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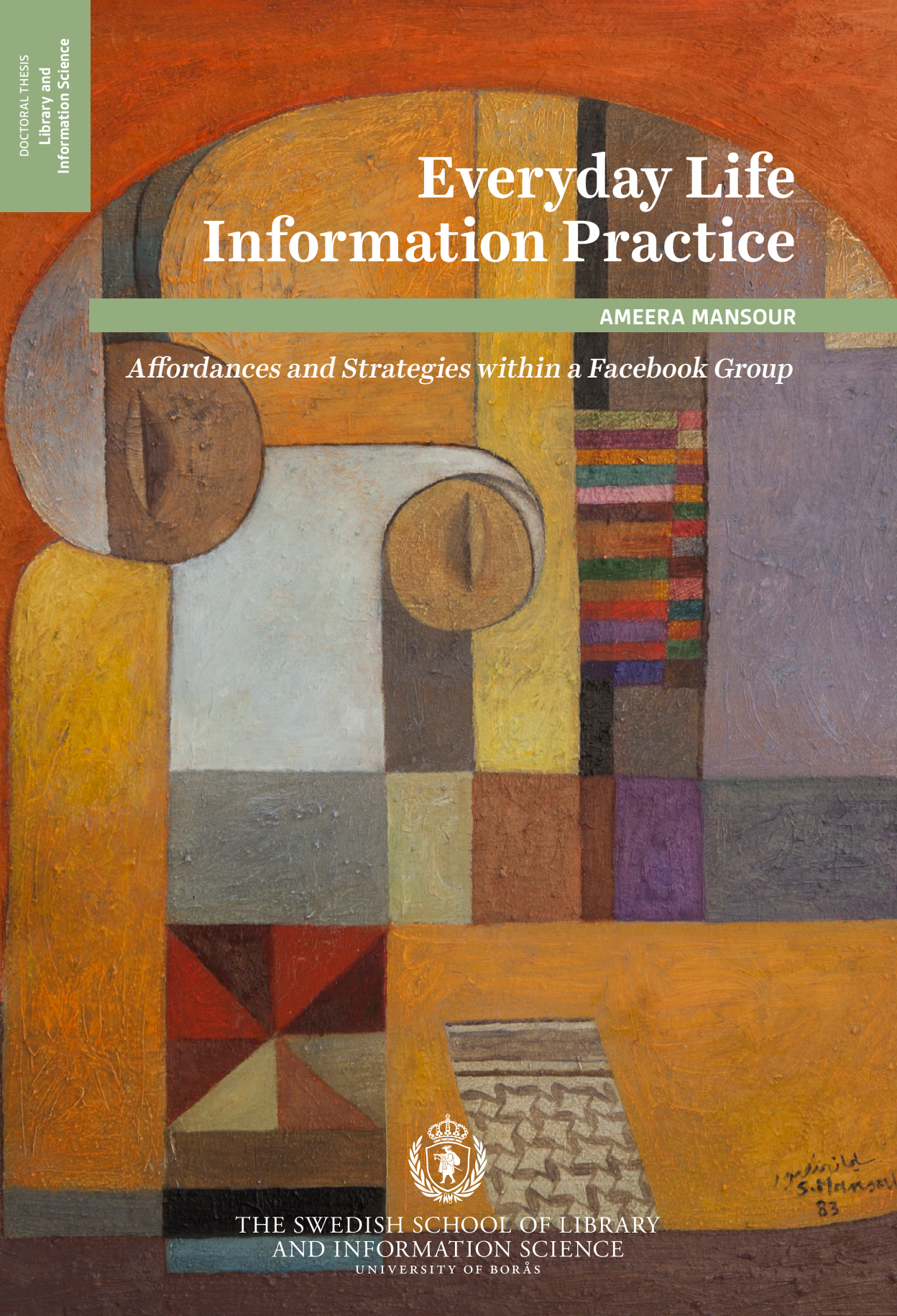
Everyday Life Information Practice

AMEERA MANSOUR

Affordances and Strategies within a Facebook Group



THE SWEDISH SCHOOL OF LIBRARY
AND INFORMATION SCIENCE
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Affordances and Strategies within a Facebook Group

Ameera Mansour

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Everyday Life Information Practice: Affordances and Strategies within a Facebook Group

Thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Swedish School of Library and Information Science, University of Borås.

Cover art: Mother and Child, Oil on Canvas, 1983 by Sliman Mansour

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Abstract

Social networking sites are integral in reshaping how we access and interact with information and others. This doctoral thesis aims to offer an in-depth understanding of engagement in an everyday life information practice within a private Facebook group. To achieve this aim, I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 members of a private Facebook group for foreign mothers situated in Sweden.

The thesis consists of a framing essay and four research articles exploring different aspects of how the group has formed, managed, and navigated engagement in information activities within the Facebook group. Grounded in a sociocultural perspective of mediated action, the research draws on specialised concepts and theories to further unpack key themes in the study. These include affordances, cognitive authority, situated learning, community of practice, communication privacy management, the imagined audience, and context collapse. These concepts and theories form the theoretical framework for the thesis, enabling interpretations of members' accounts of opportunities and challenges entailed with engagement in information activities within the Facebook group and the ways these were managed and navigated by the group.

The findings show that the Facebook group offers a distinctive online space providing affordances that simultaneously facilitate and constrain joint information activities. The study highlights six key affordances offered by the group: visibility, persistence, associations, accessibility, invisibility, and inaccessibility. Negotiation of mutual and shared goals and rules is found to be essential for sustaining a space that facilitates members' engagement in information activities. However, three complex phenomena within the Facebook group are highlighted as limiting and complicating this engagement: context collapse, time collapse, and spatial collapse. These phenomena relate to issues concerning lack of anonymity; control over information quality, flow, and privacy boundaries; and the presence of large, diverse, and evolving audiences.

Several challenges and risks are identified as a result, relating to the assessment of information credibility, management of privacy, and management of conflicts. The study discusses strategic ways the group manages and navigates these opportunities and challenges. Overall, the study offers an understanding of the complex formation, engagement, and management of an everyday life information practice within a Facebook group. This understanding contributes theoretical and practical insights into broader discussions on the use of Facebook groups for informational purposes in everyday life.

Abstract på svenska

Sociala nätverkstjänster är väsentliga för att omforma hur vi får tillgång till och interagerar med information och andra. Denna doktorsavhandling syftar till att ge en fördjupad förståelse av hur engagemang formas i en vardaglig informationspraktik i en privat Facebook-grupp. För att uppnå detta syfte genomförde jag djupgående semistrukturerade intervjuer med 20 medlemmar i en privat Facebook-grupp för utländska mammor som bor i Sverige.

Avhandlingen består av en kappa och fyra vetenskapliga artiklar som utforskar olika aspekter av hur gruppen har format, hanterat och navigerat engagemang i informationsaktiviteter i Facebook-gruppen. Studien är grundad i ett sociokulturellt perspektiv på medierad handling som kompletteras med specialiserade begrepp och teorier för att fördjupa analysen av centrala teman. De inkluderar affordanser, kognitiv auktoritet, situerat lärande, praktikgemenskap, kommunikativ integritetshantering (*communication privacy management*), den föreställda publiken och kontextkollaps. Dessa begrepp och teorier utgör avhandlingens teoretiska ramverk, som möjliggör tolkningar av medlemmarnas redogörelser för möjligheter och utmaningar som är förknippade med engagemang i informationsaktiviteter i Facebook-gruppen och hur dessa hanteras och navigeras av gruppen.

Resultaten visar att Facebook-gruppen erbjuder ett distinkt digitalt rum med affordanser som på samma gång underlättar och begränsar gemensamma informationsaktiviteter. Studien lyfter fram sex centrala affordanser som gruppen erbjuder: synlighet, beständighet, associationer, tillgänglighet, osynlighet och otillgänglighet. Förhandlingar om gemensamma och delade mål och regler visar sig vara avgörande för att upprätthålla ett rum som underlättar medlemmarnas engagemang i informationsaktiviteterna. Det framkommer dock tre komplexa fenomen i Facebook-gruppen som begränsar och komplicerar detta engagemang: kollapsade kontexter, kollapsad tid och kollapsad rumslighet. Dessa fenomen relaterar till frågor som rör brist på

anonymitet; kontroll över informationens kvalitet, flöde och integritetsgränser; och närvaron av publiker som är stora, diversifierade och i ständig förändring. Flera utmaningar och risker identifieras som en konsekvens av detta. De relaterar till trovärdighetsbedömningar och hantering av integritet och konflikter. I studien diskuteras strategiska sätt på vilka gruppen hanterar och navigerar dessa möjligheter och utmaningar. Sammantaget erbjuder studien en förståelse för den komplexitet som utmärker formeringen, hanteringen och engagemanget i en vardaglig informationspraktik i en Facebook-grupp. Denna förståelse bidrar med teoretiska och praktiska insikter till den övergripande diskussionen om hur Facebook-grupper används för ändamål som berör information i vardagslivet.

If I must die,
you must live
to tell my story
to sell my things
to buy a piece of cloth
and some strings,
(make it white with a long tail)
so that a child, somewhere in Gaza while
looking heaven in the eye awaiting his
dad who left in a blaze— and bid no one farewell
not even to his flesh
not even to himself—
sees the kite, my kite you made, flying up above
and thinks for a moment an angel is there
bringing back love
If I must die
let it bring hope
let it be a tale.

Palestinian Professor Refaat Alareer
September 23, 1979- December 7, 2023
Gaza, Palestine

Rest in Power

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It's super cliché to say this journey has been long, but it has been quite a wild ride! From pregnancy to parenting two children, moving cities and houses five times, surviving a global pandemic, and enduring a never-healing trauma triggered by devastating wars on my beloved Palestine, my PhD journey was filled with a mix of uncertainties, stress, loss, achievements, excitements, and friendships. But I've finally done it! I would not have been able to reach this stage without the help, support, and inspiration from many people in my life and many I've met along this journey.

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Lund, February 15, 2024

Ameera Mansour

List of Articles

I. Mansour, A. (2021). Affordances supporting mothers' engagement in information-related activities through Facebook groups. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *53*(2), 211–224. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000620938106

II. Mansour, A. & Francke, H. (2017). Credibility assessments of everyday life information on Facebook: A sociocultural investigation of a group of mothers. *Information Research, 22*(2), paper 750. http://InformationR.net/ir/22-2/paper750.html

III. Mansour, A. (2020). Shared information practices on Facebook: The formation and development of a sustainable online community. *Journal of Documentation*, *76*(3), 625-646. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-10-2018-0160

IV. Mansour, A. & Francke, H. (2021). Collective privacy management practices: A study of privacy strategies and risks in a private Facebook group. In *PACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *5*(CSCW2), Article 360. Association for Computing Machinery. https://doi.org/10.1145/3479504

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1. Introduction

Over the past two decades, we have witnessed a rapid transformation in how we access, connect to, and interact with information and other people. The rapid advancements in and widespread adoption of mobile technologies and social networking sites (SNSs) have rendered them indispensable, as they have become intricately enmeshed into our everyday lives and daily routines. SNSs, as a contemporary global phenomenon in our increasingly digitalised and connected societies, have become a subject of great interest, capturing attention across the global from researchers, policymakers, organisations, and many others.

As SNSs in particular play an important role in transforming how we relate to, connect, and interact with information and one another, an in-depth understanding of this transformation is essential (see Hillman and Säljö, 2016; Lomborg, 2017). The role and impact of SNSs in daily life have received considerable attention from researchers over the last two decades. An overarching interest has focused on the various ways in which people engage through SNSs, including how they engage in self-presentation and impression management (Marwick and boyd, 2014; Marwick and Ellison, 2012; Schoenebeck et al., 2016; Uski and Lampinen, 2016), advocacy (Blackwell et al., 2016), grieving (Christensen et al., 2017; Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski, 2015; Marwick and Ellison, 2012), education (Hanell, 2017, 2019; Lantz-Andersson et al., 2017), health (Sannon et al., 2019), and work (Ollier-Malaterre and Serre, 2018), to name just a few.

While SNSs have been examined with a focus on the above mentioned topics, their use for engagement in information activities in everyday life has not been emphasised, or explored in depth, in previous research (see Khoo, 2014; Lomborg, 2017; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016b; Savolainen, 2023, 2017b; Tang et al., 2021; Vitak, 2017; Zhao et al., 2021).

Previous research has highlighted the need for theoretical perspectives and research methods that help to situate SNSs and explore their use in-depth by

focusing on the nuanced and actual ways in which people engage with information and others through SNSs within specific everyday contexts (see boyd and Crawford, 2012; Elish and boyd, 2018; Hine, 2015; Karanasios et al., 2021; Lomborg, 2017; Markham and Stavrova, 2016). Such research perspectives were deemed essential in order to complement the perspectives that were predominant at the time when this research project began. These perspectives often examined large-scale data, focusing on analysing individual users' or networks' characteristics and differences, visible trends and patterns in users' activities, or specific platforms and features that enabled or limited potential activities (see Ellison et al., 2018; Lomborg, 2017; Quan-Haase and McCay-Peet, 2016; Vitak, 2017). Although more research has been published in recent years that examines group information activities in SNSs from various interpretive perspectives, there are still issues related to the use of SNSs and groups that have not been thoroughly examined. This includes the invisible, collaborative, or joint ways in which individuals and groups engage in information activities through SNSs, whether for the purpose of seeking, sharing, and assessing information (see Ellison et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2021) or managing joint privacy boundaries (see Bazarova and Masur, 2020).

The design of this thesis project is a response to growing calls for theoretical and methodological perspectives that help to interpret and contextualise SNSs' use by focusing on examining users' information activities as situated within specific everyday contexts (see Elish and boyd, 2018; Karanasios et al., 2021; Kim et al., 2021; Leonardi, 2017; Lomborg, 2017; Tang et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2021). It is also a response to the growing calls for further explorations of and theorising about information practices formed and maintained at a collective level by online groups (e.g., see Bazarova and Masur, 2020; Hirvonen, 2022; Savolainen, 2023; Suh and Metzger, 2022; Vardell et al., 2022). These goals are accomplished in this study by focusing on how an everyday life information practice is enacted and maintained in a private Facebook group where mothers seek and share information, as discussed below.

The study adopts mediated action as an overarching sociocultural perspective (Wertsch, 1998a). An interpretative, qualitative methodology was

chosen as suitable for the study because it emphasises an in-depth exploration of the ways in which people use SNSs to engage in information activities within particular contexts (e.g., Facebook groups) (see Leonardi, 2017; Markham, 2016). The sociocultural perspective is particularly useful because it helps us to focus on the situated ways in which information activities are shaped within specific SNSs contexts. Due to its nondualist ontology and constructivist epistemology (as discussed in detail in Chapter 3), this perspective is easily adaptable to concepts from diverse theoretical research traditions. The study combines several concepts into a theoretical framework in order to further expand upon mediated action to analyse and provide in-depth insights into the interrelationships between information, tools, and people's individual, interpersonal, and collective goals in shaping engagement with information activities within specific SNSs contexts.

For example, one key concept in the study is the affordance, which is introduced as a central property of mediated action (Wertsch, 1998a), but used in this study in its more recent interpretation. Following studies of affordances within SNSs, it is used to elucidate the interwoven relationship between human and material agencies in enabling and constraining possibilities for action (see Faraj and Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013; and Chapter 3). Therefore, this perspective on affordances is adopted in order to focus on the entangled relationships between people and SNSs in offering various possibilities that simultaneously enable and constrain engagement in information activities (see Majchrzak et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). The concept of cognitive authority (Wilson, 1983) is incorporated into the theoretical framework of the study to help explain how information credibility is assessed, while the concepts of situated learning and the community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) contribute to elucidating the social processes that shape how groups nurture, develop, and sustain shared information practices around common issues of interest over time. Communication privacy management theory (Petronio, 2002) is incorporated in order to focus on the social processes entailed in the negotiations and management of privacy among groups at individual, dyadic, and group levels. The imagined audience and context

collapse concepts (Litt, 2012; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012) further explain how people act in relation to diverse audiences, especially within SNS contexts, where contextual, spatial, and temporal boundaries are blurred. I argue in this thesis that such an integrated framework helps to develop a nuanced and contextual understanding of the entangled relationship between people, information, and SNSs in mediating information activities within a specific context (cf. Ellison and Vitak, 2015; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

Drawing upon this theoretical framework, the everyday life information practice that is the focus for this thesis is understood as constituted by individual and collective information activities that are carried out, situated, and mediated within the specific SNS context where they occur (cf. Dourish and Anderson, 2006; Wertsch, 1998a). The focus of the study is directed towards the activities during which people engage with information and with others, as well as the specific affordances that enable or constrain engagement in those activities within a specific SNS context.

In-depth explorations of the information practices of groups within specific contexts are generally recognised within Library and Information Science (LIS) as an approach that can illuminate the situated nature of information activities (see Francke et al., 2011; Hicks, 2018; Limberg et al., 2013; Lloyd, 2012; Lundh, 2011; Pilerot, 2014a). With this research focus, this thesis is situated within and contributes to the information practice research tradition within LIS. It specifically contributes to the research area of everyday life information practices, involving engagement with information activities within an everyday life context that is not driven by formal tasks, structures, or hierarchies (see Savolainen, 1995).

The research site selected for exploring the topic of this thesis project is a private Facebook group of foreign mothers who are situated in Sweden. This is an interesting site for exploring the research topic because Facebook groups, particularly parents' groups, have grown significantly across the world over the past two decades as essential resources for information and support (Auxier and Anderson, 2021; Gibson and Hanson, 2013; Duggan et al., 2015; Lupton et al., 2016; Smock et al., 2011; Xie et al., 2021). Furthermore, as the foreign mother of

a new-born child at the time of embarking on this thesis project, mothers' Facebook groups were playing a key role as a source of information in my own everyday life. Because I am interested, in this thesis project, in developing an understanding of the ways in which people engage in information practices within everyday life contexts on SNSs, this led me to choose this particular Facebook group because it was primarily created to seek and share information. I thus chose this Facebook group as a research site based on my research interest and my insider knowledge and personal experience of the group. The research thus may contribute with insights into the use of Facebook groups for information seeking and sharing in everyday life by parents as a broad sociocultural phenomenon.

This research is thus centred on examining the everyday life information practice and members' information activities within the context of a mothers' Facebook group. One of the core goals of creating the group was to provide a space for members to connect with other mothers in order to seek and share information, tips, and advice about navigating everyday life as a foreign mother living in, or planning to move to, Sweden. The Facebook group was initially created in 2007 as a small group of friends but has grown over the years to include more than 4000 members dispersed around Sweden. Members of the group do not necessarily know each other offline, and most interactions between them are primarily carried out through, and within, the group. However, interactions in person, and outside of the group, do sometimes occur.

The research data for the project was gathered during 2014–2015 and in 2017, and the empirical findings have been reported in four research publications. I carried out in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 20 members of the group, including one of the group's administrators. Participants interviewed for this study were thus all members of the same Facebook group. This is a useful methodological choice, and it aligns with a sociocultural approach (Wertsch, 1998a), as it allowed me to examine members' accounts of the shared everyday information practice in which they engaged as a group and in relation to the group. Overall, my interest in understanding the processes

shaping members' engagement in the information activities of the group have guided the research throughout this project.

In the following sections of this chapter, I outline the research background and problem that are central to the present study, and the research aims and questions it addresses. I continue by setting out the scope and demarcations of the research. I conclude the chapter by providing an outline of the subsequent chapters in the thesis.

1.1 Research background

Facebook stands out as one of the most prominent and widely used SNSs, with over three billion active monthly users worldwide as of October 2023 (Statista, October 2023). Beyond serving as a platform for socialising, Facebook has contributed to a transformative shift that has influenced many aspects of contemporary life, including information access and dissemination, communication, education, wellbeing, politics, business, and commerce (Bayer et al., 2020; Bucher, 2021; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016b).

Since the emergence of Facebook, it has been a topic of interest for scholars across various disciplines, focusing on a range of topics involving user engagements, such as friending, self-presentation, impression management, relationship and network maintenance, and interpersonal communication (Bucher, 2021; Lincoln and Robards, 2014; Rains and Brunner, 2015; Soukup, 2018; Uski and Lampinen, 2016; Vitak, 2017; Wilson et al., 2012; Yu et al., 2018). Most of the early scholarship on Facebook focused on how users, particularly young people and college students, navigate the site for self-presentation and identity exploration (see Bucher, 2021; Lomborg, 2017).

Over the past decade, Facebook has evolved from a platform used for socialisation and identity exploration involving close-knit networks into a powerful phenomenon shaping all aspects of contemporary life (see Bucher, 2021; also Chapter 2). Notably, it has become an essential source of information for millions, thus potentially playing a key role in transforming the ways in

which people seek, share, and access information and support relating to different aspects of daily life (Auxier and Anderson, 2021; Gramlich, 2021). The role of Facebook as a source of information has therefore attracted attention across various fields, particularly LIS and communication and media studies (see Khoo, 2014; Lomborg, 2017).

While Facebook is not ranked as a highly credible information source for politics or news, previous research has highlighted that it is still frequently regarded and consulted as a trusted source for exchanging information among known, homogeneous, and trusted individuals (e.g., family, friends, and colleagues) (see Burke et al., 2011; Ellison and Vitak, 2015a; Ellison et al., 2014b; Gramlich, 2021; Jeon et al., 2016; Johnson and Kaye, 2015; Kim et al., 2021; Lamp et al., 2012; Oeldorf-Hirsch and Gergle, 2020; Phua et al., 2017; Yu et al., 2018). Users also follow, and receive information and news through, traditional official information sources on Facebook, such as governmental institutions, and news and media organisations (Auxier and Anderson, 2021; Gramlich, 2021; Rieh et al., 2010). Traditionally, these information sources are often associated with credibility and trust (see Haider and Sundin, 2022). Furthermore, users also seek information and perspectives through other, more heterogeneous, networks, such as Facebook groups and several other social media platforms (see, for example, Ellison et al., 2014b; Morris et al. 2014; Phua et al., 2017; Shane-Simpson et al., 2018; Vitak and Ellison, 2013; Yu et al., 2018).

Previous research has explored Facebook's value for information seeking, focusing on analysing individual and large-scale patterns of information seeking, credibility assessments, and use on Facebook's personal profiles or across social media platforms (Khoo, 2014). Several researchers, including Shane-Simpson et al. (2018), Vitak and Ellison (2013), Oeldorf-Hirsch and Gergle (2020), Phua et al. (2017), and Yu et al. (2018), have focused on individual or larger differences and patterns in information seeking across social media, with many of these studies emphasising the value of Facebook as an information source.

The growing importance and value of Facebook groups as essential information sources, through which people connect with diverse communities,

have also been highlighted (e.g., Auxier and Anderson, 2021; Burke et al., 2011; Duggan et al., 2015; Smock et al., 2011). Many people utilise these groups to seek and share information with heterogeneous communities, or with others who share common interests or life experiences (see Duggan et al., 2015; Lupton et al., 2016; Xie et al., 2021). Facebook groups are found to be particularly essential for people who lack access to other sources of information and support, especially on stigmatising topics they may not wish to discuss with close networks (Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2015; Christensen et al., 2017; Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski, 2015; Prescott et al., 2020; Williams Veazey, 2018).

The formation of communities through Facebook groups to seek and share information and support appears to be a global contemporary phenomenon, and plays a crucial role in the lives of many people (Bucher, 2021; Gibson and Hanson, 2013; Lupton et al., 2016; Noveck et al., 2021; Sannon et al., 2019; Shane-Simpson et al., 2018; Soukup, 2018; Xie et al., 2021). This is further confirmed by Meta's in-house research reports, which indicate a significant growth in Facebook groups' user base over the past decade, especially during and immediately after the Covid-19 pandemic (see Noveck et al., 2021; Facebook Communities Insights Report, October 2020). These reports state that there are close to 1.8 billion people actively using Facebook groups every month, constituting nearly 50% of Facebook's total user base. Additionally, there are more than 70 million group administrators and moderators who voluntarily create and manage these groups.

Despite the increasing importance of Facebook groups as information sources and the widespread use of Facebook, research within LIS addressing the ways in which people engage in information activities within these groups is still an emerging research focus (e.g., see Hanell, 2019; Mudliar and Raval, 2018; Vardell et al., 2022). The ways in which the information practices of online communities in general, and Facebook groups in particular, are shaped, formed, sustained, and moderated, by or amongst large groups of strangers remain relatively underexplored in LIS (see also Hirvonen, 2022; Savolainen, 2023). Many LIS scholars (e.g., Hanell, 2019; Hirvonen, 2022; Mudliar and Raval, 2018; Savolainen, 2023; Vardell et al., 2022) have identified a need for both empirical

explorations and theoretical conceptualisations of information activities within the context of online groups, such as Facebook groups.

1.2 Research problem

Several studies have examined the affordances of Facebook groups, in terms of the benefits they provide as private spaces for diverse groups (e.g., parents, immigrants, international students, activists, people with chronic illnesses, cosplay fans) to organise and engage in discussions about shared interests, concerns, or experiences that can be either stigmatising or uncomfortable to discuss with close networks (see Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2015; Christensen et al., 2017; Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski, 2015; Motahari-Nezhad et al., 2022; Prescott et al., 2020; Vardell et al., 2022; Williams Veazey, 2018). This research has often focused on the empowering role and value of Facebook groups as an information and support resource for various groups, with only limited explorations taking into account the specific ways in which these groups and members, both individually and together, manage and navigate their engagement in joint and complex information activities within these groups. Additionally, with few exceptions (e.g., Mudliar and Raval, 2018; Williams Veazey, 2018, 2022), there has been only a limited focus on how the affordances of and within Facebook groups may not only offer new opportunities but also present challenges for members and groups, thus both facilitating and complicating their engagement in and management of information activities within these groups.

While sharing common affordances with other social media (e.g., visibility, editability, association, and persistence) (see Treem and Leonardi, 2012; also Chapter 2), the distinct features and interactions offered by Facebook groups may contribute novel opportunities, although they also present distinct challenges. The joint, interactive, many-to-many, (a)synchronous nature of discussions within Facebook groups means that members' information activities are instantly shared with a large number of people, allowing anyone to engage

with members' postings. This can lead to diverse potential for both benefits and risks.

Furthermore, Facebook groups, created voluntarily by any individual, differ from traditional information sources, as well as from previous and other types of online communities. Unlike traditional and more established information sources, and other online groups, which are mainly created and managed by professional organisations or moderators appointed by commercial companies (Drenta and Moren-Cross, 2011; Lupton et al., 2016), Facebook groups lack the traditional quality-control mechanisms that are employed elsewhere to maintain the quality of information sources (see Johnson and Kaye, 2015; Jeon and Rieh, 2014; Metzger and Flanagin, 2015; Bawden and Robinson, 2022; Kim et al., 2021; Savolainen, 2022, 2023). This makes it easy for users to share information on a large scale without any quality checks, rendering it difficult for other users to establish or assess the credibility of information and sources within these groups.

Furthermore, unlike other online groups that offer anonymity (see Ammari et al., 2019; Drenta and Moren-Cross, 2011; Hirvonen, 2022; Lupton et al., 2016), Facebook groups require membership through identifiable personal profiles, potentially raising privacy risks. Also, information shared within Facebook groups is automatically recorded and shared with all members, making it difficult for members to control the flow of their information within these groups. Members' information is also subject to Facebook's and group moderators' and administrators' ownership and control, as well as being accessible to external actors, posing additional risks of privacy invasion.

The ease of use and the scale at which information is sought and shared, coupled with the lack of control or gatekeeping over information quality, privacy, and flow, may pose risks and challenges related to both assessing information credibility and managing private information. These issues, and how they are handled, have been widely examined and theorised within the context of personal profiles, across several SNSs, and often in relation to maintaining personal or professional networks with known others (for example, see Ellison et al., 2014a, 2014b; Kim et al., 2021; Vitak and Ellison, 2013; Vitak

and Kim, 2014). However, in-depth explorations of these issues in relation to engagement in information activities with strangers or within Facebook groups have not been emphasised or explored in any depth in previous LIS research, with very few exceptions (e.g., Mudliar and Raval, 2018; Vardell et al., 2022). That is, there has been limited exploration of how groups navigate and manage information credibility and privacy issues on Facebook and within Facebook groups. This underscores the need to explore the ways in which information activities are carried out and navigated at both collective and individual levels in such distinct, shared information environments.

The current study builds upon and contributes to the existing literature by providing an in-depth exploration of the ways in which a Facebook group is formed and maintained as a shared information environment for engaging in information activities. The study focuses on highlighting both the opportunities and challenges presented for engaging in information activities within the group, and it explores the ways in which members, at both an individual and group level, navigate and manage these opportunities and challenges. An in-depth understanding of how people form, maintain, and use Facebook groups as information-rich environments to engage in information activities within these groups is essential for informing both theory and practice.

On the one hand, from a theoretical standpoint, the unique nature of Facebook groups as information sources highlights the need to conceptualise the specific ways in which people form, maintain, and engage in these novel information environments. On the other hand, from practical and design perspectives, accessing and using information shared within Facebook groups contributes to the formation of opinions and decisions that may not only have a significant impact on individuals but also influence others and society at large. Thus, it is particularly important to understand how people maintain and engage in information activities within Facebook groups. This understanding may help to guide the creation and customisation of safe spaces, where supporting open discussions while ensuring privacy protection and access to high-quality and credible information is crucial.

1.3 Research aim and questions

The overarching aim of this thesis is to offer an in-depth understanding of engagement with an everyday life information practice within the context of a private Facebook group. This information practice is viewed as constituted by the everyday, ongoing, information activities that members engage in within the group. A core focus is therefore on the processes shaping how members seek, share, search, access, use, evaluate, and manage information within the Facebook group.

This research is grounded in a sociocultural perspective, combining concepts and theories such as affordances, cognitive authority, situated learning, community of practice, communication privacy management, context collapse, and the imagined audience. In the thesis, I argue that combining these concepts helps us to focus on and understand various aspects of the information practice within the Facebook group. The thesis is based on a compilation of four published research articles that draw up on an interview study with members of a mothers' Facebook group. Together, the articles, and this text framing them, serve to achieve the overarching aim of the thesis. The thesis seeks to address the following research questions:

1. *What affordances does the Facebook group offer for engagement in information activities, and how?*
    - *How do the affordances of the Facebook group facilitate members' opportunities to engage in information activities?*
    - *How do the affordances of the Facebook group complicate or constrain members' opportunities to engage in information activities?*
2. *How is the Facebook group maintained as an environment for information activities, and how does the group navigate the opportunities and challenges presented within it, according to group members' accounts?*

1.4 Research scope and demarcation

The following aspects fall outside the scope of this research study. The study specifically delves into the various ways in which the Facebook group enables and constrains members' engagement in an everyday life information practice. While the study considers the role of diverse online and offline information sources, and some information activities pursued by members beyond the group – whether offline, across various SNSs, or on other online sources and platforms – these aspects and sources are not the primary focus of this research. Additionally, it is important to note that identity positioning (e.g., gender, mother, father, or immigrant) was not and did not emerge as a focal point during either the data construction or the analysis of the empirical material.

1.5 Thesis outline

This is a compilation thesis consisting of two parts. The first part consists of a thesis essay organised into seven main chapters, as follows:

Chapter 1 presents the focus of the thesis, the research background and problem, the aim and questions, and its scope and demarcation.

Chapter 2 positions the study in relation to current research within both LIS and social media research.

Chapter 3 provides a presentation of the theoretical framework of the thesis.

Chapter 4 presents the research methodology and covers various issues related to the research process, including the methods of data construction and analysis, site selection, ethical and methodological considerations, and reflections.

Chapter 5 summarises the four research articles that make up part two of the thesis and reflects upon the connections between them.

Chapter 6 provides a discussion that aims to answer the research questions, based on the four included articles and the theoretical framework.

Chapter 7 provides a concluding summary of the main research insights and contributions. It also presents a few suggestions for future research directions.

It is crucial to point out that the thesis essay, the first part of this thesis, provides some research perspectives that are commonly adopted in the study of social media and information activities relevant to the research aim and problem. This helps to situate the study within specific research fields and in relation to specific research traditions. However, the thesis essay does not include a review of previous empirical research, nor does it contain an analysis of the empirical data constructed as part of the thesis work. Instead, more thorough reviews of relevant empirical research and the interpretation of the empirical data through the theoretical concepts are primarily presented in the research articles in part two.

