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The Force of Social Media

Rethinking the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurship

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Acta Universitatis Agriculturae Sueciae

2023:90

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Abstract

The aim in this thesis is to develop an understanding of how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurial processes. Social media has transformed the way in which individuals interact, communicate, and experience contemporary society, which in turn may have implications for entrepreneurship. The thesis is based on a qualitative methodology, comprised of ethnographic and netnographic analyses of three empirical cases.

The role of social media in entrepreneurial processes is discussed in four separate papers, each exploring a different perspective on the phenomenon. Paper I introduces the topic by illuminating how online communities can function as a context in entrepreneurship and interact with local change processes. Paper II shows how individuals online can influence entrepreneurial processes by forcefully entering into local processes, discussed as "intrusive ties." Paper III focuses on online community entrepreneurship to explore social interactions, spatial factors and the entrepreneurial process. Paper IV considers the entrepreneurial risks and opportunities associated with so-called echo chambers on social media, exploring how they work as social and spatial contexts, and shape the conditions of embeddedness.

Using a contextualized view of entrepreneurship from the literature as a point of departure, this thesis provides a critical discussion of, firstly, how social media is becoming a contextual element in entrepreneurship; secondly, how we can use the metaphors of embeddedness and ties to discuss online and local relations; and thirdly, how we can rethink the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurship. The thesis contributes to the literature by unpacking the role of non-local engagement in local place, demonstrating social media's role in the structuring social life and entrepreneurial processes. Lastly, the thesis highlights the potential of netnographic methods for understanding entrepreneurship research in our connected society.

Keywords: Community, embeddedness, entrepreneurship, social context, social Media, spatial context, structure, ties.

The Force of Social Media

Sammanfattning

Syftet med denna avhandling är att utveckla en förståelse för hur sociala medier påverkar de sociala och rumsliga sammanhangen i entreprenöriella processer. Sociala medier har förändrat sättet som individer interagerar, kommunicerar och upplever samhället, vilket i sin tur kan ha konsekvenser för entreprenörskap. Avhandlingen bygger på en kvalitativ metodologi, bestående av etnografiska och netnografiska analyser av tre empiriska fall.

Rollen av sociala medier i entreprenöriella processer diskuteras i fyra separata artiklar, där var och en utforskar olika perspektiv på fenomenet. I artikel I introduceras ämnet genom att belysa hur online-communityn kan fungera som en kontext för entreprenörskap och samverka med lokala förändringsprocesser. Artikel II visar hur individer online kan påverka entreprenöriella processer genom att engagera sig i lokala processer, vilket diskuteras som "påträngande band". Artikel III fokuserar på samhällsentreprenörskap online, för att utforska sociala interaktioner, rumsliga faktorer och entreprenöriella processer. Artikel IV diskuterar entreprenöriella risker och möjligheter i s.k. ekokammare på sociala medier, och utforskar hur de fungerar som sociala och rumsliga sammanhang, och formar förutsättningarna för inbäddning.

Genom att använda en kontextualiserad syn på entreprenörskap som utgångspunkt, ger denna avhandling en kritisk diskussion om, för det första, hur sociala medier blir en kontextuell faktor inom entreprenörskap; för det andra, hur vi kan använda metaforer som inbäddning och band för att diskutera online- och lokala relationer; och för det tredje, hur vi kan ompröva de sociala och rumsliga kontexterna för entreprenörskap. Avhandlingen bidrar till litteraturen genom att visa rollen av icke-lokala engagemang i lokala platser, genom att visa sociala mediernas roll i strukturering och entreprenöriella processer. Slutligen belyser avhandlingen potentialen inom netnografiska metoder för att förstå entreprenörskap i vårt sammankopplade samhälle.

Nyckelord: Gemenskap, entreprenörskap, inbäddning, rumslig kontext, social kontext, sociala medier, struktur, band.

Preface

This thesis is the culmination of years of hard work, dedication, and perseverance not only by myself but also by my research group. The journey has been challenging, but the rewards have been enormous, and I am grateful for the opportunity to have collaborated with such an incredible group of individuals.

Furthermore, I would like to thank the participants who took part in the research study, without whom this project would not have been possible. Their insights, experiences, and stories have enriched this work and made it more meaningful.

This work stands as a testament to the power of collaboration and teamwork, and I am honoured to have been a part of the research environment at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, and more specifically, the Department of Economics.

