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Misinformation in Encounters

A Qualitative Study of Misinformation as a Social Phenomenon

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Abstract

Current research tends to see misinformation as a negative type of information in online environments, and fact-checking and improved information literacy are seen as solutions to the problem of misinformation. Considering misinformation only from this viewpoint is problematic because it does not consider misinformation as a type of information in our everyday information environment. The aim of this thesis is to broaden the understanding of misinformation as a nuanced concept and as a social and situated phenomenon affected by different factors. Encounters are used as means of clarifying misinformation. New knowledge of misinformation is needed to better address it and problems with it in different contexts and situations.

This thesis adopts the definition of misinformation as inaccurate, incomplete, vague, or ambiguous information that is affected by social, cultural, historical, contextual, and situational factors. It studies the misinformation people encounter in their everyday lives, what factors affect it (specifically, what role encounters play in this process), how misinformation can be studied, and how to manage misinformation more efficiently. These questions were studied in the context of support with information (i.e. holistic ways to help people access, use, and understand information) and, more specifically, in two contexts where such support is given: asylum seekers supported by volunteers and youth supported by youth services. In these contexts, misinformation may be extremely challenging, but simply providing accurate information without considering factors surrounding misinformation is inadequate, and suitable ways of providing and discussing information should be developed.

Misinformation was studied indirectly through interviews with people who provided support with information (i.e. volunteers and youth service workers). The analysis of the interview discussions contributed to the qualitative methodological approaches to studying misinformation. Both direct questions and indirect discussions on misinformation were found to be important for eliciting rich data. The empirical findings revealed different types of misinformation connected with authorities and official structures (outdated, incomplete, or conflicting information and perceived intimidation). Different strategies can be used when giving support with information to make misinformation less challenging, the most important of which is to encounter all people with respect and as human beings when supporting their access to and understanding of information.

The research findings highlighted the importance of encounters. The framework for caring encounter was used for analysing the social factors that influence misinformation. Caring encounters mitigate misinformation, whereas uncaring encounters or a complete lack of encounters make it challenging for people to access, understand, and use information. The research findings can be used to improve information support and services by addressing factors surrounding misinformation. Misinformation is, thus, a

social construct that should be placed in the wider context of information and seen as an unavoidable part of our information environment.

Abstrakt

Misinformation ses oftast inom aktuell forskning som en negativ typ av information på internet, och faktagranskning och bättre informationskompetens ses som lösningar till misinformation. Att se på misinformation enbart ur denna synvinkel är problematiskt eftersom då förstås misinformation inte som en del av vår vardagliga informationsmiljö. Syftet med denna avhandling är att förstå misinformation som ett nyanserat begrepp och socialt fenomen som påverkas av olika faktorer. Möten används som en faktor för att klargöra misinformation. Ny kunskap om misinformation behövs för att bättre förstå och lösa de problem som uppstår i olika kontexter och situationer där misinformation förekommer.

Denna avhandling använder definitionen av misinformation som felaktig, ofullständig, oklar och mångtydig information som påverkas av sociala, kulturella, historiska, kontextuella och situationsbundna faktorer. Det undersöks hurdan misinformation människor kommer i kontakt med i sin vardag, vilka faktorer som påverkar misinformationen och mera specifikt, hurdan roll bemötande har i den processen. Vidare fokuserar avhandlingen på hur misinformation kan studeras och vad man kan göra åt den. Dessa frågor forskas i kontexten av stöd med information (holistiska sätt att hjälpa andra med tillgång, förståelse och användning av information), som består av ytterligare två sammanhang: asylsökande som stöds av volontärer och unga som stöds av ungdomsservice. Misinformation kan vara ett stort problem i dessa sammanhang, men det är inte tillräckligt att enbart ge rätt information utan den måste ges och diskuteras på ett för mottagaren lämpligt sätt, dvs. läggas in i en större kontext.

I denna avhandling studerades misinformation indirekt via människor som ger stöd med information, dvs. volontärer och ungdomsservicearbetare. Genom att analysera diskussionen i intervjuerna, bidrog denna studie till den kvalitativa forskningen om misinformation. Både direkta frågor och indirekt diskussion behövs för att samla in mångsidiga data. De empiriska resultaten visade att det finns olika typer av misinformation i samband med myndigheter och officiella strukturer: föråldrad, ofullständig och motstridig information samt upplevt hot. Det finns olika strategier som kan användas för att lindra problemen med misinformation. Viktigast är att bemöta en människa med respekt för att stöda hens tillgång till och förståelse av information.

Resultaten i denna avhandling visade hur viktiga möten är. Ramverket för vårdande möte användes för att analysera de sociala faktorer som definierar misinformation. Ett vårdande möte kan göra det lättare att hantera misinformation medan icke-vårdande möten och brist på möten överlag försämrar människors möjlighet att nå, förstå och använda information. Resultaten kan användas för att utveckla stöd med information och informationstjänster genom att särskilt betona faktorer som påverkar misinformation. Misinformation är ett socialt begrepp som borde läggas in i en

större sammanhang och ses som en oundviklig och naturlig del av vår informationsmiljö.

List of original publications

I.   Ruokolainen, H., & Widén, G. (2020). Conceptualising misinformation in the context of asylum seekers. *Information Processing and Management*, *57*(3), 102127. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2019.102127

II. Ruokolainen, H. (2022a). A methodological approach to misinformation: An analysis of the data creation process in two interview studies. In *Proceedings of CoLIS, the Tenth International Conference on Conceptions of Library and Information Science, Oslo, Norway, May 29–June 1, 2022. Information Research*, *27* (Special issue), paper colis2229. https://doi.org/10.47989/ircolis2229

III. Ruokolainen, H. (2022b). Volunteers' strategies for supporting asylum seekers with information challenges. *Journal of Documentation*, *78*(7), 305–326. https://doi.org/10.1108/JD-08-2021-0148

IV. Ruokolainen, H., Widén, G., & Eskola, E.-L. (n.d.). How and why does official information become misinformation? A typology of official misinformation. *Library & Information Science Research*, 45(2), 101237. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lisr.2023.101237

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1. Introduction

In today's societies, there is great concern about inaccurate information, fake news, and alternative facts affecting people's lives, and this *infodemic*[1] is seen as a problem specific to digital information environment. This situation is described by the Finnish fact-checking platform Faktabaari (n.d.-a):

> However, on digital platforms we all are confronted with a bewildering flood of information that they [young people] may not be able to filter out with the skills they have acquired in the school community and at home: claims about products by influencers, search results tailored by commercial algorithms, cleverly scripted propaganda and authorisations to track online behaviour or physical movement in urban space hidden behind countless 'yes' buttons. It is therefore important to strengthen the digital information literacy of all web users, especially young people, in order to identify how we are being influenced online. (Faktabaari, n.d-a)

As the quotation emphasises, improved information and media literacy has been seen as an answer to the problems of fake news, misinformation, and disinformation, and the need for comprehensive information and media literacy programmes has been voiced, for example, by Goulds et al. (2021) and Singh and Banga (2022). Also, fact-checking has been seen as an important means to fight misinformation and disinformation and to improve information literacy. Different fact-checking websites (e.g. *FactCheck.Org - A Project of The Annenberg Public Policy Center*, 2022; *Faktabaari*, n.d-b) monitor the factual accuracy of different media, publish corrections, and thus aim to improve knowledge and understanding in society.

In 2017, the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA; 2017) released a *How to spot fake news* infographic to help libraries 'battle alternative facts and fake news' (Figure 1). Besides this infographic, countless other lists, infographics, and online videos help people navigate challenging information. As with the IFLA infographic, they emphasise considering the source, author, date of publication, style of the information, as well as one's own biases, and direct people to ask trusted experts for advice.

These kinds of checklists are useful in many cases, but they do not necessarily address the complexity of people's ways of dealing with information—and, perhaps more importantly, the complexity of information itself. There are many indications of inaccurate information in our societies.

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[1] 'A proliferation of diverse, often unsubstantiated information relating to a crisis, controversy, or event, which disseminates rapidly and uncontrollably through news, online, and social media, and is regarded as intensifying public speculation or anxiety' (Oxford University Press, 2022b).

Let's look at some examples from the Finnish context in which this study was conducted.
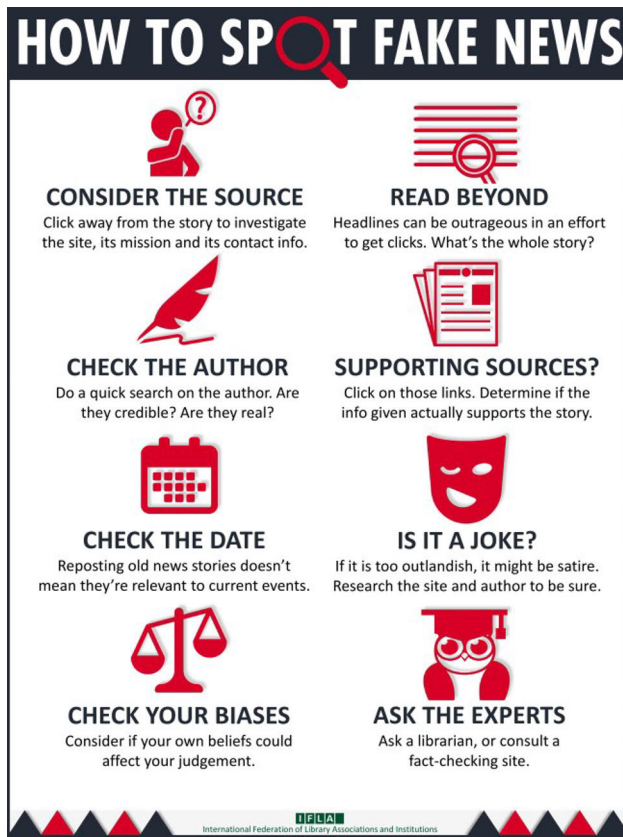
Figure 1. How to spot fake news (IFLA, 2017).

A feature article on 10 December 2022 in the Finnish newspaper *Helsingin Sanomat* (Kuokkanen, 2022)[2] states that the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) provided incomplete, conflicting, and outdated information about work permits in relation to an unfounded rejection of a Mongolian nurse's work permit application. In their study about citizens trusting public institutions, Simonen et al. (2021, p. 37) noticed that inaccurate and conflicting information about COVID-19 directives and measures, shared by the government and other public institutions, decreased general trust in society (e.g. the state's communication about face mask recommendations). Patient information used by healthcare professionals is often incomplete, which may endanger patient

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[2] For an English report about the case, see the YLE NEWS article dated 12.12.2022 at https://yle.fi/a/74-20008356 (YLE NEWS, 2022).

security (Päivärinne, 2021), and the National Audit Office of Finland has been concerned about social welfare and healthcare information being so fragmented and incomplete that it affects social and health services on a large scale (Hankonen, 2021). In their everyday lives, people may become confused by conflicting, ambiguous, misleading, or incomplete information about, for example, whether one should get a fourth COVID-19 vaccination (Akimo, 2022).

Additionally, every day, people communicate—and share information—with each other in diverse service situations, such as coffee table conversations and educational contexts, and this information, which may be inaccurate or otherwise problematic, affects people's lives on many levels. This inaccurate, incomplete, vague, or ambiguous information (i.e. misinformation; Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Karlova & Lee, 2011) cannot necessarily be addressed through fact-checking and corrections, only. Therefore, there is a need to understand all kinds of misinformation in people's lives—what it is and how and why it is formed—to fight it more effectively in the future.

1.1. Study purpose and aim

Much misinformation is evidently circulating, and it has been studied extensively, but the research has focused on its diffusion without truly considering the concept and its contextual dimensions (Jarrahi et al. 2021). Simultaneously, most information behaviour models assume that information people encounter in their lives is accurate (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). Misinformation is simply considered 'bad information' that must be corrected (Jarrahi et al., 2021; Karlova & Lee, 2011; Lee & Renear, 2008), which affects how it is studied. Thus, there is a research gap in understanding misinformation more profoundly as part of people's information environment and in relation to other types of information in people's lives.

This thesis aims to contribute to misinformation research in a novel way by studying misinformation openly and studying the factors that influence it. In this thesis, misinformation is understood as inaccurate, incomplete, vague, or ambiguous information that is affected by various social, cultural, and historical factors, as well as contextual and situational factors (Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Karlova & Lee, 2011). The contextual nature of misinformation is addressed herein by considering *encounters* as an important element of how misinformation is formed, perceived, and can be fought. Combining a social constructionist understanding of misinformation with a framework for caring

encounter (Holopainen et al., 2019) can help us to understand more concretely the contextual and situated nature of misinformation.

As the aim of this research was to understand the nature of misinformation and why it occurs (see the research questions (RQs) in Section 1.2.) a qualitative approach was chosen. The phenomenon was studied in the context of *support with information* (i.e. through groups giving support to people who need help with information) across two different contexts: volunteers supporting asylum seekers and youth service workers supporting youth. The study was conducted in Finland; therefore, these contexts are limited to Finland.

The contexts were chosen for several reasons. Firstly, both asylum seekers and youth need to access and use complex information that affects their current and future lives. Moreover, they often face challenges in accessing and understanding information. Misinformation may therefore be a great hindrance for them, restricting their ability to participate in society. Secondly, little research has studied misinformation as part of people's everyday information environment. Since this thesis introduced a new approach to misinformation research and the approach was creative, misinformation had to be studied in specific and limited contexts. Hence, the choice of the support context was based on the fact that people and groups giving support with information may be able to shed light on this complex information phenomenon from some distance, while providing insight into these groups' ways of dealing with information and its challenges.

Semi-structured interviews with volunteers and youth service workers were used as the data collection method, and the data was then analysed from different perspectives to gain an understanding of misinformation and its associated challenges. The aim of the research was to understand what misinformation is and its characteristics (i.e. why it is or why it becomes misinformation). The theme of encounters emerged from the data and from the need to understand the contextual and situational elements of misinformation in more detail.

1.2. Research questions

There is a need to understand misinformation in a more nuanced fashion and from different perspectives. There may be much more misinformation in our society than is generally recognised, and the current misinformation research does not address the diversity and complexity of this misinformation. This

thesis aims to support the understanding of this complexity by studying it qualitatively in the context of support with information.

The RQs underpinning this thesis are as follows:

> RQ1: What kind of misinformation do people encounter in connection with their everyday needs?
>
> RQ2: Why is some information misinformation, and how do encounters affect misinformation?
>
> RQ3: How can misinformation be studied as a nuanced phenomenon?
>
> RQ4: How can challenges with misinformation be mitigated?

The individual studies (I–IV) helped to form these RQs. Study I (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020) focused on the theoretical side of misinformation. Study II (Ruokolainen, 2022a) discussed a qualitative methodological approach for studying misinformation. Studies III (Ruokolainen, 2022b) and IV (Ruokolainen et al., 2023) were empirical studies that studied misinformation in the context of official information (Study IV) and ways to help and support others with information challenges, such as misinformation (Study III).

No explicit RQs were stated for Study I. The study provided theoretical premises and conceptual approaches for studying misinformation as a nuanced concept in the context of both everyday life and challenging situations, especially. A literature review of types of misinformation in the context of asylum seekers provided indications of different kinds of misinformation.

Study II analysed a particular methodological approach for studying misinformation. The associated RQs were as follows:

> RQ1. What kind of questions and discussion reveal misinformation in an interview situation when studying misinformation as a natural part of people's information environment?
>
> RQ1.1. How do direct questions on misinformation function?
>
> RQ1.2. How does indirect discussion on misinformation function?

This study helped in understanding misinformation as a subject of study and how it can be reached. This was important because there was no precedent for studying it qualitatively.

Study III focused on the information-related strategies that volunteers use when helping asylum seekers with information challenges. The RQs for this study were as follows:

> RQ1. What types of strategies do volunteers use when supporting asylum seekers with information challenges?
>
> RQ2. How are the strategies connected to information and information practices?

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These questions helped us understand what happens around information and how challenges with misinformation can be alleviated. This kind of support with information is essentially connected to encounters.

Study IV studied misinformation in the context of official information, asking:

> RQ1. What types of misinformation exist in the context of official services?

> RQ2. What characteristics of official information make it misinformation?

The fourth study helped us understand the nature of official information and how it is connected to misinformation. The typology highlighted the nuanced nature of misinformation and provided new knowledge about what characterises misinformation in different situations and why.

1.3. Thesis structure

This thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 1 introduces the thesis subject and the RQs that guide us through the thesis. Chapter 2 introduces the contexts of the study: support with information and, more specifically, asylum seekers and volunteers, as well youth and youth services. Chapter 3 focuses on the theoretical framework of the thesis, with an emphasis on misinformation as the overall theme. Encounters—a theme that emerged from the data—are raised as contextual factors that influence misinformation. Chapter 4 explains the methodology and data collection processes for the individual studies. Chapter 5 presents the findings of the individual studies. Chapter 6, focuses on discussing the novel approach to understanding misinformation, connecting it to information in general, and presents the contributions, impact, and limitations of the thesis. Finally, Chapter 7 summarises the thesis' main findings and conclusions.

2. Study contexts

This chapter explains the background of the contexts in which misinformation and encounters were studied. The overall context was *support with information*, which then informed two narrower contexts. Support with information refers to various actions—not necessarily directly involving information—that help other people access, understand, and use information. Support with information can be seen as related to information mediation; therefore, the literature on intermediaries also informed this thesis.

The study was conducted by interviewing two groups providing support with information: volunteers supporting asylum seekers (Context 1) and youth service workers supporting youth (Context 2). Since the situation and context of asylum seekers, youth, and their support groups affected the results, it was important to gain background knowledge regarding them.

In Context 1, the overall asylum situation and asylum seekers in Finland, the asylum process, and the information challenges of asylum seekers are first discussed, followed by a presentation of volunteers as providers of support with information.

Context 2 refers to youth and the services that target them. Here, the Finnish youth legislation from an information perspective is discussed, as well as young people's information challenges, and finally, youth services and their role in providing support with information are presented.

Although these contexts are discussed separately, it must be noted that people may belong to different groups and have different identities simultaneously. Many asylum seekers arriving in Finland in the past few years have been young people who may face issues that are discussed here in the youth context. Both youth and asylum seekers may identify with different majority or minority groups, or they may be seen as belonging to certain groups by other people. Thus, these categorisations are, to some extent, artificial. They are used herein only to provide background information, with no intention to discount anyone's individual experience or identity.

2.1. Support with information

This thesis approaches misinformation and the issues related to it in terms of people giving support with information. The methodological decision to use an indirect approach is discussed in more detail in Section 4.3.

Evaluation of UNESCO's work in the thematic area of media and information literacy (2020, p. 16) recommends upscaling media and information literacy

programmes to enhance the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups in society, including youth, elderly people, migrants, and people with disabilities. Haider and Sundin (2022) commented on the UNESCO recommendation:

> Once again, there are good reasons for discerning these specific groups and attempting to equip their members with education, knowledge, and resources to act independently in an unequal world pervaded by digital platforms. Yet, there is a further interpretation that can be made, which sheds light on the way in which deficiency is diagnosed in contrast to a normative ideal of media and information literacy, whose place is left void in the statement. Given that the groups singled out in this paragraph easily make up the majority of the global population, at the very least we can conclude that their members are predisposed in ways that constitute an obstacle to assuming this position and the ideal aspired to is personified by a group that is missing from the list. (p. 82)

Thus, referring to these groups as *marginalised* or *vulnerable* is problematic. The groups are very heterogeneous and diverse in their reasons for being deemed 'vulnerable'. For example, migrants may be highly information literate in some contexts, but the information environment in the new setting may pose challenges, especially for forced migrants, for whom the information environment is greatly affected by the overall situation. Therefore, vulnerability and marginalisation are highly situational when it comes to information.

Despite it being problematic that the adequate level of media and information literacy in a society is defined by a minority—'the group missing from the list', as Haider and Sundin (2022, p. 82) put it—many of the above-mentioned groups do indeed need help and support in navigating today's information environment. The two contexts (asylum seekers and youth) were chosen because they have quite clear support groups providing support with information in both contexts: volunteers (Section 2.2.5.) and youth services (Section 2.3.4.). This does not mean that no other support with information is available for these groups, nor that other groups that are considered vulnerable lack support.

The information needs of asylum seekers and youth often relate to complex societal structures, and related information is not always easy to understand. The need for support with information in challenging life situations has been noted in various contexts, such as for people experiencing mental health issues (Smith-Frigerio, 2021) and for cancer patients (Treiman et al., 2021). Psychological studies have used the concept of *informational support*, which is a component of social support, along with, for example, emotional support, social integration or network support, esteem support, and tangible aid or

instrumental support (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Cutrona, 1990; Mikal & Woodfield, 2015). Informational support can be characterised as follows:

> Informational support is help in defining, understanding, and coping with problematic events. It has also been called advice, appraisal support, and cognitive guidance. (Cohen & Wills, 1985, p. 313)

In this thesis, *support with information* is defined as 'broad and holistic actions that help people to access, process, and use information' (Ruokolainen et al., 2023). The information-related strategies that volunteers use with asylum seekers, presented in Study III (Ruokolainen, 2022b), are a good example of this kind of holistic support, which does not merely involve information mediation. Such support groups are not necessarily information professionals or focus on information aspects, but they may be vital sources of information and key actors in accessing, comprehending, and using information. Hence, people providing support may not be aware of helping particularly with information, and the information aspects may be intertwined in various interpersonal encounters.

The next section briefly discusses the literature on lay intermediaries that proved relevant to the support approach and the two contexts. It also explains why the concept of lay intermediaries is not used in this thesis, despite it relating to support with information and being useful for examining the phenomenon.

2.1.1. Lay intermediaries

Lay intermediaries (i.e. professionals other than information professionals who mediate information) have been increasingly recognised in research (Abrahamson & Fisher, 2007; Buchanan et al., 2019). For marginalised, vulnerable, or disadvantaged people, lay intermediaries may be, for example, nurses providing support for young expectant mothers (Buchanan & Nicol, 2019); doctors, social workers, psychologists, professors, teachers, and social educators supporting young women in vulnerable situations (Sabelli, 2012); state or voluntary sector professionals working with young mothers (Buchanan et al., 2019); and care workers, volunteers, and family members, functioning as information proxies for older and vulnerable adults (Cruickshank et al., 2020).

Abrahamson and Fisher (2007) defined the concept of lay intermediaries as 'those who seek information in a non-professional or informal capacity on behalf (or because) of others without necessarily being asked to do so, or

engaging in follow-up' (Background Literature Section). Buchanan and Nicol (2019) stated:

> Intermediaries, facilitate information needs recognition and considered purposeful action within problematic situations, are a key source of information in themselves, and a key integrative connection to other external sources not otherwise accessed; and tailor and personalise information for relevance, and communicate via incremental and recursive cycles that take into account learning needs. (p. 174)

When comparing these two definitions, Abrahamson and Fisher emphasised the actual information mediation, except for the follow-up, whereas Buchanan and Nicol's definition can be interpreted as extending beyond strict information activities. The latter definition touches upon the idea of support with information, which considers the recipient of support and the situation more comprehensively.

Warren (2007) highlighted an interesting aspect of an information intermediary as 'some form of human agency which, having access to a source of information, interprets and communicates it to a group which does not have access' (p. 384). The emphasis here is on knowledge sharing and two-way communication, not merely on giving and receiving information.

Pálsdóttir (2012) used the term *informal information supporters* to refer to relatives who help elderly people meet their information needs. The focus of the study was on information needs, seeking, and monitoring, although the relatives' experiences of the supporter role were also discussed. Despite the term approximating the one used in this thesis—support with information—the focus seemed to be on traditional information mediation activities.

The concept of *lay intermediaries* or *information intermediaries*, in some studies also called *gatekeepers* or *information proxies*, is helpful for discussing what support with information means in the contexts of this thesis. This short overview of the concept, mostly regarding marginalised, disadvantaged, or vulnerable people, shows that intermediaries can be understood as either narrowly conducting information seeking for others or, more broadly, supporting support recipients while also providing information. Despite the possibility of using the term broadly, as, for example, Buchanan and Nicol (2019) have done, and although the concept of information intermediaries is fairly established in library and information science (LIS), a deliberate choice was made not to use the term in this thesis.

There are two reasons why support with information was preferred over 'intermediaries'. Firstly, this thesis emphasises misinformation in encounters rather than the groups themselves. Hence, it was more appropriate to examine

the actions of the groups rather than their roles per se. This was demonstrated in Study III, which investigated volunteers' strategies for supporting asylum seekers with their information challenges (Ruokolainen, 2022b). The choice to consider actions also underlines that not all support directly concerns information mediation, although it affects different aspects of information. Secondly, the concept of information intermediaries can be understood narrowly as those who mediate information. Whether it is more fruitful to expand established concepts or to invent new ones is always debatable. In this case, the concepts of information intermediaries and lay intermediaries were relevant to this thesis, but they did not fully address the need to consider what happens between different groups in encounters: support with information.

2.2. Context 1: Asylum seekers and volunteers

In Context 1, misinformation connected to asylum seekers was studied through volunteers. To understand this context, it was important to gain background knowledge of the asylum situation in Finland, the different information challenges asylum seekers face, and volunteers' roles in asylum seekers' lives and the system. Initially, this section defines some central concepts.

2.2.1. Concepts connected to asylum

Different concepts are used in this thesis to describe the context of asylum seekers and volunteers.

An *asylum seeker* is a person who seeks protection in another country. The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) Master Glossary of Terms (2006) defines the term as follows:

> An asylum-seeker is an individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum-seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum-seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every refugee is initially an asylum-seeker. (p. 4)

The *asylum procedure* refers to the individual administrative proceeding in the destination country for a person seeking asylum. Normally, this procedure takes months or even years (Jauhiainen, 2017, pp. 11–12).

The *asylum process* comprises an individual's departure from the country of origin to seek protection in another country, the journey to the destination country, the asylum procedure, the positive or negative asylum decision, and the short-term consequences for the applicant, community, and society (Jauhiainen, 2017, p. 12). In practice, procedure and process are often used

synonymously, and in this thesis, the term *asylum process* is preferred to *asylum procedure*, and it encompasses the asylum procedure as defined by Jauhiainen, as well as the individual's overall experience in Finland.

The *asylum system* is used in this thesis to refer to the overall administrative processing of asylum applications in the destination country, in contrast to an individual *asylum procedure*. There is also a *Common European Asylum System* (Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, n.d.) that aims to ensure an integrated European Union (EU) approach to asylum procedures.

A *refugee* is a 'person who meets the eligibility criteria under the applicable refugee definition, as provided for in international or regional refugee instruments, under UNHCR's mandate, and/or in national legislation' (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2006, p. 17).

An *immigrant* is a person who, from the perspective of the country of arrival, 'moves into a country other than that of his or her nationality or usual residence, so that the country of destination effectively becomes his or her new country of usual residence' (UN International Organization for Migration, 2022).

A *migrant* is a person 'who changes his or her country of usual residence, irrespective of the reason for migration or legal status' (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2006b).

An *undocumented migrant* 'in Finland is a person who is in Finland without appropriate legal permission and whose permanence is not officially accepted by the authorities of the country' (Jauhiainen et al., 2018, p. 63).

Volunteers are people who 'provide help to others, a group, an organization, a cause, or the community at large, without expectation of material reward' (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 3). In this thesis, all actors working outside the official asylum system are referred to as volunteers, although volunteering activities may be part of their job descriptions (e.g. for church employees). The focus is, therefore, on their roles outside the official system. In the context of this thesis, volunteers are those who work with complex asylum questions, rather than recreational activities, in which a large body of volunteers are involved.

2.2.2. Situation in Finland

This research project started in 2018, after the 2015 situation when an exceptionally high number of people applied for asylum in Finland. In 2015, 32,477 applications represented an almost ninefold increase compared to the previous year (3,651 applications in 2014). However, the number of asylum

applications decreased in 2016 and has continued to decrease slowly (Figure 2)[3]. Despite the decrease in applications, the year 2015 has had an enduring impact on the asylum situation in Finland. Firstly, the asylum processes for appeals and new applications for people who arrived in 2015 were long. According to the Finnish Immigration Service (2020), 46 per cent of the asylum applications in 2019 were reapplications, and Iraqi was the most frequent applicant nationality, although few new asylum seekers were arriving from Iraq. Secondly, changes in the legislation and more rigid interpretations of the law led to many asylum seekers becoming undocumented migrants, and the number of undocumented migrants is believed to have increased (Lyytinen, 2019, p. 20).
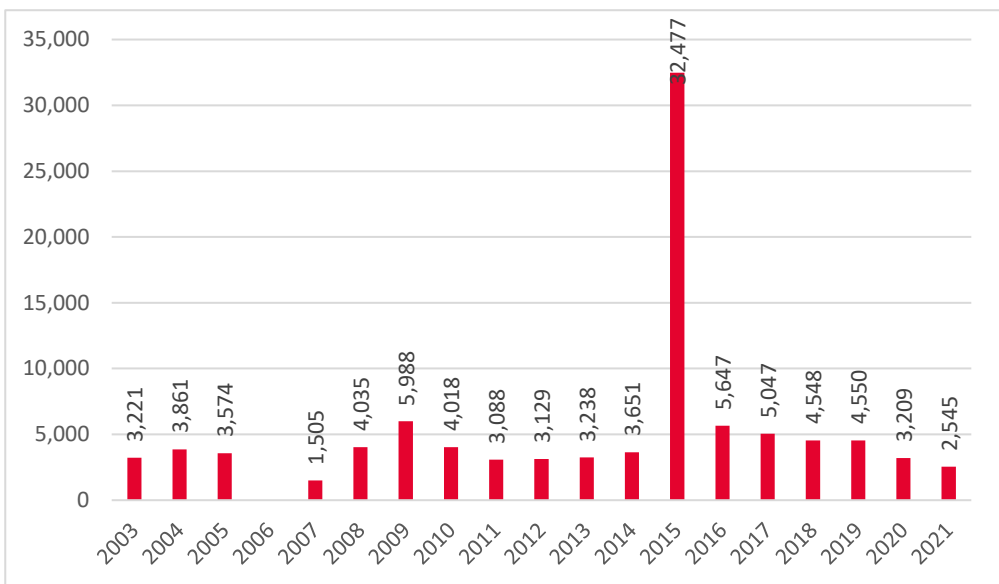
Figure 2: Asylum applications in Finland, 2003–2022. Source: Statistics from the Finnish Immigration Service[4].

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[3] The 2022 statistics are omitted because they were not complete at the time of writing. Therefore, the extent to which the war in Ukraine and Ukrainian and Russian people seeking either asylum or temporary protection have affected the decreasing trend remains unclear. The COVID-19 pandemic has also had an impact on the number of people arriving in Finland as asylum seekers (Jauhiainen, 2020). Hence, although both developments are important when considering the Finnish asylum situation, not all details can be provided in this thesis, which, in any case, does not focus solely on the development of the asylum system.

[4] Statistics for 2003–2014 are available at https://migri.fi/en/old-statistics (2006 statistics unavailable) and for 2015 at
https://tilastot.migri.fi/index.html#decisions/23330?l=en&start=612&end=623. Earlier statistics are not readily available.

Pirjatanniemi et al. (2021, p. 3) listed the changes that were made or came into effect during the Finnish government's tenure from 29 May 2015 to 6 June 2019. The Aliens Act (Ulkomaalaislaki 301/2004, n.d.) was changed several times during this period. Humanitarian protection was abolished, grounds for family reunification were tightened, the right to legal aid became more limited, and the time for appeal was shortened. Precautionary measures, denial of admittance or stay, regulations concerning deportation, and penal provisions regarding violation of prohibition of entry were also changed. However, children's rights slightly improved. These changes have mostly worsened the situation for asylum seekers and have been strongly criticised by researchers and immigration experts (see Lyytinen, 2019, p. 20).

The stricter Aliens Act and ways of interpreting it have led to an increase in undocumented migrants (Lyytinen, 2019, p. 20). Jauhiainen et al. (2018) described the situation of undocumented migrants in Finland as follows:

> An undocumented migrant in Finland is a person who is in Finland without appropriate legal permission and whose permanence is not officially accepted by the authorities of the country. Many definitions indicate that undocumented migrants do not have valid medical insurance and have only a limited access to public social and health services in Finland. Among undocumented migrants are also so-called "new paperless people" who are former asylum seekers whose asylum application was rejected, but who still remain in Finland without a legal right to do so. Many are asylum seekers who came in 2015 to Finland from Iraq and Afghanistan. To diminish the number of potential undocumented migrants in Finland, an asylum seeker from these countries receives a grant of 1,500 EUR from the state if s/he returns to the country of origin during the asylum process. (Jauhiainen et al., 2018, p. 63)

Jauhiainen and Tedeschi (2021, p. 65) stated that, as most asylum seekers do not obtain asylum or residence permits in Finland, the largest group of undocumented migrants are former asylum seekers. It is estimated that there were around 3,000–4,000 undocumented migrants in Finland in 2017, including 'new paperless people' (i.e. former asylum seekers; Jauhiainen et al., 2018, pp. 63–64).

In general, it is not always clear where the boundaries between migrants, asylum seekers, and undocumented migrants lie (Crawley & Skleparis, 2018), and people move between different legal categories (Goldring & Landolt, 2013). The state-defined legal categories do not fit the identities or everyday lives of the people in question, who may not even know their legal statuses (Jauhiainen & Tedeschi, 2021, p. 169). Therefore, it must be kept in mind that the term *asylum seeker* is not always clear in practice, and this thesis does not take a stand on anyone's legal status. Data on asylum seekers was collected

through volunteers (explained in more detail in Section 5.2.) and could concern undocumented migrants or people with ill-defined and shifting statuses. This was not per se a problematic issue, as the study depicted the chaotic but truthful state of affairs: people arriving as asylum seekers or through forced migration face many issues—including challenges with information—that are partly connected to their unclear legal statuses but are also due to the everyday problems that people face in a new situation.

2.2.3. Asylum process in Finland

As defined in Section 2.2.1., the asylum process refers to the journey, asylum procedure, asylum decision, and consequences for the applicant, community, and society, whereas the asylum procedure refers to the administrative processing of an asylum application (Jauhiainen, 2017, pp. 11–12). In this thesis, the term *asylum process* is used as a combination of the two concepts in the way Jauhiainen defined them. The administrative process (asylum procedure) is presented, but some wider aspects of the process are also discussed. For example, because the focus of this thesis is on the situation in Finland, immigrants' journeys are not discussed here. A more detailed description of such journeys can be found, for example, in Koikkalainen et al. (2020), who discussed Iraqi asylum seekers' journeys to Finland.

The asylum process is often a long and complex one by which an applicant's right to refugee status is evaluated according to internationally agreed-upon principles (Jauhiainen & Tedeschi, 2021, p. 66). The criteria for asylum are defined in the Aliens Act (Finnish Immigration Service, 2022; Ulkomaalaislaki 301/2004, n.d.):

> Aliens residing in the country are granted asylum if they reside outside their home country or country of permanent residence owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of ethnic origin, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group or political opinion and if they, because of this fear, are unwilling to avail themselves of the protection of that country. (Aliens Act 301/2004; Unofficial Translation, n.d. Chapter 6, Section 87)

According to the Finnish Immigration Service (2022), after applying for asylum, applicants are directed to reception services. During the process, the applicants live in transit centres, reception centres, and/or private accommodation. The grounds for asylum are assessed in asylum interviews. After receiving positive decisions, applicants are granted international protection (asylum) or subsidiary protection status and assigned to municipal integration services. After receiving negative decisions, applicants have 30

days to leave Finland voluntarily, but the decision may be appealed to an Administrative Court. Residence permits may also be obtained on other grounds (Finnish Immigration Service, 2022). However, the process is rarely straightforward, and, as mentioned earlier, people may shift between different legal statuses.

This description of the process is very clinical and does not necessarily reflect how asylum seekers themselves perceive the process. Although this thesis discusses some aspects of asylum seekers' experiences, this short overview by no means gives a full account of those experiences, and unfortunately, not all relevant aspects can be discussed.

Reception centres are everyday environment for many asylum seekers. Koistinen (2017) stated that most asylum seekers living in reception centres feel safe and confirm that they are treated well therein. However, there are also opposite experiences. Many asylum seekers experience racism, discrimination, loneliness, and/or a feeling of 'being stuck'. The lack of mental health services in reception centres exacerbates these problems (Koistinen, 2017). Reception centres, as everyday environment, create borders and separate asylum seekers from local people (Kivijärvi & Myllylä, 2022). They may also affect asylum seekers' lives, identities, and ways of being on a deeper level. For example, even the asylum seekers' perceptions of time may change (Marucco, 2017, p. 90), and *waiting* becomes a dominant life state (Koistinen, 2017; Marucco, 2017). In general, many asylum seekers experience living in a state of in-betweenness—'a life more of survival, not of living'—and the conflicting situation of 'being safe in uncertainty' is challenging (Hartonen et al., 2021, p. 41).

The administrative procedure affects asylum seekers mentally. Puumala (2018) stated that the asylum procedure and the asylum interview, in particular, create informational uncertainty, which derives from the impossibility of creating and eliciting objectively verifiable information and experiential knowledge. As experiential knowledge involves interpretation, asylum seekers are in a vulnerable position because their knowledge may be contested.

Hartonen et al. (2021), based on the results of their study on asylum seekers' subjective well-being, concluded that the sense of belonging and hope increases resilience and improves the livelihoods of asylum seekers; hence, the authors emphasised 'the importance of social support, participation and empowerment' (p. 41). This kind of social support is discussed in more detail in Section 2.2.5. in connection with volunteers.

2.2.4. Asylum seekers' information challenges

Relatively few empirical studies have focused on asylum seekers in LIS. For example, a topic search[5] on 'asylum seeker*' in Web of Science, when limiting the results to the Web of Science category of 'Information Science Library Science', returned 23 results. These included, for example, the health-related information-seeking behaviour of immigrants, asylum seekers, and refugees (Ahmadinia et al., 2022a, 2022b); the impact of information interaction structures on the inclusion or exclusion of asylum seekers (le Louvier & Innocenti, 2022); the place of heritage in the information experience of asylum seekers (le Louvier & Innocenti, 2021); an information needs matrix for asylum seekers and refugees (Oduntan & Ruthven, 2019); the information gaps of asylum seekers and refugees (Oduntan & Ruthven, 2021); and misinformation in the context of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants (Study I; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020). Thus, often, asylum seekers are discussed together with refugees or other immigrants.

For comparison, a similar topic search[6] on 'refugee*', limited to 'Information Science Library Science', returned 227 results, and a topic search on 'immigrant* OR migrant*' returned 640 results. Thus, there is significant interest in different immigrant groups in LIS research.

This section on asylum seekers' information challenges was partly inspired by studies on other immigrant groups, as well as research outside LIS, due to the small number of studies focusing solely on asylum seekers and their information behaviour or practices. Since many other challenges influence information, they are also briefly discussed. However, the section does not provide a complete review of the challenges asylum seekers face (not even those directly connected to information), because such challenges are not the main topic of this thesis and are discussed only to provide background information.

The information needs of asylum seekers often relate to quite complex information regarding, for example, the asylum process, rights, and duties (Honkasalo, 2017) or different services and aid that are available during the process (Merisalo, 2017). These topics can be very difficult to understand, and asylum seekers do not always comprehend even their own processes (Ruokolainen, 2022b; Ruokolainen et al., 2023).

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[5] The search was conducted in Web of Science on 13 October 2022 at 4 pm.
[6] The searches were conducted in Web Science on 14 October 2022 at 3 pm.

In communication situations, all parties may interpret cultural cues differently. For example, clinicians working with suicidal asylum seekers in Sundvall et al.'s (2018) study had difficulties interpreting asylum seekers' expressions of distress and trauma. This is problematic, especially when people experiencing trauma or distress cannot rely on receiving support due to miscommunication. There are also language and interpretation challenges (Ahmadinia et al., 2022a; Gillespie et al., 2016; Ruokolainen, 2022b; Ruokolainen et al., 2023).

Many of the information-related challenges seem to concern *informing* and *information overload*. Kainat et al. (2021) noticed that refugee women often feel that they receive more information on societal issues than they can handle (i.e. suffer from information overload). Honkasalo (2017) stated that although young asylum seekers want information on the asylum process and their own rights, mere information exchange is not necessarily perceived as fruitful, although the aim of informing may be to increase their social inclusion. Rather, inclusion is enhanced by the feeling that young asylum seekers are respected, taken seriously, and have someone they can turn to when needed. In a similar way, Oikari (2018) noticed that, rather than having issues with access to information, asylum seekers perceived understanding and discussing information as more important. Quality interactions in this context were also underlined. Thus, we can see that information and access to it are commonly not the answer to information problems, and wider quality aspects must be considered.

Study I (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020) covered a literature review on misinformation in the context of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants, which will be presented in more detail in Section 5.1. The review showed that asylum seekers may encounter misinformation in terms of outdated information, rumours, or distorted information, and that misinformation may derive from different authorities, intermediaries, and gatekeepers. Misinformation may cause false hope and unrealistic expectations. The review strongly indicated that asylum seekers face, at the very least, uncertain information, and that the situation regarding different information sources may be chaotic.