The second part consists of a collection of four peer-reviewed research articles appended as the second part of the thesis, as follows:

I. Mansour, A. (2021). Affordances supporting mothers' engagement in information-related activities through Facebook groups. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *53*(2), 211–224. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000620938106

II. Mansour, A. & Francke, H. (2017). Credibility assessments of everyday life information on Facebook: A sociocultural investigation of a group of mothers. *Information Research, 22*(2), paper 750. http://InformationR.net/ir/22-2/paper750.html

III. Mansour, A. (2020). Shared information practices on Facebook: The formation and development of a sustainable online community. *Journal of Documentation*, *76*(3), 625–646. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-10-2018-0160

IV. Mansour A. & Francke, H. (2021). Collective privacy management practices: A study of privacy strategies and risks in a private Facebook group. In *PACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, *5*(CSCW2), Article 360. Association for Computing Machinery. https://doi.org/10.1145/3479504

2. Positioning the research

The aim of this chapter is to position the thesis in relation to two principal bodies of research: Library and Information Science and Social Media Studies. The chapter is divided into two main parts. Firstly, I provide an overview of information practices as the research area within LIS to which this study is most closely related, and of the associated research focus on everyday life information practices, with its interest in everyday life contexts. Secondly, I define and discuss key, thesis-relevant concepts and perspectives commonly adopted in social media research. It is important to note that this chapter does not aim to provide a review of previous empirical research on the thesis' topic. Instead, it focuses on situating the research in relation to specific research perspectives and areas. Relevant empirical research is covered in the four peer-reviewed articles appended as the second part of this thesis.

Social media is a complex phenomenon that has a strong requirement for interdisciplinary perspectives, as pointed out by several scholars, to comprehend its implications and transformative role across various aspects of contemporary life (see Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Elish and boyd, 2018; Ellison et al., 2022; Lomborg, 2017; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016b; Quan-Haase and McCay-Peet, 2022; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). This thesis, as stated above, is positioned as an interdisciplinary study that draws from and contributes to two main bodies of research, those of LIS and Social Media. This positioning aims to enhance our understanding of social media's importance when engaging in information activities in everyday life.

There is an established and rich tradition of information practices research in LIS (e.g., Hicks, 2019; Lloyd, 2010, 2012; Pilerot, 2014a; Savolainen, 2007a), some of it focusing in particular on everyday life information practices (e.g., Bates, 2002; Hirvonen et al., 2019; McKenzie, 2003a; Savolainen, 1995, 2018). This thesis aims to contribute to this tradition with an enriched understanding of the ways in which people engage in information activities within an everyday life context.

Furthermore, the study seeks to add to the emerging field of social media studies (see Quan-Haase and McCay-Peet, 2016), through providing a better understanding of the affordances of social media and their entangled role in facilitating and constraining people's engagement with various information activities within specific everyday contexts (e.g., Ellison et al., 2014b, 2015; Ellison and Vitak, 2015; Faraj and Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

Specifically, the study contributes to the growing interdisciplinary research area focusing on the role and impact of various digital technologies (e.g., social media, search engines, algorithms, Artificial Intelligence) in (re)shaping our interactions with information in contemporary society (e.g., Andersson, 2021; Haider and Sundin, 2019; Hirvonen et al., 2023; Savolainen, 2019).

Overall, by drawing on findings and perspectives from these research areas, and adopting a sociocultural perspective – as described in Chapter 3 – it is possible to explore from various angles the complexities involved in the formation, engagement, and management of an everyday life information practice within a specific social media context. I view this study as a contribution to our understanding of the situated and nuanced ways in which people seek, share, search, monitor, conceal, evaluate, avoid, and use information within a Facebook group. It specifically seeks to shed light on what, how, and why information activities are enabled and constrained within a specific social media context, thus providing theoretical and practical insights into the use of social media for informational purposes in everyday life.

2.1 Library and Information Science Research

As mentioned above, this study is situated within the field of LIS. In the first part of this section, I begin by providing an overview of information practices as both a key concept and a research area focused on describing and analysing the various ways in which people engage with information (see Savolainen, 2007b, 2019). In the second part of the section, I provide an overview of everyday

life information practices as a specific research focus within LIS, to which this study is also related (see McKenzie, 2003a; Savolainen, 2008, 2018).

2.1.1 Information practices research

My primary interest in this thesis is people's engagement in information activities in everyday life within the context of Facebook groups. Engagement in information activities is a complex phenomenon, traditionally explored under two umbrella concepts in LIS: information practices and information behaviour (see Savolainen, 2007b). Research on information practices and information behaviour share a common focus on exploring the various ways in which people interact with information and engage in information activities (Savolainen, 2007b). The term "information activities" often encompasses the wide range of activities and actions that people undertake when dealing with information from various information sources and channels (e.g., social media, search engines, libraries, databases, and other people) (see also Limberg et al., 2012). Engagement with information activities may involve seeking, sharing, searching, avoiding, monitoring, using, and assessing information, among many other activities (see also Article I).

While both information practices and information behaviour research share a focus on information activities, the research often adopts distinct research paradigms, theoretical foundations, and methodological research approaches (see Savolainen, 2007b). These differences result in two main research areas, each with their own traditions, that influence researchers' perspectives and conceptualisations of information activities and the nature of engagement in those activities. One core difference highlighted by Savolainen (2007b) is that, in information practices research, "the emphasis [is] placed on the role of contextual factors of information seeking, use, and sharing", offering an alternative point of view to information behaviour, which typically focuses on examining information activities at the level of individual information seekers (p.121). (For further discussion on the main similarities and differences, refer to Limberg et al., 2013; Lloyd, 2012; Savolainen, 2007b; Talja and Nyce,

2015; "The Behavior/Practice Debate" 2009). The research presented in this thesis is situated within and contributes to the research area of information practice, specifically focusing on everyday life information practices. This specific research focus is further discussed in section 2.1.2.

Information practices research within LIS has its theoretical roots in, and is influenced by, how practice theories have been developed in various fields, including sociology, philosophy, anthropology, education, and science and technology studies, among others (Lloyd, 2012; Limberg et al., 2013; Pilerot et al., 2017; Savolainen, 2007b; Talja and Lloyd, 2010; Talja and Nyce, 2015). Theories of practice began to attract attention during the 2000s within various fields in what is often referred to as a "practice turn" in LIS (Talja and McKenzie, 2007) or a "turn to practice" in HCI (Kuutti and Bannon, 2014). Practice theories within LIS have been influential in theorising how people's activities are interwoven and embedded within particular social practices (see also Cox, 2012; Pilerot et al., 2017; Savolainen, 2007b; Schatzki, 1997). LIS scholars employing practice theories share an interest in describing and analysing human actions or activities involving information as enacted within specific social practices (Limberg et al., 2013; Lloyd, 2012; Savolainen, 2007b). This is a different analytical focus from research with an interest in how people's cognitive abilities, personal characteristics (e.g., age, gender, etc.), or individual and isolated actions have consequences for information behaviour (Limberg et al., 2013, p.106; see also Lloyd, 2012; Pilerot and Limberg, 2011).

Whereas some scholars contributing to the research area of information practices have primarily been influenced by practice-based approaches, others have combined these approaches with constructs from epistemologically related sociocultural theories in their theorising of information activities (for a discussion see Cox, 2012). According to Cox (2012), a focus on learning, which is emphasised by the sociocultural perspective, was considered uncommon and is usually not emphasised by practice-oriented theorists. As I discuss further in Chapter 3, in their theorising of practice, Lave and Wenger have focused on situated learning as an integral of, and an active process within, engagement in

relation to a socioculturally situated practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

Building on these ideas, Annemaree Lloyd has employed theories of practice and sociocultural theory (such as those of Gherardi, 2000; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) to conceptualise information literacy practices within LIS as active processes of learning and engagement in shared and collective information activities within specific contexts in work, education, and everyday life. More specifically, in a series of studies, Lloyd integrated the concepts of "situated learning" and "community of practice" developed by Lave and Wenger (1991) and "knowing" from Gherardi (2000) to examine and understand information practices in various contexts, including those of emergency workers (Lloyd, 2005), nurses (Bonner and Lloyd, 2011), migrants and refugees (Lloyd et al., 2013, 2017), and enthusiast car restorers (Lloyd and Olsson, 2019). Lloyd's primary contribution to the research area of information practice has thus been her emphasis on the situated nature of the "learning" and "knowing" that occurs through participation in a specific sociocultural context.

Researchers who study information practices have tended to emphasise different tenets of practice, depending on the perspectives adopted (e.g., activities, rules and norms, temporality, learning, embodiment, and materiality) (see Pilerot et al., 2017). Given the varied interpretations of "information practices", it is thus an ambiguous term, with no clear consensus among LIS researchers regarding the scope or definition of the concept (Pilerot et al., 2017; Savolinen, 2007). In this thesis, I use the term "information practice" to specifically signal and position the study within information practices as an established research area within LIS (see also Lloyd, 2012; Limberg et al., 2013; Savolainen, 2007b). This is mainly because this research area broadly focuses on the situated ways in which people engage in information activities, which is in line with the theoretical assumptions of the sociocultural perspective adopted in the study, as further discussed in Chapter 3. I also use the term "information practice" in the study when specifically referring to the "shared online practice" that the studied Facebook group developed, managed, and sustained through the adoption of shared repertoires of tangible and intangible tools, entailing

"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" (Mansour, 2020, p.627, emphasis in original).

2.1.2 Everyday life information practices

The predominant emphasis of information practices research is often placed on analysing information activities in formal workplaces, or academic or educational settings that are governed by institutional rules and regulations, as well as formal structures and hierarchies (Case and Given, 2016; McKenzie, 2003a; Savolainen, 2008). However, within LIS, a specific research focus has emerged that largely focuses on analysing people's information activities in everyday life contexts, where those information activities are seen as spontaneous and less driven by formal structures or hierarchies (Case and Given, 2016; Lloyd and Olsson, 2019; Savolainen, 2018). This specific research focus is commonly referred to as Everyday Life Information Seeking (ELIS) (Savolainen, 1995, 2018) or, more broadly, everyday life information practices (Lloyd, 2013; McKenzie, 2003a; Savolainen, 1995, 2008, 2021).

Research on this topic is often conducted under the broader research traditions of information practices or information behaviour, which I have previously discussed. ELIS therefore experiences an overlapping influence from both research traditions, as well as their respective theoretical underpinnings and methodological approaches (see also Cox, 2012, 2013; Savolainen, 2007b, 2016). Generally, an everyday life information practice is often used within LIS to refer to the situated ways in which people engage in information activities to navigate various situations within specific everyday contexts that do not necessarily involve academic, professional, or work-related goals and tasks (Savolainen, 2017a, 2018; see also Hirvonen, 2019; Lloyd and Olsson, 2019; McKenzie, 2003a). This ELIS research stresses that information practices are shaped and enacted through everyday routine and mundane activities that people engage in within the specific context where these activities occur (Lloyd, 2012, p.774).

Within LIS, an interest in information activities such as information seeking and searching within everyday life contexts has grown since the late 1980s, during which time there has been a shift from system-centred research to user-centred perspectives (Dervin and Nilan, 1986; Haider and Sundin, 2019; Savolainen, 2017b; Sundin et al., 2017). This shift has also been observed in other, interrelated research fields such as HCI, CSCW, and research on social media. (For a further discussion see section 2.2, and also Bayer et al., 2020; Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Clemmensen et al., 2016; Kuutti and Bannon, 2014; Rogers, 2012). Research within ELIS has examined information seeking activities in various everyday life contexts, such as leisure, hobbies, health, vaccinations, parenting, immigration, and unemployment, to name just a few (see Case and Given, 2016; Eriksson-Backa et al., 2018; Hertzum and Hyldegård, 2019; Hirvonen, 2019; Kari and Hartel, 2007; McKenzie, 2003b; Savolainen, 2017b).

In a series of studies, Reijo Savolainen has been influential in conceptualising information activities in relation to everyday contexts, or "ordinary life", and as part of wider everyday practices. His research has been particularly useful in showing how people seek and share information within both online and offline settings to solve various everyday issues such as unemployment, home buying, environmental activism, immigration, health, wellbeing, dieting, and vaccinations, among others (see Savolainen, 2023, 2017b, 2011a, 2010, 2008).

Several models of everyday life information seeking have been developed within LIS, focusing on describing how people seek information through a variety of information sources and channels, to achieve particular goals or solve particular problems (for an overview of these information seeking models see Case and Given, 2016; Savolainen, 2018). The models that are of most notable relevance to this thesis include Savolainen's ELIS model (Savolainen, 1995), Bates's (2002) information seeking and searching integrated model, and McKenzie's model of information practices in everyday life (2003a). In these models, information seeking is broadly conceptualised as a process that is facilitated by various modes, including active or passive, directed or non-(un)directed information seeking. Bates (2002) proposed a model consisting of

two modes: an active mode of engaging in information seeking activity (e.g., searching, browsing), and the passive mode of seeking information when one has no specific need or goal in mind (e.g., monitoring, maintaining awareness). Similarly, McKenzie (2003a) proposed a model consisting of everyday information seeking activities, such as: active information seeking, active scanning, non-directed monitoring, and information seeking through a proxy. These models have been particularly useful for analysing the main information activities and modes of engagement with information and others in the research presented in Article I. They are also beneficial for the overall discussion of the research findings of this study.

As already mentioned, information practices and information behaviour research broadly focuses on examining the various ways in which people interact with information, including seeking, searching, sharing, accessing, evaluating, and using information, among others (Savolainen, 2007b). However, research within these areas and within everyday life information practices, has predominantly focused on information seeking activities, which are treated or analysed as discrete and isolated from other interrelated activities (see Savolainen, 2019, 2016). This is reflected in the many available models that have been developed around information seeking, with limited attention being given to other interrelated information activities such as information sharing (for further discussion, see Pilerot, 2014a; Savolainen, 2019; Talja, 2002). While interrelated information activities such as information sharing have gained more attention in LIS, particularly in professional and workplace contexts (e.g., Forsgren and Byström, 2018; Pilerot, 2015; Talja, 2002), there is still a need for further exploration of information sharing activities within everyday life contexts (see Savolainen, 2017a, 2019).

Information sharing is often used interchangeably with "knowledge sharing" (Pilerot, 2014a). Previous research on information sharing has either examined it as an indirect activity, or primarily in relation to work-related tasks (see Robson and Robinson, 2013; Savolainen, 2019; Talja and Hansen, 2006). Research on information sharing has often drawn from fields such as information systems, communication, organisational studies, and CSCW, which

all focus on the sharing, exchange, or transfer of knowledge and information within workplace settings (Forsgren and Byström, 2018; Pilerot, 2012; Savolainen, 2019; Talja and Hansen, 2006). Thus, when researchers examine information seeking and sharing within LIS, they tend conceptualise them as two distinct activities (see Savolainen, 2019), or even as distinct research areas and subfields (see Pilerot, 2014a). In a review of major information seeking models, Savolainen aimed to establish a more holistic understanding of the relationship between information seeking and sharing activities (see Savolainen, 2019). His analysis showed that the interplay between information seeking and sharing in previous literature has been approached indirectly and implicitly, rather than directly or explicitly (Savolainen, 2019, p.530). Hence, although his efforts bridge the gap between the two activities conceptually and theoretically, at the time when the articles in the thesis were written, such a bridge had yet to be established empirically.

In this thesis, I draw upon and contribute to the area of information practices research, and more specifically everyday life information practices research, by providing in-depth insights into engagement with an everyday life information practice within the context of a private Facebook group. This research aims to expand the focus beyond viewing information seeking as an isolated activity performed by an individual information seeker. In particular, the key contribution to this line of research lies in highlighting the joint and multifaceted nature of new modes of engagement in highly networked and interrelated information activities such as seeking, sharing, searching, monitoring, avoiding, concealing, and evaluating, among many other activities within the everyday life context of a Facebook group.

2.2 Social Media Research

This study also draws on the multidisciplinary field of social media scholarship, which is the focus of this section. I begin by providing an overview of some perspectives that have been used to define and analyse social media. I focus on

discussing the perspectives that are most relevant to my research questions, while noting that the discussion is not intended to provide an exhaustive summary of all the available perspectives in this area. (For a more detailed and comprehensive analysis and discussion of the topic over the years, see e.g., Baym and boyd, 2012; Bayer et al., 2020; Bucher and Helmond, 2018; boyd, 2010, 2015; Couldry and van Dijck, 2015; Ellison et al., 2022; Fox and McEwan, 2020; Khoo, 2014; Lomborg, 2017; Treem and Leonardi, 2012; van Dijck, 2013; van Dijck and Poell, 2015).

2.2.1 Defining social media and social networking sites

The terms social media and social networking sites (SNSs) are often used interchangeably, but there are varying meanings and definitions for these terms in different contexts and disciplines (see Bayer et al., 2020; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016b; Obar and Wildman, 2015; Quan-Haase and McCay-Peet, 2016). Until the mid-2010s, social media, social networks, and social networking sites were the most frequent, and interchangeable, terms used.

The rapidly evolving landscape of information technology over the past two decades, coupled with various similarities and differences among digital tools and applications, now makes it difficult to provide a clear-cut definition of these terms (for overviews see Aichner et al., 2021; Bayer et al., 2020; Carr, 2021; Obar and Wildman, 2015; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). Thus, depending on how these sites have been viewed and approached, as discussed further below (see section 2.2.2), social media researchers have defined social media and SNSs in various ways. Some researchers focus on defining them based on their core features or elements (e.g., the profile, network, newsfeed, stream, messages, likes, comments, etc.), while others view them on the basis of the practices they enable (e.g., self-presentations, interpersonal communications), or their core affordances (e.g., visibility, persistence, associations, editability, searchability, etc.), as noted in previous research (Bayer et al., 2020; boyd and Ellison, 2008; Hogan and Quan-Haase, 2010; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

In this thesis, I use "social media" as an umbrella term to refer to the new generation of social computing tools in a wider sense, including mobile applications, websites, and platforms, which enable the direct creation, communication, and sharing of information in various modalities (e.g., text, images, videos). SNSs are a subset of social media technologies, and represent digital technologies that allow people to create and maintain diverse networks and connections (see also Bayer et al., 2020; Ellison and Vitak, 2015; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016b). Social media share a set of common affordances (as further discussed in section 2.2.2), including the ability to create and display a personal profile (boyd and Ellison, 2008; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

One of the earliest definitions of social network sites was proposed by boyd and Ellison. They defined SNSs as online platforms "that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (boyd and Ellison, 2008, p.211). Although this definition has frequently been used to define social media, social networking sites and social network sites, it is important to note that boyd and Ellison distinguished social network sites from other types of social networking and social media sites. The authors preferred to use the term "social network" (or "social network sites") rather than "networking" to emphasise that users primarily communicate with people who are already part of their social network. According to boyd and Ellison (boyd and Ellison, 2008; Ellison and boyd, 2013), social network sites such as Facebook are one type of social media that is particularly used to socialise, maintain, and strengthen relations among people who already know each other offline, rather than forming new connections with strangers. boyd and Ellison (2008) explained:

> Networking emphasizes relationship initiation, often between strangers. [...] On many of the large SNSs, participants are not necessarily "networking" or looking to meet new people; instead, they are primarily communicating with people who are already a part of their extended social network. To emphasize

> this articulated social network as a critical organizing feature of these sites, we label them "social network sites." (p.211)

Thus, social network sites or social networking sites (both abbreviated as SNSs) are terms that are often associated in academic discussions with platforms such as Facebook, while the term social media is often associated with other sites that may not necessarily be used to connect with or maintain already established networks (for a discussion, see McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016b; Obar and Wildman, 2015).

While early scholarship on SNSs, and particularly Facebook, focused on their use for self-presentation and maintaining existing networks of known others, the use of platforms like Facebook has evolved during the past two decades to encompass a much wider range of communication and collaboration possibilities with broader audiences that extend beyond close connections (for a discussion, see Bucher, 2021; Vitak, 2017). For instance, as Bucher (2021, p.80) has recently noted, viewing Facebook as an SNS that is primarily used to network and maintain established connections does not reflect the nuanced ways in which both Facebook as a platform and users' practices have evolved over time since their conception, now offering a wide range of possibilities for users. For example, Facebook offers various features such as groups, messages, pages, and events, which provide various forms of visibility and enable users to connect with both known and unknown others around shared interests, and organise events (Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2016; Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski, 2015; Mudliar and Raval, 2018). The introduction and utilisation of these features has expanded people's options for making new connections and interactions through and on Facebook, and they have made the platform more than just a tool for maintaining established social networks and connections (Bucher, 2021).

Furthermore, Facebook is one of the very few SNSs that enforces a high degree of identifiability of users' information through an explicit real-name policy, requiring users to provide their legal and real names to be able to engage through the platform and use its services. This real-name policy, which contributes to the platform's unique affordance of heightened visibility and

identifiability of users' information and their real-life identities, has been discussed/addressed in more detail in previous research (for more information refer to Bucher, 2021; Chen, 2018; Ellison and Vitak, 2015; Hogan, 2013; Schoenebeck et al., 2016).

In this thesis, Facebook is viewed as a distinctive social networking site (SNS) and a tool that offers diverse possibilities for communication as well as the potential to achieve a variety of goals beyond maintaining established connections, as noted in previous research (Bayer et al., 2020; Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Ellison and Vitak, 2015; Smock et al., 2011). By recognising these distinct opportunities, via affordances offered through Facebook, we can better understand the nuanced ways in which Facebook is used in everyday life, as emphasised by Bucher (2021) and others.

2.2.2 Perspectives on social media

Over the past two decades, social media has grown into a widespread phenomenon, leading to multidisciplinary research problems and questions that scholars have approached from different perspectives (boyd, 2015; Ellison et al., 2022; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016b).

Scholars from fields such as LIS, psychology, educational sciences, media and communication studies, human-computer interaction (HCI), computer-supported cooperative work (CSCW), information systems, and computer science, among others, have all contributed to the study of social media. These diverse fields share a common interest in social media as a phenomenon, but prioritise and emphasise different aspects, including social, psychological, cognitive, and material/technical aspects (Ellison et al., 2022; Quan-Haase and McCay-Peet, 2016; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). In general, scholarship on social media aims to understand its role and impact in mediating and complicating various aspects of contemporary society. This includes issues related to communication, entertainment, work, education, commerce, advertising, health, wellbeing, and politics, among many others (see Aichner et al., 2021; Bayer et al., 2020; Fox and McEwan, 2020). Ellison et al. (2022) and Bucher and

Helmond (2018) have identified three dominant theoretical perspectives that are employed in different fields to study these social media issues: user-centred, system or platform-centred, and sociotechnical.

User-centred and system-centred perspectives are two key theoretical perspectives that have been widely applied in the study of social media (for a more detailed discussion, refer to Ellison et al., 2022; Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Bayer et al., 2020). A user-centred perspective on social media studies broadly focuses on the end user by analysing the social, behavioural, psychological, or cognitive aspects that influence, or are entailed in, social media use. This includes, but is not limited to, users' characteristics (e.g., age, gender, education, etc.), motivations, norms, relationship ties, behaviours, practices, patterns of use, social structures, or compositions (for a discussion and overviews see Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Ellison et al., 2022; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016b; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). Previous research shows that this line of inquiry has received significant attention in social media scholarship, particularly in the social sciences and humanities (see McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016a, 2016b; Quan-Haase and Sloan, 2022; Lomborg, 2017).

A system- or platform-centred perspective often involves research focusing on the analysis, design, or development of social media platforms, including their features and functionalities. It also explores their role in prompting and influencing different types of actions and usage patterns (see McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016a, 2016b; Papacharissi, 2009). Research that applies this perspective examines how the platform features are designed to increase engagement, promote information disclosures, facilitate communication and collaboration, allow for privacy controls, or ensure safety and security (for more information and overviews, refer to Bayer et al., 2020; Ellison et al., 2022; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016a, 2016b). This line of research views social media as a toolkit or bundle of features, and aims to explore how social media sites and platforms can be effectively utilised or designed to influence user engagement and thus enhance the overall user engagement and experience (see Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Leonardi, 2017 for a discussion).

While user-centred perspectives often focus on the cognitive, psychological, or social aspects (e.g., social relations, values, and norms) that influence social media use, system- or platform-centred perspectives focus on the design and analysis of the specific features, functionalities, and platforms that influence these outcomes (for a discussion see Bucher and Helmond, 2018). For example, a user-centred perspective on social media privacy may focus on exploring the cognitive, psychological, behavioural, or social factors and patterns that influence people's information disclosures on social media, such as culture, relationship ties, norms, or values (e.g., Beam et al., 2018). In contrast, a system-centred perspective focuses on the design and analysis of specific privacy settings and features that prompt or influence users to disclose less or more information and details (e.g., Fiesler et al., 2017). Several social media scholars have noted that the former perspective is predominant in the social sciences and humanities, while the latter is predominantly adopted in information systems and computer sciences (see Ellison et al., 2022; Bucher and Helmond, 2018; McCay-Peet and Quan-Haase, 2016a).

Besides these two perspectives, a sociotechnical perspective has been proposed, which has gained increasing popularity in recent years because it offers a middle ground between user-centred and system-centred perspectives (for a detailed discussion see Ellison et al., 2022; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). This perspective offers a cross-disciplinary approach that combines social and technical aspects related to social media and its use.

Sociotechnical perspectives in the study of social media focus on analysing and understanding the reciprocal relationship between users and social media platforms, and how it shapes and influences their various uses and outcomes (Bayer et al., 2020; Ellison et al., 2022; Faraj and Azad, 2012; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). From this perspective, social media is broadly viewed as a sociotechnical phenomenon in which "the technological and social mutually constitute one another" (Ellison et al., 2022, p.3). This approach acknowledges the "social and technical nexus" (Faraj and Azad, 2012, p.238), and how they co-evolve and shape each other over time, providing various possibilities for action (see also Chapter 3; Bayer et al., 2020; Ellison et al., 2022; Ellison and Vitak, 2015;

Leonardi, 2012; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). Both Ellison et al. (2022) and Treem and Leonardi (2012) argue that this perspective has the potential to offer social media scholars a balanced and dynamic perspective for understanding the role and impact of social media, because it recognises the entangled relationship between users and social media platforms, and how it influences possibilities for action.

One example of a sociotechnical perspective is the relational affordance perspective, which this study also adopts (as further discussed in Chapter 3, section 3.3). An affordances perspective focuses on the mutual and reciprocal relation between users and social media platforms and its role in enabling or constraining various possibilities for action (see Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Ellison et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2017; Faraj and Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013; Mansour et al., 2020; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). As argued by Ellison and colleagues (Ellison and Vitak, 2015; Ellison et al., 2022), the rapid evolution of social media as a sociotechnical phenomenon compels researchers to go beyond merely describing specific technical features, uses, or users of SNSs at a given moment in time. Several social media scholars have thus advocated for using affordances as a theoretical lens, which allows researchers to bridge the conceptual gap between the social and technical features of social media. This has proved useful in offering a nuanced understanding of the dynamics involved in using these media by both individuals and groups (Faraj and Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013; Mansour et al., 2013, 2020; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

Hence, adopting a sociotechnical perspective, particularly a relational affordance perspective, has enabled social media scholars to identify "higher-level affordances" across social media platforms, including visibility, editability, association, and persistence, explaining their similarities and differences and how people utilise them to achieve various goals (see Ellison and Vitak, 2015; Ellison et al., 2022; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). These affordances vary, however, across various social media platforms and over time. For instance, numerous features available across social media platforms enable and constrain the level

and degree to which users' information and activities are made visible, persistent, and editable (Treem et al., 2020, p.53).

Overall, a sociotechnical perspective exemplified by affordances offers a theoretical tool that helps us to understand how social media offer new possibilities that may enable or constrain engagement in information activities. It also helps to address the classic divide between user- and system-centred perspectives, by offering a perspective that explores the mutual relationship and interplay between people and the materiality of social media platforms in offering unique possibilities and capabilities for action.

A sociotechnical perspective focusing on the affordances of social media enables us to focus on the role of the mutual relationship between the user and the capabilities of social media in shaping its use. However, relying solely on affordance as a standalone theory remains limited, because it focuses narrowly on the immediate context of interaction between a user and a platform, often overlooking its broader sociocultural context, as noted by Kaptelinin and Nardi (2012), and further discussed in Chapter 3.

To conclude, different perspectives have been adopted in the study and analysis of social media, but there is still a need for interdisciplinary efforts to help in fully unpacking the complexities entailed in social media use (Ellison et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2017; Karanasios et al., 2021; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). In the next chapter, I present the theoretical framework of the study, which builds on a sociocultural perspective of mediated action. This perspective is supplemented with a relational view of affordance and a number of other theories and concepts from different research fields.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1 Chapter overview

This thesis focuses on providing an in-depth understanding of the use of a Facebook group for informational purposes in everyday life. It examines the various ways in which members of a private Facebook group engage in information activities through the group and the affordances that shape those activities. In Chapter 2, I discussed why employing a perspective that takes both users and tools/technology into account, rather than focusing solely on one or the other, is essential for providing a nuanced understanding of social media's role and use in everyday life. In this chapter, I present a theoretical framework for the work reported in this thesis, grounded in a sociocultural perspective, in order to capture multiple viewpoints on social media.

A sociocultural perspective emphasises that people's actions and activities are mediated through learning and interaction with others and the tools available within a specific sociocultural context. This perspective is particularly useful because it is versatile and can easily help to integrate a range of concepts and theories that focus on the role of tools and individual, interpersonal, and collective processes (cf. Karanasios et al., 2021). It also helps to highlight the role of different types of tools in shaping people's activities within a particular sociocultural context (cf. Karanasios et al., 2021; Wertsch, 1998a). A sociocultural approach is well-suited to this study and employing it contributes to a nuanced and holistic understanding of how the information activities within the Facebook group are shaped in relation to the specific sociocultural context in which they take place.

This chapter is structured as follows: Firstly, I provide an overview of the theoretical framework of the study, presented in Table 1 below, encompassing the theoretical concepts used in the four articles. These concepts include mediated action, affordances, cognitive authority, situated learning, community

of practice, communication privacy management, context collapse, and the imagined audience. Secondly, I discuss the key assumptions that inform a sociocultural analysis and theorising. Thirdly, I discuss the key theoretical concepts presented in Table 1, which are used as analytical tools in the thesis articles. I outline the purposes of these concepts and how they helped me to focus on aspects relevant to the research's problem and the aim of the thesis project. Specifically, I discuss how employing these concepts can help in understanding and explaining different aspects related to people's use of SNSs as information and communication tools in everyday life. I also suggest that integrating these concepts can help to further unpack the complexities involved in engaging in information activities through social media. Combining these concepts from different fields contributes to bridging disciplinary boundaries (see Chapter 2) and extends our understanding of how people use social media when engaging in information activities. Overall, the theoretical framework sheds light on the complex role and entangled relationship between people and social media in facilitating and constraining engagement with and navigation of contemporary forms of overlapping contexts of information activities, which transcend fixed contextual, spatial, and temporal boundaries.

Table 1 Outline of the theoretical framework of the study

Theoretical concepts	Key concepts	Purpose and focus in the thesis
Mediated action (Wertsch, 1998a)	Cultural tools, materiality, knowing how	Overarching perspective which helps to situate members' information activities within the specific SNS context where the activities occur. (Article II)
Affordance (Treem and Leonardi, 2012)	Visibility, accessibility, persistence, associations	Helps to explain how and why human and material agencies intertwine to offer various possibilities that enable and constrain information activities within social media environments. (Articles I, III, and IV)
Cognitive authority (Wilson, 1983)	First-hand and second-hand knowledge, intrinsic plausibility	Helps to understand how the authority and credibility of information sources are assessed in particular situations and for specific purposes. It provides a basis upon which members can decide whether to trust information and others as credible or authoritative. (Article II)
Situated learning & community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998)	Situated knowing, community, practice, joint enterprise, mutual engagement, shared repertoires of communal resources	Helps to understand the processes that shape how members nurture, develop, and sustain the shared information practice within the group over time. (Article III)
Communication privacy management (Petronio, 2002)	Privacy control, (co-)ownership, boundary, rules, turbulences	Helps to understand the complex processes involved in the considerations, negotiations, and management of privacy boundaries of and within the group, specifically regarding what, when, where, and with whom private information is revealed or concealed in relation to various contexts and situations. (Article IV)
Context collapse & the imagined audience (Litt, 2012; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012)	Space, time, audience	Helps to understand and explain the interplay between members' actions and their audience, when the audience is diverse and unknown, and spatial and temporal boundaries are blurred. (Articles III and IV)

3.2 The sociocultural perspective of mediated action

This study adopts mediated action as its primary sociocultural theoretical perspective. I combine this perspective with several theoretical concepts from the four articles (discussed in section 3.3), considering them key components to form an overarching theoretical framework for the study. This framework is designed to help in the interpretation, discussion, and uncovering of potential interconnections within the overall research results (cf. Kivunja, 2018).

