



# Conceptualising misinformation in the context of asylum seekers

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## ARTICLE INFO

### Keywords:

Misinformation  
Asylum seekers  
Information practices  
Vulnerable communities

## ABSTRACT

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 These include official information that is inadequate or presented inadequately, outdated information, misinformation via gatekeepers and other mediators, information giving false hope or unrealistic expectations, rumours and distorted information.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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<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ipm.2019.102127>

Received 29 November 2018; Received in revised form 9 August 2019; Accepted 11 September 2019

Available online 19 September 2019

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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.<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>1</sup> 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<sup>2</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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, Duijnste & 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, Espósito & 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



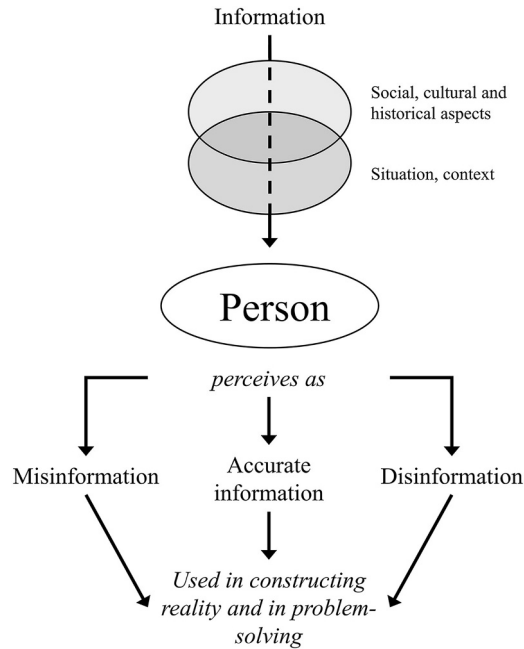


Fig. 1. Social Information Perception model.

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

This work was supported by the Oskar Öflund Foundation and the Waldemar von Frenckell Foundation. We would like to thank our colleague Eeva-Liisa Eskola as well as the anonymous reviewers for valuable feedback.

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