Information is not a one-way phenomenon, and perhaps too often, information-related discussions focus on the recipient. More focus should be placed on how asylum seekers can share their knowledge and make their own views heard. Kuusisto-Arponen (2017) stated that official structures do not readily recognise asylum seekers' own experiential knowledge, which may be

vital when discussing their situations. Neglecting this knowledge may contribute to social isolation, marginalisation, and mental health problems.

The importance of social networks has been recognised in research (Borkert et al., 2018; Honkasalo, 2017; Merisalo, 2017), and they affect access to and understanding of information. However, asylum seekers face challenges in building and maintaining new social networks (Kuusisto-Arponen, 2017; Maiche, 2017).

Since challenges with information cannot be separated from other life challenges, it is important to understand the stress and mental burdens asylum seekers may face. Everyday life can itself be challenging for them, as Jauhiainen (2017, p. 8) pointed out, referring to everyday life in reception centres, due to issues with language and being surrounded by an unfamiliar environment and people. Previous, often traumatic, experiences make it difficult to build a new life (Jauhiainen, 2017, p. 16), particularly when asylum seekers, due to their status, experience an in-between state with an uncertain outcome where waiting becomes an integral part of everyday life (Brekke, 2004, 2010; Nykänen et al., 2019, pp. 168–169). Uncertainty and fear shape asylum seekers' information practices (Dekker et al., 2018; Witteborn, 2014).

The asylum system and politics, as well as public opinions about asylum seekers, probably also have an impact on different aspects of information. There is little—if any—direct research on the impact of the legislative changes in Finland on asylum seekers' information behaviour or practices. Studies III and IV touched upon these impacts: volunteers working with asylum seekers felt that the changes have complicated information about the asylum system and process and that it is difficult for asylum seekers to understand all the relevant information (Ruokolainen, 2022b; Ruokolainen et al., 2023).

2.2.5. Volunteers as support

Asylum applicants encounter huge numbers of people during the asylum process: border authorities, immigration authorities, police officers, reception centre workers, social workers, lawyers, interpreters, non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers and volunteers, health care professionals, other asylum seekers, and other individuals. As Jauhiainen (2017) stated, 'the common Finnish people' are the biggest group surrounding asylum seekers (p. 9), but apart from people working in the reception centres and different officials whom the applicants meet during the application process, they are often quite distant from the asylum seekers. Positive and important encounters, especially for social inclusion, often occur in everyday settings and

spaces. An important support group consists of earlier immigrants and those sharing the same cultural background. Different organisations, NGOs, and volunteers play an important role in facilitating asylum seekers' everyday lives and smoothing the process of settling in Finland (Jauhiainen, 2017, p. 9).

Thus, there are many different individuals and groups that provide support with information. The need for 'natural' support is highlighted in an example from Renner et al. (2012), who trained laypeople to act as sponsors and provide social support to asylum seekers in Austria. Although the overall results for social support were good, some groups of asylum seekers were reluctant to accept support from strangers, which negatively affected the results (Renner et al., 2012). This could indicate that support should come from groups and individuals who are a natural source of support for asylum seekers themselves and/or have natural links to the society in the specific host country.

In this thesis, volunteers were chosen as the support group because their role in supporting asylum seekers throughout the asylum process has become extremely important in Finland. As already defined in Section 2.2.1., volunteers 'provide help to others, a group, an organization, a cause, or the community at large, without expectation of material reward' (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 3). In the context of the asylum process, it is difficult to define all the different actors and their statuses, and there may be local differences in needs and activities. The involved actors may be people working or volunteering in NGOs, individuals helping asylum seekers with no or only loose connections to an organisation, church employees using their work time to help asylum seekers, people volunteering at churches, activists trying to improve asylum seekers' situations, networks of volunteers and activists who help with different issues when needed, etc. All these actors are in this thesis referred to as *volunteers,* although some of them may work with asylum seekers in a professional capacity. However, the common denominator is working and volunteering outside the official asylum system. In practice, the volunteers in this thesis supported asylum seekers with various aspects of the asylum process, and people volunteering only for recreational/leisure activities were excluded from the scope of the study.

Karakayali and Kleist (2016) noted that volunteering activities in Germany were becoming broader and more advanced. Volunteering in the context of asylum seekers differs from other types of volunteering, as the motivation is not merely to volunteer but to help asylum seekers (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016). These kinds of political elements in volunteering and humanitarian action were also noted by Ahonen and Kallius (2019, p. 93). The shift from a recreational

activity to a more activist role is highlighted by the fact that volunteers substitute for state obligations and may even provide core services that would normally be covered by official representatives (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016). This increased importance of volunteers for asylum seekers may be problematic if asylum seekers have no choice other than to turn to volunteers. As a participant in Lloyd et al.'s (2013) study stated, 'You have to trust them [volunteers] because you don't know anything about this country' (p. 132). Many volunteers in Finland are women, which may initially seem strange to many asylum-seeking men (Nykänen et al., 2019, p. 168). Therefore, it is not easy to say whether asylum seekers always necessarily prefer or trust volunteers as support people, and the volunteers' role must be viewed critically despite their importance.

Volunteers have been seen as sources and intermediaries of social support (Behnia, 2007; Brinker, 2021; Renner et al., 2012) and information (Kennan et al., 2011; le Louvier & Innocenti, 2021; Lloyd et al., 2013). The flexibility of volunteers' roles makes it easier to provide personalised support, and they may function as a link between asylum seekers and other institutions or organisations (Brinker, 2021). Their roles are often multifaceted, and volunteers may offer 'emotional, informational, and instrumental supports' (Behnia, 2007, p. 3). The information intermediary role includes being a source of everyday information, especially, but this role may change over time, and volunteers become less crucial when asylum seekers start building their own information relationships (Kennan et al., 2011, pp. 197–198). Volunteers are often close enough to the asylum seekers to recognise specific information needs or preferences for information, such as 'the importance of visual and oral information' (Lloyd et al., 2013, p. 132). They may also assist in navigating and clarifying official information (Lloyd et al., 2013, p. 135). The social and informational support role may indeed be successful, but only if the asylum seekers acknowledge the volunteers as important information sources and are willing to share information with the volunteers (le Louvier & Innocenti, 2021, p. 4).

2.3. Context 2: Youth and youth services

In Context 2, misinformation in connection with youth was studied through youth service workers. If asylum seekers' statuses can be hard to define in practice, the term *youth* comprises at least an equally wide variety of identities, people, and groups, which cannot all be discussed in this thesis. It is important to remember that youth and young people refer to a large group of people

whose only common denominator might be their age; therefore, the issues raised in this chapter—and overall in this thesis—are inevitably simplifications of a complex situation.

This chapter is constructed as follows. Firstly, it defines the central concepts. Secondly, it explains youth in Finland and how they are doing. Thirdly, it describes the information challenges of youth, and finally, it discusses youth's right to information services and the services of informational support providers.

2.3.1. Concepts connected to youth

The Finnish Youth Act (Government Proposal for a New Youth Act 111/2016, n.d.) defines concepts connected to youth as follows:

> 1) young people means those under 29 years of age;
>
> 2) youth work means the efforts to support the growth, independence and social inclusion of young people in society;
>
> 3) youth policy means coordinated actions to improve young people's growth and living conditions and intergenerational interaction;
>
> 4) youth activities means activities in which young people engage in voluntarily on their own terms;
>
> 5) national youth organisation means a registered organisation that pursues the purposes and promotes the underlying principles of this Act and whose operations extend to all parts of the country;
>
> 6) national youth work organisation means, aside from a national youth organisation, a registered association or foundation providing youth activities or youth-work services that pursues the purposes and promotes the underlying principles of this Act and whose operations extend to all parts of the country;
>
> 7) national youth work centre of expertise mean an entity that seeks to develop and promote competence and expertise in youth-related issues on a nationwide basis. A centre of expertise may consist of a contract-based consortium of two or more entities.
>
> (Government Proposal for a New Youth Act 111/2016, n.d., Chapter 2, Section 3)

In this thesis, *youth* are understood as people who use different youth information and counselling services. This definition resulted from the data, which covered youth service workers' experiences with their clients.

In this thesis*, youth services* are understood as different information and counselling services targeted at young people. These services may be national, municipal, or provided by NGOs. The services are free of charge to youth, non-profit, and based on the voluntary participation of their clients. The services

focus on providing the support young people need in life. Often, this involves focusing on education or working life, but also more holistically on supporting the social inclusion and well-being of youth and preventing their initial or further marginalisation. More concretely, youth services may, for example, direct their clients to other services and provide support via conversation. Mostly, the services are targeted at young people under 30, but the age range may vary for different services, sometimes starting from as young as 13 but more often from 15 or 16.

Youth service workers are people working in the above-mentioned services. Often, youth service workers have vocational upper secondary qualifications as youth workers and community instructors, community educator degrees, or Master of Social Sciences degrees in youth work and youth studies, but there are no specific qualification requirements for youth work in Finland, and therefore, youth service workers can have varying educational and professional backgrounds (Ministry of Education and Culture, n.d.).

2.3.2. Youth in Finland

It is not always easy to say who youth are, and defining youth depends heavily on the context (Huttunen, 2022, p. 22). Youth can be seen as the phase of life between childhood and adulthood, but life situations, needs, and interests may vary greatly among youth (young people), as with any age group (Kojo, 2022, p. 7). As already stated, youth and young people are understood in this thesis as those who use youth services. Nevertheless, it is important to provide some perspective on the situation in Finland in general (i.e. who young people in Finland are and how they are doing).

In 2021, there were 957,212 people between the ages of 15 and 29 in Finland (Statistics Finland, n.d.)—about 17 per cent of the whole population (5,549,599; Statistics Finland, 2022). About 10 per cent (97,070) of the youth in 2021 had a first language other than Finnish, Swedish, or Sami, and the foreign-language-speaking youth population is steadily rising (Valtion nuorisoneuvosto, n.d.). Although the number of foreign-language-speaking youth is increasing, the age groups are generally shrinking, meaning that the number of youth is decreasing annually (Kojo, 2022, p. 7).

Youth in Finland are generally doing well, but different problems are accumulating on minority of youth, which means that well-being is polarised, and the inequality of youth is increasing (Allianssi, n.d.; Kojo, 2022). The problems concern marginalisation, mental and physical health, and equality issues regarding education, work, and income. Besides these themes, today's

youth must deal with three crises that overshadow their lives and substantially affect their future: the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the climate crisis (Kojo, 2022, p. 4). This section is mostly inspired by the Allianssi report (Kojo, 2022), which summarises recent trends and research on youth in Finland.

Overall, one of the biggest problems for youth in Finland is marginalisation[7], which is a serious problem on the individual, social, and societal levels (Allianssi, n.d.). The Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos, 2022a) estimates that about 3–10 per cent of youth have risk factors for marginalisation, which include the low education levels of both young people and of their parents, long-term unemployment and the long-term need for income support, changes in family structure, as well as substance abuse or mental health problems (Allianssi, n.d.; Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos, 2022a).

The use of antidepressants is steadily increasing, indicating either a growing number of mental health problems or better recognition of them. Smoking and the use of alcohol are decreasing, but simultaneously, drug experimentation and drug abuse are increasing (Allianssi, n.d.). Kojo (2022, p. 10) pointed out that youth with substance abuse problems often also have mental health problems.

About 20–25 per cent of youth suffer from mental health issues, which are some of the most common health issues among youth, and young people may have several different mental health disorders simultaneously (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos, 2022b). Moreover, the lack of low-threshold and early support services increases the long-term costs for society (Kojo, 2022, p. 10).

Belonging to a minority increases the risk of being or becoming discriminated, exposed to racism, marginalised and/or exposed to sexual harassment (Kojo, 2022, p. 22). For example, disabled youth, youth with foreign backgrounds, and youth belonging to sexual or gender minorities, are especially vulnerable (Virrankari & Leemann, 2022).

There are further gaps among youth when it comes to education, work, and income. For example, mental health problems and exhaustion are among the most significant reasons for youth discontinuing their studies (Into ry, 2020; Kojo, 2022, p. 10). The stress young people experience has increased, and they feel burdened by studies, loneliness, and an uncertain future (Mieli ry, 2022).

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[7] 'Marginalization is both a condition and a process that prevents individuals and groups from full participation in social, economic, and political life enjoyed by the wider society' (Alakhunova et al., 2015).

It became more difficult to obtain summer jobs and internships during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, which, in turn, made it more difficult to enter the workforce (Kojo, 2022, p. 15). Today's students also have more dept than older generations (Kojo, 2022, p. 14; Suomen ylioppilaskuntien liitto (National Union of University Students in Finland), 2022). Young people are overrepresented among those receiving basic social assistance (Kojo, 2022, p. 13), which is the 'last-resort form of financial assistance for individuals and families which covers some of the basic necessities of life' (Kela, n.d.).

Lastly, three major crises in recent years have substantially affected youth. The COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine, and the climate crisis have resulted in, for example, more learning difficulties and mental health problems, as well as a decreasing sense of community (Kojo, 2022, p. 4). Many of the above-mentioned issues with stress, loneliness, education, and income worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some young people have benefitted from distance learning, but for many, the pandemic has been especially burdensome (Kojo, 2022). The war in Ukraine has decreased youth's sense of security, causing anxiety, distress, despair, anger, and difficulty concentrating (Kojo, 2022, p. 21). Youth experience substantially more fear of climate change and eco-anxiety than former generations, which can be severe enough to affect their studies, work, and enjoyment of social occasions (Grénman et al., 2022). However, at the same time, biodiversity has become an important value for youth, and young people believe in sustainable global solutions (Grénman et al., 2022).

To summarise, most youth are doing well, and in general, the well-being of youth has increased in the twenty-first century (Terveyden ja hyvinvoinnin laitos, 2019). Serious issues still affect youth, both on the individual and societal levels, and various problems tend to concern the same young people who are at risk becoming marginalised.

2.3.3. Young people's information challenges

As stated, young people, even in one country, are a heterogeneous group with varied needs, preferences, and challenges. Some information challenges are discussed here, but this short overview simplifies a complex situation and is lacking in the sense that different youth groups are not addressed separately. There are also, probably, huge differences between 15-year-olds and those who are almost 30 years old. Not all young people experience the mentioned challenges discussed next, nor do the challenges affect all youth to the same extent.

There are indications that young people predominantly use the internet and social media to seek information (Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021). They expect 'to be able to interact with the information they view', and paper-based sources as 'slow' media attract them less than fast-changing online information (Bilal & Zhang, 2019). However, youth also have difficulties in seeking information online, especially in 'formulating effective search queries, decomposing search tasks, and solving information problems', and this may partly be caused by low levels of conceptual understanding of the internet and search engines (Bilal & Zhang, 2019). The Ministry of Finance in Finland (Valtiovarainministeriö, 2017, p. 6) stated, in its report on young people's needs for digital support, that young people have digital skills, but those skills are not generally applied to societal issues, which means that young people are not necessarily able to seek information about, for example, working life or social services. At the same time, they often lack interest in these societal issues, and thus, *digital marginalisation* is increasingly becoming a risk for young people.

These points raised by the Ministry parallel concerns about young people's *information literacy*. Benselin and Ragsdell (2016) stated that compared to older generations, young people are increasingly using technology, even to the extent of risking addiction. However, simultaneously, youth may have issues with lower levels of information literacy, which makes them struggle with information searches and management. This again causes *information overload*. Older generations struggle with technology, but they have better information-seeking and management skills (Benselin & Ragsdell, 2016).

Almeida et al. (2022), based on earlier research, noted some indications of young people using their own strategies to *evaluate information*. Important factors for them are, for example, design, visuality, interactive elements, topicality, source popularity, and authority in the young people's eyes. Youth may make quick decisions and put less cognitive effort into those decisions (Almeida et al., 2022). Similarly, Bilal and Zhang (2019) considered young people's evaluation skills rudimentary. Therefore, it is perhaps wrong to state that youth do *not* assess or evaluate information but that their 'checklist' for the process does not necessarily match the older generations' criteria for information evaluation. This may be particularly problematic with information that is created and provided by grown-ups, and much of the societal and official information discussed in this thesis concerns that type of information. It also seems that research on *misinformation* in the context of youth research has focused mainly on the evaluation of information without more critically discussing what constitutes misinformation in this context (Almeida et al.,

2022; Hodgin & Kahne, 2018; Macedo-Rouet et al., 2019; Pérez-Escoda et al., 2021). Thus, much of the concern about youth's challenges revolves around questions concerning their information literacy and ability to evaluate information.

Nevertheless, it must also be borne in mind that younger generations are also creators of information themselves (e.g. Koh, 2013; Richard & Kafai, 2016), not merely passive consumers of it or people lacking skills in all forms of information evaluation. Young people also interact with information more regularly than before due to their use of mobile phones (Benselin & Ragsdell, 2016). Thus, the picture of youth's information challenges is quite complex, but it can be stated that they have specific information needs and challenges compared to older generations, which may be forgotten when information is provided to them.

2.3.4. Youth services as support

Finnish youth information and counselling services are based on European guidelines (Fedotoff & Pietilä, 2011). The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency (ERYICA) introduced the European Youth Information Charter in 1993. The charter was further updated in 2004 and 2009, when principles for online youth information were also created, and the revised document, which was approved in 2018, forms the basis of current European youth work (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency, n.d.). The aim of youth information and counselling services is 'to guarantee the equality of access to information for all young people, regardless of their situation, ethnic background, gender or social category' (Fedotoff & Pietilä, 2011, p. 4).

According to Siurala (2018, pp. 51–53), recent developments in Finnish youth work include a focus on digital youth work; professional cooperation between, for example, representatives from local educational, social, or health care services involved in the activities; and targeting youth work for individuals at risk (i.e. NEET youth (youth not in employment, education, or training; OECD, n.d.)). Youth work reaches almost all youth in Finland, but there are some regional differences, and in remote rural areas, there may be issues with youth service delivery (Siurala, 2018, p. 51).

The most relevant youth service concepts and services considering the context of this thesis (support with information) are presented as examples here. However, since there are many different services, both onsite and online, not all services can be mentioned or discussed in detail. This section emphasises services that provide onsite and face-to-face guidance or training,

sometimes besides online services, leaving out only online chat services targeted at youth. All the services presented here are based on the voluntary participation of the clients.

Since 2015, youth in Finland have been offered information and counselling services at one-stop guidance centres (*Ohjaamos*), and there are now over 70 *Ohjaamos* (J. Savolainen & Lehto, 2021) that collect different public services under one roof (Ohjaamot.fi, n.d.). The one-stop approach has four main principles: '(a) universal access, (b) customer choice, (c) integrated services and (d) accountability' (Kettunen & Felt, 2020, p. 296). The services can be youth services, social and health services, upper secondary schools, unemployment services, social insurance services, and services provided by other organisations, and businesses, but guidance may also be given on questions related to housing, immigration, and leisure time (Määttä, 2018, p. 158). The *Ohjaamo* concept and services have their roots in the EU's Youth Guarantee to tackle youth unemployment (Kettunen & Felt, 2020, p. 293).

Määttä (2018, p. 158) stated that the *Ohjaamo* concept has been seen as an answer to two societal concerns about youth: 1) youth are seen through their risks of being or becoming marginalised, and 2) there is a need for youth to transfer smoothly from school to further education and working life. In this scenario, *Ohjaamos,* as youth-friendly and flexible services, have been seen as an alternative to older bureaucratic services to help youth transfer from one life phase to another (Määttä, 2018, pp. 159, 165). The *Ohjaamo* concept considers youth as a diverse group, the individuals within which require tailored services (Kettunen & Felt, 2020, p. 294).

Outreach youth work focuses on helping NEET youth reach the other services they need. Outreach youth work involves individual guidance and support, and the basic elements include encountering, a holistic approach, and trust (Bamming & Walldén, 2018, p. 8). Outreach youth work is defined in the Youth Act (Nuorisolaki 1285/2016, n.d.) as follows:

> The mission of outreach youth work is to reach young people in need of assistance and provide access to services and other support designed to promote their growth, independence, social inclusion and life management skills as well as to improve access to education and facilitate entry into the labour market. Outreach youth work is based on voluntary participation by and cooperation with the young person involved. (Government Proposal for a New Youth Act 111/2016, n.d.)[8]

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[8] Citation from the English translation of the Proposal for the new Youth Act (111/2016).

In practice, outreach activities may involve 'several types of emotional work, rehabilitative work and forms of training and psychiatric/psychological or other behavioural assessment' (Mäkelä et al., 2021, p. 102).

NGOs also provide youth services and outreach youth work. An example of such an NGO is the Deaconess Foundation, which is a non-profit foundation that helps people at risk of social exclusion (Deaconess Foundation, n.d.-a). The foundation conducts youth work based on the Vamos concept (Deaconess Foundation, n.d.-b). The starting point for Vamos activities is the double challenge facing youth in our society: either youth are left outside the service system for some reason, or encounters with the services do not lead to desired outcomes (Alanen et al., 2015, p. 7). Vamos offers individual and group coaching for young people who are worried about coping with everyday life, housing, mental health, income, work, or education, and coaching usually occurs about 1–4 times a week (Merikukka et al., 2021, pp. 13–14).

As we can see, many services for young people aim to help them with various questions and challenges from a client-oriented perspective. Thus, they aim to provide *support with information*. ERYICA argues for the necessity of youth information support and services as follows:

> Youth Information is a continuously changing field. In the past, information was often static, came from fewer sources and was controlled and provided by a few information providers. Today the nature of producing information has changed dramatically: information changes and updates very quickly, and there are thousands of **information sources and channels**. As new formats are continuously being developed, the reliability of information is often hard to assess. In this context, young people must grow and find their place in society; they themselves are not only information users but also producers and multipliers. Youth Information plays a crucial role in assisting young people to identify and evaluate reliable information. (ERYICA - The European Youth Information and Counselling Agency, n.d.) [bold in the original]

Nevertheless, this support role should be viewed critically. For example, Mäkelä et al. (2021) pointed out that young people are often seen as 'suitably vulnerable, employable and competitive subjects' (p. 111) who have deficiencies that must and can be corrected so that young people can pursue healthy and stable lives and enter the workforce. The authors called for young people's right to be treated as capable and active subjects, although they may not meet society's criteria for a proper lifestyle and may not agree with the services and help provided for them.

Thus, both legally and from the perspective of services, youth services are seen as highly relevant sources of support for youth. However, it is also

important to understand whether young people see these services as relevant and desirable. Pajamäki and Otter (2018) studied young people's own experiences with youth services. In their view, young people also criticise services, and they:

- do not know enough about the services (lack information)
- have a fear of shame and stigmatisation if/when using these services
- lack trust in the services and service providers
- find the grown-up way of encountering difficult
- suffer from stiff service structures
- feel that they are not heard in the services.

Therefore, considering youth's own experiences, youth services may not, in all cases, be the best providers of support with information. However, for lack of a clearer group of individuals, groups, or organisations that functioned in a similar role, reaching the entire youth age group, youth services were chosen for this thesis because their *aim* is to provide support, despite varying outcomes.

3. Theoretical framework

This thesis combines two theoretical perspectives—misinformation and encounters—based on a theoretical understanding of misinformation that highlights social factors, situation, and context. Encounters emerged as an important factor forming misinformation.

The first section of this chapter defines misinformation through the concept of information and its relationship to truth. Secondly, it explains why this thesis focuses on misinformation rather than other types of information or information in general. Thirdly, it provides a short overview of relevant research on misinformation.

The second section focuses on encounters, defining and describing the concept of caring encounter. It also provides a short overview of the different aspects of encounters connected to information and information services.

3.1. Misinformation

This thesis uses Karlova and Fisher's (2013) definition of misinformation, which understands misinformation as information that is inaccurate, uncertain, vague, or ambiguous in a given context and situation for a receiver. This definition highlights the social and contextual aspects of misinformation and is firmly rooted in the concept of information, which will be discussed next.

3.1.1. Information and truth

To discuss misinformation, we must first consider the concept of *information* and its relationship to truth. Defining information has never been an easy task, but Case and Given (2016, p. 58) provided a good overview of this subject. This thesis cannot discuss the concept in detail, but it explains some basic ideas of what information is, which is needed as 'traditional models of information behaviour seem to suggest a normative conception of information as consistently accurate, true, complete, and current, and they neglect to consider whether information might be misinformation (inaccurate information) or disinformation (deceptive information)' (Karlova & Fisher, 2013).

There have been tensions in LIS between two major approaches: the *objective approach* and the *subjective/interpretative/cognitive approach* (Capurro & Hjørland, 2005). For example, for Stonier (1991), information was 'an intrinsic property of various systems (in fact, the universe itself) which exists irrespective of whether any human or other forms of intelligence perceive it or utilise it' (p. 261).

Bates (2005, 2006, p. 1042) tried to combine objective and subjective approaches by distinguishing between two types of information: Information 1 is the 'pattern of organization of matter and energy', and Information 2 is 'some pattern of organization of matter and energy given meaning by a living being'. Thus, Information 1 is objective information, and Information 2 aims to address the subjectivity of information. These categories indicate that there are essentially two types of information.

An interesting new contribution to the question of objective and subjective information was made by Jarrahi et al. (2021), who discussed the two dimensions of information through the Chinese yin–yang philosophy and strongly emphasised forming and informing, which are two essential and inseparable sides of information. Information comprises a *forming* process by which an information object is created in a sociocultural context, and an *informing* process in which both the information subject and object influence one another. The information object may influence a person's beliefs, but at the same time, past experiences and beliefs have an impact on how information is interpreted.

In 1976, Dervin proposed a three-type formulation of information (Dervin, 1976): 1) objective information, data, 2) ideas and structures that a person receives from others, and 3) procedures whereby people become informed. Later, the third type of information was developed to form the Sense-making approach (e.g. Dervin, 1998, 1999, 2006), which sees information as a product of sense-making and sense-unmaking. Dervin (1998, p. 36) viewed information and knowledge as 'the sense made at a particular point in time-space by someone'.

The Sense-making approach approximates the situational and social constructionist view of information represented by, for example, Hjørland (2007) and Tuominen and Savolainen (1997). Hjørland (2007, p. 1450) criticised the duality of information definitions and the objectivity of information, seeing objectivity as consensus-based and therefore situational. The situational nature of information is underlined in the social constructionist approach, which sees 'information use as a discursive action' (Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997, p. 81). Social constructionism is a useful approach for understanding how truth is negotiated socially rather than as a fixed entity (objective information) or merely an individual creation (subjective information). Social constructionism understands information, information systems, and information needs as 'entities that are produced within existing discourses', and a social reality is produced and organised in collaboration

(Talja et al., 2005, pp. 89–90). Social constructionism strongly emphasises *language* as a means to negotiate social reality, and although this approach largely underpinned this thesis, other elements of human interaction are also seen to influence the creation of information—and misinformation.

Buckland (1991, pp. 351–352) distinguished between three different meanings of information: *information-as-process*, which is the act of informing and becoming informed; *information-as-knowledge*, where knowledge is understood as something that reduces uncertainty; and *information-as-thing*, objects that are informative. The last definition, information as a thing (i.e. informative), and the social constructionist understanding of information as social, are starting points for discussing whether misinformation may be considered information.

The need to discuss the essence of information comes from the general assumption that the claim of truth is an intrinsic element of information (Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Karlova & Lee, 2011; Stahl, 2006). For example, Dretske (1981, p. 45) distinguished between information and meaning: information cannot be false, whereas meaning can be without truth and, thus, misinformation is not information. Likewise, Florini (2005, 2011) classified misinformation as 'pseudo-information' because of the truth condition for information. Budd (2011) did not count 'untrue communicative acts', such as rumours, as information. In addition to the explicit discussions of whether information must be true to be information, many of the models of and studies on information activities have been based on the simple assumption that people only encounter accurate information (Karlova & Fisher, 2013).

Fox (1983) discussed the nature of information and misinformation and how they relate to truth, defining information as something that *informs* and claiming that the act of informing does not require the piece of information to be true. Thus, when information *misinforms*, it is false information, but nevertheless information. Therefore, 'misinformation is a species of information, just as misinforming is a species of informing' (Fox, 1983, p. 193).

In a similar way, Jarrahi et al.'s (2021) yin–yang metaphor of the two sides of information can be applied to misinformation. It links misinformation to the subjective side of information, and it is seen as information that is not bastardised or the opposite of knowledge:

> Thus, since the conditions of misinformation are so tightly linked with how people form and interpret their reality, misinformation is born from the subjective aspects of information.

> This articulation of misinformation calls into question the common misconception that misinformation is anti-knowledge. The language of text or visuals through which the misinformation is operationalised reveals only the surface of a deeply embedded cultural system. To decipher and negotiate the truthfulness of the information (even the veridical, context-independent facts), it requires one to navigate through their own cultural assumptions. (p. 9)

Thus, this thesis sees misinformation as a type of information. The next section presents the most relevant attempts to define misinformation.

3.1.2. Defining misinformation

Despite misinformation being a widely researched topic nowadays, there are relatively few profound and ambitious definitions of the concept. Nevertheless, definitions are needed, as they affect how misinformation is studied, which Vraga and Bode (2020) highlighted by questioning 'how to best study and define misinformation when the boundaries between accurate and misinformation can and do change' (p. 136).

Many researchers simply see misinformation as wrong, inaccurate, or false information. For Stahl (2006), misinformation was accidental falsehood. Losee (1997) saw misinformation as partly or wholly false information. Vraga and Bode (2020) defined it as 'information considered incorrect based on the best available evidence from relevant experts at the time' (p. 138), thus linking it to expertise. The authors themselves acknowledged the problems of such a definition, as expertise may change, and they also acknowledged the changing nature and fluidity of misinformation. This definition, with its challenges, can, in fact, be applied only to information that is somehow connected to scientific or expert information. It can be challenging to discover expert evidence for information in everyday situations.

The most ambitious definition—one that can be applied to this thesis—came from Karlova and colleagues (Karlova, 2018; Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Karlova & Lee, 2011). According to them, misinformation is inaccurate but also 'uncertain (perhaps by presenting more than one possibility or choice), vague (unclear), or ambiguous (open to multiple interpretations)' (Karlova & Lee, 2011). They highlighted the receiver's point of view in a specific context and situation. This thesis adopts this definition of misinformation.

Karlova and Fisher (2013) elaborated on how and why misinformation is formed and why it should be understood as a type of information. This is possible if information does not have a claim of truth, which is possible when the essence of information is to be informative (Buckland, 1991; Fox, 1983). Therefore, misinformation may inform us and help us construct a certain

reality. Misinformation is also information if information is seen as subjective and situational (Hjørland, 2007). In the context of misinformation, this means that it is false for the receiver at the moment when the receiver receives it (Karlova & Lee, 2011). However, its subjectiveness does not rule out it being highly social. Karlova and Fisher used Tuominen and Savolainen's (1997) social constructionist view to highlight the social nature of information. The social context determines what is understood as information and informative. To summarise, misinformation is a type of information, as misinforming (misinformation informing) is an information activity in a conversational act, and it may be used to construct reality. Misinformation is bound to context and situation and is created in social situations, where the meaning of the information is created through collaboration (Karlova & Fisher, 2013).

This definition of misinformation is both elaborate but also broad enough—perhaps even vague enough. This definition is rooted in LIS research and can therefore be easily applied. Moreover, it provides room for its application in different contexts. As little research has studied misinformation in the context of people's everyday information environment, a broad and open approach is needed to explore the different aspects of what misinformation can be (i.e. allowing the discovery of types of misinformation that could be overlooked by narrow definitions). In this thesis, misinformation is seen as a type or subcategory of information that people can encounter, seek, and use.

3.1.3. Types of information

As established in the previous section, misinformation is information. Here, it is briefly compared to other types of misinformation, and it is explained why this thesis only addresses misinformation.

Often misinformation is discussed together with *disinformation*, which the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2022a) defines as 'the dissemination of deliberately false information, esp. when supplied by a government or its agent to a foreign power or to the media, with the intention of influencing the policies or opinions of those who receive it; false information so supplied'. The High Level Group on Fake News and Online Disinformation (2018) defined it as 'all forms of false, inaccurate, or misleading information designed, presented and promoted to intentionally cause public harm or for profit' (p. 3). Thus, *intention* distinguishes it from misinformation. However, Karlova and Fisher (2013) pointed out that disinformation does not have to be false, only 'deliberately deceptive'. Thus, as the essence of disinformation is to *mislead*, there is no requirement for it to be false (Fallis, 2009).

Recent literature has started to recognise *malinformation*, which occurs 'when genuine information is shared to cause harm, often by moving information designed to stay private into the public sphere' (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017a, p. 5). It seems that malinformation, like misinformation and disinformation, has not yet been defined relative to the concept of information. The importance of distinguishing malinformation from misinformation and disinformation—or, more generally, seeing them all as separate types of information—has been highlighted, for example, by Baines and Elliott (2020). It is important to understand that there are different types of information, the complexity of which can be addressed by using terms that distinguish the characteristics of information in a more nuanced way (Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017a).

This thesis only addresses misinformation—and does so in a broad way—making no clear distinctions between different types of information. This approach may be criticised, but it was employed for a reason. There is still very little—if any—research addressing all types of information in people's natural information environment; therefore, this kind of approach is still evolving. This thesis contributes to the goal of understanding information more holistically by studying misinformation and aiming to understand what it can be. An open approach may be needed before a larger body of more elaborate research is established, and later, clearer distinctions and categorisations can be made.

3.1.4. Research on misinformation

Misinformation has become a well-researched phenomenon in recent years. A full review of all the research would be impossible, but a short overview of recent trends in misinformation research will provide some indication of the research field. Firstly, this section briefly discusses state-of-the-art research and shows that research gaps still exist despite the huge numbers of studies on the topic. It then discusses in more detail some contributions that are particularly relevant to the scope of this thesis. These include theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches.

It is difficult to give a precise and comprehensive overview of the misinformation research that has been conducted, as the topic is extremely popular in many academic fields. Research has examined, for example, health (Southwell et al., 2019; Suarez-Lledo & Alvarez-Galvez, 2021; Swire-Thompson & Lazer, 2020; Wang et al., 2019) and (more precisely) COVID-19 misinformation (Baines & Elliott, 2020; Bangani, 2021; Bastani & Bahrami, 2020; Brennen et al., 2020; R. Savolainen, 2021), political misinformation (Jerit

& Zhao, 2020; Li, 2020; Swire et al., 2017), and misinformation connected to climate change (Benegal & Scruggs, 2018; Cook, 2019; Treen et al., 2020), to give a few examples. Social media is seen as the dominant forum for the diffusion of misinformation (Allcott et al., 2019; Shin et al., 2018; Chou et al., 2020), and indeed, it seems that misinformation is mostly treated as an online phenomenon—and problem. The diffusion, recognition or detection, and correction of misinformation have been studied (Kumari et al., 2021; Qinyu et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2021), and many studies have focused on the negative effects of misinformation on both individuals and society (Barua et al., 2020; Featherstone & Zhang, 2020; Greenspan & Loftus, 2021; Huijstee et al., 2022). In LIS research, the evaluation and correction of misinformation, information literacy, and credibility assessment have been popular topics (Haider & Sundin, 2022; McGrew & Chinoy, 2022; R. Savolainen, 2021; Skarpa & Garoufallou, 2022; Vamanu & Zak, 2022; Zhang et al., 2022).

In general, misinformation has been treated quite negatively in the research; for example, it has been criticised by Jarrahi et al. (2021), Karlova and Fisher (2013), Karlova and Lee (2011), and Lee and Renear (2008). There are indeed negative aspects of misinformation, and it does have serious negative consequences, which this thesis addresses. However, preconceptions about misinformation *only* being negative can be problematic from a research perspective. Thus, there is a need for more nuanced research approaches.

Research on misinformation is predominantly quantitative across all fields, but there have been some qualitative contributions. Young et al. (2020) interviewed library staff about their perceptions and experiences of tackling misinformation in their community. However, the study viewed misinformation quite simplistically as 'factually inaccurate information' and focused mostly on libraries' role in fighting it rather than in understanding or detecting misinformation per se. Saunders (2022) used a mixed-methods approach (survey and interviews) to ask university faculty about their views on mis- and disinformation, their ways of addressing misinformation in their courses, and their students' abilities to evaluate mis- and disinformation, as well as the university libraries' involvement in tackling the issue. Kosciejew (2020) used a qualitative documentary analysis to study the kinds of policies libraries introduced to tackle COVID-19 issues, including misinformation. Naeem and Ozuem (2021) analysed socially shared misinformation related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Interestingly, their study used a social constructionist approach to misinformation sharing as a social practice, whereas misinformation itself was simply defined as unintentionally false information.

The study focused on understanding people's reactions to misinformation and the outcomes of misinformation sharing rather than on the misinformation itself, which was not analysed.

Different typologies of misinformation are discussed in Studies I and IV (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020; Ruokolainen et al., 2023)[9]. The more general ones include an early typology of misinformation on the internet provided by Fitzgerald (1997), who identified 10 types: incomplete information, pranks, contradictions, out-of-date information, improperly translated data, software incompatibilities, unauthorised revisions, factual errors, biased information, and scholarly misconduct. Wardle (2020) and Wardle and Derakhshan (2017b) aimed to understand 'information disorder' (i.e. problems caused by mis-, dis-, and malinformation) through seven types of problematic information: satire or parody, false connection, misleading content, false content, imposter content, manipulated content, and fabricated content. Typologies have also been connected to specific topics, such as political misinformation (Machado et al., 2019) and COVID-19 (Bastani & Bahrami, 2020; Brennen et al., 2020).

This short overview shows that there are still some major gaps in misinformation research. Misinformation is not studied as a natural part of our diverse information environment. Therefore, novel ways to consider the phenomenon may be needed, and the concept of *encounters* was used in this thesis to understand the social dimension of misinformation. This approach is discussed in the following chapter.

3.2. Encounters

An *encounter* refers to an inner dimension, in contrast to a *meeting,* which is an outer framework for interaction (Holopainen et al., 2019, p. 9). During this research project, it became clear that encounters—or the lack of them—affected misinformation. Hence, the importance of considering encounters as an essential element of misinformation formation and perceptions emerged from the data. Specifically, *asymmetric encounters*, where one person is in a client/patient position and the other person acts in a professional capacity, are central to this thesis, which addresses encounters using approaches that include asymmetry but aim for mutual understanding.

Firstly, the concepts of encounter and caring encounter are discussed. Although research on encounters crosses many different fields, nursing science has developed a body of research on the topic; therefore, this thesis was mostly

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[9] The findings regarding the typologies will be presented in Section 5.1.

but not exclusively inspired by encounters in nursing science. In the Nordic context, the Swedish concept of *bemötande* has been used to describe good ways of encountering people. As Bäärnhielm et al. (2020) wrote in their English summary, the 'Swedish word, 'bemötande', has no direct equivalent in English but refers to contact, treatment and the relationship with a patient' (Engelsk sammanfattning). Another quite established term is *caring encounter*, and the discussion on caring encounter in this thesis also encompasses the literature on *bemötande*. Encounters are also discussed from an information perspective and in the context of LIS.

3.2.1. Caring encounter

The health sciences have a tradition of discussing nurse–patient relationships. As Fagerström (2021) stated, the 'characteristics of the theoretical development in nursing science and societal development in the Nordic countries can be summarized in four nursing science perspectives: health, holism, ethos as a person-centered fundamental ethical approach, and caring' (p. 75). This means that patients are recognised holistically as human beings, including their life contexts, and nurses must reflect on their practices and decision-making (Fagerström, 2021, pp. 82–84). This approach can be discussed in terms of *encounter* and *caring encounter*, through which the professional philosophy and patients meet.

A caring encounter refers to the interaction and quality of the interaction between a health professional and a patient (Fossum, 2020, p. 32). Possible components of caring encounter are, according to Fossum (2020, pp. 34–35):

- friendliness
- being helpful
- outlook on people
- human dignity
- quality
- information: accurate answers and explanations
- respect
- warmth and engagement
- appearance/behaviour
- reception
- treatment
- intonation

This list demonstrates what Hall (2001, p. 47) described as the core of caring encounter: it is characterised by actual behaviour but also by the attitudes behind this behaviour. Holopainen, Kasén et al. (2014) saw the following attributes as central to caring encounter: being in presence, recognition, availability, mutuality, and togetherness. Encounters do not have to be long or recurring to be caring (Holopainen et al., 2015), and a person often has numerous caring moments within a single care organisation (Holopainen, Kasén, et al., 2014, p. 186).

Although the importance of mutuality in caring encounter has been highlighted by, for example, Holopainen and colleagues (Holopainen et al., 2015, 2019; Holopainen, Kasén, et al., 2014; Holopainen, Nyström, et al., 2014), caring encounters can be seen as encounters in which people are not on the same levels to start with, and which are, thus, asymmetric (Hall, 2001, p. 61; Sundström, 2008, p. 13). This has to do with the fact that caring encounter occurs between a professional and a patient or client. In encounters with authorities, the non-voluntary basis of the meetings is especially evident, and clients may be cautious or even suspicious of the encounters (Hall, 2001, pp. 62–66). However, in caring encounters, there are various ways to level out asymmetry.

