influencers	53 (5.5%)	14 (1.5%)	6 (0.5%)
Artists	4 (0.4%)	5 (0.5%)	2 (0.2%)
Travel groups	220 (22.8%)	114 (12.0%)	119 (10.3%)
Supporter groups	100 (10.4%)	3 (0.3%)	0
Diaspora	161 (16.7%)	27 (2.9%)	0
General public, local pages and groups	106 (11.0%)	25 (2.6%)	6 (0.5%)
Others	43 (4.5%)	49 (5.2%)	46 (4.0%)
Total	965 (100%)	947 (100%)	1154 (100%)

Source: author’s coding based on CrowdTangle data.

Dominant voices in the Facebook rhetorical arena

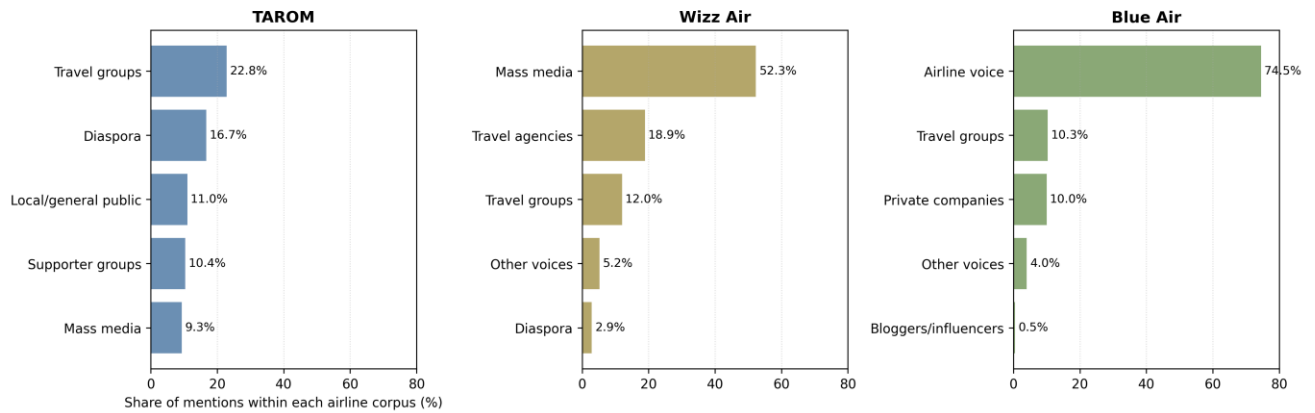


Figure 1. Dominant voices in the Facebook rhetorical arena.

Source: Author’s calculations based on CrowdTangle data.

TAROM: A Community-Based and Diasporic Arena

TAROM shows the most dispersed rhetorical arena. No single voice category exceeds one quarter of all mentions. The most visible category is represented by travel groups, with 220 mentions, or 22.8% of the total. This indicates that discussions about TAROM were strongly connected to passenger experiences, travel communities, and practical issues related to mobility. The second most visible category is diaspora, with 161 mentions, or 16.7%. This gives the TAROM arena a specific symbolic dimension. Romanian communities abroad mention the company in relation to routes, access to Romania, travel opportunities, and the continuity of connections with the home country. This is why the national carrier is not discussed only as an airline, but also as a link between Romania and communities outside the country.

The importance of diaspora also aligns with the findings of Cmeciu et al. (2025), who show that diaspora groups can act as active digital voices without necessarily becoming central hubs. Applied to TAROM, this means that diaspora communities amplify and circulate messages about the company, but the arena remains dispersed rather than coordinated by one dominant diaspora actor.

Local pages and general public groups also have a visible presence, with 106 mentions, or 11.0%. Supporter groups account for 100 mentions, or 10.4%, while mass media accounts for 90 mentions, or 9.3%. The company's own voice represents only 6.4% of the mentions. This means that the online conversation about TAROM was largely produced outside the company's official communication.

Political and governmental voices are less visible but still present. When governmental actors, political actors, governmental organizations, political organizations, and public organizations are aggregated, they represent approximately 7.3% of TAROM mentions. This is consistent with the company's status as a national carrier and with the political and public interest surrounding its financial and operational performance.