Dedication

To my research group, EIS: As we continue to tackle new challenges and explore fresh ideas, I have no doubt that our collective efforts will contribute to a better understanding of the world around us, and that we will have fun along the way. Thank you for being a part of this journey.

Contents

List of publications

This thesis is based on the work contained in the following papers, referred to by Roman numerals in the text:

I. Jonsson, J. and Gaddefors, J. (2023) How online communities are important for rural entrepreneurial change – the library revolt', *Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy*, 17(4), pp. 815-833. https://doi.org/10.1108/JEC-01-2022-0016.

II. Jonsson, J. (2023) 'When social media backfires – intrusive ties in entrepreneurship', *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*. https://doi.org/10.1177/14657503231196104. (Published online, forthcoming in print).

III. Jonsson, J. 'Exploring the social and spatial role of social media for community entrepreneurship.' (The manuscript is in the second round of review in *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*)

IV. Jonsson, J. and Astner, H. Exploring social media echo chambers in entrepreneurship. (This manuscript was accepted to the ISBE's conference in Birmingham, England, November 8-10, 2023).

Papers I-II are reproduced with the permission of the publishers.

The contribution of Josefina Jonsson to the papers included in this thesis was as follows:

I. This is a co-authored paper in which I served as the lead author. I collected and analysed the data and contributed to the overall design and development of the study.

II. I am the sole author of this paper. This paper was presented at the 21st Nordic Conference on Small Business Research, from May 18, 2022, to May 20, 2022, in Kolding, Denmark.

III. I am the sole author of this paper. This paper was presented at the doctoral day, on the 21st Nordic Conference on Small Business Research, from May 18, 2022, to May 20, 2022, in Kolding, Denmark.

IV. This is a co-authored paper in which I was the lead author. I collected and analysed the data and played a key role in developing the overall design of the study. This paper was presented at ISBE's conference in Birmingham, England, from November 8 to November 10, 2023.

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Prologue

The Force is described as a mystical and spiritual element that adds depth and complexity to the Star Wars universe, shaping the destinies of its characters and influencing the course of galactic history. The struggle between the light side and the dark side is a central conflict in the Star Wars narrative, with characters often facing moral dilemmas and choices regarding how they use the Force.

As with the Force in Star Wars, achieving balance in the realm of social media is a constant struggle. Finding harmony between the positive and negative aspects is a challenge that individuals, communities, and societies must grapple with.

Just as Jedi and Sith must navigate the temptations of the light and dark sides of the Force, so too must we navigate the opportunities and pitfalls of social media. In this way, social media, much like the Force, becomes a force for good or bad in our modern world, shaping the destiny of individuals and societies alike.

1. Introduction

In an era defined by rapid technological advancements and unprecedented digital connectivity, the world of business and entrepreneurship finds itself at a crossroads. The traditional paradigms that once governed entrepreneurial endeavours are being reshaped and redefined by the pervasive influence of social media.

The use of social media has transformed the way information is shared, with algorithms shaping user preferences and influencing social perceptions. Social media's influence on information dissemination and polarisation has implications for well-being, actions, and attitudes (Valensise et al., 2023). However, social media has also been proven to be important for entrepreneurship, in the shape of platforms offering resources and opportunities.

Research regarding the field of social media and entrepreneurship show a change in how entrepreneurs carry out their everyday activities, with streams of marketing (see e.g. Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010; Hensel and Deis, 2010; Michaelidou et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2015; Brink, 2017), business networking (Smith et al., 2017), information search (see e.g. Fernandes et al., 2016; Kuhn et al., 2016; Quinton and Wilson, 2016) and crowdfunding (Fietkiewicz et al., 2018; Roedenbeck and Lieb, 2018; Datta et al., 2019).

But social media is not only a tool to be used for the benefit of entrepreneurship, as readers will see in this thesis; social media is affecting how we create our contexts and, consequently, our actions.

In this thesis, I present arguments for how social media is a part of our context and how it influences local entrepreneurial processes. To illustrate this, I employ two metaphors, "embeddedness" and "ties," to discuss their contributions in understanding social media's role in the social and spatial context in entrepreneurship.

Embeddedness in entrepreneurship encompasses a diverse set of dimensions, including spatial (Haugh, 2022), social (Jack and Anderson, 2002), and online (Jonsson and Gaddefors, 2022) aspects. Entrepreneurs can benefit from being embedded in local communities, which provide access to resources and support (Cunningham and Barclay, 2020). However, online interactions, while expanding reach and visibility, can also bring about challenges in the form of so-called intrusive ties (Jonsson, 2023) and negative reciprocity.