Encounters can be described as *uncaring* by patients 'due to a lack of engagement, notwithstanding that patients expect to be treated as the unique patients they are, irrespective of the length of the encounter' (Holopainen et al., 2015, p. 50). Hall (2001, p. 112) described the characteristics of a negative encounter between a client and a person handling social security matters in the following way: the processor explains rather than listens, maintains a clear distance from the client, and explains the law rather than what the client should concretely do. These are the 'stiff' elements of bureaucracy. According to Sundström (2008, p. 65), a negative encounter comprises the following factors: being unfriendly, showing a lack of interest, displaying a nonchalant attitude, uncertainty, invisibility, and an unfavourable environment. To summarise, the human aspect is forgotten in negative or uncaring encounters. Since caring encounter influences the parties in the encounter and may have long-lasting impacts (Holopainen et al., 2019), an uncaring or negative encounter may diminish trust and affect future encounters.

Although all these aspects of caring encounter influence this thesis, a more thorough analysis of the concept of a caring encounter can be found in Holopainen et al. (2019). The central components of the concept are for the

purpose of this thesis shown in Table 1, and a framework for caring encounter based on Holopainen et al.'s understanding of the concept is constructed.

Table 1. Framework for caring encounter based on the concept of caring encounter developed by Holopainen et al. (2019).

ANTECEDENTS			
A reflective way of being Caring attitude Shifting modes of being according to the situation	**Openness, sensitivity, empathy, and the ability to communicate** Sensitivity to the patient's needs Empathy and warmth	**Confidence, courage, and professionalism** Admiring the patient's courage Showing professionalism	**Showing respect and supporting dignity**
ATTRIBUTES			
Being there Participation and involvement Being with, being close, and sharing Presence, listening, and seeing here and now	**Uniqueness** To be seen as a person, an individual, a unique human being Having means to express the uniqueness of the patient Small talk, calming speech, and humour Eye contact, stillness, and wordless encounters		**Mutuality** Changes the asymmetric situation Equal, mutual companionship
CONSEQUENCES			
Influencing both nurse and patient	**Helping patients express their needs and find words to describe suffering**	**Creating trust**	**Building mutual understanding that goes beyond the individual encounter**

Holopainen et al. (2019) identified the antecedents, attributes, and consequences of caring encounters. Antecedents of caring encounters include 1) a reflective way of being, 2) being open, sensitive, emphatic, and communicative, 3) having confidence in one's own professional role and admiring the patient's courage, and 4) having respect for the patient and supporting the patient's dignity. A caring encounter has the following attributes: 1) being there, which refers to participation and involvement as well

as the way of being in the space and situation; 2) uniqueness (i.e. treating the patient as a unique person and confirming this in various ways); and 3) mutuality, through which both parties become mutual companions and change the asymmetry of the situation. A caring encounter influences both parties and helps the patient to express different needs and show emotions. It also creates trust and mutual understanding that goes beyond individual encounters.

Holopainen et al. (2019) stated that their concept, which is mostly applied to nursing, can be applied in other healthcare professions. The context of this thesis was far removed from nursing, and the professionals who were either interviewed for this thesis or whose work was discussed indirectly were rarely healthcare professionals. Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, the healthcare aspects of the framework have been omitted, and the focus is on the encounter itself. However, since the data were gathered by interviewing professionals, the participants were asked about their interactions with clients, and the findings mostly concerned misinformation and information-related issues in interactions with authorities or other professionals; hence, the idea of a professional role was valid in this case. Each profession has special characteristics that cannot be directly applied to other professions. Nevertheless, the impact of encounters on misinformation can be analysed with the help of this framework.

3.2.2. Information aspects of encounters

Information is one component of a caring encounter, as the patient has the right to correct information and advice (Fossum, 2020, p. 35). Holopainen et al. (2019) highlighted the patient's need to obtain 'sufficient and objective information' as a part of a caring encounter but claimed that bluntly giving information without human engagement is perceived as cold and insensitive (i.e. uncaring; p. 52). As mentioned earlier, mere informing is considered a characteristic of a negative encounter (Hall, 2001, p. 112). Sundström (2008, p. 37) also mentioned library clients' need to *exchange information* and share their own opinions.

Caring encounters in the library context have been discussed by Sundström (2008) and in some master's theses (e.g. Forslund & Jansson, 2010; Jonsson & Svensson, 2002; Leek & Magnusson, 2007; Tomova, 2005). Sundström (2008, p. 65) compared caring encounters in libraries to other forms of customer service. The clients highlighted issues such as being friendly, available, and professional; showing interest; listening; and taking time (see also Jonsson & Svensson, 2002; Leek & Magnusson, 2007; Tomova, 2005). Therefore, the

human aspects of encounters seemed to be the most important aspects for clients. Librarians saw the encounters similarly but highlighted the importance of information literacy (i.e. they emphasised the ability to give the 'right answer'; Sundström, 2008, pp. 66, 83).

One aspect of encounters that has been discussed in the context of information professionals is *empathy*. Miller and Wallis (2011) stated that empathy is key to successful information and library services, but information professionals should be aware of the components of empathy to enable them to display empathic behaviour to clients. They suggested key attributes of, or perhaps aims for, empathic behaviour in this context:

- building collaborative working relationships with clients and colleagues;
- providing quality client service in information and knowledge work;
- promoting social inclusion and cultural literacy in community networking;
- promoting general wellbeing for information and knowledge professionals and their clients;
- information counseling or coaching for positive change;
- stimulating creativity, innovation and generating solutions to problems;
- managing tacit knowledge in building social capital and trust among members of learning organizations and communities of practice; and
- designing information architecture and managing online communities to support empathic interaction

(Miller & Wallis, 2011, p. 129)

Cavanagh (2009, p. 130) found that librarians can help their clients solve problems or queries with the help of *information empathy*. This has a specific link to information sharing: the librarian can take the client's needs into account if the client shares personal information that shapes the interaction situation. In a similar way, Birdi (2008, p. 587) stated that empathy and affective listening shape interactions between librarians and their clients. Empathy is important particularly to disadvantaged groups because positive interactions empower clients and encourage their future use of library services.

4. Method and data analysis

This chapter describes the method and data analysis processes of Studies II–IV. Study I did not involve empirical data collection. Qualitative research was the main approach and semi-structured interviews were the method of data collection, as described first. The chapter describes the chosen approach to study misinformation indirectly through people who provided support with information. The chapter also describes the participants and some aspects of small samples and dyadic interviews compared to individual interviews. Finally, it discusses the data analysis processes and various ethical considerations.

4.1. Methodological premises

To successfully collect data, the philosophical principles behind different methodologies should be clear to the researcher (Sutton, 2018, p. 3810). The previous chapter presented the theoretical framework for this thesis. Misinformation is seen as a social construct that is embedded in our everyday practices and encounters. The RQs were developed to understand the nature of misinformation and ask *why* information is or becomes misinformation. Thus, the research required a methodology for *understanding* different aspects of misinformation as a social phenomenon and in encounters. Understanding and interpreting human life are at the heart of qualitative research (Leavy, 2014, p. 21), which was therefore seen as a suitable approach for this research.

The premise for qualitative research is the world itself. Corbin and Strauss (2008) argued that, because the world is complex and there are no simple explanations, a methodology for understanding the world needs to capture its complexity. Qualitative research studies phenomena in their natural settings (Connaway & Radford, 2021, p. 260; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 10) and, when successful, sheds light on the meanings, actions, and social contexts of research participants (Fossey et al., 2002).

In LIS, quantitative methods, especially surveys and questionnaires, have been the most popular data collection methods (Togia & Malliari, 2017, pp. 48–50), but there are study areas where qualitative methods have had a longer and more established tradition, such as information behaviour research (Greifeneder, 2014; Vakkari, 2008). In general, the variety of research methods and the use of qualitative research in LIS have increased, enabling a wider range of methods to be chosen to best meet study objectives (Chu, 2015; Connaway & Radford, 2021, p. 21; Togia & Malliari, 2017). Some ways to

classify different qualitative approaches are shown in Table 2, and as can be seen, the classifications may vary greatly. Sutton (2018) highlighted the diversity of qualitative research by stating that 'what we call qualitative research out of convenience is actually a diverse collection of philosophies, historical traditions, discipline-specific concepts, and useful practices' (p. 3806). Therefore, stating the exact nature of qualitative research can be difficult.

Table 2. Some classifications of qualitative research approaches and methods in LIS.

Sutton (2018)	Togia and Malliari (2017)	Cibangu (2013)
Historical approach	Case study	Ethnography
Ethnographic methods	Biographical method	Historical criticism
Case study	Historical method	Literary criticism
Grounded theory	Grounded theory	Discourse analysis
Ethnomethodology	Ethnography	Case study
	Phenomenology	Open-ended interviews
	Symbolic interactionism/semiotics	Casuistry
	Sociolinguistics/discourse analysis/ethnographic semantics/ethnography of communication	Meditation practice
	Hermeneutics/ interpretive interactionism	Logic
		Counselling
		Therapy
		Focus groups
		Grounded theory
		Biography
		Comparative method
		Participant observation
		Introspection

Despite the wide variety of different methods and approaches, data for this research was collected through *interviews*, which are a popular data collection method in LIS (Togia & Malliari, 2017). Interviews are an ethnographic method whereby the researcher closely observes the studied phenomenon (Connaway & Radford, 2021, p. 375; Sutton, 2018).

The grounds for the methodological choices in this thesis were, firstly, in the theoretical premises and, secondly, in the state of the prevailing misinformation research. As explained, the aim of this research was to understand misinformation in a natural setting. There has been little qualitative research on misinformation, and part of the phenomenon is, therefore, unexplored (Ruokolainen, 2022a). This also means that few previous

qualitative studies on the topic could be applied to the research or used as examples. Therefore, this thesis partly confirms that misinformation can be studied qualitatively and explains *how* it can be done. Because of this, a widely used, established, and familiar method was chosen. This choice and the interview method will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

4.2. Semi-structured interviews

Humans are communicating and conversational creatures living dialogical lives; 'conversations are therefore a rich and indispensable source of knowledge about personal and social aspects of our lives' (Leavy, 2014, p. 278). Interviewing can be a good way to study our lives, thoughts, and experiences. The idea of people as dialogical creatures also goes hand in hand with the topic of this thesis: information and misinformation as socially negotiated phenomena.

In view of the diversity of interview methods and techniques, drawing clear lines between them can be difficult. The interviews in this thesis were *semi-structured interviews* chosen to facilitate flexible interaction with the participants. Semi-structured interviewing can be described as 'a qualitative technique that requires the researcher to have a schedule of questions, but implements them flexibly allowing the participant to guide the direction of the interview' (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2018, Table 3.1 Different types of interview). A flexible combination of open-ended and targeted questions may be applied (Ayres, 2012; Galletta & Cross, 2013, p. 45) to allow enough structure for the interview situation while simultaneously permitting flexibility and the emergence of topics that the researcher cannot necessarily anticipate (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2018).

The starting point for the interviews was a curious and open mind, as well as the participants' comfort, which meant that the interviews were adjusted to the participants' needs and wishes. Although interview guides were used (Table 5 in Section 4.4.1. and Table 8 in Section 4.4.2.), they were adjusted according to the situation. The interviews started with topics that were familiar to the participants (e.g. their work). Misinformation and information questions were integrated into the discussion and adjusted to an understandable form.

The method was considered suitable for addressing this topic for several reasons. Firstly, using a method that was familiar to both the researcher and the participants helped to address a topic that has not extensively been studied qualitatively. Secondly, choosing an established and well-used method confirmed that misinformation can indeed be reached with the semi-structured

interview method, although different methods could generate additional knowledge of the topic. Thirdly, as already mentioned, as the formation and understanding of misinformation are seen as a social practice in this thesis, it was important to apply a method that accounted for this dimension.

The social nature of the interview technique can, however, be seen as a limitation. It can be difficult to analyse the conversational world from within, particularly using conversational tools (Brinkmann, 2014, p. 278). This also means that the method may leave out some non-verbal, tacit, or embedded information and information activities. Even well-planned questions are unable to cover all aspects. Interviews are also limited to one situation, which is generally not a natural setting for the participants. The participants may also adjust to the situation. These limitations do not necessarily mean that interviews are not an effective way to collect data, but they should be considered when evaluating the data collection process and findings.

4.3. Indirect approach through support with information

Misinformation was studied through people who provided support with information. This approach—here referred to as an indirect one—is a methodologically interesting choice, as its potentials have not been thoroughly discussed in previous literature but can bring new and valuable insights to different data collection processes. Firstly, it is discussed how and why this approach was chosen, and then, the indirect approach as a methodological choice is presented.

4.3.1. From direct to indirect approach

Initially, the plan was to study misinformation in the context of asylum seekers and gather data on misinformation directly from asylum seekers. The idea was to combine participant-driven photo-elicitation (PDPE) with semi-structured interviews. In PDPE, photographs taken by the participants are included in the research interviews (Harper, 2002). The images are used as a starting point for discussion, and both the images and the discussion generated by them are considered data. PDPE as a participatory method strongly emphasises the participants' thoughts and views, making them experts on the topic (Julien et al., 2013), which is vital when studying marginalised and vulnerable groups. PDPE can also help overcome language barriers (Cox & Benson, 2017) and mitigate the possible power imbalance between the researcher and the participants.

Pilot interviews with asylum seekers—six interviews altogether in 2019 and 2020—showed that little data on misinformation could be gathered

directly from asylum seekers, although the data were otherwise rich and interesting. Hence, as the focus of the study was misinformation, another approach had to be chosen. Interviews with volunteers, which were initially planned as complementary background interviews, proved fruitful in this sense.

Due to the small sample of volunteers (explained in more detail in Section 4.4.3.), another dataset was needed. Since a direct approach with 'marginalised' communities had already proven unfruitful, other groups that provided support with information were considered. Both the presence of misinformation and the need for support with information were seen as starting points for choosing a second context. Youth were considered a suitable context for several reasons. Firstly, there are vast numbers of information and counselling services for youth, indicating their need for support with information. Secondly, as discussed in 2.3.3., youth have challenging and vital information needs, suffer from information overload, and often lack sufficient information literacy to tackle these issues. Misinformation may therefore be a significant problem in the lives of youth. Although research on youth and information has recognised misinformation as a problem, there has been little precise research on the matter, as is the case with asylum seekers.

The two contexts were considered similar enough to draw a parallel between misinformation in the context of asylum seekers and youth, but at the same time, misinformation could be compared in these two contexts. This added more substance to the findings; it could be studied whether misinformation is strictly context-bound (i.e. existing in one context only, or more generalisable). Although the two contexts are inadequate for drawing conclusions about misinformation in all contexts, they can provide strong indications.

4.2.2. Indirect methodological approach

Methodologically, this kind of indirect approach seems uncommon, although recent LIS research has started to recognise various groups as lay intermediaries and to study them (Abrahamson & Fisher, 2007; Buchanan et al., 2019). Sabelli (2012) used mixed methods, including in-depth interviews and focus groups, to study the information intermediary role of doctors, social workers, psychologists, professors, teachers, and social educators supporting young adults and adolescents. Buchanan and Nicol (2019) focused on nurse–mother interactions and nurses' understanding of information literacy when studying the health information literacy of young mothers and health

information literacy education. They used observation, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. Cruickshank et al. (2020) used interviews, focus groups, and a workshop to study the digital proxy role of care workers, volunteers, and family members dealing with older and vulnerable adults. Buchanan et al. (2019) asked about the information intermediary role in the interviews and about the information needs and sources of young mothers in the focus groups to study state and voluntary sector professionals who supported young mothers. This last example shows possibly an indirect approach, as, besides the intermediary role, the intermediaries were asked about their clients.

Without full access to the methodological considerations underpinning these studies, it is difficult to draw a strict line between studying the *intermediary role* and studying *clients* or *aspects of their lives* through information intermediaries. In many cases, both can be done. However, this thesis found little discussion on the methodological choices of studying a hard-to-reach phenomenon or group through other people or groups.

There were good grounds for using the indirect approach and collecting data via information intermediaries. For instance, additional stress caused to vulnerable groups by participating in a research project could justify applying an indirect approach. Asylum seekers, especially, have been desirable research participants since at least 2015, and they may feel burdened by projects that do not help their individual cases and/or necessarily support them mentally. When considering hard-to-reach topics, people who provide support with information, professionally or otherwise, may be able to give an overall view of the situation, expressing it in a different way to that of their clients. This does not mean that clients' views are not valuable or indispensable or that the people in intermediary roles should speak for their clients, but that the intermediary or information provider role can be a welcome addition to research settings.

4.4. Participants and data collection

This section focuses on the data collection process from different points of view. Firstly, it presents the participants and the data collection processes of the two datasets. The sample of volunteers was rather small, and this issue is addressed in Section 4.4.3. Lastly, the use of dyadic interviews along with individual interviews is discussed.

4.4.1. Volunteers

The participants in the first set of interviews were volunteers working with asylum seekers. As mentioned in Sections 2.2.1. and 2.2.5., the term volunteer in this thesis refers to people who are not officially associated with the Finnish asylum system and who work or volunteer with matters connected to the asylum system or the situation (rather than only with recreational activities). This limitation was imposed because it was important that the participants had wide knowledge of the subject. However, in practice, it is not easy to categorise people who volunteer for these kinds of activities; therefore, people in different roles were asked to participate.

Six interviews were conducted with seven participants; five individual interviews and one dyadic (pair) interviews (Table 3). The interviews were conducted in September 2019–February 2020. The participants engaged in volunteer work in southern Finland. Some background information on the participants will be given herein, but as the circles of people helping asylum seekers are relatively small in Finland, and to protect the participants and their clients, no organisations or exact geographic locations are specified. Only pseudonyms were used when reporting the results, and excerpts were chosen in the way that the participants' identities were not revealed.

Table 3. Interview types with the volunteers.

Interview type	Number of interviews
Individual interviews	5
Dyadic interviews	1
Total	6

Table 4. Volunteers and types of volunteering.

Type of volunteering	Participants
NGO workers	2
Church/parish workers	2
Activist–volunteers	3
Total	7

Two of the participants worked in an NGO to decrease the marginalisation of people with an immigrant background. Two participants worked in churches, and three participants were classified as 'activist–volunteers'; they volunteered at support drop-in centres for asylum seekers and/or helped asylum seekers privately with their cases. Some participants were found

through relevant organisations, and some through snowball sampling. Table 4 shows the types of volunteering.

An interview guide (Table 5) was prepared for the interviews. The guide was mainly used a checklist for different themes, and the interviews largely consisted of free and relaxed discussions. The participants' own preferences were considered extremely important, but the discussions were gently guided when needed. The participants were informed about the topic (misinformation and different information challenges) before and during the interviews, but these topics were not emphasised in the discussion. Rather, the starting point was the participants' work and thoughts, which were considered important themes for studying misinformation, as explained in Study II (Ruokolainen, 2022a).

Table 5. Interview guide for interviews with volunteers.

Work/volunteering	Could you tell me about your work?
	What languages do you use?
Asylum process/situation	Do you have an overall picture of the situation? What about your clients?
Clients	What kind of information needs do your clients have?
	To whom do your clients turn when they have questions?
Networks	What kind of networks do you have?
	What contacts do you lack?
	What kind of networks do your clients have?
Rumours	Are there rumours circulating? What kind?
Misinformation	Do your clients sometimes misunderstand things? What are those things?
	Are there cases when you don't know what to do or how to give advice?
	Is some information difficult for you?
	Have you received information that was incorrect?
	Have you misunderstood something?
	Have you given misinformation to your clients?
	Is some information conflicting?
	Are there misunderstandings between you and your clients?
Emotions	What kind of feelings do your clients show you?
	Do you like your work?
	What do you enjoy? What frustrates you?

The shortest interview lasted 1 hour 21 minutes and the two longest ones 2 hours 16 minutes each. The average length was 1 hour and 49 minutes. The interviews were conducted at the local university, at the workplaces of the participants, or at their homes. All interviews were face-to-face interviews, and

they were voice recorded and transcribed by external transcription services with the participants' permission.

4.4.2. Youth service workers

The participants in the second set of interviews were youth service workers. In total, 13 interviews were conducted, of which ten were individual interviews and three were dyadic interviews (Table 6). The interviews were conducted in September–November 2021. All interviews in this data collection round were conducted via Zoom, and hence, participants in different geographic locations could be easily reached. No specific organisations or geographic locations are mentioned here, but the participants worked in different cities and towns in Finland, mostly in the southern parts of the country.

Table 6. Interview types with the youth service workers.

Interview type	Number of interviews
Individual interviews	10
Dyadic interviews	3
Total	13

Table 7. Youth service workers and types of youth services.

Type of youth services	Participants
Outreach youth work	6
One-stop services	5
Other services for NEET youth	4
Other general youth services	1
Total	16

Six participants were engaged in outreach youth work (Table 7). Five provided one-stop services but had different job descriptions. Four participants worked in other organisations with NEET youth, and one participant did not fit into any of these categories. In total, 16 people were interviewed.

An interview guide (Table 8) was prepared based on the one used with the volunteers. However, since the context differed, some adjustments were made. Some themes, such as rumours, proved irrelevant in this context. Compared to the interviews with the volunteers, the interviews with the youth service workers were more structured, with less free-flowing discussion, as described in Study II (Ruokolainen, 2022a). The participants were informed of the topic

of the study beforehand and during the interviews, but misinformation was not emphasised. The starting point for discussion was the participants' work.

Table 8. Interview guide for interviews with youth service workers.

Work	Could you tell me about your work? How did you end up working here? What is your educational background?
Clients	Who are your clients?
Clients' information needs	What do your clients ask you about? What kind of challenges do your clients have? How do you think that youth should get information about different things? What do you think is the best way to give information to young people?
Networks	With whom do you collaborate? How are your networks?
Misinformation	Do your clients sometimes misunderstand things? What are those things? Are there cases when you don't know what to do or how to give advice? Is some information difficult for you? Have you received information that was incorrect? Have you misunderstood something? Have you given misinformation to your clients? Is some information conflicting? Are there misunderstandings between you and your clients? What kind of conceptions, preconceptions, or even misconceptions do your clients have?
Emotions	What kind of feelings do your clients show you? Do you like your work? What do you enjoy? What frustrates you?

The shortest interview was 1 hour 13 minutes and the longest one 1 hour 53 minutes. The average length was 1 hour 28 minutes. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed by external transcription services with the permission of the participants.

4.4.3. Small samples

As explained in Section 4.3.1., the interviews with volunteers working with asylum seekers were initially planned as background interviews. Because of the initial plan, the small circles of volunteers, the face-to-face interview method, and the intensity and length of the interviews, the sample was small. Small samples are not necessarily problematic, but their implications should be considered.

Several factors have been found to be important in the context of adequate sample sizes, including 'the quality of data, the scope of the study, the nature of the topic, the amount of useful information obtained from each participant, the number of interviews per participant, the use of shadowed data, and the qualitative method and study design used' (Morse, 2000, p. 3).

The *saturation point* (i.e. 'the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data' (Guest et al., 2006, Abstract)) is often emphasized. The scope of the study refers to the focus of the study, and the narrower the topic, the faster the saturation point may be reached (Guest et al., 2006, p. 75; Morse, 2000, p. 3). In this case, the topic could be seen as both broad and narrow. Misinformation itself is a somewhat vague subject. However, as the subject was approached through volunteers' work and activities, it was also a focused topic.

The nature of the topic (i.e. the complexity of the question at hand (Morse, 2000, pp. 3–4)) can also be seen as related to expertise (i.e. participants' knowledge of the topic at hand). If participants are experts in their field and share 'cultural competence', their answers will probably be similar (Romney et al., 1986). All volunteers were very actively involved in helping asylum seekers, had received suitable training, and used their experiential knowledge to support asylum seekers. Their experiences of their work/volunteering activities and the asylum system did not differ greatly. Nevertheless, many practical factors also influenced the sample size. The interviews were conducted face-to-face and therefore in a somewhat restricted geographic area. As the participants' activities were limited to helping with asylum cases, few volunteers matched these criteria in the chosen geographic area. The seven volunteers effectively represented the actors and relevant organisations in the area.

Morse (2000) described the quality of the data and the amount of useful information as follows: 'If data are on target, contain less dross, and are rich and experiential, then fewer participants will be required to reach saturation' (p. 4). The data collected from the volunteers were rich and focused. This can be seen in the comparison made in Study II, where the mentions of misinformation in the datasets were counted according to the types of discussion. Table 9, originally published in Ruokolainen (2022a), shows that both datasets contained approximately the same number of references to misinformation, despite the different sample sizes. The biggest difference was in the way data were created (i.e. through direct questions or indirect discussion, rather than by the number of relevant references to misinformation

per se). The volunteers' data were also otherwise rich, as can be seen in Study III (Ruokolainen, 2022b), where the different strategies that volunteers used with asylum seekers to help them with information challenges emerged as a theme from the data.

Table 9. Mentions of misinformation in the interviews, originally published in Ruokolainen (2022a).

	Interviews, volunteers	References, volunteers	Interviews, youth service workers	References, youth service workers
Direct questions	6	43	13	69
Indirect discussion	6	65	11	41

The nature of interviews affects the resulting data, and in-depth interviews are likely to produce enough data with small samples (Boddy, 2016; Guest et al., 2006). Again, when comparing the two datasets, the volunteers' interviews were more in-depth, whereas the youth service workers' interviews were more structured. The volunteers' interviews were also longer. None of this was intentional or planned but happened organically. Similar interview guides were used, and the same researcher conducted the interviews, so the setting was quite similar. The differences in the datasets and the data collection processes have not been analysed further, but they may have arisen from, for example, the different contexts and job descriptions. Youth services focus more specifically on counselling and providing information, whereas volunteers' activities are extremely diverse, which could have affected the nature of the interview discussions. Additionally, conducting the youth service workers' interviews via Zoom may have affected their length, focus, and structure.

Despite the in-depth nature of the interviews, they were still structured due to the method used (i.e. semi-structured interviews), and all necessary themes were covered in the interviews. More structured interviews do help to reach the saturation point more quickly (Guest et al., 2006).

Morse (2000) also raised the question of 'shadowed data' (p. 4), which refers to participants talking about the experiences of others instead of their own experiences, only, and the use of shadowed data may strengthen the analysis and make it faster. In the context of *support with information*, the interviews involved talking about other people's experiences and making comparisons. The utterances concerning other people and their experiences should, of

course, be treated critically in the analysis, but they indeed helped to provide richer data in this case.

Although the aspects discussed here in connection with the saturation point are often seen as the guiding principles for determining sample sizes in qualitative research, focusing too greatly on the saturation point may be problematic for two reasons. Firstly, the demand for a saturation point indicates that a single case is never enough, and secondly, it gives little guidance on adequate sample sizes prior to the data collection (Boddy, 2016, p. 427). In this case, it could not be anticipated that the two data collection processes—despite different sample sizes—would produce sufficiently rich data for the scope of this thesis. Therefore, the researcher's own (even intuitive) judgement of the data and the data collection process probably influenced the decisions made during the process. What constitutes 'enough' is thus an individual decision, which should be thoroughly explained and justified.

4.4.4. Dyadic interviews

Both datasets comprised individual and dyadic interviews. This data collection decision was not made deliberately from the beginning but proved to be a useful methodological choice. Two participants spontaneously decided to be interviewed together, and when collecting the second dataset, this option was offered to all the contacted people and organisations.

Dyadic interviews refer to interviews in which two participants are interviewed together. The dynamic differs somewhat from individual interviews and focus groups, although it has elements of both interview types (Morgan et al., 2013). The advantage of dyadic interviewing (and focus groups) is that the 'active interaction between the participants goes beyond interviewing that merely occurs within a group format where the individual participants each respond to the moderator's questions' (Morgan et al., 2016, p. 110). Indeed, the biggest difference between individual and dyadic interviews is that there is an element of inter-participant interaction in the latter (Morgan et al., 2013). This interaction produces the data in dyadic interviews (Kvalsvik and Øgaard 2021) and is characterised by *sharing and comparing*, which Morgan et al. (2016) described as follows:

> By sharing their points of view, the participants expand their coverage of the research topic. By comparing their points of view, the participants differentiate their thoughts about the research topic. Both these forms of interaction create possibilities to introduce and talk about ideas that might not have occurred to an individual. (p. 110)

Challenges with dyadic interviews include, for example, domination of one participant by the other, with the potential to cause a power imbalance and possible conflicts (Kvalsvik & Øgaard, 2021). Nevertheless, dyadic interviews may give more control to the participants, levelling out the researcher–participant power imbalance (Morgan et al., 2013). Nevertheless, although dyadic interviews may bring up new points of view because of the inter-participant discussion, some topics may be more suited to individual interviews, where participants can, in confidence, share personal information (Morgan et al., 2013).

The differences between individual and dyadic interviews have not been analysed further in this thesis, and the data gathered from both types of interviews were treated identically in the data analysis. In this case, the choice of data collection method was supported by the flexible participant-driven approach, which prioritised the participants' preferences. Firstly, it was considered that people in the same organisation might want to participate together, and secondly, it would be more efficient for the organisations (i.e. take less of their time) if they did so. In any case, the participants were invited to choose the interview type, and they also suggested the pairs themselves. This approach was considered important for levelling out the researcher–participant power imbalance, and the aim was that the participants would draw something positive from the interviews, which many of them stated they used for self-reflection. Dyadic interviews were also considered suitable because the interview topic was the participants' work, which they inevitably discussed within their organisations. For a more personal topic, individual interviews only would have been a better choice.

Despite the lack of a deeper analysis of the dyadic interviews, it is possible that the participants in the dyadic interviews complemented each other; certainly, their dialogues were interesting and enjoyable. All the dyadic interviews were easy to moderate, and in none of them did one participant dominate the discussion. It was ensured that both participants had the opportunity to answer all the questions, but the participants considered their interview partners in the discussions and were very inclusive in their approach. Overall, the interviews (both dyadic and individual) facilitated free and relaxed discussions. A deeper comparative analysis of the interview types and data obtained through them could reveal some differences. However, no clear or significant differences were noticed during the data analysis process, and both interview types produced rich and valuable data.

4.5. Data analysis

The data were analysed thematically (i.e. by 'identifying themes or patterns of cultural meaning; coding and classifying data, usually textual, according to themes; and interpreting the resulting thematic structures by seeking commonalties [sic], relationships, overarching patterns, theoretical constructs, or explanatory principles' (Mills et al., 2013, para. 1)). Themes may be derived from the researcher's prior theoretical understanding (theory-driven/concept-driven/deductive/a priori approach) or emerge from the data (data-driven/inductive approach; DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011; Gibbs, 2007; Ryan & Bernard, 2003; Steppins, 2008).

Gibbs (2007) summarised the differences between theory-driven and data-driven approaches. In theory-driven coding, the themes may come 'from the research literature, previous studies, topics in the interview schedule, hunches you have about what is going on, and so on' (p. 44). Data-driven coding resembles grounded theory, and the idea is to openly explore what the data can offer. This does not necessarily mean that there are no preconceptions in data-driven analysis, but that an open and curious approach to the data is encouraged (Gibbs, 2007). Whereas the theory-driven approach involves constantly revisiting the theory, the data-driven approach is based on repeated and meticulous examination of the data; therefore, regardless of the source of the thematic codes, 'code development is an iterative process' (DeCuir-Gunby et al., 2011, p. 138).

The two approaches are not mutually exclusive, and they can be used for data analysis (Gibbs, 2007). This means that a contextual framework may be used as a starting point, but it does not constrain coding during the analytical process. A combination of these two approaches was used for this research, perhaps with a slight emphasis on the data-driven approach. As with the data collection process, the social constructionist understanding of misinformation (Karlova & Fisher, 2013) was the starting point for the analysis. The types of misinformation found in Ruokolainen and Widén (2020) were also considered possible codes. However, it was clear from the beginning that more themes could be identified, and an open approach to everything that might relate to misinformation was adopted. The codes could overlap[10], since the purpose was not to impose strict boundaries between different types of misinformation, and participants could discuss several aspects simultaneously.

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10 Expect for the coding in Study II, which will be explained later in this section.

The data analysis started with the dataset with volunteers, and this data analysis process was more open and iterative than the later one concerning youth service workers. The initial coding comprised 32 general codes (themes), some of which had subthemes. These themes were general, and not all concerned misinformation. The first round of coding functioned as a 'tour' of and checklist for the data. Some aspects became clear in the first rounds of reading: firstly, although the data were very rich and included various interesting topics, it was noticed that it would be useful to have more data on misinformation to better support the results, and secondly, the volunteers' information-related strategies (Ruokolainen, 2022b) emerged as an important topic. When the theme of strategies was identified, the data was revisited, focusing on this theme, and six strategies were found.

Table 10. First coding scheme for misinformation in both datasets. Study IV (Ruokolainen et al., 2023).

Codes	Number of interviews	References
Factors surrounding misinformation	19	159
Misunderstandings and misconceptions	18	91
Official information	17	58
Sharing misinformation	16	38
Misinformation connected to complicated circumstances	13	34
False hope and unrealistic expectations	13	25
Conflicting and ambiguous information	12	26
Rumours and distorted information	10	34
Outdated information	10	17
Intimidation	6	21
Gatekeepers and intermediaries	6	16

After collecting the second dataset from the youth service workers, the data analysis strategy was adjusted. The analysis of both datasets focused exclusively on misinformation and related issues, and the first preliminary coding scheme can be seen in Table 10. The codes included the six types of misinformation found in Study I (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020), and therefore,

the analysis had traits of the theory-driven approach. However, the hope from the beginning was to find more types of misinformation and themes connected to misinformation; therefore, the analysis was never limited to an existing scheme. Official information (the focus in Study IV (Ruokolainen et al., 2023)) was one type of misinformation identified in Study I, so that theme already existed. However, its importance and division into different subthemes emerged from the data.

Thereafter, the analysis focused solely on official information. The data were revisited with the theme of official information in mind, and the codes were combined and refined. Three new codes emerged: 1) language and terminology, 2) encounters with authorities, and 3) incomplete information. The data analysis then continued outside NVivo, which meant that the existing codes in NVivo were refined and categorised manually. The analysis process resulted in four types of official misinformation and three characteristics that explain why official information is or becomes misinformation.

The initial and refined coding of misinformation for Study IV was also used in Study II (Ruokolainen, 2022a). All codes focusing on misinformation or the factors surrounding it were further analysed (presented here in alphabetical order):

- conflicting and ambiguous information
- encounters with authorities
- factors surrounding misinformation
- false hope and unrealistic expectations
- gatekeepers and intermediaries
- incomplete information
- intimidation
- language and terminology
- misinformation connected to complicated circumstances
- misunderstandings and misconceptions
- official information
- outdated information
- rumours and distorted information
- sharing misinformation

These codes were recoded and split into two categories: *direct misinformation questions* and *indirect misinformation discussion*. Unlike the

other codes, these two codes could not overlap. Questions from the interview guide that directly involved misinformation or factors surrounding it were considered direct questions:

> Have you received incorrect information?
>
> Have you given or shared misinformation?
>
> Have your clients misunderstood something?
>
> Have you misunderstood something?
>
> Are there misunderstandings between you and your clients?
>
> Is some information conflicting?
>
> Are there rumours? What kind?
>
> What kind of conceptions and preconceptions do your clients have?
>
> (Ruokolainen, 2022a, Findings Section, Direct misinformation questions)

However, as stated in Ruokolainen (2022a), the 'above-mentioned questions are simplifications of a natural discussion, which means that the questions would be asked in everyday language, and terms such as information and misinformation were often avoided. The questions were not posed as such in all interviews but were integrated into the discussion.' (Findings Section, Direct misinformation questions). Questions and discussion that did not directly involve misinformation but led to discussing misinformation were understood as indirect discussion.

In general, the approach to data analysis was open and curious. It was considered important to see what themes emerged from the data. Nevertheless, misinformation was always the focus of the analysis, but it was analysed broadly and open-mindedly, considering different aspects that could not necessarily be foreseen before the data collection or analysis began. However, this also meant that the data analysis was somewhat subjective, and another researcher could have analysed and categorised the data differently. This is not necessarily a problem, as all qualitative research involves interpretation. A collaborative approach could add value to future data analysis processes.

4.6. Ethical considerations

Methods and data are essentially connected to different ethical aspects, which have been considered throughout the entire research project, according to the ethical principles for human sciences (social sciences and humanities) established by the Finnish National Board on Research Integrity (TENK; Kohonen et al., 2019). The main principles include respecting the dignity and autonomy of the research participants, respecting material and immaterial

cultural heritage and biodiversity, and avoiding causing harm or damage to the research participants, communities, or other subjects of research (Kohonen et al., 2019, p. 8).

As the initial plan was to conduct interviews with asylum seekers, the ethical aspects of the project were of paramount concern. The Board for Research Ethics at Åbo Akademi University (FEN) approved the research project and the data collection plan in their ethical assessment in February 2019. However, this process involved the initial data collection plan with asylum seekers only. A second assessment was not requested for the interviews with volunteers and youth service workers, as these groups were not considered vulnerable, and there were no other problematic aspects of the interviews. Nevertheless, the same ethical principles were maintained throughout the project, and great emphasis was placed on the integrity of all participants and their clients, regardless of their positions.

The participants in this thesis were well informed about the study objectives, methods, data storage plans, and use of their personal information. They were also reminded of the right to withdraw their consent on several occasions. As already explained, the methodological choices were participant-based (i.e. the comfort of and respect for the participants were considered important at all stages), and the data collection process was always secondary to this. One organisation required internal permission to conduct the research, which was requested and obtained before contacting individual participants.

The principle of treating the participants with respect, both in person and when reporting the results to a larger community (Kohonen et al., 2019, p. 9), involved not only the research participants, but also their clients and the people the participants worked with. One of the aims of this thesis was to increase knowledge and understanding of asylum seekers and youth's situations; therefore, best research practices were considered to ensure that the research and subsequent thesis did not cause or increase prejudice or harm towards them.

Experts reviewed the data management plan of this project to ensure that different aspects were thoroughly considered. This involved ethical and technical aspects of the data collection, storage of the data (during and after the project), and the handling of personal information. The integrity of the research participants was considered in all phases of the research, and both the data and the participants' personal information were stored securely and destroyed appropriately. It is possible that some of the data will be deposited in the

Finnish Social Science Data Archive[11] after the project's termination, but all data will be anonymised and pseudonymised according to the archive's guidelines (Finnish Social Science Data Archive (FSD), n.d.) before that happens. The data in the archive will only be accessible to other researchers, which will minimise the risk of misuse of the data.

5. Findings

This chapter presents the findings of Studies I–IV. The chapter is divided into theoretical findings, methodological findings, and empirical findings, with findings on misinformation and encounters discussed separately.

5.1. Theoretical findings

The starting point for this research was the theoretical understanding of misinformation and how it could be applied to empirical research. While reading earlier literature on misinformation, some theoretical gaps were identified, and attempts to address these gaps were proposed in Study I (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020).

As discussed in Section 3.1., the relationship of information to truth, and the normativity of research focusing on information generally and mis-, dis-, or malinformation specifically were found to be somewhat problematic. An increasing number of studies understand misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation as types of information (Baines & Elliott, 2020; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017a). However, there are still challenges with one type of information: *information*. It is studied the most, but not explicitly as a type of information, existing besides other types. At the same time, the term 'information' is confusing, since its use for both the main and subcategories of information may give the impression that information (subcategory) is the *right* information, somehow more real than the other types of information. A further implication is that the definition of information (main category) is somehow connected to truth. There is a need to discuss information as a subcategory on an equal footing with other types of information. To avoid confusion, Study I proposed that the subcategory should be addressed as *accurate information* to highlight the fact that all other types of information can and should be studied and considered part of our information environment.

The complexity of the situation with information can also be tackled by not addressing it normatively in research. Study I presented two concepts that can be used when studying misinformation: *perceived misinformation* and *normative misinformation*. These concepts are based on Haasio's (2015) concepts of *normative* and *disnormative information*. Normative information is information that is generally accepted as true in a certain social context, whereas disnormative information violates the social norms and attitudes that define normative information. Disnormative information may, for example, be experiential knowledge. None of these types of information is automatically

accurate or inaccurate (Haasio, 2015). If there is normative information (i.e. information generally accepted as accurate), there is probably also normative misinformation (i.e. information generally accepted as inaccurate; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020, pp. 3–4). However, all other views of information are not necessarily false or unfounded and should not be treated as such in research. Therefore, there is a need to study perceived misinformation, which is information that individuals or smaller social groups perceive as inaccurate, regardless of the consensus. These concepts help to understand the nuanced nature of misinformation and avoid normative approaches in research. Thus, especially when studying misinformation directly with different groups, these concepts can help in considering diverse views.
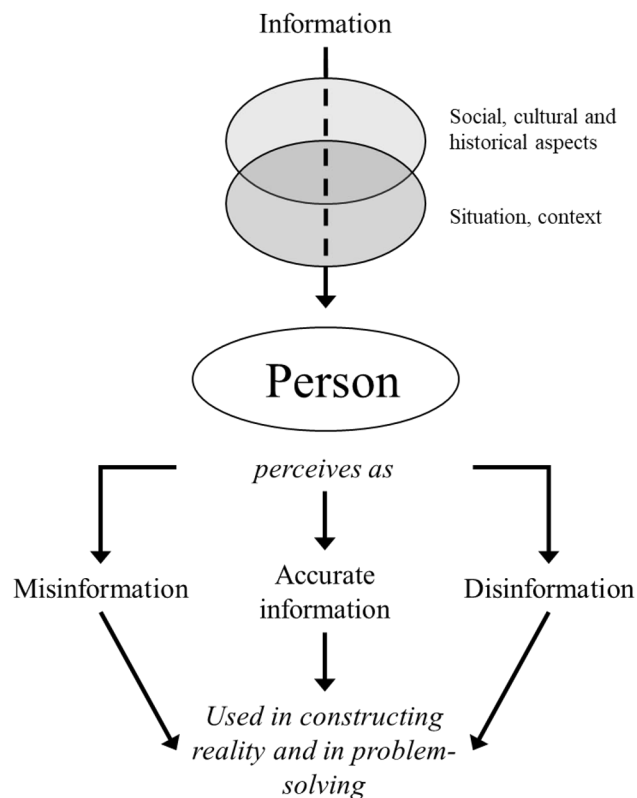

Figure 3. Social Information Perception model (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020).

