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# Shared information practices on Facebook

Shared  
information  
practices on  
Facebook

## The formation and development of a sustainable online community

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### Abstract

**Purpose** – This study aims to develop an in-depth understanding of the underlying dynamics of an emergent shared information practice within a Facebook group, and the resources the group develops to sustain this practice.

**Design/methodology/approach** – In-depth semi-structured interviews were carried out with twenty members from the group. The findings are based on comparative analysis combined with narrative analysis and were interpreted using theories of situated learning and Community of Practice.

**Findings** – The study shows that although members of this multicultural mothers group endorsed different, sometimes opposing parenting practices, the group had to find common ground when sharing information. Managing these challenges was key to maintaining the group as an open information resource for all members. The group produced a shared repertoire of resources to maintain its activities, including norms, rules, shared understandings, and various monitoring activities. The shared online practice developed by the community is conceptualised in this article as an information practice requiring shared, community-specific understandings of what, when, and how information can or should be sought or shared in ways that are valued in this specific community. The findings show that this shared information practice is not *static* but continually evolves as members negotiate what is, or not, important for the group.

**Originality/value** – The research provides novel insights into the underlying dynamics of the emergence, management, and sustainability of a shared information practice within a contemporary mothers group on Facebook.

**Keywords** Information practices, Community of practice, Online communities, Mothers, Norms, Social media, Social networking sites, Facebook

**Paper type** Research paper

### 1. Introduction

Our contemporary society is witnessing a rapid adoption of mobile technologies and social networking tools, now embedded in almost all aspects of many people's everyday and professional life. As a result of these advancements, social networking online has become commonplace for many people, offering numerous opportunities to connect and interact with diverse local and global communities (boyd, 2017).

Facebook, for instance, has been consistently reported to be one of the most predominant social networking sites (SNSs), with billions of users from all around the world (Duggan *et al.*, 2015). On Facebook, people are able to stay in touch with pre-established offline social networks (e.g., family, friends, colleagues) and form and join new local and global communities with masses of other people who share common interests or concerns (Smock *et al.*, 2011). Facebook reports, for instance, that there are more than 1 billion people who access Facebook groups monthly, and of those, more than 100 million people are part of so-called "meaningful groups" (Zuckerberg, 2017). A growing body of research has revealed that Facebook groups are increasing in popularity and attracting diverse user groups. For instance, parents, particularly mothers, are known as one of the most avid users of Facebook groups (Duggan *et al.*, 2015; Lupton *et al.*, 2016; Niela-Vilén *et al.*, 2014).



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The use of online parenting groups seems to have grown into a worldwide phenomenon because these groups enable parents to connect and discuss parenting experiences, practices, and philosophies with other parents (Lupton *et al.*, 2016; Niela Vilén *et al.*, 2014). Facebook groups have been found to be used by parents of children with special needs, LGBT parents, stay-at-home fathers in the United States (Ammari *et al.*, 2014; Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2015, 2016; Blackwell *et al.*, 2016), parents of autistic children in Malaysia (Roffeei *et al.*, 2015), breastfeeding mothers of pre-mature newborns in Finland (Niela-Vilén *et al.*, 2015), immigrant mothers in Sweden (Mansour and Francke, 2017), and grieving parents in Sweden and Denmark (Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski, 2015; Christensen *et al.*, 2017), amongst others. These groups have been recognized by many parents as empowering, offering information and social support that complements, and in some instances, replaces traditional information and support channels (Lupton *et al.*, 2016; Niela-Vilén *et al.*, 2014).

Although people's ability to engage in online communities is far from new, SNSs have changed how these online communities are formed, maintained, and organised (Baym, 2011; Boyd and Ellison, 2007; Lupton *et al.*, 2016). Whereas earlier online communities were often organised, monitored, and sponsored by professional organisations and companies that controlled how the groups were used, SNS groups are often self-governed by ordinary individuals (Drentea and Moren-Cross, 2011; Lupton *et al.*, 2016). Most importantly, SNSs make content more visible, scalable, replicable, searchable, and persistent than the content of earlier online communities (Boyd, 2010).

In spite of this capacity for individual empowerment, current research illustrates that SNSs present people with new, complex challenges. For example, SNSs have contributed to a growing phenomenon, known as “context collapse,” where people from multiple social groups collapse into one flat social space, becoming a single audience (Boyd, 2010; Marwick and Boyd, 2011a, b; Marwick and Ellison, 2012). People now connect with groups previously kept separate (e.g., family, friends, and colleagues), blurring the lines between private and professional contexts (Boyd, 2010). This is because these diverse groups value different practices and may have different expectations of what is appropriate to discuss in these communities, which may create tensions or conflicts (Boyd, 2010; McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011). For instance, while it is usually appropriate to share private content with close family and friends, sharing the same content with colleagues may be inappropriate or risky (McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011; Ollier-Malaterre and Serre, 2018; Ammari *et al.*, 2015).

Numerous researchers have looked at how people engage in emerging social networking practices of self-presentation, relationship maintenance and friending, and privacy (e.g., Ammari *et al.*, 2015; Blackwell *et al.*, 2016; Uski and Lampinen, 2016; McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011, b; Marwick and Boyd, 2011a, b, 2014; Ollier-Malaterre and Serre, 2018). These studies have mostly examined practices on an individual level and within the context of personal profiles. There is still a limited understanding of the underlying dynamics of shared practices on a group level, which are mostly emerging on SNS-based groups (Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski, 2015; Marwick and Ellison, 2012). Participation in shared practices can be complicated because these groups are often joined by heterogeneous members who are usually unknown to one another (Marwick and Ellison, 2012). Further, whereas there is a large amount of research on users' participation in online communities the majority of this research is still undertheorised and has been mostly concerned with its quantity (for an extensive review, see Malinen, 2015).

Many parents today are members of SNSs groups, and this raises the question of how members of these groups participate in increasingly diverse and complex parenting communities, where they are confronted with myriad parenting practices that may confirm or contradict their own (Abetz and Moore, 2018; Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2016). The aim of this study is to answer this question by providing an understanding of the underlying dynamics of emergent shared information practice within the context of a multicultural

mothers' Facebook group, specifically by providing insight into how this practice is developed, managed, and sustained by the group. For achieving this aim, the study employs a Community of Practice (CoP) perspective (Wenger, 1998) where the analytical focus is on the group and how members engage with and participate in the shared practice of the group in ways that are accepted and valued by its members. Taking the community or group as a unit of analysis brings the focus to the shared online practice that members of the group have developed as they build and sustain the information resources embedded within their community. Thus, information practice is conceptualised in this article as a shared online practice, which entails shared and collective understandings of *what*, *when*, and most importantly, *how* information can or should be shared by community members in ways that are valued in this specific community. Such an approach will provide an opportunity to explore the nature of a shared information practice resulting from participation in an SNS parenting community. The article will answer these questions:

What are the rules and norms that shape appropriate ways to seek and share information within a large multicultural mother's Facebook group? How are these rules and norms formed, negotiated, reproduced, and enacted?