Lev Vygotsky, a Soviet psychologist, was a prominent researcher in the sociocultural tradition, studying how children learn and develop through active interaction with their sociocultural environment. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is grounded in a nondualist ontology, which concerns the nature of existence and what it means for something or someone to be (Packer and Goicoechea, 2000, p.227). This ontology can be traced back to Karl Marx, who criticised earlier dualist ontologies and constructivist epistemologies of being and knowing that separated the individual from the social world, the subject from the object, and the "known from the knower" (Packer and Goicoechea, 2000, p.228). Marx's nondualist ontology and constructivist/collectivist epistemology views these entities as parts of a larger whole, mutually constituting, (re)constructing, and transforming each other (Lloyd, 2021; Talja et al., 2005; Thorne, 2005).

Grounded in this work, a sociocultural perspective adopts a constructivist/collectivist epistemology which views human development and learning as both individual and collective, dynamic, multifaceted, tool-mediated, and socially constructed through practical processes and activities (Packer and Goicoechea, 2000; Talja et al., 2005; Thorne, 2005). This means that an individual's understanding of the world does not develop in isolation but rather it is contextually dependent, constantly evolving, and shaped by ongoing interactions with others, changing the sociocultural contexts and the tools available within a particular environment (Lloyd, 2021, p.15; Talja et al., 2005). Hence, in order to address the issue of differing perspectives, sociocultural analysis focuses on analysing human action as a complex sociocultural

phenomenon that is socially constructed and tool-mediated (Packer and Goicoechea, 2000; Wertsch, 1998a). I provide further details on this analysis later in this section. Thus, the nondualist ontology and constructivist/collectivist epistemology underlying sociocultural theory aim to link different perspectives without reducing one to another (Wertsch, 1998a). In this thesis, I have adopted a nondualist and constructivist/collectivist stance in line with the sociocultural perspective, with the goal of linking and complementing, rather than reducing, other perspectives.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of learning aims to explain "how mental functioning is related to cultural, institutional, and historical context" (Wertsch, 1998a, p.12). Vygotsky's early theorising focused on language as a cultural tool, consisting of signs and symbols which children adopt as they learn about, interact with, and participate in meaningful activities within their sociocultural environment (Wertsch, 1998b, 2009). This theorising was further applied and extended by others to explain and describe how various types of tools are often developed, used, or adopted, consciously or unconsciously, to mediate people's interactions with the world around them (e.g., Engeström, 1987/1999; Wertsch, 1998a).

According to this approach, almost all human action, whether taken by individuals or groups, is mediated (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995; Wertsch, 1998b, 2009). The sociocultural perspective centres on mediated action and the tools people use to achieve their goals, with the aim of elucidating "the relationships between human action, and the cultural, institutional and historical contexts in which this action occurs" (Wertsch, 1998a, p.23; see also Wertsch and Tulviste, 1999). Mediated action is a key concept in the sociocultural perspective, constituting its fundamental unit of analysis (Wertsch, 1998a).

Vygotsky's original framework of mediated action is represented by a triangular model consisting of three primary basic components: subject, object, and tool(s). The model has been highly influential in explaining and theorising complex everyday situations and relationships between people and the tools that mediate their interactions with the world to achieve specific goals (see Clemmensen et al., 2016). Due to Vygotsky's short scholarly life, his analysis of

mediated action was further developed by his followers, leading to many different interpretations of his early ideas (for example, see Arnseth, 2008; Engeström, 1987/1999; Kuutti and Bannon, 2014; Wertsch, 1998a). Sociocultural theory has been embraced as an interdisciplinary theoretical framework across various disciplines, including LIS, psychology, education, anthropology, and human-computer interaction (HCI), among many others (see Clemmensen et al., 2016; Karanasios et al., 2021; Limberg et al., 2013, Säljö, 2010).

Sociocultural theory offers a holistic perspective that allows us to account for and situate the ways in which people act and interact, individually or collectively, with information or others, and the tools they use and adopt through the processes that mediate their actions within a broader sociocultural context (Wertsch, 1998a, 1998b).

One strength of a sociocultural approach is that it is versatile, adaptable, and can be compatible with various theories and concepts that help to shed light on the different dimensions at play in shaping human actions and interactions with tools within "complex, real-world contexts" (Clemmensen et al., 2016, p.618). In this thesis, I draw upon James V. Wertsch's (1998a) interpretations of Vygotsky's original work, through the sociocultural approach of mediated action that he developed. Mediated action is thus a sociocultural approach that embraces an overarching view of action in relation to the context in which it takes place, which both shapes and is shaped by the action taken (Wertsch, 1998a). Wertsch's main contribution to this line of work is that he extended Vygotsky's theorising by outlining several properties that help to define mediated action characterised by a complex relation and tension between "cultural tools and the active use of these cultural tools by individuals or groups" (Wertsch, 1998b, p.521; see also Wertsch, 2009).

Vygotsky's essential claim is that the human mind, and human action, is always mediated by tools that are developed or adopted to achieve specific goals. Tools, or mediational means, terms that are often used interchangeably, are an essential element and concept within a sociocultural perspective for clarifying how the human mind and actions are mediated (Wertsch, 1998a). From a mediated action perspective, tools both mediate and extend people's

minds and actions beyond what they could accomplish independently on their own (Wertsch, 1998b; Wertsch and Tulviste, 1999).

Wertsch (1998a, 1998b) outlined four central properties of mediated action that are relevant to this thesis; namely: (1) cultural tools and mediated action are socioculturally situated; (2) materiality is an important property of cultural tools; (3) the relationship between subjects and tools can be characterised in terms of use and knowing how; (4) cultural tools always involve affordances and constraints.

These properties provide a foundational framing for my analysis of mediated action, and serve as guiding principles for integrating and extending the theoretical concepts used within the thesis' articles. Within the study, they particularly help to highlight various aspects related to how information activities are mediated within social media environments, which I describe further below.

The first property outlined by Wertsch is that mediated action and cultural tools are "socioculturally situated" (Wertsch, 1998b, p.521). This sociocultural emphasis on human action as mediated allows us to understand both the action and its broader context. This involves examining the goals of the action, considering who is involved, and exploring the various types of tools adopted or developed to accomplish it (Wertsch, 1998a). In this way, mediated action provides a broader perspective that extends beyond the often narrow focus on elements such as "behaviour, mental or linguistic structure, or attitudes" (Wertsch, 1998a, p.12).

A mediated action perspective stipulates that individuals do not learn in isolation; rather, they learn through their interactions with each other and with the surrounding sociocultural context where the action occurs (Wertsch, 1998b). Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that a sociocultural perspective highlights that learning should be viewed as "an integral part of a generative social practice in the lived-in world" (p.35). Consequently, this perspective emphasises the *situatedness* of action, underscoring the essential connection between people's learning and the social practices that shape this learning within the context of their lived experience in the world (cf. Packer and Goicoechea, 2000, p.230).

Materiality is the second important property of mediated action. A mediated action perspective highlights the role played by cultural tools in people's interactions with, and mediation of, the world using tools that are available and were developed within a particular sociocultural context. Wertsch (1998a) points out that the materiality of cultural tools, in its various forms, plays an essential role in mediating people's actions. While some cultural tools have a concrete physical materiality (e.g., books, tablets, calculators, computers), others are intangible or conceptual in the sense that they have no concrete physical materiality (e.g., language, signs, customs, norms). For instance, language is one of the most prominent examples of cultural tools employed in sociocultural theorising to emphasise the role that intangible tools play in mediating people's actions and interactions with the world around them.

This brings me to the third property outlined by Wertsch, which highlights that the relationship between people and cultural tools should be considered in terms of use and "knowing how" (Wertsch, 1998a, 1998b). A mediated-action perspective highlights that learning and knowing are characterised by "appropriation" or "mastery", whereby people develop the situated skills they need to use specific cultural tools through a process of engagement in meaningful activities to accomplish various goals as they interact with or react to the cultural tools being used (Wertsch, 1998a, p.46). Wertsch points out that: "the development of such skills requires acting with, and reacting to, the material properties of cultural tools. Without such materiality, there would be nothing to act with or react to, and the emergence of socioculturally situated skills could not occur" (1998a, p.31). A sociocultural perspective on mediated action therefore posits that people's skills emerge through their use, or appropriation, of particular cultural tools, with some classic examples including language, calculators, or computers, leading to "the development of particular skills rather than generalized abilities and aptitudes" (Wertsch, 1998a, p.46).

The fourth property of mediated action outlined by Wertsch is that cultural tools are associated with affordances and constraints that can both empower and constrain possibilities for action (Wertsch, 1998a, 1998b). Affordances are viewed from this perspective as fixed properties of tools, which are often used

or produced to extend, empower, and enable action by providing "new capacities for human consciousness" (Wertsch, 1998a, p.38). Thus, in Vygotsky's early sociocultural theorising about the introduction of new cultural tools, his focus was often centred on their empowering role in facilitating "certain patterns of action" (Wertsch, 1998b, p.522). Wertsch later expanded upon Vygotsky's early ideas, recognising that the introduction of new tools not only involves new affordances, but also introduces new constraints and challenges that constrain possibilities for action. Wertsch claims that the limitations, and constraints, of cultural tools are only recognised when newer tools are introduced, exposing the limitations of their predecessors (Wertsch, 1998b, p.523). In other words, Wertsch's emphasis on affordances often explores how tools empower people. According to Wertsch (1998a, 1998b), tools gain meaning only when incorporated into actions aimed at accomplishing specific goals. He distinguishes between the "affordances" and "constraints" of tools, as discussed in Wertsch (1998a, p.38). The former carries a positive connotation of empowerment, while the latter has a negative connotation, suggesting their limited role in mediating action.

It is important to note here that the perspective I take on affordances differs from that adopted by Wertsch. I further discuss and elaborate upon these different interpretations and why one would adopt them in the section summarising the theoretical concepts used in the articles (see section 3.1.1).

3.2.1 Operationalisation of the theory

In this study, people's information activities on social media are conceptualised as mediated actions, which take place within, and are shaped as part of, a broader sociocultural context. Different types of cultural tools play an essential role in mediating people's information activities, and it is important to consider the role of both tangible and intangible cultural tools in mediating and shaping those activities. Furthermore, affordances are an important property of mediated action, and they play a crucial role in empowering or constraining action during the use of social media. People develop the skills they need to use

social media through a process of engaging in meaningful activities to accomplish various goals as they interact with and through various social media platforms.

Hence, in order to gain an in-depth understanding of people's information activities, it is crucial to consider the sociocultural context in which these activities take place and the role that various types of cultural tools play in mediating these activities to achieve a range of goals (Kuutti and Bannon, 2014, p.7; Wertsch, 1998a).

Sociocultural theory thus provides me with a theoretical perspective to understand people's information activities within a social media environment. This perspective is useful because it focuses on the interrelationships between the subject engaging in an activity, the aim of engaging in that activity, and the tools employed to carry out the activity (Wertsch et al., 1995). By framing social media activities as socioculturally situated, the aim is to gain an in-depth understanding of the mediational role of meaning and the use of social media, as cultural tools, for those involved in information activities (cf. Karanasios et al., 2021; Kaptelinin and Nardi, 2018). This perspective has the potential to address the limitations of the dominant user-centred and system-centred perspectives that are normally employed when studying the use of social media, as discussed in Chapter 2. A sociocultural perspective, in particular, helps us to situate people's information activities and their actual use of social media by recognising both social and material aspects, along with other, broader sociocultural dynamics. This perspective is thus crucial for understanding the role that social media plays and its impact in shaping information activities in everyday life (see Karanasios et al., 2021).

3.3 Theoretical concepts

In the following sections, I outline the theoretical concepts I have used in the four articles, focusing on outlining their strengths and limitations. I then suggest ways in which these concepts can be integrated with the broader sociocultural perspective adopted in the study to help focus on specific aspects related to the ways in which people's information activities are mediated within a specific SNS context.

3.3.1 Affordances

The notion of affordance is a key concept in the theoretical framework of the thesis. Affordances were introduced above as a central property of mediated action (Wertsch, 1998a, 1998b). However, the concept has been further developed by other researchers since the late 1990s, and it has been used in a more recent interpretation adapted to social media in this study. It has proven valuable for analysing the various possibilities for engagement in information activities within the Facebook group, as discussed in more detail in Article I. Additionally, it has been useful for examining and discussing the findings presented in the other three articles (II, III, and IV), which focus on the opportunities and challenges arising from engagement in information activities within the context of a private Facebook group. In the following sections, I discuss the varied interpretations of the concept and elaborate upon the perspective I have adopted in this study. In addition, I explore the importance and relevance of utilising recent interpretations of the concept in the study, instead of how it is utilised in the mediation action perspective.

The concept of affordance was originally introduced by psychologist James Gibson (1979) to explain how animals perceive their natural environment, and as offering various possibilities for action. Over the past two decades, the concept has received considerable attention and has been valuable for examining and theorising the relationship between people and technology, leading to diverse interpretations and conceptualisations (Bucher and Helmond,

2018; Ellison et al., 2022; Evans et al., 2017; Faraj and Azad, 2012, Leonardi, 2017; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). One central point of difference in the various conceptualisations regards the 'placement' of affordances in either human or material agency (see Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Faraj and Azad, 2012; Leonardi, 2017). Both Bucher and Helmond (2018) and Leonardi (2017) note that some researchers have used affordances as synonymous with the inherent features of technology itself (i.e., technical affordances), while others emphasise social structures, or the psychological aspects, skills, or cognitive factors of users exploiting these technologies (i.e., social affordances). In this way, while one perspective attributes affordances primarily to the material agency of technology, emphasising the role of tools/technology in shaping human action, the other perspective attributes affordances to human agency, emphasising the role of the user in perceiving and shaping the affordances of technology (Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Faraj and Azad, 2012; Leonardi, 2017).

A third perspective, which is the one adopted in this thesis, often referred to as a relational sociotechnical approach (previously discussed in more detail in Chapter 2), builds on Gibson (1979) to suggest that affordances should not be solely attributed to either human or material agency (Leonardi, 2010; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). Instead, from this perspective, affordances are seen to emerge, and are formed, through reciprocal and entangled "relationships between people and the materiality of the things with which they come in contact" (Leonardi, 2010, n.p.). Affordances, therefore, emerge during activities involving both human and material agencies (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). This relational perspective is particularly useful in explaining how and why human and material agencies become intertwined in shaping various possibilities for action (Leonardi, 2017, p.12). It emphasises the entangled relationship between human and material agency in offering possibilities for action, rather than isolating them from each other (Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Faraj and Azad, 2012; Leonardi, 2017).

Furthermore, this perspective highlights that affordances may have a "contradictory influence" on action, simultaneously enabling and constraining it (Majchrzak et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). Therefore, a relational

sociotechnical perspective on affordances emphasises the entangled relationship between people and the technology they use, not only in enabling possibilities for action but also in constraining them. Such an entangled relationship depends upon the actors' goals, the specific technology, and the context of use (e.g., Faraj and Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). This view differs from Wertsch's view on affordance, as I explain further in this section.

Affordances are understood in this thesis as situated within specific contexts and emerging during activities that involve both human and material agencies. From this perspective, the affordances within Facebook groups may vary and change for different groups and across different contexts of use, while the technology's material features remain constant or the same (Hutchby, 2001; Leonardi, 2010; Leonardi et al., 2012). According to researchers who adopt a relational affordance perspective, "materiality exists independent of people, [but] affordances do not" (Leonardi, 2010, n.p.). For instance, identical technologies may create different dynamics of use and offer different possibilities for action, depending upon the users and the specific context in which they are used (Leonardi and Barley, 2010). Due to the diverse goals that people are pursuing when using Facebook groups, they consider them to be affording various or different possibilities for action, which can either enable or constrain their activities (cf. Leonardi, 2010). Therefore, echoing Hutchby (2001) and Leonardi et al. (2012), whereas materiality may remain the same for different tools, affordances change across different contexts because they emerge as the result of interactions between a tool and an agent offering different possibilities for action.

It is important to note that the relational affordance approach that I have adopted in this thesis differs from the perspective taken by Wertsch on affordance in his writings on mediated action. As I mentioned earlier, in section 3.2, the concept of affordance is considered a central property of mediated action, which is specifically associated with cultural tools in terms of providing affordances and constraints (Wertsch, 1998a). Wertsch (1998a, 1998b) based his interpretations of affordance on HCI scholar Donald Norman's interpretation of

the concept, which was popular at the time, a conceptualisation that deviates from Gibson's original formulation (see Leonardi, 2017 for a discussion on Norman's conceptualisation of affordance).

Norman (1990), who is interested in the design of artefacts, views affordances as properties of technologies and artefacts that are developed by a designer, which are independent of the user's perception or control. As such, Norman's perspective on affordance gives little agency to the user and suggests that good design should have intuitive or "built-in" affordances, promoting specific types of action (cf. Leonardi, 2017; Leonardi and Barley, 2010; Norman, 1999). According to Norman, affordances are intrinsic and fixed properties of a technology that are available to all users across different contexts and waiting to be perceived by the user (Leonardi, 2017; Norman, 1999). Drawing upon Norman's work, Wertsch associates affordances in the mediated action perspective with the properties or material features of tools, which are often used or produced to extend, empower, and enable action (Wertsch, 1998a).

A sociocultural perspective thus posits that cultural tools (e.g., language, a calculator) provide affordances that make it difficult to carry out specific actions without these tools (Wertsch, 1998a, p.29). Wertsch further expanded upon this line of theorising of tools as empowering by arguing that the introduction of new tools brings both new affordances and constraints. According to Wertsch, the constraints of cultural tools only become apparent when newer tools are introduced, exposing the limitations of previous ones (Wertsch, 1998a, p.29). From a mediated action perspective, Wertsch views the "affordances and constraints" of cultural tools for action as quite distinct (for a discussion see Wertsch, 1998a, p.38), with the former having a positive connotation while the latter has a negative connotation for its role in limiting possibilities for action. This differs from the relational affordance perspective that I adopt in this thesis, which, as I mentioned earlier, emphasises that affordances can have a "contradictory influence" by simultaneously enabling and constraining possibilities for action (Faraj and Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

The main strength of adding this perspective to the theoretical framework is its acknowledgement of affordances as context-dependent and situated, rather than fixed properties inherent to a specific social media site. A contemporary understanding of the affordance concept as relational, as outlined above, fits well within the sociocultural perspective adopted in this thesis because it emphasises the interplay between people and the tools they use when situated within a particular context (Clemmensen et al., 2016; Kaptelinin and Nardi, 2012; Rogers, 2012). This approach specifically enables a nuanced exploration of how affordances are shaped by the features of a platform, and the information activities, rules, norms, and learning processes of its users.

3.3.2 Cognitive authority

Cognitive authority forms another key concept of this thesis' theoretical framework. It has been useful for analysing credibility assessments and how members decide whether or not to trust a particular information source. The concept was useful for discussing the research findings presented in Article II and is also beneficial for the overall discussion of the research findings of the thesis.

"Cognitive authority" is a classic concept introduced to information science by Patrick Wilson in 1983. Wilson proposed this concept to explain how individuals construct knowledge and establish criteria for assessing the authority and credibility of the information sources they consult. The concept of cognitive authority is closely intertwined with the notion of credibility and focuses on two core components: competence and trustworthiness (Wilson, 1983, p.15). In his work, Wilson argues that people develop knowledge about the world in two primary ways: "first-hand knowledge" and "second-hand knowledge." First-hand knowledge refers to knowledge gained through direct observations and personal experiences of the world, such as seeing, hearing, smelling, or touching something, or developing particular skills through direct and first first-hand education or training (Wilson, 1983). However, realistically, people cannot know or experience everything first-hand and on their own, so

instead they rely on the words and expertise of others to develop second-hand knowledge about the world. Wilson emphasises: "All I know of the world beyond the narrow range of my own personal experience is what others have told me. It is hearsay" (1983, p.13).

Second-hand knowledge about the world, obtained through the words of others, the "cognitive authorities" consulted as trusted information sources, is the primary focus of Wilson's analysis (Wilson, 1983; see also Savolainen, 2022). Cognitive authorities are, therefore, second-hand or "second best, not so good as first hand" information sources that people choose to trust or consult in order to obtain information about aspects of the world they do not know about (Wilson, 1983, p.10). Cognitive authority is always attributed by somebody; no one is a cognitive authority in themselves, they are always a cognitive authority to somebody.

Cognitive authorities are credible sources of information that hold a certain degree of influence, and their expertise and advice may carry more weight than those of others. As Wilson puts it: "The authority's influence on us is thought proper because he [sic] is thought credible, worthy of belief" (Wilson, 1983, p.15).Cognitive authorities are thus those whom "one would consciously recognise as proper" to influence one's decisions or thoughts (Wilson, 1983, p.15). It is important to highlight that cognitive authority is not solely attributed to individuals, it may also be attributed to various sources of information such as institutions, organisations, or artifacts (e.g., thermometers, libraries, books, reports, or documentaries) (Wilson, 1983). In this regard, people often assign different types or "pools of cognitive authorities" that they recognise as proper and credible information sources to consult when they seek to obtain information or "second-hand knowledge" about specific topics (Wilson, 1983, p.16).

The assessment of knowledge obtained through second-hand sources can be difficult and complex, because people often have to assess knowledge claims about topics for which they have little or no prior knowledge (Rieh, 2010; Wilson, 1983). In this regard, cognitive authority serves to explain what people value as knowledge and how they decide who possesses what knowledge about

a particular topic, or in Wilson's words, "who knows what about what" (p.10). That is, cognitive authority helps us to understand how and why people decide and justify what and who is a cognitive authority or credible source for them on a particular topic.

According to Wilson, cognitive authority, and hence a source's credibility, is often justified based on a variety of tests, direct or indirect, to determine which information sources should be recognised as cognitive authorities. These include several traditional rules or cues that people often rely upon and "cite as indirect tests or indexes of credibility" (Wilson, 1983, p.21). Among many others, a source's reputation, history, affiliations, merits, and qualifications, such as their formal education, expertise, occupation, and training, all provide a basis and direct test for the recognition of a cognitive authority (Wilson, 1983, p.21).

Whereas people rely on these indirect tests to justify why one may choose or recognise an information source as a cognitive authority, another direct test that, according to Wilson, people apply when justifying cognitive authority is "based on the ground that one finds the views of an individual intrinsically plausible, convincing, or persuasive" (Wilson, 1983, p.24). Thus, cognitive authority may be attributed based on whether the information or knowledge claim being made by a source is intrinsically plausible. This is often done, for instance, by assessing the information or knowledge claim being made and whether it aligns with one's pre-existing knowledge or beliefs on a topic, where some pre-existing values and beliefs about a source of information set limits to what is considered credible and trustworthy (Wilson, 1983, p.24). In Article II, when interpreting these cues from a sociocultural perspective on mediated action, they are understood as intangible cultural tools that are traditionally developed and recognised in order to provide a basis for the recognition of credibility and authority on a topic. However, cognitive authority is not inherent to a specific topic, source, or person; instead, it is determined by the people who are assessing the credibility and trustworthiness of information or a source using various criteria or factors, including their own pre-held beliefs, knowledge, or expertise in a particular field (Rieh, 2018; Wilson, 1983).

Regardless of how cognitive authorities are recognised, whether through direct or indirect tests, they are not universal, equal, or fixed (Wilson, 1983, p.13). People often grant cognitive authorities the power to influence their thoughts or actions in specific contexts and spheres of knowledge to varying degrees (Wilson, 1983; see also Savolainen, 2022). Hence, cognitive authority is an attributed property, limited to specific spheres of knowledge and expertise, and relies upon a relationship between at least two entities in order to be considered valid. This distinguishes it from expertise, because possessing knowledge alone cannot confer cognitive authority without recognition from another person (Wilson, 1983; see also Hirvonen et al., 2019; Rieh, 2010). That is, being an expert in a topic may not necessarily mean that one is a cognitive authority; rather, a cognitive authority must be recognised and trusted by another person or group as possessing the knowledge and competence to talk about a specific topic. For instance, a source may be considered a cognitive authority and a credible source of information to speak with full authority on a particular topic in which they are expert (e.g., international law) but may be assigned little authority to speak on another topic about which they have no knowledge or expertise (e.g., biology) (see Wilson, 1983, p.169). Moreover, recognition of cognitive authority can be lost or revoked if this authority fails to speak or continue to provide information that is intrinsically plausible, leading to a situation where one can no longer "take seriously views that are so blatantly implausible" (Wilson, 1983, p.25).

The concept of cognitive authority has been particularly useful and widely applied within LIS to understand and analyse how people assess credibility in relation to various offline and online information sources, such as blogs, discussion forums, and social media (some examples include Francke and Sundin, 2012; Hirvonen et al., 2019; Kim et al., 2021; Mierzecka et al., 2019; Savolainen, 2023; Sundin and Francke, 2009). It is important to note that a review of related work on cognitive authority and credibility assessments in relation to online environments can be found in Article II; therefore, it is beyond the scope of this study to cover.

In this study, cognitive authority offers a useful analytical tool to help us understand how people decide whom to trust as credible information sources. Specifically, the concept allows us to understand not only what information people find credible but also their justifications for why and how they decide which information sources to trust. Hence, the usefulness of incorporating the concept of cognitive authority into the theoretical framework of this study stems from its specific focus on credibility assessments to explain the basis upon which members decide which sources to trust as cognitive authorities, whether from within or outside the Facebook group. As discussed earlier, in Chapters 1 and 2, assessing information obtained through Facebook groups can be further complicated due to the lack of established authority controls within these groups and the limited information available about others' credentials and expertise. This limitation makes it difficult for people to assess the credibility of information and its sources within these groups. In this regard, employing cognitive authority in this study will help us to understand and explain how and why group members decide and justify which information is credible and whom they can trust as credible sources for information and advice within the context of the Facebook group.

3.3.3 Situated learning and community of practice

Situated learning and community of practice are two interrelated concepts that are part of this thesis' theoretical framework. They have been particularly useful in Article III, for understanding and discussing how the Facebook group nurtures, develops, and sustains participation in a shared information practice over time. These concepts are also beneficial for discussing the research findings of the thesis as a whole.

The main contribution of these concepts to the overall theoretical framework is that they explicitly focus on and add learning in relation to community and practice dimensions, thus reconstructing learning and knowing as participation in interrelated and joint information activities that are

meaningful to a specific community of practice (Arnseth, 2008; Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

The concept of situated learning was introduced in the early 1990s within the fields of cognitive anthropology and educational sciences by Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in their book on situated learning as a form of "legitimate peripheral participation" (see Lave and Wenger, 1991). Wenger (1998) further developed these ideas and the concept into a theory of practice, focusing on learning, meaning-making, and identity-negotiation in relation to various communities of practice. From this perspective, learning is viewed as a central aspect of all aspects of everyday life, which extends beyond traditional educational environments (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Riley and Aubrey, 2022). In line with a sociocultural perspective, Lave and Wenger argue that learning, and knowing, should be viewed as an active process of engagement in relation to a socioculturally situated practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). They suggest that learning, and knowing, may not necessarily be either deliberate or the main goal of action, but rather an outcome of continuous and changing participation in the everyday activities of a community that engages in a shared practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Situated learning entails an active process of engagement in the activities of a specific community of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

A community of practice means that a group of people who share a concern, an interest, a passion for something, or common goals want to learn more about a subject or develop their own, unique practice as they interact regularly during the daily activities of the community (Wenger, 1998). From this perspective, a practice is an outcome of such continuous and changing engagement and social relations that develops, and evolves, over time (Arnseth, 2008). A practice is thus what is being upheld by a particular community, and thus it provides the community with its main "source of coherence" (see Wenger, 1998, p.48).

Outside of educational environments, the notion of community of practice, and its foundational conceptualisation in the theory of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) has received a great deal of attention in relation to the study

of learning and knowing within work environments. Within LIS, the notion of community of practice has been one example of many practice theories embraced by scholars in the study of educational and work-related practices (see Cox, 2012; and Chapter 2). The main usefulness of the concepts of situated learning and community of practice is that they help us to understand information activities as socioculturally situated in relation to a specific practice (see Chapter 2; Cox, 2012; Zhao et al., 2021; Zhong et al., 2023).

Wenger suggests that three interrelated elements help us to describe, nurture, develop, and sustain a community of practice; namely: a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoires of communal resources which are developed over time (Wenger, 1998). A *joint, negotiated, enterprise* refers to the mutually agreed upon understandings of the important and collective goals of the community and the best ways to help the community achieve these goals. The joint enterprise is not strictly defined or predefined; instead, it is the result of a mutually negotiated agreement between those who are actively engaged in interaction with others during the everyday information activities of the community. In this way, the community's joint enterprise is deeply interrelated with *mutual engagement*, the second element that helps to define a group as a community of practice and sustain it over time. According to Wenger (1998), mutual engagement and sustaining relations over time are what defines a community of practice, and are an important element of it, setting it apart from other types of aggregation or grouping (e.g., groups, networks). I revisit this issue later in this chapter. It is essential to clarify here that sustained interaction does not entail that members of the community meet every day; instead, it signifies that they are consistently engaging, interacting, and collaborating around shared common concerns to achieve common goals (Wenger, 1998). Furthermore, Wenger (1998, p. 78) asserts that "[b]ecause mutual engagement does not require homogeneity, a joint enterprise does not mean agreement in any simple sense. […] The enterprise is joint not in that everybody believes the same thing or agrees with everything, but in that it is communally negotiated." I return to this point later in this discussion.

In the pursuit of negotiating a joint enterprise that is centred around shared interests or concerns, and due to the mutual engagement over time, members of the community take part in sustaining their interaction by developing their practice through the adoption and production of shared repertoires of resources (Wenger, 1998). *A shared repertoire* is the third interrelated, and essential, element of a community of practice because it serves as a source of coherence for the community. A community's shared repertoires consist of the shared resources that are produced by the community over time, including information, experiences, stories, routines, rules, norms, and common ways of doing things, as well as ways of addressing common or recurring problems and dilemmas (Wenger, 1998).

Taken together, these three primary interrelated elements (i.e., a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and a shared repertoire), characterise and sustain the shared practice of a community over time (Wenger, 1998). A situated learning perspective helps to highlight how learning and knowing result in changes, and transformations, of the different elements of a practice shared by the community over time (cf. Arnseth, 2008, p.294). A community of practice perspective helps us to focus on joint information activities that are situated in relation to a specific community of practice (Østerlund and Carlile, 2003, p.3; see also Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998).

In line with this perspective, the online space of the Facebook group under study serves as a "lived-in world of everyday activity [that] becomes the site where the action is" (Arnseth, 2008, p.294). Employing these concepts in this study helps to draw attention to people's accounts of what they do and how they make sense of their actions in concrete situations, the unfolding activities in which they engage, and the resources they employ (Arnseth, 2008, p.294; Lave and Wenger, 1991).

However, while situated learning and community of practice provide useful analytical tools for understanding the situated nature of activities as part of the engagement in the practice of a community, these concepts have been critiqued and, by themselves, they do have some limitations. Firstly, the concepts have been critiqued for their simplified views on situated learning as

well as the "romanticised notion" of community (Riley and Aubrey, 2022, p.266). In particular, the concept of community has been criticised for its connotations of, and over-emphasis on, consensus, harmony, and homogeneity (Cox, 2012). As discussed earlier, and as the results reported in Article III demonstrate, a joint enterprise and mutual engagement do not necessarily entail either total harmony or homogeneity; something that Wenger also makes clear (e.g., see Wenger, 1998, p.78). Instead, the joint enterprise of a community is communally negotiated as a "collective product" of the situated and communal ways of doing things and responses to their daily situations, including achieving common ground in relation to conflicts, dilemmas, and disagreements within the community (Wenger, 1998, p.78). Hence, even though not every individual member of a community will agree about how a particular situation should be handled, "the practice evolves into the communal response to that situation" (Wenger, 1998, p.79).

This brings me to the second critique of community of practice, which is its over-emphasis on what is collectively shared by the community, rather than what is distinct or different (Arnseth, 2008; Riley and Aubrey, 2022). Within this thesis, the specific focus on the negotiation of a joint enterprise and common ground, or what is *commonly shared* by the community/group, is seen as a strength rather than a limitation. Both the notions of situated learning and community of practice help to elucidate the processes shaping engagement in *joint* information activities in relation to the context where they take place. From this perspective, knowing and learning how to participate in the community or group is seen as becoming situated and embedded through continuous engagement and participation in the daily, and mundane, activities within a particular community of practice.