Wizz Air: A Media-Mediated and Commercial Arena

Wizz Air shows a different configuration. Its rhetorical arena is dominated by mass media, which generated 495 mentions, or 52.3% of the total. This means that Wizz Air's public visibility in the analyzed hashtag corpus was strongly mediated through news pages and journalistic content.

Travel agencies represent the second largest category, with 179 mentions, or 18.9%. Travel groups also appear, with 114 mentions, or 12.0%, but they do not dominate the conversation. This structure suggests that Wizz Air was framed mainly through information about routes, offers, operational changes, travel opportunities, and media coverage.

Unlike TAROM, Wizz Air is weakly represented in diaspora discussions, with only 27 mentions, or 2.9%, and in political or supporter-group communication. The company's own voice is almost absent from the hashtag-based corpus, with only four mentions, or 0.4%. This suggests that Wizz Air was more often the object of discussion than the direct speaker in the analyzed Facebook arena.

This structure is consistent with Wizz Air's profile as a large low-cost operator. The public discussion is likely to be centered on routes, prices, cancellations, safety rules, service updates, and travel conditions, rather than on national identity or symbolic expectations.

Blue Air: Organizational Dominance and the Narrowing of the Public Arena

Blue Air presents the most concentrated arena. Out of 1154 mentions, 860, or 74.5%, belong to the airline category. This indicates that the company's own communication dominated the hashtag-based conversation. Travel groups generated 119 mentions, or 10.3%, while private companies accounted for 115 mentions, or 10.0%. Other categories were either weakly represented or absent.

The absence of mass media, political actors, governmental organizations, travel agencies, supporter groups, and diaspora from the hashtag-based Blue Air arena should not be read as proof that these actors did not discuss the company elsewhere. It means that their participation was not visible in the Facebook hashtag corpus analyzed here. Part of the wider debate may have circulated through comments, consumer complaint spaces, news articles without hashtags, or other digital platforms.

This result becomes more relevant when read against Blue Air's post-pandemic trajectory. The company suspended flights from Romania in September 2022, and the Romanian National Authority for Consumer Protection sanctioned Blue Air for cancelled flights in the same year. Later, the European Commission ordered the recovery of incompatible state aid from Blue Air, and the company's financial difficulties culminated in bankruptcy. These developments show

that Blue Air was not only affected by the general pandemic crisis, but also by an extended organizational crisis involving operations, public trust, and financial viability.

The finding that Blue Air’s visible arena is dominated by the airline voice can therefore be interpreted in two ways. First, it may show that the company relied heavily on its own communication to maintain visibility during a fragile period. Second, it may reveal the limits of hashtag-based public visibility. Critical voices may have existed, but they did not become visible through the hashtags used in the corpus.

For this reason, Blue Air is not only a case of organizational dominance. It is also a case of communicative fragility. A crisis-affected company may produce many visible posts, but if the public arena remains narrow, organizational communication can appear central while broader public dissatisfaction moves to other spaces.

Dominant Emotions in Online Communication about the Airlines

The emotional distribution confirms that anxiety was the dominant emotion in the online communication about all three companies. However, the intensity and combination of emotions vary from one airline to another.

Table 2. Distribution of dominant emotions by airline

Emotion	TAROM	Wizz Air	Blue Air
Anxiety	388 (40.2%)	380 (40.1%)	659 (57.1%)
Anger	224 (23.2%)	206 (21.7%)	76 (6.6%)
Fear	198 (20.5%)	211 (22.3%)	292 (25.3%)
Sadness	141 (14.6%)	140 (14.8%)	125 (10.8%)
Guilt	11 (1.1%)	6 (0.6%)	1 (0.1%)
Shame	5 (0.5%)	4 (0.4%)	0 (0.0%)
Total	965 (100%)	947 (100%)	1154 (100%)

Source: Author’s coding based on CrowdTangle data.

Anxiety is almost identical in the cases of TAROM and Wizz Air: 40.2% for TAROM and 40.1% for Wizz Air. In the case of Blue Air, anxiety reaches 57.1%, a much higher share. This result is consistent with the crisis context, where uncertainty about flights, refunds, operational continuity, and changing restrictions produces a strong emotional orientation toward insecurity and lack of control.

Anger is the second most visible emotion for TAROM, with 224 cases, or 23.2%. It is also prominent for Wizz Air, with 206 cases, or 21.7%. In contrast, anger is much lower for Blue Air, where it appears in only 76 cases, or 6.6%. This does not necessarily mean that Blue Air generated less anger in the broader public sphere. Rather, it suggests that anger was less visible in the hashtag-based corpus analyzed here, probably because the arena was dominated by organizational messages rather than by external critical voices.