Study I also proposed the Social Information Perception model (SIP; Figure 3) to better depict the nuanced nature of the situation with various types of information and how they are perceived. Four assumptions form the basis of the model: '(1) all information is information, (2) all types of information can

be accurate information, misinformation or disinformation, (3) the perception of information is social, and (4) all information can be used in constructing reality and in problem-solving' (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020, p. 9). When receiving information, different social, cultural, or historical factors, as well as contextual and situational factors, affect how information and its accuracy are perceived by different individuals and groups. To understand misinformation more deeply, there is a need to understand and further study the factors that influence it.

To help form the theoretical understanding of misinformation, a literature review on the types of misinformation in the lives of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants[12] was conducted (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020). The following types of misinformation were identified: *Official information* (i.e. information from authorities) may be false, incomplete, misleading, or conflicting, which both frustrates asylum seekers and makes them turn to other sources. *Outdated information* is both a theoretical type of misinformation, connected to the situational nature of misinformation, and a concrete type, connected to changing legislation and practices and authorities' own uncertainty about information. Misinformation may be received through *gatekeepers and other information mediators*. This happens in tight immigrant communities, especially, and is connected to language skills and integration levels. For example, children, who often have better language skills than their parents, frequently seek information for them but are not necessarily able to interpret it correctly. Misinformation causes *false hope and unrealistic expectations*, which may ultimately affect migration decisions. False hope may be connected to information avoidance; information that gives hope is accepted, but other information, even if more accurate, is avoided. *Rumours* may circulate in asylum-seeker communities, and social media has become common fora for the diffusion of rumours. Rumours are also connected to *distorted information*, which is formed when a piece of information is shared and changes its form. However, distorted information does not have to evolve from rumours; it may, for example, originally derive from official information.

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[12] Hereafter, these three groups will collectively be addressed as asylum seekers, since the focus is on them as a group, despite the literature review referring to other groups because of the lack of research on asylum seekers only.

5.2. Methodological findings

As discussed, it is difficult to study misinformation directly and qualitatively. Thus, a creative approach for evaluating the data collection and analysis process was needed to analyse how well semi-structured interviews would produce data on misinformation. The analysis of the interview discussion leading to data on misinformation constitute the methodological findings of this research. These findings were presented in Study II (Ruokolainen, 2022a). References to misinformation (i.e. references in all codes concerning misinformation), as explained in Section 4.5., were divided into two categories: direct misinformation questions and indirect misinformation discussion. Example of both discussion types are shown in Table 11 (p. 68). Table 9 in Section 4.4.3. shows the division of these codes for both datasets. With volunteers, 43 misinformation references were connected to direct questions and 65 references to indirect discussion. For the youth service workers, these numbers were transposed: 69 references to direct discussion and 41 to indirect discussion. Misinformation was discussed in all interviews, but in two of the youth service workers' interviews it was mentioned only when asked directly. The two contexts were therefore slightly different in this regard. In the more structured interviews with youth service workers, the direct questions worked better, whereas indirect discussion seemed to work better in the less structured interviews with volunteers. Both types of discussion were nevertheless needed to obtain as much data on misinformation as possible.

Direct misinformation questions involved asking about misinformation or related topics directly, as explained in Section 4.4.3. Direct questions generally worked very well, and even if not answered directly, participants returned to the questions later in the interviews. In some cases, the participants gave examples of different types of misinformation when answering one question. Sometimes, they understood the questions differently from what was intended, but this could lead to interesting answers. However, it was sometimes difficult, and could even feel uncomfortable, to ask about misinformation. Interestingly, participants stated that some examples of misinformation were too minor to report. This indicates that there may have been some examples of misinformation that the method could not uncover because the participants judged them insignificant. Thus, the methodological approach used in this thesis should be developed further in this regard.

Indirect discussion could not be analysed through questions, but only through discussion themes. It was noticeable that talking about the *clients*, the

participants' work, and the *participants themselves* led to data on misinformation. The first theme involved 'clients' conceptions, the challenges and pressure they face and feel, their information needs and practices, their information literacy, and their situation in life' (Ruokolainen, 2022a, Findings Section, Indirect misinformation discussion). The work theme included 'services and service networks, the asylum process (in the case of volunteers), as well as work and work descriptions' (Ruokolainen, 2022a, Findings Section, Indirect misinformation discussion). Participants also discussed their work identities, emotions, and critical attitudes. Therefore, asking widely about different topics that do not necessarily relate directly to information can be a fruitful way to collect relevant data.

Table 11. Study II: Examples of types of discussion.

Type of discussion	Example	Explanation
Direct misinformation question	Researcher: 'Have you noticed other things that your clients have not understood or have misunderstood?' Youth service worker Karri: [About youth, services, and misunderstandings] 'Then this person asks me how to do it [make an appointment], and I have to google what the number is this week. The services keep changing quite often, so even a professional has a hard time keeping up with the practices'.	Question and discussion on misunderstandings led to discussing outdated information.
Indirect misinformation discussion	[Researcher explains the research project] Youth service worker Helena: 'Funny that you approached us with your project. We have this project, and one person in it asked if we have had some challenges with student counselling. And then we discussed, in a bit of an exaggerated manner, that previously you could work quite passively. Nowadays, you have to actively seek information. The counselling suffers if you are not awake. When you asked me earlier about incorrect information, I just now came to think about how we might have, let's say, a guidance counsellor who has information from year X. They might not be acquainted with new guidelines; they just act based on old information and don't consider individual needs'.	Theme: work. The explanation provided by the researcher inspired the participant to go back to formerly discussed themes and bring up a new example of misinformation.

The findings show that both types of discussion are needed to uncover misinformation in interviews. The conclusion is that when participants freely describe their everyday practices and way of thinking, and the researcher asks *gently probing* questions about misinformation, broad and nuanced quality data on misinformation may be obtained.

The findings are limited by the fact that it was not always clear whether participants were consciously talking about misinformation, and the findings therefore involve interpretation by the researcher. However, misinformation is embedded in social practices, and thus, it can be difficult to actively notice all aspects of it without deeper analysis involving also interpretation.

5.3. Empirical findings

The empirical findings are divided according to the theoretical framework of this thesis. *Misinformation* was the focus of the study from the beginning, whereas *encounters* emerged as an important theme during the project.

5.3.1. Misinformation

Study IV (Ruokolainen et al., 2023) focused on misinformation in the context of official information, defined as information 'either received from authorities and official services or about authorities, official services, or processes' (Section 3.3. Official information). Two datasets were used for the analysis; thus, the contexts of the study were official information in the lives of asylum seekers and youth.

Four types of misinformation and three characteristics defining misinformation were identified, comprising a typology of misinformation in the context of official information. Official information was one of the misinformation types found in Study I (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020), which were used as starting points for the data collection and analysis for Study IV, but without limiting the findings to the existing types. The importance of understanding official information in more detail emerged from the data. The following types of misinformation were found in Study IV: 1) outdated information, 2) conflicting information, 3) incomplete information, and 4) perceived intimidation. The types are exemplified in Table 12 (p. 70).

Outdated information is information that has changed despite old information still being available. In these two contexts, this kind of information is often connected to changing services, legislation, or practices.

Conflicting information is connected to conflicting opinions and advice that both asylum seekers and youth receive about services and legislation. Also, a

contradictory impression may be caused by small signs that transmit conflicting information, such as, for example, contradictory or ambiguous ways of treating clients inside a system, based on which the client forms a picture of the system. Conflicting information is connected to the non-dualistic nature of information; it forms a continuum of accuracy rather than being right or wrong. This makes conflicting information both possible and understandable.

Incomplete information is information that leaves out some aspects of information and forms a distorted picture. There were many examples of this with, for example, official services, processes, and documents. The social context and the recipients are highlighted in this type (i.e. different information recipients need different kinds of information). Therefore, seemingly accurate information may be incomplete for some groups.

Perceived intimidation is either accurate or inaccurate information that is presented in an unfriendly, hostile, or intimidating way. This shapes the message. This type can either be considered misinformation or disinformation if the motives of the information provider are considered intentional. This type was described particularly in the context of police and health services.

Table 12. Study IV: Examples of types of misinformation.

	Example
Outdated information	'You think that you know how something works, but then the law has already changed'. (Volunteer Sofia)
Conflicting information	'I can call three different lawyers and ask what to do. The first one has one opinion and the second one another. They can be conflicting, but then I call the third one'. (Volunteer Sara)
Incomplete information	'If I tell them, "it would be good to admit yourself to a mental hospital", they don't understand what it means. You have to explain what it means. But if you try to Google what a hospital stay means, what it entails, and how people benefit from it, there is no such information'. (Youth service worker Karri)
Perceived intimidation	'A psychiatrist states that you are not depressed because you have washed your hair, you've taken a shower. Or, just get a grip of yourself. Or they tell a severely depressed and anxious person that they won't give them any sick leave because it would make them more passive. These kinds of encounters are very damaging. Think about going to a specialist and being full of hope that you'll get some help after such a long time. Then, you meet a person who invalidates and humiliates you or, maybe, says the same things your bullies have said. Building trust again with that place is really difficult'. (Youth service worker Katja)

Study IV recognised characteristics that are involved in how and why official information is or becomes misinformation (Table 13; p. 71): 1) structural

factors, 2) language and terminology, and 3) encounters with authorities. The last aspect will be discussed in more detail in the following section.

Structural factors are connected to (often complicated) official services and legal processes. Many social benefits involve interpretation, and information about them may be ambiguous. Asylum seekers and youth may face particular challenges in understanding different systems and services.

The *language and terminology* used in official information may make the information difficult for asylum seekers and youth to comprehend and use. Participants used terms such as *professional language* and *officialese* to refer to bureaucratic language use. Clients may have their own ways of using language, which may create or deepen a gap between the different conversational parties.

Table 13. Study IV: Examples of characteristics of official information.

Characteristics of official information	Example
Structural factors	'It's a real jungle with the services. People mix up Kela[13] with social services, and the same goes for employment services and local government pilots on employment. Where to get health services has also changed. The system you've got used to has changed, so don't be lulled into thinking that things remain the same'. (Youth service worker Eva)
Language and terminology	'The vocabulary may be difficult, and it [the decision] may be written in officialese. You yourself have to read syllable by syllable what it says'. (Youth service worker Helena)
Encounters with authorities	'If you meet a social worker once a month, you don't form that kind of relationship. And every time, there is a different interpreter present'. (Volunteer Emma) 'If we talk about the service system, there is a certain arbitrariness and power. … [There is] dismissal, exercise of power, bureaucracy, not encountering people'. (Youth service worker Katja)

These characteristics show that misinformation is embedded in social contexts and practices, which leads us to the following topic: encounters as a contextual factor that strongly influences misinformation.

5.3.2. Encounters

As mentioned, *encounters* were identified in Study IV as one of the factors defining how and why official information is or becomes misinformation (Ruokolainen et al., 2023). This relates to different communication situations when dealing with different authorities. Negative encounters were identified

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[13] The Social Insurance Institution of Finland.

as very harmful for the dissemination of information, particularly regarding, for example, perceived intimidation, whereby the whole message of information is affected by unfriendly or hostile behaviour. Invalidation and humiliation may characterise some of these encounters. However, encounters do not have to be so heavily negatively loaded to be seen as negative. Such *uncaring encounter*s are the opposite of Holopainen et al.'s (2019) definition of caring encounter. Since caring encounters are based on respect and building and maintaining trust, a lack of these elements may feel alienating to asylum seekers and youth. These groups may also have the experience of not being met—not being encountered—at all. Fruitful information sharing ceases in such uncaring encounters, and they may even be seen as characteristic of the system, in which the arbitrariness and power elements in some structures constitute uncaring elements. The last aspect is exemplified by the statement of youth service worker Katja: 'If we talk about the service system, there is a certain arbitrariness and power. ... [There is] dismissal, exercise of power, bureaucracy, not encountering people' (Table 13).

However, encounters may also positively affect information sharing. Study III (Ruokolainen, 2022b) showed this by elucidating the strategies volunteers use when supporting asylum seekers with their information challenges. Six information-related strategies were identified: 1) information mediatory strategies, 2) language adjustment strategies, 3) spatial and non-verbal communicative strategies, 4) inclusive strategies, 5) supervisory strategies, and 6) strategies with shifting roles. Examples of these strategies are shown in Table 14 (p. 74).

Information mediatory strategies are directly connected to information, which means, for example, balancing the amount or timing of information, giving alternatives, explaining information in detail, and supporting the understanding of it. Volunteers clearly tried to verify different pieces of information for asylum seekers.

Language adjustment strategies involve adapting the use of language to the client, which may mean, for example, using metaphors and concrete examples, drawing, and/or simplifying language. Also, different dimensions of interpretation are important—both language and cultural interpretation and interpretation of and couching in bureaucratic and systemic language. These strategies can be used to ensure that clients understand the information and are able to share important information with authorities. Language adjustment strategies are essentially connected to the language characteristics of the official information found in Study IV (Ruokolainen et al., 2023). The use of

these strategies suggests that volunteers are (consciously or unconsciously) aware of the language elements of information.

Spatial and non-verbal communicative strategies consider elements of space and body language in communication. Often, togetherness and caring are emphasised by small gestures and adjustments, such as seating arrangements, with the intention of creating a safe space in which information sharing is possible.

Inclusive strategies are another way to make clients feel safe. These strategies start with individual needs. The main point is to meet clients as human beings first, which is at the heart of a caring encounter (Holopainen et al., 2019). Inclusion is enhanced by 'showing interest in the clients' well-being, being friendly and giving emotional support' (Ruokolainen, 2022b, p. 313). Volunteers made the effort to be available and flexible, and they invested time in the encounters.

The key factors of *supervisory strategies* are, on the one hand, supporting the human agency of clients and, on the other hand, supporting clients by acting on their behalf. This contradictory strategy is based on the clients' best interests and starts with the clients' needs and situations, as do inclusive strategies. Supervisory strategies, however, focus more on the activist component of volunteers' work (Sotkasiira, 2018). This may mean criticising or questioning the asylum system, with volunteers trying to 'fill in' when they feel that the asylum system is failing asylum seekers.

Volunteers balanced different *roles* to help them support asylum seekers. They had professional volunteering roles, sometimes besides other professional roles, and roles as friends or family members. Shifting between these roles made it easier for them to encounter asylum seekers on a level that allowed them to share information in the best way. Their roles may also have increased trust in many ways.

Table 14. Study III: Examples of information-related strategies.

Information-related strategies	Example
Information mediatory strategies	'When a person is in a stressful and difficult situation in life, you have to repeat things and go through them again'. (Volunteer Emma)
Language adjustment strategies	'Then I explained it to her with easier language, the same thing the lawyer asked but a bit differently. Then she had a lot to tell, I wrote to the lawyer that there was this, this, and this'. (Volunteer Sara)
Spatial and non-verbal communicative	'It's also how you organise the space, how you speak to the person. We do not sit like me here, you there and I'm here behind a computer. You try to sit together and ask how do you feel today, how is it going.' (Volunteer Mia)
Inclusive strategies	'We are a service where you can come and cry if you have a bad day. And then, little by little, when you have asked many times if everything is OK, is everything OK, is everything OK, suddenly there is a no. Then there is a story'. (Volunteer Sara)
Supervisory strategies	'You can't burden a person with all the decisions. If you yourself very clearly know what is better, you have to say so. And not be, like, well you can decide'. (Volunteer Sofia)
Strategies with shifting roles	'It is clear that some of them have also become my personal friends. And sometimes we meet and do something together or invite each other over. And suddenly half an hour goes by then we fill in a form'. (Volunteer Marianne)

6. Discussion

The aim of the discussion is to connect the theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches of the research with the aim of understanding misinformation in a new way. The first section revisits the RQs, provides a new framework for caring encounters, and offers a new visualisation of the social factors affecting misinformation to better understand misinformation as a situated social construct. Although this thesis has focused on misinformation, it has also highlighted that the focus should shift towards seeing misinformation as one type of information that people encounter in their everyday lives. The contributions and social impacts of this thesis are presented next, and finally, the limitations of this thesis are discussed.

6.1. Towards a novel understanding of misinformation

This thesis aims to shed light on the understanding of misinformation as a nuanced concept. The four studies contributed to this understanding in different ways and helped to form a new understanding of misinformation.

The first RQ asked what kind of misinformation people encounter in connection with their everyday needs. The theoretical contributions of this thesis help in understanding the nuanced nature of misinformation. Study I (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020) further developed the understanding of misinformation as inaccurate, incomplete, vague, or ambiguous information that is affected by various factors (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). It highlighted that misinformation is as any information that should be studied as part of our natural information environment. The nuanced nature of misinformation is theoretically illustrated and further revealed by the empirical contributions.

More concretely, the typology of misinformation provided in Study IV (Ruokolainen et al., 2023) answered the first RQ by placing some types of misinformation in the context of official information. People encounter misinformation that is not necessarily easy to detect. The nuanced nature of misinformation may mean that people who receive and use this information do not necessarily know that they are dealing with misinformation, which again may cause problems. In the context of official information, it may be difficult to reach a sufficient understanding of important structures and services if the information concerning them is outdated, conflicting, incomplete, or is perceived as intimidating.

The third RQ asked how misinformation can be studied as a nuanced phenomenon. Firstly, based on the theoretical contributions of this thesis, the

concepts of perceived and normative misinformation (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020) can be useful when misinformation is studied directly (see Section 4.3.). These concepts help to address the complexity of different viewpoints in society without diminishing them. Because of the indirect approach used in this research, these concepts have not been applied thoroughly herein.

Secondly, the SIP model (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020)—and especially the filters it includes—supports consideration of the different factors that surround misinformation. Misinformation is seen as situated in everyday practices rather than as something separate and distant from people's everyday lives. This influenced the methodological aspects of this thesis. Study II (Ruokolainen, 2022a) showed that it is possible to study misinformation through social practices. Indeed, interviews that included both direct questions and indirect discussions proved to be a valid data collection method. Thus, interview discussions can highlight different kinds of misinformation in our natural information environment. Simultaneously, it can be understood *how* this misinformation is formed and received and *why* there is misinformation by placing misinformation in context.

The second RQ asked why some information is misinformation and how encounters affect it. This is exemplified in this thesis by the characteristics of official information (Study IV), which are structural factors, language, and terminology, as well as encounters. Encounters are also essentially connected to the fourth RQ, which addressed the ways in which challenges with misinformation may be mitigated. Study III (Ruokolainen, 2022b) presented information-related strategies for holistically supporting people with information challenges, and these strategies involve many elements of caring encounters (Holopainen et al., 2015, 2019; Holopainen, Kasén, et al., 2014; Holopainen, Nyström, et al., 2014), which are discussed as follows.

6.1.1. Caring encounter, uncaring encounter, and non-encounter

This thesis has established that encounters are an important element of how misinformation is formed, how it is perceived and understood, and how challenges with it can be reduced. To understand the importance of encounters, the framework for caring encounter (Section 3.2.1.), based on Holopainen et al. (2019), was used.

Misinformation is socially constructed since the social context defines what is understood as information and as informative (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). As visualised in the SIP model (Figure 3, Section 5.1.), different social, cultural, and historical factors, as well as contextual and situational factors, can influence

this understanding. Encounters—which of course are not the only elements defining misinformation and the understanding of it—comprise these different factors.

Caring encounter (Holopainen et al., 2019) can be seen as the ideal way to encounter a client. In caring encounter, the professional's engagement in the situation is shown in different ways, and the aim of the encounter is to create and enhance trust, respect, and mutual understanding. As stated, volunteers' strategies to support asylum seekers with information challenges (Ruokolainen, 2022b) can be seen as means to create caring encounters. The professionals holistically considered the encounters and their quality, and when successful, these encounters supported access to and understanding of information.

On the other hand, there are negative examples of encounters: *uncaring encounter* identified in Study IV (Ruokolainen et al., 2023). Again, these encounters critically influence how and why misinformation is formed. Incomplete information may be formed when different parties do not understand each other; there is none of the mutual understanding that is essential for caring encounter. In the context of conflicting information, authorities and official information providers may lack the understanding that potentially vulnerable groups, especially, may have trouble evaluating contradictory information. Perceived intimidation is the most obvious type of uncaring encounter since intimidation forms in an unfriendly or hostile environment. To conclude, these types of misinformation are strongly connected to not being seen as an individual with individual needs and capabilities.

In addition to caring encounter and uncaring encounter affecting information and understanding of it, *non-encounter* can be seen as the third aspect of encounters in the context of misinformation. In many cases, it is not even a question of uncaring encounter; an element clearly visible in the findings was that many asylum seekers and young people do not feel encountered at all (i.e. there is a lack of encounter). For example, youth service worker Katja mentioned this when talking about the service system 'not encountering people', and volunteer Emma also highlighted that there cannot be a true relationship between a social worker and an asylum seeker if they seldom meet each other (Table 12, Section 5.3.1.). Hence, individual encounters can be caring and thus fruitful—even when they are short (Holopainen et al., 2015)—but the feeling of not having enough encounters or having no encounters at all may create a pattern of mistrust, distrust, and untrust (Huvila,

2017). Non-encounters can, therefore, lead to a generally suspicious attitude that is counterproductive to sustainable information sharing.

Table 15. Extended framework for caring encounter in the context of information and support with information.

ANTECEDENTS			
A reflective way of being Caring attitude Shifting modes of being according to the situation	**Openness, sensitivity, empathy, and the ability to communicate** Sensitivity to a person's needs Empathy and warmth	**Confidence, courage, and professionalism** *Acknowledging a person's skills and human agency* Showing professionalism	**Showing respect and supporting dignity**

ATTRIBUTES		
Being there Participation and involvement Being with, being close, and sharing Presence, listening, and seeing here and now *Discussing information together*	**Uniqueness** To be seen as a person, an individual, a unique human being Eye contact, stillness, and wordless encounter *Spatial togetherness* *Consideration of language*	**Mutuality** Changes the asymmetric situation Equal, mutual companions

CONSEQUENCES			
Influencing information ***Decreasing the negative consequences of misinformation*** **Helping people express their needs** *and understand* **information**	**Influencing all parties in the encounter**	**Creating trust**	**Building mutual understanding that goes beyond an individual encounter**

Although this thesis has shown that official information may indeed be misinformation, lacking trust in it (and in official structures in general) may lead to relying on other, even more unreliable, sources of information. There are many cases in which disnormative information (Haasio, 2015) is useful and reliable. For example, volunteers in this research applied critical and activist expertise (Sotkasiira, 2018) that partly challenged the official asylum system (Ruokolainen, 2022b); therefore, the information they provided may be seen as disnormative in some cases. However, there may also be other sources that are less useful, and official information, despite not being perfect, is the information that people must receive and use to navigate societal structures.

Caring encounter is a holistic way of being in a situation that underlines meeting the person as a human being. Ideally, caring encounters (even short ones) can build a trusting relationship that makes information sharing possible. Information sharing supported by caring encounter involves discussing information together, with an emphasis on *understanding*, not only passing on, information. Therefore, caring encounter can diminish the threat of the problematic consequences of misinformation.

These dimensions of caring encounter are collated in Table 15 (p. 78), which further develops the framework shown in Table 1 (Section 3.2.1.). The new framework considers an information support moment, including the formation and understanding of information and misinformation, from the viewpoint of caring encounter. Thus, information is highlighted in the new framework, marked with italics.

This framework concretely shows the elements that people providing support with information, especially, may and should consider, although the elements of caring encounter could be applied to all kinds of information-sharing situations. The new framework was constructed based on an understanding of the nature of misinformation and how misinformation is formed and interpreted in encounters. There are few new elements in how to meet a person, compared to the original idea of a caring encounter. However, the new framework includes clients' skills and human agency as antecedents. The attribute of being there involves discussing information together, and the attribute of uniqueness considers spatial and language elements. The consequences differ the most, as different aspects of information, misinformation, and information sharing are highlighted, but the essential idea of caring encounter remains the same. The framework is an important contribution because it helps in understanding more concretely how and why

encounters are important in connection with information and misinformation. It illustrates an ideal support situation that can be applied in different contexts.

Regarding the factors influencing information (i.e. filters in the SIP model), encounters can be understood as social, cultural, historical, contextual, and situational factors that influence information. Encounters are by nature social, and they are situated in social structures. There are cultural elements in encounters, such as clashes of understanding, that form or even define encounters. Individual encounters constitute a continuum of encounters, and past encounters influence how a person perceives them. This means that a person carries past encounters with herself or himself that affect present and future encounters. Encounters are strongly bound to certain contexts, and finally, they are situational. Information sharing happens in a specific situation—an individual encounter—but is affected by layers of other encounters and information with all their characteristics.

6.1.2. Misinformation as a social construct

As explained in the previous section, the SIP model (Figure 3, Section 5.1.), originally presented in Study I (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020), was useful for understanding the complexity of misinformation, although the model was not implemented in such a way in the individual studies or in this thesis. This was partly due to the change in approach: misinformation was studied indirectly, and the direct perception of information could not be studied. Nevertheless, the model can still be useful in more direct settings.

The visualisation of the SIP model depicts accurate information, misinformation, and disinformation as separate types of information, despite the description of the model stating that these types of information are not readily separable but are placed on a continuum of information. The model excludes malinformation as one possible type of information, and the visualisation does not show the possibility of new types of information emerging. It was also noteworthy throughout this project that different factors not only influence information perception but also *information itself*. In general, the upper part of the SIP model (as depicted in the reframed SIP model; Figure 4) was the most interesting and useful throughout this project because it highlighted the importance of filters for information and its perception. Therefore, there is a need for a new visualisation (Figure 5) that emphasises the filters.
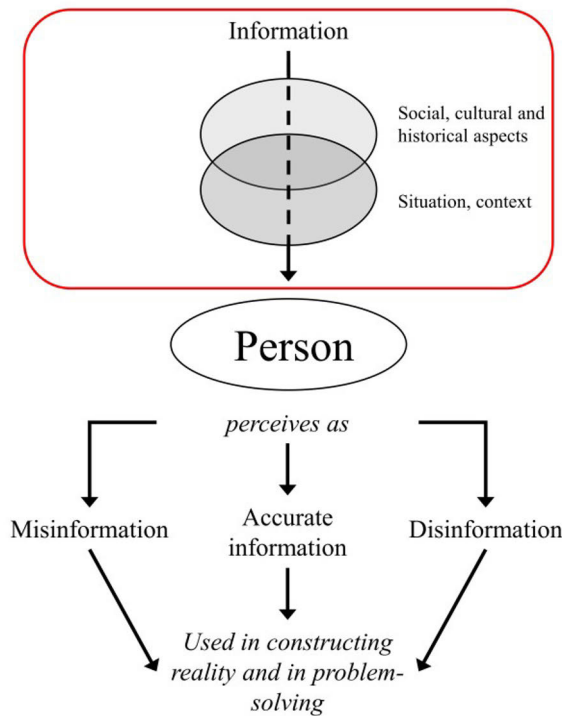
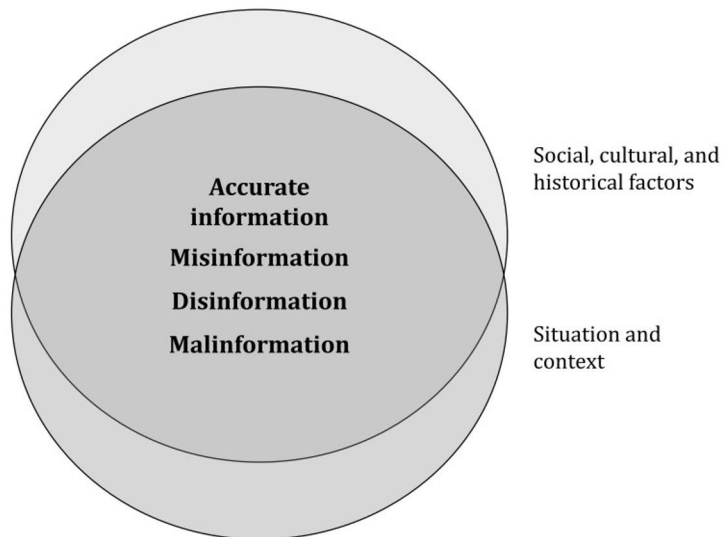Figure 4. The reframed Social Information Perception model (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020).

Figure 5. Filters that affect information.

In the new visualisation of the filters that affect information (Figure 5), four different types of information are depicted without distinct borders to show that the types are not always easy to separate. Eventually, the visualisation could only state 'information' as a concept comprising all possible types of information that exist in our information environment. However, the visualisation intentionally underlines the different types of information that should be considered when studying information in people's lives. The types of information are located inside the circles—filters—that represent social, cultural, historical, situational, and contextual factors. Placing the types of information inside them shows that information is situated in a social context. Information is an entity 'produced within existing discourses' (Talja et al., 2005, pp. 89–90). Therefore, although information (i.e. accurate information, misinformation, disinformation, or malinformation) would exist outside our social contexts, as is understood in the objective approaches (see Section 3.1.1.), these filters inevitably influence how this information is formed and perceived. Information cannot be observed outside and without these factors. This is also why the different factors affecting information are named *filters* in this research; information is essentially filtered through them.

The new visualisation helps to further elucidate the situated nature of information. It is difficult to study any type of information without placing it in a social setting. This thesis has demonstrated it through the importance of encounters, which concretely show what the social factors influencing information (c.f. Karlova & Fisher, 2013) may be in practice. However, there are many other factors that influence information. The characteristics of official information (i.e. structural factors, language and terminology, and encounters) are one way to discuss filters that define misinformation.

A theoretical approach supports the methodological choices of a study (Sutton, 2018, p. 3810). This visualisation of the filters fosters the inclusion of the social setting in the research design. The methodological findings of this thesis revealed that roughly the same number of references were made to misinformation through direct questions and indirect discussion. Indirect discussion involved clients and their issues, participants' work, and their thoughts and identities. This shows that the context and elements surrounding misinformation are important for truly understanding it. More importantly, to enhance our knowledge of misinformation, we should consider information as a whole. The visualisation helps in this by highlighting the fact that—despite this thesis focusing on misinformation—we should change our focus to

information, which will be discussed next. The visualisation can also help us to further understand the nuanced and complex nature of misinformation.

6.1.3. Beyond misinformation

Despite this thesis focusing on misinformation—albeit with a somewhat broad and loose definition—the study has shown that separating misinformation strictly from other types of information is not necessarily beneficial. Rather, we should understand information to form a continuum and acknowledge that the nature and type of information may sometimes be unclear.

Misinformation has been defined as inaccurate, uncertain, vague, or ambiguous information that is affected by contextual, situational, and various other factors (Karlova & Fisher, 2013), visualised as filters in the previous section. This thesis has shown that a broad and somewhat loose definition of misinformation is important, as misinformation may relate to a specific time (e.g. outdated information) or information's changing nature. Karlova and Fisher (2013) also highlighted the receiver's point of view: misinformation is inaccurate information in a specific context for a specific receiver. Thus, defining misinformation clearly in all situations and contexts can be difficult due to its changing nature and the different ways in which it is perceived. Therefore, it is useful to discuss misinformation in connection with information.

Four types of information were discussed in Sections 3.1.3. and 5.1. Earlier studies have identified misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (e.g. Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Karlova & Lee, 2011; Wardle, 2020; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017b, 2017a) and have highlighted the need to see them separately and not gather all 'problematic information' under the term 'misinformation' (Baines & Elliott, 2020). This thesis further emphasises the importance of seeing *accurate information* as a type of information (Section 5.1.).

The need to separate different types of information is indeed fruitful, as they highlight the diverse nature of information and underscore that not all information is accurate. However, strict lines between the types may also move us further away from seeing them all as *information* in our natural information environment, especially if some types are seen as 'bastardised' versions of information (Jarrahi et al., 2021). Research on mis-, dis-, and malinformation has focused on online settings and seen them mostly as negative phenomena, and this limitation and preconception has simplified these types of information.

Therefore, although there is a need to understand what accurate information, misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation are and further define them, we should shift the focus from individual types of information to information as a whole and accept its complex, fluid, vague, and changing nature.

This thesis has not discussed other types of information in detail, but the findings could be interpreted through them, as well. For example, depending on how the motives for information sharing are perceived, perceived intimidation may be classified as disinformation. Some may argue that accurate information can be incomplete or uncertain, making some of the types found in Study IV (Ruokolainen et al., 2023) more accurate information than misinformation.

This thesis offers ways to observe and manage uncertainty with information. The concepts of perceived and normative misinformation, along with their counterparts (normative and disnormative accurate information, disinformation, and malinformation), can be used to clarify whose perspective is discussed. The concepts themselves acknowledge the complexity of information, its receivers, and the factors surrounding it. They can help us to study *information* as a whole and in a nuanced way, while also addressing its subtypes and respecting different people and their views. In general, research should embrace information holistically, with its uncertain and complex nature, and be open-minded to different types of information in people's everyday lives.

Uncertainty about the nature of misinformation—and information in general—can be seen as interesting and definitely not only as challenging. This thesis has demonstrated what misinformation *may be,* but it has not exclusively clarified precisely what it *is*. It may, in fact, be very difficult, if not impossible, to find a definitive answer to this question.

This thesis has both created new theoretical concepts and highlighted existing elements, such as visualised and concretised the importance of social factors in misinformation (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). The new theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions are important additions to LIS research, including research on information behaviour and practices, as well as misinformation research in other fields.

6.2. Contributions and impact

Misinformation is seen as one of the biggest challenges in our society today, and it has been widely studied, but the research has largely failed to explore its

nature in depth. Studying it only as an internet phenomenon excludes a great deal of misinformation. At the same time, as the findings of Study IV (Ruokolainen et al., 2023) showed, authorities may also spread misinformation. This thesis helps examine different structures through the lens of misinformation. Without understanding what underlying factors cause or affect misinformation and other uncertain elements of information, it is difficult to clarify information and provide it in a way that is suitable for different individuals and groups. Thus, although this thesis has stated that misinformation is unavoidably present in our information environment, there are different ways to tackle it.

This thesis considered support with information in two specific contexts: asylum seekers and youth. These groups' challenges with information were outlined in Sections 2.2.4. and 2.3.3., clearly demonstrating that different issues with information may crucially affect people in these positions or phases of life. Asylum seekers need to access and use complicated and changing legal and societal information, while at the same time dealing with information barriers, such as differences in language and the understanding of information, unfamiliar information environment, and psychological burdens. Young people use limited sources for information seeking, often have difficulties in evaluating information, and suffer from information overload because of low levels of information literacy. At the same time, in the transition phase between childhood and adulthood, they have a great need to use official information, which may be difficult for them to understand.

Understanding what factors affect misinformation can help support these groups with information. Seeing caring encounters and, more concretely, information-related strategies as important factors influencing access to, and the understanding and use of, information can make it easier for different information providers and support people to help these groups with information. Likewise, information creators, such as different authorities, may make information more understandable by better understanding what makes information difficult to access, understand, and apply. There may also be a need for more tailor-made information services that some youth already benefit from. Respectful encounters help with information and its challenges, as this thesis has thoroughly demonstrated.

Although this thesis has discussed misinformation in encounters in limited contexts, the findings may be applied to other contexts. In particular, the findings regarding encounters and information-related strategies may be applied to various interactions in which information is shared or discussed. To

some extent, and perhaps with some modifications, they could be applied to digital environment. The study has mostly discussed misinformation in the context of official information, but the types of misinformation presented herein may also be found in other contexts. The findings may help in studying different information contexts from a misinformation risk point of view. They may also help identify new types of misinformation.

To support different stakeholders in using the findings and conclusions of this thesis in their work, different aspects have been considered. Open access publishing has been preferred, whenever possible. The findings have also been presented to different audiences and in different formats during the project. Great emphasis has been placed on ethical considerations, as explained in Section 4.6., to ensure the sustainable use of the findings.

6.3. Limitations

Theoretical premises affect how a phenomenon is studied (Sutton, 2018). Therefore, the chosen definition of misinformation as a socially situated construct affected how the data were collected, analysed, and framed. With a different theoretical starting point, the findings regarding misinformation may have differed.

Some additional aspects could have been fruitful for discussing misinformation. For example, research on misunderstandings (e.g. House et al., 2003; Verdonik, 2010) could have provided further insights into what happens between people during information sharing. Due to space limitations, this line of study could not be followed.

Encounters and caring encounters are not the only approaches that could have shed light on the situated and contextual nature of misinformation. Even when discussing encounters, other approaches to understanding human interaction and communication could have been used. Other approaches, such as interaction ritual (Goffman, 2005) and interaction ritual chains (Collins, 2004), were considered but the framework for caring encounter proved to be the most useful in this context, where the asymmetric professional–client dimension was present.

Some of the methodological limitations, such as small samples, have already been discussed in Chapter 4. Qualitative research processes comprise interpretative and intuitive elements (Leavy, 2014, p. 6), as was the case in this thesis. Further validation with different methods, larger samples, and a larger research group conducting the interviews and analysing the results could have

enriched the findings. However, the findings have been presented as indicative and guiding, not final.

The study was experimental in the sense that no existing methodological guidelines were available; thus, it was not clear from the beginning how misinformation could be approached methodologically. As stated in Section 4.3.1., the direct approach, at least with asylum seekers, was clearly unfruitful. Using the indirect approach (i.e. approaching support people) for data collection meant that the voices of asylum seekers and youth were not directly represented in this thesis. However, the indirect approach provided an interesting methodological contribution that can be applied in contexts where more direct approaches fail or when some groups are hard to reach.

The findings based on the data comprised the methodological approach for studying misinformation, the types of misinformation in connection with official information, and information-related strategies. The data were rich, and findings on misinformation other than those relating to official information could have been obtained in a longer project. The present findings provide examples of the aspects of misinformation that can be studied, how they can be studied, and what findings may be obtained, but they do not clarify the overall situation, even in the current study's limited contexts. There is still much about misinformation that we do not understand.

The information-related strategies presented in Study III (Ruokolainen, 2022b) were based only on data collected from volunteers. Therefore, deeper analyses should be conducted regarding their application in a youth context, as well as in other contexts. Despite such an analysis not being made in this thesis, the data gathered from youth service workers strongly indicate that similar strategies are used in this context. Further research could show some contextual differences and make the strategies more generalisable. Nevertheless, both datasets indicate the importance of caring encounters, which the strategies represent.

7. Conclusions

Misinformation is present in our lives, no matter whether it is seen as a great threat or as an unavoidable part of our information environment. Since misinformation may be, for example, outdated, incomplete, or conflicting information connected to complicated social structures, fact-checking lists do not necessarily help individuals evaluate the information. Therefore, it is not enough to address misinformation as a problematic online phenomenon; it should be understood in a more nuanced way, which the contributions of this thesis support.

This thesis has discussed the nature of misinformation as a nuanced phenomenon that is bound to social context and situation. The social nature of misinformation can be concretised through encounters. Uncaring encounters and non-encounters create or form misinformation, whereas caring encounters based on quality human interaction may reduce the challenges with misinformation.

Despite the focus of this thesis on misinformation, it highlights the need to see misinformation as one type of information among others (i.e. accurate information, disinformation, and malinformation). Studying information without preconceptions about its accuracy can truly help us to gain a profound understanding of people's information behaviour and practices. The methodological approach of this thesis helps by linking misinformation to the normal social practices into which it is integrated.

This thesis has elucidated misinformation as a theoretical concept, created new theoretical and methodological ways to understand and study it, and empirically showed the different kinds of misinformation, why they are formed, and what can be done about them. However, there is still a need to continue studying misinformation as one type of information among others. Future research should consider factors other than encounters that may affect misinformation. The connection of misinformation to other concepts, such as misunderstandings, should also be further inspected. New methodological contributions finding ways to study misinformation directly are needed, and this could reveal other types of misinformation not covered in this thesis. Research should continue to study whether there is other types of misinformation in our societal structures. In addition, studying other types of (online and offline) everyday misinformation will be important for gaining a more holistic understanding of people's everyday information practices and environment.

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Appendix: Original publications

Ruokolainen, H., & Widén, G. (2020). Conceptualising misinformation in the context of asylum seekers. *Information Processing and Management, 57*(3), 102127. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2019.102127.