In this thesis, I have analysed three different entrepreneurial processes, all situated in rural areas, presented in four separate papers.

In paper I, I went to Ravenville (a fictitious name) - a small rural town in mid Sweden. This paper emphasises the importance of embeddedness in entrepreneurship, where local connections and a sense of place were critical for framing and supporting entrepreneurial initiatives. The paper also introduces the concept of "online embeddedness" and raised questions about its practical significance.

In paper II, I have focused on a rabbit farmer and a group of animal rights activists to examine how entrepreneurship is evolving within this context, introducing the concept of "intrusive ties" to explain a form of unwanted embedding process. This results of the study highlights the dual nature of online interactions, which can be both beneficial and harmful, blurring the lines between private and business spheres.

In paper III, I returned to Ravenville and followed the online social process of developing a grocery store to understand how online community entrepreneurship is evolving. This study delves into the role of online communities in organising entrepreneurial ventures. The study examines how online interactions, relationships, and collective agency can drive entrepreneurship and the creation of business contexts.

Paper IV expands on the concept of embeddedness, distinguishing between forced embedding and desired embedding. I explore so-called echo chambers on social media to discuss the structuring characteristics and online embeddedness of social media in entrepreneurial processes. This study highlights the reciprocal nature of embedding and how entrepreneurs actively shape and participate in their context.

Taken together, these studies highlight the evolving nature of embeddedness and ties in entrepreneurship, where traditional physical connections are complemented by digital interactions, creating new

opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurship, and shaping the social and spatial contexts.

In this thesis, I elaborate on these thoughts and present entrepreneurship as interacting with and influencing both online and local social and spatial contexts. This complex interplay show how communities evolve and how individuals interact within them, providing a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of the digital age's impact on our social and spatial contexts.

1.1 Background

In 2011, Welter showed how a contextualised view could develop theorising about entrepreneurial processes. She suggested focusing on contexts like business, social, spatial and institutional (Welter, 2011, Baker and Welter, 2020; Korsgaard et al., 2022). Since then, we have seen how context has been discussed (Baker and Welter, 2020; Korsgaard et al., 2022), and the social context has been discussed thoroughly (Anderson et al., 2012; Korsgaard et al., 2022; Wigren-Kristoferson et al., 2022).

Initially, the focus of this thesis was on rural entrepreneurship. Understanding the concept of place is essential when examining rural entrepreneurship, since rural entrepreneurship exhibits unique spatial characteristics that set it apart from other settings of entrepreneurship (Korsgaard et al., 2015b). So, I started by approaching the literature on the spatial (Welter, 2011; Gaddefors & Anderson 2017) and social (eg. Jack and Anderson, 2002; Anderson et al., 2012) contexts in entrepreneurship. However, as I approached the literature on rural entrepreneurship and context, I found that many studies were vague in describing *what the social context is*, and *what the spatial context is*. Additionally, I saw that the context in entrepreneurship has evolved with the emergence and proliferation of social media. This development has ushered in three significant changes of importance for this thesis.

Firstly, the creation of the "there and now" spatiotemporal zone is of importance (Zhao, 2006). With the advent of digital connectivity, entrepreneurs now operate within a novel spatiotemporal zone, characterised by immediate and location-independent interactions. This transformation challenges conventional notions of time and space within entrepreneurial endeavours.

Secondly, new means of communication. The rise of social media has fundamentally altered the ways in which entrepreneurs exchange information and ideas. It offers an efficient and asynchronous communication channel that transcends geographical boundaries.

Lastly, online social networks have emerged as new social gathering places. Online social networks, epitomised by platforms like Facebook, have emerged as essential hubs for social interaction and networking. Entrepreneurs now leverage these platforms to connect, collaborate, and engage with a diverse global audience, reshaping traditional notions of physical networking spaces.

This evolving landscape underscores the need to revisit and re-evaluate the role of the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurship, considering the transformative impact of digital technologies and online social networks on entrepreneurial processes. This thesis will delve into these changes and their implications for entrepreneurship.

With this as my background, I will now present the aim and scope of this thesis.