How do members manage the challenges of seeking and sharing information within the group?

### *1.1 Individual practices in SNSs*

SNSs enable people to connect and interact with family, friends, and colleagues, as well as strangers. This flexibility offers benefits, as well as challenges and risks (see Vitak, 2012; Vitak and Ellison, 2012). Previous work identifies a constant negotiation of how and with whom one should seek or share information within social networks (Vitak and Ellison, 2012). This latter came to be described as "context collapse" in which "the flattening out of multiple distinct audiences in one's social network, such that people from different contexts become part of a singular group of message recipients" (Vitak, 2012, p. 541). The consequences of context collapse can include loss of privacy, loss of job opportunities, embarrassment, social rejection, and loss of respect (Boyd, 2010; Davis and Jurgenson, 2014; Ollier-Malaterre and Serre, 2018). Thus, many SNSs users find themselves in situations where they have to balance "tensions between revealing and concealing information" (Vitak and Ellison, 2012, p. 244; Vitak *et al.*, 2015). Uski and Lampinen (2016) show how youth engage in "profile work" or strategic self-presentation in the construction of an authentic image of themselves in accordance with social norms requiring them to "be real" in their sharing practices, which can paradoxically result in unauthenticity. Other studies observe this paradox, pointing out that although users are willing to share a lot of content with their social networks, they are very conscious of their own and others' privacy (e.g., Boyd, 2014; Ammari *et al.*, 2015).

Context collapse has, therefore, been examined as a problem of self-presentation, or as a potential loss of privacy concern, where SNSs users are constantly engaged in "profile work" and self-articulation (Ammari *et al.*, 2015; Hampton, 2016; Uski and Lampinen, 2016). This research points out that social norms play an important role in shaping the ways individual users participate in social networking-related practices (McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011). Social norms are often defined as implicit or explicit rules, regulations, and expectations, structuring interactions between individuals or groups (Bicchieri, 2006). Such norms are socially negotiated and can be understood and enacted through social interaction at the individual (i.e., perceived norms) or group level (i.e., collective norms) (Chung and Rimal, 2016). Consequently, norms can act as a framework or set of guiding principles used by individuals to make sense of their experiences within the context of community-specific codes of conduct (Burnett *et al.*, 2003; Burnett and Bonnici, 2003; Chung and Rimal, 2016).

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The increasing emphasis on the importance of norms in shaping various emerging SNSs related practices (e.g., privacy, photo sharing, mourning, friending) has produced three main interrelated approaches to the relationship between norms and practices: SNSs use norms, norms concerning content, and norms governing interaction (for an extensive review, see [Wagner, 2018](#)); while the first two norms refer to appropriate use of SNSs (e.g., friending, tagging, liking, status updates, photo sharing), interaction-related norms refer to governing interaction between users ([Wagner, 2018](#)). Current research reveals that many users have implicit norms about the quantity and quality of the content that should be shared on SNSs ([McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011](#); [Uski and Lampinen, 2016](#); [Ollier-Malaterre and Serre, 2018](#)). These studies point out that excessive sharing of insignificant content, excessive friending, inauthentic content sharing or profile tuning, unflattering content tagging, attention-seeking, and emotional content sharing are perceived as inappropriate within SNSs contexts. Further, negative or heated interactions, fights, personal attacks, and name-calling are perceived as inappropriate ways of interactions on these sites ([Marwick and Ellison, 2012](#); [McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011](#)).

Research has demonstrated that in managing the challenges of sharing information with multiple and diverse audiences, SNSs users often employ social and technical strategies to communicate in ways that are appropriate for these networks. Whereas technical strategies typically involve the manipulation of a site's settings or features, social strategies entail decisions about when and how to share information, what information to share, and with whom (See [Vitak et al., 2015](#)), that is, as people are trying to figure out how to protect their information or communicate while following collective rules of how to communicate with others, they employ social and technical strategies ([Ammari et al., 2015](#); [Marwick and Boyd, 2011a, b, 2014](#); [Vitak et al., 2015](#); [McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011](#); [Uski and Lampinen, 2016](#)). These strategies can either be preventive, in the sense that they protect content by controlling and limiting who has access to it, or corrective, in a sense that they are adjusted when norms, privacy, or self-presentation have been violated ([Ammari et al., 2015](#); [Vitak et al., 2015](#); [McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011](#)). These strategies include increasing the site's privacy settings ([Strano, 2008](#); [McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011](#); [Vitak, 2012](#); [Vitak et al., 2015](#); [Marwick and Boyd, 2011a, b, 2014](#)); creating separate accounts to interact with various audiences ([Ammari et al., 2015](#); [Marwick and Boyd, 2011a, b, 2014](#); [Ollier-Malaterre and Serre, 2018](#)); employing friend lists to segment friends into different groups or editing post settings to make content available only to a subset of one's friends ([Marwick and Boyd, 2011a, b, 2014](#); [Vitak et al., 2015](#); [Ollier-Malaterre and Serre, 2018](#); [McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011](#)); selective befriending ([Vitak et al., 2015](#); [Marwick and Boyd, 2011a, b, 2014](#); [Zillich and Müller, 2019](#)); sharing content that is appropriate for all audiences ([Ammari et al., 2015](#); [Vitak et al., 2015](#)); and not sharing content at all ([Vitak et al., 2015](#); [Strano, 2008](#); [McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011](#); [Vitak, 2012](#); [Zillich and Müller, 2019](#)).

### *1.2 Shared practices on SNSs*

Previous research has also argued that the norms shaping participation in SNSs are negotiated collectively ([Marwick and Ellison, 2012](#); [Zillich and Müller, 2019](#)). For instance, to maintain their privacy and self-presentation on SNSs, individuals have to not only manage what content they share on these sites or who has access to this content; they must also negotiate with others (e.g., family, spouses, friends, peers) about what content is shared, be it information about the individual or their contacts ([Ammari et al., 2015](#); [Marwick and Ellison, 2012](#); [Marwick and Boyd, 2011a, b, 2014](#); [McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011](#)). Many SNS users seem to be aware and considerate of the norms of their social networks in relation to privacy and self-presentation expectations, and they tend not to share content that may violate these expectations ([McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011](#)). However, when these norms and expectations are

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violated, and inappropriate content is shared, users often rely on corrective strategies to reinforce these norms by untagging themselves from inappropriate content (Marwick and Boyd, 2011a, b, 2014), asking others to remove this content (Ammari *et al.*, 2015; McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011; Vitak *et al.*, 2015), removing or blocking those who are violating norms or hiding them from the News Feed (McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011). Finally, many users choose to overlook inappropriate content to keep the peace, if that content is not deemed serious or harmful (Ammari *et al.*, 2015; McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011).