I

Conceptualising misinformation in the context of asylum seekers

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A B S T R A C T

This conceptual paper focuses on misinformation in the context of asylum seekers. We conducted a literature review on the concept of misinformation, which showed that a more nuanced understanding of information and misinformation is needed. To understand and study different viewpoints when it comes to the perception of the accuracy of information, we introduce two new concepts: *perceived misinformation* and *normative misinformation*. The concepts are especially helpful when marginalised and vulnerable groups are studied, as these groups may perceive information differently compared to majority populations. Our literature review on the information practices of asylum seekers shows that asylum seekers come across different types of misinformation. These include official information that is inadequate or presented inadequately, outdated information, misinformation via gatekeepers and other mediators, information giving false hope or unrealistic expectations, rumours and distorted information. The diversity of misinformation in their lives shows that there is a need to understand information in general in a broad and more nuanced way. Based on this idea, we propose a Social Information Perception model (SIP), which shows that different social, cultural and historical aspects, as well as situation and context, are involved in the mental process which determines whether people perceive information as accurate information, misinformation or disinformation. The model, as well as the concepts of *perceived* and *normative misinformation*, are helpful when the information practices of marginalised and vulnerable groups are studied, giving a holistic view on their information situation. Understanding the information practices more holistically enables different actors to give trustworthy information in an understandable and culturally meaningful way to the asylum seekers.

1. Introduction

The focus of this conceptual paper is on misinformation in the context of the marginalised and vulnerable groups of asylum seekers in Finland and their information experiences and practices. For today's asylum seekers, social media and technology, especially smartphones, are important in seeking information and keeping in touch with others. There are many advantages in using technology; asylum seekers access information they would otherwise not have access to and this supports their social inclusion. However, greater dependence on technology and social media can also increase the risk of encountering misinformation. The paper shows that misinformation is unavoidable in the lives of asylum seekers and it comes in many forms.

In the past few years, researchers from different fields have started paying more and more attention to misinformation. Studies cover topics such as fake news and fact-checking (Margolin, Hannak & Weber, 2018; Nyhan & Reifler, 2012), diffusion of misinformation and disinformation in social networks and online (Shin, Jian, Driscoll & Bar, 2018; Vosoughi, Roy & Aral, 2018), people's

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abilities to assess the credibility of information (Ecker, Lewandowsky & Tang, 2010; Kumar & Geethakumari, 2014) and if and how perceptions based on misinformation can be corrected (Lewandowsky, Ecker & Cook, 2017; Walter & Murphy, 2018). The growing interest in misinformation is connected with the fact that more and more communication takes place online and people are more aware that not all information found on the Internet is trustworthy. Yet, many information behaviour models still do not consider misinformation at all, and studies on information practices or behaviour often treat all information as accurate (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). At the same time, misinformation is often viewed from a normative viewpoint, which is especially problematic when studying marginalised and vulnerable communities. In this paper, we use the definition of misinformation by Karlova and Fisher (2013), Karlova and Lee (2011) which highlights the receiver perspective; misinformation is thus defined as information which is perceived as inaccurate, incomplete, vague or ambiguous by the receiver in a context and situation.

In the context of asylum seekers, there is relatively little research that addresses misinformation. The ways in which misinformation and disinformation affect the public opinion of asylum seekers have been studied (Haslam & Holland, 2012; Pedersen, Attwell & Heveli, 2005). Some studies mention that asylum seekers encounter misinformation and that it is a problem for them (Brekke, 2004; Gillespie et al., 2016; Merisalo, 2017; Rotter, 2010). However, misinformation has not been the focus of the studies on asylum seekers, nor have questions, such as what misinformation means to them and what kind of role it has in their lives, been studied comprehensively.

This paper aims to conceptualise misinformation in the context of asylum seekers' information practices, i.e. socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use and share information (Savolainen, 2008). Our study sheds light on the complexity of misinformation and the information situation of asylum seekers. We use the asylum situation of Finland as an example. Focus on one country is important, as different countries have varying asylum policies and situations, even within the EU (e.g. Jauhiainen, 2017a, 24; Mouzourakis, 2016, Mouzourakis et al., 2015). There have been constant and rapid changes in the asylum legislation and guidelines in Finland, concerning e.g. humanitarian protection and the appeal times for asylum applications (Koistinen & Jauhiainen, 2017). It can be said that the asylum situation in Finland is characterised by uncertainty, which also makes misinformation a greater threat. A practical reason for focusing on Finland is our future empirical research, which will be conducted in Finland.

This paper constitutes comprehensive literature reviews on the concept of misinformation and on misinformation as an aspect of the information practices of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants.[1] Based on misinformation research, we propose two concepts, which can be used in empirical misinformation research, especially in the context of marginalised communities. The concepts of *perceived misinformation* and *normative misinformation* enable the understanding of different viewpoints when misinformation is studied. We identify different types of misinformation that asylum seekers encounter. These include official information that is inadequate, outdated information, misinformation via gatekeepers and other mediators, information giving false hope or unrealistic expectations, rumours and distorted information. We propose the Social Information Perception model (SIP) for understanding how information perceptions are formed and what factors are involved in the process. Through combining the analysis of misinformation and information practices, it is possible to create a more nuanced understanding of the information situation of asylum seekers in general, and specifically misinformation, in order to better meet the information needs of asylum seekers. Overall, the nuanced understanding enabled by the concepts of perceived and normative misinformation, as well as the SIP model, may lead to new information handling practices and social services. These again contribute to the idea of social innovation. Social innovations are ideas, i.e. products, services and models that meet social needs (European Commission, 2015, 2018). When different actors, such as immigration officials, reception centres, legal services and volunteers, better understand the information experiences of asylum seekers, their chances of providing accurate and timely information in a meaningful manner and form for the asylum seekers increase.

The main arguments of the paper are: (1) all information, despite its accuracy, has to be understood as an aspect of information practices. Currently, information practice research focuses mainly on information as accurate information, and, therefore, (2) we need a more nuanced understanding of information in general, including perspectives of misinformation and disinformation. One way of obtaining a nuanced picture is to study information perception from different viewpoints, which we highlight in this paper. The arguments are especially important in the context of marginalised and vulnerable communities, whose viewpoints are often neglected and whose need for accurate and timely information is of great importance.

2. Misinformation

When misinformation is studied, many researchers simply refer to the Oxford English Dictionary definition, where it is defined as, "wrong or misleading information" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018b). Misinformation is often discussed together with disinformation, i.e. "deliberately false information" (Oxford English Dictionary, 2018a), and the concepts are often confused as well. The concepts are commonly treated as negative types of information that have to be corrected, something which has been criticised by e.g. Karlova and Lee (2011) and Lee and Renear (2008). Karlova and Lee (2011) argue that, because the concepts are used as general terms in many other fields than Library and Information Science, there are few precise definitions of them. The concepts of misinformation and disinformation are complex, and they and their exact relationship to accurate information are challenging to define. Although the term *information* is often used as a synonym for information that is accurate, we make a distinction between the main

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[1] As there are relatively few studies solely on asylum seekers, we also include studies on refugees and immigrants even though we are aware that all these groups are heterogeneous and have varying challenges with information. However, we see that the experiences of all transnational and diasporic communities can be useful when understanding information and misinformation in the context of asylum seekers.

category and subcategory of information in terminology. In this study, we use the concept of *information* only when referring to the general concept of information, which comprises all the subcategories of accurate information, misinformation and disinformation. To avoid confusion, we consistently use the term *accurate information* for the subcategory of information.

Stahl (2006) defines misinformation as accidental falsehood and disinformation as deliberate falsehood. However, other researchers do not classify them as rigidly in the sense of always being false. Losee (1997) states that misinformation is partly or wholly false information. For Zhou and Zhang (2007), misinformation is concealing, ambivalent, distorted or falsified information, and therefore they make no distinction between misinformation and disinformation. Karlova and Lee (2011) and Karlova and Fisher (2013) understand misinformation as inaccurate, incomplete, vague or ambiguous information, but it has to be perceived as such by the receiver in a given moment and in a specific context. This definition is used in this paper. For these researchers, disinformation is deceptive or misleading information, but not necessarily completely false. However, it can be difficult to discern the motives behind sharing information, i.e. if someone intentionally wants to mislead others by sharing disinformation.

The question of information and truth goes back to the nature of information, which Karlova and Lee (2011) have discussed thoroughly. Misinformation and disinformation can be seen as forms of information if information does not carry a claim to truth. This is possible when the essence of information is to be informative (Buckland, 1991; Fox, 1983), and thus, misinformation and disinformation can be used for becoming informed and constructing reality (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). Misinformation and disinformation are also information if the information is seen as subjective and situational (Hjørland, 2007). In the context of misinformation, this means that the receiver deems the information to be false in the moment of receiving it (Karlova & Lee, 2011). However, its subjectiveness does not rule out it being highly social. Karlova and Fisher (2013) use Tuominen and Savolainen's (1997) social constructionist view to highlight the social nature of information. In social constructionism, information and interaction with it are seen as discursive actions (Tuominen & Savolainen, 1997, 81), and social reality is produced and organised in social interaction (Talja, Tuominen & Savolainen, 2005, 89). Social context affects what is understood as information and as informative. The subjectiveness, reliance on situation and the social nature of information lead to a situation where, in practice, it can be difficult to define if something should be classified as accurate information, misinformation or disinformation. We discuss this aspect more in the following section by introducing the new concepts of *perceived misinformation* and *normative misinformation*. These concepts provide an aid to understanding the complexity of misinformation.

As we can see, the approaches used here rely quite heavily on social constructionism, which is not the only possible approach for addressing information. However, as the paper mostly focuses on individual and social perception of information and treats misinformation and disinformation as forms of information, social constructionist approaches and theories building on it are very useful.

2.1. Perceived and normative misinformation

Social, cultural and historical aspects influence our understanding of information and what we perceive as true (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). Therefore, studying issues that deal with truth and understandings of it have to take into account the social dimensions. This is especially crucial when studying groups and individuals that are in the margins of a society and do not necessarily share the same understanding of truth. Often when we talk about truth, we are actually talking about the normative understanding of it, and it can be difficult to tell the difference between true and normative claims (Stahl, 2006). For discussing the relationship of truth and normativity, Haasio (2015) has introduced the concepts of *normative* and *disnormative information*. These terms facilitate the understanding that not all information is either true or false, but generally accepted or disregarded in a social context. Normative information is information consistent with the dominant or generally accepted norms and attitudes in a society, whereas disnormative information contradicts these norms, being, for example, experiential knowledge, information distributed through social networks and media. Disnormative information is not automatically inaccurate, nor is normative always accurate. Haasio has applied the concepts to socially withdrawn people, but we see that they can be helpful for understanding other minorities and marginalised groups, as well.

For tackling the issue of truth and normativity when studying misinformation – especially in the context of marginalised communities – we propose two new concepts: *perceived misinformation* and *normative misinformation.* Perceived misinformation is based on the definition of misinformation by Karlova and Fisher (2013), Karlova and Lee (2011), where misinformation is understood as information that is perceived as inaccurate, incomplete, vague or ambiguous information by the receiver in a context or situation. Thus, perceived misinformation shows the receiver's point of view. Normative misinformation, again, is based on Haasio's definition of *normative information*; it is information that is in some social contexts generally accepted as inaccurate. The concept is an attempt – even if not an exhaustive one – to answer the dilemma of information and truth in empirical research. Both concepts can be seen as tools that facilitate the discussion of misinformation without taking a stand on what would be objectively accurate or inaccurate. In the same manner as is done with misinformation, accurate information and disinformation can be divided into *perceived* and *normative accurate information* and *perceived* and *normative disinformation*. Studying perception together with normative views is generally important to get a thorough picture of information practices. However, since we are focusing on misinformation in this paper, we only discuss perceived and normative misinformation.

The need to use these concepts arises from the fact that, for the most part, (empirical) misinformation research does not clearly state from whose point of view the inaccuracy of information is perceived or defined. In many studies, misinformation has simply been defined as inaccurate or misleading information (e.g. Kumar & Geethakumari, 2014; Vosoughi et al., 2018), as information that later turns out to be false (e.g. Ecker et al., 2010; Lewandowsky, Stritzke, Freund, Oberauer & Krueger, 2013) or it has not been defined at all (e.g. Kuklinski, Quirk, Jerit, Schwieder & Rich, 2000; Nyhan & Reifler, 2012; Putnam, Sungkhasettee & Roediger, 2017; Vicario et al., 2016). The concept of perceived misinformation is needed to give voice to the information receivers and to respect their

views and values. This is especially important with groups that do not necessarily share the normative views of a society. This can be the case with asylum seekers, who often have a different social and cultural background compared to the majority population in the host society. When studying marginalised and vulnerable communities, it is important to avoid ethnocentricity and show respect to their views and values (European Commission). Perceived misinformation is an attempt to do this. However, understanding their views in a context does not only mean seeing them in the light of their history and background. They exist, navigate and function in a new social context that has possibly different views, norms and values that guide the understanding of information, as well. Therefore, perceived misinformation should be compared to normative misinformation. The concept of normative misinformation does not abate the views of the studied group, as the normative views are not seen as true ones but rather as one interpretation that happens to be dominant in a social context. In practice, studying normative misinformation empirically can be much more challenging than understanding perceived misinformation. Even if a consensus may be more difficult to detect than an individual perception – and there may be more interpretations made by the researcher involved – it is still easier to discuss it with the help of normative misinformation than claiming something to be objectively accurate or inaccurate. Both concepts together aid in seeing misinformation – and information in general – as a nuanced phenomenon.

2.2. Diffusion and acceptance of misinformation

As misinformation is quite easily available, how people accept it and what they do with it are relevant questions. Spreading information, including misinformation, is deeply rooted in our information practices (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). In that regard, disseminating misinformation is not a new phenomenon. However, many researchers point out that the Internet and social media have made the diffusion of misinformation quicker and easier (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Vicario et al., 2016; Vosoughi et al., 2018). Though misinformation is easily spread via (informal) social networks, all kinds of actors disseminate misinformation, including governments and businesses (Karlova & Fisher, 2013).

There are several reasons why people accept misinformation. Kuklinski et al. (2000), p. 794) understand the psychology of misinformation through three characteristics in human behaviour; firstly, people make inferences when information is incomplete, secondly, they have a strong drive to accept information that is consistent with their earlier attitudes and beliefs and, thirdly, they easily become overconfident in these beliefs. According to Lewandowsky et al. (2013), narratives play a big role in this; narratives help us manage the complexity that accompanies large amounts of information, but, at the same time, they enable the dissemination of misinformation. People readily believe information that is consistent with the dominant narrative. These narratives, however, can be different in different social circles or societies. People keep on believing and relying on misinformation even after it has been corrected (Ecker et al., 2010; Rich & Zaragoza, 2016). Therefore, it truly affects us and our decision-making even though we may be aware of misinformation.

2.3. Types of misinformation

Although misinformation is a topical issue, there is little consensus concerning the different types of misinformation. McCright and Dunlap (2017) have recognised the need to differentiate between types of misinformation in order to know how to deal with them. Yet, their types – "truthiness, bullshit, systemic lies, and shock-and-chaos" – are mostly connected with political misinformation and disinformation. Psychological misinformation tests have differentiated between e.g. additive and contradictory misinformation (see e.g. Moore & Lampinen, 2016) or neutral and non-neutral misinformation (e.g. Morgan, Southwick, Steffian, Hazlett & Loftus, 2013). Fitzgerald (1997) identified 10 misinformation types on the Internet: incomplete information, pranks, contradictions, out-of-date information, improperly translated data, software incompatibilities, unauthorised revisions, factual errors, biased information and scholarly misconduct. She is not alone in treating misinformation primarily as an Internet phenomenon. Yet, misinformation and its different types are not limited to online environments, even though digital information worlds certainly are important in the diffusion of misinformation. The contexts mentioned earlier, political misinformation and psychological tests, do not grasp the complexity of misinformation in the context of everyday information practices either. More research is needed into the identification of different types of misinformation in various contexts in order to understand the nature of misinformation as a social phenomenon within people's everyday lives.

2.4. Consequences of misinformation

Many researchers are worried about the negative consequences of misinformation, which are both individual and societal (or collective) and influence decisions and actions. Firstly, misinformation may cause individuals to experience confusion, uncertainty, suspicion, fear, worry and anger (Karlova & Fisher, 2013) or alienation and disempowerment (Stahl, 2006). It can make people mistrust information and the communities where it is distributed (Karlova & Fisher, 2013), the government (Shin et al., 2018) and its services and institutions (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). It affects people's views and values concerning public, political and religious matters (Kumar & Geethakumari, 2014) or health, scientific, environmental and economic matters (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). Lewandowsky et al. (2017) state that the worst-case scenario would be that people stop believing in facts altogether.

Secondly, misinformation can also affect groups or even societies, having thus both collective and societal consequences. Misinformation can cause mistrust and friction in a community, including governments and businesses (Karlova, 2018; Karlova & Fisher, 2013). Politics, policies and legislation can be affected by misinformation (Berinsky, 2017). Misinformation can even lead to violent conflicts (Lewandowsky et al., 2013).

Both individual and collective/societal decisions may be based on – or at least affected by – misinformation. Kuklinski et al. (2000) state that acts based on misinformation can actually have worse consequences than making random decisions. Uncertainty can lead to uninformed choices or make an individual confused about whether to act or to refrain from taking any action at all (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). People can make voting decisions based on misinformation (Shin et al., 2018), or refrain from vaccinating their children because of it (Lewandowsky et al., 2017). Misinformation can be difficult to make use of, and people may have to turn to other sources or repeat their work when facing misinformation (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). Misinformation has also affected political decisions (see e.g. Berinsky, 2017).

The negative consequences of misinformation have been given much attention, whereas the possible positive consequences have been discussed much less, if at all. We propose that, to some extent, misinformation may also have positive consequences. It can be an unavoidable part of our collective problem-solving process (Bordia & DiFonzo, 2005). Misinformation can also bring people together, at least in an already-existing social network (Bordia & DiFonzo, 2005; Kimmel, 2004). If misinformation can boost one's self-image (Bordia & DiFonzo, 2005) and even carry hope, which will be discussed in Sections 3.3.4 and 3.3.5., misinformation can have positive consequences on an individual or his or her immediate surroundings, even if it has a negative impact on the society at large. Hope, even if temporary and based on false premises, can be important for individuals or groups at a given moment. We argue that misinformation should not be treated as bad information primarily leading to negative consequences. The consequences of misinformation are more complex and should be studied more.

3. Asylum seekers

An asylum seeker is "an individual who is seeking international protection" (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2006). Asylum seekers are not automatically refugees who have to meet the criteria of the refugee definition (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2006). Finland follows Directive 2011/95/EU (2011), whereby refugees have "a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership of a particular social group". Asylum seekers receive refugee status if they are granted asylum. The European Court of Human Rights (2011, Paragraph 251) defines asylum seekers as members of "a particularly underprivileged and vulnerable population group in need of special protection". Asylum seekers have a disadvantaged legal position when compared to other groups, which affects their possibility to participate in the host society (European Council of Refugees & Exiles, 2017, 11).

The current asylum situation in Finland is still affected by massive migration in 2015. The year was exceptional in Europe, as 1255,600 people applied for asylum across the EU; this was 700,000 more applications than the previous year (Eurostat, 2016). The amount of asylum applications in Finland in 2015 (32,476) was less than 3 per cent of the total applications in the EU (Jauhiainen, 2017b), although this number of applications was exceptional for Finland. Although the amount of asylum seekers in Finland and throughout Europe has dropped since then, the situation in 2015 had – and still has – a long-standing impact on the asylum situation in Finland and, perhaps more importantly, it showed that various issues associated with asylum seekers have to be discussed widely within Finnish society (Jauhiainen, 2017a, 2017b).

Most of the asylum seekers coming to Finland are young men, ages 18–35 years. When looking at the situation between January 2015 and May 2018, over half of the applicants (53%) were from Iraq. The next largest groups were Afghans (14%), Somalis (6%) and Syrians (5%) (Finnish Immigration Service, 2018).

Many of those who came to Finland had prior contacts in the country or received accurate or inaccurate information about the country on the Internet and social media. Finland was not the paradise they expected, and the long waiting periods for applications, especially, caused frustration (Jauhiainen, 2017b; Juntunen, 2016). There have been several changes in the Aliens Act and guidelines in the past few years. Humanitarian protection is no longer granted, the requirements for family reunification have been made more rigorous and the appeal period for asylum applications has been shortened (Koistinen & Jauhiainen, 2017). Stricter regulations concerning information about country of origin have also been introduced (Pakolaisneuvonta, 2017), or the information about country of origin has been interpreted differently by the Finnish Immigration Service, the Administrative Court and the Supreme Administrative Court (Jauhiainen, 2017a). Overall, the situation has caused confusion and frustration both for the asylum seekers and for people working with and helping them.

Asylum seekers are not a homogeneous group; rather, they come from varying situations and have varying needs (Jauhiainen, 2017a; Quirke, 2011). Yet, some common factors can be identified. Asylum seekers have left their home country and have often endured a rough journey. In the destination country, they often are in a state of liminality, i.e. they exist in between two statuses with an uncertain outcome (see e.g. Stewart, 2005). This makes asylum seekers an even more vulnerable group than other immigrants or even refugees who have a more secure future in the new country. While asylum seekers wait for their asylum decision, they may experience uncertainty and powerlessness, and they mentally prepare themselves for two possible outcomes: integration or return (Brekke, 2004, 2010). As getting an asylum or (permanent) residence permit has become more difficult in the past years, and the amount of undocumented migrants has risen; uncertainty and liminality may almost become a permanent situation for many asylum seekers (Lyytinen, 2019, 20).

3.1. Asylum seekers and technology

Nowadays, technology, especially smartphones, are an essential part of the lives of asylum seekers, both prior to and after migration (Almohamed & Vyas, 2016; Dekker, Engbersen, Klaver & Vonk, 2018; Gillespie et al., 2016; Honkasalo, 2017; Juntunen, 2016; Merisalo, 2017; Merisalo & Jauhiainen, 2017). Juntunen (2016) has even used the term "Facebook migration" to highlight the

importance of social media for the (young) asylum seekers of today. Smartphones are used for e.g. maintaining relationships (Almohamed & Vyas, 2016), information seeking (Dekker et al., 2018) and language learning (Honkasalo, 2017). They can be seen as an indispensable tool for social and digital inclusion (Almohamed & Vyas, 2016). Via social media, asylum seekers can find information they do not obtain from more official sources, or they can verify the trustworthiness and accuracy of information given by the authorities (Dekker et al., 2018).

However, there are also challenges and risks associated with the use of technology and smartphones. Asylum seekers may have irregular access to technologies and the Internet (Leung, 2010). For example, in lack of a telephone subscription, they may be dependent on a free Wi-Fi connection. Many asylum seekers are afraid of digital surveillance, especially during their journey (Dekker et al., 2018; Gillespie et al., 2016; Leung, 2010). Although the technological skills of the asylum seekers may be good, inadequate language skills can act as a barrier to accessing and making use of information via their smartphones (Almohamed & Vyas, 2016). Dekker et al. (2018) found out that asylum seekers and refugees rarely used applications and sites designed specifically for them, either because they were not aware of them or they did not trust them. Thus, even if there are attempts to improve the situation of asylum seekers with technology, such improvements may not always reach the target group.

3.2. Information practices of asylum seekers

Information practices are "socially and culturally established ways to identify, seek, use, and share the information available in various sources" (Savolainen, 2008, 2). The social process of learning about and settling into a new information environment and understanding how to deal with information in a new setting are emphasised in the concept of information practices (Lloyd, Kennan, Thompson & Qayyum, 2013). When information practices are studied, the focus is often on the information needs, motives behind information seeking or sharing, different barriers preventing it and strategies.

Liminality, discussed in Section 3, can be an important factor that shapes the information practices of asylum seekers. According to Dekker et al. (2018), uncertainty may be one of the most crucial starting points for the information seeking of asylum seekers. However, there are relatively few studies focused solely on asylum seekers in the field of Library and Information Science. Therefore, there is also a lack of research concerning the kind of impact liminality has on the information practices of asylum seekers, even though e.g. Lloyd (2017) highlights the importance of studying information experiences through that lens.

In addition to the liminal state, the earlier experiences of the asylum seekers affect their information practices. These experiences may derive from both the conditions in the home country and from the often long and multiphase journey. These include trauma, stress and social isolation (Quirke, 2011). There are studies on the information practices of asylum seekers during the journey (see e.g. Dekker et al., 2018), but more research is needed on how these experiences affect the settlement period in the destination country.

In the destination country, asylum seekers often have varied information needs. They are associated with the asylum process in Finland, rights and duties (Honkasalo, 2017), as well as the services, programmes and aid during the process (Merisalo, 2017). Needs associated with social networks are one of the most important types of needs asylum seekers have. They need to know how to form and maintain personal networks and feel connected, as well as how their family and friends are coping or what the overall situation in the home country is Honkasalo (2017), Merisalo (2017), Wall, Otis Campbell and Janbek (2017). Information also helps to maintain emotional security (Fisher, Durrance & Hinton, 2004), build and maintain hope (Brekke, 2004) and learn language(s) (Merisalo, 2017).

There are barriers to information seeking in the lives of asylum seekers. The new information environment, with all its information sources, may be "culturally alien" (Eeli, 2014; Mehra & Papajohn, 2007) and there may be other cultural clashes in accessing and understanding information (Caidi, Allard & Quirke, 2010; Srinivasan & Pyati, 2007). Insufficient language skills are one of the greatest and most common barriers (Aarnitaival, 2012a; Eeli, 2014; Fisher et al., 2004; Gillespie et al., 2016). Language issues are also associated with bureaucracy; bureaucratic structures and language can prevent asylum seekers from accessing information (Caidi et al., 2010; Ikonen, 2013; Pakarinen, 2004). As social networks are crucial for the information seeking of asylum seekers (Borkert, Fisher & Yafi, 2018; e.g. Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Elsner, Narciso & Thijssen, 2018), lack of social networks and capital in the new setting are substantive barriers (Eeli, 2014). Information itself and its timing can also be a barrier; asylum seekers often get too much information too early at a time when they are unable to adopt it (Lloyd et al., 2013; Mikal & Woodfield, 2015).

3.3. Misinformation among asylum seekers

Misinformation as an aspect of the information practices has generally received very little attention in literature. There are even fewer studies pertaining to the context of asylum seekers, refugees or immigrants. There are some studies that directly mention the presence of misinformation[2] in the lives of these groups (Borkert et al., 2018; Eeli, 2014; Fisher, Yefimova & Yafi, 2016; Gillespie et al., 2016; Jeong, 2004; Lloyd et al., 2013; Merisalo, 2017; Palmgren, 2014; Wall et al., 2017). However, the presence of misinformation often remains a notion and the studies do not dig deeper into the question of misinformation or what it entails on a more concrete level. Nevertheless, the notion indicates that misinformation is a highly relevant aspect of the information practices of asylum seekers, and more empirical research is needed.

We have identified different types of misinformation based on earlier studies on asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants, and on

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[2] Studies which mention e.g. inaccurate, incorrect, false or distorted information are included as well.

misinformation research. Studies focusing on the journey or refugee camps were also included, insofar as they were comparable with the situation in Finland. The different types are official information that is inadequate or presented inadequately, outdated information, information via gatekeepers or other mediators, information giving false hope or unrealistic expectations, rumours and distorted information. The types are partly overlapping and not necessarily conclusive, as there is direct empirical data missing. We use the definition of misinformation by Karlova and Fisher (2013), Karlova and Lee (2011), i.e. understand it broadly as inaccurate, uncertain, vague or ambiguous information. It can be argued that some of the following types could also be understood as information or disinformation. However, as misinformation was not defined or further discussed in most of the studies, we refer to everything as misinformation. It must also be noted that it is not always clear from whose perspective the misinformation is defined or perceived in the studies.

3.3.1. Official information

Marginalised communities cannot necessarily trust information given by authorities (Dekker et al., 2018). Pikkarainen and Wilkman (2008) and Aarnitaival, 2012a, 2012b) noticed that refugees and immigrants feel that authorities do not always provide sufficient information; they may hold back information, present it inadequately or fail to correct misinterpretations caused by lacking information. Brekke (2004, 2010) identified misinformation or misleading information in official guides and booklets given to asylum seekers. In reality, the waiting time for the asylum decision was, in most cases, much longer than estimated or promised by authorities, which caused mistrust towards the authorities. Immigrants in Mallon and Hasanzadeh's (1998) study were frustrated with situations where different authorities gave conflicting information, causing the immigrants to jump from one office and counter to another. This made the immigrants reluctant to turn to authorities in general and, as a result, they preferred to consult friends and acquaintances for information. However, friends and acquaintances also provided them with misinformation, which was harmful for their integration.

The risk of inaccurate, incomplete or inadequate official information is, thus, not only a problem in itself, but can also lead asylum seekers to turn to other sources of misinformation. Alternative sources, again, may provide more speculative information where the source or motives behind the information may be unclear (Dekker et al., 2018). Yet, if official information is lacking, the only information – and in that regard the most reliable – may be from alternative sources. Juntunen (2016, 53) highlights the importance of obtaining trustworthy informal or unofficial information.

3.3.2. Outdated information

Outdated information is both a theoretical type of misinformation based on the fact that misinformation is situational (Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Karlova & Lee, 2011) and a concrete type recognised by e.g. Aarnitaival (2012a) and Gillespie et al. (2016). Karlova and Lee (2011) and Karlova and Fisher (2013), Brekke (2004), Jeong (2004) underline the situational aspect of information; misinformation and disinformation are dependent on the situation and, over time, they may become another form of information. Even official documents that have been accurate at the time of their publication can be seen as misinformation when the situation changes. Asylum seekers may have difficulties finding out about such changes.

Asylum policies in Finland have undergone various changes, as discussed in Section 3. Gillespie et al. (2016) recognise the problem of accurate information becoming easily outdated when the conditions change constantly. Also, Aarnitaival (2012a) sees problems in the changes in the immigration-related legislation in Finland and in it being fragmented. This leads to a situation where even the authorities are not always sure about the details of the acts, and the information given to the public has been outdated. In Jeong's (2004) study, outdated information was a problem in a closed immigrant community where few external information sources were used.

3.3.3. Gatekeepers and other information mediators

Individuals are important information sources for asylum seekers, and they are often preferred to institutions (Gillespie et al., 2016). Asylum seekers trust their friends and other refugees (Borkert et al., 2018) who have arrived in the destination country earlier and who are already integrated in the society, especially those from their own language community, as well as service providers, caseworkers and volunteers (Lloyd et al., 2013). Religious organisations can be important information sources as well (Simich, Beiser, Stewart & Mwakarimba, 2005). All important information sources may, however, also disseminate misinformation.

Jeong (2004) studied Korean students in the United States and identified their ethnic church as an important gatekeeper to information that also provided inaccurate information. Asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants are often dependent on their communities (Lloyd et al., 2013). If a key member in the community shares inaccurate information, the members may not be able to evaluate its trustworthiness, and they turn to other sources. Lloyd et al. (2013) state that misinformation inside the community can decrease trust towards the entire community and the information generated in it.

Asylum seekers also tend to delegate information seeking to family members, relatives and friends (Aarnitaival, 2012b), and especially to children (Bishop & Fisher, 2015; Brekke, 2004; Chu, 1999; Mikal & Woodfield, 2015). Those who are more literate and have better language skills help others in the community. Children are often asked to perform information-seeking tasks that may be too demanding for them and, at the same time, they are not necessarily capable of making sophisticated information choices (Chu, 1999). Chu also noticed that children did not share all information with their parents or within the community and, in this way, they, too, acted as information gatekeepers. Deciding which information to disseminate and which to withhold is challenging and this filtration of information can lead to choosing sources of misinformation.

3.3.4. False hope and unrealistic expectations

Information does not only inform but can also be an important contributor to feeling hopeful, which has been noticed in connection with different illnesses. Information about an illness helps build and maintain hope amongst patients and their family members (e.g. Harris & Larsen, 2008; Verhaeghe, van Zuuren, Defloor, Duijnstee & Grypdonck, 2007). However, inaccurate or incomplete information can cause false hope, which is not perceived as positive in the end and can cause distrust towards new information (Verhaeghe et al., 2007).

Asylum seekers often experience stress (Quirke, 2011), and they have a need for emotional security (Fisher et al., 2004); this also involves the feeling of hope. Most concretely, hope is associated with the asylum decision and the waiting period (Brekke, 2004; Rotter, 2010). In Rotter's (2010) study, both asylum seekers and people working with them recognised the threat of false hope, either caused by the case workers' poor choice of words or by circulated misinformation. Having accurate information available for the asylum seekers was seen to be a solution for the problem. Brekke (2004) noticed that false hope was also associated with information avoidance, i.e. asylum seekers received information indicating both a positive and negative decision by the authorities, but they tended to disregard the latter in order to maintain hope.

In the past few years, the Internet and social media have begun to strongly influence the migration and mobilisation of refugees (e.g. Dekker et al., 2018; Dekker, Engbersen & Faber, 2016; Juntunen, 2016). There are numerous reasons why asylum seekers and refugees choose to come to Europe or Finland, but one of the main reasons is an overly optimistic picture of the destination country that asylum seekers formed based on misinformation distributed in social networks and especially via social media (Juntunen, 2016; Merisalo, 2017; Shankar et al., 2016; Simich et al., 2005). However, there is also a risk of people in destination countries using misinformation and disinformation to make those countries appear less attractive (Koser & Pinkerton, 2002). Nevertheless, misinformation is involved in the expectations of different countries and the conditions therein.

Unrealistic expectations do not only concern migration decisions but also life in the destination country. Pikkarainen and Wilkman (2008) state that because of the fragmentary nature of information, refugees may get an unrealistic picture of, for example, the housing situation in Finland.

3.3.5. Rumours and distorted information

Rumours are a well-researched social phenomenon, although they have not been widely discussed in the context of misinformation. Rumours have been defined as statements or propositions for beliefs which lack confirmation, certainty or secure standards of evidence (see e.g. Fine, 2005, 2; Kimmel, 2004, 21). Berinsky (2017, 243–243) understands them as a particular form of misinformation that has two features; they "are statements that lack specific standards of evidence" and are widespread and social, not just loose beliefs. Rumours often spread when people feel uncertain or anxious, and rumours are used as steps in information seeking that has a purpose of reducing this uncertainty (e.g. Kimmel, 2004; Rosnow, Esposito & Gibney, 1988). They function as "a collective problem-solving process" (Bordia & DiFonzo, 2005, 88). Rumours also satisfy our personal and social needs and help in building and maintaining relationships (Bordia & DiFonzo, 2005; Kimmel, 2004). Rumours can make people maintain a positive self-image, link them to a social group and confirm their earlier beliefs (Bordia & DiFonzo, 2005). Rumours can be divided to *dread rumours* and *wish rumours* (e.g. Bordia & Difonzo, 2004; Rosnow et al., 1988; Sunstein, 2014, 57). Dread rumours predict a bad consequence, whereas wish rumours carry hope or refer to a positive consequence. Rumour discourse, in general, can be helpful in understanding misinformation. Campion-Vincent (2005) states that earlier research has often treated rumours as diseases, whereas nowadays they are understood as an inevitable part of social human behaviour.

Surprisingly, rumours are directly mentioned only by a few authors in the context of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants (Aarnitaival, 2012a; Palmgren, 2014; Pikkarainen & Wilkman, 2008; Wall et al., 2017). However, the importance of oral information, social networks, and the nature of information diffusion through them, are widely discussed topics (e.g. Borkert et al., 2018; Dekker & Engbersen, 2014; Dekker et al., 2016; Elsner et al., 2018; Fisher et al., 2004; Palmgren, 2014). Rumours are social by nature and often circulate by word-of-mouth (Kimmel, 2004; Sunstein, 2010). Thus, we argue that rumours are a part of the lives of asylum seekers and some of them are false, i.e. misinformation.

More concretely, (false) rumours concern job opportunities (Aarnitaival, 2012a), social benefits (Pikkarainen & Wilkman, 2008), threat of deportation (Rotter, 2010) and, as already discussed, countries of destination (Juntunen, 2016; Merisalo & Jauhiainen, 2017). Nowadays, Facebook and other social media are common fora for diffusion of rumours (Juntunen, 2016; Wall et al., 2017).

Lastly, asylum seekers encounter distorted information, which is also recognised in research on misinformation (Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Karlova & Lee, 2011; Zhou & Zhang, 2007). Zhou and Zhang understand distortion as deliberate, which many other researchers would classify as disinformation. However, in our view, distortion may happen unintentionally when a piece of (originally accurate) information is passed on through several people. Rumours have a tendency to become distorted (Rosnow & Fine, 1976). Pikkarainen and Wilkman (2008, p. 31) noticed this happening with regards to social benefits: rumours about social benefits became quickly distorted when passed on by word-of-mouth.

However, distorted information does not originally have to be a rumour. Distorted information can arise through misunderstandings, which may for instance be the case with official information (Aarnitaival, 2012a; Pikkarainen & Wilkman, 2008). Gillespie et al. (2016) and Koser and Pinkerton (2002) state that refugees have a fear of media and institutions distorting information, it being thus perceived as disinformation.

4. Social Information Perception model

Based on research pertaining to misinformation and the information practices of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants, we
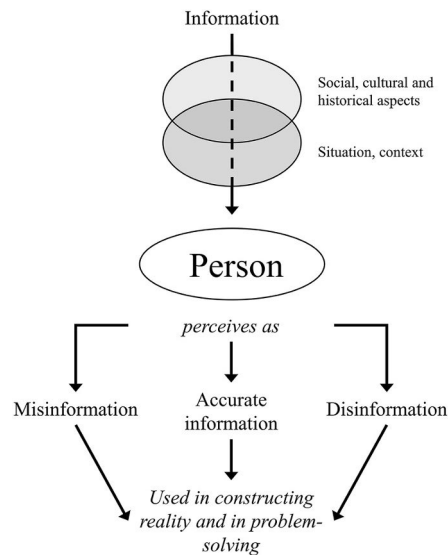
Fig. 1. Social Information Perception model.

propose a Social Information Perception model (SIP) (Fig. 1). The SIP model comprises four assumptions: (1) *all information is information*, (2) *all types of information can be accurate information, misinformation or disinformation*, (3) *the perception of information is social*, and (4) *all information can be used in constructing reality and in problem-solving*. The model and the assumptions can be applied generally when studying information practices, but due to our focus, we will discuss the model in the context of asylum seekers.

The first assumption, *all information is information*, refers to the fact that information can be true or false or something in-between, and yet, it should be seen as information, as discussed in Section 2. This assumption is based on the understanding of information as informative (Buckland, 1991; Fox, 1983), which means that misinformation and disinformation are forms of information in the same way that accurate information is information (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). When asylum seekers come across information, they may not have a clear picture of how truthful or trustworthy it is. In addition, different asylum seekers may have differing experiences of trustworthy information. There is no guarantee that asylum seekers will never encounter misinformation or disinformation. Still, information behaviour models often ignore misinformation and disinformation and treat all information as accurate (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). There are two essential problems in this. Firstly, it is implied that information has to be accurate in order to be information and, secondly, this view neglects a great deal of information in people's lives. This means that one aspect of information practices is left unstudied. There is a need to consider information as a whole, as comprising misinformation and disinformation, and this model aims to contribute to that need by emphasising that all information is essentially information.

The second assumption, *all types of information can be accurate information, misinformation or disinformation*, is founded on our literature review pertaining to the information practices of asylum seekers discussed in Section 3. It was shown that asylum seekers receive misinformation from different sources and via different channels, and anything from official information to rumours can be misinformation. The same most likely applies to accurate information and disinformation. This means that both normative and disnormative information (Haasio, 2015) can be accurate information, misinformation or disinformation. Therefore, misinformation does not necessarily have any features other than inaccuracy that would expose it, and misinformation, as well as accurate information and disinformation, comes in all shapes and sizes. In Fig. 1, the first two assumptions are illustrated with the term 'information', as our understanding of information comprises these assumptions.

The third assumption, *the perception of information is social*, is based on the idea of information practices (Savolainen, 2008), presented in Section 3.2., and research on misinformation and disinformation by Karlova (2018) Karlova and Fisher (2013), Karlova and Lee (2011), discussed in Section 2. According to Savolainen (2008, 2), the ways to identify information needs, to seek, share, evaluate and use information, are formed socially and culturally. Adding to this definition, we propose that the notion of understanding what information *is*, and whether it is seen as accurate information, misinformation or disinformation, are also information practices. Karlova and Fisher (2013) argue that, as information is never constructed in a vacuum, "[s]ocial, cultural, and historical aspects may influence how information, misinformation, disinformation … are perceived and used". Thus, when asylum seekers interpret the information they receive, there are different factors, which we call filters, involved. At least, social, cultural and historical aspects, as well as situation and context, influence the perception of information. These social filters are especially interesting when understanding the information perception of minorities and marginalised groups, such as asylum seekers. Their social, cultural and historical backgrounds are different, and their information practices are affected by the situation they face in the host country.

The fourth assumption of the SIP model, *all information can be used in constructing reality and in problem-solving*, derives from the research on acceptance of misinformation, discussed in Section 2.2. Studies indicate that people believe in, use and share misinformation and it affects their thoughts and actions (e.g. Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Kuklinski et al., 2000; Lewandowsky et al., 2013). Although some information may be perceived as inaccurate, misleading or deceptive, asylum seekers do not necessarily just dismiss it. At the very least, it helps them to construct reality or solve a problem in the sense that they find out what is *not* to be trusted. This can be an important step toward other information. In conclusion, we argue that accurate information, misinformation and disinformation all are essential aspects of our information practices.