The usefulness of including the concepts of situated learning and community of practice in the theoretical framework is that it allows us to focus on the "community" as a whole and helps to gain an in-depth understanding of the social processes shaping members' engagement in the information activities within the Facebook group. This helps us to understand how members engage, both individually and as a group, in establishing, participating in, and

sustaining the shared information practice of their joint community of practice within the Facebook group.

3.3.4 Communication privacy management

Communication Privacy Management (CPM) theory forms a key component of this thesis' theoretical framework. It has been particularly useful for analysing privacy management and discussing the research findings presented in Article IV, and is also beneficial for the overall discussion of the thesis' research findings.

CPM can be traced back to Irwin Altman's (1975, 1976) foundational work in environmental and social psychology. Altman focused on the nature of privacy management, emphasising the processes involved in self-disclosure (i.e., managing personal privacy boundaries), and its role in developing intimate relationships with others. His early conceptualisation of privacy management extended the theorising of information disclosure and privacy beyond the individual cognitive processes and factors that were prevalent in the field of psychology at the time. However, Altman's theorising primarily focused on privacy management in relation to singular/personal space (i.e., the self) and interpersonal space maintained through *dyadic* relations with others. His work has thus provided central conceptual foundations for conceptualisations of personal and interpersonal privacy, with theories such as CPM being influential in expanding this theorising to highlight the complexities entailed in managing collective and group privacy boundaries beyond individual and dyadic boundaries (i.e., personal, or interpersonal boundaries) (Brann et al., 2021; Petronio and Child, 2020). Sandra Petronio first introduced CPM theory to the field of communication studies in the 1990s, with a particular interest in understanding information disclosure and privacy management by groups within home or work contexts (e.g., families, intimate partners and couples, health workers and doctors, employees) (see Petronio, 2002, 1991). The theory has a core focus on the disclosure, or non-disclosure, processes relating to

information considered private by various groups, and the negotiation processes involved in managing and protecting that information.

Petronio's CPM theory proposes four core, interrelated principles to explain privacy management as a process that unfolds during the daily activities of members of specific groups within specific sociocultural contexts (Petronio, 2002; Petronio and Child, 2020): privacy boundaries, privacy rules, privacy turbulence, and privacy rule recalibration. The *privacy boundary* principle is a metaphorical concept that describes the boundaries/lines that people draw around their private information in order to maintain control of, and access to, the information they (co-)own when communicating with others within various contexts (e.g., private vs. public). These privacy boundaries are drawn in order to maintain, control, and safeguard information (co-)ownership, with metaphorical lines separating the information they intend to protect by keeping it private from the information they intend to disclose to others or in public. From this perspective, what is considered public or private is contextual and can vary depending on individuals, groups, and situations. It is those to whom the information belongs, whether individuals or groups (e.g., families), who make decisions about whether a piece of information is to be considered private, and thus protected. The principle of *privacy rules* helps us to understand the decisions and choices that people make regarding the regulation of their privacy boundaries. This includes what information to disclose or keep private, how much to disclose, when to disclose, and to whom. Privacy boundaries and rules are established through both implicit and explicit negotiations and conversations and are learned through ongoing involvement and socialisation in evolving activities (Petronio, 2002; Brann et al., 2021).

From a CPM perspective, Petronio (Petronio, 2002; Petronio and Child, 2020) argues that privacy boundaries are both individual and collective. Individual privacy boundaries are focused on one person's privacy boundary, while collective boundaries involve multiple levels, such as those shared by couples, families, co-workers, or groups (Petronio and Child, 2020, p.77). Thus, privacy boundaries can be adjusted (i.e., restricted or expanded) through privacy rules that determine who is included or excluded. These boundaries

separate insiders, who are included within a personal or group boundary, from outsiders, who are excluded from it. *Privacy turbulence* occurs when privacy boundaries and rules are (un)intentionally broken, invaded, or disrupted, resulting in a loss of control and (co-)ownership of information. Instances of privacy turbulence may occur when private information is (un)intentionally revealed, accessed, or leaked to others outside the privacy boundary. *Privacy rule recalibration* is the process for recalibrating privacy rules in response to the negative repercussions of privacy turbulence, by exerting greater control to prevent future violations (Petronio and Child, 2020).

Overall, the theory offers versatile concepts consisting of boundaries, rules, turbulences, and recalibrations, which help to develop the often individualistic or "simplistic, one-way" (Brann et al., 2021, p.81) views on privacy and its management as an individual right and responsibility that have been prevalent in theorising informational privacy on social media (see also Bazarova and Masur, 2020; Suh and Metzger, 2022; Wu et al., 2020).

The main reason for incorporating this theory into the overarching theoretical framework of the thesis is that it specifically helps to explain how people manage their private information when seeking and sharing information, both individually and collectively. Hence, the theory helps to conceptualise privacy management as a collective process and responsibility that is contextual, fluid, ongoing, and complex (Petronio and Child, 2020, p.76). In particular, the theory helps us to understand and explain the complexities involved in managing private information as it unfolds during the situated everyday activities of a particular group (Petronio and Child, 2020).

By taking both individual and group-level activities into account, CPM thus aligns itself with the sociocultural perspective adopted in this study, helping to contextualise and situate people's actions in terms of managing their privacy, or what they would consider to be private information in relation to a specific situation or context. From the perspective of CPM, privacy management should not be considered a merely cognitive or individual process, but rather a collective and complex process that is negotiated individually, interpersonally,

and collectively by members of a specific group who share a common goal of protecting their personal and the group's privacy (Petronio and Child, 2020).

However, despite its strength in elucidating complex social processes, CPM has some limitations. Developed during the early to late 1990s (Petronio, 1991, 2002), prior to the emergence of social media, it was designed to explain information disclosure processes among groups of people who already knew each other and whose offline communication was limited by time and geographical boundaries. However, the advent of social media and mobile technologies has introduced many new tensions and dynamics, such as the erosion of temporal and spatial boundaries, and the presence of large, unknown, and invisible audiences, making it more challenging and complicated to manage privacy boundaries (Brann et al., 2021; Davis and Jurgenson, 2014; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Petronio and Child, 2020; Vitak, 2012). These novel technologies have further complicated the meanings and theorising of context, space, time, boundary, control, and ownership (see Marwick and boyd, 2011, p.115; and also Brandtzaeg and Lüders, 2018). Thus, while CPM helps to explain complex information disclosure processes, there is still a need to consider the intertwined role of tools or new technologies in shaping them. To broaden its theoretical scope, it is thus beneficial to situate the theory within a broader sociocultural framework that explicitly focuses on the role of tools in mediating privacy management.

Additionally, this theory and its overarching theoretical framework can be complemented by incorporating the concepts of context collapse and imagined audience (Litt, 2012; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012). This adds a contemporary perspective, enabling us to further unpack such complexities and extend the understanding of contemporary forms of overlapping contexts that transcend fixed contextual, temporal, and spatial boundaries. These concepts, and their positioning within the theoretical framework of this thesis, are discussed and developed below.

3.3.5 The imagined audience and context collapse

Context collapse and imagined audience are two relevant and interrelated concepts in this thesis' theoretical framework. They have been particularly useful for discussing the research findings presented in Articles III and IV, exploring the complexities involved in navigating overlapping audiences and blurred contextual boundaries on social media. They are also useful for the overall discussion of the research findings of the thesis.

As I discussed above (see section 3.3.4), according to CPM theory, people can maintain control of what, when, where, and to whom they reveal or conceal information through a process of negotiation (Altman, 1975, 1976; Petronio, 2002). Similarly, the concepts of situated learning and community of practice (see section 3.3.3) focus on how people learn and negotiate appropriate ways of acting and interacting in relation to a specific community of practice, which carry certain expectations about what information members of a community of practice will share and how they should act and interact in relation to a shared practice bounded by time and place/space.

Such theorising thus assumes that a particular action can be controlled, bounded, or segregated by time, a particular context of interaction (e.g., professional vs. personal, private vs. public), a particular community or audience (e.g., family, friends, colleagues), and by space (e.g., work, home). However, what happens when the audience for an action or the recipient of information is unknown or not physically present in the moment of action, or when multiple audiences from different contexts meet in one space at the same time?

This is something that we have witnessed over the past two decades due to the rapid expansion of social media and mobile technologies, which have complicated both the meanings and theorising of context, audience, space, and time (Brandtzaeg and Lüders, 2018; Davis and Jurgenson, 2014; Marwick and boyd, 2011). In this new era of social media, or networked publics (boyd, 2010), actions are instantly made more visible, scalable, and persistent to invisible, diverse, and large audiences (Treem and Leonardi, 2012). As information and

communication were made highly visible, boundaries between different contexts and audiences became blurred, collapsing segregated contexts and social groups into single online spaces that transcended both time and space/location (Brandtzaeg and Lüders, 2018; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012).

In light of this development, in this thesis I employ two additional concepts: context collapse and the imagined audience (boyd, 2008; Litt, 2012; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012) in order to understand and explain how people envision audiences and contexts as they engage in information activities through social media, where diverse audiences from distinct contexts may all potentially be co-present in a single online space.

Both the concepts of context collapse and the imagined audience are interrelated and build on Erving Goffman's (1958/1990) early theorising of self-presentation and impression management in everyday life, focusing on how individuals tailor their performances to present themselves and act appropriately for a given situation or context, and the audience for a particular action. The concept of context collapse describes the contemporary phenomenon of pervasive social media use, where people are constantly connected and simultaneously interacting, with audiences from multiple social groups and contexts in one space and at the same time (boyd, 2008; Vitak, 2012). The notion of context collapse posits that, within social media environments, "people, information, and norms from one context seep into the bounds of another" (Davis and Jurgenson, 2014, p.477; also see Vitak, 2012).

The concept of the imagined audience has historically been used to conceptualise how trained writers, media professionals, actors, and public figures understand their audiences and tailor their writing, messages, performances, and acting to match the expectations of audiences that are not physically co-present (Litt and Hargittai, 2016; Marwick and boyd, 2011).

From an imagined audience perspective, both the immediate context and the "actual audience" of a particular action play an influential role in shaping how an individual makes decisions regarding what to write, say, or not say, and how to act or not act, based on her or his expectations of the audience and what

their expectations might be (Litt, 2012; Marwick and boyd, 2011). This implies that people make conscious and strategic decisions about how they present themselves based on the actual audiences they are communicating with in a given space and time (Vitak, 2012, p.452).

When the audience for a particular action is unknown, or not physically present, such as within social media settings, the "imagined audience" construct suggests that the "audience is often imagined and constructed by an individual in order to present themselves [and act] appropriately" (Marwick and boyd, 2011, p.115). Thus, the concept helps to elucidate the image or "conceptualization of the people with whom we are communicating", especially when the audience is unknown or not physically present (Litt, 2012, p.331; Litt and Hargittai, 2016). Such a process can be particularly complicated on social media as people's actions and the information they post are often highly visible and persistent, and can be seen, accessed, copied, archived, and distributed quickly to, and by, large (un)expected audiences (boyd, 2008, 2010; Dourish and Anderson, 2006; Litt and Hargittai, 2016; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

It is important to highlight that, within this thesis, the concept of "audience" or "imagined audience" differs from a "community of practice". As I discussed earlier, a community of practice refers to a group of people who share a common goal to learn about and sustain a specific practice through continuous engagement in related activities. An audience, however, refers to any spectators who observe the action, whether or not they are part of it or known to the individual or community, or share their common goals. An audience may consist of one's various known communities (e.g., family, friends, colleagues), but also of others who are not necessarily known, such as strangers, platform developers, hackers, and advertisers. Moreover, an audience does not have to share a common goal; rather, an audience may contain others with malicious/conflicting intentions towards an individual or group.

Another concept useful for this thesis is a parallel to the concept of context collapse, introduced by Brandtzaeg and Lüders (2018) in the form of "time collapse", which helps to explain how context collapse within social media contexts can include temporal boundaries. The concept of "time collapse"

specifically helps to explain "how context in social media may muddle the time boundary between past and present" (Brandtzaeg and Lüders, 2018, p.1). This extended theorisation of context collapse is useful for this study because it adds the time dimension to the overarching theoretical framework.

The concepts of imagined audience, context collapse, and time collapse are all useful additions to the overarching theoretical framework of the thesis, because they help to problematise and describe the *messiness*, rather than neat orderliness, of navigating boundaries between distinct times, contexts, communities of practice, and audiences (Davis and Jurgenson, 2014, p.478). These concepts, consistent with Davis and Jurgenson's (2014, p.478) argument, help us to move beyond "entire lines of theory [that] assume social actors hold many identities, with related networks, and that these identities and networks remain relatively separate from one another". The concepts are thus an important addition to the theoretical framework because they add a contemporary understanding enabling us to further unpack the complexities entailed in comprehending and engaging in complex information activities through social media. These concepts help to extend our comprehension of how people understand and navigate contemporary forms of overlapping contexts that extend beyond fixed geographical, or spatial, boundaries.

In summary, this study draws upon a sociocultural perspective of mediated action, incorporating concepts such as affordances, cognitive authority, situated learning, community of practice, communication privacy management, context collapse, and the imagined audience. Combining this perspective with these concepts enables us to focus on specific aspects related to the ways in which members' information activities are mediated within a specific SNS context.

4. Research methods

This chapter provides a detailed account of the methodological considerations and decision-making process involved in selecting a suitable research approach and design for the study. Each of the various steps, from site selection, through data collection, analysis, designing the articles, to presentation of the research findings, was carefully considered in order to effectively address the research focus and questions while considering potential ethical implications.

I begin the chapter by discussing the rationale behind the choice of a qualitative research methodology for this study. In the subsequent sections, I delve into the research process, covering the selection and demarcation of the research site, the methods employed for data construction and analysis, and the design of the research articles. I further reflect upon the ethical considerations that emerged throughout the research process and how they were addressed. Finally, I conclude the chapter by reflecting upon and addressing issues related to my positionality as a researcher and the generalisability of the research findings.

4.1 Interpretive qualitative research approach

This study seeks to provide an in-depth and contextual understanding of an everyday life information practice within a Facebook group by focusing on how members' engagement with information activities is mediated within the group.

To achieve this aim, I employed an interpretive qualitative research methodology, using in-depth interviews, as further explained in section 4.2.2. This choice of methodology is particularly well-suited to research of an exploratory nature (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The adoption of an interpretive research methodology entails an acknowledgement of the contextual realities that emerge in relation to a specific sociocultural phenomenon (Lloyd, 2021; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Stake, 2010). This research methodology aligns well

with the sociocultural approach adopted in this study, which is characterised by a nondualist ontology and a constructivist/collectivist epistemology, as discussed in further detail in Chapter 3.

The sociocultural perspective underscores the intricate interplay between people and tools that shapes activities within specific contexts (Wertsch, 1998a). It recognises that people's actions and understandings of the world emerge from interactions with both others and the tools available within a particular sociocultural context (see also Lloyd, 2021; Packer and Goicoechea, 2000; Thorne, 2005). This perspective thus highlights the need for a deeper analysis of various aspects shaping engagement in information activities.

Furthermore, qualitative research approaches are ideally suited to the study of complex and continuously evolving real-world phenomena such as the one explored in this study, because they enable the capturing of nuances, and the generation of rich insights (cf. Rubin and Rubin, 2012; Stake, 2010). In this study, my qualitative approach, consisting of in-depth interviews, enabled me to gain in-depth insights into how members use a private mothers' Facebook group and make sense of their engagement with information and other members within the group. From a sociocultural viewpoint, contextualising members' information activities by considering their interactions with others and with the available tools is vital within the specific group context.

The adoption of an interpretive qualitative methodology is thus appropriate for studying the use of SNSs, as it enables the prioritising of an in-depth exploration of why and how people account for their SNS use within a particular context. A qualitative methodology thus helps to avoid any decontextualisation of SNS use, by centring the analysis on the intricate relationship between users and their activities within the Facebook group (boyd and Crawford, 2012; Elish and boyd, 2018; Hine, 2015; Markham and Stavrova, 2016). By adopting this approach, an in-depth analysis becomes possible, generating insights into people's understandings and experiences in relation to themselves, other people, and their activities (Miller and Glassner, 2021). The qualitative methodology helped to expand the analytical focus beyond a user- or platform-centric investigation, as it allowed a thorough exploration of the

processes shaping members' information activities within the Facebook group (cf. Leonardi, 2017; Markham, 2016).

The selection of a qualitative interpretive research methodology was also suitable in light of recommendations by Leonardi (2017) and Markham (2016), as it effectively helped to account for and capture the interplay between the social and material aspects that shaped members' information activities within the group. This approach enabled the exploration and analysis of members' accounts of their information activities, considering the goals, the actual possibilities, and the challenges that participants described encountering when seeking and sharing information within the Facebook group (Leonardi, 2017; Markham, 2016).

To summarise, the adoption of an interpretive qualitative research methodology, coupled with a sociocultural perspective, provided the flexibility and adaptability required to thoroughly address the research problem at hand. This approach, in embracing an exploration of complexity, enabled me to uncover the intricate processes shaping engagement in information-seeking and sharing activities within a specific Facebook group context (i.e., a private Facebook group of foreign mothers who are located in Sweden).

4.2 A personal journey in the exploration of a potential research site

As I was embarking on this research project, I was also embarking on my own motherhood journey as a first-time mother. Facebook groups were important tools enabling me to join and follow communities who discussed various topics that were important in my everyday and professional life. As a member of these groups, the similarities and differences of being a group member that I observed over the years piqued my curiosity as a researcher. I have been a member of Facebook groups concerning various topics and interests, and noticed that, of these, the mothers' groups were the most active. It is not surprising then that prior research has discovered that parents, and especially mothers, are the most

active demographic group users of SNSs in general and of Facebook groups in particular (Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2015; Britton et al., 2019; Duggan et al., 2015; Lupton et al., 2016; Morris, 2014).

The use of online parenting groups, as discussed in the background chapter, seems to be a worldwide, still evolving, phenomenon with parents utilising various types of online groups to connect with peers who share their specific parenting experiences (Lupton et al., 2016; Xie et al., 2021). As an insider member and a researcher, I thus considered these groups to be interesting sites to explore for the topic of my PhD project, which concerns people's information activities and the ways in which these activities are mediated with and through SNSs. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 28) note: "sometimes the setting itself comes first – an opportunity arises to investigate an interesting situation or group of people; and foreshadowed problems spring from the nature of that setting".

Initially, I considered four mothers' Facebook groups that I had joined as potential research sites. (For an overview and comparison between these groups, see Table 2.) At that time, two of these Facebook groups were closed, and based in Sweden; one was large, with thousands of members, while the other was smaller, with 200 members. The other two groups were secret and were based in the UK and had 100 and 200 members respectively. A secret Facebook group is only visible to group members, it is not visible to non-members, and it cannot be located through search engines. A closed Facebook group is visible to non-members, which means that it can be located through Facebook's search feature, but a membership request must be sent and accepted for someone to gain permission to access the group and view its content. It is important to note that, up until late 2019, Facebook groups' privacy settings were either public, closed, or secret. However, because these privacy settings were confusing for both members and administrators, Facebook has changed the privacy settings of groups to simplify them by providing only two privacy options: public (visible and searchable by anyone), or private (private-visible; private-hidden) (Davis, 2019).

All four groups had parenting as their focal topic of discussion, but there were many differences between them. The membership within the Sweden-based groups was diverse, consisting of foreign mothers with children of any age residing in Sweden, but originating from various parts of the world. Access to the Sweden-based groups was thus very exclusive, limited to mothers-only who had migrated or were planning to migrate to Sweden. The Sweden-based groups' membership base was thus constantly changing and growing as mothers moved in or out of Sweden and joined or left the group. The larger group had migrated from an earlier online forum to Facebook groups.

The UK-based groups were more homogeneous, consisting of English mothers of children born in 2012, who mainly resided in different parts of the UK. Membership of the UK-based groups was more exclusive and fixed, consisting of those who were already members, with no new membership requests or invitations to the groups being allowed. In terms of my membership of these groups, when I approached them, I was a fairly well-established member of the UK groups, having been with them for a period of four years. However, I was a newcomer, of about seven months, in the Sweden-based groups prior to the data collection.

My experiences of these groups were thus very different. In contrast to the Sweden-based groups, in the UK groups members knew each single member, although not all members had met offline. I felt that the discussions and questions in the UK groups were very personal and intimate, while the discussions and questions in the Sweden-based groups were very pragmatic and formal. Given the different characteristics and the different 'feels' that I experienced as a member of these groups, my instinct as a researcher led me to believe that these groups might be interesting and potential research sites to conduct my study. Ideally, I hoped to explore at least two of these groups and investigate the similarities and differences between their cultures and members' information activities within them. Each of these groups was thus an interesting target and could possibly have been a distinctive and interesting research context.

4.2.1 Negotiation of access to potential research sites

As part of the planning, I designed a small pilot study consisting of an online questionnaire before embarking upon the main research project. My main aims when conducting this pilot study were to: 1) gain the groups' trust by making the study's aims clearer to potential participants; 2) gauge the groups' reactions and responsiveness to the research; 3) evaluate the research questions and identify topics to prioritise; and 4) gain a nuanced impression of members' information activities across various SNSs in general, and within the Facebook group in particular. I was inspired to use this method by Boellstorff et al. (2012, p.92), who advised this method to gain entry to the "field site, gain trust, and gather basic information [and] identify topics to prioritize." Thus, this questionnaire was not primarily aimed at producing data for analysis per se.

The questionnaire covered basic questions concerning demographics, general use of online and offline information sources, social media use, and general information activities within the groups. More specifically, the questionnaire covered questions about participants' membership of the respective Facebook groups (Groups I, II, III, and IV), namely: membership and group activities, group access and average use, their views on the group, the information they sought or did not seek in the group, the quality of information provided, and their goals for seeking or sharing information in the group. At the end of the questionnaire, participants could choose to provide their email address if they wished to participate in a follow-up study.

As all the groups considered were either secret (Groups I and II) or closed (Groups III and IV), based on my insider knowledge of the groups' implicit rules and norms, and before attempting to make any announcements about the study in these groups, I obtained the administrators' consent. I sent private Facebook messages to all the main administrators of the four groups (n=8) (see Appendix 1). Facebook messages were the only accessible method to reach and communicate with these administrators before posting about the study publicly in the groups. In these messages, I introduced myself as a member as well as a PhD student, and informed them about the aim of my research project and my

intentions when posting about my research in the groups. I specifically asked for their permission to post an announcement about the research and my desire to recruit participants from the groups. I extended my invitation to the admins, encouraging them to participate in the research. At this stage, none of the group administrators volunteered to participate. After deliberation among the administrators of the four groups, I was granted permission to post my announcement (see Appendix 2).

Subsequently, I posted about my research in each of the four groups. In the post, I introduced myself in my professional role/capacity and explained the aim of my research project. The post included a link to the questionnaire, which members could follow to participate in the research by answering it.

Thus, it was an open invitation to all group members to participate, and the sample that I aimed to achieve through this procedure was a matter of convenience sampling. This means that each member of the group had the choice of whether to participate or not. This self-selection is a known procedure in convenience sampling (see Farrokhi and Hamidabad, 2012) because it helps the researcher to find participants who have enough time and interest to participate in the research and do so voluntarily.

While I posted several reminders inviting more members to participate, the questionnaire achieved a very low response rate. It received only seven responses from the UK-based groups, and of those only five members provided their emails to participate in a follow-up interview. From the Sweden-based Facebook groups, the questionnaire received only 57 responses from both groups and of those only *eight* members volunteered to participate in an interview.

Following this, I contacted all members who had provided their emails in the questionnaire and sent each one an email containing an information sheet and a consent form providing more details about the research study, what her participation in the research might entail, her rights and obligations, and whom to contact should she need more information or clarification (see Appendices 5 and 6). This provided the participants with an additional opportunity to decide if they would still like to continue their participation in the research. I managed

to arrange interviews with all eight members who had initially volunteered to participate in a follow-up study from the Sweden-based groups.

Unfortunately, only one participant from the UK-based groups responded and agreed to participate in an interview. None of the other four members who had provided their emails responded to my private Facebook messages or to my emails. I took that as a hint that they were no longer interested in participating in the research; therefore I respected their decision, and no longer attempted to contact them. Consequently, I decided to exclude the UK-based Facebook groups as potential research sites due to the lack of response. I informed the member who had already agreed to do an interview about my decision, thanked her, and we cancelled our planned interview.

Table 2 Overview of prospective research sites

Facebook group	Type of group	Location	Group size	Focus	Group activity
Group I	Secret	UK	100+	UK mothers	Highly active/at least a few posts a day
Group II	Secret	UK	200+	UK mothers	Highly active/at least a few posts a day
Group III	Closed	Sweden-regional level	200+	Foreign mothers in Sweden	Irregular activities/1 post/month
Group IV	Closed (2014), secret (2017)	Sweden-national level	1780+ (2014) 4000+ (2017)	Foreign mothers in Sweden	Highly active/at least a few posts a day

4.2.2 Demarcation of the research site

As the UK-based Facebook groups were no longer considered as potential sites of interest, this led me to delimit the research site to the two Facebook groups based in Sweden (i.e., Groups III and IV). At this stage, the overarching research aim was to focus on the participants' information activities within these Facebook groups and situate them in relation to a broader ecosystem of online

and offline information sources in their everyday lives. While I was interviewing the members who had volunteered to participate, I simultaneously continued to recruit more participants by reposting the research invitation several times, inviting more members from both groups to participate in the research (see Appendix 4).

Early insights emerging from the first set of interviews with members from both groups (Groups III and IV) led me to further delimit the research focus as well as the site. On the one hand, the response rate to the questionnaire from Group III was considerably lower than the response I received from Group IV, with three and 54 responses received from each group respectively. Furthermore, the three members who volunteered for the interview from Group III were not very active in the group and seldom used it to seek or share information with others. Based on these interviews, combined with my observations of the group's activities, the group received weekly and monthly posts and updates from members about local offline activities and events. Members mainly used the group to broadcast about, and organise, local offline activities and events. My interviewees' information activities (e.g., information-seeking, searching) that we discussed thus took place outside the group, and not in or through the group.

Overall, Group IV was much more active and vibrant than Group III, and my interviews with members of Group IV also uncovered intriguing insights that I considered interesting for further in-depth exploration. This group (IV) was very active, with several daily information requests and discussions posted. The participants shared very interesting insights about their various information activities in relation to, and within, the Facebook group. For instance, members shared their insights and views about the information they and other members sought and shared in the group, the challenges and concerns they had about seeking and sharing information in the group, their views on the group, and their views about other information activities.

These insights were intriguing and encouraged me to focus on the shared information practice of Group IV, and on members' information activities within it, rather than focusing on their broad use of online (and offline)

information sources in their everyday lives. Such insights thus shaped my decision to demarcate the research site's boundaries by delimiting the research site to focus on Facebook Group IV. As a result, I decided to exclude Group III as a research site, as well as the two interviews I had carried out with the participants from that group, because they did not add insights into the new, shifted focus of the research.

4.3 The research site: Facebook Group IV

The research site for this thesis is a Facebook group of international mothers who are situated/based in Sweden. I have been a member of this group since early 2014, which is seven months before the data collection commenced. The group was created by one member in 2007, and she still administers the group, along with another three administrators. The group had around 1,500 members during the first phase of data collection in autumn 2014/spring 2015, and had grown massively to include 4,200 members around the time of the second phase of data collection (autumn 2017). Members of the group are all mothers and are of various backgrounds and nationalities. English is the official language of communication within the group, because it is the common language understood by all group members.

When this research project started, the group was closed, which meant that anyone could search, find, and locate it (e.g., through Facebook's search feature or through other search engines), read its description, and view its members list. However, the group's activities and content were only visible and accessible to group members. This meant that no one except members could access or view the content or the activities of the group. The group settings were changed to secret around the time of the second phase of data collection (late 2017). This means that the group cannot be found or located through search engines but can only be located and joined through membership invitations shared by current group members. That is to say that the group is hidden, and no one can find or view the group or its activities, except those who are already members.

Furthermore, group administrators must approve each individual membership request before a prospective member can access the group's information activities.

4.3.1 Criteria for selecting and recruiting participants

In addition to convenience sampling, as described earlier, I recruited more participants through snowball sampling (Patton, 2002). During the interviews, I asked informants for tips on whom it might be interesting and useful to interview. Participants thus suggested and invited other members to participate in the research. When I reposted invitations and reminders about the study to the group, some of my informants posted positive comments, encouraging and tagging other members to participate in the study. It should be noted, however, that while such an approach has provided a useful and a convenient way to recruit more participants, it posed ethical issues because those who recommended the study and commented on my posts were jeopardising their privacy by exposing their identities as research participants to other members of the group.

Furthermore, when I became solely interested in the dynamics that shape members' online information practices within Facebook groups, I narrowed down my focus to the participants' information activities within Group IV. Specifically, I became interested in the ways in which members engaged in information activities within the group (such as seeking, sharing, accessing, assessing, and using information) and the affordances of the group that enabled or constrained their engagement in these various activities.

Thus, the insights and reflections gained from the first set of interviews, along with the advantage of being an insider member of these groups, assisted me in teasing out what might be an interesting research focus and identifying important topics and themes to highlight. Most importantly, such insights enabled me to identify potential and specific members to recruit, which I did through purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002). As Pickard notes, such sampling takes an inductive approach that is well suited to a qualitative research

approach because the sample grows as the research progresses and it "maintains the emergent nature of research" (Pickard, 2013, p.64). Therefore, I conducted purposeful sampling based on the aim of the research and specific criteria that would help in answering the research questions (Bryman and Bell, 2015).

The participants recruited through purposeful sampling were selected based on the following criteria: their role in the group (e.g., administrative role) and their group membership experiences (e.g., long-established members, active members). One of the key advantages of purposeful sampling is its ability to allow the identification of "information-rich cases", facilitating a thorough understanding of issues crucial to the study's purpose (Patton, 2002, p.230). This involved, for instance, selecting and inviting members because they were identified as knowledgeable, long-established, or very active members through my observations of the group. Some members, identified as active members, were approached to participate in the research because they could provide insights into their information-seeking and sharing activities within the group. Others were approached because they had been identified as long-established members of the group or played a key role in managing it (e.g., the administrators).

Recruiting participants using this method proved fruitful, because it allowed me to learn about diverse issues of importance for this research, which it was not possible to learn about by limiting myself to participants who volunteered at the beginning. Thus, purposeful sampling was particularly useful because it allowed me to diversify the perspectives and experiences of being a member of the group and overcome the limitations of recruiting members through snowball and convenience sampling (Patton, 2002).

After potential participants were identified, I sent personal invitations inviting them to participate in the study. However, not all members who were invited through this sampling method agreed to participate. I concluded the first data collection in the spring of 2015, at the point when there were no further, or new, insights being added to the study through new interviews. As Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.203) suggest, "the criterion invoked to determine when to stop sampling is informational redundancy". I thus stopped recruiting more

participants when informational redundancy and a point of saturation had been reached (Silverman and Marvasti, 2008).

However, as I continued my analysis of the interviews for Article III, the important role of the group administrators in managing and moderating the group's activities emerged. This necessitated interviewing the administrators to gain further and more in-depth insights into the group's activities from their perspectives. Therefore, I contacted the administrative group (n=4) through private Facebook messages, inviting them to participate in an interview. In this message, I explained the purpose of the study and the interview and asked whether they would be interested in participating. Two of four group administrators replied to the invitation, but only one, who is the founder of the group, agreed to participate in an interview (see Appendix 3).

In total, 20 members of the Facebook group participated in this research, including one of the group's administrators. The participants' ages ranged from 25 to 45 years old and they had between one and three children each. The children's ages ranged from 0 up to 13 years old. Participants' time in Sweden ranged from eight months up to 20 years. Most participants were highly educated, holding a minimum of a bachelor's degree, and had diverse educational backgrounds. The participants came from 10 different countries.

4.3.2 Data construction through interviews

For this research, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured, qualitative interviews with 20 women who were recruited from the target Facebook group, 19 regular members and one group administrator. Qualitative interviews were particularly valuable for this type of study because they offered access to participants' accounts of their information activities within the group. These interviews serve as "evidence", shedding light on "what happens" within the group and how participants made sense of themselves and their experiences of relationships with others and the group (Miller and Glassner, 2021, p.52). The interviews enabled interviewees to share their experiences of being a member of the Facebook group and enabled me to gain in-depth insights and insider

knowledge about members' individual and group activities. Consequently, the interviews allowed me to learn through the participants' narratives and accounts of their activities about what was happening in the group (i.e., the group's activities). As Boellstorff and colleagues put it: "the meanings people give to their actions and the world around them form an essential component of understanding" (2012, pp.92–93).