Emerging research indicates that navigating context collapse may only be effective on an individual level. Context collapse is much harder to manage in the case of SNSs groups when the audience is heterogeneous, unknown and the individual has fewer technical tools to manage or control content and audience, compared to those available with personal profiles (Marwick and Ellison, 2012; Zillich and Müller, 2019). For instance, context collapse can be much higher in Facebook groups (see Marwick and Ellison, 2012) because these Facebook groups and pages are often created by one person and together with one or more individuals (e.g., administrators) who have full technical control over these groups. These administrator(s) can decide who joins these groups, set rules and guidelines, remove content, remove or block members, and delete these groups or pages (Marwick and Ellison, 2012; Juneström, 2019). Whereas individual members have very limited technical possibilities (i.e., as the ones described above) to control

who views, shares, or comments on their content. Content in these groups can be viewed, shared, and commented on by anyone who has access to these groups, which intensifies the possibility that people will be more exposed to conflicting or hostile comments, which may lead to larger disagreements (see Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski, 2015; Juneström, 2019; Marwick and Ellison, 2012), that is, unlike personal profiles, Facebook groups and pages do not allow individual members to select who joins these networks and views and comments on their content. They must, therefore, find new ways to cope with these challenges.

Research on communities formed online reveals that members of these group tend to collectively develop a shared set of rules that regulate community members' interactions (Baym, 1993, 1998, 2007; Burnett and Bonnici, 2003; Burnett *et al.*, 2003; Postmes *et al.*, 2000). These norms tend to be specific to their community, reflecting the distinctive nature of their shared online practices (Baym, 2007; Wenger, 1998). For instance, the findings of Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski (2015) and Christensen *et al.* (2017) show that bereaved parents use Facebook groups as "safe haven" in ways that undermine dominant western norms requiring silence around death and a quick recovery from grief. These parents were able to develop their own distinctive shared practice, which allowed members to express grief, continue their bond with their deceased children, and share photos of their children in ways that de-tabooed death; however, as members had different views about the content of these photos, they needed to negotiate the photos that were appropriate to be shared. For mourning pages that are public and thus might be seen by strangers and "grief tourists," family and friends worked collectively to confront rule-breakers and reinforce norms of "appropriate" grieving that could maintain a positive image of the deceased (Marwick and Ellison, 2012).

The current literature suggests that SNS-related practices and norms shaping these practices seem to evolve over time as the platforms evolve, users become more skilled in using these platforms, their networks become more diverse, and they learn how to interact with diverse networks (Strano, 2008; McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011; Vitak, 2012). The following section will describe the theoretical base underpinning the present work.

## 2. Community of practice

The concept community of practice (CoP) and situated learning perspective (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) are used as theoretical tools for this article's analysis of its

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empirical material. The CoP is defined in this article as a group of people who share a common information practice that they collectively work to sustain and gain more knowledge about (Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). From a situated perspective, learning to be a member of a group is understood as a social process in which people become part of a CoP by actively engaging in its practice in ways that are acknowledged and accepted by the community (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Engagement in an information practice is mutually negotiated, shaped, and reshaped by people who are actively engaged in the activities of their particular sociocultural setting, and thus, shape valued and accepted ways of participation in that setting (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

A shared practice is, thus, an essential component of a CoP, giving a community its coherence. According to Wenger (1998), there are three interrelated features that sustain a community's shared practices: mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire of group resources. First, mutual engagement addresses the (re)production of acceptable, community-specific ways of engagement, resulting in distinctive relationships and understandings between members particular to the collective site. A shared practice, for instance, is a result of such mutual engagement among group members, which continues to be (re)produced as members continue to engage, negotiate, and respond to their daily situations and dilemmas in the group. Second, a joint enterprise is a collectively developed shared understanding of how the group can achieve its goals, developed and sustained by members via daily group activities. For Wenger, a joint enterprise is what "keeps a community of practice together" (Wenger, 1998, p. 77). Developing common ground becomes the goal and mutual responsibility of the community. For instance, it may involve developing or adopting rules, norms, or shared understandings, which define acceptable ways to seek or share information within a practice that aligns with the group's goals, and thus, keep the information practice going. Over time, the community accumulates these norms, rules, and shared understandings of addressing different situations into communal resources, or shared repertoires (Wenger, 1998; Wenger and Wenger-Trayner, 2015). These resources reflect the history of mutual engagement in the shared practice of the group, which can later be used to negotiate new meanings and coordinating future activities.

By drawing on the CoP perspective, an information practice is defined, in this article, as a shared understanding or established ways, which define what, how, and when to seek, share, or withhold information in ways that are sanctioned within a particular sociocultural setting (e.g., the Facebook group). Thus, CoP provides a particularly useful lens for conceptualising and understanding contemporary information practices within SNS settings. The use of this theory can shed light on the nature of group dynamics and shared resources (e.g., rules, norms, shared understandings) produced to organise, coordinate, and sustain a shared information practice (cf. Wenger, 1998, p. 13, p. 283). A CoP perspective is, thus, particularly well-suited to the purpose of this study because it provides a language that helps to describe and understand the underlying dynamics of how the shared information practice of the group is formed and the resources that members have developed and produced to sustain this practice.

### **3. Research design**

#### *3.1 Research setting and participants*

The setting for this study is a multicultural Facebook group of foreign mothers living or planning to move to Sweden. The group was founded a decade ago to serve as an information resource where these mothers shared information, tips, and experiences, as well as supported each other as they raised their families in a foreign country. Members come from various parts of the world and use English to communicate within the group. The data collection was conducted in two phases. In the first phase (2014–2015), the group had 1,500 members and

was managed by two administrators; in the second phase (2017), the group had grown to 4,000 members and four administrators. At the time of data collection, the group was set to be closed, which meant that anyone could locate the group through search engines but had to request membership to access and view the group. As a foreign mother living in Sweden, I myself have been a member of this group since 2014. An invitation to participate in the study was posted to the group after gaining permission from the administrators. The participants were recruited through convenience, purposeful, and snowball sampling. Some members volunteered to participate in the study, and some of these participants recommended others. The remaining participants were purposefully selected and invited to join the study based on their role (e.g., administrative role) and specific membership status (e.g., active and regular members) to ensure that the study covered a breadth of experience in the group. In particular, active, long-standing, and administrative members were invited to take part in the study because they provided greater insight into the group's dynamics and routines. The researcher stopped recruiting more participants when a point of saturation in the data analysis was reached (Silverman and Marvasti, 2008). In total, twenty members from the group participated in the study, of which 19 were members, and one was an administrator.

The participants ranged in age from 25 to 45 years old, had 1–3 children between the ages of a newborn up to 13 years old. Participants had varied membership experiences; some participants were highly active and participated in the group's information activities, whereas some followed the group very actively but seldom participated in its activities. A few participants were not very active. Their membership ranged from a few months (5–8 months) up to several years (8–10 years).