The model shows the subcategories of information separately. It indicates that people perceive the information they receive as accurate information, misinformation or disinformation. However, the perception of information may not always be as clear as depicted in the model. People can perceive something as belonging in part to two or even three categories, or they may not be sure about the nature of the information they receive. This can be the case with misinformation that gives hope. To some extent, one may know that it is incorrect and yet, at the same time, it may be perceived as accurate. Accurate information, misinformation and disinformation can be seen to form a continuum where the borders between the categories of information are not always clear. Nor is information perception a simple linear process, and the illustration does not capture iterative processes which may be involved in information perception. Thus, the model depicts a simplified situation.

The SIP model helps to trigger awareness that (1) all information can be used somehow, (2) the accuracy of information can be perceived differently by different receivers, and (3) there are certain factors present in this process. More concretely, the model can help in including contextual and situational factors in different studies, which, of course, is often done otherwise, too. However, the model shows that these factors do not only affect what information we need and how it is sought and used, but also how information is perceived and defined. Apart from adding to the general discussion of information practices and misinformation, the model contributes to the research on marginalised communities. It helps in understanding why individuals or groups perceive information differently – if they do so. Nevertheless, the model can be applied to all information practice studies that are interested in information as a complex and nuanced phenomenon.

5. Discussion

This paper proposes two main arguments: (1) All information, including misinformation and disinformation, are present in information practices. As the current information practice research mainly deals with accurate information, (2) a more nuanced understanding of information is needed, including misinformation and disinformation. Studying information perception from different viewpoints contributes to this nuanced understanding. The preceding arguments are especially vital when the information practices of marginalised and vulnerable groups are studied. The new approaches presented in this paper, the concepts of *perceived* and *normative misinformation* as well as the Social Information Perception model, aim at contributing conceptually and concretely to the above-mentioned goals.

First of all, we argue that all information, not just accurate information but also misinformation and disinformation, should be seen more concretely as forms of information that are present in people's lives and therefore should be studied. This argument was discussed in connection with the SIP model in Section 4. Information behaviour or practice studies have not traditionally considered misinformation or disinformation (Karlova & Fisher, 2013). Even if studies on misinformation have dealt with issues that are definitely connected with information practices, such as spreading misinformation (e.g. Dekker & Engbersen, 2014), or accepting it (e.g. Ecker et al., 2010; Kuklinski et al., 2000), these types of studies do not necessarily show the information practices as a whole and how misinformation is related to them. Misinformation is not put into the larger context of (everyday) information practices, which is problematic, as the context for misinformation is not visible.

Studying and understanding all information in people's lives requires a more nuanced understanding of information. This paper aims to contribute to this understanding by showing that different viewpoints matter when information practices are studied. This is especially connected to the accuracy of information. Studying marginalised and vulnerable communities requires extra considerations when it comes to respecting their views and values. This can be done methodologically by, for instance, using participatory methods (see e.g. Benson & Cox, 2014), but it can and should be done conceptually, also. Therefore, when studying the kind of misinformation asylum seekers encounter in their lives, it has to be clearly stated from whose viewpoint something is considered as misinformation. It cannot be a question of merely "testing" whether or not asylum seekers recognise normative misinformation.

The concepts of *perceived* and *normative misinformation* help to address the various viewpoints in research. They enable putting misinformation into a larger social context without denigrating individual views and values. The SIP model illustrates the types of factors involved in the process of perceiving something as misinformation, accurate information or disinformation – or as something in between. The model also makes our first argument visible; all information has to be studied, as it can be used in decision-making and in problem-solving. It has to be borne in mind, as well, that not all misinformation and disinformation can be considered negative. As discussed in Section 2.4., positive consequences are also possible. Therefore, researchers should keep an open mind when considering and studying misinformation in people's lives.

The concepts and the SIP model are essentially connected to each other. The model shows the process of the formation of perceived misinformation, as well as perceived accurate information and perceived disinformation. The process depicted in the model is, however, also present when normative misinformation, normative accurate information and normative disinformation are negotiated and constructed. The filters are *social*, i.e. shared by multiple people in a particular social setting, and therefore many people having the same background and experiences share – at least to some extent – the view of what is categorised as misinformation, accurate information or disinformation. Sometimes differentiating between perceived and normative misinformation is not easy.

Perceived misinformation in one context or situation could be normative misinformation in another context. For example, asylum seekers may perceive a piece of information differently from the surrounding society, but the same information may be normative misinformation, accurate information or disinformation among their own social networks. It must also be noted that perceived and normative misinformation are not fixed or unchangeable. The process of negotiating information and its accuracy is fluid.

Both the concepts of *perceived* and *normative misinformation*, as well as the SIP model, are new, more nuanced, ways of looking at the information experiences of the marginalised and vulnerable groups of asylum seekers. Thus, they contribute to the development of social innovations, which are ideas, products, services and models that meet social needs (European Commission, 2015, 2018). Social services and policies are fundamental for the idea of social innovations, of which information services are an important part. For designing and maintaining information services, as well as future emerging technologies associated with the provision of information, it is thus of utmost importance to have a holistic view of asylum seekers' information situation. This can be done by trying to understand from different viewpoints the unavoidable misinformation that asylum seekers have in their lives and information perception as a social process. In the context of marginalised and vulnerable groups, having access to accurate and timely information in a socially and culturally meaningful way is highly important (Caidi & Allard, 2005; Lloyd et al., 2013). However, different actors, such as immigration officials, reception centres, legal services and volunteers, are not necessarily able to give accurate information in the right manner if they are not aware of how information is perceived and interpreted by the target group.

Different social and information service providers are not separate actors, either. Still, asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants often experience that different information providers can give conflicting information, i.e. they do not necessarily communicate well with each other. Thus, it is not enough for independent actors to have a clear view of the information situation of asylum seekers; they also need to co-operate together. Co-operation is also cost-effective. Different actors do not have to stumble into the same pitfalls when providing information to asylum seekers. Essentially, co-operation also provides the possibility to create and maintain more integrated and individualised information services, which is the essence of the idea of social innovation. Overall, it is important to understand that if trustworthy official information is not available, asylum seekers are likely to turn to more uncertain information sources. This can also increase inequality among asylum seekers, as some receive better information than others via their social networks. On the whole, the situation can cause suspicion and mistrust toward both authorities and other information sources, which adds to the already existing uncertainty and anxiety in the lives of asylum seekers.

One of the goals of social innovation is to promote life-long learning in a changing world (European Commission, 2018). As discussed in this paper, the asylum situation is challenging and constantly changing. The future of the asylum seekers is not certain as they prepare themselves for either future integration into the host society or to return to their country of origin – or they stay in an even more unclear situation as undocumented migrants, which is estimated to be the future for more and more former asylum seekers (Gadd, 2017; Jauhiainen, 2017a; Lyytinen, 2019). Learning and having support in learning are vital factors in building and maintaining people's ability to "go on", their ability to cope in new and changing situations (Lloyd, 2015). Learning does not take place in formal settings only; rather, informal and social learning opportunities are also important for asylum seekers (Morrice, 2007). We see that understanding perceived misinformation, especially how and why perceptions are formed, is also vital in supporting lifelong learning.

This paper has used the Finnish asylum situation as a reference point for two reasons. Firstly, EU countries do not have a common way of dealing with incoming groups, policies or legislation, and politics influencing the asylum situations can differ (e.g. Jauhiainen, 2017a, 24; Mouzourakis, 2016; Mouzourakis et al., 2015). For a more practical reason, our future research will be conducted in Finland. This paper has emphasised the importance of the context in connection with information perception and practices. The insecurity deriving from the changes in the asylum policies and legislation in Finland (Koistinen & Jauhiainen, 2017; Pakolaisneuvonta ry, 2017), as well as the asylum seekers' fear of remaining in an uncertain situation (Lyytinen, 2019, 20), can have an impact on information practices, too. This is a concrete example of the filters in the SIP model.

In this paper, we have underlined the complexity of misinformation. This can also be seen as a challenge or limitation, as it is not necessarily clear in all situations what misinformation is, how it is perceived and why, and what its relationship to accurate information and disinformation is. Although recognising and studying misinformation and disinformation as separate forms of information, in the same manner as accurate information, we do see studying information holistically as a more significant goal. Distinguishing between misinformation, accurate information and disinformation may be difficult. Despite this and especially because of it, all information practices have to be studied in people's lives, regardless of the accuracy of the information and its origin.

6. Conclusions

In this paper, we have discussed the concept of misinformation as an aspect of the information practices of asylum seekers. Asylum seekers encounter many different types of misinformation, both normative and disnormative. These include official misinformation, outdated information, information via gatekeepers and other mediators, information giving false hope or unrealistic expectations, rumours and distorted information. Based on the literature reviews on misinformation and on information practices of asylum seekers, refugees and immigrants, we formed our main arguments; all information, whether accurate or inaccurate, should be understood as an aspect of information practices and there is a need for a more nuanced understanding of information. Studying information from different viewpoints contributes to a nuanced understanding, which is especially important in the context of marginalised and vulnerable communities who have to be treated with respect in research.

Although misinformation can be seen as unavoidable in the information situation of asylum seekers, it can also be an even more substantial threat to vulnerable communities than to majority populations. The success of the asylum process depends on accurate and timely information and, at the same time, asylum seekers often lack access to it. Having a holistic view on the information

practices of asylum seekers, including misinformation and the reasons for accepting it, is essential to provide accurate information in a culturally meaningful way. Our concepts of *perceived* and *normative misinformation*, as well as our Social Information Perception model (SIP), help in forming a more nuanced picture of the information experiences of asylum seekers and other marginalised and vulnerable communities. Through them, how information is socially perceived as either accurate information, misinformation or disinformation and how this perception can differ from the normative attitudes in society can be better understood.

The study has its limitations. As already discussed, the SIP model is a simplification of a very complex phenomenon, and not all of the assumptions and dimensions of the model could be discussed in detail. For example, the filters mainly remain a notion, but they should definitely be discussed in more detail in future research. Although we argue for the importance of studying information and information practices as a whole, this paper mostly focuses on misinformation. Including accurate information and disinformation would give a more comprehensive view of the information situation of asylum seekers. There are also aspects of misinformation, for example its relationship to ambivalence, which could not be discussed in detail in this paper. As there is little direct empirical research on misinformation among asylum seekers, our approach is somewhat theoretical. However, earlier research clearly indicates that misinformation is present in the lives of asylum seekers. More research is needed, and our future research indeed focuses on how asylum seekers perceive different types of information, what misinformation they receive and what factors, such as cognitive authorities, are involved in this. In general, we argue that future research should see misinformation and disinformation in the same manners as accurate information, as an aspect of the information practices of different user groups.

Acknowledgments

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II

A methodological approach to misinformation: An analysis of the data creation process in two interview studies

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Abstract

Introduction. This study discusses misinformation from the qualitative methodological point of view. Methodological library and information science (LIS) discussions have not addressed the question of information sufficiently, which also is shown in misinformation research that needs more qualitative contributions in order to understand the phenomenon more broadly. Two data creation processes are used as an example of how to ask about misinformation as a nuanced phenomenon in semi-structured interviews.
Method and analysis. The data creation process of two interview studies was analysed. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two participant groups: volunteers working with asylum seekers and youth service workers working with youth. The analysis focused on the direct misinformation questions and indirect discussion on misinformation in the interviews.
Results. Both direct questions and indirect discussions resulted in discussing misinformation and its surrounding aspects. There were individual and group-specific differences in what worked best: volunteers tended to favour more indirect discussion whereas direct questions functioned slightly better with the youth service workers. Misinformation can be reached through the combination of free discussion and gentle probing.
Conclusions. Qualitative interviewing creates new knowledge on misinformation and helps to understand it broadly and in nuance. The connection between the theoretical premises and methodological choices of empirical research should be made more visible, and the question of how to study information should be discussed more in LIS.
Topic areas: Theories of LIS, Qualitative research methods, Methods and methodologies
Keywords: Misinformation, Qualitative research, Semi-structured interviews

Introduction

This paper analyses the interview questions and discussion from two studies to understand how misinformation can be found through semi-structured interviewing. A starting point for this kind of analysis is the lack of methodological discussions in the field of library and information science (LIS) on *how to study information*. Information and its surrounding aspects are studied with increasingly versatile methods, but seldom is it further described how information is detected in these studies. Qualitative research especially still lacks methodological meta-level discussions (Cibangu, 2013; Suarez, 2010). Misinformation as a topic is gaining more and more interest, which is in itself not surprising. People are increasingly concerned about its effect in the modern information environment. Nevertheless, we argue in this paper that the research on misinformation is somewhat one-sided and lacking more precise theoretical and methodological definitions. There are also few qualitative contributions.

Methodological publications describing individual studies often present a single method in a specific context, i.e. the way the data is collected or created. Our method is not a new or innovative one: rather, interviewing is one of the most common techniques in qualitative LIS research (Togia & Malliari, 2017). Central to this analysis is not the method per se but our approach is slightly different: our focus is not on the research method but rather we discuss *how* to study one phenomenon, misinformation, by combining the theoretical premises and the method, which we call a methodological approach. The purpose of this paper is to function as an example, though not an exhaustive one, of how to build a qualitative study on misinformation. The aim is to broaden the research field of misinformation so that it would be

studied versatilely, and also as a part of people's natural information environment and activities.

The paper firstly discusses studying *information* in qualitative LIS research, and, secondly, the qualitative methods used in research on *misinformation*. These preliminary states of research show that there are scant meta-level discussions on information and misinformation from the methodological point of view, and the methodological choices are not always sufficiently discussed or justified. Qualitative research on misinformation is still emerging. Thirdly, we briefly present our social-constructionist view on misinformation, which is needed to understand the methodological approach, i.e. the conversational approach, through semi-structured interviews. Two groups working with people in need of support with information were interviewed: volunteers working with asylum seekers and youth service workers working with youth. Analysis of the interviews shows that both direct questions about and indirect discussion on misinformation are needed to understand this broad phenomenon. Asking about misinformation requires *gentle probing*, as the topic itself is difficult and even sensitive. At the same time, understanding misinformation in its natural milieu requires openness and giving space to the views of the participants.

Information in qualitative LIS research

Quantitative methods have long dominated the LIS research, but qualitative methods have started gaining a firmer foothold in the field (Togia & Malliari, 2017, pp. 48–49). However, in some areas, such as information behaviour research, qualitative and quantitative methods are more evenly distributed, and qualitative methods even dominate (Greifeneder, 2014; Vakkari, 2008). Qualitative methods are mostly borrowed from other fields, mainly from other social sciences, which is in itself natural, as *'[t]he concept of information is so deeply part of the social and cultural experience of being human that the study of information cannot be easily detached from the very phenomena it seeks to investigate'* (Sutton, 2018, p. 3807). Julien et al. (2013, p. 257) point out that *'few scholars publish meta-level discussions of their methodological approaches, which could guide new research practices within the field'*. LIS has suffered from using methods without critically considering what is actually studied, that is the epistemology of information (Cibangu, 2013; Day, 2010; Suarez, 2010). An answer to this problem would be conceptual critique, which also extends to methods and research practices (Day, 2011).

In empirical studies, methods are normally described briefly and on an average level. Meta-level discussions of methods, again, are often mainly lists of methods borrowed from psychology and social sciences, without discussing their use in LIS. Sutton (2018) divides qualitative methods into the following: historical approach, ethnographic methods, case study, grounded theory, and ethnomethodology. Togia and Malliari (2017, p. 48) count *'case study, biographical method, historical method, grounded theory, ethnography, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism/semiotics, sociolinguistics/discourse analysis/ethnographic semantics/ethnography of communication, and hermeneutics/interpretive interactionism'* as qualitative methods. Jamali (2018) uses three approaches—grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology—in his analysis of the impact of qualitative methods. For Cibangu (2013, p. 203), the chief qualitative methods are *'ethnography, historical criticism, literary criticism, discourse analysis, case study, open-ended interview, casuistry, meditation practice, logic, counseling, therapy, focus group, grounded theory, biography, comparative method, participant observation, and introspection'*.

As Cibangu points out, using a specific method does not mean that a study is qualitative, as some methods can be used in both qualitative and quantitative research. He rather understands qualitative research as research that is, firstly, using one or several qualitative methods and, secondly, having one or several characteristics of qualitative research: ethnographic, contextual, experiential, or case-analytic characteristics (Cibangu, 2013, pp. 201–203).

Qualitative methods with misinformation

Misinformation is a topic gaining more interest in all fields, including in LIS. It is a broad topic with different angles and areas of study focus, for example, on its diffusion, recognition, or correction (e.g. Kumari et al., 2021; Qinyu et al., 2021; Zhao et al., 2021). As there is not yet any critical discussion on qualitative methods with misinformation, in the same manner as presented above, we approach the question through document searches on the Web of Science (WoS), which are neither exhaustive nor systematic. However, they can give some indication of the current state of research from the methodological point of view. All searches were conducted January 4, 2022.

A WoS topic search on 'misinformation' and 'qualitative', with limiting the results to Information Science and Library Science, gives twenty-one results in English, and in three of these, misinformation is mentioned in the publication title, indicating the central focus of the study. Methods include focus group interviews (Ardèvol-Abreu et al., 2020; Matthews et al., 2002; Naeem & Ozuem, 2021), semi-structured interviews (Huang et al., 2020), in-depth interviews (Logan et al., 2021), interviews (Igwebuike, 2021), grounded theory-based interviews (Greenberg et al., 2019), content analysis (Bangani, 2021; Patra & Pandey, 2021; Sahoo et al., 2021; Savolainen, 2021; Soleymani et al., 2021), qualitative documentary analysis (Kosciejew, 2020), case study (Liu et al., 2021), and clinical-qualitative method (Martinelli et al., 2021). Most of the publications are new, dating from 2019 to 2021, which indicates the growing interest in studying misinformation qualitatively.

A WoS topic search on 'misinformation' and 'interview*' in Information Science and Library Science yields twenty results in English, which for the most part are the same results as earlier. Three of the results mention misinformation in the title. For example, Young et al. (2020) used semi-structured interviews and a workshop to ask public library staff about their perceptions and experiences in misinformation, how library programming might address misinformation, and barriers in this programming. They also educated library staff about mis- and disinformation. No interview guide is included but interview questions concerning misinformation are described as follows, indicating quite direct misinformation questions:

> *A second set of questions then asked the participants about their prior experiences with misinformation, including whether they have had personal or professional experiences with misinformation, whether their library has ever done programs on misinformation, whether their patrons would be interested in such programming, and what they think would be an engaging and effective approach to teach their patrons about misinformation.* (Young et al., 2020, p. 541)

Naeem and Ozuem (2021) analysed online reviews and tweets and conducted focus group interviews to understand the social meanings deriving from misinformation in the context of panic buying during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their group interview guide includes some direct questions on misinformation (e.g. *'Q7: Can you share any rumor/misinformation on social media which negatively influenced the purchase of groceries?'*) and also many contextual questions (e.g. *'Q3: Do you think that social media influenced your spending practices and routines during this pandemic?'*).

It is not possible to have a close look at all other methods used to study misinformation, but for purposes of comparison, a WoS search on 'misinformation' in Information Science and Library Science yields 286 results, which should include both qualitative and quantitative research as well as conceptual contributions. No meta-level analyses on studying misinformation methodologically were found in these searches. It also seems that the theoretical premises of misinformation are scarcely discussed or even defined in all the

studies, which definitely affects the methodological choices and thus also the findings of the studies.

Social-constructionist view on misinformation

Methodological choices and data creation processes should be guided by a theory or by theoretical approaches (Sutton, 2018, p. 3810). In this study, misinformation is understood as inaccurate, incomplete, vague, and ambiguous information, and the perception of what is considered misinformation is affected by various social factors (Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020). In social constructionism, information is considered a social entity that is created and formed in social and discursive interactions (Talja et al., 2005, 2002; Tuominen et al., 2006), information being a part of social practices that are *'concrete and situated activities of interacting people, reproduced in routine social contexts across time and space'* (Savolainen, 2007, p. 122). This also means that information can be studied through social practices.

Important for the social constructionist definition and understanding of misinformation is that the researcher cannot normatively decide what misinformation is or test the recognition of it. Two concepts are helpful when discussing and studying misinformation: perceived misinformation refers to any piece of information that an individual receiver perceives as false, whereas normative misinformation refers to information that is in some social context generally and normatively considered false (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020). We highlight that any piece of information may potentially be fully or partly false in some situation or context, and misinformation does not necessarily equal bad information. Thus, when studying it methodologically, an open attitude to any kind of misinformation that the data might reveal is essential. Types of misinformation can be, for example, outdated or conflicting information or information that easily leads to misunderstandings or misconceptions.

Research questions

The following research questions guide the analysis of the method and the data creation process:
1. What kind of questions and discussion reveal misinformation in an interview situation when studying misinformation as a natural part of people's information environment?
      1.1. How do direct questions on misinformation function?
      1.2. How does indirect discussion on misinformation function?

Data creation

The paper presents two data creation processes, one with volunteers working with asylum seekers and the other with youth service workers. Both studies are a part of a qualitative research project focusing on misinformation as a part of people's information environment. The interview approach in the two studies can be described as semi-structured (e.g. Auress, 2012). As humans act in a conversational reality, interviewing is seen as a valid method by which to understand their social practices, and *'conversations are therefore a rich and indispensable source of knowledge about personal and social aspects of our lives'* (Leavy, 2014, p. 278). The semi-structured interview is a *'qualitative technique that requires the researcher to have a schedule of questions, but implements them flexibly allowing the participant to guide the direction of the interview'* (O'Reilly & Dogra, 2018, p. 37). Similar kinds of interview guides (Appendices 1 and 2) were prepared, covering approximately the same topics, but with some contextual differences. In the end, the interviews with the youth service workers were more structured, whereas there was much more individual variation between the volunteers, and their interviews tended to be less structured.

In the first study, six interviews with seven volunteers working with asylum seekers were conducted, addressing misinformation in the context of the asylum process and the asylum seekers' lives. Volunteers in two cities/towns in southern Finland were contacted directly and some were found through snowball sampling. As the circles of volunteers connected to the asylum process are tight and small, the small sample represents people working in almost all relevant organisations and actors in the chosen area. In addition to this, because of the in-depth nature of the interviews, the saturation point was reached quite quickly. Face-to-face interviews were conducted from September 2019 to February 2020. On average, the interviews were one hour and forty-nine minutes long. One pair interview with two volunteers working closely with each other was conducted. Three interviews were in Finnish, two in Swedish, and one in English. Participants worked in local NGOs, churches, or independently. However, they had contact with each other and had the same kind of support networks and schoolings, and they coordinated work among themselves. Although some of them were working professionally with asylum questions, they were not part of the official asylum system and, hence, we refer to them all as volunteers.

The second study focused on youth service workers, and the context of the interviews was misinformation in the lives of youth and the services provided for them. Thirteen interviews with sixteen participants were conducted from September to November 2021. Different organisations, both municipal and NGOs, which were either working with potentially marginalised youth or more generally with youth services, were contacted, and pair interviews were offered as an option for people working in the same organisation. Individual participants were also found through snowball sampling. Despite the slightly different work descriptions, all organisations were aimed at preventing both initial and further marginalisation of youth between fifteen and twenty-nine years of age. All participants provided information, guidance, or support services. As the interviews were conducted on Zoom, actors in different cities, towns and municipalities in Finland could be reached. All interviews were in Finnish and, on average, they were one hour and twenty-eight minutes long.

All interviews with both groups were conducted by the same researcher, transcribed by external transcription services, and analysed in NVivo. The participants were told about the objectives of the study—misinformation and challenges with information—but these aspects were not emphasised during the interviews.

It was justified to use the indirect approach through intermediaries, as the focus of the studies is misinformation, not the groups themselves. These two contexts both involve misinformation in potentially disadvantaged, marginalised and vulnerable situations, and we wanted to avoid burdening individuals in these groups. Misinformation is difficult to discuss for anyone, and even more so for people who are in the middle of an acutely difficult situation. If asylum seekers and youth had been studied directly, the samples would have had to have been much larger, due to at least two reasons: firstly, there could have been many individual differences between the individual participants, and secondly, it was estimated that misinformation would not be discussed as thoroughly in each interview as with people working with these groups. The data does not represent the thoughts of asylum seekers or youth.

The approach was to discuss broadly different matters that the participants found important to mention, i.e. focusing on their social practices in the work/volunteering context. However, as there is little qualitative research on misinformation, it was also considered important to study how a more direct approach to misinformation functions. Therefore, the researcher would also guide the discussion with direct misinformation questions and gentle probing. The assumption was that rich data on all kinds of social and information-related phenomena would be created, and misinformation would only form a smaller part of the data. Data on surrounding phenomena was considered important in two ways: firstly, warm-up discussion was needed,

and, secondly, it was assumed that misinformation could be found through indirect discussion on different topics, although it was not necessarily clear beforehand what these topics would be. Therefore, the questions were prepared so that various information aspects would be discussed and enriched by questions concerning misinformation.

Findings

Table 1 shows the number of references (i.e. mentions of misinformation) on which the analysis is based. The mentions refer to the coding of misinformation based on the nuanced understanding of it, not the term misinformation, and the participants were not necessarily always discussing misinformation directly and knowingly. Participants in pair interviews, one pair among the volunteers and three pairs among the youth service workers, were not analysed separately, as the discussion would often be overlapping. In all interviews with the volunteers (n=6), both direct questions and indirect discussion resulted in discussing misinformation broadly. Forty-three mentions (references) were found through direct questions, and sixty-five mentions through indirect discussion. Direct questions worked well in all interviews with the youth service workers (n=13), whereas misinformation was discussed through indirect discussion in eleven interviews. The number of mentions through direct questions was sixty-nine, and forty-one through indirect discussion. These numbers give some indication of how the questions and other discussion worked, but we will have a more qualitative look at this in the following sections. Volunteers, although a small sample, discussed misinformation richly and thoroughly, both when asked directly and spontaneously. However, indirect discussion seemed to work slightly better when looking at the quantity. With the youth service workers, direct discussion resulted in more mentions of misinformation. In two interviews, indirect discussion did not result in discussing misinformation at all.

	Interviews, volunteers	References, volunteers	Interviews, youth service workers	References, youth service workers
Direct questions	6	43	13	69
Indirect discussion	6	65	11	41

Table 1. Number of interviews and mentions of misinformation

Direct misinformation questions

The following questions were considered direct misinformation questions (based on the broad and nuanced understanding of misinformation), and therefore *direct* questions are considered to involve also misunderstandings and conceptions, not merely blunt questions on information.

> Have you received incorrect information?
> Have you given or shared misinformation?
> Have your clients misunderstood something?
> Have you misunderstood something?
> Are there misunderstandings between you and your clients?
> Is some information conflicting?
> Are there rumours? What kind?
> What kind of conceptions and preconceptions do your clients have?

The above-mentioned questions are simplifications of a natural discussion, which means that the questions would be asked in everyday language, and terms such as *information* and *misinformation* were often avoided. The questions were not posed as such in all interviews but were integrated into the discussion.

The question on rumours worked well with the volunteers, whereas it was quickly noticed that rumours could not be discussed in the same manner with the youth service workers. Their work does not involve close and tight circles in the same manner as does the work of volunteers. Then again, clients' conceptions and preconceptions were explicitly discussed with only youth service workers. The differences, which were also individual, had to do, firstly, with the different contexts and, secondly, with the participant-driven approach, where the participants' thoughts and a pleasant interview situation were considered more important than exact data.

Direct questions sometimes worked very well. Often participants would give examples of different kinds of misinformation when answering one question. For example, Karri talked about misunderstandings that his clients had, but also started discussing outdated information.

> *Researcher: Have you noticed other things that your clients have not understood or have misunderstood?*
> *Karri: [About youth, services, and misunderstandings] Then this person asks me how to do it [make an appointment], and I have to google what the number is this week. The services keep changing quite often, so even a professional has a hard time keeping up with the practices.*

Sometimes participants answered direct questions differently than was expected. One example of this kind of situation is when volunteer Marianne started explaining how she got angry when asked about giving misinformation. The phrasing of the question has to do with the original interview language.

> *Researcher: Have you accidentally said something wrong [given incorrect information]?*
> *Marianne: Do you mean have I given wrong information or become angry? That one time I got angry...*

Either the preceding discussion on a certain topic affected the understanding of the question or the participant had a theme that dominated the whole interview. The latter was quite common: for example, youth service workers could be concerned about the pressure their clients were feeling in society. Most of the volunteers had a very critical attitude towards official asylum politics and policies, which set a tone for the interviews.

Posing misinformation questions and having differing answers to them also showed that misinformation is not an easy topic about which to ask. Direct questions sometimes felt sensitive to ask, especially when they concerned clients and their conceptions. Most participants also diminished the importance of some misinformation, considering it too unimportant for the researcher to hear about, although participants were encouraged to talk about even small issues. Often participants would answer direct questions with a very short answer, not actually coming up with anything, but later providing answers to that topic through indirect discussion. This could indicate that, firstly, participants processed the topic unconsciously, or, secondly, that they simply did not understand the researcher's question but had something to say about it when discussing it on their own terms.

Indirect misinformation discussion

Indirect misinformation discussion is difficult to analyse through posed questions, as misinformation could also come in spontaneous discussion. Therefore, the analysis focuses on themes that were discussed when misinformation was mentioned. The first type of themes is connected to *clients*: clients' conceptions, the challenges and pressure they face and feel, their information needs and practices, their information literacy, and their situation in life.

Youth service worker Sami described the misconceptions he felt some of his clients had. Sami's quote is also a good example of how the researcher's questions can be understood and answered in different ways.

> Researcher: What kind of questions and needs do young people normally have?
> Sami: One challenge is of course that many young people feel that when they have come to us, they should have a job at the end of the week and preferably with a good salary. Then they notice that we can't do any magic tricks, and then there is the challenge of whether or not these people come to the next meetings anymore.

The second type are *work* themes. These include services and service networks, the asylum process (in the case of volunteers), as well as work and work descriptions. Youth service worker Helena's description of a work project is also a good example of how participants would come back to themes that were discussed earlier in the interview. It was quite common for participants to ask the researcher to explain the research project in more detail at the end of the interview, in response to which they would then come up with additional examples or topics. This kind of discussion was often fruitful.

> [Researcher explains the research project]
> Helena: Funny that you approached us with your project. We have this project, and one person in it asked if we have had some challenges with student counselling. And then we discussed, in a bit of an exaggerated manner, that previously you could work quite passively. Nowadays, you have to actively seek information. The counselling suffers if you are not awake. When you asked me earlier about incorrect information, I just now came to think about how we might have, let's say, a guidance counsellor who has information from year X. They might not be acquainted with new guidelines; they just act based on old information and don't consider individual needs.

Sometimes themes evolved into something else. Volunteer Emma discussed languages and interpretation services, as well as her work, but the discussion spontaneously turned to asylum seekers giving misinformation in asylum interviews and in regard to their feelings.

> Researcher: What languages do you use and speak?
> [Discussion on languages and interpretation services]
> Emma: We have had many situations where people in asylum interviews have completely frozen when there has been someone from the home village, some cousin of someone's wife or someone. When they've been asked if the interpretation goes well, they just say yes because they don't want to hurt the feelings of the interpreter. They feel they can't say anything in front of that person, but they can't express this concern in that situation.

The third type of themes have to do with the *participants* themselves. They discussed their work identity, emotions, and attitudes, which were often critical. Especially the volunteers expressed critical and activist expertise (Sotkasiira, 2018), but this was not strange to the youth service workers either. For example, youth service worker Katja expressed her critical attitude throughout the whole interview. This led to talking about misinformation in bad encounters. Later, she came back to the theme when discussing her own emotions:

> Katja: A psychiatrist states that you are not depressed because you have washed your hair, you've taken a shower. Or, just get a grip on yourself. [...]

> Researcher: What frustrates you in your work?

Katja: Gross, invalidating encounters don't just frustrate, well, they make me try harder. I don't see any reason to be collegial if someone, psychiatrist or anyone, starts humiliating in an unprofessional way a person who is vulnerable.

Discussion

This paper provides an example of how misinformation can be found through semi-structured interviews. We analysed questions and discussions in interviews and found out that misinformation was discussed both when asked directly and through other themes, which included 1) clients and their issues, 2) work, and 3) the participants themselves. With direct questions, there were individual differences in how they worked. Sometimes it was clear that participants understood the questions differently than the researcher intended. Explaining the research project often evoked good insights. A comparison of the two studies shows that, despite the same approach and similar questions, the context of the study affects what kind of questions and discussions create fruitful data. With volunteers, the indirect approach worked slightly better, whereas the direct questions in the otherwise more structured interviews with youth service workers were slightly more successful. Both types of discussion were needed to get a holistic understanding of misinformation and the issues around it. Much misinformation would have been missed without one of the discussion types.

This kind of comparison of questions and discussions and of different groups is not an exhaustive methodological analysis. Rather, we aim to show that *information*, in this case misinformation, can be analysed from the methodological point of view. There should be a clear connection between the theoretical premises, the choice of the method, and the implementation of it. In this case, misinformation is seen as a phenomenon intertwined with various social practices (Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020), and information itself is formed through discursive and social interactions (Talja et al., 2005, 2002; Tuominen et al., 2006). As conversations are an important part of our social reality (Leavy, 2014), interviewing was considered suitable for understanding misinformation connected with different kinds of social practices. The semi-structured method (Auress, 2012; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2018) gave enough structure for asking specifically about misinformation and enough space for the participants to address issues they felt are important to them.

Misinformation and different aspects of it could be found through different methods, and therefore we highlight the *approach* rather than an individual method. The semi-structured interview method is limited and cannot reveal all aspects of misinformation. For example, tacit, embodied, and visual information and knowledge could perhaps be found more easily through other methods, such as visual methods (Hicks & Lloyd, 2018), participatory arts-based methods (Given et al., 2013), or guided tours (Thomson, 2018). These kinds of methods could also help to study more hard-to-reach groups. However, the increased use of different methods and the introduction of new ones to LIS does not per se solve the question of critical reflection. Many already established methods, such as surveys, interviews, participatory methods and focus groups can still bring much to LIS research, but they could be critically and transparently analysed, i.e. in how they manage to reveal the phenomenon in the focus of the study. Future methodological contributions could make use of this kind of approach.

In this study, misinformation is understood as a broad and nuanced social phenomenon, and methodological choices should support this approach. In practice and in the case of this study, this means asking participants to describe their everyday social practices (e.g. Savolainen, 2007) broadly, combining it with *gentle probing* in misinformation. This combination may be needed as qualitative research on misinformation is still finding its form. It should be accepted that individual interviews might not reveal any piece of misinformation. Although here we did not further analyse the link between the questions and the different types of misinformation, it was clear that the interviews brought up many aspects that could not be

anticipated. Many aspects of misinformation were also left unsaid or said indirectly. Information is itself not a straightforward or easy topic to discuss. *How to ask about information*? could and perhaps should be a question concerning the LIS field more widely, bringing more conceptual depth, such as that for which Cibangu (2013), Day (2011) and Suarez (2010), for example, have called. Julien et al. (2013) have highlighted the need for meta-level discussion concerning methodological issues for guiding new research practices. Opening the questions and the data creation processes in this way can be one step towards that direction, making it easier for other researchers to create ways to study misinformation from different angles.

Qualitative LIS research has mostly borrowed methods from other fields without further meta-level discussions (Cibangu, 2013; Sutton, 2018; Togia & Malliari, 2017). Unique to LIS is the study of information and the aspects surrounding it, and qualitative approaches could contribute to the understanding of information as a complex phenomenon. This includes misinformation, where qualitative contributions are still emerging, as this study's document searches show. It is difficult to compare the findings of this study to the questions used in earlier studies on misinformation, as the contexts are different and the kind of analysis employed in this study has not previously been made. Nevertheless, Young et al. (2020) indicate using direct questions whereas Naeem and Ozuem (2021) seem to combine direct and contextual/indirect questions. As qualitative contributions to misinformation research that would dig more deeply into the phenomenon are still scarce, researchers would definitely benefit from sharing at least their interview questions and from briefly discussing whether they used indirect or direct ways to discuss misinformation in interviews.

We argue that our approach, the social-constructionist approach to misinformation and the way to study it as a natural part of people's information environment, brings valuable new knowledge to the topic. Describing the method and data creation processes in more detail than usual brings new insight into this emerging field that still seeks its research practices. With qualitative methods, in this case semi-structured interviews, the sensitivity connected with misinformation can be considered, understood, and included in the research. Misinformation is indeed a topic that involves various feelings and preconceptions, on both the participants' and the researchers' sides. These feelings and preconceptions can and should become part of the analysis, as they are at the heart of the topic. All research on misinformation, with different kinds of methods and approaches, is welcome, but the need to study the phenomenon more broadly should be highlighted. This includes deepening the understanding of misinformation as a natural and even unavoidable part of people's everyday lives and information activities, which should be shown in the methodological choices and discussions as well.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have described the methodological choices and data creation processes of two studies to show an example of how to ask about misinformation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteers working with asylum seekers and youth service workers to understand misinformation in contexts where people need support with information. Direct questions about and indirect discussions on misinformation were analysed. Indirect discussion involved issues related to the clients of the participants, work, and the participants themselves. Both types of discussion were needed to discuss misinformation broadly and in nuance, but there were individual and group-specific differences in what worked best.

Qualitative methods are increasingly used in LIS but meta-level discussions on such methods are still scant. LIS has also suffered from not addressing more specifically *how to study information*, despite information being the main focus of the field. Misinformation is a trending topic in research. Still, there are few qualitative contributions that would give

additional depth to misinformation research. It is also not always clear what the theoretical premises for misinformation are in individual studies, although this affects the choice and use of methods, too. Our analysis of misinformation from the methodological point of view is an attempt to contribute to these research gaps and start a fruitful discussion in the field.

This analysis is not an exhaustive one, and due to space limitations we could not provide a deeper analysis on different types and aspects of misinformation that were found through direct questions and indirect discussion. Our future research will analyse misinformation in contexts where support with information is needed. This methodological contribution is one viewpoint to the phenomenon. We encourage other researchers to discuss information-related phenomena from different angles, including methodologically. Methodological contributions could include topics such as information use and sharing as well as trust in information and how these aspects can be reached through different methods.

This study contributes to the understanding of misinformation, giving an example of how it can be studied qualitatively. We show that testing misinformation recognition and correction are not the only ways by which to understand this complex phenomenon. Rather, misinformation should be understood as a natural part of people's information environment, and this aspect should be seen in methodological choices as well. The approach of this study provides a deeper and open-minded understanding of misinformation. On a practical level, this analysis can help other researchers in figuring out ways to ask about misinformation—and, we would argue, also about information in general.

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About the author

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Appendices

Appendix 1. Interview guide with volunteers

Work/volunteering	Could you tell me about your work?
	What languages do you use?
Asylum process/situation	Do you have an overall picture of the situation? What about your clients?
Clients	What kind of information needs do your clients have?
	To whom do your clients turn when they have questions?
Networks	What kind of networks do you have?
	What contacts do you lack?

	What kind of networks do your clients have?
Rumours	Are there rumours circulating? What kind?
Misinformation	Do your clients sometimes misunderstand things? What are those things?
	Are there cases when you don't know what to do or how to give advice?
	Is some information difficult for you?
	Have you received information that was incorrect?
	Have you misunderstood something?
	Have you given misinformation to your clients?
	Is some information conflicting?
	Are there misunderstandings between you and your clients?
Emotions	What kind of feelings do your clients show you?
	Do you like your work?
	What do you enjoy? What frustrates you?

Appendix 2. Interview guide with youth service workers

Work	Could you tell me about your work?
	How did you end up working here?
	What is your educational background?
Clients	Who are your clients?
Clients' information needs	What do your clients ask you about?
	What kind of challenges do your clients have?
	How do you think that youth should get information about different things?
	What do you think is the best way to give information to young people?
Networks	With whom do you collaborate? How are your networks?
Misinformation	Do your clients sometimes misunderstand things? What are those things?
	Are there cases when you don't know what to do or how to give advice?
	Is some information difficult for you?
	Have you received information that was incorrect?
	Have you misunderstood something?
	Have you given misinformation to your clients?
	Is some information conflicting?
	Are there misunderstandings between you and your clients?
	What kind of conceptions, preconceptions, or even misconceptions do your clients have?
Emotions	What kind of feelings do your clients show you?
	Do you like your work?
	What do you enjoy? What frustrates you?

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III

Volunteers' strategies for supporting asylum seekers with information challenges

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper examines the strategies that volunteers use when supporting asylum seekers with their information challenges to be able to develop services for asylum seekers and promote their access to reliable information in the most suitable way.

Design/methodology/approach – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven volunteers who help asylum seekers with their asylum cases in two cities in Finland. The interview data was thematically coded and analysed.

Findings – Six types of information-related strategies were identified: information mediatory, language adjustment, spatial and non-verbal communicative, inclusive, and supervisory strategies, as well as strategies with shifting roles. These strategies holistically support asylum seekers' information practices, considering the challenges of their situation and emotional needs.

Originality/value – This study creates new knowledge about volunteers' role in the information practices of asylum seekers, highlighting their unique position both in and outside the asylum system. Information-related strategies are a novel way of examining the ways to holistically support other people's information practices, by understanding that information is intertwined in all kinds of everyday actions and interactions.