1.2 Aim

Entrepreneurship is a process that is embedded within a social context. It is then directed, facilitated, or limited by peoples' positions in social networks (e.g. Jack and Anderson, 2002). Place is also considered significant for understanding entrepreneurship (e.g. Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). Therefore, both social and spatial contexts are frequently addressed in the literature on entrepreneurship and context, often within the framework of embeddedness (Korsgaard et al., 2022). Despite the existence of diverse perspectives on the concept of "context", particularly concerning its social and spatial dimensions, there is a lack of disciplinary precision in establishing clear definitions for both the social and spatial contexts. Furthermore, the impact of social media on the alteration of our perceptions and understanding of social and spatial contexts remains underexplored, highlighting a critical gap in current research.

For this reason, the overarching aim in this thesis is to develop understanding of how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in the entrepreneurial process. The following questions has guided me:

RQ 1: What role do social media play in entrepreneurship?

RQ 2: How do the metaphors of "embeddedness" and "ties" help us comprehend the role of social media in entrepreneurship?

RQ 3: How are the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurship formed?

Intrigued by these questions, I have developed four separate studies for this thesis. The studies collectively contribute to the exploration of the metaphors of embeddedness and ties, as well as how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurship. While closely interconnected, the results presented in each paper offers somewhat distinct contributions. Below is a summary of the intended aim and research question for each of the papers.

Table 1. Overview of the aim and research questions of the four papers.

Paper	Aim	Research Question
I	… to discuss how entrepreneurial processes in rural areas can be shaped not only through local community relations but also by online interaction.	How does an online community interact with a local community during the entrepreneurial process?
II	…to explore the potential negative impacts of social media for entrepreneurship, and explore online interactions as a part of the social dynamics surrounding entrepreneurship	How do the negative aspects of social media matter to the entrepreneurial process?
III	…to explore how social media matters to social and spatial aspects of community entrepreneurship	How do social media interactions influence the process of community entrepreneurship?
IV	… to explore how echo chambers on social media work in entrepreneurship	RQ1: How does social media echo chambers work as social and spatial contexts? RQ2: How does embeddedness work in social media echo chambers?

The papers are presented in a summarised version in Chapter 4 and are provided in their entirety at the end of this book.

1.3 Structure of the thesis

In the next chapter, I will present the theoretical framework I have developed in the four papers. This chapter conceptualises entrepreneurship as a social endeavour, and presents a contextualised perspective on entrepreneurship (e.g. Welter, 2011). As the aim of the thesis is to explore how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in the entrepreneurial process, the focus in the theoretical framework is to define the social context and spatial context within this thesis. I discuss embeddedness (Jack and Anderson, 2002) and ties (Granovetter, 1973) as two central concept for the social context. I continue the chapter by discussing structuration theory (Giddens, 1984), place (Tuan, 1977), and communities as a framework for understanding the spatial context.

In Chapter Three, I will discuss the methodological choices made, with a focus on my ethnographic (Johnstone, 2007) and netnographic (Kozinets, 2019) approaches, and the employed social constructionist ontology and an interpretivist epistemology. Chapter three will conclude with a reflection on the implications of the choices made.

In Chapter Four, I will provide a summary of each one of the papers that together make up my thesis.

Lastly, in Chapter Five, I will address the aim of my thesis and present the contributions. I will discuss social media as, first, a positive force that fuels the local place and facilitates online community building. Second, as a barrier that creates a disabling context through intrusive ties. Third, as an enabler that opens up opportunities and redefines social context and place. And lastly, as an amplifier that forms context by structuring local practices. These four perspectives together explain the force of social media. I will then discuss online embeddedness and ties, connecting them to how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in the entrepreneurial process. The chapter ends by considering practical implications, future research prospects, and reflections.

2. A contextualised view of entrepreneurship

During the process of writing this thesis, I have explored various perspectives on how social media influences the social and spatial contexts of the entrepreneurial process. In the articles, I have found it beneficial to employ perspectives related to embeddedness, ties, and structuration, to discuss communities, and the social and spatial contexts. All of which are interconnected with the study of entrepreneurship. Table 2 shows the different theoretical perspectives and when they are used in the four articles respectively.

Table 2. Overview of the theoretical framework in the four papers.

Papers	I	II	III	IV
Framework	Context Communities Embeddedness Structuration	Context Embeddedness Ties	Context Communities Structuration	Context Embeddedness

In this section, I present a contextual view of entrepreneurship, which suggests that entrepreneurship is influenced by the broader social, cultural, and historical contexts in which it takes place (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Johannisson, 2011; Baker and Welter, 2020). For this thesis, I view entrepreneurship as a social (e.g. Greve and Salaff, 2003; Anderson et al., 2012; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017), process of change (Steyaert and Hjorth, 2006), developing in context (Welter, 2011).