In this sense, interviews were well suited to a sociocultural investigation because they can be seen as a site for reproducing knowledge in which the participants reconstruct and mediate their social worlds using words and language that reflect and mediate their experiences (cf. Wertsch, 1998a). Another major advantage of the interview is that it allowed me to move back and forth in time, asking questions and seeking details about different past events and activities taking place in the group, which enabled the interviewees to "reconstruct the past, interpret the present, and predict the future" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.273).

Interviews also served to provide access to those whose online activities may have been difficult to observe (e.g., non-active participants), and to provide access to norms, values, and interpretations that would have been difficult to access or obtain otherwise. The one-to-one interviews thus provided the participants with an opportunity to speak about topics they may not have felt comfortable discussing in the group or with other group members (cf. Boellstorff et al., 2012, p.95). For example, some insights that the participants shared with me were not necessarily discussed, shared, or made visible to other group members. These included: critical views of the group, their perceptions of and reflections upon other members' activities in the group, activities that they did not engage in, and also information or topics that they did not feel comfortable about sharing in the group. Hence, the interviews were instrumental for learning about various perspectives, group dynamics, implicit rules, and norms that may not always be visible within a group interaction (cf. Boellstorff et al., 2012, p.94). To sum up, interviews with members who had various experiences and roles allowed me to learn from their perspectives and accounts about their individual and group activities, and the ways in which they had navigated, both

individually and as a group, the opportunities and challenges of seeking and sharing information with others through the group.

In addition, observation as a data-construction method can also be used in the study of various practices, such as information practices (Limberg et al., 2013). Observing members' activities was therefore a method that I considered for this research to complement the individual interviews. For instance, during the interviews, I asked the participants for their permission to look at and observe their information activities in the group; for example, what kind of posts they make. Although I obtained their permission, several aspects made employing such a method unfeasible for this research project. On the one hand, while many of the participants I interviewed were invisibly active in following the group's activities, they did not engage regularly or visibly in those activities. Therefore, there was very little, or no, visible engagement by the participants to be observed within the group setting. In this case, interviews provided a better way to capture what was not being said or made visible within the group setting. But also, in a way, such an insight supports the findings from the individual interviews that most participants were hesitant about engaging in group activities due to the various concerns they had described during the interviews (e.g., information quality and credibility, conflicts, and privacy risks). On the other hand, employing such a method may have raised various ethical concerns, which I discuss further in the section on ethical considerations. In analysing the benefits to the scope of the research versus the risks of employing this method, I therefore decided against observation to collect data.

4.3.3 The interview process and interview guide

Because all the participants were mothers, lived in different parts of the country, and were either on parental leave or working, they were given the opportunity to schedule interview times that were most suitable for them (e.g., at night/after their children's bedtime, during lunch breaks, etc.). Thus, it was important to carry out the interviews using various means (e.g., face-to-face, Skype, FaceTime, phone, Facebook Messenger) that were convenient for both the

participants and myself. Although this constrained the times when we could meet, this flexibility allowed us to arrange times that suited them best. For example, I interviewed participants who felt more comfortable meeting face to face, I interviewed people at night, through a chat interview when they did not feel comfortable talking on the phone, and one participant was very generous in talking with me while she was on vacation abroad. These flexible approaches in terms of time and method of interviewing thus offered many advantages, but also some drawbacks (e.g., time lag, loss of connection, absence of body language and non-verbal cues). This may have hindered the development of rapport with the participants.

The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder and ranged in duration from 45 to 90 minutes. While most of the online interviews went smoothly, the chat interview was the most challenging to engage in and coordinate, and it was very time consuming, lasting for approximately 90 minutes. For instance, because it was asynchronous chat, the fast pace of the discussion in the interview meant that both the participant and I were lagging behind because we were both writing questions and answers at the same time.

I conducted the data collection in two phases. During the first phase, between the autumn of 2014 and spring of 2015, I recruited and interviewed 19 members of the Facebook group. During the second phase, in autumn 2017, I carried out an interview with one of the group's administrators.

The interviews were semi-structured, employing an interview guide that was designed before the interviews commenced to provide guidance and structure for the discussions. Initial questions were formulated based on a sociocultural perspective on information activities, taking into account the specific context in which they occur. The formulation of these questions, and the subsequent data analysis, were also informed by key concepts and models used to analyse how people interact with information. These included the ELIS model developed by Savolainen (1995), the information practices in everyday life model used by McKenzie (2003a), the integrated model of information-seeking and searching employed by Bates (2002), and information sharing as described by Talja and Hansen (2006).

The aim of the interview guide was to have some points of departure for discussion and to keep track of all the prominent issues that needed to be covered during the interviews. However, as this study is exploratory in nature, the questions were designed to be open-ended to give the interviewees the opportunity to elaborate and discuss different issues in greater depth, but also to bring in interesting insights, even if they were not covered in the questions. This meant that the questions were emergent and evolved with the interviews, with new questions added, removed, or more strongly highlighted. The interviewees were also asked prompt questions to encourage them to elaborate further on their answers (e.g.: What do you mean by this? Can you tell me more about this? Can you explain? Do you have an example of this?).

The questions that I asked the participants in the first set of interviews (see interview guide in Appendix 6) covered different issues in relation to their general social media use, the websites and platforms they mainly use, their activities across these sites, and the main sources they most often rely upon and consult for information. My initial focus was on their general information activities across the various online and offline sources they used to seek and find information in everyday life. I also asked specific questions about that Facebook group: the information they sought and shared (or not) in the group, the information they encountered in the group, their evaluation of information from the group that they used (or not). I employed the critical incident technique (Williamson, 1998) to help participants recall recent instances when they had asked for, shared, or encountered useful information in the group. Sometimes participants had also relied on searching through their previous information activities to retrieve previous instances when they had either asked questions or shared information with others in the group. I specifically encouraged the participants to describe and elaborate more upon these activities by asking prompt questions (such as: Can you tell me about a time where you have sought/shared information in the group? What was this information about? With whom did you share it? Who shared it? Did many people answer your question? Were their answers useful? Did you find the information you were looking for? Did you use the information? How and why was it (not) useful for

you?). This offered a good way to gain in-depth insights into the participants' reasoning and reflections upon information they found relevant or irrelevant for them in the group.

Initially, the interviews revealed a paradoxical and complex picture of members' information activities in relation to the group. Firstly, members exhibited a notably critical stance towards the group as a source of information. However, despite expressing concerns about the quality and credibility of information and advice shared in the group, they continued to be members. Furthermore, these interviews provided interesting, if self-contradictory, accounts. In certain situations, the participants distanced themselves from the group and other members, describing them as strangers. However, in other situations, they aligned themselves with fellow members and with the group, giving the impression of a tightly-knit support network.

These early insights piqued my curiosity, prompting a deeper exploration in an attempt to understand the reasons for this apparent contradiction. These insights facilitated reflecting upon and asking follow-up questions aimed at exploring the nuances of the participants' engagement within the group. Specifically, why were they members of the group, and how and for what purposes did they use it, especially given their opinion that the group and other members lacked credibility as sources of information?

Therefore, my exploration sought to address pivotal questions and insights: Why were they members of the group? If they maintained a certain distance from the group, why did they use it, and for what purposes? Why were they actively following and engaging with it? What kinds of information did they actually seek and share in the group? Additionally, when, and if, they did use information from the group, how did they assess which information was credible and which not?

These specific insights inspired the focus of Article I and Article II of this thesis. Taken together, these two articles contribute to an understanding of the above-listed questions by emphasising members' strategic engagement within the group to identify, access, and evaluate information that was relevant and useful to them. The data collection also coincided with a transformative period

within the group, between autumn 2014 and spring 2015. During this period, I witnessed firsthand several recurring conflicts and disagreements within the group that resulted in: 1) friction within the group, with some members creating their own private Facebook groups, and 2) threats to the stability and longevity of the group when its founder considered shutting it down (as discussed in Article III).

Subsequent interviews also revealed intriguing accounts of a mixture of tensions, conflicts, and contradictions of which I had been unaware and were not observable to me as a new member (of nine months at the time) and as a researcher. For instance, the participants had certain ideas about information and topics that they perceived to be inappropriate for seeking or sharing within the group. Most importantly, the participants also talked about appropriate and inappropriate ways of interacting within the group. These early insights thus inspired the focus for Article III and Article IV of the project.

The data construction and analysis were iterative, and insights from the initial interviews were used to refine the questions asked and topics covered in the subsequent interviews. For example, some participants brought up inappropriate topics and inappropriate ways of providing information within the group, which was not already covered in the initial questions. Consequently, this warranted a revision of the interview guide to include more questions about these issues in order to gain more insights into them. But it also helped in eliminating some questions that were found to be less important. For instance, I found that the participants' information activities through other online and offline information sources did not contribute to the focus of the research. Thus, as the interviews and participant recruitment processes progressed, the interviews became more tailored and more specific to the different dynamics within the group.

In addition, the interview questions posed to the administrator were more focused on the administrator's role of moderating and managing the group. For instance, the interview with the administrator (see Appendix 7) covered questions about the history, motivation, purpose, and vision behind her creation of the group; the admin's moderating role in the group; the group rules;

members' activities; and the topics that members were allowed or not allowed to discuss or share in the group. Thus, the interview questions with regular members and the administrator were aimed at understanding the different dynamics at play, given the various experiences and roles they had within the group.

4.3.4 Data analysis

4.3.4.1 Transcription and data analysis software

To prepare for data analysis, I transcribed the interviews verbatim, which was essential for maintaining the participants' voices and in order to "highlight nuances of a statement and facilitate communication of the meaning of the subject's stories to readers" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.186). The transcription process formed an important layer/level of analysis as it provided a "continuation of the interview conversations but with more emphasis and focus on the different possible and unfolding meanings" (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.193). I thus took extensive notes during this process as reflections and insights started to emerge.

After transcribing the interviews, I imported all the transcripts into Atlas.ti, a computer-aided qualitative data analysis software package, to facilitate and manage the data analysis process. Atlas.ti provided easy access to the transcripts during coding, which proved particularly useful for managing the analysis process by facilitating coding, grouping codes, adding notes and comments, and visualising the empirical material. The data analysis was both theoretically and empirically driven, and I used Atlas.ti to code the empirical material based on broader themes and predefined theoretical concepts (e.g., affordances, information activities, credibility assessments), and also the themes that emerged from the data.

I employed two main techniques to analyse the data: constant comparative analysis (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) and narrative analysis (Riessman, 2005). Constant comparative analysis was utilised to analyse the empirical material for

all four research articles (Articles I, II, III, and IV), whereas narrative analysis was employed for the analysis of the empirical material in Article III. The analytical techniques used in each article are summarised in Table 3, and detailed explanations of the specific steps conducted during the analyses of the data are presented in the appended articles.

4.3.4.2 Constant comparative analysis

In constant comparative analysis, one key principle of central importance is the concept of "comparison" (see Boeije, 2002; Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Boeije (2002) illustrates various types of comparison that can be conducted, which are contingent upon the type of study, the types of data source, and the empirical materials being analysed. In relevance to this study, two main levels or stages of comparison were undertaken: "comparisons within a single interview" and "comparisons between interviews" (Boeije, 2002, p.395). The former, emphasising comparisons within individual interviews, enabled an in-depth exploration of "similarities" and "differences" within each interview. The latter, involving comparisons across interviews, facilitated a broader understanding of similarities and differences across all the interviews, which enhanced the overall interpretive depth of the study (Boeije, 2002, p.395).

For instance, I started the analysis and coding of the data by carefully reading each individual transcript line by line to get a sense of the whole, while coding interesting paragraphs, sentences, lines, and words (Pickard, 2013, p.271). These codes were exploratory and descriptive, with the aim of describing what exactly was being said and what each chunk of data was about, which "encapsulates what is seen to be 'going on'" (Silver and Lewins, 2014, p.84).

Sometimes these codes were descriptive (e.g., what is this about, information sources consulted, types of information sought, shared, concealed, used, not used), while at other times the codes were more specifically informed by theoretical concepts or specific insights and themes developed from the previous stage of analysis (e.g., affordance of the group, credibility assessments, privacy concerns, or information activities such as seeking, sharing, or avoiding). At other times, a code would simply be a placeholder to indicate

something interesting to be followed up. Moreover, this stage also involved printing out the transcripts labelled with codes from Atlas.ti, reading it closely, labelling and coding it with a pen and a marker, and editing any changes made along the way in Atlas.ti's original code list. Therefore, I re-read each transcript multiple times to revisit and improve the code list before moving on to the next one. This resulted in a large number of codes, which described each chunk of data at both a general and very detailed (line-by-line) level. The aim of conducting internal comparisons within a single interview was to "develop categories and label them with the most appropriate codes" (Boeije, 2002, p. 395).

At the end of this stage, I summarised the most interesting issues and reflections upon the data into broad themes, focusing on key issues such as any opportunities or challenges discussed by the participant in relation to engaging in information activities within the group. The same procedure described above was applied to each single interview transcript, but also when comparing each transcript with the preceding ones.

Throughout this analytical process, I used Atlas.ti to group all the identified codes into a coding list. The organisation of codes into an Atlas.ti coding list helped in comparing the codes emerging from each individual transcript and allowed routine modifications to the list. An important focus during the coding process was directed towards being open to what was emerging from the data and to challenge any assumptions in order to allow the voices of the participants to guide the analysis and shed light upon their own lived experiences of the Facebook group's use.

As the data analysis progressed, the codes became more exhaustive. The code list I had generated from previous transcripts was available for subsequent transcripts, often echoing, extending, and/or adjusting the overall code list. By the time all the transcripts had been coded, important themes and patterns had started to emerge. At this stage, the analysis involved moving from the very specific to the abstract, from individual transcripts to broader understandings, with the aim of identifying patterns of similarities and differences across the participants' experiences and activities within the group. This stage of the analysis was focused on re-examining the codes created during the first stage

(Silver and Lewins, 2014; Pickard, 2013). My analytical focus, using the constant comparative techniques, concentrated on identifying patterns of similarity and difference between codes created during the initial coding stage, with the aim of relating and linking similar codes under the same category.

I eventually chose four of the most frequently recurring and key themes for further and deeper inspection to form a basic understanding of the phenomenon under study. Key themes that emerged during this stage of analysis included: affordances facilitating information-seeking and sharing activities, information credibility assessments, conflicts and (in)appropriate ways of engaging with the group, and information privacy concerns and management. Since this is a compilation thesis, each of these themes underwent a thorough examination in a separate but connected research study published as an article, and the primary analysis and findings are detailed in the four appended research articles. This allowed me to delve deeply into each theme, explore them more thoroughly, and effectively disseminate the research results. The analysis presented in each article was facilitated using different conceptual tools that were used as lenses and guiding frameworks during the analysis and coding of the data (see Chapter 3).

4.3.4.3 Narrative analysis

In Article III, alongside constant comparative analysis, I also employed the narrative analysis technique (Bamberg, 2012; Riessman, 2005). Narrative analysis, which can be employed in various ways, primarily focuses on analysing "narratives" or "stories" in order to "explore how people story their lives" and experiences and to position these stories within a larger whole or specific social and historical context of persons, organisations, or groups (Esin, Fathi, and Squire, 2014, p.203). Specifically, a narrative analyst seeks "to systematically relate the narrative means deployed for the function of laying out and making sense of particular kinds of, if not totally unique, experiences" (Bamberg, 2012, p.78).

The application of narrative analysis in this study aimed to capture a portion of the evolution of the group's information activities over time. This

involved analysing segments of the interviews that contained narratives or accounts from group members with diverse experiences at different points of time in the group of how things had changed over time. The goal was to weave together fragmented narratives from different interviews into a coherent whole, thereby narrating and reconstructing, based on the participants' accounts, how and why things had changed and evolved in the group over time. Narrative analysis was particularly useful to "interpret the past rather than reproduce it as it was" (Riessman, 2005, p.6). Riessman (2005, p.6) further explains that: "the 'truths' of narrative accounts are not in their faithful representations of a past world, but in the shifting connections they forge among past, present, and future".

To illustrate the evolution of the group's information activities over time, I focused on a recurring conflict within the group, which I had personally observed as an insider member. The goal of employing narrative analysis was to analyse how disruptive activities, such as fights and conflicts, could illustrate the processes through which members navigated, negotiated, and resolved conflicts within the group. More specifically, I aimed to explore how the group's information activities, norms, and rules changed over time.

I specifically chose to focus on "vaccination conflicts" for a close analysis and the development of a "storyline" due to the rich empirical material about various events that had influenced what information was allowed or not allowed to be shared on this topic in the group. Bamberg (2012, p.90) highlights that "stories, irrespective whether they are 'small' and short or whether they constitute a lengthy turn in the form of a full-blown life story, have antecedents and consequences in situations in which they emerge".

The vaccination conflict was an ongoing issue during the initial phase of data construction, and had been in progress even before I joined the group. The interview method facilitated the collection and discussion of rich narratives about past and unfolding events, the identification of potential informants (e.g., the administrators), and the gathering of rich insights into past and unfolding activities involving this conflict at different points in time and from different perspectives (e.g., administrator, long-established members, and those involved

in or witnessing the unfolding conflicts). This was crucial during the process of data analysis because it helped in reconstructing a "storyline" based on "many differently positioned" members within the group (Esin et al., 2014, p.203). By employing narrative analysis, my aim was to capture the sequence of events leading to the vaccination conflict and how it had evolved and shaped the group's information activities in the past (i.e., prior to the data construction), present (i.e., time of data construction between 2014 and 2015), and future (i.e., time of data construction in 2017). By weaving the participants' diverse accounts and their experiences into a "storyline", my focus remained on describing and narrating, through their accounts and narratives, "what has occurred; to lay out why things are the way they are or have become the way they are" within the group (Bamberg, 2012, p.77).

Table 1 An overview of the design of the four articles

Article	Focus	Research design	Sample	Analysis	Unit of Analysis	Author contributions
Article I (2020)	Affordances facilitating engagement in information activities	Qualitative in-depth interviews	Regular members (n=19) and administrator (n=1) of a private Facebook group of international mothers situated in Sweden.	Constant comparative analysis	Individual and group-level information activities (individual members, group)	AM is the sole author of this article and holds primary responsibility for all its parts.
Article II (2017)	Information credibility assessments	Qualitative in-depth interviews	Regular members (n=19) of a private Facebook group of international mothers situated in Sweden	Constant comparative analysis	Individual-level information activities (individual members)	AM designed the study, and carried out the data collection and the coding. She had primary responsibility for the analysis, to which HF contributed to discussions and direct input. AM wrote the first full drafts. HF revised the discussion and conclusions of the final version. Both co-authors read and approved the final version of the article. AM holds primary responsibility for the final content of the article. AM: 90%. HF: 10%.
Article III (2020)	Evolution, participation, and monitoring of the information practices of the group.	Qualitative in-depth interviews	Regular members (n=19) and administrator (n=1) of a private Facebook group of international mothers situated in Sweden	Constant comparative analysis and narrative analysis	Individual and group-level activities (individual members, group);	AM is the sole author of the article and holds primary responsibility for all its parts.
Article IV (2021)	Information disclosure and privacy concerns and management strategies.	Qualitative in-depth interviews	Regular members (n=19) and administrator (n=1) of a private Facebook group of international mothers situated in Sweden	Constant comparative analysis	Individual and group-level activities (Individual members, group)	AM designed the article, conducted background work, chose appropriate methods and theories, conducted the data collection and analysis, and wrote the first full drafts of the article. HF made some revisions to the discussion and conclusion. After review comments, AM refined the analysis. AM and HF then collaboratively revised the full text, with AM primarily working on the introduction, literature review, methods, discussion, and conclusion, and HF on findings and discussion. Both co-authors approved the final version of the article, but AM holds primary responsibility for its final content. AM: 85%. HF: 15%.

4.4 Ethical considerations and reflections

In this research, I observed the Swedish Research Council's (2017) and the Association of Internet Researchers Ethics Working Committee's recommendations for good research practice (Markham and Buchanan, 2012) in the planning, collection, analysis, storage, and dissemination of the research data. It is important to note that ethical considerations in this research were not a one-time or straightforward decision, but rather they were dealt with as a process that evolved alongside the research process and on a case-by-case basis as the project unfolded (see Markham and Buchanan, 2012). Firstly, ethical considerations as a 'process' rather than an end goal meant that any potential ethical issues predicted to arise in this research were dealt with in an iterative way, in the sense that they were constantly revised during the research process and as they emerged during the different phases of the research (e.g., research planning, data collection, analysis). Secondly, addressing ethical considerations on a case-by-case basis meant that they were dealt with as they emerged based on each, and every, individual case for each participant, issues that I describe further in this section. Three principal, correlated ethical principles have guided the research process, with the fundamental aim of protecting the participants and minimising the risk of causing harm, namely: informed consent, preventing harm, and privacy.

Informed consent was one of the first and most important ethical issue to be ensured when carrying out the research. As a first step, I sent an informed consent form along with an information sheet to each participant, in which I informed them about the research, whom to contact should they need more information or clarification, their rights as research participants, and how their data would be used and dealt with throughout the whole research process (see Appendix 5). I informed each participant that participation in the research was voluntary, that during the interviews they had the right to skip a question, refuse to answer a question, or to request termination of the interview at any point. The participants were also informed that I would audio-record the interviews to be used for transcription and analysis purposes. They were also

informed that the interview data and results of the research would be used in my thesis and for academic publications and presentations. To further ensure that the research participants were fully aware of what their participation in the research might entail, during each interview, I reiterated to each individual participant the aims of the research project and how the interview data would be used. I informed them that there would be no direct benefits for them in participating in the research, but that sharing their experiences would help to broaden our understanding of the ways in which people use SNSs for information, which may have both theoretical and practical implications. I also informed them that there were no foreseen potential risks associated with participating in the research, and I specifically advised them not to disclose any information about themselves or others (e.g., children) during the interviews that they did not wish to make public (i.e., in research publications or presentations).

Preventing harm is also a key ethical concern, which is directly connected to both informed consent and privacy (Hammersly and Atkinson, 2007; Sveningsson Elm, 2009). Preventing harm essentially means that, as a researcher, I have a moral obligation to prevent harm and any wrongdoing to the research participants so that they are not affected negatively by participating (Hair and Clark, 2007). Preventing harm can be achieved in various ways, but it can primarily be achieved through protecting the privacy and identity of the research participants. This is especially true in studying an online group, where participants' information and identities may be easily identifiable and traceable. Hence, such issues contributed to my decision not to employ direct observations as a data construction method, which I initially considered for this research project. On the one hand, quoting any of the information activities of participants who were visibly active in the group posed the risk that they may be easily identifiable by others, because it is easy to search the group and trace a particular quote or question to a particular member. Another risk was related to the fact that the group is a large private group and conducting observations in such a group might have disturbed members' activities, because members may not have felt safe if their information activities within the group were being

observed for research purposes. Furthermore, as this is a large private Facebook group, I needed to gain consent from all members, and this was neither feasible nor possible due to the group's size and because new members were constantly joining. Therefore, I assessed that employing such a method to observe the participants' engagement, or the group's activities, may inflict more harm than any anticipated benefits of the research could justify and I decided against employing such a data-collection method for this research.

Moreover, when analysing the data, it was also important to consider not only those who had consented to take part in the research, but also other members who had not consented to participate in the study. For instance, during the interviews, some participants shared quite harsh and critical views of some other members of the group, who could be easily identifiable within the group. This raised the issue of whether, as a researcher, I have the ethical obligation to prevent harm to others who had not consented to be part of the research. In such cases, I chose not to include quotations that may lead to causing harm to other members of the group.

Privacy is also another key ethical principle that should be ensured in research. Privacy is a notion that concerns research participants' integrity, and their right to self-determination to control what and how much they disclose, who knows, and what others know about them and what they have disclosed (Altman, 1975; Sveningsson Elm, 2009).

During the research, I employed several strategies to protect the participants' privacy and identities from being revealed to others in order to protect them from unanticipated harm. Firstly, no sensitive information was collected during this research and the participants were specifically advised not to disclose any information they considered private, whether about themselves or their children, which they may not wish to make public (e.g., in research publications and presentations). Some participants chose to reveal their identities by sharing in the group that they had been interviewed for the study. I offered all participants the opportunity to read and review the interview transcripts for data accuracy, and to add or delete any information they wished to include or withhold. This gave the participants the opportunity to add, edit,

or delete any information that they may (not) wish to see included in the final transcript. None of the participants accepted the offer to review the transcripts.

Secondly, I excluded details and events that risked making an individual participant identifiable. This was primarily done to protect the participants' identities from being revealed to others within the group, because it can be easy to link an individual member to a specific event or description. For instance, during the transcription stage, I removed from the data all information and personal details that might risk revealing participants' identities and pseudonymised them by replacing specific details with metadata (e.g., [city], [country of origin], [occupation], etc.). Thirdly, I assigned pseudonyms (P1–P19, Administrator) in the research publications to further conceal their identities and provide further privacy.

As an extra privacy and anonymity protection measure, I also randomly swapped the pseudonyms pertaining to each individual participant in each of the four research publications. This was done to make it more difficult to identify or track back a specific quotation to an individual participant across the different publications. To that end, I created a matrix to keep track and ensure that each participant was assigned a different unique pseudonym in each publication. Therefore, I use different pseudonyms for each individual participant, and thus it should not be possible to connect or track the same participant across the different research publications. It is important to note that, while I assigned a pseudonym to the group's administrator, it was not possible to completely conceal her identity, and other group members can still easily identify her. I informed her of this fact, she had no issues with it, and gave her consent for it. I offered her an additional opportunity to review and approve the interview transcripts and direct quotations that I intended to use in the research manuscripts before publishing them; however, she rejected both offers. I also offered the participants the opportunity to receive a copy of the research publications, and I shared a copy through an open access link either to the publication or through a PDF file with the participants who requested them.

Finally, in relation to the storage of the research data, I stored the data files in secure locations (e.g., a local hard drive on a computer, a memory stick) that

were encrypted and secured with a password in accordance with research storage rules at the University of Borås.

4.4.1 Positionality and reflections upon my role as a researcher

In undertaking this research, I appreciate my dual role during the empirical process of collecting data. Being a researcher carrying out research about how mothers seek and share information online (through the group) cannot be separated from the fact that I am also a mother seeking similar information to that sought by my own research participants. This is an intriguing situation for me, both personally and professionally, which makes it an opportunity to reflect upon my methodological choices and be transparent about them.

My insider status, as well as my role as a mother and a group member, facilitated my access to the research site and allowed me to recruit participants and carry out this study. My academic background may also have influenced the types of participants who were attracted to the research, with the majority who agreed to participate holding higher educational degrees. Due to their academic backgrounds, many participants were genuinely curious about the project and were willing to help a fellow researcher. One participant, who was also doing her PhD at the time, shared with me that she was aware of how challenging it can be to recruit research participants and thus had stepped in to help. Another participant held a master's degree in a similar topic and was personally interested to both learn about and understand her own experience as a social media user through the lens of my research. As the participants had background knowledge about the intricacies of doing research work, it was thus easy for me to explain the value of taking part in the project, what taking part in the research may entail, the research process, and how the data from the project would be used.

My role as a foreign mother in Sweden and a member of this group may also have contributed to the depth and breadth of details that the participants were willing to share with me. The benefits of having a shared identity with the participants, such as being a foreign mother and a member of the group,

provided a certain level of trust and openness; thus, they were more willing to participate and share their experiences and thoughts because there was an assumption of this shared experience/identity (cf. Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). The participants were curious to learn about my family life, my research, and my experiences as a mother and a member of the group, and I was happy to answer their questions. Having such two-way open conversations during the interviews was crucial for building rapport and trust (cf. Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Such openness and trust might have been difficult to achieve otherwise if I had been a complete outsider.

Hence, my insider-researcher status within the group enhanced the breadth and depth of understanding of the information practice in relation to a private and hidden Facebook group. In general, such groups can be difficult or even impossible for a researcher to access or gain trust if they are not a mother or a member of the group. A major consequence of this was developing a good level of familiarity with the research setting, which helped me to generate rich and detailed knowledge about the group (cf. Patton, 2015). However, despite the benefits of being a member of the group being studied, there were also some drawbacks. One of the main challenges of conducting this research was to understand the research setting as an insider but "still be able to describe it and its nuances to and for outsiders" (Patton, 2015, p.338).

Researching a familiar context or group of which one is a member might make it difficult to isolate one's own biases and interpretations from the actual phenomenon and how it is experienced by the participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.81). Being an insider member of the group I was studying involved the risk and challenge of disentangling myself from becoming too enmeshed in my own experience, and striving to look at the analysis from a wider or outsider perspective (cf. Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Such an awareness of potential personal biases, and acknowledging that my own interpretations and experiences within the group may not be the same as the participants' interpretations helped me when striving to "make the familiar strange" (boyd, 2009, p.29). It was thus important to have pre-planned, open-ended questions based on theoretical constructs as a first point of departure, while at the same

time allowing a certain degree of flexibility for the interview questions to evolve based on what was important to, and brought up by, the participants (cf. Patton, 2015). This allowed the participants to freely discuss their own experiences, meanings, and understandings of being a group member. For instance, I used insights and reflections formed during earlier interviews to reflect upon and reformulate the interview questions, recruit specific participants, and prioritise which topics to discuss in subsequent interviews. I encouraged the participants to talk and elaborate upon their own understandings of issues and events, rather than talking about them from my own experience. Furthermore, interviewing members of the same group also provided me with the opportunity to develop a wider understanding of what was going on based on members' various perspectives and situated experiences of being members of the group (cf. Patton, 2015). In addition, I also discussed emerging themes and results with the participants throughout the data construction, which provided an opportunity to enhance self-understanding and obtain the participants' validation and accounts of their own experiences (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.196).

It was thus crucial to remain reflexive throughout the data construction by constantly reflecting upon my own biases and trying not to project my perceptions onto the participants (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.81). In interpretive research, it is "impossible to remove all subjectivity from a qualitative study" (Pickard, 2013, p. 21). However, what is important is that I am conscious of my own subjectivity and possible biases, while attempting to minimise them.

In addition, sometimes while I was conducting both the interviews and my data analysis, I felt both an insider and an outsider. Therefore, my positionality in this research should be seen as neither a complete insider nor an outsider (cf. Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Instead, in this research I occupy a "third space, the space in between," which allows me to occupy the position of both insider and outsider (Dwyer and Buckle, 2009). Whereas I shared the same life experience and group membership as the participants, sometimes I shared their perspectives and opinions about the group and parenting, and at other times I did not. Furthermore, some participants had been members of the group for a

very long time, and I was a relative newcomer. Therefore, there was a great deal of back history and behind-the-scenes dynamics that I was unfamiliar with/unaware of, which made me feel like an outsider. Therefore, despite my commonality with the research participants, and being a member of the group, there were many differences in terms of our situated experiences within the group, our views on the group, our sociocultural backgrounds, languages, and parenting views and beliefs. This insider-outsider, or "third space", position may have both benefits and drawbacks. On the one hand, a benefit was the ability to adopt an outsider perspective, providing the necessary distance from which to view the participants' experiences, which were sometimes distinct from my own. On the other hand, occupying such an outsider position might have influenced and limited what the participants were willing to disclose to me.

4.4.2 Generalisability

One final methodological reflection I would like to discuss pertains to the issue of generalisability. As I mentioned earlier, this study follows a qualitative research approach, aiming to provide an in-depth understanding of engagement in an everyday life information practice within the context of a private Facebook group. The objective is to exemplify and situate SNS use within the context of this group and some members of the group whom I interviewed, rather than making claims that the findings could be generalised to other group members, groups, social media platforms, or different contexts of use.

Rather than generalising, the study aims to delve deeper into the participants' information activities within the group through a detailed analysis. By examining the actions and strategies adopted by the participants, I believe that this study can offer valuable insights into the processes shaping how and why these mothers engage in information activities within a specific social media context, and the affordances that enable or constrain such activities. The focus is on understanding the contextual nuances and specificities, rather than solely emphasising technical features or user characteristics (Leonardi, 2017).

This approach thus helps us to move beyond research approaches that tend to generalise or decontextualise social media use, overlooking the specific contexts of their use (for a discussion see Hine, 2015; Markham, 2016; Vitak, 2017).

By providing detailed and nuanced insights into the information activities of the group, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of members' information activities that could potentially be "theoretically generalizable" (Peräkylä, 2021). It emphasises the importance of considering the situated nature of social media use and the need to explore specific contexts in order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Instead of aiming for broad generalisations, this study aims to offer rich and contextually grounded insights that can enhance our knowledge about the nuanced ways in which social media is used within a specific context to interact with both information and others.