Fear has a relatively high presence in all three cases. It accounts for 20.5% of TAROM mentions, 22.3% of Wizz Air mentions, and 25.3% of Blue Air mentions. In the pandemic context, fear is connected to health risks, travel restrictions, flight suspensions, uncertainty about return routes, and geopolitical or operational instability.

The low presence of guilt and shame suggests that the emotional discourse around the airlines was dominated by primary emotions connected to uncertainty, threat, frustration, and loss, rather than by secondary emotions involving self-evaluation or moral responsibility.

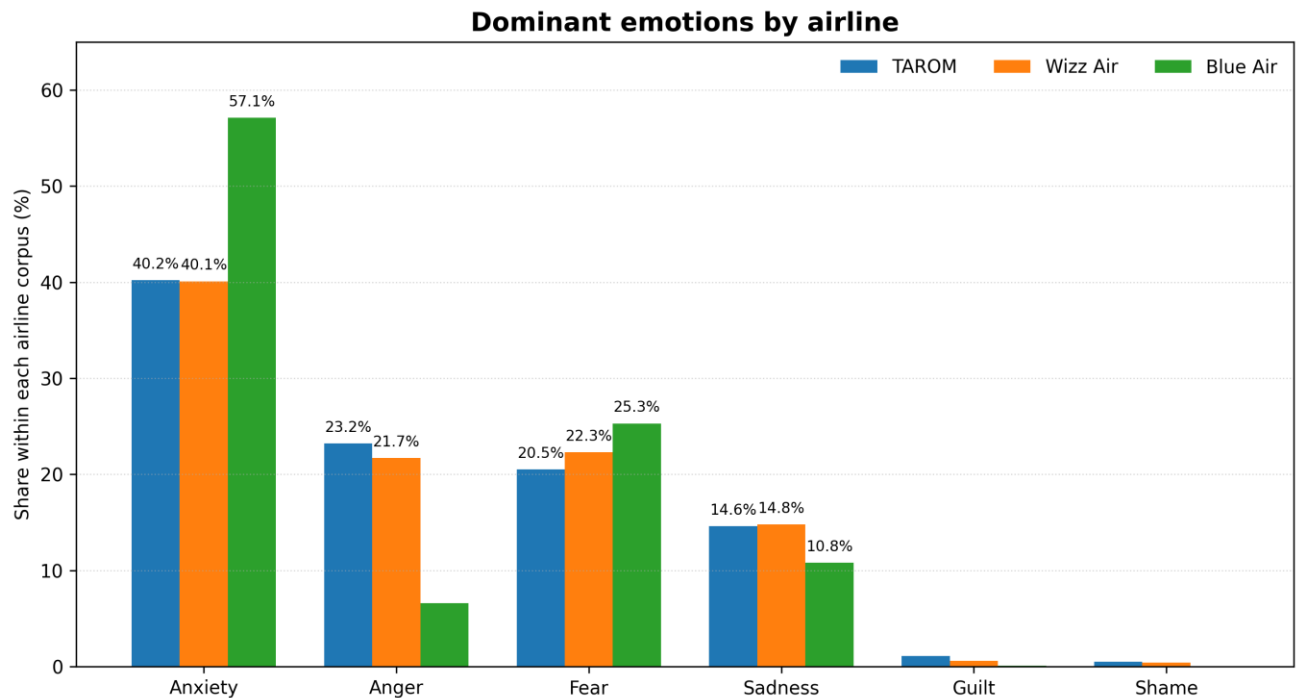


Figure 2. Dominant emotions in online communication about the three airlines.

Source: Author's calculations based on CrowdTangle data.

Connecting Voices and Emotions

The most relevant finding emerges when the distribution of emotions is interpreted together with the distribution of voices. Anxiety dominates all three arenas, but it becomes especially visible in the case of Blue Air, where official communication is the main source of mentions. This suggests that repeated organizational updates about disruptions, cancellations, operational limitations, or return flights may keep the public conversation focused on uncertainty.