Firstly, perspectives on the entrepreneurial process have been developed from constructionist origins (e.g. Jack and Anderson, 2002; Anderson and

Smith, 2007; Steyaert, 2007), emphasising social aspects of this process. This thesis also employs the social constructionist approach, viewing entrepreneurial processes as operating within a social reality (Chell, 2000), that sets limits on choices of action possibilities and as involving attempts to respond to circumstances imposed by the surrounding social and spatial contexts. As such, entrepreneurship is a process that is embedded in a social context (Jack and Anderson, 2002). Thus, an individualistic view of entrepreneurship is challenged – I would instead assert that entrepreneurship is constructed through peoples' interactions and that it therefore can be better understood as a social phenomenon (Lindgren and Packendorff, 2009). Entrepreneurship has been described as strongly dependent on social interactions (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Johannisson, 2011). Anderson et al. (2012, p. 964) view entrepreneurship as "dynamic in bringing together, connecting, interrelated and complicated elements of both self and circumstance." Entrepreneurship is as such a socially situated and socially enacted process (James et al., 2022). It is deeply influenced by the social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which it takes place (Welter, 2011). Rather than viewing entrepreneurship as an individualistic pursuit, this perspective recognises that entrepreneurial activities are shaped by social interactions, networks, and collective dynamics.

The full application of the social constructionist perspective can, however, lead to the oversocialisation of entrepreneurship, focusing primarily on processes rather than the entrepreneurs themselves (Müller, 2016). This is where an understanding of entrepreneurial agency is valuable, since it emphasises the interaction between agents and context.

Investigating context is a way to understand the process of entrepreneurship (Welter et al., 2017). The concept of context helps us scrutinise different perspectives. For example, it is not only the social context that matters - also the spatial context can be investigated to make sense of the entrepreneurial process by including a perspective on the meaning and heritage of the surrounding location(s) (Korsgaard et al., 2015a). Especially for rural communities, a sense of place is important in the creation process, since identity, pride, and heritage all can play a central role in these communities (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2018).

Welter (2011) discussed contexts as business-related, institutional, social, and spatial; context thus encompasses the physical, social, economic, and political conditions that surround individuals and influence their actions. Within the realm of entrepreneurship studies, there has been a notable surge

in scholarly interest and focus placed on the business context (Baker and Welter, 2020). Scholars within the field have increasingly recognised that the success or failure of entrepreneurial ventures is intricately linked to the specific economic, social, cultural, and regulatory conditions in which they operate (Baker and Welter, 2020).

To delve deeper into a contextualised perspective on entrepreneurship, this thesis places significant emphasis on understanding the intricate relationship between social and spatial contexts.

The next section, 2.1, presents the social context. I present the theory of ties, which suggests that social relationships are formed through various types of ties, such as kinship ties, friendship ties, and work ties (Granovetter, 1973). Ties can be strong or weak, and they can influence entrepreneurship in different ways (Jack, 2005). Related to ties is the theory of embeddedness, which suggests that ties are embedded within broader social structures and institutions, i.e. the context. The role of embeddedness in shaping and sustaining entrepreneurship is crucial (Jack and Anderson, 2002), and embeddedness is a reoccurring concept in entrepreneurship studies (Korsgaard et al., 2022).

In section 2.2, I present the spatial context. I present theories on structure, place, and communities to discuss how individuals in places are linked through common interests, norms, and values. The theory of structuration suggests that social structures are not fixed but are constantly being reproduced and transformed through social action (Giddens, 1984). Places can also be viewed as continuously shaped by human interactions and the meanings attributed to them (Tuan, 1977).

2.1 Social context

Prior studies have noted the importance of the social context for entrepreneurship (e.g., Jack and Anderson, 2002). Steyaert (2007) views entrepreneurship as the development of a process, and Welter (2011) emphasises the importance of acknowledging the context surrounding the process. However, definitions of the social context vary in the literature, and it can be difficult to grasp the full extent of context.

Prior studies have explored social contexts through various lenses, such as those focused on networks, households, and families (Welter, 2011). These investigations aimed to analyse network structures, the prevalence and regularity of network connections, as well as the makeup and functions of

households and families. Other researchers view context as a kind of social capital in itself (Smith et al., 2017), often represented as the value embedded into the fabric of peoples' social connections or group dynamics (Gedajlovic et al., 2013).