5. Summaries of research articles

In this chapter, I summarise the key theoretical concepts, methods, and main findings of each of the four research articles that form a central part of this thesis. These summaries will set the stage for a more detailed discussion in the next chapter. In this chapter, I also describe how these articles contribute to our understanding of the dynamics that emerge during engagement with the shared information practice developed within a Facebook group. This includes a discussion of the opportunities and challenges involved in engaging with information activities through the Facebook group, as well as the tools and strategies that members employed to mediate their engagement in these activities. Taken together, the contributions of these articles aim to fulfil the overarching goal of this thesis.

5.1 Affordances supporting mothers' engagement in information-related activities through Facebook groups

Article I focuses on the information activities that members engage in through a Facebook group, and the group's affordances that enable such engagement. The article aims to achieve a twofold goal: (1) to deepen our understanding of information activities enabled through a Facebook group, and (2) to describe the affordances that enable engagement with these activities. Although other articles included in this thesis (namely, Articles II and III) were written prior to this one, I have chosen to discuss and list this article first because it provides a foundation for describing various aspects related to engaging in information activities within the group. The article addresses two key questions: (1) How and why do foreign mothers engage in information-related activities through a Facebook group? (2) What affordances enable their engagement with information-related activities in the Facebook group, and how did these affordances facilitate that engagement?

The theoretical framework for this article includes LIS models of information-seeking and sharing (see e.g., Bates, 2002; McKenzie, 2003a; Savolainen, 1995, 2016; Talja and Hansen, 2006), along with a contemporary interpretation of the concept of affordance (e.g., Faraj and Azad, 2012; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). By doing so, Article I contributes with information and affordances perspectives on how SNS affordances facilitate and mediate engagement with information activities within an everyday life context.

The article draws upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews carried out between 2014 and 2017 with 20 members, including one group administrator, of a private Facebook group of foreign mothers situated in Sweden. The empirical material was analysed using a constant comparative technique, focusing on identifying the information-seeking and sharing activities that the participants engaged in through the group, and the various modes they employed during these activities, such as whether they were in a passive/active or directed/undirected mode. During the first iteration of this analysis, I identified the information activities of members, which I then interpreted through an affordance lens, placing emphasis on understanding the interplay between people and the Facebook group in enabling members' engagement with the identified information activities.

The main outcome of the data analysis for Article I was the identification of four central, interrelated information activities that members pursued through the group: posting (actively seeking information and advice from others), commenting (actively sharing information and connecting members to information resources), monitoring (passively observing and maintaining awareness of information through others' activities), and searching (actively locating and accessing information already available in previous group postings and conversations).

Article I also identifies the primary affordances in the group that facilitated and enabled members' engagement with these information activities. These affordances, which are further explained in Chapter 6, consist of visibility, accessibility, persistence, and associations, which are entwined in offering members opportunities to engage with both information and others through the

group. Some of these affordances relate to findings in the other articles. For instance, the affordance of associations offers members opportunities to draw inferences and cues from other members' activities, which allow them to learn about others' knowledge and expertise, their credibility (as in Article II), and the rules and norms of what constitute (in)appropriate methods and information to seek and share (as in Article III). Other instances that link the findings presented in Article I with the other articles include showing how members jointly helped each other to solve common problems and navigate daily life as foreign mothers in a new country. This finding, which is focused on how group members worked together towards achieving joint group goals (e.g., nurturing a supportive, friendly, and safe information space), was also supported in my analyses for Articles III and IV, to which I return in more detail later.

Other findings from Article I show that the Facebook group enabled members to engage in information activities in both visible and invisible modes contingent upon their goals; such as whether they had specific problems to solve, and whether they wanted to make their information or activities visible to, or invisible from, others. These findings led to, and were supported in, my analysis for two other Articles (III and IV), as described below.

By providing insights into (in)visible, passive, and active modes of engagement in information activities through SNSs, Article I contributes to the social media literature, which has often privileged the examination of more visible, and active, modes of engagement in SNS information activities (such as information-seeking or sharing) (see Ellison et al., 2018). Furthermore, employing in-depth qualitative interviewing, taking information activities as the main unit of analysis, and interpreting these activities through affordance and information lenses contributes to a contextual understanding of what, why, and how information activities were carried out through the Facebook group. More specifically, this perspective enables us to understand the reciprocal relationship between the participants' specific information goals when they engaged in various information activities, and the social and technical aspects of the Facebook group that created various opportunities for members to achieve their informational goals.

At a theoretical level, I argue in this article that the identified information activities were interrelated, and that they were enabled and sustained by the group and those who were actively engaged in seeking and sharing information with others. By conceptualising SNS-based information activities in this way, the main conclusion of Article I is that social media and information scholars should move beyond examining SNS-based information activities as isolated, individual, active, and visible activities. Instead, the article suggests that information activities (e.g., posting, commenting, monitoring, searching) should be examined as interrelated, and thus should not be examined independently or separately from each other, especially in highly visible and networked SNS environments. Thus, modes of both visible and invisible engagement with information should be considered in the study of information activities within Facebook groups. The study contributes to social media and LIS scholarship by conceptualising users' SNS-based information activities as both visible and invisible, as an extension of the active/passive and (un)directed modes of engagement identified in prior LIS literature (e.g., Bates, 2002; McKenzie, 2003a; Savolainen, 1995).

This study draws attention to the need for theories and methods that can help to improve our understanding of the information activities that are enabled by SNSs beyond an exclusive focus on a site's particular features, and beyond users' direct and individual information activities on that site. Instead, the study highlights the wide range of opportunities to interact with information and others facilitated through the social and technical arrangements of the group, which enabled members to instantly seek, share, monitor, search, and use information from others through the group. The article concludes by suggesting a need to understand the intertwined relationships between the various information activities that members engage in on the site when facilitating and preserving the group's current and future information activities.

5.2 Credibility assessments of everyday life information on Facebook

The focus of Article II is to understand people's views on, and the ways in which they assess, the credibility of information obtained and shared through a Facebook group. Due to the widespread use of Facebook (groups) as information resources within various aspects of daily life, Article II contributes to contemporary discussions on the ways in which people assess the credibility of everyday life information and advice shared in such groups. The aim of this article is to explore if, and if so why, Facebook group members (belonging to a mothers' group) perceived the group as containing credible information, and to describe the ways in which they assessed the credibility of the information provided within the group. To fulfil the aim of the research, the article addressed the following research questions: (1) What perceptions did the members of the Facebook group have of the group as a credible information source? (2) How did members of this Facebook group assess information credibility in the group and what cultural tools did they employ in this process?

The article adopts the sociocultural perspective of mediated action (Wertsch, 1998a) that is employed as an overarching perspective in this thesis (see Chapter 3), and the concept of cognitive authority (Wilson, 1983). Combining these concepts was particularly useful for developing an understanding of the various cultural tools, and cognitive authorities, that people rely upon to help them mediate their information credibility assessment activities within the group.

The article draws upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews carried out during 2014–2015 with 19 members of a private Facebook group for foreign mothers situated in Sweden. The empirical material was analysed using a constant comparative technique, with a specific focus on members' information credibility assessments. The analysis revealed a paradox between members' conceptualisations of the Facebook group as an information source and their actual use of the group. The article shows that the majority of those who were interviewed expressed concerns about the quality of information shared by

others, voicing a belief that the group was not a credible source from which to seek information and advice. Yet, they had continued to be part of the group, and many of them actively sought and shared information and advice with others. The article offers a few explanations for this paradox. Firstly, members of the group did not necessarily have a previous relationship and they did not know each other offline. This had created mistrust because the information was coming from strangers and it was challenging to verify or assess their identities or backgrounds, and hence their credibility.

Furthermore, members used the group to connect and socialise online with similar others in the local community who shared their common life experiences, and challenges, people with whom they would not have been able to connect otherwise. Hence, some members used the group to stay up to date and follow other conversations invisibly without necessarily seeking or sharing information with others. These findings are also supported in the analyses presented in Articles I and IV. Thus, staying up to date, socialisation, and entertainment were core incentives for using the Facebook group and connecting with others through it, rather than its perceived credibility.

Most importantly, the in-depth interviews and analysis presented in this article revealed that, when talking about information credibility, members distinguished between different types of topics and knowledge domains. Based on this, my co-author and I conceptualised these two primary knowledge domains as "professional knowledge" and "personal knowledge". We defined professional knowledge as "knowledge gained and transmitted predominantly in a person's or organization's professional capacity or as an extension of that capacity", whereas personal knowledge was used to refer to "knowledge gained through personal experience in a personal (rather than professional) capacity" (Mansour and Francke, 2017, n.p.). The major finding of this study was thus that the Facebook group was not considered a credible source to consult for information on topics/matters that require professional knowledge (e.g., health and medical conditions). Instead, group members turned to and consulted other, more traditional, sources that were considered more trustworthy for information on such topics. However, the Facebook group was considered a

suitable source to seek information in the domain of personal knowledge on matters where there was a lack of other credible sources to consult, or when information was difficult to locate or interpret through other sources. Primarily, other members' personal and specific local knowledge, gained through first-hand experiences in dealing with and navigating various local institutions, was highly valued by members (e.g., preschools, schools, housing, healthcare, health insurance systems, and (un)employment, etc.). These findings led to the design of Article I, in which I examined what information activities the participants engaged in to seek, share, and use information from the Facebook group, and how they helped each other to interpret information and solve common problems.

It is important to note that the personal knowledge or experiences shared by others in the group were not taken for granted or at face value when using information obtained from the group. Rather, drawing upon the sociocultural perspective of mediated action (Wertsch, 1998a), we identified several cultural tools that members adopted to facilitate their decisions and assessments of the credibility and trustworthiness of information shared by others in the group. Such intangible cultural tools included language use and writing style, expertise, life experience, educational background, and similar lifestyles and worldviews. Primarily, members adopted these tools in order to identify whom to trust or not trust as having cognitive authority, and thus as trustworthy sources of information. We found that, despite exposure to varying and wide-ranging ideas and opinions within the group, given that this is a diverse group, participants were more likely to trust information as credible and trustworthy if it was shared by others who had similar opinions, lifestyles, or worldviews. That is, if the information was intrinsically plausible and confirmed their prior opinions and beliefs (Wilson, 1983). Thus, we argue that a Facebook group is not always necessarily used to seek new information or perspectives; it is often the case that information is more likely to be trusted if it is reassuring, or shared by others who share or confirm one's prior beliefs. Finally, and consistently with previous work, my co-author and I note that previous experience and familiarity with a particular SNS platform is essential in providing members with skills that

can help them to assess the credibility of information and others, findings which are also supported in Articles I and III.

5.3 Shared information practices on Facebook

Article III focuses on the ways in which people navigate engagement with a complex everyday information practice online, by contributing with an information perspective on discussions around the formation and development of rules and norms shaping appropriate engagement with a practice. The aim of this article is to provide an in-depth understanding of the dynamics of an emergent shared information practice within the context of an international mothers' Facebook group, specifically by providing insight into how this specific online practice was developed, managed, and sustained by the group. The article addresses these questions: (1) What are the rules and norms that shape appropriate ways to seek and share information within a large multicultural mother's Facebook group? (2) How are these rules and norms formed, negotiated, reproduced, and enacted? (3) How do members manage the challenges of seeking and sharing information within the group?

The theoretical framing of this article consists of the notions of situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and the community of practice (Wenger, 1998) to analyse and conceptualise the ways in which group members, individually and as a group, engaged with, managed, and sustained the group as a collective information resource for its members.

The article draws upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews carried out between 2014 and 2017 with 20 members, including one group administrator, of a private Facebook group of foreign mothers situated in Sweden. The empirical material was analysed using constant comparative analysis combined with a narrative analysis. Primarily, through constant comparative analysis, I focused on accounts of both the implicit and explicit rules and norms that shaped appropriate and accepted ways of engaging in information activities within the group. Subsequently, narrative analysis was employed to capture how the

origins and formations of the group's shared online information practice, and the rules and norms shaping this practice, had evolved over time. Conflicts and disagreements, as disruptions to the group's regular information activities, were thus identified as a suitable focus for further in-depth analysis, because it enabled an exploration of how the rules of what is allowed or not allowed were established and enforced over time as an outcome of members' disruptive information activities (such as engaging in or initiating conflicts) (see Wenger, 1998).

Article III demonstrates the ways in which members of the group – individually and as a group – adopted, developed, navigated, and enforced rules and norms around appropriate ways to seek and share information and support with other group members. Such rules and norms, and their eventual enforcement, were found to be crucial in shaping and maintaining the shared online information practice of the group over time. The article's findings show that group members had to cope with their differences and, despite endorsing different, often polarising, views on parenting, as a group they had to find common ground to sustain the group as a collective information resource for the mutual benefit of its members.

In this article, I argue that group members worked towards cultivating a joint enterprise of polite, respectful, and responsible participation with an eye to maintaining the group as a friendly space to allow members to openly seek and share information and support on topics that could lead to conflict. However, the findings show that this was not necessarily the case, as the group later implemented explicit rules (communicated through a pinned post) banning members from discussing specific contentious topics (e.g., vaccinations), and members held implicit norms around how and what topics they deemed appropriate or not to seek and share information about in the group. These findings indicate that the community had developed and adopted group "shared repertoires" (Wenger, 1998), constituting a repository of communal resources (e.g., explicit rules, implicit norms, and shared understandings, among others) that defined sanctioned ways of engaging within the group. These communal resources contributed to sustaining the

community's shared online information practice and mediating members' information activities over time, as further discussed in Chapter 6.

Such appropriate participation was enacted by group members during their daily information activities by employing various strategies shaped by the group's rules and norms of what constituted appropriate ways of seeking and sharing information and advice with others. These included: (1) engaging carefully and cautiously when responding to posts and sharing information or opinions on topics one may disagree with; (2) avoiding sharing information or opinions on contentious topics; (3) concealing information from others by not seeking information predicted to trigger conflicts/arguments; (4) voluntarily leaving, or involuntarily being removed from, the group when a member was no longer able to follow or agree with the group rules. Furthermore, the administrators, with the help of group members, adopted administrative monitoring and moderating strategies to establish, manage, monitor, and enforce the rules and norms of the group in order to maintain the best interests of the online community.

It is argued in this article that there is a need to employ appropriate methods and theories that help in capturing both the implicit and explicit ways in which members learn, and negotiate, what is allowed or not allowed within a particular information practice, and how such negotiations (re)shape that practice over time, rather than solely examining these rules and practice at a single point in time. It is further argued that there is a need to employ theories that help us to understand the ways in which people individually and as groups form, manage, and participate in information activities within large and diverse groups.

At a practical level, Article III sheds light on the challenges involved in negotiating appropriate ways of engaging in information activities in an online group consisting of a large and heterogeneous group of people unknown to each other. At a methodological level, by employing in-depth, one-to-one interviews, and by combining constant comparative analysis and narrative analysis to examine the empirical material, the article contributes by providing in-depth insights into the processes shaping the development and evolution of the shared

information practice employed by this community from different perspectives and at different points in time. At a theoretical level, the article makes a contribution by employing the theories of situated learning and community of practice, which enabled the use of both the individual and the group as units of analysis, and to situate members' individual activities in relation to the group. Consequently, in this article, I argue that, although members of this group endorsed different, often polarising, individual parenting practices, they found sufficient common ground to maintain and sustain the group as an information space/resource that members continued to benefit from.

5.4 Collective privacy management practices

Information disclosure and privacy are key and pressing issues dominating contemporary discussions, especially in the context of SNSs and their social implications. However, there is still a limited understanding of how SNS users manage their information disclosures and privacy collectively (or in groups), rather than individually, on these sites.

The main aim of Article IV is thus to provide an in-depth analysis of information disclosure and privacy management carried out within a particular Facebook group. This includes focusing on the privacy risks that members associated with disclosing information within the group and the strategies they employed to navigate and manage those risks. The research questions addressed in this article are: (1) What, if any, privacy concerns do members of a private Facebook group perceive in disclosing information in the group? (2) How is privacy co-managed by members within a private Facebook group?

With an interest in how people manage and protect their informational privacy within Facebook groups, the article builds upon, and extends, prior literature on social media and the notion of Communication Privacy Management theory (CPM) (Petronio, 2002). The article draws upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews carried out between 2014 and 2017 with 20 members, including one group administrator, of a private Facebook group of foreign

mothers situated in Sweden. The empirical material was analysed using constant comparative analysis, focusing on participants' accounts of information disclosure and privacy risks and concerns within the group, and the ways in which they managed these concerns, both individually and as a group. It is important to note that this study specifically addresses the information disclosure and privacy issues that were found to be relevant and important to the group. Other privacy-related issues, such as those concerning Meta (formerly Facebook) as a company, or other advertisers and companies gaining access to group members' information, were not within the scope of this study's analysis.

It is argued that privacy management within group contexts is a complex collective process that is accomplished by means of coordination and collaboration among, and by, group members at various levels as they seek to manage various privacy boundaries within the group (e.g., group, intragroup, and individual/personal), as further described below.

One of the main arguments set out in this article is that privacy management should be viewed, and conceptualised, as a collective and collaborative effort, rather than merely an individual task. To address the two research questions posed in this article, the analysis firstly focused on identifying the privacy concerns that members raised at an individual level in relation to disclosing information, and the specific group dynamics that had previously shaped those concerns within the group. Secondly, the analysis focused on understanding how members, collaboratively and as a group, managed the concerns described, by examining the strategies they adopted to protect their own privacy, the privacy of others, and of the group.

Overall, contradicting prior work alluding to the safety of Facebook groups for discussing sensitive and stigmatising topics, the analysis reveals that most participants associated high risks/concerns with disclosing information in the Facebook group, despite it being a private and secret group. This is in part because members of the group were sharing their privacy boundaries with a large, continuously evolving, audience consisting of both known and unknown others who were potentially geographically co-located. This has implications

such as context collapse (i.e., the presence of (in)visible audiences from multiple contexts and social groups), time collapse (i.e., content can be viewed by both current and future audiences), and spatial collapse (i.e., content can be viewed by online audiences who could potentially also be co-located offline), which further complicated members' information disclosure and privacy management. Thus, members' information disclosure was potentially visible, accessible, and searchable by a large number of known and unknown, current and future audiences.

In this regard, the analysis revealed that members of the group collectively managed their privacy within the group on at least three levels: the group, intragroup, and personal levels. At a group level, members managed an exterior group privacy boundary between the group and outsiders, and an interior group boundary among members. This included employing interrelated strategies at both these levels to protect the privacy of the group from both the inside and the outside. Strategies employed at this level included: changing the group's privacy settings to private and hidden; setting very exclusive and invitation-only criteria for who was allowed into the group; extensive vetting of membership requests to ensure that those allowed in fit the set criteria; establishing explicit group privacy rules to protect members and the group; and enforcing the rules and removing members who violated them.

At an intragroup level, members worked collaboratively with one or a few other members to form and manage their privacy within the group. This involved employing strategies such as engaging in hidden information disclosure, whether this was by creating spinoff sub-groups with a few trusted and known others, or through private messages whereby a member engaged in one-on-one private conversations with other members. This also involved employing strategies such as anonymous information disclosure, in which group members asked anonymous questions publicly on behalf of other members to protect their identities. Meanwhile, at a personal level, members managed their privacy by only making public information disclosures that were appropriate for all potential audiences, and/or engaging in self-censorship

where they set as off-limits topics that they would not reveal to the group (e.g., custody or divorce battles, abuse, marital problems).

The argument here is that privacy management is extremely complicated within the context of large online groups where people communicate and share their privacy boundaries with a large, evolving, both known and unknown, potentially co-located audience. This raises new privacy concerns and challenges, because members must navigate not only collapsing contexts, but also contexts in which time and space also collapse. Such an understanding thus extends our understanding of privacy and how it is managed within large, networked groups, something that has been overlooked in previous social media research, which largely adopted an individualistic approach to privacy. At a practical level, the article suggests some design recommendations aimed at providing enhanced privacy controls in large and communal groups, in order to offer people more opportunities to access necessary information and support, while simultaneously controlling and limiting the visibility, accessibility, and flow of their information.

6. Discussion

In Chapter 6, I undertake an overarching discussion of the four research articles presented in Chapter 5. The study's discussion draws upon a sociocultural perspective of mediated action (Wertsch, 1998a). The thesis is based on a compilation of four published research articles that draw upon in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with 20 members of a foreign mothers' private Facebook group situated in Sweden. The study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of engagement in an everyday life information practice within the context of a Facebook group. The focus is on examining how members engage in information activities and how these engagements are mediated within the context of the Facebook group. The following research questions guided the work conducted for this study:

1. *What affordances does the Facebook group offer for engagement in information activities, and how?*
    - *How do the affordances of the Facebook group facilitate members' opportunities to engage in information activities?*
    - *How do the affordances of the Facebook group complicate or constrain members' opportunities to engage in information?*
2. *How is the Facebook group maintained as an environment for information activities, and how does the group navigate the opportunities and challenges presented within it, according to group members' accounts?*

The mediated action perspective, which is adopted in this study, highlights the relationship between people and the various tools they develop or adopt to achieve their goals within a sociocultural context, in this case the Facebook group. The current study underscores the intricate interplay between social and technical aspects of the group in shaping members' information activities within the specific sociocultural context where these activities take place (see also Wertsch, 1998b). It thus emphasises that members' activities and understandings of their participation in the group emerge from a mutual relationship between the people involved and the tools available in this evolving

information environment (see also Lloyd, 2021; Packer and Goicoechea, 2000; Thorne, 2005). Adopting such a perspective thus highlights the need for an in-depth analysis of various factors shaping people's engagement in information activities.

This chapter is divided into two main parts. In the first part, I begin by addressing the first research question and two sub-questions, focusing on the main affordances of the Facebook group in terms of the opportunities and challenges they present, as well as their role in facilitating or constraining participants' engagement in information activities. In the second part, I address the second research question by discussing the ways in which both the group and its members navigate and manage the opportunities and challenges offered by the group. I specifically explore the tools and strategies the group and its members have adopted and developed to mediate their engagement in information activities within the group.

6.1 What affordances does the Facebook group offer for engagement in information activities?

The primary focus of the first research question addressed in this thesis was to explore the affordances of the Facebook group and how they shape members' engagement in information activities. By utilising a relational affordances perspective, as proposed by Treem and Leonardi (2012) and Majchrzak et al. (2013), this study emphasises that the affordances of the Facebook group emerge as the result of an entwined relationship between members' activities and the tools and features of the Facebook group. This "entangled relationship" (Faraj and Azad, 2012) creates various possibilities for engagement in information activities within the context of the group. In line with this theoretical perspective, this thesis further emphasises that the affordances of the Facebook group offer possibilities for action which both enable and constrain members' engagement in information activities within the group.

Overall, the findings reveal that the Facebook group offers six key affordances: visibility, accessibility, persistence, associations, invisibility, and inaccessibility. The affordances of visibility, persistence, and associations were identified through examining previous studies of social media (e.g., Treem and Leonardi, 2012). The other three affordances (accessibility, invisibility, and inaccessibility) emerged as important and relevant to this group through an overall analysis of the research findings.

Visibility is a fundamental affordance, referring to the possibilities that enable members to instantly communicate with a large audience and make their information and activities highly visible (see also Treem and Leonardi, 2012). The instant and high visibility available through social media is a core and distinctive feature of these platforms, setting them apart from other and previous communication methods such as face-to-face interactions, emails, and discussion forums (for an in-depth analysis, refer to boyd, 2010; Treem and Leonardi, 2012; Treem et al., 2020). The affordance of *persistence* refers to the possibilities offered by the group that enable members to sustain, record, store, and permanently preserve their information and activities over time (see Article I; also Treem and Leonardi, 2012). The affordance of *associations* refers to the possibilities offered by the group that enable members to draw inferences and cues from their own and other members' activities (see Article I; also Treem and Leonardi (2012).

Accessibility is an affordance identified within the context of this study, referring to the possibilities offered by the instant and continuous visibility and persistence of information, as well as the knowledgeable and experienced members who share common life experiences through the group (Article I). *Invisibility* is another affordance identified within the context of this group, referring to the possibilities offered by the group to keep it hidden from outsiders and prevent them from locating or viewing it. It also involves possibilities offered for keeping members' activities hidden from other members within the group. *Inaccessibility* is another affordance identified within the context of this study, referring to the possibilities offered by the group to make

it challenging for outsiders to access the group, even after they have managed to locate it through private invitations shared by insider members.

In the following section, I present an overall theoretical development and elaboration of these six affordances by focusing on the role they play in offering possibilities that facilitate participants' engagement in information activities within the context of this group. In the subsequent section, I continue the discussion of these affordances by focusing on their paradoxical role in creating constraints that limit members' ability to engage in information activities.

6.1.1 How do the affordances of the Facebook group facilitate members' opportunities to engage in information activities?

The first part of the first research question of this thesis aims to explore the opportunities that the affordances of the group offer that facilitate and mediate members' engagement in information activities.

6.1.1.1 High visibility and accessibility of information activities

The affordance of visibility facilitates the forging of connections between group members who share a common life experience and face common challenges. Within the group, the affordance of visibility offers members various possibilities for action to communicate directly and instantly and engage in information activities that make them highly visible to other group members (as shown in Articles I and II). The affordance of visibility offers members various opportunities to directly and instantly post information, comment on each other's posts, and monitor the group to seek and share information and advice. The study suggests that the instant and high visibility of other group members and their information activities often encouraged the participants to actively post in order to seek information and advice from the group, especially on topics requiring immediate or personalised local knowledge and advice (Articles I and II). For instance, members actively sought information from the group when they needed to resolve specific life problems related to navigating local institutions or everyday life situations such as interpreting local rules and

regulations and finding local family activities and excursions. These findings are consistent with previous research (e.g., Bates, 2002; McKenzie, 2003a; Savolainen, 1995), which emphasises people's active engagement in information activities when they are faced with new situations or need to resolve a particular life problem, such as becoming pregnant with twins, or becoming unemployed.

The affordance of visibility also facilitates members' active and instant engagement with the group's information activities, including monitoring (i.e., utilising one's personal Newsfeed or the group's timeline to follow the group's activities) and commenting (i.e., utilising the comment feature to discuss or share information with others). These activities often take place synchronously within the group. The findings show that the participants valued the dynamic, synchronous, and active nature of the interactions and discussions taking place within the group, which often enabled instant and smooth engagement in diverse information activities (e.g., posting, commenting, and monitoring), as shown in Article I. They also particularly valued the ability to monitor and instantly access visible personalised information within the group, especially on specific topics that required local knowledge and expertise, which were made available through other members of the group. The findings presented in Articles I and II demonstrate that the group enabled members to directly seek and share personalised information and advice about local events, activities, or specific situations. For example, information to help with a specific issue such as filling in forms to apply for parental or sick leave, recommendations for local family-friendly restaurants, or evaluating potential local job prospects based on one's educational background and language skills, as evidenced in Articles I and II.

Members and the broader community played a central role in sharing, monitoring, and mediating local knowledge and first-hand experiences about specific local situations, thus contributing to members' situated learning (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Both Articles I and II report on how group members leveraged the affordance of visibility to provide access and enable the exchange of both personal knowledge (defined as "knowledge gained through personal experience in a personal, rather than professional, capacity" (Mansour and

Francke, 2017, n.p)) and, occasionally, professional knowledge (defined as "knowledge gained and transmitted in a person's […] professional capacity" (Mansour and Francke, 2017, n.p)). Within this community, this translates into enabling members to collaborate by helping each other to solve specific problems (e.g., choosing a day-care centre, communicating with local authorities) and navigating new everyday life situations in an unfamiliar society. Group participants were therefore motivated to monitor the group for several reasons, including staying up to date with relevant information, sharing information with others, learning from and about other members, ensuring that group members were following the group's rules, and avoiding making their information visible to others.

The affordance of visibility offered various possibilities, enabling the emergence of another important affordance; namely, accessibility. These affordances of visibility and accessibility are related in terms of offering possibilities for direct and accessible engagement in information activities within the group. Accessibility refers to the possibilities provided as a result of the instant and continuous visibility of information and others within the group (refer to Articles I and II for an in-depth discussion). These possibilities enable and facilitate accessibility to a heterogeneous community of mothers, who all share diverse but common life experiences and challenges. The affordance of accessibility can also be seen to offer possibilities for mothers to connect with others within the group, who share specific or similar lifestyles, parenting values, and cultural backgrounds, as discussed in Article II. This was observed in both Articles I and II because the high visibility of group activities facilitated instant and direct connections based on participants' preferences and needs, which enabled further access to information among diverse participants in the group. The results presented in Articles I–III particularly highlight several accounts of how participants directly connected with other mothers who had children in similar, older, or younger age groups, mothers who shared the same nationality, or those residing in specific cities and towns. More specifically, some members formed their own sub-communities to discuss private or specific topics, such as single parenting or investing in Sweden, or with those who

shared the same nationality or lived in the same geographical location, as demonstrated in Articles I, III, and IV.

In addition, the emergence of both visibility and accessibility can be explained from the perspective of relational affordances (Faraj and Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013; Mansour et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012). This perspective offers an opportunity to understand the entangled relationships between group members, their goals, and the Facebook group features and how they facilitate the emergence of these affordances. The findings of this study emphasise how the affordances of visibility and accessibility emerged and intertwined due to the entangled and dynamic relationship between members' goals of engaging in information activities (e.g., seeking and sharing or staying updated with information) and the features of Facebook groups (e.g., posting, commenting, the Group Wall). Furthermore, when interpreted through a community of practice lens (Wenger, 1998), the findings underscore the close relationship between the needs and goals of individual members and the broader community, which facilitated access to information and knowledge resources within the community. This, in turn, creates and supports opportunities for members to engage in other information activities, such as preserving the knowledge and information resources of the community over time. The affordances of visibility and accessibility thus create a context for the affordance of persistence, as further developed in the next subsection.

6.1.1.2 Persistence of information activities

The affordance of persistence refers to various possibilities for action offered by the group that enable members to sustain, store, access, record, and permanently preserve the group's information activities over time (see Article I, also Treem and Leonardi, 2012 for a discussion on persistence). Since all information activities within the Facebook group are recorded, and therefore persistent – unlike other platforms, which offer limited duration for a specific period of time (e.g., Snapchat, Instagram stories, and Facebook stories) – the affordance of persistence is both contingent upon, and plays a key role in, facilitating members' opportunities to maintain sustained visibility and

accessibility in relation to the group's information activities (as discussed in Article I). That is to say, the persistence of the group's information activities further facilitates and influences members' potential ongoing and asynchronous engagement in such activities within the group (e.g., posting, commenting, monitoring). For instance, without members' posts being recorded, other members would not have the opportunity to interact and engage with those activities, such as by adding comments.

The affordance of persistence also enables the group to record members' ongoing information activities over time by documenting and preserving the resources of knowledge and expertise embedded within members' information activities, turning them into group "shared repertoires" (Wenger, 1998). The findings of this study are consistent with previous research in this respect (Majchrzak et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012), which shows that the use of online discussion boards through enterprise social media within organisations facilitates the utilisation, codification, and preservation of employees' knowledge and expertise as crucial organisational assets and resources over time. In the context of the group studied here, the knowledge and expertise possessed by members in terms of raising a family and navigating various daily situations in Sweden as foreign mothers are key assets in everyday life. These assets have been steadily codified and preserved over time, making them accessible for use by both current and future members of the group. As these assets remain preserved in shared repertoires, they facilitate the continuity of the shared online information practice, as discussed in section 6.2.2. The group's information activities, characterised by persistence, visibility, and accessibility, allow members to engage in both passive and active asynchronous modes of information seeking, regardless of whether they have a specific problem to solve. An example of information seeking activities is searching and browsing through previous discussions to locate information or topics of interest that have been previously shared, thereby providing asynchronous and rapid access to information when needed. These activities are made possible in particular through monitoring the group's Timeline or using the search button to retrieve and access previous discussions. Group members are therefore able to monitor

the group and access information without direct or visible involvement in its activities (see Articles I, III, and IV).

Finally, the affordance of persistence enables the group to codify and document the once-implicit rules and transform them into more explicit, visible, and permanently available group-specific rules and guidelines. These are then communicated to both current and future group members through a pinned post at the top of the group's timeline, which enables those rules to persist. Interpreting these findings through a community-of-practice lens (Wenger, 1998), the study suggests that the pinned post containing specific group rules and regulations can be seen as part of the group's codified communal resources and repertoires (see section 6.2.2). The pinned post, as a codified group resource, is permanently visible and accessible, and it plays a key role in shaping the group's current and future information activities. This includes determining what information and topics are allowed or not allowed to be discussed or shared within and outside of the group, setting the tone for discussions, specifying how discussions should or should not take place, establishing criteria for adding members to the group, and more, as shown in Articles II, III, and IV.