In the case of TAROM, anxiety is also dominant, but it is accompanied by higher levels of anger and sadness. This emotional combination corresponds to the structure of the TAROM arena, which includes many external voices: travel groups, diaspora, local pages, supporter groups, media, and influencers. These actors do more than circulate information. They evaluate the company, link it to public infrastructure, national identity, mobility, public resources, or personal travel experiences. For this reason, the emotional profile is more mixed. The crisis is not only operational; it is also symbolic and communal.

For Wizz Air, the emotional structure is shaped by a media-driven arena. Mass media accounts for more than half of the mentions, while travel agencies and travel groups also have visible roles. Anxiety and fear are strongly present, but anger also remains high. This suggests a discourse centered on operational disruptions, public reporting, travel uncertainty, and passenger experience.

Blue Air presents a different pattern. The dominance of organizational communication coincides with a high level of anxiety and a lower level of visible anger. This may be explained by the nature of the corpus. If most messages come from the company, they are more likely to focus on information, updates, clarifications, and operational measures. Such messages can express or trigger anxiety because they deal with uncertainty, but they are less likely to contain explicit accusation or indignation.

Therefore, emotions should not be treated as isolated reactions. They are shaped by the structure of the arena in which they circulate. A more open and dispersed arena allows critical emotions to become more visible. A more organization-centered arena tends to make uncertainty and informational anxiety more visible, while potentially hiding or displacing anger into other spaces.

Discussion

Three Arena Profiles

The findings confirm the relevance of Rhetorical Arena Theory for the study of airline crisis communication on Facebook. The COVID-19 crisis did not create one uniform public arena. Instead, it generated differentiated configurations of voices around each airline.

TAROM's arena was the most multivocal. The company was discussed by travel groups, diaspora communities, local pages, supporter groups, media pages, influencers, and political or public actors. This distribution suggests that TAROM was not perceived only as a service provider. It was also treated as a public and symbolic actor, connected to national infrastructure, mobility, public resources, and the relationship between Romania and its diaspora.

Wizz Air's arena was structured mainly by mass media and travel-related intermediaries. The company appears as a highly visible commercial and operational actor, but not as a national symbol. The emotional profile reflects this position. Anxiety and fear are strongly present, but anger is also important, most likely because public discourse about low-cost airline services often centers on delays, cancellations, changes in travel conditions, and customer experience.

Blue Air's arena was dominated by the company's own communication. This creates a narrower rhetorical structure. The high share of anxiety can be read in relation to repeated operational updates and the company's difficult post-pandemic situation. At the same time, the low visibility of anger should be interpreted carefully. It may reflect the structure of the collected corpus rather than the absence of public frustration.

Diaspora, National Carriers, and Symbolic Expectations

The TAROM case shows that a national airline can carry a symbolic burden that exceeds its operational role. The strong presence of travel groups, diaspora communities, local pages, and supporter groups indicates that TAROM is embedded in a social and affective field. It is discussed not only through routes, prices, or service quality, but also through expectations related to national infrastructure and public responsibility.

The diaspora finding is particularly important. In the analyzed data, diaspora is the second most visible category for TAROM. This cannot be treated as a simple audience segment. Diaspora communities participate in the rhetorical arena by circulating information, expressing expectations, and connecting the airline to questions of mobility and belonging.

This explains why anger and sadness are more visible in the TAROM emotional profile. These emotions are not only reactions to flight disruptions. They also reflect expectations toward a company perceived as part of national infrastructure. When such a company is criticized, the criticism can carry both practical and symbolic meanings.

Blue Air, Organizational Dominance, and Communicative Fragility

Blue Air's case is the most complex. At first glance, the high number of mentions suggests strong visibility. However, the internal structure of that visibility is narrow. The company's own communication accounts for nearly three quarters of the analyzed mentions. This means that visibility does not necessarily equal multivocality.

The later collapse of Blue Air makes this pattern analytically important. The company's post-pandemic difficulties were not only operational or financial. They also affected its communicative capacity. Flight suspensions, consumer protection sanctions, state-aid recovery procedures, insolvency, and eventual bankruptcy contextualize the high anxiety associated with the company. The public arena around Blue Air appears dominated by uncertainty.

The lower level of visible anger in the Blue Air corpus should therefore be interpreted with caution. It may not mean that publics were less critical of Blue Air. It may mean that critical discourse appeared in other spaces: consumer complaints, media articles, comments, private groups, or posts without the hashtags used in the collection process.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

Theoretically, the article contributes to crisis communication research by connecting Rhetorical Arena Theory with emotion-based crisis mapping. It shows that emotional distributions are not only effects of crisis type. They are also effects of arena structure. The same general crisis context can generate different emotional profiles depending on which voices are present and how they participate.