### *3.2 Data collection*

In-depth semi-structured interviews were chosen for the collection of empirical data. The interviews were carried out using means that best suited the participants, including (2) in person, (12) Skype, (2) FaceTime, (1) chat conversation, and (3) over the phone. The first phase of interviews was carried out with 19 participants from the fall of 2014 until the spring of 2015. The last interview was conducted in autumn 2017, with one of the group's administrators. The interviews lasted from 45 to 90 min. All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The researcher also engaged in ongoing conversations with some participants via Facebook's private messages throughout the data collection period. The aim was to exchange tips, feedback, and gain insight into ongoing activities in the group.

The empirical material presented in this article is part of a larger doctoral project, which aims to provide a sociocultural understanding of the role that contemporary, digitally mediated groups, such as Facebook groups, play in shaping people's everyday information literacy practices. Therefore, interview questions for the project covered a broad range of issues in relation to the ways in which the participants seek, share, access, and assess information from the group. The data collection and analysis for the project were iterative, providing an opportunity to use initial insights from early interviews to followup on and invite members to participate for subsequent interviews.

An initial insight emerging from the first interviews, which inspired the production of this article, is what the participants described as (in)appropriate or (un)acceptable ways to seek and share information in the group. Therefore, for a subsequent interview, participants were asked specific questions about these issues, such as: are there any topics/information that you think are (in)appropriate for sharing or discussion in the group, and why? How do you or other members react when these topics are shared by you or by others? Can you give me some examples?

Whereas interviews with regular members have focused on information activities and interactions with others in the group, the administrator's interview focused on the

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administrative group's role. Specifically, the interview with the administrator covered issues ranging from general questions about the history and purpose of the group to more specific issues related to the administrative group's role in moderating members' activities. Some of the questions posed to the administrator in relation to this article were as follows: are there any topics/information that are (in)appropriate, or are banned from discussion in the group, and why? Are there any explicit rules that members should be aware of when participating in the group? What are they? How did you decide these rules? To what extent, when, and how does the administrative group get involved in moderating members' activities?

Conducting one-on-one interviews proved to be useful, since this method allowed private and open discussions between participants and the researcher, enabling access to private opinions about group dynamics that might not have been shared in a group setting (Boellstorff *et al.*, 2012). The interview also allowed the researcher to move back and forth in time and ask questions about past and current activities taking place in the group (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Conducting the interviews over an extended period of time has facilitated direct access to the group's past, present, and future activities. Particularly, conducting an interview with the administrator three years later, after the first interview was conducted allowed to reflect and gain in-depth insights into the group's past and present activities. Further, the ongoing conversations with some of the participants allowed the researcher to gain valuable insight into ongoing activities in the group. These methods were particularly useful for capturing how some of the group's activities, norms, and rules have evolved and how the participants reflected on them over time (Silverman and Marvasti, 2008).

### *3.3 Limitations*

In spite of the depth and richness of the empirical data, it must be acknowledged that the homogenous sample in this study may not be representative of all other members' experiences in the group. This is because while several attempts were made to have a demographically diverse sample, the majority of those who agreed to participate were highly educated, holding at least a bachelor's degree. Further, although the participants came from 10 different countries, the majority came from English-speaking countries.

### *3.4 Data analysis*

The data were analysed using constant comparative analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) combined with narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005). ATLAS.ti was used to facilitate and organise the data analysis process. The constant comparative analysis involved reading the transcripts in an iterative manner to identify key themes of interest in relation to the theoretical concepts. For example, the analysis was focused on identifying the main goals, norms, and rules that defined what constituted appropriate ways of seeking or sharing information within the group.

The next stage of analysis aimed to gain an understanding of the evolving character of the shared practice. Disruptions in the group's regular activities, such as conflicts and disagreements, have been identified as a particularly relevant unit of analysis. This is because conflicts and disagreements and the ways in which the group develops to resolve these problems can provide important analytical insights into the evolution of the group's practice (Wenger, 1998), that is, such disruptions can provide opportunities for the group to reevaluate the rules for conducting its regular activities, thus contributing to the group's sustainability of its shared practice (Wenger, 1998).

This was achieved by focusing on one particular conflict (i.e., vaccination) that was the subject of intense debate during the first phase of data collection; this conflict drastically declined through the end of the first phase and three years later in the second phase of the

data collection. Therefore, the gathered data had rich material about unfolding events and actions involving this particular debate at different points of time, providing insights into the group's past, current, and future activities. A narrative approach to the analysis enabled the researcher to capture the sequence and consequence of events that led to conflict, resolution, and the reactions and reflections of members caught up in these debates. A narrative approach thus facilitated grouping these narratives into one coherent and meaningful "storyline" that serves to describe "what has occurred; to lay out why things are the way they are or have become the way they are" (Bamberg, 2012, p. 77; Riessman, 2005). As Riessman advises, "what makes diverse texts "narrative" is sequence and consequence: events are selected, organised, connected, and evaluated as meaningful for a particular audience" (2005, p. 2).

The vaccination conflict can, therefore, shed light on a specific period of time when the group's shared practices were under (re)negotiation. This is because, as the findings will demonstrate, this conflict has fundamentally shaped the current information practices of group members, defining what information members are allowed or not allowed to seek or share within the group about this particular topic.

### *3.5 Ethical considerations*

All ethical considerations in this study were dealt with in accordance with the Swedish Research Council requirements and the AoIR Ethics working committee recommendations (Markham and Buchanan, 2012). A consent form and an information sheet were sent to each participant. The participants were made aware that their participation in the study was completely voluntary, and they were advised during each interview to withhold any information that they did not want to make public. Further, any information that could lead to the identification of any participant by group members or others was removed from the transcripts and not used in this article. However, it was not possible to hide the identity of the administrator, and she had no issue with being identified. Each participant was given a pseudonym (P1–P19, P-admin) to further protect their identities. It is worth noting that the pseudonym of P-admin is used interchangeably with the administrator, for stylistic purposes.

## **4. Findings**

### *4.1 The Facebook group: background*

After the birth of her daughter in 2005, the administrator of the group explained that she joined an internet forum to connect with other foreign mothers living in Sweden. However, she described her experience in the forum as unpleasant. She felt continuously criticised for her parenting choices. After getting into repeated arguments with other members, she decided to leave that forum and start her own small group on Facebook, a new social networking site back then, together with other mothers whom she met through the forum. The purpose of creating the Facebook group, she explained, was to connect foreign mothers living in Sweden to each other so that they could help and support by sharing information about different aspects of raising a family in a foreign country. She described her motivation behind creating the group:

My thought was that there will be people here who have no support, family or close friends, and they don't get to understand the system or where do they need to go to, if they needed information. And I thought [the group] was a good place for us to start by sharing information about what we already knew. (P-admin)

Her earlier negative experience as a mother in the other forum thus shaped her decision to create a more inclusive group where members felt they could seek and share information

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about their parenting practices freely without fearing judgment. She describes her aim in the following:

I really wanted it to be from the very beginning where it was the case where nobody can make judgment on anyone else, regardless of their religion, their beliefs, and you know, if you are [pro-vaccines] or [anti-vaccines]. I don't want people to feel pressured in any situation. I don't want that on the group. (P-admin)

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However, ten years later, she found that the group had grown from being “just like a coffee group” (P-admin) with a couple of other mothers, to a massive group connecting thousands of foreign mothers from all over Sweden. Despite this rapid growth, the administrator emphasised that she still tried, together with the other administrator, to maintain an inclusive group. In order to achieve this, P-admin explained that certain norms and rules had been set up as explicit guidelines that defined appropriate interaction and participation in the group, including what information could be shared by members. These rules, as described by the administrator, are presented below.