Keywords Information-related strategies, Information challenges, Information practices, Asylum seekers, Asylum process, Volunteers

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

This paper examines the strategies, which volunteers use when working with asylum seekers to help them with information challenges. Asylum seekers are individuals who pursue international protection (UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2006). As in many other European countries, Finland received an exceptionally high number of asylum seekers in 2015, over 32,000 applications, and although the number of applicants has since fallen to approximately the same level as before 2015 (2,545 applications in 2021) (Finnish Immigration Service, 2022), the situation in 2015 still has an impact on the asylum system in Finland today. Since 2015, there have been many changes in the legislation and practices in Finland. These changes have largely made asylum seekers' situation increasingly difficult, leading to increased numbers of people falling outside the system, leaving them without asylum services or a residence permit (Pirjatanniemi *et al.*, 2021). While waiting for their decision, asylum seekers do not have access to all the services that other immigrants have in Finland, and the Act on the Promotion of Immigrant Integration (FINLEX, 2011; Integration.fi, 2021) does not apply to asylum seekers, excluding them from integration

services. The asylum processes are long, which may create an almost permanent situation of liminality and uncertainty for many asylum seekers (Lyytinen, 2019, p. 20).

Asylum seekers have challenges related to information that significantly affect their asylum processes. The challenges essentially form their information practices, i.e. socially and culturally established ways to identify information needs, seek, use and share information (Savolainen, 2008, p. 2). There are multiple stages and levels of information needs, which are not fixed but flexible (Oduntan and Ruthven, 2019, p. 803). Information needs are complex, associated with the asylum process (Honkasalo, 2017) and different services and aid (Merisalo, 2017). People going through the asylum process are not a homogeneous group and therefore have individual information needs. For this reason, generic information is not always helpful (Martzoukou and Burnett, 2018), and neither is simply providing information enough to fulfil asylum seekers' information needs (Oduntan and Ruthven, 2020, p. 7). Navigating the new information environment is not easy, not least because of insufficient language skills (Aarnitaival, 2012; Gillespie *et al.*, 2016) and the system's bureaucratic language (Caidi *et al.*, 2010; Ikonen, 2013). Different social networks are an important part of asylum seekers' information practices (Borkert *et al.*, 2018; Dekker and Engbersen, 2014; Elsner *et al.*, 2018). Social networks are also a question of equality among asylum seekers, as not all networks are equally good (Lloyd *et al.*, 2013). Access to useful services, again, help with the asylum processes (Oduntan and Ruthven, 2020, p. 12).

Asylum seekers cannot always trust the credibility of information (Caidi *et al.*, 2010, p. 503) and they come across various kinds of misinformation, including official information, outdated information, misinformation via gatekeepers and information intermediaries, misinformation causing false hope and unrealistic expectations, as well as rumours and distorted information (Ruokolainen and Widén, 2020). Moreover, the timing with information is often off, i.e. asylum seekers receive too much information at the wrong time and information is no longer available when they could mentally process it (Lloyd *et al.*, 2013; Mikal and Woodfield, 2015). Significant factors affecting information practices are diverse issues related to mental health and well-being, including, trauma, stress and social isolation (Quirke, 2011), liminality (Dekker *et al.*, 2018; Lloyd, 2017) and uncertainty (Brekke, 2004; Kooy and Bowman, 2019).

Volunteers' active role in supporting asylum seekers is generally acknowledged (Jauhiainen, 2017, p. 9). In Finland, volunteering activities became especially popular in 2015, and volunteers were an immense asset to the more established actors, but they also needed coordination (Gävert, 2016, p. 49; Niemi and Siirto, 2017, p. 44). In the past few years, volunteers have increasingly assumed responsibility for services and activities that authorities have failed to fulfil (Karakayali and Kleist, 2016, p. 66), and volunteering and humanitarian action in this context have become widely political (Ahonen and Kallius, 2019, p. 93). Indeed, volunteers have a distinct role in supporting the asylum seekers (Jauhiainen, 2017, p. 9); they help with asylum applications and appeals, act as support persons in the asylum interviews, and help with, for example, housing and education [1]. Previous studies have concluded that volunteers are important sources of everyday information, especially (Kennan *et al.*, 2011, p. 197; Lloyd *et al.*, 2013). Le Louvier and Innocenti (2021) found that volunteers and charity workers can bolster asylum seekers' integration in society and support navigation in the new information environment, but only if asylum seekers recognise them as important information sources.

Sotkasiira (2018) found that volunteers exercise different kinds of expertise than other actors in the asylum system. Her five dimensions of expertise, based on Bauman (1987, 1992, 1996), Raitakari (2002), Smith (2011) and Garrett (2012), are legislative, interpretative, neutral, critical and activist. *Legislative expertise* refers to experts who often follow external rules and perceive to have the right information, which they disclose to clients. *Interpretative expertise* involves understanding asylum seekers' diversity of views and respecting them, and experts

and clients come to conclusions in collaboration. When applying *neutral expertise*, experts see themselves as neutral actors who do not judge nor solve matters for their clients. In this case, the clients are solely responsible for their own lives. In *critical expertise*, the experts take a stand on matters and deliberately aim to dismantle power structures. *Activist expertise* aims to make the world more equal together with different actors. In other words, activist expertise also emphasises collaboration. Critical and activist expertise question the neutral expertise, especially. Sotkasiira (2018, pp. 304–305) also found that authorities often balance between legislative, interpretative and neutral expertise, whereas volunteers exercise critical and activist expertise.

In this paper we focus on how volunteers support asylum seekers' information practices in diverse ways. This approach can be compared to the concept of *information intermediaries*. There is a growing body of research on information intermediaries within the context of marginalised and/or vulnerable populations. Recent literature has begun to consider more diverse groups as intermediaries; they are not information professionals only (Buchanan *et al.*, 2019). Intermediaries include support workers (Buchanan *et al.*, 2019), social workers (Sabelli, 2012), nurses (Buchanan and Nicol, 2019), care workers, volunteers and family members (Cruickshank *et al.*, 2020). According to Buchanan and Nicol (2019, p. 174), information intermediaries "facilitate information needs recognition and considered [sic] purposeful action within problematic situations, are a key source of information in themselves, and a key integrative connection to other external sources not otherwise accessed; and tailor and personalise information for relevance, and communicate via incremental and recursive cycles that take into account learning needs".

This definition of intermediaries is similar to our understanding of *information-related strategies*, which are diverse ways to create safe spaces and places, inclusion, as well as respect and trust. These, again, facilitate information flow and help asylum seekers tackle with information challenges, such as misinformation and misunderstandings. However, with the strategies, we shift focus from the individuals, i.e. volunteers as information intermediaries, to their actions. This enables us to holistically approach numerous factors related to information. For example, as the situation has a strong impact on information practices in the context of forced migration (Oduntan and Ruthven, 2020), the strategies help us understand how to make the situation easier by supporting information practices. We argue that obtaining timely and accurate information involves various factors, which are not necessarily directly linked to information. Therefore, it is not only a question of information transfer but also of a more holistic approach to support information practices. This approach contributes to the Library and Information Science (LIS) research on forced migration, where Oduntan and Ruthven (2019, p. 792) have identified two kinds of research gaps: firstly, there is a tendency to exclusively focus on information, without linking it to the surrounding phenomena (see also Cibangu, 2013) and secondly, information studies on forced migration do not have the level of analytical depth expected for LIS research (see also Lloyd, 2017).

The following research questions form the basis of the present study:

RQ1. What types of strategies do volunteers use when supporting asylum seekers with information challenges?

RQ2. How are the strategies connected to information and information practices?

This paper presents findings based on interviews with seven volunteers, including two non-governmental organisation (NGO) workers, two Church employees and three activist–volunteers/independent volunteers. All of them worked outside the official asylum system. Six different types of information-related strategies were identified in the data: *information mediatory*, *language adjustment*, *spatial and non-verbal communicative*, *inclusive* and *supervisory strategies* as well as *strategies with shifting roles*. We use the nuanced

understanding of information and misinformation as well as the Social Information Perception model (SIP) by Ruokolainen and Widén (2020) to link the strategies to asylum seekers' information challenges and practices. Volunteers use critical and activist expertise (Sotkasiira, 2018) to ensure that asylum seekers' rights, e.g. the right to information, are fulfilled. We show that respect and trust are vital components of the strategies but, at the same time, outcomes of them. As stated, they can possibly enhance asylum seekers' well-being and access to information.

2. Methods and participants

We used a semi-structured method to interview the volunteers working with asylum seekers. The method offers both freedom to the participants to discuss the subject at hand on their terms and enough structure for the interviewer to address the research questions. The interviews consisted of open-ended and targeted questions (Galletta and Cross, 2013, pp. 1–2, 45; O'Reilly and Dogra, 2018, p. 37). The guiding principle in this study was pleasant, comfortable discussion allowing the participants to freely discuss the matters they felt were important. This also meant that the interviewer did not necessarily ask all of the questions in the same way. The participants could reveal as much background information as they wished. The interviewer guided the discussion gently. A loose interview guide (Table A1) was used, and the questions were related to job description, the asylum process and system, networks, access and barriers to information, rumours, misinformation and feelings. Emphasis was given to relaxed discussion, and the interviewer modified the questions based on the issues arising in the discussion. The primary aim was to obtain data on misinformation, information challenges and the surrounding topics through relaxed discussion and more targeted questions.

We interviewed seven volunteers in six interviews, which were conducted from September 2019 to February 2020. The participants were working with asylum seekers in two cities in southern Finland. Two of them were NGO workers, two working for local churches and three activists and/or volunteering at an NGO or independently. The participants networked with or had knowledge of each other. They attended same trainings, and therefore followed the same guidelines and best practices. None of the participants had recent personal experiences of forced migration, but some of them had experiences with immigration. They all had native-level or very good skills in the local languages. It should be noted that not all of the participants' background information is provided here to protect their anonymity, because the circle of volunteers is small in the area and in Finland. Some participants were contacted directly, some were found through snowball sampling. The interviews took place at the participants' workplace, home or at the local university, and they were conducted in three different languages (Finnish, Swedish or English [2]), according to the participants' wishes. The interviews were 1 h 49 min long on average. The dataset is a part of a larger study focusing on misinformation and information challenges in the context of marginalised communities.

The research was limited to actors who helped asylum seekers with various issues, such as the asylum applications and appeals, housing, the threat of deportation, education, employment and personal issues, including mental health. The participants acted as support people during asylum interviews and at the police station where rejected applications are issued. Some of the participants were involved in coordinating other volunteers. Although some of the participants were working professionally with these issues (at NGOs or churches), we use the term *volunteer* for all of them to separate them from actors who have a more official status in the asylum system [3]. Volunteers are, in many instances, able to speak more freely about their work than professionals in the field, which was considered important as questions concerning the asylum process and system are sensitive in Finland's political

climate. Some of them also had other clients, such as people with a refugee status or undocumented migrants, but the interviews mainly focused on the asylum questions. People who volunteered for the recreational activities only were excluded from the study so that as many issues as possible could be discussed.

The sample in the present study was small. Small samples may be justified when homogeneous groups are concerned and the study is in-depth in nature (Boddy, 2016). Guest *et al.* (2006) found that almost all (94%) commonly expressed themes occurred within six interviews. The study context and the scientific paradigm affect what can be considered a sufficient sample size (Boddy, 2016). Interview structure, content, participants sharing common experiences and narrow objectives of the study (Guest *et al.*, 2006), as well as participants' expertise in the subject (Romney *et al.*, 1986) can help reach the saturation point more quickly. In our study, the objective was to understand misinformation and information challenges in the context of the asylum situation, forming a rather focused area of study. The people helping asylum seekers with all aspects of the process form a relatively tight network, and in practice the participants represent all key actors in the chosen area. They were chosen due to their level of activity and expertise, although some of them had volunteered a shorter time (less than a year). All the participants helped or had helped several asylum seekers, not just with individual cases. Their volunteering activities focused on the entire asylum process and not, for example, on recreational activities. The interviews were long, and the in-depth discussions on the volunteering activities and information-related factors were exhaustive. Despite the loose structure of the interviews, the same themes and topics were covered in all of them. Although the participants worked/volunteered at different places, their experiences were fairly similar. Bearing all this in mind, the seven participants' expertise and experiences were considered to form a valuable and sufficient basis for the data analysis, although the findings cannot be generalised to all volunteers in Finland, let alone in other countries.

The interviews were voice recorded and the recordings transcribed by professional transcribing services. The transcripts were thematically coded (Mills *et al.*, 2013) with NVivo. Although the interviews touched upon information-related issues on a large scale, the initial focus of the analysis was on misinformation and information-related challenges. The thematic framework for coding was the nuanced understanding of information and misinformation in the context of marginalised populations by Ruokolainen and Widén (2020), while applying an inductive approach (Mills *et al.*, 2013), as well. The theme of the volunteers' strategies emerged during the analysis process when we noticed that the participants described information-related issues through their own actions for preventing and managing information challenges. Therefore, in the context of this paper, the coding can be described as data-driven/inductive, although our coding otherwise was a combination of theory/concept-driven/deductive and data-driven/inductive coding (e.g. Decuir-Gunby *et al.*, 2011, pp. 137–138; Gibbs, 2007; Mills *et al.*, 2013). The data-driven approach allows the creative and innovative discovery of new concepts organically (Steppins, 2008). As is typical with the data-driven approach (Decuir-Gunby *et al.*, 2011), the data was revisited multiple times and the coding was refined. In the end, the analysis resulted in six codes, the information-related strategies, which are presented in the following section.

3. Findings
The findings in the present study constitute six information-related strategies to manage challenges with information. They are: (1) information mediatory strategies, (2) language adjustment strategies, (3) spatial and non-verbal communicative strategies, (4) inclusive strategies, (5) supervisory strategies and (6) strategies with shifting roles. The strategies partly overlap. The participants discussed all the strategies, except for one, in the interviews; the spatial and non-verbal communicative strategies were discussed by five participants out

of seven. Therefore, despite the limited findings due to the small sample, the strategies well represent the experiences of the group at hand.

3.1 Information mediatory strategies

Information mediatory strategies are complex and describing them exhaustively is difficult. The participants are aware of dealing with information and the importance of it. Mia's [4] quote summarises the power of information: "And sometimes even when there is nothing to do and I'm like, the best I can do is get information if they deport you." The participants feel that it is extremely important for their clients to have as much information about their situation as possible and that all situations are explained exhaustively and honestly, even if the situation seems complicated or even hopeless. They try to give alternatives, be honest about the complexity and uncertainty of information and explain everything so that the clients themselves can make informed choices. However, at the same time, they also balance the amount and quality of information they give to their clients, if they consider it to be irrelevant for the client at a particular moment or if the client is unable to process it:

> I'm also thinking all the time—OK, do I need to pass this info on to the client? Is it necessary for me to tell him or her a bit? (Mia)

This paradox in information mediation can be explained by the holistic and client-driven approach, which is well demonstrated in all the following strategies.

There are multiple challenges with information. Issues related to understanding, on both sides, were mentioned in all interviews. Sara describes the relationship of information and understanding: "So, giving information and understanding information. What we have told you, and if you have understood it, are two completely different things." The participants try to make sure that the clients understand the information they receive, wherever it comes from. This is especially important in the context of receiving asylum decisions, which also causes many misunderstandings.

> We and our volunteers are there on a routine basis when the decisions are given. To make sure the person understands what it means. You see, many people get the impression that they will be deported in 30 days. And what was actually said is that you have 30 days for a so-called voluntary return, and you will not be deported anywhere. But people go, in a way, all crazy in that moment. (Emma)

At the same time, the participants also report hearing the police give misinformation or misleading information in these situations. For example, information may be given in an intimidating way. The participants correct misunderstandings that their clients have and the misinformation they receive but try to do it in a sensitive way. Sofia describes how she deals with situations where the clients are misinformed about how converting to Christianity could help their case:

> A while ago, there were quite many who thought that you have to convert to Christianity to get asylum. It was really a shame because then you have to explain it. If you say you are a Christian, they have to process your case, but it's not something you have to say. You should absolutely not go against your own faith. [. . .] And it becomes difficult to say that information. Especially when you do not have much common language to explain it with. (Sofia)

The participants are quite careful not to give any misinformation themselves, but some acknowledge that they have sometimes given the wrong advice and corrected it afterwards. However, they underline that they often refrain from giving advice before checking its accuracy because information connected with the asylum process is very complex.

Rumours circulate among asylum seekers and volunteers.

These kinds of rumours can be quite challenging, like how do you get asylum and if we will have a readmission agreement with Iraq and these kinds of things. It causes a huge amount of distress when something spreads and, if somebody gets returned, everybody knows it. (Emma)

Rumours among volunteers are important as they can give hints about changes in the legislation or practices. However, they are met with caution. The participants use wide networks to obtain and verify information. The credibility of rumours is judged by the source or the network where it spreads. The volunteers also explicitly state whether the rumour is credible or uncertain when sharing it with others.

Some concrete ways of dealing with information challenges are double-checking and getting second opinions, as Mia states: "I always try to double-triple-check as much as I can." Education and training help volunteers understand and tackle the complexity of the asylum system. When communicating with the clients, repetition is one of the key methods:

When a person is in a stressful and difficult situation in life, you have to repeat things and go through them again. (Emma)

I probably just go on and on with it for a long time. If I do not really understand, I just ask again and again what you mean. (Maija)

Information mediatory strategies are time-consuming and require sensitivity. The findings clearly show that the participants understand the complexity and sensitivity of information, and the importance to deal with it carefully. Emma summarises the information mediatory strategies well:

Nothing is so exact. [. . .] I think that I give information quite carefully because you never know the outcome. So many things affect it, but most likely you can give different alternatives. So, this involves constant learning, something that applies now is not valid anymore after a while. (Emma)

To summarise, the information mediatory strategies refer to direct interactions with information. The participants give and share information, balance the amount and extent of it, (culturally) interpret and explain information to their clients, repeat important information, verify information and rumours, and correct misinformation and misunderstandings.

3.2 Language adjustment strategies

The participants have many ways of adjusting language. They state that they change the way they speak, depending on the situation, and they appropriate language culturally and situationally. This could mean concrete examples, metaphors, drawing and simplifying language. Sara describes a situation where she felt that her client was not able to tell everything to the lawyer, which had to do with complicated language.

Then I explained it to her with easier language, the same thing the lawyer asked but a bit differently. Then she had a lot to tell, I wrote to the lawyer that there was this, this, and this. (Sara)

Sara found it helpful if the volunteers did not have Finnish as their first language: "I noticed that people understand more or better if you do not have Finnish as your first language. I use basic words when I notice that someone does not understand." Maija points out that people working closely with asylum seekers learn to understand many ways of speaking Finnish: "Maybe with understanding it is like, when we are with them a lot, we understand and think that they speak really good Finnish."

Adjusting language also refers to using several languages simultaneously. Marianne describes a strategy that is common among the other participants, as well: "We use these Finnish terms and then we speak English in between. We use harjoittelu [internship] and so on." Terms that are associated with the asylum process, education or work, bureaucracy, and Finnish society, especially, are used in Finnish.

The participants have a fairly good understanding of the level of language their clients master in different situations and intervene if they notice that the clients' interests are at risk because of difficult language. Often, the participants act as go-betweens between the clients and other actors, such as Migri [5] officials. They coach their clients in "Migri language", which means, for example, being as descriptive, precise and coherent as possible. This kind of language use is important in asylum interviews.

> And then I say, imagine that the person who listens to you at Migri or reads your text is like a blind person, who has become blind, or has always been blind, and you have to explain to this person what it's like when a human walks. So first, a human has two long things called legs and long arms and a head and a body. And then, the walk starts like this. And try in a figurative way, in a visual way to explain everything. First the leg: one leg starts, and it moves ahead, and then it touches the ground. Then the weight shifts. And because the weight shifts, you go to the other leg, and explain the connections. (Mia)

With authorities, the participants themselves try to sound as authoritative as possible by using bureaucratic language.

As language is a central issue, the participants make sure that they have an (un)official interpreter present when important matters are discussed to ensure their clients fully understand their own case. Sofia points out that interpretation is not merely about words and their meanings but requires cultural interpretation: "You do not just need word-for-word translation but also something like cultural translation with this information. Like, what does it mean." Sofia mentions professional confidentiality as one question that could be misunderstood because of lack of trust towards authorities.

Language adjustment strategies depend much on the client: the clients' needs and wishes are the basis of communication. Balancing with language issues takes time and a lot of effort. The participants stated that language is one of the common problems, which goes beyond practical issues. Emma states: "I think that language is a problem for the clients. They are in a subordinate position, both because of language and the system. It also makes our everyday job more difficult." Therefore, the participants clearly understand language as a mechanism of power.

3.3 Spatial and non-verbal communicative strategies
The participants discussed power issues and their concrete manifestations, which include considering questions related to space and place and how to make different situations safe for the clients. They describe how they sit together with the clients, not necessarily facing each other with a computer in between them but next to each other, on an equal level. They also mentioned being *together* and making sense *together*. They show friendship and caring through their body language.

> It's also how you organise the space, how you speak to the person. We do not sit like me here, you there and I'm here behind a computer. You try to sit together and ask how do you feel today, how is it going. (Mia)

They are also aware of other kinds of situations where their clients might not feel safe. Kaisa describes how she also spatially prepares her clients for the asylum interviews:

> One thing I say plainly is that we go to the second floor, then we go to that room. The room is white, and there is a computer desk, and the interviewer is there in front of you with a computer. We often emphasise that they should not be offended if the interviewer does not look them in the eyes the whole time when they are writing at the computer. I say these things step by step, what happens there, and people often feel some relief. (Kaisa)

The participants not only use spatial and non-verbal communicative strategies with their clients but also with the authorities. Two kinds of non-verbal communicative strategies were

mentioned: on one hand, they show power and authority, and on the other hand, they act benignly.

> I've seen even with the client how some people at the police or Migri could be speaking to me, talking to me, dealing with me, looking at me in the eyes or speaking normally, and then not even look at the client or like, go there, do this. I'm trying to translate both language-wise and information-wise between the authority and the client, and the authority is looking only at me and speaking about the client in the third person, even if the client is there and listening the whole time. I try to be the mouth of the client by looking at the client. When I look at the authority, I'm next to the client. (Mia)

> I try to be as benignant as possible. [. . .] I try to show that I'm not there as a threat, because I think that would affect the interview negatively. Somehow I also show that I'm 100 per cent on the asylum seeker's side. (Sofia)

To summarise, physically being at the clients' side becomes a symbolic action in supporting the asylum seekers at the grass-roots level, and often this support means being against the authorities.

3.4 Inclusive strategies
The clients' well-being is a guiding principle for the participants, who show they care in many ways and aim to make their clients feel safe. The clients' needs are the basis of any help or service, as Marianne states: "Our activities very much start from the individual's needs". Encountering the clients first and foremost as human beings is important for all the participants, being a client or an asylum seeker is always secondary.

> You meet people and sometimes people speak a lot about the process, sometimes they do not. So, I approach these people as people. I take asylum into consideration but it is not the main issue in our interactions. (Mia)

The participants manifest their care by showing interest in the clients' well-being, being friendly and giving emotional support. Some tangible ways of increasing the inclusion of the clients include being available, flexible and investing time, as Marianne describes: "I have shown that I'm available. I answer messages in Messenger in the evening. I could be strict as well, but I have not been". The participants contact their clients just to catch up and hear how they are doing.

The inclusive strategies are strongly associated with building trust, which often takes a long time and involves persistent work. Mia describes her ways of building trust even when difficult matters are discussed: "But even if it's hard, I always ask, are you OK, is this OK, do you want a break, am I doing it the wrong way." Some participants feel that trust is also built-in everyday situations, such as when they cook or do the dishes together. Trust is created through patience and openness, such as Sara describes:

> We are a service where you can come and cry if you have a bad day. And then, little by little, when you have asked many times if everything is OK, is everything OK, is everything OK, suddenly there is a no. Then there is a story. (Sara)

The inclusive strategies are often described through non-inclusive strategies, even exclusion. All the participants refer to interaction with Migri and the police, especially. Emma describes the problematic setting of asylum interviews:

> If you think from the basic social work point of view, I would never work with clients like that. Like, you see a person three times for one hour and then you expect that, hey tell me everything. And then like, there is a camera by the way, there is an interpreter and then I will record this and then we'll write this down and then we'll see if it went right and then we ask all the time but wait a minute, didn't you just tell me that it was like this. [. . .] I think that what maybe makes the situation so unnatural is

that when you tell someone something horrible, normally, the person you tell it to somehow shows that hey I'm sorry that you've been through this and it must be really hard to talk but we still have to ask these questions because we investigate this. [. . .] Unfortunately, it has gone to the point where the person feels that they just ask and ask, and it makes them feel like they're an underdog. (Emma)

Unempathetic behaviour is so common that both the participants and their clients are positively surprised when they encounter appropriate treatment, as Mia describes: "I've even had clients ask if I could please send an e-mail to the person who is working there because he or she behaved normally. And I'm like, OK, we are at the level that I have to thank someone for behaving normally." Unkind behaviour may also affect the situations where the police issue negative decisions to the asylum seekers. The situations are difficult enough as such for the asylum seekers, but unnecessary intimidation by the police may even lead to misunderstandings concerning appeals, deportation or voluntary return.

3.5 Supervisory strategies
The supervisory strategies are partly related to the inclusive strategies but they go deeper into the human agency of the clients. The participants balance between supporting the clients' human agency and initiative, on the one hand and, on the other hand, speaking on the clients' behalf and making sure they do not speak against their own interests. Supervision involves having an overall picture of the client's situation and acting based on it. In many cases, this means focusing on basic needs first. Emma describes this balancing in two parts of her interview:

> Our aim is to support the inclusion of people who are in a very vulnerable position. We think that the way to support this inclusion is to provide them with an overall picture of their situation. [. . .] I have heard social workers in reception centres say that they support the person to make their own decisions, and why are you guys helping. If you really start to think, that person is traumatised. This is not the time to make them to stand on their own two feet. This is the time when they need help so that they can at some point stand on their own two feet. It does not happen overnight. (Emma)

The supervisory strategies are sometimes contradictory. The participants give advice based on their educated knowledge but, in the end, the clients are responsible for their own choices. The fact that there are seldom easy answers makes these kinds of contradicting decisions problematic. Nevertheless, the participants feel that it is their responsibility is to give the clients their educated opinion:

> You can't burden a person with all the decisions. If you yourself very clearly know what is better, you have to say so. And not be, like, well you can decide. (Sofia)

Many concrete supervisory strategies have to do with asylum interviews and rejected asylum applications, but also with, for example, housing or health. Using power of attorney was mentioned in some interviews, and Mia explains as follows: "We use power of attorney a lot, and we can do quite a lot of stuff with it. And I have to say that people mostly trust me, so it's never been a problem." Preparing the asylum seekers for asylum interviews is very common, as described earlier. The participants are in contact with lawyers and Migri, and they act as support persons in asylum interviews. For example, one participant stopped an interview with a minor because a lawyer was not present. Thus, the participants take initiative when their clients are not aware of important matters. Different volunteer actors also coordinate help among themselves to ensure resources are used effectively. If no other options are available, the participants help with preventing deportation.

Although the participants sometimes feel a need to decide something on the clients' behalf, they try to negotiate and come to various conclusions together with the clients. If they have to

override the client, they try to explain the situation and make sure the client receives sufficient information. Trust is important in this process.

> I was with this client at Migri, and three employees came one after the other to talk to me. And the client was silent and I'm like, I'm really sorry, now I'm going to talk for 20 minutes in Finnish. I will tell you what was said. Please trust me. I'm doing this in your interest. And the person was fine, because there was this very strong trust. (Mia)

The supervisory strategies are necessary, as many things can be complicated. The participants feel that their clients cannot be expected to understand everything in their own asylum processes, and therefore taking control of the situation is often better for the client than letting them juggle on their own. Mia states that there are problems with the attitude behind supervisory strategies: "And sometimes I feel bad because I think that I speak in a way that portrays people in the asylum process like they don't know, they don't understand. And it's wrong because it's not respectful, it's generalising. But it's also true that the process is not made to be understood and appropriated."

3.6 Strategies with shifting roles

The participants balance between different roles that organically intertwine in their work. They have a clear professional role in the volunteering work, as Mia describes: "When I say work, it's volunteering, but it is work in the sense that it's effort. It's the things you do. It's time. You need to have knowledge, and I think, I feel we work in different positions." Volunteers provide services that should be covered by the official asylum system. They feel responsible for their clients and their cases, and they work intense hours. They are aware of their personal limits and the limits of their own expertise. For example, some of them focus on specific topics, such as deportation or family reunification. They attend regular training and counselling.

The participants hope their work is recognised as a part of the process, as Emma states: "Our aim is to build a third-sector, external actor that supports asylum seekers throughout the whole process." Thus, the participants see a need for an actor that is separate from the authorities and the official system, people who are there for the asylum seekers. Emma continues: "I often think that here in Finland we are still in our infancy when we talk about multi-professional cooperation and not obtaining expert knowledge from anyone else than the authorities." The volunteers' role as non-authorities can help asylum seekers trust them. Furthermore, clients can often trust and use the information they receive from volunteers rather than, for example, listening to rumours circulating among asylum seekers.

Apart from the professional volunteering role, the participants have different (professional) backgrounds that affect and support their work. They use tools and techniques to cope with stress and vicarious trauma.

> But then again, all volunteers have their backgrounds. Some have their social worker background or their psychologist background or their nurse background, and all of these bring about somewhat different things. And then also many researchers. (Sofia)

Some volunteers also have a background as asylum seekers or refugees, or are themselves in the process but, at the same time, help others. These people are often able to provide peer support.

> It can be that there is not a clear-cut boundary between the clients and volunteers, because people have skills, they have knowledge, they have some resources, so over time they may be in several roles. (Mia)

Interesting are also the participants' roles as friends, friend-like persons or mothers. One participant [6] identifies herself as a mother to the young men she is helping. She has, for

example, attended parents' evenings at schools and has herself received help at home from her clients. Her work, indeed, resembles parental caregiving:

> I believe that having someone who cares has an impact. They can say like, Mom, I would not be here without you. That is a huge thanks for just texting and visiting and talking and listening. I have not done anything special.

Some participants see many of their clients as friends, others have a stricter attitude with clients. Nevertheless, they use the same kinds of friendship strategies. They spend time with the clients very informally and help them at the same time.

> It is clear that some of them have also become my personal friends. And sometimes we meet and do something together or invite each other over. And suddenly half an hour goes by when we fill in a form. (Marianne)

Friendship with the clients is also something that gives strength to the volunteers. Strategy-wise, the role as friend or mother supports information sharing, as Maija points out: "In many other cultures, you do not go to professionals in the same way. If we have problems, we go to a professional, like to a social worker, but in many other countries you go and ask a relative for advice and help." Thus, their role as a friend or mother is extremely important in the asylum system, as authorities do not have the same possibility to apply similar strategies. The roles coexist, shift, are fluid and support each other.

4. Discussion

This paper introduces volunteers' strategies to help asylum seekers with information challenges. Volunteers use information mediatory strategies to support asylum seekers in understanding information, accessing accurate and timely information, and navigating in the complex information environment. Behind language adjustment strategies there is an understanding that language on multiple levels can be a barrier to receiving and understanding information, and volunteers adjust their language accordingly. When applying spatial and non-verbal communicative strategies, volunteers aim to create safe spaces, places and situations where information sharing becomes possible. Inclusive strategies guarantee that asylum seekers are encountered with sensitivity, as human beings, and their emotional needs are recognised and fulfilled in different situations. Supervisory strategies highlight the human agency and rights of asylum seekers. Lastly, volunteers use strategies with shifting roles to organically and fluidly choose the best possible ways to encounter asylum seekers.

Although our focus is not on asylum seekers' information practices, our findings are similar to the information challenges identified in earlier research (e.g. Caidi *et al.*, 2010; Lloyd *et al.*, 2013, 2017; Oduntan and Ruthven, 2019, 2020). Our study elucidates the phenomenon from the perspective of volunteers, i.e. people who closely work with asylum seekers. Volunteers are – partly consciously, partly unconsciously – aware of information challenges. They recognise that information in the asylum system changes, is not precise and is hard to understand. They notice misunderstandings and even direct misinformation. They are aware of challenges in understanding between different parties, for example, due to issues with language on different levels. They understand that not all information or information sources are equally relevant and that they may affect individual asylum processes. Volunteers also acknowledge that the mental state of asylum seekers affects their ability to understand and use different kinds of information.

4.1 Nuanced information and the social information perception model
The volunteers' awareness of information challenges lies underneath the strategies presented in this paper. The complexity of information and information practices in the context of

asylum seekers can be discussed with the help of the social information perception model (SIP) (Ruokolainen and Widén, 2020), which depicts the process of perceiving information and its accuracy. The model shows that people encounter all kinds of information, i.e. accurate information, misinformation and disinformation, which is then interpreted and used in different ways. When a person interprets information, different factors, i.e. social, historical and cultural aspects, as well as situation and context, affect how information is perceived. A person then understands the information as accurate information, misinformation or disinformation and uses it in constructing reality and problem-solving, even when the piece of information is dismissed. Figure 1 shows this simplified model, which can help to understand the process of receiving and perceiving information, and the strategies show that volunteers are – consciously or unconsciously – aware of how asylum seekers perceive and use information, why information is often challenging, and in what ways these challenges can be made easier. The strategies are essentially founded on understanding another person's ways of dealing with information and acting based on it.

In the context of the asylum process, information is often fragmented and unclear, and as legislation and practices change, knowing whether a piece of information is accurate is difficult. Asylum seekers come from different backgrounds and information environments, and they are often in a challenging and liminal situation in the host country. Their contacts affect the kind of information they receive and how they perceive it. An example of a cultural factor affecting information perception and practices could be the impact of collective culture (Baldwin, 2014, p. 78) on information practices. This often means trusting family and friends as the main sources of information (Kainat *et al.*, 2021). The strategies with shifting roles consider this cultural difference and enable people to share information in everyday occasions with people who can be considered friends or family. The situational factors are particularly interesting in the context of asylum seekers, also noticed by
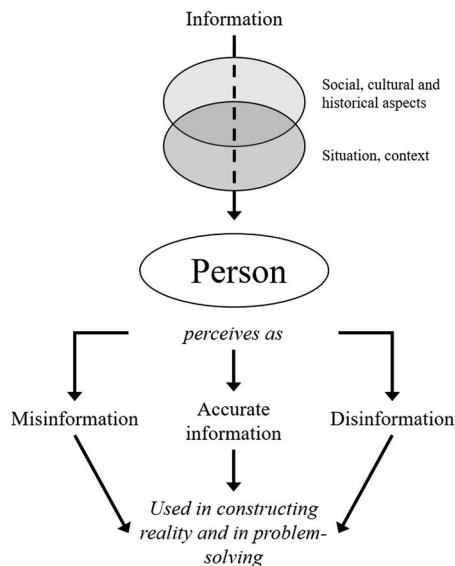
Figure 1.
Social information
perception model

Oduntan and Ruthven (2020), as the legal status of asylum seekers also outlines information needs and use. For example, situation is an evident factor when the police issue negative asylum decisions. Even if the police present the decision correctly, the situation itself, the mental state of the applicant and the attitude of the police can affect how the asylum seeker perceives the information about the decision. Volunteers applying, for example, inclusive, spatial and non-verbal communicative, as well as supervisory strategies may make these situations easier.

We underline that different perceptions of information should by no means be dismissed as false. However, asylum seekers are forced to function in a social, cultural and situational context where dealing with information is not often easy. We argue that the strategies are a sensitive way to consider this process of information perception and help asylum seekers navigate in a complicated information environment, while still showing respect to them and their views.

4.2 Multi-level expertise

The strategies are formed on multiple levels, and it is useful to understand the different dimensions of expertise behind the strategies. Volunteers evidently exercise *critical* and *activist expertise*, confirming Sotkasiira's (2018, pp. 304–305) results where critical expertise is used to question power structures, and activist expertise highlights activism together with other actors. We argue that the fact that the volunteers use these strategies for supporting the asylum seekers and their rights is in itself a manifestation of critical and activist expertise. They question many factors and practices in the asylum system and power structures and consider the asylum seekers' rights as their guiding principle. They accentuate collective actions in their work, i.e. they work together with different actors in the field: other volunteers and activists, lawyers, NGO workers and different kinds of officials. We highlight that this collaboration includes asylum seekers who are, of course, often clients and people in need of help but also actors who have skills, knowledge and resources.

Expertise is related to information. The use of critical and activist expertise starts from the idea that asylum seekers have rights, including the right to accurate and timely information, which help in the asylum process. The supervisory strategies, especially, accentuate the asylum seekers' human agency, and having a holistic picture of one's own situation is a vital part of it. Asylum seekers need different kinds of information to "stand on their own two feet". Human agency, again, influences information practices and enhances access to information, creating a virtuous circle.

4.3 Respect and trust as cross-cutting themes

The culturally and situationally sensitive strategies to help others with their information practices extend past activities directly linked with information. The cross-cutting themes in the strategies are *respect* and *trust* [7], which the Finnish Institute for Health and Welfare (2018) understands as key components of social inclusion, in addition to livelihood, services, information and knowledge, skills, activity and shared meanings. Respect, i.e. individual perception of worth to a group, sense of inclusion in a group, and fair treatment within a group (Huo *et al.*, 2010, p. 200), supports two aspects of social life: striving for status and recognition as well as the need to belong and feel included (Huo and Binning, 2008, p. 1572). People in the margins of a group have a stronger need for respect (De Cremer, 2002), and lack of perceived respect can further marginalise them (Huo and Binning, 2008, p. 1573). Respect can lead to improved social engagement, higher self-esteem and better mental health (Huo *et al.*, 2010; Huo and Binning, 2008). In the same manner, trust has a positive impact on well-being, and its impact is more advantageous among people belonging to discriminated and disadvantaged populations (Helliwell *et al.*, 2016, pp. 14–15). Trust is evidently connected to

vulnerability: it can be defined as relying on others when vulnerable and believing that no harm will be done (Sasaki and Marsh, 2012, p. 9). Trust is vital for relationships and social groups, and small details can be decisive when an individual takes the risk to trust another person (Curtis, 2011, pp. 54–55). Trust is needed for effective information sharing, and it influences information practices and perception of information (Huvila, 2017). Asylum seekers often have difficulties with trusting people due to past experiences, being accustomed to not trusting people, being mistrusted by others, not knowing people and concerns about telling the truth (Raghallaigh, 2014).

In the context of asylum seekers, these aspects of respect and trust are extremely important. Asylum seekers are actively shut out of the society due to their status and belonging to a group or social recognition are not self-evident for them. In Finland, they are not provided with official integration services. Active confirmation of belonging through acts of respect could positively affect their well-being. In a new cultural, social and situational context, it can be hard to know who to trust, or even take the risk to trust a strange person, in the first place. At the same time, asylum seekers are dependent on other people's help. The strategies are ways to create respect and trust, which affect information practices and support the asylum seekers' well-being. Well-being, in turn, has a positive influence on information practices (Zou, 2021). Thus, respect and trust, information and emotional well-being can be seen as factors influencing one another and creating a virtuous circle. Respect and trust are the underlying motives behind and guiding principles for the strategies but are also the outcomes of them.

4.4 Theoretical and practical contribution

After presenting all these aspects of the information-related strategies, we come to the essence of them. Information-related strategies do not only involve information mediation but are a holistic approach to support other people's information practices, which are socially and culturally established ways to identify information needs, seek, use and share information (Savolainen, 2008, p. 2). Information practices are a part of people's social practices, and they are habitual ways of dealing with information (Savolainen, 2007), with emphasis on social relationships and social contexts (McKenzie, 2003). In the context of migration, information practices can be seen as the social process of learning to function in a new information environment and understanding how to deal with the information in a new setting (Lloyd et al., 2013). Although not all of the strategies seem to be directly linked to information and information practices, they definitely revolve around them. In other words, information practices are intertwined in all kinds of everyday interactions, and therefore information-related strategies should also be a part of everyday interactions. The strategy approach acknowledges complex information processes and enables and supports information practices at large, with various actions that make situations safe and respectful. In the context of asylum seekers, these include information mediatory, language adjustment, spatial and non-verbal communicative, inclusive, and supervisory strategies, as well as strategies with shifting roles. In other contexts, there could be other kinds of strategies to support the information practices of other people and groups.

Information-related strategies are a novel contribution to the information practice discourse. Information practice approaches do consider the context and situation (e.g. McKenzie, 2003; Savolainen, 2006; Talja et al., 2005). Research on information intermediaries, again, tackles the same kinds of issues as our understanding of information-related strategies. However, we shift the focus from the individuals, volunteers as information intermediaries, to their actions. We also argue that the strategies help examine the activities around information from a broader perspective. True access to reliable and useful information is enabled by many diverse actions, which take into consideration different

cultural, social, contextual and situational factors. Thus, information-related strategies are actions and processes around information that enable and support sustainable information practices for other people.