6.1.1.3 Associations derived from information activities

The affordance of associations refers to the opportunities for action offered by the group that enable members to gather information, draw inferences, and gain cues from the activities of other members (see Article I; also Treem and Leonardi, 2012). The findings suggest that the high visibility of and accessibility to other members and the group's information activities, combined with sustained engagement in group activities over time, enable members to learn, and draw inferences and cues, from other members' activities, such as postings. Examples of these cues include personal identifying details such as names, profile pictures, occupations, locations, or places of origin, as demonstrated in Articles II and IV. For instance, group members reported that they regularly gathered information and learned about others in the group, including their perspectives, values, worldviews, educational and cultural backgrounds, writing styles, lifestyles, and professional and life experiences. This helped

members to establish and form new connections and relationships with previously unknown people, as well as assessing their credibility.

These findings align with previous research highlighting how people often draw upon any available details and cues when assessing the credibility of information from unfamiliar sources or strangers on social Q&A sites and anonymous discussion boards (e.g., Yahoo), as well as when reading user-generated recommendations and product reviews (Flanagin et al., 2014; Jeon and Rieh, 2014; Metzger et al., 2010). This study extends these findings by emphasising that such cues help in contextualising members' information activities through mutual and sustained engagement over time, and informing their decisions about whether or not to engage in these activities within the Facebook group. This aspect is further explored in section 6.1.2.2.

The affordance of associations also offers important opportunities for facilitating the sharing of knowledge and expertise among group members, often driven by imagined associations such as shared challenges, values, perspectives, nationalities, or lifestyles, as discussed in Articles I, II, and III. Members have the opportunity to establish instant and explicit connections with others who possess domain-specific knowledge or expertise within the group. This is primarily realised through direct tagging, which facilitates easy and instant access to perceived experts within the group. For instance, in Article I, the findings highlight instances where particular members were often tagged for their specific expertise as schoolteachers, their local knowledge about certain neighbourhoods, or their insights into working conditions in specific Swedish cities.

These findings can be interpreted in light of, and extend, the types of associations proposed by Treem, Leonardi, and colleagues (Leonardi, 2015; Treem and Leonardi, 2012; Treem et al., 2020). They argue that the high communication visibility within enterprise social media enables workers to make two main types of associations: associations between people and who they are connected with within an organisation (e.g., "*who knows whom*"), and associations between people and the information/content they post and the type of knowledge they possess (e.g., "*who knows what*"). In the context of the

mothers' Facebook group, members do not seem to leverage the affordance of association to learn or maintain awareness about who knows whom within the group. Instead, they are more concerned with members' connections outside the group (e.g., "*who knows whom*"), an association that it is challenging to make within this group context, as further discussed in Section 6.1.2.2. However, the group also enables members to make the second type of associations between people and the information they post, and the type of knowledge they possess within the group (e.g., "*who knows what*").

In addition, the findings reveal that, as most members are unknown to each other, the Facebook group enables members to establish a third type of association: understanding *who the person is* based on the information they disclose and post over time within the group. This new association type is referred to as "*who is who*", thereby extending the two types of association (i.e., "*who knows whom*," "*who knows what*") proposed by Treem, Leonardi, and colleagues (Leonardi, 2015; Treem and Leonardi, 2012; Treem et al., 2020).

6.1.1.4 Information and the group's invisibility and inaccessibility

Drawing upon the affordances presented in Article I and the research findings discussed above, in this thesis I propose the expansion of the affordances of SNSs in the context of a secret Facebook group to include two additional affordances: invisibility and inaccessibility.

The affordance of invisibility refers to possibilities offered to the group and its members to keep the group and members' activities hidden and invisible from outsiders. It also includes opportunities to keep certain activities invisible from fellow members of the group. Specifically, the Facebook group offers its members the option to set the group as "secret" and "hidden", making it invisible and inaccessible to non-members. Furthermore, the research findings show that the Facebook group allows participants to monitor and search the group's ongoing and previous activities to keep up-to-date or access relevant information without making themselves or their information activities visible to others in the group. Inaccessibility refers to the possibilities offered by the group to make it challenging for outsiders to access the group, even after they have

managed to locate the group through private invitations shared by insider members, as demonstrated in Articles III and IV. Invisibility and inaccessibility represent key affordances that allow this group to exert more control over who can see and access the group and its activities.

From this perspective, it can be argued that the Facebook group simultaneously offers members high visibility and accessibility to engage in various information activities while maintaining high levels of invisibility and inaccessibility to outsiders, who are unable to locate or view the group's activities. The affordances of invisibility and inaccessibility are also important in maintaining the privacy and credibility of the group by minimising the ability of outsiders to locate, access, or intrude upon the group, as evidenced in the analyses presented in Articles III and IV. Article IV further demonstrates that the group has gradually adjusted and tightened its privacy rules and controls to limit its visibility and accessibility to outsiders. This included changing the group's privacy settings to "secret" and implementing very stringent membership filtering criteria, such as being a foreign mother or mother-to-be who is living in, or planning to move to, Sweden. Membership is therefore restricted to a narrow group of individuals, with the goal of creating a "thick exterior privacy boundary" to maintain the group as a private and safe space for its members (Article IV, p. 16; see also Petronio, 2002).

This study therefore underscores the importance of considering the affordances of invisibility and inaccessibility in the context of private online groups, particularly in terms of how these affordances may enable members to exercise greater control over both their personal privacy and that of the group as a whole. This is in line with previous research, which has also established that private Facebook groups are widely popular, especially among stigmatised or marginalised communities. These groups offer members private and secret spaces to discuss sensitive topics they may not feel comfortable discussing with their close social networks such as family, friends, or colleagues (e.g., Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2016, 2015; Blackwell et al., 2016; Christensen et al., 2017; Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski, 2015; Yeshua-Katz and Hård af Segerstad, 2020).

It must be noted, however, that the mothers' Facebook group is not necessarily entirely private, as evidenced in Article IV. In this article, it is argued that, although the group may provide high invisibility and inaccessibility to outsiders, it still offers high visibility and accessibility within the group to insiders who may be known or who may leak information to outsiders, leading to many challenges and risks that may further complicate members' information activities, as discussed later, in section 6.1.2. Thus, the research findings contribute to previous literature on social media (e.g., Faraj and Azad, 2012; Treem and Leonardi, 2012) by highlighting the nuanced and diverse ways in which Facebook group affordances can be used by different groups.

6.1.2 How do the affordances of the Facebook group complicate or constrain members' opportunities to engage in information activities?

The second part of the first research question of this thesis aims to explore the challenges presented by the affordances of the group, which constrain and limit members' opportunities to effectively engage in information activities.

In the previous section, I discussed how the group affordances (namely (in)visibility, (in)accessibility, persistence, and associations) offer opportunities for members to connect, collaborate, and interact with information and other members sharing similar life situations. Group members engage in various information activities with the goal of seeking and sharing instant localised and personalised information and support resources. These information resources help members to navigate new aspects of their daily lives within an unfamiliar information environment (as described in section 6.1 and Article I). However, the findings indicate that these affordances play a dual and paradoxical role in providing both opportunities and challenges that simultaneously facilitate and constrain engagement in information activities within the Facebook group. This observation aligns with the relational affordance perspective employed in this thesis, which underscores the notion of affordance as simultaneously enabling and constraining possibilities for action (see also Faraj and Azad, 2012; Majchrzak et al., 2013; Mansour et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

The paradoxical role of affordances is manifested in the emergence of three key, complex phenomena that have affected how members manage and navigate information activities within the group. These include context collapse (i.e., the erosion of contextual boundaries between distinct contexts) (see Marwick and boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012), time collapse (i.e., the erosion of temporal boundaries between the past, present, and future) (Brandtzaeg and Lüders, 2018), and spatial collapse (i.e., the erosion of boundaries between distinct online and offline contexts) (discussed further in section 6.1.2.2. and Article IV). Each of these phenomena entail tensions and challenges that constrain the opportunities offered by the group affordances for engaging in information activities. The findings of this study indicate that, within the studied Facebook group, factors contributing to the collapse of contextual, temporal, and spatial boundaries are: the persistence of members' information activities over time; the instant visibility and accessibility of these activities to large, known, unknown, invisible, and future audiences; and the ability to link these activities to individual members (as evidenced in Articles II, III, and IV). This makes it complex for members to engage in information activities, requiring both members and the group to navigate conflicts and disagreements, assess information credibility, and manage privacy boundaries. Such complexity can be seen in various contexts, including other types of SNSs and traditional methods of communication, such as face-to-face interactions or email exchanges (for a comprehensive discussion refer to boyd, 2008; Brandtzaeg and Lüders, 2018; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Palen and Dourish, 2003; Treem and Leonardi, 2012; Vitak et al., 2015, 2012). However, it is argued in this thesis that the complexity associated with engaging in information activities becomes more prominent and explicit in the context of a large, diverse, and potentially co-located online Facebook group (see Articles III and IV).

6.1.2.1 The erosion of contextual boundaries

Facebook groups enable their members to connect and interact with a large, heterogeneous, and mostly unknown audience. However, while this opportunity offers members various benefits, it also faces them with several

tensions and challenges. In the context of SNSs, the first of these is often context collapse (see also Marwick & boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012). Context collapse is a sociotechnical dynamic that emerges as a result of "the flattening out of multiple distinct audiences in [the group], such that people from different contexts become a singular group of message recipient" (Vitak, 2012, p.541). Building upon, and expanding, the "imagined audience" framework proposed by Litt (2015), this study indicates that members of the mothers' Facebook group envision three primary and distinct audiences observing their information activities within the group: an abstract audience, a specific audience, and a future audience. For members, each of these audiences is associated with potential risks and concerns in terms of observing their information and interacting with their group activities. In this section, I focus on addressing the abstract audience, while in the next section I move on to specific and potential future audiences.

The first type of audience is vague, abstract, and unknown, consisting of members who are strangers and others who may have access to the group. Group members described several concerns related to this type of audience, including privacy concerns (explored in more detail in Article IV) as well as concerns over information quality and credibility, which limited their engagement with information activities. This aspect is discussed in both Articles II and III, where the participants reflected upon the difficulty they experienced in assessing the credibility of information and of other members. This difficulty often emerged due to the lack of quality controls on information and the absence of traditional cues within the group, such as details about their backgrounds, knowledge, skills, expertise, and affiliations, as demonstrated in Article II. People commonly employ such cues to make judgements about information credibility and the attribution of cognitive authority (for example see Rieh, 2018; Wilson, 1983). The fact that the audience in a Facebook group is largely made up of numerous unknown members holding diverse values and perspectives can also lead to concerns about the credibility of information and other members. Group members faced challenges in assessing the credibility of information shared by unknown others in the group, because it was challenging

to make decisions regarding what or whom to trust or believe as a "cognitive authority" (Wilson, 1983) who could potentially provide credible information and advice.

Furthermore, the challenge of communicating with a diverse and unknown audience made it difficult for my participants to tailor the information they posted to the group, as people from different backgrounds value different information as being credible. Without a clear understanding of their audience, group members were concerned about receiving or sharing information and advice that might conflict with their own or other members' values and beliefs. Within traditional face-to-face communication, individuals often tailor their actions based on the tone, attitudes, preferences, and expectations of actual small and explicit audiences that are often known and visible and with whom they are interacting (Litt and Hargittai, 2016). In contrast, within SNSs such as the studied Facebook group, members often lack these cues and information because they are mainly communicating with invisible or vague audiences (for a discussion, refer to boyd, 2008; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Litt, 2012; Vitak, 2012). This limits the opportunities for members to engage in information activities within the group because they lack the ability to distinguish their audience or the context of their activities. The wide and instant broadcasting of activities within the Facebook group increases the likelihood of context collapse and thus limits members' ability to tailor their information and activities to the group or select who can view, access, or comment on their posts.

In addition, the Facebook group was established by an individual member and is being jointly managed with three other members who act as administrators and moderators and maintain full technical control over the group and its activities. This includes making decisions about group membership, defining and establishing the group's nature and purpose (such as setting the group as public or private), and determining who is added to or removed from the group, among many other tasks and responsibilities. As a result, regular individual members have very limited technical control over the flow of their information or the general audience available within the group. Since members cannot control the visibility or accessibility of their information

activities within the group, they often tend to believe that their information activities are constantly being observed by, and visible to, a "massive audience" (Litt and Hargittai, 2016). Hence, context collapse is further complicated within the Facebook group as it connects a large number of members who are unknown to each other and come from multiple contexts with diverse and often conflicting practices, values, norms, nationalities, spoken languages, and backgrounds. The complexity arises from the collapse of this audience of diverse members and norms into a single online space, that is, the Facebook group (cf. Davis and Jurgenson, 2014; Marwick and boyd, 2011; Vitak, 2012).

This type of context collapse differs slightly from the types of context collapse examined in the studies by Marwick and boyd (2011), Vitak (2012), and Davis and Jurgenson (2014), in which people from different contexts of a person's life gained access to the same information. Within this Facebook group, context collapse occurs when members who are strangers with diverse backgrounds and values connect and interact within the same Facebook group. The findings show that such context collapse has resulted in a great sense of lack of control among group members since they are faced with challenges related to drawing boundaries and remaining aware of who is observing and interacting with their activities. It also makes it difficult for group members to tailor their information activities to meet the distinct expectations or needs of members from different communities and contexts. The lack of contextual awareness, together with a lack of physical and verbal cues, has often led to misinterpretations and misunderstandings, ultimately limiting participants' capacity to seek or share required information within the group.

The dynamic nature of interactions within the group, characterised by instant and rapid posting and commenting by many members, has often added further complexity. This aspect can potentially trigger a rapid escalation of discussions on polarising topics, which may eventually turn into large-scale conflicts with a surge of hostile, out-of-control comments (see Article III). The findings demonstrate that, in such a dynamic group setting, boundaries separating different subgroups are fluid and it is challenging to control or define them since all members share the same joint online discussion space (i.e.,

Facebook Group Timeline). This fluidity of contextual boundaries makes it challenging to manage this group, with its many members engaging in joint and fast-paced discussions, as discussed in Articles II, III, and IV.

An additional challenge described by group members is related to the risks arising from members, whose credibility cannot be assessed, sharing misleading or inaccurate information, whether intentionally or not. According to the participants, the sharing of inaccurate or misleading information was a frequent issue in the group, involving both mundane topics and more serious ones (e.g., health, diagnoses, vaccinations, medications), as evidenced in Articles II and III.

Hence, the lack of quality control over information shared within the group increases the challenges of assessing the expertise of others in the group. This has led to concerns about the credibility and reliability of both the information itself and its source, shifting the responsibility for establishing and assessing credibility to the group's administrators and individual members (see also Bawden and Robinson, 2022; Haider and Sundin, 2022; Savolainen, 2022). The study suggests that the increasing visibility, accessibility, and persistence of information within the group has at times posed challenges in terms of assessing information credibility. It has also often led to conflicts among members who adhered to different values and beliefs regarding what should be viewed and valued as credible.

6.1.2.2 The erosion of spatial and temporal boundaries

Although group members seem to predominantly be connecting and engaging with strangers through the online space of the Facebook group, they are potentially linked together, directly or indirectly, through offline geographical location and/or social networks. In particular, the participants associated risks with the potential presence of a second type of "specific audience" (Litt, 2015), consisting of individuals known to the member from their immediate social networks, such as friends, acquaintances, or colleagues. The potential presence of such audiences within the group, without members knowing, created a context for unexpected encounters in both online and offline settings. In particular, the possibility of participants' online information

activities within the group being observed by a specific audience, who could easily identify an individual member in their everyday life, had led to the emergence of "spatial collapse" as another potential tension identified within the study. As discussed in Article IV, the notion of spatial collapse entails the convergence of online and offline spaces, connecting individuals who share an offline location and physical proximity. In essence, spatial collapse refers to the blurring of spatial boundaries between online and offline contexts, stemming from the flattening and presence of multiple audiences from these distinct contexts within a single shared online space.

Overall, given that members' activities and information within the group are highly visible, since members' Facebook profiles are linked to these activities, overall, participants were reluctant to engage in information activities involving the disclosure of private information within the group that might potentially leak to their offline networks. The study indicates that the lack of control over boundaries, audiences, and flow of information shared within the group often leads to what can be described as "privacy turbulences" (Petronio, 2002). Privacy turbulences occurred in various forms, with one occurrence being the sharing of private information that inadvertently reached unexpected specific audiences within the group (e.g., family, friends, or colleagues), leading to concerns about potential loss of privacy. Privacy turbulences were not limited to individual members, but also threatened the collective privacy of the group. Instances where members' private information was leaked to outsiders (e.g., an employer, or employee), who were not allowed access to the group or its information, further exacerbated concerns about the privacy of both the group and individual members. The "permeable boundaries" within the group (Petronio, 2002; Petronio and Child, 2020), coupled with the lack of control over information flow and audience across time and space, have contributed to such recurring privacy turbulences and breaches.

Spatial collapse was particularly prone to occur not only among familiar acquaintances who shared the same physical locale, but also among unknown members who may later become known, or may turn out to be operating within the same social circle or residing within the same local neighbourhood or

community, such as neighbours, acquaintances, colleagues, or parents at the same daycare facility. This brings me to the third type of imagined audience, identified in Article IV and proposed as an extension of Litt's framework, involving future audiences. These were associated with potential future implications of past or current information activities within the group. These future audiences typically consisted of prospective members who may be added to the group later, as well as potential future employers, or the children of participants in the future.

Given that members' information and their activities are connected to their personal profiles and are automatically recorded within the group, they are often easily visible and accessible at any given time unless deliberately deleted or removed from view. The potential presence of future audiences accessing past or current information activities has given rise to a new potential tension, the complex dynamic of "time collapse". The notion of "time collapse" refers to "how context in social media may muddle the time boundary between past and present, which, in turn, can affect how users manage their identity and performance on social media" (Brandtzaeg and Lüders, 2018, p.1). In this study, participants contemplated potential unforeseen repercussions of their past and current information activities, expressing concerns about the possibility of privacy loss due to their activities being visible and accessible to future audiences.

6.2 How is the Facebook group maintained as an environment for information activities, and how does the group navigate the opportunities and challenges presented within it?

Overall, the study highlights that the mothers' Facebook group connects a large number of group members together, including people adhering to different values and belonging to different communities. This creates novel opportunities to engage in various information activities, while at the same time raising many

challenges and concerns (see section 6.1). In this section, I address in detail the second research question posed in the study, based on members' accounts of the ways in which the Facebook group is maintained as an environment for engaging in information activities. I also discuss the ways in which both members and the group navigate the opportunities and challenges that emerge during ongoing engagement in information activities within the group.

The findings indicate that, although group members belong to different communities of practice outside the group (cf. Wenger, 1998), their constant participation within the group has led over time to the formation of the group's own shared information practice, which is primarily maintained online, as discussed in Article III. This shared information practice is achieved through continuous and mutual engagement in the group's activities. That is, the Facebook group itself has evolved into a community of practice. The shared experience of being a foreign mother in Sweden is thus what has brought this particular community together and provides it with coherence and continuity (see Wenger, 1998, Articles III and IV, and Chapter 3). In particular, three interrelated elements have helped me to describe how the shared information practice is nurtured, developed, and sustained by this community over time; namely, a joint enterprise, mutual engagement, and shared repertoires of communal resources (Wenger, 1998). In Article III, I discuss these elements, focusing on how they enable the group to sustain its activities and handle recurring conflicts and disagreements. In the following sections, I try to offer a further theoretical development and elaboration of these elements in relation to tensions, including credibility and privacy (discussed in further details in sections 6.2.4 and 6.2.5 and in Articles II and IV).

6.2.1 Negotiating and adopting shared goals

A joint enterprise is the first building block that was used to maintain a shared information practice within this community (Article III). A joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998) refers to the mutually agreed upon shared consensus and mutual agreement concerning essential and collective goals that this particular

community of practice aspires to accomplish as a group. Drawing insights from the empirical material as a whole, I was able to identify four core, interconnected common goals which are vital to this community.

A primary and core goal of this community, which permeated the creation of the Facebook group, is to serve as an information space connecting mothers who face common challenges while living in a foreign country, enabling them to seek and share information and advice from each other. Related to this goal is the cultivation of an atmosphere characterised by friendliness, respect, and constructive engagement, wherein group members can openly seek and share information and advice, irrespective of their parenting or cultural differences (as evidenced in Article III). A third goal embraced by the community is safeguarding privacy, both within the confines of the group and beyond (Article IV). Lastly, a fourth essential goal for this community is that the information shared in the group should be credible and of good quality (Articles II and III).

This study suggests that mutual engagement (Wenger, 1998) and participation in the group's information activities by members, including the challenges and disruptions they encountered along the way (such as the conflicts and disagreements discussed in Article III, and privacy turbulences in Article IV), has helped to shape and manage the boundaries of the shared everyday life information of the group (see also Petroni, 2002). An examination of the empirical material revealed that active participation, particularly by members who are directly engaged in the group's activities, has played a fundamental role in shaping the shared goals of the group. For instance, in Article III, it is shown that, alongside the initial establishment of the group, the admins formulated a set of rules and norms which serve as a common boundary for all members of the group. These rules and norms also evolved to address recurring conflicts and continue to adapt to emerging group activities. Similarly, Article IV illustrates the introduction of new privacy rules to handle situations in which some group members engaged in privacy-invading activities by sharing members' private information with others outside the group.

Hence, these findings suggest that the shaping process has occurred gradually over time, leading to the establishment of the group's shared

repertoire of resources. The current study thus underscores the dynamic interplay between mutual engagement and negotiation (as depicted by Petronio, 2002; Wenger, 1998), as those actively involved contribute to the shaping of the group's collective goals as valuable resources. Over time, a shared repertoire of resources (e.g., rules, norms, personalised and localised first-hand experiences, etc.), has emerged as an essential element of the community's shared online information practice. Further details about this shared repertoire are discussed in the next section.

Furthermore, aligned with the sociocultural perspective adopted in this study, and building upon earlier research (Lloyd, 2021; Lundh, 2011; Pilerot, 2014b; Talja et al., 2005), the findings also emphasise that participants' engagement in the group's information activities and their understanding of these activities do not occur in isolation. Instead, they are intricately enmeshed with the continuously evolving context of the group and the frequent interactions among group members. This complex interplay underscores how the group's shared repertoires, a collection of tools cultivated within the specific context of the group, shape and guide the participants' understanding and activities within the group.

In the next section, utilising a sociocultural lens of mediated action (Wertsch, 1998a), I explore the situated and specific ways in which the group's shared repertories of resources have been adopted, developed, and utilised in practice. The discussion highlights how these resources and tools function to mediate members' information activities, impacting upon individual, interpersonal, and collective levels of engagement.

6.2.2 Maintaining and sustaining shared group repertoires

This study, influenced by a sociocultural perspective of mediated action (Wertsch, 1998a), emphasises the crucial role of various tools, both tangible and intangible, in mediating members' information activities in search of personal and collective goals. The findings indicate that the members have developed and adopted "shared repertoires" within the community (Wenger, 1998),

constituting a repository of tools and communal resources that sustains the community's shared online information practice and mediates members' engagement in its daily information activities over time. This repertoire encompasses rules, norms, information resources related to personalised and localised first-hand experiences, advice, stories, routines, and common ways of carrying out activities and addressing recurring problems and dilemmas. The rules and regulations formulated by the group constitute a prime example of the tools used to maintain the shared information practice among group members. These rules and norms specify implicit and explicit values, regulations, and guidelines that regulate members' engagement in the group's everyday practice and its various information activities (cf. Bicchieri, 2006). Facebook groups offer features for group administrators to establish and communicate such rules and norms, making them visible and accessible for all group members to follow. As discussed in Articles III and IV, the admins use a pinned post to stress the rules and provide a constant reminder to all group members as they seek and share information with each other. These rules not only facilitate sustained engagement in information activities, but also help in resolving conflicts, attaining the group's shared goals, nurturing a common understanding, and regulating interactions among group members extending beyond individual members' goals.

There are two types of rules regulating group activities: out-group and in-group rules. Out-group rules refer to instructions and guidelines that regulate the boundaries between those inside and outside the group. For example, there are rules regulating the sharing of group information or inviting and accepting new members, as discussed in Article IV. In contrast, in-group rules focus on regulating the interactions and engagements among members within the group. These include rules about the tone of discussion, the types of information shared, and members' mutual responsibilities towards each other and to the group, as discussed in Articles III and IV.

The findings suggest that negotiating, establishing, and understanding such rules is critical in order for group members to manage, navigate, and participate effectively in the group's information activities. By recognising the

significance of these implicit and explicit rules, group members are better able to manage their participation and promote constructive and safe group discussions among members. The findings further show that the rules and norms shaping and regulating engagement in information activities within the context of the group are the result of a continuous and a mutually negotiated process that evolved over time (as discussed in more detail in Articles I, III, and IV). Consistent with previous literature on how rules and norms shape social media use (e.g., Wagner, 2018; Zillich and Müller, 2019), this study emphasises the importance of considering the role of rules and norms and the ways in which they have shaped members' interactions with information and with others in the Facebook group.

The current findings are also consistent with findings by McLaughlin and Vitak (2012) and Uski and Lampinen (2016), that the rules and norms shaping engagement on SNSs are not static but rather evolve over time. This study further extends this argument, which primarily focuses on self-presentation, by showing that rules and norms continue to be individually and collectively negotiated in order to achieve both personal and collective goals within the context of a large online group. In interpreting the findings through a mediated action perspective (Wertsch, 1998a) and an interrelational perspective of affordance (Majchrzak et al., 2013; Treem and Leonardi, 2012), the results underscore the entangled relationship between the goals of group members and the tools (e.g., norms, rules, group features) adopted or developed to mediate members' information activities to achieve specific goals. This relationship was found to be essential in offering possibilities that both enable and constrain engagement in information activities within the group.

Facebook, as a technical platform, has facilitated the realisation of group goals by providing and furnishing the necessary technical tools to create, safeguard, and maintain the online space (i.e., the Facebook group). For example, group members use a variety of Facebook tools, including pinned posts, groups and personal newsfeeds, public and anonymous posts, comments, search, browse, report, delete, private messaging, spin-off subgroups, group settings, and membership control features. These tools are used to facilitate

members' engagement in several everyday information activities such as posting, commenting, monitoring, searching, evaluating, removing, and hiding information. In doing so, members have been able to establish a community within this online space by nurturing connections and interactions among the participant mothers, who share mutual life experiences and concerns. The role of mediators of action (Wertsch, 1998a), such as the group founder and its administrators, also appears to have been central in establishing and managing the group's "shared repertories" (Wenger, 1998). In particular, they have contributed to establishing a sense of community by implementing group-specific values and rules, and managing, controlling, and safeguarding group activities on behalf of its members, as discussed in Articles III and IV.

6.2.3 Mutuality of responsibility

As discussed above while explaining shared repertoires, the group has developed and produced a range of explicit rules and implicit norms that regulate (in)appropriate engagement in information activities and mutual responsibility among its members, as evidenced in Articles I, III, and IV. These rules and norms include mutual norms of reciprocity, mutual respect, and politeness, and mutual protection of group privacy and others.

Firstly, the findings in the first article, for instance, show how implicit norms of reciprocity play an important role in shaping members' information seeking and sharing activities in the group. Norms of reciprocity are used to describe the implicit rules and expectations that group members hold about their own responsibilities, as well as those of other group members. These responsibilities involve contributing to the group by supporting other members and sharing information and information resources that might be useful for the group. The participants expected that other group members would respond to their questions and provide them with relevant and timely advice. They also described a sense of responsibility to reciprocate others' help and support by actively giving back to the group and its members.

Secondly, mutual rules of respect describe the implicit and explicit expectations held by group members about (in)appropriate ways of seeking and sharing information and advice, especially about conflicting or private topics, in order to maintain the group as a constructive, supportive, and safe place for all members. The findings presented in Articles III and IV suggest that the group has adopted, and explicitly enforces, a mutual understanding of responsibility in terms of being supportive, friendly, and respectful of other members' rights to safely seek and share information about topics that might be private or in conflict with one's own.

Mutual responsibility also entails the adoption, enactment, and enforcement of collective rules and norms by the group in order to maintain and sustain its collective information practice (cf. Petronio, 2002; Wenger, 1998). These include employing strategic methods to seek and share information with others; methods that take into consideration the explicit or dominant norms of the group, which are described in detail in Article III. These include: 1) engaging with caution in the discussion of potentially contentious topics; 2) avoiding engaging in ongoing discussions about controversial topics; 3) concealing information about one's own potentially conflicting practices in order not to provoke conflicts; and 4) leaving the group if a member can longer cope with, or follow, the group's rules. Similarly, mutual responsibility also involves collectively working together to maintain the privacy of the group and its members, which is described in detail in Article IV. This responsibility includes employing strategies such as: 1) changing the group's privacy settings; 2) allowing and inviting only members who belong/fit the group identity; 3) reporting and removing members who violate the group's rules and norms; 4) helping members gain access to necessary information and support resources anonymously and privately; 5) verifying prospective members' identities; and 6) not leaking or sharing information from the group with outsiders. These are discussed in Articles III and IV.

In the following sections, I provide a more detailed discussion of how mutual responsibility, guided by individual and collective goals, has shaped the activities of the group and its members, ultimately leading them towards

achieving their respective goals. The focus of the discussion is on two primary goals: ensuring and assessing credibility, and managing information privacy within the group.

6.2.4 Assessing and moderating information credibility and conflicts

The study revealed that members have adopted and developed various tools to assess and regulate the credibility of information sought and shared within the group. These tools include implicit and explicit rules and norms about what types of information should, or should not, be sought and shared within the group.

An interesting observation from the study is that most of the participants considered the Facebook group an inappropriate place to seek or share information and advice on topics that require professional knowledge and expertise. The study shows that the participants made their credibility assessment of information and information sources in relation to two main domains of knowledge: knowledge gained through a professional capacity, education, or training; and knowledge gained through first-hand experience in a personal capacity (as detailed in Article II). The study participants explained that they relied on what they considered to be formal and established cognitive authorities, often consulted outside of the group, to mediate information and knowledge for them, and to assess the credibility of knowledge claims on topics requiring professional knowledge and expertise. For example, Articles II and III discuss findings showing that cognitive authorities (Wilson, 1983), such as those with formal and professional bodies of knowledge (e.g., official and scientific information sources), were particularly highly valued by most participants as trusted information sources on topics such as health, medication, vaccination, and well-being. These findings are consistent with previous work focusing on formal workplace and educational contexts that value professional knowledge and expertise (Andersson, 2021; Francke and Sundin, 2012; Francke et al., 2011; Gärdén et al., 2014; Lloyd, 2012, 2014; Lundh, 2011; Pilerot, 2014a).

The study also highlights the crucial role played by "ongoing engagement" (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998) in the group's information activities in shaping members' assessments of information credibility over time. The findings reported in Articles I, II, and III demonstrate that continued engagement in the group's daily activities, which is facilitated through the high visibility of members' activities in the group (e.g., Newsfeed, Wall), enabled the participants to stay continuously updated with group activities, and familiarise themselves with the group, and with each other. Through this process, they gained group-specific "situated knowledge" (Lave and Wenger, 1991) and expertise that assisted them in evaluating the credibility of both information and other group members, as discussed in Articles I, II, and III. This ongoing engagement shows that participants monitored the group and gathered situated knowledge and cues about other, unknown, members, such as their language use, writing style, expertise, life experience, lifestyles, parenting values, and worldviews (as evidenced in Articles II and III). Consistent with the notion of "intrinsic plausibility" (Wilson, 1983) and with previous research (Metzger et al., 2010; Savolainen, 2021), this study highlights that participants often tended to selectively choose and trust only information shared by members with similar values and worldviews. Article II demonstrates that members relied on these cues as tools when considering what could be considered "intrinsically plausible" (Wilson, 1983) when assessing the credibility of information and others in the group. Information shared by other members which aligned with the participants' own values and beliefs were considered the most reliable sources of information and advice within the group, and were thus assessed to be highly credible. Information that did not align with someone's own values or belief was considered the least worthy, and hence not credible (Article II and III).