#### *4.2 Group's rules and norms*

The administrator described a number of formal rules put in place to make it easier to manage the group. These rules are made explicit and are communicated to members via a pinned post. A pinned post is a feature in Facebook groups, which allows group administrators to select a particular post and place it at the top of the group wall to make it visible to group members at all times.

The administrator emphasised that it was crucial for all members, especially new ones, to familiarise themselves with the norms and rules of the group in the pinned post. She noted: “there is a lot of time when people first join the group and they don't know, they have not read the pinned post. [So,] just the main rule is to read the pin[ned] post [laughs].” Also, as will be discussed later in this article, all members were constantly reminded of these rules if they happened to violate them.

Given the voluntary nature of the administrative group work, the pinned post serves as a reminder limits of what is allowed or not in the group. These rules should serve to minimise tensions and conflicts, as well as administrative work. P-admin explained: “sometimes it becomes unmanageable because of the amount of people, and because you know we all have families, we all have jobs. So, we cannot be on there all the time.”

Some of these rules were aimed at defining the group boundaries by regulating what content was permissible and how it should be shared. For instance, the administrator emphasised that the main purpose of the group was to exchange information, experiences, and advice about raising a family in Sweden. Other types of activities, such as advertising or selling, were restricted. The administrator pointed out that “that's not what the group is about, like there are other sales groups for that.” A further rule was that members were no longer allowed to include pictures in their main posts because some members sometimes shared inappropriate content. For instance, “people post pictures of their baby's diapers, but then maybe you don't particularly want to see that. So, the pictures should go in a comment underneath the first post” (P-admin).

Some of the rules strongly emphasised by the administrator were aimed at regulating interactions among members to ensure norms of common courtesy when seeking or sharing information in the group. For instance, members were expected to be polite, friendly, constructive, and respectful towards their fellow members, P-admin explained: “the main rule is, ‘if you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all’” To be polite and respectful was not only imposed by the administrators; this was a collective and collectively-enforced expectation about how to communicate in the group – in other words, a norm. For instance, many participants emphasised the importance of maintaining a

positive, supportive, and friendly vibe in the group, as P13 clarified: “I like to post positive things, I try not to say things that are negative.” She shares information only “if it is helpful and relevant to the person.” P11 also believed that the advice she shares and expects others also to share should be “supportive and constructive.” P19 agrees that other members should be “reasonable [ . . . ] they support rather than be aggressive.”

Another main rule in the group is that members are explicitly forbidden from engaging in any debates about vaccination. Vaccination debates were not banned at the early stages of the data collection in 2014, but members were expected to engage respectfully in these debates. The ban was enacted towards the end of the first period of data collection in 2015 and has been strongly enforced and reinforced since then. The administrator clarified that although she wanted the group to be a space where all members could freely seek, share, and discuss information about any parenting practice, civility was impossible to maintain when it came to vaccinations. This particular parenting choice engendered constant conflicts in the group, leading to a ban on all discussions of vaccines, and hence, made it a rule. Members are still allowed to seek and share “factual” information about vaccinations (P-admin, P2). The administrator clarified: “if you want to ask, ‘where can I go to get a vaccination?’, that’s fine. But the intent of pro- and anti-vaccination is not something that we allow to be discussed in the group.” These aspects will be further discussed in more detail in the final section of the findings. The following section describes how norms and rules are enacted and reproduced through the daily information activities of the group.

#### *4.3 Shared understandings of appropriate participation in the group*

Many interviewees recognised the diversity of parenting practices in the group and that their own parenting practices may not be shared by all group members. This recognition compelled them to adapt their information activities in order to participate in the shared practice of the group. Participants consistently described four common ways they adopted when engaging or participating in the group’s daily information activities: engaging, avoiding, concealing, and/or leaving. It is worth noting that these ways were consistently described by most participants and applied both to how they acted themselves and how they expected other members to act.

*4.3.1 Engaging.* Some participants described that while they might not agree with other members’ parenting practices, it was not their job to judge others for their choices, given the diversity of members. Hence, when participants engaged with other members on such issues, they were particularly cautious about how they shared information and described paying close attention to the tone they used, in order to avoid misunderstandings. P2 described her cautious approach as follows:

I would try and maybe suggest “well, this is what worked for me and perhaps you could try this” but always, hopefully, with the tone of not being judgmental and just trying to suggest and trying to help. (P2)

Similarly, P14 recalled an instance of sharing information with another member about the psychological consequences of letting a child cry itself to sleep. She emphasised that she was often cautious when questions about such a controversial parenting practice came up and that she usually avoided commenting on these kinds of posts or sharing information with supporters of this parenting practice. However, in this case, as the other member explicitly asked others for arguments for why she should not follow this particular parenting practice, P14 was willing to engage:

I would not have written that if someone was asking, to try to get the baby to sleep that way [ . . . ] But if someone wants to have reasons not to do it, then I would gladly say “I would not do it either.”

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Therefore, whereas most participants have emphasised the importance of sharing information with others if they believed that they could be of assistance, it was more important for them to act within the socially accepted norms and rules of the group, that is, to be respectful of others' parenting practices.

*4.3.2 Avoiding.* The participants described avoiding as another common way of navigating potential disagreements in the group. Namely, the participants avoided engaging with opposing parenting practices in the group. The reason that participants gave for avoidance was that although they disagreed with some of what was shared in the group, they considered engagement in tension-filled discussions to be pointless. P10 stated:

If someone posts something that I don't agree with, I just don't comment on it and I keep going, I just disagree to myself and work to the next post. But people feel the need, like, to comment and be negative, and I don't think that's useful.

P10's approach is consistent with the administrator's approach in balancing her own personal views of parenting when moderating the group. She commented: "I don't judge people based on their decisions; I just scroll past it. Just scroll past it [laughs]. [. . .]. Otherwise, you know, I can't run the group" (P-admin).

To avoid engaging in conflict by not responding to questions involving certain parenting practices was only not something the participants only did, but what they expected of other members. For example, P2 condemned aggressive and hostile comments, which violated the group's shared norms and rules of supportiveness and friendliness, and suggesting that it should be a matter of common sense to ignore certain information requests: "to be honest, I never really understand [. . .] as far as I am concerned, you know, if you don't like a post just don't read it! Don't get involved in it."