Understanding the strategies and the volunteers' role in asylum seekers' information practices also contributes to the everyday work with asylum seekers and possibly with other groups that may also be considered marginalised. Authorities and all actors in the asylum process cannot fully adopt the same kinds of strategies as volunteers because, for example, building personal relationships is not possible in all situations. In the Finnish context, where changes in the legislation and practices as well as long asylum processes cause people to fall outside the system (Pirjatanniemi *et al.*, 2021) and where asylum seekers are not entitled to official integration services (FINLEX, 2011; Integration.fi, 2021), the expertise of volunteers could be acknowledged and utilised more officially. In any case, volunteers and the third sector provide services, which are not covered by the official system (Karakayali and Kleist, 2016). The volunteers' role as an outside actor can also seem more trustworthy to the asylum seekers, and this could be considered an asset, and not as a threat to the official asylum system. The strategy approach may also give a new perspective to helping volunteers to examine processes and actions in their work in Finland, perhaps in other countries, also. Awareness of these strategies, which is perhaps partly unconscious, may make it easier to improve the existing work practices and coordinate work among volunteers more efficiently, while still bearing the clients' interests in mind. However, despite the special role of volunteers, the strategies are not limited to volunteers only. Many of the strategies could be applied in all positions in the system. Inclusive behaviour, appropriate language use and sharing information in an understandable way are at least relatively easy ways to increase the well-being of asylum seekers.

5. Conclusions

This paper presents six types of strategies, which volunteers use to help asylum seekers with information challenges and support their information practices. Volunteers use information mediatory strategies to make sure asylum seekers obtain information in the best possible way and understand it. Language adjustment strategies consider various challenges with language, such as when bureaucratic language is used. Spatial and non-verbal communicative strategies are used to make asylum seekers feel safe and cared for in different spaces. Volunteers aim at encountering individual asylum seekers in an inclusive way, even when difficult matters are discussed. With supervisory strategies, the human agency of asylum seekers is supported in a way most suitable for their individual situation. Lastly, volunteers have different roles, such as the professional work role, the role as a non-authority and the role as a friend or parent. These roles are fluid and make it easier to help asylum seekers in different situations.

The information-related strategies are a novel way of understanding factors around information practices. Merely giving information is not enough in asylum seekers' challenging situations. Rather, information practices should be supported holistically by showing respect, sensitivity and caring, thus, creating a basis for accessing and processing reliable and timely information. Quality human interaction is the basis for sustainable information practices. The strategies contribute to the overall situation of asylum seekers and make it easier for them to deal with information and challenges with it. The strategies are not simple nor stable; rather, they are flexibly and organically applied and adjusted according to the situation and needs of the individual asylum seekers.

This study has its limitations. Not all aspects of the asylum situation in Finland could be discussed, although they could have created additional depth to the analysis. Since the

asylum situations in different countries are not the same, the findings do not necessarily directly apply to other countries. However, with necessary modifications, these contexts could be studied with the help of the strategy approach. Due to the small sample, the findings must be put into the limited context. A larger sample could render better grounds for generalisation, i.e. provide indications of whether these findings apply to volunteers on a larger scale, as well. Combining semi-structured interviews with other methods, such as observation, could have given further confirmation to the findings. Now, the data relies solely on the participants' verbal accounts of their experiences and therefore, the voice of asylum seekers is not present in this paper. Anything mentioned about the feelings and views of the asylum seekers are interpretations by the people working with them. As Lloyd *et al.* (2013, p. 132) point out, asylum seekers may not have any other choice than to trust volunteers and rely on them as trustworthy information sources.

Despite the limitations of the study, the strategy approach can help understand different factors. The asylum system and situation of asylum seekers are indeed complicated and receiving help is vital. The strategies aim at giving sensitive support. As the volunteers put it themselves, the goal is to make people more independent, but the process is long and complicated. Inequality among asylum seekers is also great, as receiving help may depend on how active they themselves are – or it depends on pure luck. Further holistic studies pertaining to the kind of (informational) support and services asylum seekers need and prefer and who should provide these services are needed. The limited findings provide an interesting new approach, and further studies could investigate various aspects of volunteers', and other information intermediaries', ways of supporting access, interpretation and use of information. With the help of the strategy approach, future research can more easily examine groups that support information practices for other people and communities. For example, it would be interesting to see how more official actors in a given context apply different strategies when their role is apparently narrower. We also encourage further research on inclusive behaviour and respect and their role in information practices.

Notes

1. There are many ways of volunteering, and some volunteers focus mainly on recreational and social activities. However, in this paper we focus on activities connected with the asylum system as the role of volunteers has become more and more important in it.

2. The citations in Finnish and Swedish were translated to English by the researcher and checked by two other researchers. The translations attempt to depict similar ways of speaking as in the interviews, but they are not word-for-word translations to better guarantee clarity and readability.

3. The intention of this study is not to create or increase any contrasts between different actors in the asylum system. The participants in this study had collaborated extensively with many actors, such as lawyers. However, they did express their criticism towards the system and authorities, including the officials at the Finnish Immigration Service and the police.

4. All names are pseudonyms to insure the anonymity of the participants and their clients.

5. The abbreviation of the Finnish Immigration Service, which is often used in everyday language.

6. To further protect the identity of the participant, her pseudonym is left out in this section.

7. Both respect and trust are broad concepts, which are discussed here only briefly and superficially. A more thorough review on the concept of trust in LIS research can be found in Huvila (2017) and in refugee studies in Lyytinen (2017).

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Appendix

Work/volunteering	Could you tell me about your work?
Asylum process/situation	Do you have an overall picture of the situation? What about your clients?
Clients	What kind of information needs do your clients have?
	Who do your clients turn to when they have questions?
Networks	What kind of networks do you have?
	What contacts do you lack?
	What kind of networks do your clients have?
Rumours	Are there rumours circulating? What kind?
Misinformation	Do your clients sometimes misunderstand things? What are they?
	Are there cases when you do not know what to do or how to give advice?
	Is some information difficult for you?
	Have you received information that was incorrect?
	Have you misunderstood something?
	Have you given misinformation to your clients?
	Is some information conflicting?
	Are there misunderstandings between you and your clients?
Emotions	What kind of feelings do your clients show you?
	Do you like your work?
	What do you enjoy? What frustrates you?

Table A1.
Interview guide

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IV

How and why does official information become misinformation? A typology of official misinformation

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	It is important to widen the understanding of misinformation in different contexts. The findings of this qualitative study showed that official information can be misinformation. Official information, which is information concerning and/or coming from official services and processes, was studied with semi-structured interviews in two contexts in which support with information was needed. Four types of misinformation were found: outdated, conflicting, and incomplete information and perceived intimidation. Official information has characteristics related to structural factors, language, and terminology, as well as encounters that make it prone to misinformation. A typology of official misinformation was created to show the nuanced nature of misinformation and the different social, contextual, and situational factors surrounding misinformation. In-person support may be needed to tackle misinformation. Official information can be made clearer and more suited to different groups, which also diminishes the risk of misinformation.

1. Introduction

Misinformation is often seen as a problematic issue online and on social media (e.g., Allcott, Gentzkow, & Yu, 2019; Calo, Coward, Spiro, Starbird, & West, 2021; Fernandez & Alani, 2018; Karduni et al., 2019). Misinformation research has focused on the diffusion, recognition, and correction of misinformation (e.g., Kumari, Ashok, Ghosal, & Ekbal, 2021; Qinyu, Sakura, & Li, 2021; Zhao, Da, & Yan, 2021). There are negative consequences of misinformation for both individuals and societies (Barua, Barua, Aktar, Kabir, & Li, 2020; Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020; Stahl, 2006). However, it is often treated solely as false and negative information that should be corrected without more clearly defining its nature (Jarrahi, Ma, & Goray, 2021; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020).

Societies are built on official information (Hänninen, Karjalainen, & Lahti, 2005, p. 3), that is, information concerning and/or coming from official services and processes, which is often needed in changing and even challenging life situations. It is often considered trustworthy and accurate compared to information obtained from more informal sources (Huo & Li, 2019). However, making it publicly available does not guarantee access to it, which is affected by different factors, such as people's different literacies (Henninger, 2017).

2. Problem statement

Without understanding how and why official information may become misinformation, different authorities and official actors may unintentionally make it challenging for people to access and use vital official information, and authorities may even create and spread misinformation. Despite misinformation being a widely researched topic, most studies have not discussed precisely what misinformation is and what kind of role it plays in people's everyday information environments, of which official information is also a part. There is a lack of a broad and nuanced qualitative understanding of the phenomenon (Ruokolainen, 2022a).

To understand how and why official information becomes misinformation, two research questions were addressed:

1) What types of misinformation exist in the context of official services?
2) What characteristics of official information make it misinformation?

In addressing these research questions, a typology of official misinformation was created. The typology helps to understand misinformation as a nuanced phenomenon and to influence official information so that it becomes more accessible and reliable in different situations. A more nuanced understanding of misinformation as a concept helps

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prevent its negative consequences.

3. Literature review

3.1. Broad and nuanced understanding of misinformation

Misinformation is inaccurate, incomplete, vague, or ambiguous information in a certain situation and context, and various social, historical, and cultural factors affect how individuals and groups perceive information and its accuracy (Karlova & Fisher, 2013; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020). Thus, misinformation can be considered a type of information, as information forms in social processes and does not essentially carry the notion of truth. This is possible when information is defined as *informative* (Buckland, 1991; Fox, 1983), and the truthfulness of information does not define how people perceive and use it (Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020; Tandoc, Lim, & Ling, 2018). Therefore, misinformation is not "a bastardised version of information that is considered the opposite of knowledge" (Jarrahi et al., 2021, p. 9).

Misinformation can be discussed in comparison with other types of information. Often, it is seen as accidentally false information, whereas *disinformation* refers to intentionally false or misleading information (Stahl, 2006). Some researchers have also distinguished *malinformation*, that is, accurate information shared or moved to cause harm, for example, private information made public (Baines & Elliott, 2020; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017a; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017b). Distinct from misinformation are also *misperceptions* (false beliefs) (Thorson, Sheble, & Southwell, 2018, p. 289). Although the distinctions and categorizations are indeed important, a more open approach was applied here. To find as much data on misinformation as possible, all types of information that were not indisputably or unambiguously accurate were considered of interest. The approach was to include, rather than exclude, various pieces of information, which were all referred to as *misinformation*, despite the controversy of the term. This is justified, as there is still a lack of qualitative research understanding misinformation holistically in people's lives (Ruokolainen, 2022a), and the categorizations in this context have yet to evolve.

3.2. Misinformation typologies

"Typologies descriptively differentiate aspects or characteristics of phenomenon or group," which do not necessarily aim to be exhaustive; rather, typologies may be completed by new categories and ideally should be applied in future empirical research (Fleming-May, 2008, pp. 41–42). Typologies may be indigenous, that is, created by the group studied, or analyst-constructed, in which the researcher identifies patterns that are unperceived by the group itself (Patton, 2002, pp. 454–460).

The increase in misinformation research in recent years has led to a growing number of typologies. For example, Wardle and colleagues (Wardle, 2020; Wardle & Derakhshan, 2017b) identified seven types of misinformation and disinformation to understand information disorder: satire or parody, false connection, misleading content, false content, imposter content, manipulated content, and fabricated content. Some misinformation typologies have been connected to specific subjects and/ or fora, such as COVID-19-related misinformation (Bastani & Bahrami, 2020; Brennen, Simon, Howard, & Nielsen, 2020), vaccine misinformation on Twitter (Jamison et al., 2020), political misinformation (Machado, Kira, Narayanan, Kollanyi, & Howard, 2019), and crisis-related misinformation (Lu, 2020). There are several typologies of fake news as a type of misinformation (Ferreira, Robertson, & Kirsten, 2020; Tandoc et al., 2018; Toma & Scripcariu, 2020; Wang, Rao, & Sun, 2020). Many of these typologies are strongly connected to misinformation on the Internet or social media.

An attempt toward a more everyday approach to misinformation can be found in Ruokolainen and Widén (2020), who conducted a literature review on misinformation in the context of asylum seekers, refugees,

and immigrants and found six types of misinformation: official information that is incorrect, outdated information, misinformation via gatekeepers or intermediaries, misinformation giving false hope or unrealistic expectations, as well as rumors and distorted information.

3.3. Official information

Despite different societies largely relying on *official information* (Hänninen et al., 2005, p. 3), it and its characteristics are difficult to define. For example, based on public perception, Chauhan and Hughes (2017, p. 3151) defined official information in the context of online crisis information as "information whose source is perceived by the public as more authoritative and/or trustworthy". Huo and Li (2019) understood official information as a normative and trustworthy way to control rumors without stating how they defined the concept. Hänninen et al. (2005, p. 3) concluded that official information considering vulnerable groups generally aimed to represent official truth and was often distant, general, and constructed, not detailed, based on the experiences of the groups themselves, or reflective. The authors instead described *other information* to include precise information, tacit knowledge, counter knowledge, and weak knowledge. Thus, it seems easier to define the antonyms of official information than the term itself.

Related concepts are *government information* and *public sector information*, which Henninger (2017) defined as information provided by the government and public institutions, highlighting that public access to government information is not ensured by placing it online; accessibility is in practice more nuanced than the governmental understanding of it, and people often need different literacies to access governmental information. Official information can also be compared to expert knowledge and to the discussion on whose expertise is heard in society. Jakonen (2017, pp. 102–103) discussed expert knowledge indirectly by defining counter knowledge as information/knowledge formed in processes in which information and different views are compared to other information, facts, theories, and views. In these comparisons, official information was perceived as somewhat stiff and static, not flexible, or adaptive, and not necessarily as information that respects multiple views in society. Nevertheless, Jakonen (2017, p. 102) argued that mainstream information (currently accepted valid information) has often, at some point, been marginal or even critical. This would indicate that official information can also be considered changing.

Thus, official information can be considered through its status in society, sources, trustworthiness, or even truthfulness. A pressing issue is access or lack of access to it. Here, official information is defined as information that is either received from authorities and official services or about authorities, official services, or processes, such as immigration or rehabilitation processes. This definition is adopted because, in practice, people access and discuss the official information they need via different sources and with various people.

4. Method and data

4.1. Study contexts

The data were collected as part of a larger research project focusing on misinformation as a social phenomenon, more specifically in contexts where people need support with information (Ruokolainen, 2022a; Ruokolainen, 2022b; Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020), as is often the case in challenging life situations (e.g., Smith-Frigerio, 2021; Treiman et al., 2021). Support with information refers to broad and holistic actions that help people access, process, and use information. It does not merely involve mediating information, but various inclusive and respectful ways to encounter people can enhance their access to vital information (Ruokolainen, 2022b).

Two groups were interviewed: 1) volunteers working with asylum seekers and 2) youth service workers working with young people under 29 years of age. The study focused on these participants' experiences

with their clients. UNESCO (2020) considers both migrants and youth as disadvantaged, marginalized, or vulnerable groups, whose media and information literacy must be supported (see also Haider & Sundin, 2022, p. 82). Hence, misinformation can be even more problematic in these populations. Both groups need official information to navigate social structures. In Finland, where the study was conducted, asylum seekers and youth have clear support groups. Volunteers have become important support people and information sources for asylum seekers (Ruokolainen, 2022b; Jauhiainen, 2017, p. 9). Volunteering in the context of asylum seekers differs from traditional volunteering activities (Musick & Wilson, 2008, p. 3), as motives behind it are political, to help specifically asylum seekers (Ahonen & Kallius, 2019; Karakayali & Kleist, 2016), and volunteers cover core services (e.g., legal help), where society fails asylum seekers (Karakayali & Kleist, 2016). Based on European guidelines (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency, 2023b), Finnish youth are entitled to information and counseling services, which are important in assisting them with their information needs (European Youth Information and Counselling Agency, 2023a). The aim of the services is to promote "the integration into education and working life" (Siurala, 2018, p. 52).

4.2. Research design and approach

A semi-structured interview method was used, which consists of open-ended and targeted questions during relaxed discussions (Galletta & Cross, 2013, pp. 1–2, 45; O'Reilly & Dogra, 2018, p. 37). The overall topics of the interviews were misinformation and challenges with information, of which the participants were informed. However, these topics were not emphasized during the interviews, but misinformation was approached as a theme intertwined in everyday activities and not as a negative phenomenon but as openly and widely as possible. On a concrete level, the discussion touched upon varying themes, such as work in general, challenges at work, clients' needs, social networks, and emotions (see interview guides in Appendices 1 and 2). An organic combination of free discussion and gently probing questions functioned well in creating data on misinformation, which was found through both direct questions and indirect discussion (Ruokolainen, 2022a). The conversation topics were similar in both participant groups, with some contextual differences.

An indirect approach through people giving support was chosen for several reasons. First, this qualitative and holistic approach to misinformation is new, and there are no best practices to follow from earlier research. Second, both asylum seekers and youth may have several challenges with information, which can be overwhelming, and having a bigger picture of one's information environment in that situation can be difficult. Taking part in a study may also cause additional stress. As the focus of the study was not directly on the experiences of youth or asylum seekers but on misinformation in these limited contexts, people in intermediary positions were considered to be able to approach information phenomena from different angles and reflect upon the experiences of a wide clientele. Professionals working with different clients could provide more examples of misinformation than individual clients. However, this does not diminish the need to study misinformation more directly in the future.

4.3. Data collection

In September 2019–February 2020, seven volunteers working with asylum seekers were interviewed in six interviews, of which one was a pair interview. The participants were working with asylum seekers in non-governmental organizations (NGO), churches/parishes, or independently (activist–volunteers). The term volunteer was chosen to underline their engagement outside the official asylum system, but they are in fact, largely considered important actors in the asylum process (Jauhiainen, 2017, p. 9). They worked in two cities/towns in southern Finland with asylum applications and appeals, deportation, education,

employment, housing, and mental health, and some also with coordinating other volunteers. People volunteering only in recreational activities were excluded from the study. Some participants were contacted directly, and some were recruited through snowball sampling. The sample was small, since volunteers have quite tight circles, and the participants represent nearly all relevant organizations and actors in the chosen area. A small sample can be justified if the structure of the study is focused on narrow objectives (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006) and the participants have sufficient expertise in the subject (Romney, Weller, & Batchelder, 1986; see also Ruokolainen, 2022b). This study's design and participants met these criteria. One researcher conducted all interviews: three interviews in Finnish, two in Swedish, and one in English, and the interviews were 1 hour 49 minutes long on average. All interviews were conducted in person at the participants' workplaces, homes, or at the local university.

The second dataset, gathered in September–November 2021, consisted of 10 individual and three pair interviews with youth service workers (YSWs), 16 participants in total. The participants worked in different youth service organizations across southern Finland. The organizations were national, municipal, or NGOs that provided information, guidance, and counseling services mostly to youth between 15 and 29 years old. The services were free of charge and based on the voluntary participation of the clients. Some organizations and participants focused on all young people, while others focused more specifically on people with challenges with education, work, housing, or mental health issues. All organizations guided youth to the services they needed and aimed to prevent marginalization or further marginalization. The interviews were conducted on Zoom in Finnish by the same researcher as the first dataset and were, on average, 1 hour 28 minutes long.

4.4. Data analysis

All interviews were recorded, transcribed by external transcription services, and thematically coded and analyzed using NVivo software. The initial focus was on misinformation, and the six types of misinformation by Ruokolainen and Widén (2020) were used as a starting point in the data creation process and analysis. It was considered that misinformation related to official information, social networks, intermediaries, rumors, and emotions could be found, but the intention was not to verify these types or extend the preliminary typology but to openly study all kinds of misinformation. Hence, the analysis had traits of both data-driven and theory-driven analysis (Gibbs, 2007), with more emphasis on themes emerging from the data, which were revisited several times to form a firm basis for thematic coding. Eleven codes were created in the initial coding (Table 1). These codes were partly broader, some narrower, not necessarily on the same levels, and overlapping. After many iterations, the importance of the overall theme of official information emerged from the data. After this, some codes were dismissed, combined, and/or renamed. During the last rounds of coding, three additional codes were created (Table 2). The types of official

Table 1

First coding scheme based on the data-driven approach.

Codes	Number of interviews	References
Factors surrounding misinformation	19	159
Misunderstandings and misconceptions	18	91
Official information	17	58
Sharing misinformation	16	38
Misinformation connected to complicated circumstances	13	34
False hope and unrealistic expectations	13	25
Conflicting and ambiguous information	12	26
Rumors and distorted information	10	34
Outdated information	10	17
Intimidation	6	21
Gatekeepers and intermediaries	6	16

Table 2
New codes connected to official misinformation.

Codes	Number of interviews	References
Language and terminology	16	33
Encounters with authorities	13	50
Incomplete information	11	24

misinformation and characteristics presented in this study are combinations of different codes of the initial coding, and a large part of the types and characteristics were initially included in the code of *official information*. Approximately the same amount of data on misinformation was found in both datasets, although the samples were of different sizes.

5. Findings

In the context of asylum seekers, the sources of official information were especially the Finnish Immigration Service (Migri) and the police, but also reception centers and lawyers. Common topics of official misinformation involved the asylum process, residence permits, being or becoming undocumented, the right to work, and reception services. Youth received official information from the Social Insurance Institution of Finland (Kela), employment services, and health, mental health, and substance abuse services. Topics of official misinformation included different social benefits, local government pilots on employment, health services, and different societal processes. Some participants also mentioned misinformation connected with compulsory education, social services, and youth services.

First, four types of misinformation were identified: outdated, conflicting, and incomplete information and perceived intimidation. Second, based on these types, three inherent characteristics involved in official information being or becoming misinformation were identified.

5.1. Types of misinformation

5.1.1. Outdated information

In both contexts, outdated information was mostly official information that had changed, but people continued to use the old information. Volunteers referred to changes in the asylum system, legislation, and practices: *"You think that you know how something works, but then the law has already changed"* (Volunteer Sofia). Concretely, outdated information was related, for example, to the right to work: *"Is it now three or six months? It has changed. Migri gave an answer to a person, and it was just incomprehensible. Does this person have a right to work or not?"* (Volunteer Marianne). This excerpt also highlights the unclarity of official information.

YSWs mentioned their own confusion with changing services, such as health services:

> Then this person asks me how to do it [make an appointment], and I have to Google what the number is this week. The services keep changing quite quickly, so even a professional has a hard time keeping up with the practices. (YSW Karri).

Several YSWs brought up temporary projects in the field of youth services. They mentioned individual actors, such as guidance counselors, passing on outdated information to the youth. This information had to be corrected elsewhere and the issue of outdated information continued to spread.

5.1.2. Conflicting information

Both groups noticed conflicting information received from different actors:

> I can call three different lawyers and ask what to do. The first one has one opinion and the second one another. They can be conflicting, but then I can call the third one. (Volunteer Sara).

This young person said that they had made it [the CV] with a career coach. I could not say that I would never have given you this kind of advice. I could see the reaction in them, like they've done it with a career coach, and here I am, giving them completely different advice. (YSW Milja).

Conflicting information influenced interaction with clients*: "You have to be careful not to give an absolute answer"* and *"We try to give as accurate information as possible"* (Volunteer Emma). Thus, participants understood that information was not always only accurate and inaccurate but more nuanced.

Acting based on conflicting information was not easy:

> Many people with an alcohol or drug history have a question of whether one should tell them about the substance use when seeking mental help. This can make it much more difficult to get therapy or some social benefits. I would like to say that it's not true, that, of course, you should be honest, but luckily, I don't have to say anything. Honestly, I don't know what I would do if I had to say something. I think this impression is correct; you shouldn't be honest. (YSW Katja).

Conflicting information gave contradictory impressions. Many YSWs discussed the pressure youth felt and what was expected of them. However, when the youth needed help changing their lives, help was hard to get or even denied. This could lead to challenges in communication on all sides, as Nea and Sanna explained together:

> And when the young person is motivated to seek help and finally gets contact with the health services, and when the discussion starts, it comes out that the appointments are once a month or every other month. And then, the one phone call has been canceled and postponed by a month. Then, the young person says they don't get anything out of it and rather stop going. (YSW Nea).

> The health services interpret this in the way that the young person is not committed to treatment. (YSW Sanna).

Similarly, the conflicting information asylum seekers gave influenced asylum decisions or was even used against them.

> You can clearly see that they [Migri] are looking for inconsistencies. They pounce on things like, hey, you told us that you were home when that man came to meet you and your father the first time. But here you say that you were elsewhere when he came. And it might have been that the man had visited them twice, but you mixed up those times. But this can be interpreted in the way that they [Migri] seek these kinds of things so that they can say that first you said this and now this, and the whole story becomes incredible. (Volunteer Emma).

Thus, conflicting information seems to reveal the credibility of the person giving the information. Interestingly, these findings showed that conflicting information was quite common, a natural part of people's information practices, and even rooted in official structures. However, in the context of these two groups, it acted against them.

5.1.3. Incomplete information

Incomplete information refers to information in which some aspects of the content are left out, and a distorted picture may be formed. The participants provided several concrete examples of themes in which incomplete information had occurred. Volunteers mentioned being or becoming undocumented, the right to work, temporary personal ID, Migri and its role, and the obligation of confidentiality. YSWs referred to mental health services, including ward care, different obligations and rights related to services, services in general, preparatory education for vocational training, Kela forms and attachments, and vocational rehabilitation.

Different services were mentioned, and YSWs, especially, were concerned that there was not enough detailed information about

services that helped young people understand them.

> If I tell them "it would be good to admit yourself to a mental hospital", they don't understand what it means. You have to explain what it means. But if you try to Google what a hospital stay means, what it entails, and how people benefit from it, there is no such information. (YSW Karri).

Instructions provided by services can be incomplete information. Phrases such as *"book an appointment at the healthcare center"* (YSW Karri) or *"register as a job seeker"* (YSW Milja) are not detailed enough to tell youth what to do concretely. YSWs found it problematic that youth were not explicitly told *why* they should perform certain, sometimes seemingly arbitrary, tasks.

Much of the incomplete information was considered natural and understandable, but some participants had more negative attitudes. Not having all the information available could give the impression that people were not welcome:

> I would just want to know how everything works, like there could be a manual. … But this information is not easily available. It seems that there is no true interest in having it easily available, either. What if we had another kind of attitude in society? Now, it seems that the current attitude is that we should be an inhospitable country. We should attract no one; we should not make it easy. (Volunteer Marianne).

Some YSWs mentioned that young people gave incomplete information in some situations, which negatively affected other situations:

> A young person does not always bring up that they have a diagnosis. It could affect employment or education, but they don't always think that it could be important. (YSW Eva).

However, leaving out details was also justified, as Katja explained in the previous section, in stating that young people did not necessarily want to reveal their substance abuse history in mental health services.

5.1.4. Perceived intimidation

Perceived intimidation happens when inaccurate or inadequate information is presented in an unfriendly or even hostile way, so that it shapes the understanding of the message. Both the volunteers and YSWs connected perceived intimidation only to the authorities. Perceived intimidation differed from other inaccurate official information, since the motives behind providing this information were considered malicious, or at the very least indifferent, by the participants and possibly their clients. Therefore, perceived intimidation can also be classified as disinformation.

Volunteers described perceived intimidation in encounters with the police, especially:

> For example, when giving the negative decision, the police can say now you're illegally in this country, and you don't have any alternatives other than to go home. And they are not the ones who make the decision about residence permits based on, let's say, studies. They can say, "Do you believe that you can get it if you're in a vocational school? That's not possible." And it is. But if the police say so, of course, this person thinks like shit, this was my last chance. (Volunteer Sofia).

> I don't know why this police person or this Migri person has to emphasize the bad things. They are like, there is a risk that your client will be removed from this country before the decision to this permit comes, because this decision is usually applied from abroad. Is he or she aware? Tell your friend that he or she can wait in the home country. And I'm like, that's not accurate. Because if you say this, which is true, you also have to say, it's also true that in these cases, the court usually stops the deportation. (Volunteer Mia).

Perceived intimidation was more clearly present in the volunteers'

interviews, but some YSWs associated it with health services, such as a potential encounter between a depressed young person and a psychiatrist:

> A psychiatrist states that you are not depressed because you have washed your hair, you've taken a shower. Or, just get a grip on yourself. Or they tell a severely depressed and anxious person that they won't give them any sick leave because it would passivate them more. These kinds of encounters are very damaging. Think about going to a specialist and being full of hope that you'll get some help after such a long time. Then you meet a person who invalidates, humiliates you, or maybe says the same things your bullies have said. Building trust again with that place is really difficult. (YSW Katja).

5.2. Characteristics of official information

5.2.1. Structural factors

Much misinformation was related to many official services and legal processes being complicated and bureaucratic; therefore, misinformation was formed and integrated into the structures. The clearest examples were discretionary benefits and services that themselves involved interpretation, causing, for example, conflicting information. With all the changing practices and interpretations of the law (Ahonen & Kallius, 2019; Pirjatanniemi et al., 2021), the asylum system involves much interpretation and uncertainty.

> For example, two years ago, everybody was making applications after the administrative court negative, for many reasons. I had a feeling that many people thought this was the good thing to do. Like, it's true that you can do it. Sometimes, it is a good thing to do. But the process is so complicated, and every case is so different, and there are so many pros and cons to weigh and counterweigh. People may think that my friend did a new application, so I will do it, too. (Volunteer Mia).

Volunteer Sofia, referring to the common assumption in society of people misusing welfare systems, stated that asylum seekers were often not capable of misusing the system because it was too complicated to understand: *"You could notice it [the unawareness of the system] in the comments people would give to one another: 'you speak so good English, you're for sure getting asylum' or 'you're an engineer, you will get asylum'."* Thus, misunderstanding the system may also lead to sharing misinformation with others.

Complicated systems and services were a concern among the YSWs:

> It's a real jungle with the services. People mix up Kela with social services, and the same goes for employment services and local government pilots on employment. Where to get health services has also changed. The system you've got used to has changed, so don't be lulled into thinking that things remain the same. (YSW Eva).

Some YSWs considered it understandable that there was unclear and incomplete official information:

> You start to understand the reason why those people [at Kela] say something in this way. They don't want to keep you in the dark, but they don't dare to say that this thing is exactly like this, and then it goes in a completely different way the following day. (YSW Elias).

Both participant groups used themselves as a comparison in structural matters, if they had trouble understanding some structures and terminology, they wondered how their clients could comprehend such issues. Official information was structurally complicated for end users, and in the case of marginalized groups in particular, it may be nearly impossible to understand.

5.2.2. Language and terminology

Both participant groups recognized issues with language and terminology connected to official processes. YSWs especially discussed

bureaucratic language and how it hindered understanding:

> The vocabulary may be difficult, and it [the Kela decision] may be written in officialese. You yourself have to read syllable by syllable what it says. (YSW Helena).

Volunteer Sara mentioned lawyers using legal language, which the clients did not understand. Participants and their clients mixed up concepts such as "vocational rehabilitation" and "internship" (YSW Milja).

Both groups recognized their clients as having their own ways of using language, and they acted as interpreters between authorities and clients. With volunteers, this was connected concretely to different languages and ways of speaking the local language, whereas the YSWs discussed youth language:

> If you go and read Kela's web pages, it's professional language. Then we have young people who speak youth language or street language, so there is little common ground for mutual understanding. (YSW Sami).

In addition to language gaps that do not enhance communication and positive encounters, language is connected to inequality:

> It's very uneven. If you ask someone if their lawyer knows, they say, yes, I told them directly. It depends much on their Finnish skills. They can communicate also well with us, but then there are these people who practically don't know any Finnish and have a really hard time getting things done. (Volunteer Maija).

5.2.3. Encounters with authorities

The importance of positive human encounters was emphasized in both datasets, whereas negative encounters were considered very damaging. An encounter is an interaction between a client and a professional, and due to these roles, the encounter parties are often in asymmetric positions where the professional has more responsibility for the encounter (Sundström, 2008, p. 13). Both participant groups were aware of human communication, different social realities (between the clients and authorities), and differing expectations causing clashes:

> We are humans in communication. … It can happen at any time that somebody will misunderstand. Or there are different realities, social realities, so it is absolutely understandable. This is why it is so unnatural to explain every single detail. (Volunteer Mia).

The participants felt that positive encounters were based on building relationships and trust and giving enough time for the encounter. These goals were not met in negative encounters with the authorities. Perceived intimidation was the clearest example of the impact of negative encounters on misinformation, and they comprised invalidation and humiliation. However, other kinds of encounters also diminished trust:

> If you meet a social worker once a month, you don't form that kind of relationship. And every time, there is a different interpreter present. (Volunteer Emma).

> Has the young person been pushed around. … Has the young person had a feeling that they are listened to and understood and trusted. (YSW Ossi).

Encounters are connected to attitudes and conceptions. Negative encounters, or the fear of them, could cause clients to react to and/or form negative attitudes toward authorities, which again made the situations worse, as YSWs Nea and Sanna explained in Section 5.1.2.

At its worst, negative encounters were part of the system:

> If we talk about the service system, there is a certain arbitrariness and power. … [There is] dismissal, exercise of power, bureaucracy, not encountering people. (YSW Katja).

6. Discussion

6.1. Misinformation and official information

Returning to the research questions, the findings showed that 1) there are at least four types of misinformation in the context of official services, and 2) official information possesses characteristics connected to structures, language, and encounters that make it misinformation. Based on the findings, misinformation is related to social factors, context, and situation. Outdated information is *false* and problematic because it is used at the wrong time. Conflicting information is related to the lack of consistently easy and indisputable answers in societal processes. Incomplete information does not have to be completely false, only one-sided or insufficient, but it may give an impression that leads to incorrect conclusions. Perceived intimidation is associated with negative encounters that form impressions about services and official actors, and it may be incorrect information that is also shared in a hostile way.

The findings align with Karlova and Fisher (2013) definition of misinformation as inaccurate, incomplete, vague, or ambiguous information affected by various social factors. Misinformation forms in social situations, interactions, and encounters. The findings also illustrate the nuanced nature of misinformation; it is not absolutely and unchangingly false in all situations and times, and sometimes official information is understandably misinformation. Studying misinformation in the context of official information scratched the surface of the nuanced nature of misinformation, but the findings clearly indicate that misinformation is not only bad or bastardized information (Jarrahi et al., 2021) that can and should always be avoided. Rather, misinformation can be considered an unavoidable part of one's information environment, even in the case of official information. Misinformation also relates to trust, as well as feeling encountered, respected, and included, and it is not a detachable entity of all the information and social phenomena surrounding people's everyday lives.

The findings show that official information has characteristics that make it inherently prone to misinformation. Changing structures create at least outdated information, whereas the interpretation of legislation and practices is involved in conflicting and incomplete information. Complicated language and terminology make it difficult to access information, which can also otherwise be problematic or confusing for clients. Bureaucratic terminology may lead to misunderstandings, which are further shared with others as misinformation. Dealing with official information often involves various encounters with authorities and is not always considered positive by clients. Negative encounters most directly connect to perceived intimidation, but they also otherwise diminish trust and may create misunderstandings and misperceptions. These characteristics of official information increase the risk of misinformation.

The lack of a unified definition of official information makes it difficult to compare these findings to earlier research. Official information has been described as trustworthy (Chauhan & Hughes, 2017; Huo & Li, 2019) or representing truth in some matter (Hänninen et al., 2005), as difficult to access (Henninger, 2017) and distant (Hänninen et al., 2005), as well as stiff and static (Jakonen, 2017). These characteristics alone are simplifications of the phenomenon. The purpose here is not to have an exhaustive answer to the nature of official information but to consider characteristics related to misinformation. Language and terminology make it distant and difficult to access, even stiff and static. Complicated structures, however, also make official information changing and imprecise. Official information seems to be like any other information, possessing several even contradictory characteristics. Official information cannot be simplified by calling it trustworthy or truthful in all situations. To answer the overall question of how and why official information becomes misinformation, it can be concluded that official information is as any information; characteristically prone to and can be or become misinformation through unintentional, negligent, or deliberate actions, depending on various social and contextual

factors.

6.2. Typology of official misinformation

Although the increased number of misinformation typologies indicates an interest in expanding the understanding of misinformation, misinformation is still often used somewhat generally and vaguely without further clarification and is mainly understood as problematic information online. There is a need for a broader understanding of the concept. To address this issue of conceptual vagueness, a typology of official misinformation was proposed (see Table 3).

The typology was based on data on official information, and the types were analyst-constructed (Patton, 2002). The types of misinformation in the context of asylum seekers, immigrants, and refugees by Ruokolainen and Widén (2020) were used as a starting point to compose preliminary outlines for data collection and analysis, but the aim was not to verify these types or limit the study to them. The data-driven approach showed that official misinformation, one of the Ruokolainen and Widén (2020) types, was significant in the context of youth and asylum seekers and needed further analysis. The typology of official misinformation considered the characteristics of official information, which showed that official information is as any information, sometimes reliable and sometimes vague or inappropriate in some situation or for some people. Misinformation, again, is information that cannot be merely considered false or problematic.

The types overlap, as the same pieces of information may be considered different types of official misinformation. The typology is not exhaustive and may and should be extended. Nevertheless, the typology helps to study what kind of misinformation people encounter in their everyday information environment. Although the typology focused on official information and considered its characteristics, it may function as an inspiration for future misinformation typologies and studies that study misinformation from the information receiver's point of view. For example, work-related misinformation or misinformation in everyday encounters can be studied with the help of it.

6.3. Theoretical and practical implications

As the current study is one of the few to study misinformation qualitatively (Ruokolainen, 2022a), with the aim of understanding its nature in more nuance, the findings have a true contribution to library and information science research. Instead of normatively testing whether people recognize misinformation or why people rely on it (e.g., Kumari et al., 2021; Qinyu et al., 2021), there is a need to understand misinformation more holistically: What is misinformation in different contexts? What kind of misinformation do people encounter in their natural information environment? How do people perceive information and misinformation? (see also Ruokolainen & Widén, 2020). Misinformation is not solely connected to fake news, health-related information, or politics, nor is it only present on the internet.

Similar findings in the two different contexts strengthened the findings; misinformation associated with official information was surprisingly similar in both datasets. This indicates that official information can also be misinformation in other contexts. Hence, the findings help consider official information and its accuracy and availability in different contexts. It is important that the providers of official information become aware of how and why their information can be misinformation; thus, it is difficult to use. Official information can be made clearer and available in the best way for different recipients.

It seems that some people or groups may need face-to-face encounters to truly have access to information and to combat different problems with official information, which is important considering their social inclusion. The role of intermediaries and support people could be strengthened to reach this aim. People also need more tailor-made information services, where the focus is not solely on providing information but on discussing it.

6.4. Limitations

Qualitative research involves interpretation and subjectivity (Peshkin, 2000), and alternative interpretations of the findings could have been made. The curious approach to misinformation as a wide concept affected the findings, which should be considered indicative, as there is

Table 3
Typology of official misinformation

	Official information		
Characteristics	**Structural factors** Complicated and bureaucratic structures create different types of misinformation. This has to do with, for example, discretionary benefits, systems, or services and changing legislation or practices. Misinformation derives also from misunderstanding some structures.	**Language and terminology** Issues with language hinder understanding between different parties. Official language may obscure the content of official information. Clients' language skills are connected to their ability to use services and obtain information.	**Encounters with authorities** Poor quality interaction between an authority and a client causes misunderstandings and even misinformation. Negative encounters diminish trust and shape clients' attitudes to authorities.
Types of misinformation	**Outdated information** There are changes in legislation, practices, or services, which also involves changes in information. However, old information may still be used as accurate information.	**Conflicting information** Official information is not always unambiguous, and people may receive different information and advice concerning complicated structures. Some encounters or correspondence with authorities may also give a contradictory impression of some matter.	**Incomplete information** Some content of official information is left out or the information is not detailed enough. Often this information relates to rights, services, benefits, or official organizations and their roles. Incomplete information may shape the clients' perceptions and make them misunderstand some information.	**Perceived intimidation** Authorities present accurate or inaccurate information in an unfriendly or hostile way, which may shape the content of the message. This happens, for example, in encounters with immigration services, the police, or health services.

little preceding qualitative research on misinformation, related to official information, especially. Future research may elaborate on the findings and find clearer borders between different types of information and misinformation.

The indirect approach through volunteers and YSWs made it possible to discuss misinformation broadly, despite it being a very difficult topic to reach in qualitative interviews. Nevertheless, the findings do not indicate the thoughts of asylum seekers or youth. The data focused on misinformation and related aspects; therefore, negative aspects were often emphasized in this study. The participants also reported good information flow, encounters, and misinformation connected to contexts other than official information, which unfortunately did not fit in this study. Nevertheless, problems with official information formed a large part of the data.

7. Conclusions

Official information is vital for people to be able to function in society. However, official information may be misinformation, which may be derived from official structures, language, and negative encounters. Therefore, having ostensible access to information is not sufficient. As societal processes are complex, it is crucial to inspect information about different services and processes to develop them so that different people in society can truly access and understand that information. With the help of the official misinformation typology, which shows the nuanced ways in which official misinformation may be misinformation, different authorities can make information clearer and provide in-person support suitable for different client groups. This also involves adopting respectful and inclusive practices that diminish the impact of negative encounters that contribute to misinformation. A wider understanding of misinformation, to which the typology contributes, helps to study the phenomenon thoroughly and to find different risks misinformation may pose. Further misinformation typologies in different contexts, not merely in online environments, are needed. There is also a need for a more person-centered approach to misinformation, which does not involve only controversial topics. The typology is an attempt to steer misinformation research to understand misinformation as a natural part of people's everyday information environment. This would also make people's own perceptions of information better heard and valued.

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Appendix A. Supplementary data

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