Practically, the findings suggest that airlines should not monitor emotions separately from actors. Knowing that anxiety or anger exists is not enough. Companies need to know who expresses these emotions, where they circulate, and which subarenas amplify them. For TAROM, monitoring diaspora groups, local pages, and travel communities would be essential. For Wizz Air, media coverage and travel intermediaries appear central. For Blue Air, official

communication may have shaped the visible arena, but additional monitoring beyond hashtags would be needed to detect critical external reactions.

The findings also show that digital crisis communication cannot be reduced to official page management. Corporate posts matter, but the crisis arena is distributed. It includes formal organizations, media actors, commercial intermediaries, communities, and publics whose interpretations can modify the meaning of the crisis.

Conclusions

This article analyzed the voices and dominant emotions present in Facebook communication about TAROM, Wizz Air, and Blue Air in the context of the COVID-19 crisis and its aftermath. The findings show that the three companies were not discussed in the same type of rhetorical arena.

TAROM generated a dispersed and community-based arena, shaped by travel groups, diaspora communities, local pages, supporter groups, and media. The strong presence of diaspora is central to the interpretation of this case. It shows that the national carrier is linked to mobility, belonging, and the relationship between Romania and Romanians abroad.

Wizz Air generated a media-driven arena, dominated by mass-media pages and travel-related commercial actors. Blue Air generated an organization-centered arena, where the company's own communication represented the majority of identified mentions. In the Blue Air case, organizational dominance should be read in connection with communicative fragility, operational uncertainty, and the company's later insolvency and bankruptcy.

Anxiety was the dominant emotion in all three cases, confirming the relevance of the Integrated Crisis Mapping model for airline crisis communication. However, the distribution of anger, fear, and sadness varied across the three companies. TAROM and Wizz Air showed higher levels of anger, while Blue Air showed a much stronger concentration of anxiety and a lower visibility of anger.

The main contribution of the article is the link between voices and emotions. Emotional reactions in digital crisis communication are not only individual responses to disruption. They are also shaped by the structure of the rhetorical arena. The actors who speak, amplify, criticize, or remain absent influence which emotions become visible and how the crisis is publicly interpreted.

The study also shows that post-pandemic airline crises should be understood as extended processes rather than isolated events. Blue Air's later insolvency and bankruptcy contextualize the high level of anxiety and the organizationally dominated arena identified in the corpus. In this sense, the crisis did not end with the acute pandemic period, but continued through financial, operational, and reputational consequences.

Limitations and Future Research

The study has several limitations. First, the data come only from Facebook. Other platforms, such as X/Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, forums, news comments, or consumer complaint platforms, may show different voice structures and emotional patterns.

Second, the collection was based on selected hashtags. This method is useful for identifying visible and traceable conversations, but it may exclude relevant posts that mention the companies without using the analyzed hashtags. This limitation is especially important for Blue Air, where several external voices were absent from the hashtag-based corpus.

Third, another limitation concerns data access and reproducibility. Since CrowdTangle was discontinued after the corpus was built, exact replication may require access to Meta's newer research infrastructure or to alternative archived datasets. This does not affect the internal validity of the collected corpus, but it should be considered when comparing future studies with the present results.

Fourth, the results are aggregated by company and do not fully explore variation across the three periods. A future version of the study could compare pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis emotional patterns separately.

Fifth, the coding identifies the dominant emotion in each post. Some posts may contain multiple emotions, such as anxiety and anger, or fear and sadness. A more detailed qualitative analysis could examine emotional combinations and transitions.

Finally, the coding process should be strengthened in a future version through intercoder reliability testing. A second coder and a reliability coefficient, such as Cohen's kappa or Krippendorff's alpha, would increase the methodological robustness of the article.

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Appendices

The following appendices present the coding schemes used for the two dimensions analyzed in the article: the voices of the digital rhetorical arena and the dominant emotions expressed in Facebook posts. The schemes were used to assign each item one voice category and one dominant emotion category.