*4.3.3 Concealing.* Several participants described concealing information about their own parenting practices from others as a way of protecting themselves from potential hostility, but also to prevent triggering a larger group conflict. In situations where they might expect a conflict to arise, interviewed members might look outside the group, preferring other information sources and channels. P8 explained, as did many other participants that she recognised that the group was not a suitable place to seek or share information on "inflammatory" or "contentious" practices. She points out:

I would not ask questions related to religion or breastfeeding, umm, it may seem strange, but I am just very aware of the things that can get really controversial, so I just don't bother with that on there.

Seeking information about breastfeeding or religion may trigger a backlash and be frowned upon by some members of the group. P8 believed that it would be more acceptable and would not trigger a similar backlash in other like-minded groups built around these practices. Topics like breastfeeding and religion are not prohibited in the group studied here, and the administrator stressed that it is within members rights to seek information on these topics. However, some participants seem to be well aware of their sensitivity and of the fact that not all members would conform to the rules and the norms of the group in their response.

This suggests that members who conceal information relating to contentious parenting practices to avoid potential conflict may have limited use for the group. Some participants noted that circumcision and abortion are two parenting practices that information are no longer sought or shared about in the group. The fact that self-censorship governed the treatment of some formally unregulated topics suggests that some information activities are not only shaped by the rules of the group but are also shaped through interactions around specific topics and which people dominated these interactions (cf. Wenger, 1998, p. 79). Amongst other things, this indicates that members use the group in ways other than those intended by the administrator when founding the group, namely as a space for members to

seek and share information openly about their parenting practices regardless of whether or not they are controversial.

*4.3.4 Leaving.* Some participants chose to leave the group when they could no longer cope with more argumentative discussions of parenting practices, feeling that they could no longer follow the group's rules and norms. On one occasion, P5 got into a heated argument with some members about male circumcision practice, after which she left the group. I sent her a private Facebook message to investigate why she was no longer a member. She replied:

I had an argument with some mums about circumcision. Decided it is best if I left. I think we all share the information that we have found best suits our families and [we] try to persuade others to do the same for some reason? Like we all have found the "right" way? (P5, follow-up chat)

Likewise, a while after my interview with P14, I also noted that she was no longer a member. So, I sent her a private Facebook message to investigate the issue. She wrote back to me explaining that she decided to leave the group after constantly getting irritated by others' complaints about life in Sweden, which she considered to be inappropriate. She responded: "I got a little fed up with all the complaining about more or less everything in Sweden, so I decided to leave the group." Interestingly, this was one topic that she felt strongly about a few years earlier, when we had our interview:

Complaining about Sweden is the only thing that I have a hard time with, I don't think they are off-topic, because clearly it is important to people to complain about the system. I think it is great they seem to find help in those groups. (P14, follow-up chat)

Again, it is worth noting that circumcision and cultural complaints were not banned as discussion topics, which indicates that they were not considered to be inappropriate, at least formally, regardless of how some members felt. Leaving can thus be considered as a way adopted by members who are no longer able to cope with the group's rules and norms concerning controversial practices.

To conclude, the participants seem to be constantly involved in evaluating their participation in the group by carefully assessing *when* and *how* to participate, *when* to share or withhold information, and *what* the "appropriate" or right content or tone was for sharing information on potentially controversial parenting practices. These accounts of careful participation demonstrate the way the socially accepted norms and rules in the group are enacted, negotiated, and reproduced through the day-to-day interaction of its members, in a pursuit of maintaining the group as a positive, supportive, and friendly space, where members can freely seek and share information with others (cf. Wenger, 1998).

#### *4.4 Negotiations, formations, and reinforcements of the group's norms and rules*

The findings indicate that although the group strives to create a friendly, nonjudgmental space where members should feel free to seek and share information about their diverse parenting practices, conflicts did arise quite often, and not all members acted within the group's socially and formally established ways of interacting. These findings highlight the complexities and contradictions of members' interactions within the group with respect to expectations, expressed behaviour, and actual behaviour. Many participants, for instance, pointed out that although members believed that they shared an understanding about friendliness within the group, maintaining that common ground was harder to achieve in practice. P8 noted: "people want to be friendly and supportive, but they cannot be on hot topics." Vaccination was one such hot topic. Although many participants emphasised the importance of discussing vaccinations in a sensible way, some found that some members were unable to discuss this topic in a "respectful manner," as P2 explained.

The participants' narratives of the events surrounding vaccination discussions offer a few insights as to why this might be the case. Several participants explained that due to the

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emotional nature of the debate on vaccinations, members' enquiries on this topic tend to always escalate rapidly into "personal attacks" (P7), where the focus usually shifts from a simple request for information to an uncontrollable aggressive debate, where members on both ends of the debate end up being hostile to one another.

Many participants felt that members who often fueled these conflicts had very strong opinions about vaccinations, which they tried to "impose" on others, either through sharing judgmental opinions or misleading or irrelevant information. While this was not necessarily restricted to the vaccination debate, many participants believed that this often happened when the information was sought or shared about it within the group. P6 commented: "There are some people that are really against [vaccinations], they just think that it's not the right thing to do. So, they are just trying to say it's only my way, or everything else is wrong."

P10 recalled one incident validating this point, where she asked about what she described as basic information about vaccinations (e.g., schedules) but received irrelevant and unhelpful information from others about alleged side effects. This, in turn, triggered a conflict amongst members, as she explains: "I wasn't sure when they give MMR vaccine in Sweden, so I asked on the group and that started a huge debate that got like out of control."

So, although all members are entitled to seek and share information with regard to their own parenting practices, many participants explained that inappropriate attempts to convince, mislead, and attack others for their choices led to arguments. Thus, attempts to inappropriately persuade or shame others, broke the group rules (e.g., respectful and nonjudgmental engagement), and resulted in confrontations that reinforced the social norms of the group. P14 clarified: "I mean if someone who does not want to vaccinate their kids, I am not the one to judge, but if you tried to convince others by saying things that are actually not true, that's I think where my line goes."

P2 agreed on the inappropriateness of sharing misleading information but, unlike P14, she avoided engaging in discussions about vaccinations because she did not "want to get into a fight," but explained that there are others whom she "know[s] will always jump in and put forward the opposite position, [because] they fear that somebody who doesn't know better will look at these websites and make their decision based on misinformation."

Given that conflicts continued to erupt in the group and constantly sharing information about vaccines evolved into what the administrator described as unmanageable "personal attack [which] really leads to really big rows" (P-admin), the administrators decided to ban the vaccination debates and only allowed basic information on this topic to be shared (see norms and rules section). P2 presented her understanding of the issue: "from my experience that was made after months of these fights breaking out over and over again, and so I suppose that is fair enough."

Despite this ban, the researcher was tipped off by one informant about one erupting conflict. She sent me a private Facebook message as follows:

P6: Were you following last night's drama on the group? The admin almost closed it because of a vaccines discussion that got too heated.