Another interesting finding of the study is that the participants did not only engage in activities to assess the credibility of information sought and used within the group, but also extended their activities to assess the credibility shared by themselves or others. This is because group members were cautious about the potential adverse risks and repercussions related to disseminating

information that could be misinterpreted or considered misleading within the group. For instance, in Article III, the findings highlight instances of doctors and nurses who avoided sharing information or responding to members seeking medical advice or opinions within the group. It is also exemplified in this article in several instances where participants described how they or other members had confronted those who were providing misleading information about vaccinations in the group.

Furthermore, the group administrators play a critical role in maintaining information quality and credibility within the group (Article III). The administrators are directly involved in proactive activities to ensure that information is credible and trustworthy. These activities include closely monitoring and reviewing the group discussions revolving around topics such as health, vaccinations, and medications. The administrators also have the authority to employ measures such as removing posts and links potentially containing inaccurate information, issuing warnings, and in certain instances removing members who persistently post inaccurate information to the group. Such activities highlight the critical gatekeeping role that Facebook group administrators play in monitoring, deciding, removing, and filtering the types of information that are or are not allowed to be posted to the group.

The findings here therefore offer important insights to aid our understanding of information credibility assessments, as members also incorporate their assessments of the quality and credibility of information into their information sharing, monitoring, and moderating activities within the group. While the relationship between information sharing and credibility assessments has received some attention within traditional professional and work contexts within LIS (Pilerot, 2014a, Talja, 2002, Sundin, 2011, Butler et al., 2008), I believe that this area warrants further exploration within everyday life contexts.

6.2.5 Maintaining and safeguarding privacy within the group

Similarly to managing conflicts and assessing credibility, group members also engage in various information activities with the goal of maintaining and safeguarding privacy within the group. The study demonstrates that group members employ both tangible and intangible tools to regulate and manage the visibility and accessibility of information and the group. For instance, tangible tools include adjusting the group's privacy settings as well as setting up explicit rules and regulations to co-manage and regulate its exterior boundaries between members and outsiders (Article IV; see also Petronio, 2002). These tools serve a dual purpose for the group: safeguarding privacy and maintaining the group's shared goals and identity.

The findings presented in Articles I, II, and IV reveal that creating a safe and exclusive space for foreign mothers to seek and share information and advice is a primary goal of the group. The out-group rules play a vital role in achieving this goal by setting and establishing a set of criteria that help members to identify and filter who should have access or join the group. The study shows that these rules help in achieving the group's goals by screening out individuals who do not align with the group's shared goals, i.e., do not share the group's common interest and concerns about navigating everyday life as a foreign mother situated in Sweden. Drawing upon the concepts of imagined audience and context collapse (Litt, 2015; Marwick and boyd, 2011), the study suggests that employing these tools enables members to manage and filter out various outsider audiences who may not align, or may even conflict, with the group's shared goals, concerns, and challenges. Some examples of outsider audiences include, among many others: childless foreign women, fathers, Swedish mothers, childcare workers, family and friends, employers, the authorities, spammers, and trolls. In this respect, interpreted through the lenses of a community of practice and communication privacy management (Petronio, 2002; Wenger, 1998), the emphasis on establishing and maintaining a shared group identity is key to maintaining mutual feelings of responsibility and

accountability, developing common goals, and achieving consensus despite potential differences.

Alongside maintaining the group's shared goals, members also use a variety of the tools offered by Facebook to maintain group privacy goals. These tools include group privacy settings and controls (e.g., secret group), an invitation-only feature, a list of prompt questions that prospective members must answer before they are accepted, and documentation for the group (e.g., group description, pinned post) outlining the group's goals, values, rules, and regulations. By using these tools, members are able to make privacy-related rules easily visible and accessible (e.g., through a pinned post) to everyone in the group, while at the same time keeping them invisible and inaccessible to outsiders. Hence, from a mediated action perspective (Wertsch, 1998a), privacy rules and controls can be seen as essential tools in mediating group activities because they enable members to jointly safeguard the group and its boundaries. For instance, both Articles III and IV show that such settings allowed the group to become closed to new members (in 2014), and then secret and private (from 2017 onwards), and therefore hidden, invisible, and inaccessible to non-members (as outlined above in Section 6.1.1.4).

Managing and safeguarding privacy using Facebook's privacy and control features is critical for groups where there is sensitive and private information being shared, or if members want to maintain a high level of privacy when seeking and sharing information. This issue has been identified in previous research, demonstrating that various groups employ Facebook's features to create safe spaces for members to discuss private issues, while limiting access to outsiders who do not share the common interests and concerns of the group. There have been several examples of different group contexts discussed in previous research where privacy is of significant importance, including groups for people with chronic or invisible diseases (Sannon et al., 2019), grieving parents (Christensen et al., 2017; Hård af Segerstad and Kasperowski, 2015), LGBT parents (Blackwell et al., 2016), stay-at-home fathers (Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2016), parents of children with special needs (Ammari and Schoenebeck, 2015), and immigrants (Mudliar and Raval, 2018).

To summarise, this study highlights that the mothers' Facebook group connects a large number of members, each potentially adhering to different values and belonging to different communities of practice outside of the group. This connectivity through the group has created novel opportunities for engagement in information activities, while simultaneously raising several challenges and concerns, as highlighted in section 6.1. In navigating the opportunities and challenges encountered during engagement in information activities within the group, the study's findings show that a practice has emerged through the group's activities within the Facebook group, which is primarily maintained online. This was achieved through negotiation and the adoption of shared goals and repertoires of resources, enabling both members and the group as a whole to navigate the opportunities and challenges entailed in engagement in information activities within the group.

7. Conclusions

This chapter provides a concluding summary of the main insights and contributions of this research. It also presents some platform design recommendations, discusses the limitations of the research design, and concludes with suggestions for future research directions.

Over the past decade, the use of private Facebook groups as information sources has increased significantly within various spheres of everyday life (see Auxier and Anderson, 2021; Duggan et al., 2015; Lupton et al., 2016; Xie et al., 2021). This trend emphasises the importance for scholars, developers, and information and User Experience (UX) professionals to gain more knowledge and develop a better understanding of why and how people engage in information activities within these groups, and the potential opportunities and risks of such engagement. This also emphasises the need to understand how people's engagement in information activities within Facebook groups is maintained and sustained over time. This understanding is essential if we are to comprehend, conceptualise, and address the challenges faced by various communities that rely upon and use such online groups when seeking and sharing appropriate information and support resources to help solve a variety of problems. This study thus set the goal of contributing with an in-depth understanding of engagement in an everyday life information practice within the context of a private Facebook group.

7.1 Research contributions

This study makes theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. From a practical standpoint, the study offers insights from an LIS perspective into the ongoing conversations about the potential benefits and risks of using social media for information purposes and communication (see Bayer et al., 2020; Faraj and Azad, 2012; Karanasios et al., 2021; Leonardi, 2015; Lomborg, 2017; Treem

and Leonardi, 2012). It highlights the nuanced ways in which people interact with both information and other people within a specific context. It is particularly useful to draw upon concepts such as cognitive authority (Savolainen, 2007; Wilson, 1985,) to aid us in understanding how, why, and when SNSs are valued, or not, as information sources within particular situations and domains. Also, by drawing upon the rich sociocultural and practical research traditions of LIS and employing a qualitative research methodology – specifically, in-depth interviews – the study provides nuanced and contextually relevant insights into participants' engagement or non-engagement in information activities within the mothers' Facebook group. Methodologically, this approach sheds light upon often-overlooked, hidden, or secretive information activities and communities on SNSs, which are challenging to observe or access (see also Christensen et al., 2017; Ellison et al., 2018; Lijadi and van Schalkwyk, 2015; Yeshua-Katz and Hård af Segerstad, 2020).

By adopting a relational perspective on affordances (Treem and Leonardi, 2012), the findings demonstrate that the mothers' Facebook group presents opportunities and challenges that both enabled and constrained the participants' engagement in information activities. The study thus builds upon and extends this line of theorising by contributing in-depth and contextual insights into how six key, interrelated affordances are leveraged within this specific sociocultural context: visibility, accessibility, persistence, associations, invisibility, and inaccessibility. The way in which the study combines this relational view of affordances with the mediated action perspective provides insights into the mutual relationship between participants' goals and the features available within Facebook groups, which offer various possibilities and constraints for engagement in information activities. This understanding contributes to the growing scholarship on social media that seeks to move beyond a sole focus on the user or platform features (see Bucher and Helmond, 2018; Treem and Leonardi, 2012).

Drawing upon these affordances, the study advances current theorising of information activities by proposing two additional modes of engagement in

information activities with the Facebook group context: visible and invisible modes. These two modes allow group members to actively engage in group activities, either visibly or invisibly, thereby facilitating access to the group's information resources and activities, whether or not they have specific information interests. This complements existing models of information seeking, which include active, passive, direct, and indirect modes (see Bates, 2002; McKenzie, 2003a; Savolainen, 1995), and extends our understanding of the affordances of Facebook groups for engagement in information activities. Previous research on SNSs has predominantly focused on more visible and active modes of engagement in activities, such as direct and active information seeking or sharing on these sites (see Ellison et al., 2018). The study also extends current scholarship on affordances in two ways. Firstly, it identifies and proposes three additional affordances (accessibility, invisibility, and inaccessibility), which emerged as crucial in shaping members' information activities within this Facebook group. Scholars studying Facebook groups can look for occurrences of these affordances in order to understand the role they may play in shaping people's information activities within the context of other Facebook groups. Secondly, by integrating and incorporating the concept of affordances into a broader theoretical framework, which considers the role of situated learning over time and the broader community in mediating possibilities for action (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1998; Wertsch, 1998a), this study expands the analytical field on affordances. Previous scholarship on affordances has often focused on the "dyadic" relationship between an individual user and a tool within a specific, focal, or immediate context of interaction (see also Kaptelinin and Nardi, 2012; Mansour et al., 2013).

Incorporating the notions of situated learning and community of practice into the study's theoretical framework has shifted the focus towards the social and learning processes and shared repertoires produced by the community that shape engagement in collective information activities within groups, transcending the abilities or activities of any individual members. These concepts help to draw attention to the community and its role in shaping and making sense of information activities in the context of this specific community

of practice. The study thus contributes with insights into how members engage, both individually and collectively, in establishing, negotiating, participating, and sustaining the specific shared information activities and practice within the mothers' group. By integrating communication privacy management theory into the overarching theoretical framework, this thesis contributes to both LIS and social media scholarship. It does so by shedding light on the complex and collective decisions and processes around information disclosure that shape what, when, how, where, and with whom people disclose private information via the group. The findings demonstrate how group members individually, interpersonally, and collectively manage their private information within the situated and everyday context of the group.

Insights from the study also contribute to the literature and theorising on privacy management by highlighting how it becomes even more challenging within the context of large online groups, where people communicate and share privacy boundaries with a large, evolving audience, consisting of both known and unknown individuals. The study suggests that privacy management becomes further complicated because members of the group share a "collective privacy boundary" (Petronio, 2002), requiring them to navigate and negotiate privacy boundaries that span contextual, temporal, and spatial boundaries. This understanding thus extends our knowledge of privacy management within large, networked groups, an aspect that has often been overlooked in LIS and prior social media research, which has typically adopted individualistic approaches to investigating privacy management on social media in relation to close social contacts (see Bazarova and Masur, 2020; Fei Wu et al., 2020).

By incorporating the concepts of context collapse and imagined audience into the theoretical framework, this study also contributes to LIS by offering a contemporary understanding of the intricacies involved in engaging in information activities within an SNS context. These concepts draw attention to the interplay between distinct times, contexts, communities of practice, and audiences in shaping members' information activities. This extended theorisation of context collapse, including the time dimension, is particularly relevant when explaining the dynamics of the group and members' engagement

in information activities over time. It helps us to move beyond lines of theorising which assume that social actors maintain separate identities and distinct communities, highlighting the nuanced interactions between overlapping contexts (cf. Davis and Jurgenson, 2014, p.478). The study extends this line of theorising by proposing spatial collapse as an extension of context and time collapse. Spatial collapse refers to the convergence of online and offline spaces among SNS users who are potentially unknown to each other but who share an offline or physical location. Spatial collapse addresses the spatial dimension and the tension resulting from the blurring of spatial boundaries between online and offline contexts, which stems from the presence of multiple audiences within a single shared online space (see also Article IV).

Furthermore, the study expands the "imagined audience" framework developed by Litt (2015) by introducing the concept of "future audiences" (see Article IV). Within the context of the mothers' group, these future audiences include prospective members, future employers, or the children of the participants in the future. This addition to the theoretical framework helps us to understand how an awareness of the potential of future audiences risks shaping participants' information activities within the group. These concepts are thus an important addition to the theoretical framework because they add a contemporary understanding to help us further unpack the complexities entailed in comprehending and engaging in information activities through social media. These concepts help to extend our understanding of how people understand and navigate contemporary forms of overlapping contexts for information activities that extend beyond fixed geographical, or spatial, boundaries.

Against this backdrop, incorporating these concepts (i.e., affordances, cognitive authority, situated learning, community of practice, communication privacy management, and context and time collapse) within a broader sociocultural framework emphasises the interrelationship between people and the diverse types of tools they adopt and develop in order to mediate their information activities within a specific context. This sociocultural approach has the potential to enrich scholarship on social media, viewed as a complex social

and technical phenomenon, by means of its versatility in incorporating concepts from various theoretical traditions that focus on the individual, interpersonal, and collective processes shaping engagement in information activities within SNSs (see also Karanasios et al., 2021). A sociocultural perspective is particularly valuable for situating people's information activities on SNSs within specific SNS contexts, thereby advancing social media and LIS scholarship.

7.2 Design implications

Based on the findings of this study, and considering the current design of Facebook groups, there are some limitations in relation to maintaining the quality and credibility of information, and in maintaining members' privacy within these groups. While design suggestions addressing privacy concerns are presented in Article IV, this study has also identified the need to develop tools enabling users to address concerns around the quality and credibility of information shared within Facebook groups.

Social media sites in general, including Facebook groups, lack established quality control and regulations, and these are also challenging to establish due to the rapidly changing nature of social media (Bawden and Robinson, 2022; Francke and Sundin, 2012; Kim et al., 2021; Metzger et al., 2010; Savolainen, 2022). Despite Facebook's efforts to put automated and universal measures in place to regulate content and information quality (e.g., community standards, automated tools, human moderators, and contracted fact-checkers), harmful and inaccurate information continues to be disseminated within Facebook groups (for more details, see Smith and Graham, 2019). This highlights the limitations of the current design and features of Facebook groups for maintaining the quality and credibility of information and content within these groups. This could potentially result in harmful or misleading information going undetected, especially in hard-to-reach and hard-to-access private Facebook groups. For instance, the study notes the limited tools offered for the users of Facebook groups to assess and maintain the quality and credibility of

information within these groups. In particular, in terms of information credibility and quality control, there is a need to complement the automated measures already in place with more contextual and user-centred quality and credibility controls.

One potential design solution is to provide Facebook users with tools to increase the awareness, labelling, and detection of potentially harmful or inaccurate information and content. For instance, the recently introduced "community notes" feature on X (formerly Twitter) (see About Community Notes on X, n.d.; Malik, 2022) in late 2022, which allows users to add context to posts using various types of content (e.g., text, images, links), could also be useful for the users of Facebook groups to enable the addition of context or official information and sources to posts containing potentially incorrect or misleading information. Collaborative and tailored fact-checking tools, specifically tailored to a group's specific topics and needs, could further help in verifying and assessing information within Facebook groups. This might involve providing users with tools to create sub-communities within their groups of content and information moderators with verifiable credentials, similar to the approach used on Wikipedia (see Keegan and Fiesler, 2017; Viégas et al., 2007). In this way, incorporating tools within Facebook groups that enable users to verify information accuracy, and to label, report, or remove potentially misleading information could be an effective solution. Nevertheless, implementing these design solutions may pose challenges, particularly in ensuring that the members providing the assessments possess sufficient knowledge to support the validity and credibility of their assessments.

Overall, this study suggests that Facebook groups, and potentially other online groups, could benefit from a range of user-friendly and group-centred tools and features, as well as social solutions, instead of relying solely on platform automation. Such tools and social efforts should be aimed at ensuring that information shared within these groups is safe, accurate, and useful.

7.3 Research limitations

This study has a few limitations that should be considered when interpreting its findings. The research involved interviewing 20 members of a private Facebook group for foreign mothers in Sweden. Data construction for the thesis project occurred in two phases between 2014 and 2017. Consequently, changes and developments in Facebook groups and members' activities after 2017 were not addressed during the interviews. However, it is important to note that more recent changes in Facebook groups are considered in later analyses conducted for this study (e.g., Article IV, Chapter 6). It is crucial to interpret the study's findings cautiously, as they may not accurately represent different types of Facebook groups, other group members, or other user demographics with diverse educational levels or non-native English speakers. The study provides a better understanding of some members' engagement with the group's information practice and how these can be interpreted theoretically. Based on this, theoretical contributions can also be made. Taking these limitations into account, and considering the study's findings, in the following section, I provide further suggestions for future research directions.

7.4 Future research

This thesis has identified some relevant topics for future research. It has provided deeper insights into the central role played by group administrators and moderators in managing, maintaining, and controlling information activities within this mothers' Facebook group. The study provides valuable insights by suggesting that this voluntary work, involving moderating, managing, and gatekeeping of information activities, can be considered a novel type of information practice emerging within the context of the group. The findings demonstrate the essential role of this type of voluntary work in regulating information activities within the context of the Facebook group under study (as evidenced in Articles III and IV).

To the best of my knowledge, information practices related to voluntary work have received only limited attention in previous studies focusing on social media in the field of Library and Information Science, with only a few exceptions, such as Sundin's (2011) research on the voluntary work of Wikipedia editors. Furthermore, although emerging information practices related to online professional moderation have gained more attention in recent years, especially concerning issues related to misinformation in politics, journalism, and health contexts (e.g., as observed in Juneström, 2022), the voluntary moderation of information activities by administrators in online groups focusing on everyday life requires further exploration.

Moreover, future research should consider recruiting diverse samples and employing a variety of methods to compare the research results in relation to Facebook group use in different contexts. Further research is needed to understand the consequences of engagement in information activities taking place within different types of Facebook groups. Future research could use insights from this study to consider similar and different sociocultural dynamics across different types of Facebook groups (e.g., public vs. private/closed groups, local vs. global, small vs. large) and how they may influence the types of information activities that take place, as well as members' engagement in those activities. For instance, the research findings contribute with insights into how group-specific rules and norms play a crucial role in shaping members' information activities. Future research could explore what kinds of rules and norms are adopted by similar or different types of Facebook groups, and how they influence the information activities taking place within these groups.

The results of this thesis also contribute with insights into the role of mutual responsibility and goals in shaping group members' information activities. As it becomes more common for such activities to take place through Facebook groups in daily life, it is important to consider the ethical implications of engaging in them. Future research could explore issues such as the ways in which users of SNSs in general, and Facebook groups in particular, consider their own and others' responsibilities towards being respectful to others and towards maintaining information privacy, quality, and credibility within these

groups. The thesis also provides insights into the everyday life information practice of the mothers' group during the specific periods when the empirical material for the research project was collected, between the autumn of 2014 and the spring 2015, and during the autumn of 2017. Future research could further extend the study's findings by examining later types of sociotechnical transformations shaping people's engagement in information activities within Facebook groups.

In summary, this study has highlighted the importance of continued exploration of engagement in information activities within specific SNS contexts and at different points in time. The study highlights the need to view engagement in information activities within SNSs as an ongoing process of negotiation, learning, and knowing, rather than a one-time event.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: research site access request (admins)

Dear [name],

I am writing to request your permission as an admin of the [name] group to post a questionnaire within it. This pilot questionnaire is part of my doctoral research project conducted at the University of Borås, Sweden, under the supervision of Dr. Helena Francke and Professor Elena Maceviciute.

The main aim of my research project is to understand how people appropriate social media in their everyday lives to seek and exchange information with each other. As a mother myself, I am interested in mothers' experiences and the ways they use social media communities to seek and provide advice. Through this questionnaire, I hope that group members can share their experiences of using the Facebook group with me, so that I can learn how they communicate and exchange information/advice with other fellow mums in the group.

Here is a link to the questionnaire (http://www.mobosurvey.com/SHH9C) if you would like to have a look at it and, of course, if you wish to participate.

Participation in the questionnaire is entirely voluntary for the members. However, I wanted to check with you as admins of the group regarding the group policies concerning such issues and if I am allowed to post the link or not.

Please let me know if you need further information or clarification about the study. I am looking forward to hearing from you, and many thanks for your help in advance!

Warmest regards,
Ameera

Appendix 2: research invitation (Facebook group post)

Dear mothers,

I am working on a doctoral research project exploring how people use social media in their everyday lives to seek and exchange information with each other. As a mother myself, I am particularly interested in mothers' experiences and how they use social media groups to seek and provide advice.

Therefore, as a mother who uses this Facebook group to seek and share advice, I am inviting you to take part in my study by answering the following questionnaire (http://www.mobosurvey.com/SHH9C).

You can find more information about the study and questionnaire in the link I provided, but if I missed anything, please do not hesitate to send a message me on Facebook, or an email ☺

Any help or feedback is highly appreciated.

Thank you in advance.

Best,

Ameera

Appendix 3: research invitation (admins)

Dear [name],
I am reaching out to inquire if you or any of the other admins in the group would be interested in participating in a research study for my doctoral research project.

Approximately two years ago, I conducted interviews with some group members regarding their information activities within the group. Now, as I am writing my second and third articles, I have identified some interesting issues from my analysis and previous interviews that would greatly benefit from an administrator's perspective.

Would you (or any other group admins) be interested in participating in an interview? The interview would last approximately 45 minutes to one hour. I can provide more detailed information about the purpose and scope of the study if this is something of interest to you.

Your insights would be invaluable to my research, and I sincerely appreciate your consideration of this request.

Looking forward to hearing from you.
Best regards,
Ameera

Appendix 4: recruitments' Facebook group post (reminder)

Dear mothers,

I posted a while ago inviting people to participate in a research study about mothers' information experiences in social media. Many of you responded to my call and generously shared your experiences with me (to all those who participated: you know who you are, thank you!).

Now, I am looking for more people to participate, and I hope to cover as many experiences as possible.

I have interviewed very few new and expecting mothers, so it would be great if you, as a new/expecting mother, would be interested in participating in this study. I am also hoping to interview more members who are active in the group posting/commenting. Also, if you actively read others' posts but don't comment or post yourself, I would be very glad to talk to you too.

If this sounds interesting to you, please send me a personal message, and I will provide you with more information about the study. Please not that you are not obliged to participate if you request information about the study. It's just that you can get an understanding of the aims of my research project and what it may involve, to help you decide if you want to participate or not.

If you have any questions about the study or if there is anything that you are wondering about, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Many thanks in advance.

Ameera

Appendix 5: informed consent

HÖGSKOLAN I BORÅS
VETENSKAP FÖR PROFESSION

Mothers' information experiences in social media environments
"Doctoral research project"

This document contains all information you may need about the study before signing the consent form. The consent form is a formal agreement between you and the researcher that guarantees your rights before, during and after your participation in the research project. Please take your time to read it carefully and provide your signature at the end of the form. If there is anything that is unclear to you, or if you need any further clarifications, please do not hesitate to contact me or the supervisory team of the project at the addresses provided below.

Who is conducting the study?

This study is part of a doctoral research project conducted at the University of Borås by Ameera Mansour. It is supervised by Dr. Helena Francke and Professor Elena Maceviciute.

What is the purpose of the study?

The main purpose of the study is to explore and understand the experiences of mothers' everyday life information seeking, when using social media. For instance, this study seeks to understand: what are common information sources that you consult to motivate and inform your choices and decisions daily? In what ways and to what extent do you use social media platforms in forming these decisions; what motivates you to use/not use social media; how do you negotiate and evaluate information you find on social media?

What is required from you?

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide at any point that you no longer wish to participate, you may withdraw from the study without any penalty or prejudice.
Your participation involves taking part in a one-to-one interview with the researcher. You can see below all the specifications of the planned interview.

- The interview can be done face-to-face, via Skype, by telephone, chat, or any other means that you feel most comfortable with.
- The interview is estimated to take roughly 45 minutes (up to an hour) of your time. You may be asked to do a short follow-up interview, if possible, in case something needs further clarifications or something interesting came up in the analysis.
- During the interview you will be asked questions about the ways you seek and share information on social media in general and in the Facebook group.
- If you feel uncomfortable at any point during the interview you can request to skip the question, you also have the right to refuse to answer; or you can request to terminate the interview.
- The interview will be audio-taped for later transcription purposes.
- The interview record will be transcribed, you will be assigned a pseudonym, and the transcript will be sent back to you to get your feedback and for verification purposes. That will give you the opportunity to add, edit or delete any information that you wish (or you may not wish) to include in the transcript that will be used for the analysis.
- All collected data will later be analysed. The results of the analysis will be used for academic publications and presentations, primarily but not limited to publications that will be part of my doctoral dissertation. You may ask to receive a copy of these publications if you wish.

Privacy and confidentiality

Your privacy and confidentiality in this research are very important to me. In my research, I will adhere to the relevant ethical considerations outlined in the Swedish legalizations. If I use quotes from the interview in publications or presentations, I will refer to you by a pseudonym. You will also have the possibility of reviewing the transcript of the interview to withdraw information that you have shared with me if you wish.

What are the benefits and risks associated with this study?

There are no direct benefits to you in participating in this study. However, your participation may help the research community to better understand how mothers use social media in their daily information seeking and sharing.

The study will focus primarily on your interaction with the information resources you use in your everyday life; therefore, I do not foresee any potential risks associated in participating in this study. However, you are advised to withhold information if you think sharing may harm you.

Whom to contact if I have further questions?

If you need more information about the research project, please do not hesitate to contact the principal researcher or the supervisory team at the following addresses:

Principal researcher	Principal supervisor	Associate supervisor
Ameera Mansour Email: Telephone: ***PhD. Candidate,*** Swedish School of Library and Information Science, University of Borås. http://www.hb.se/en/Research/Researchers/Mansour-Ameera/	**Dr. Helena Francke** Email: Telephone: Swedish School of Library and Information Science, University of Borås. http://www.hb.se/en/Research/Researchers/Francke-Helena/)	**Prof. Elena Maceviciute** Email: Telephone: Swedish School of Library and Information Science, University of Borås. http://www.hb.se/en/Research/Researchers/Maceviciute-Elena/

Consent Statement and Declarations

Please make sure you understand and agree to the following statements before giving consent to participate.

- I have read and understood information provided in this document.
- I understand the purpose of this study and I know about the benefits and risks that this research project entails.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time from the study without any penalty or prejudice.
- I understand how confidentiality will be maintained and my privacy will be protected in this study.
- I understand that the interview will be recorded and transcribed into text.
- I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the study and have received satisfactory answers to these questions and any additional details requested.

Signatures

I have read the above and I understand all the conditions. Hereby, I freely give my consent and voluntarily agree to participate in this research project:

Participant	Researcher
Name/Pseudonym:	Name:
Signature:	Signature:
Date and Place:	Date and Place:

Appendix 6: interview guide (members)

Introduction:

I will introduce myself and the study briefly, and ask her to introduce herself. I will also ask if she has any questions about the study or the information sheet before we start.

Questions:

1) What social media platforms do you use? How often do you use them?
2) Can you tell me about the social media groups you are a member of? How many groups are you part of, and what are their purposes?
3) Can you provide some insights about the [name] group? Why did you join? What type of information or advice do you typically seek within the group? How frequently do you check or engage with others in the group?
4) Do you have specific questions or information that you wouldn't share on the group or social media? If so, why? (OBS: if they mention different Facebook groups, I should ask for an explanation if they use them similarly or differently).
5) Can you recall the last time you sought information or advice within the group? Please choose an instance that was particularly important to you. Describe the activities you engaged in during this process, including where you looked for information, etc. Specifically:
    - What was the topic?
    - Did you find the information you were looking for?
    - Was the information useful to you?
    - How did you use this information?
    - Did you explore or check other sources for information other than the group?
    - Did you receive or encounter consistent or contradictory information/advice? How did you resolve this and arrive at a decision of what information to use?
6) Similarly, can you think about the last time you provided advice within the group?

7) Do you believe that there are appropriate or inappropriate topics/information to be discussed and shared within the group? (Both in general and within the realm of parenting)
8) Is credibility an issue for you in this group/social media? If so, why? What criteria do you use to assess credibility?
9) Do you trust the advice given by other members within the group? Do you consistently agree with the advice shared within the group? If not, why do you think this is the case?
10) Do you see any benefits in seeking or sharing information within the group/social media? Can you tell me more about that?
11) Do you see any risks in seeking or sharing information within the group/social media? Can you tell me more about that?
12) Apart from this Facebook group, what other resources do you often consult or rely on for information?
13) How would you compare and situate social media sources and other resources to the Facebook group?
14) What type of content do you typically post on your private profile or other groups? Is there anything you post on your profile that you wouldn't post within this group or other groups, and vice versa? Why?

Appendix 7: interview guide (admin)

Introduction:

I will introduce myself and the study briefly, and ask her to introduce herself. I will also ask if she has any questions about the study or the information sheet before we start.

Introductory & General questions

1) Can you tell me about the [name] group?
    - What was your motivation behind creating the group?
    - What is the main purpose of the group?
    - How many admins are in the group? What are their roles and responsibilities in administering the group?
    - How does someone join the group? Who is accepted in the group? Is everyone accepted? If not, why?
    - What issues (topics) are often discussed in the group?
    - Do you seek or share information/advice with other members in the group?
    - Are there any information/questions that you would not seek, share, or discuss in the group? Why is that? Can you give some examples?

Moderating the group/admins roles

2) Is there anything that is explicitly not allowed to be discussed in the group? Or that you would react to or look out for? Can you give some examples?
3) Do you think there are any inappropriate behaviors in the group? What do you think is an inappropriate behavior in the group? And how do you and the other admins handle that?
4) Are there any topics that are inappropriate but are still allowed to be discussed in the group?
5) What personal qualities do you think make a good member in the group?
6) Do you have any rules in the group how members should participate in the group? Can you give some examples?
7) What happens if a member doesn't stick to the rules of the group?

8) What is the role of the admin(s) in moderating the group?
    - To what extent do the admins moderate the discussions (or information exchanged) in the group?
    - How do you moderate the discussions in the group? Do you moderate them at all? When do the admins need to step in?
9) How do you and the other admins handle and manage conflicts in the group, if there are any?
    - Can you tell me about the process, what do you and the other admins usually do?
    - How do you usually decide not to allow a specific topic to be discussed in the group? Do you take that decision upon yourself as a main admin, together with the other admins, or? Who decides?
    - Do you discuss with the other admins or members issues in relation to the group and how to handle and manage them? Who decides which topics and issues are allowed to be discussed in the group? (If she talks about vaccination conflicts, I should ask explicit questions about how they managed these conflicts, but also how did they came to the decision to ban discussions on vaccines, and if these discussions are still banned since the interviews were conducted two years ago).
10) Did it ever happen that you had to remove a member or a thread from the group? Why? Can you tell me more and give some examples about this?
11) I have recently noticed that more members are sending their questions anonymously to [admin's name], and she posts them on their behalf in the group. Does anyone send you questions to post on their behalf? Why do you think they are sending the questions to the admins instead of asking these questions directly in the group? Do you have any idea of the reasons behind doing that?
12) Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything you want to add? Is there anything that you were expecting to discuss but we didn't?

Articles I-IV

Article I

Mansour, A. (2021). Affordances supporting mothers' engagement in information-related activities through Facebook groups. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, *53*(2), 211–224. https://doi.org/10.1177/0961000620938106

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Article III

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Article IV

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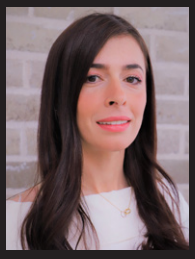

Social networking sites are integral in reshaping how we access and interact with information and others. This doctoral thesis aims to offer an in-depth understanding of engagement in an everyday life information practice within a private Facebook group. Based on interviews with Facebook group members, the thesis addresses questions such as: **What affordances does the Facebook group offer for engagement in information activities? How do these affordances facilitate or constrain members' opportunities to engage? How is the group maintained as an environment for information activities and how does the group navigate the opportunities and challenges presented within it?**

The findings show that the Facebook group offers a distinctive online space providing both valuable opportunities and challenges for engagement in joint information activities. The study also highlights the strategic ways members individually, collaboratively, and as a group manage and navigate these opportunities and challenges. Overall, the thesis contributes theoretical and practical insights into the multifaceted engagement within a Facebook group for informational purposes in everyday life.

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