Appendix A. Coding scheme for voices in the digital rhetorical arena

Table A1. Voice coding scheme used in the content analysis

Voice category	Operational definition	Illustrative example
Airlines	Airline companies communicating about their own services, operational changes, innovations, partnerships, routes, or crisis-related updates.	TAROM announces the suspension of flights to/from Chisinau.
Governmental actors	Individual state representatives, such as ministers, secretaries of state, or officials, who communicate decisions, regulations, or support measures affecting airlines.	A transport minister announces state aid for TAROM.
Governmental organizations	Governmental institutions or public administrative bodies communicating decisions, policies, or infrastructure measures related to air transport.	A ministry posts about transport investment and support for airlines.
Political actors	Politicians, members of parliament, party	A politician comments on the

Voice category	Operational definition	Illustrative example
	leaders, or public officials who comment on decisions affecting the aviation sector.	future of national companies.
Political organizations	Political parties or party structures communicating official positions, initiatives, or criticism related to airlines.	A party page publishes a message calling for TAROM to be saved.
Public organizations	Public-interest institutions, local authorities, NGOs, or academic institutions discussing the role of airlines in society, economy, or regional development.	A county council discusses cooperation with TAROM.
Private companies	Companies from other industries that mention airlines in relation to partnerships, events, logistics, employee mobility, tourism, or cultural activities.	A cultural event announces that guests will travel with TAROM.
Travel agencies	Tourism companies or travel-service providers discussing flight availability, offers, partnerships, routes, and passenger travel experiences.	A travel agency promotes TAROM flights to holiday destinations.
Mass media	News organizations and online publications reporting news, analysis, interviews, financial information, or operational developments involving airlines.	An online publication reports on aid granted to TAROM.
Bloggers / Influencers	Content creators with visible online audiences who share opinions, reviews, personal experiences, or criticism related to airlines.	An influencer posts criticism about TAROM management.
Artists	Cultural public figures who mention airline travel, routes, performances, or personal experiences involving airlines.	An actor posts about travelling by air for a performance.
Travel groups	Online groups, forums, or pages dedicated to travel, where users discuss routes, prices, airports, destinations, and passenger experiences.	A travel group announces charter flights from Iasi Airport.
Supporter groups	Online communities supporting political figures, parties, or public persons that circulate opinions about airlines through their own ideological or community lens.	A supporter group comments on airline pricing or regulation.
Diaspora	Communities of people living abroad who discuss flight access, travel experiences, and the role of airlines in maintaining connections with the home country.	A diaspora page circulates the message "Save TAROM".
General public, local pages and groups	Local or general-interest Facebook pages and groups without clear institutional, political, or thematic specialization, where airline-related	A local community page discusses regional routes or airport connections.

Voice category	Operational definition	Illustrative example
	issues circulate within everyday community discussion.	
Others	People, pages, or groups that participate in the online conversation about airlines but do not fit the previous categories.	A generic page shares an airline-related post without a clear profile.

Source: Author's coding scheme, adapted from the methodology and updated results of the doctoral research.

Appendix B. Coding scheme for dominant emotions

Table B1. Emotion coding scheme based on the Integrated Crisis Mapping model

Emotion category	Operational definition	Illustrative example
Anger	Primary emotion indicating indignation, blame, or intense frustration toward the crisis situation, the organization, or the response provided.	A post strongly criticizes TAROM management and public spending.
Fear	Primary emotion indicating insecurity, threat, danger, or concern about the possible consequences of the crisis.	A news post reports the suspension of flights because of the regional conflict.
Anxiety	Primary emotion associated with uncertainty, lack of control, overwhelming threat, and the inability to predict travel or organizational outcomes.	Blue Air announces limited repatriation flights and the grounding of aircraft during the state of emergency.
Sadness	Primary emotion associated with tangible or intangible loss, decline, regret, or the need for restoration and consolation.	A post refers to repatriation flights or to the symbolic decline of a national carrier.
Guilt	Secondary emotion linked to direct or indirect responsibility, wrongdoing, or involvement in the crisis.	A post discusses TAROM's alleged involvement in practices that harmed public or market interests.
Shame	Secondary emotion associated with perceived organizational responsibility, public disapproval, disgrace, or damage to collective identity.	A post frames TAROM's conduct as morally unacceptable or publicly embarrassing.

Source: Author's coding scheme, based on the Integrated Crisis Mapping model (Jin, Pang, & Cameron, 2007, 2012).