Author: I thought the vaccine discussions were banned?

P6: Maybe they were, and people didn't follow the rule.

As illustrated here, despite the administrators' efforts to moderate and limit these conflicts by banning this debate, some members continued to break group norms and rules by being aggressive and attacking each other. Consequently, the administrator, as a founder of the group, decided to shut it down. As the researcher interviewed the administrator a bit later,

this had provided an opportunity to follow up on this to gain more insight. Reflecting on what had happened, she said:

[It] quickly became a personal attack between people and me trying to stop them. They were very despicably [sic] mean to each other, like judging each other. So, I didn't want to deal with this anymore and decided to close the group and told everybody "OK, I will just give you 24 hours just to find somebody in the group [to connect with] or start your own group." (Administrator)

But the administrator was talked out of this decision, with some members offering to serve in the administrator group. P-admin said: "we had a very difficult time, but we needed some extra admins after what happened. Then I had the offer from two other people to join as admin[istrator] to help." P-admin explained that the new administrative group decided to start fresh by explicitly informing members that any debates on vaccinations would not be tolerated, and members who violated the rules were removed from the group. As the administrator explained: "There were some people who were very judgmental, very outspoken and very difficult people, we got rid of [them]."

Thus, the new administrative group became stricter in enforcing the group norms and rules, relying on different means to achieve this. Such a process of adaptation exemplifies how norms are enacted and then reinforced as rules. For instance, P-admin explained that those who violated the rules were often asked to remove their inappropriate posts or comments. Offenders were also directed to the pinned post to read the rules. The administrators also removed inappropriate posts instantly if there was a risk of conflict escalation. In addition, group members helped to uphold the goals of the group by reinforcing the norms and rules, for example, by joining the administrators' in order to moderate the group (see above), by confronting those who violated the group's norms and rules (as described in the examples above), or by reporting inappropriate discussions to administrators. P-admin explained:

People have been there for a long time, they are fully aware of what we are trying to do here, we kind of rely on [them], you know, maybe report when somebody is being unpleasant, or when there is something happening on the [group], that they know it shouldn't be there.

As the second phase of the data collection was carried out three years after these conflicts erupted, it was possible to note that the combination of these different monitoring activities seems to have played an important role in minimising conflict in the group. As the administrator noted: "it must have been three to four years ago, we started fresh and it has been a lot better since then." This sentiment was also echoed by other participants who credited the administrators' tight control over the group with its current friendly and positive atmosphere. One participant explained that "I think nowadays they are a lot stricter. I think earlier I've seen a lot of those [vaccine conflicts], but I haven't seen that much lately" (P11). Another participant added, "the tone of the posts seems to be friendlier" (P8).

## 5. Discussion

The empirical findings showed that the participants were mutually engaged in (re) negotiating shared understandings that defined appropriate participation in the Facebook group in a pursuit to maintain the goals of the group (cf. Wenger, 1998). Group members worked collectively to cultivate a shared space for responsible and respectful information sharing, reflecting the group's joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998). The findings also show that in the process of negotiating this joint enterprise, the group enacted and enforced a set of norms and rules that were (re)shaped by members' active information seeking and sharing activities. These norms and rules represent a *shared repertoire* (Wenger, 1998) that members drew on in their daily activities and interactions. The shared ways adopted by the participants to

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navigate possible conflicts exemplify and highlight how these norms and rules are enacted and reproduced in the daily activities of the group. The following sections offer more details on all these aspects.

### 5.1 *Mutual negotiation of a joint enterprise*

The empirical findings demonstrate commonality in how the participants described appropriate participation in the information activities of the group. This implies common goals and a shared understanding among group members of appropriate ways to engage in information seeking and sharing. Drawing on their narratives, the group appears to have two overlapping goals. First, the main goal of this group is to serve as an information resource for mothers to seek and share information, experiences, and advice about raising a family in Sweden. Second, another essential goal for the group is to cultivate a friendly, nonjudgmental space for members, where they could seek and share information with one another regardless of their parenting practices. Group members tended to engage with others cautiously and politely, especially when seeking or sharing information on polarising parenting practices. There were many instances in the findings where this shared understanding of being a kind, responsible, and respectful member was exhibited in various members' activities. This reflects the joint enterprise of the group, that is, to be a friendly and collaborative information resource for everyone. Accomplishing these two goals is vital to the continuity of the group. This is in line with Wenger's (1998) observation that a joint enterprise is what keeps a community of practice together, making this group's two goals essential to the group's sustainability of its shared practice.

However, it is important to emphasise that a joint enterprise does not necessarily evolve out of continually harmonious interaction between group members (cf. Wenger, 1998). It is also developed through activities that help them navigate and overcome tension and disagreement. Their joint enterprise requires that group members are mutually engaged in negotiating common grounds for maintenance of the group and its shared information practice. Therefore, the preservation of the group as a useful information resource is contingent on members' capacity to cope with their differences (see also Marwick and Boyd, 2014; Wenger, 1998). Thus, their enterprise is joint or shared because it is *communally negotiated* (Wenger, 1998).

An essential part of this negotiation was the development of shared resources (e.g., norms and rules) that defined how information should be accessed. In other words, the appropriate ways that provide access to the shared practices and information resources of the group define what a valued membership in this group is, and it is what gives legitimacy for its members (cf. Wenger, 1998). Being a knowledgeable member in this group was not merely about being able to seek or provide information with others. It was also about knowing what, when, and how to seek, share, or withhold information from others in ways that were appropriate and accepted in this specific community (cf. Lave and Wenger, 1991).

In addition, it is important to emphasise that the joint enterprise of this group was *continuously evolving* as its shared practice evolved (Lave and Wenger, 1991). A prime example is the vaccination debate, which threatened to shut down the group. Although the administrator wanted the group to be an open space for everyone to seek and share information regardless of their parenting practices, adjustments to the enterprise had to be made. New rules were introduced to ensure continuity and harmony amongst its members. This has two implications: on the one hand, it clearly shows that the joint enterprise is not *static* but rather is *communally negotiated*, adjusted when disturbances require collective responses. This shows that the rules and norms in the group are shaped in response to unfolding events and reoccurring conflicts in group members' daily information activities. It also demonstrates that although the group operated within a

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broader context (Wenger, 1998, p. 79), beyond the control of members, including administrators. Their shared practice is (re)shaped in response to day-to-day dilemmas and interactions. These findings are consistent with Martey and Stomer-Galley's (2007) findings on how members' daily interactions shape the rules and norms that guide gaming communities.

### 5.2 *A shared repertoire*

The findings show that in developing the shared practice of the group, members as a group adopted and produced a few main resources to maintain the group's joint enterprise, namely: norms, rules and shared understandings amongst members for how to interact appropriately and address recurring tensions in the group.

*5.2.1 A continuum of explicit and implicit rules.* The first category of resources produced and adopted by the group during its negotiation of a joint enterprise was a set of explicit norms and rules for participation in the group's activities. They cover different issues ranging from instructing members on what is (in)appropriate information to defining norms in relation to (in)appropriate ways of interacting with one another. These norms correspond to the two types of norms of SNSs use identified by Wagner (2018), norms regulating content and norms regulating interaction. They are also similar to the preventive strategies implemented by Ammari *et al.* (2015) and McLaughlin and Vitak (2011) for participants in a pursuit to maintain their privacy or self-presentation goals.

As has been shown by the participants' narratives, the group's norms and rules evolve as they are adapted to new events. For example, there is a continuum between explicit and implicit rules in the group. While most of the rules presented in the findings were explicit, some were implicit and had to be made explicit later in a pinned post at the top of the Facebook's group wall (e.g., sharing pictures, selling and advertising, banning vaccine debates, and so on). As such, the pinned post is the resource that the community has produced and revisited in an ongoing negotiation process. This post serves as a resource that reflects the shared history of the group (e.g., past activities) but it also creates a "live point of reference" to mediate and shape group members' current and future information activities in the group (See also Burnett and Bonnici, 2003; Wenger, 1998).

*5.2.2 Shared understandings in navigating conflict.* The group also developed shared understandings amongst group members in navigating and coping with opposing practices being discussed or shared in the group. This was clearly demonstrated in the similarities found across the participants' narratives of how they act, and their expectations of how others should act, when, for example, opposing or conflicting parenting topics are shared in the group. The fact that the majority of these participants described the same patterns of appropriate ways to handle these different situations and interact with others reflects the group's rules and norms. These expectations seem to be commonly held by the study participants, that is, the findings demonstrate that there is a common implicit and explicit agreement amongst members for resolving or managing different group dilemmas (see also Marwick and Boyd, 2014; Wenger, 1998), mainly: by providing information carefully, avoiding sharing information, concealing information, and/or leaving the group to avoid further disagreement.

The findings showed that the participants learned *what*, *when*, and *how* to seek or share information in the group through participating in the group activities. Sometimes, members judged it best to not participate at all by withholding or concealing information from others (see also Vitak and Ellison, 2012; Vitak *et al.*, 2015). This approach can also be seen as a form of responsible participation (cf. Wenger, 1998), as members are very careful and cautious in keeping the peace by not invoking any topics that might cause conflict and disrupt the daily activities of the group (see also Ammari *et al.*, 2015; McLaughlin and Vitak, 2011)

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Ultimately, such common understandings are shaped by the norms and rules of the community, which are (re)produced through members' daily participation in the situated information activities of the Facebook group (cf. [Lave and Wenger, 1991](#)).

### 5.3 *Mutuality in accountability*

The similarities across the participants' narratives concerning appropriate ways to share information in the group is another finding. What was interesting was not that they all agreed but that most participants felt concerned about maintaining the community as a positive place, or in Wenger's words, they felt accountable for their enterprise. This sense of responsibility was not only about sharing information with one another, but also about supporting each other and treating one another with respect. In other words, making the group space as comfortable was part of a joint enterprise that made the group sustainable (cf. [Wenger, 1998](#)). This confirms findings by [Bryant et al. \(2005\)](#) on Wikipedia contributors, who felt personally responsible for maintaining the quality of their contributions, quality being the main enterprise in the Wikipedia community.

Being accountable for the joint enterprise (e.g., following the norms and rules of the community) is the choice of individual members and is monitored and enforced by both other community members and the administrative group (cf. [Wenger, 1998](#)). For example, the administrators monitor and moderate the discussions by following concrete steps for enacting the norms and rules of the group. They also rely on other members to report violations observed in the group. Ideally, if those who violate the rules are not aware of them, they would be made aware, after which they would follow these rules. However, if a member continued to disrupt the daily activities of the community by deliberately invoking conflicts in violation of the group norms and rules, then the administrators removed them from the group. So, although the administrators have the ultimate "technical control" over the group, they act as a "*communal regime*" together with other group members ([Wenger, 1998](#), p. 81). These findings differ from previous research that did not find the same type of mutual accountability present in other Facebook pages. For instance, while some administrators of Facebook pages have exercised sole control over moderating these pages, others have lacked interest in moderating them, leaving this job to members (see [Juneström, 2019](#); [Marwick and Ellison, 2012](#)). However, researchers have identified the shared monitoring activities found in this study to be some of the most essential guiding principles in maintaining successful and sustainable communities online (e.g., [Bryant et al., 2005](#); [Viégas et al., 2007](#)) and offline (e.g., [Ostrom, 2000](#)).

## 6. Conclusions

This study aimed to offer an understanding of the development of a shared information practice by members of a Facebook group and the ways this practice is established, managed, and sustained. Drawing on the notions of Community of Practice and situated learning, the findings show that although members in this group adhered to different, sometimes oppositional parenting practices, they as a group, had to find common ground to cope with differences when sharing information in the group in ways that maintained the group as a useful information resource for all members. The joint enterprise for the group, thus, was able to have an inclusive, supportive, and collaborative information resource for all.

To maintain this joint enterprise, the group established its own distinctive online shared practice. A number of interrelated features are found to sustain the shared practice of the community, namely: explicit norms and rules, shared understandings of how to handle conflict, and various monitoring activities to manage the practice. The group negotiated and established a set of explicit rules and norms of polite, nonjudgmental interaction for sharing

information. Shared understandings (e.g., engaging, avoiding, concealing, leaving) and various monitoring activities (e.g., collective management of the daily information activities in the group) illustrate how norms and rules are formed, enacted, and reinforced in practice. The negotiation of group-specific norms that facilitate interaction in groups has been observed across different types of online groups (e.g., Baym, 1993, 1998, 2007; Burnett and Bonnici, 2003; Burnett *et al.*, 2003; Martey and Stormer-Galley, 2007; Marwick and Ellison, 2012). This may indicate that this study's findings may be applicable to other groups.

By employing a narrative approach to data collection and analysis, the study makes a methodological contribution to understanding the dynamics of emergent shared information practices. Conducting interviews over an extended period of time with members of various situated experiences in the group (e.g., administrators, active members, long-standing members, and members who left the group) gave the researcher access to various perspectives and activities in the group that can be challenging to be accessed or captured at snapshot of time, or in a short period. Particularly, this has enabled the researcher to capture through various perspectives and at different periods of time the ways the group has conducted its activities. This approach allows researchers to address evolution in practice by allowing the participants to reflect on their and the group activities over time. The findings show that the shared information practice developed by the group was not *static* but continually evolved through negotiation with an eye towards the group sustaining its daily information activities. In light of these results, the study highlights the need for adequate methods and theories that help to understand and capture the evolution of such practices rather than to examine them as static or at a snapshot of time. The study also identifies the need to move beyond the exclusive focus on individual practices of young adults and college students to include different types of SNS-based communities in an effort to understand the emergence of collective information practices, and the similar or different ways these practices are developed and sustained.

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