For the purposes of this thesis, I view the social context as being constituted by ties (Granovetter, 1973), which are important in the processes of embedding (Korsgaard et al., 2022). Using the theories of ties and embeddedness to explore the social context in entrepreneurship constitutes a valuable approach that offers insights into the complex and multifaceted nature of entrepreneurial activities. This perspective draws heavily from sociological and network theories, and provides a nuanced understanding of how social relationships influences entrepreneurship.

2.1.1 Ties and Embeddedness

In this subsection, I will delve into the concepts of ties and embeddedness. Such a perspective on entrepreneurship implies that it emerges from its social environment, shaped by the interactions of individuals within a social context, and influenced by the surrounding social milieu (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011). When viewing entrepreneurship as a social process, we need to understand the social relations involved and how are they formed in relation to the context (i.e. the process of embedding). The level of embeddedness is dependent upon the ties. I will first discuss ties, then embeddedness, and lastly the relation between the two.

In Granovetter's seminal work (1973), he introduced a concept that has since become central to our understanding of social networks and their impact on individual behaviour: the distinction between strong and weak ties. These ties represent the varying degrees of connection which individuals have within their social networks, with strong ties characterised by frequent interactions. Granovetter's hypothesis has had far-reaching implications, particularly in the field of entrepreneurship research, where it has been instrumental in unravelling the intricate relationship between tie strength and resource accessibility (Jenssen and Koenig, 2002).

This fundamental idea of strong and weak ties has not only served as a theoretical cornerstone but has also had practical applications in discussions about how entrepreneurs receive support (Jack et al., 2004), the dynamics of startup formation (Klyver et al., 2012), and the critical role of social networks at different stages of business development (Klyver and Hindle, 2007).

More recently, Nordstrom et al. (2020) delved into Granovetter's later work to investigate entrepreneurs and their actions, often referred to as entrepreneuring, within its broader societal context. While Granovetter (1973) earlier highlighted the existence of strong and weak ties in social relations, the concept of embeddedness extends this understanding by examining the extent to which these ties are deeply intertwined within larger social institutions and structures (Jack and Anderson, 2002).

Embeddedness, contingent upon the depth of an individual's ties, emerges as an important factor influencing entrepreneurship. As stated by McKeever et al. (2015, p. 52), "embeddedness represents the nature, depth and extent of an individual's ties into environment and is typically perceived as a configuring element of business process." Embeddedness can also be viewed as an integral component of social and cultural frameworks (Vestrum, 2014), or as an enabler or barrier for entrepreneurship (Wigren-Kristoferson et al., 2022). As such, embeddedness not only opens up opportunities for action but also imposes certain boundaries (Jack and Anderson, 2002).

The influence of embeddedness on resource mobilisation and acquisition has been documented in various studies (see e.g. Ozdemir et al., 2016). Social embeddedness, for instance, enhances the likelihood of resource generation (Díaz García and Carter, 2009), whereas structural embeddedness facilitates access to distant resources and information (Ozdemir et al., 2016). Despite its significance, embeddedness has often been examined from a single-level perspective, with limited attention given to its multilevel aspects. However, ongoing efforts are being made to address this gap. Crick and Chaudhry (2010), for instance, highlight that transnational entrepreneurs can reap benefits from being embedded in multiple contexts, including both physical and virtual realms, enabling them to effectively leverage resources from their country of origin.

In Table 3, I illustrate the relationship between weak and strong ties and embeddedness. Since embeddedness is constituted by how individuals' social ties connect them to their context, I consider weak ties as crucial for the process of becoming embedded. The process of embeddedness is viewed as a collective process, with weak ties serving as initial steps for gaining access to larger social structures. Weak ties can evolve into established relationships over time. Conversely, I regard strong ties as a prerequisite for embeddedness. When individuals have well-established, deep relationships, they can be seen as part of larger social structures, thereby gaining access to

the information and resources associated with the context in which they are embedded.

Informal connections that introduce fresh insights and possibilities, such as business partnerships characterised by their distant, transactional, and emotionally detached nature, play a vital role in the process of embeddedness. These less intimate connections serve as bridges between disparate social circles, allowing individuals to tap into novel information and resources that are not readily accessible within their immediate social circles. These loose connections grant access to information and resources deeply ingrained within larger social frameworks and institutions.

Conversely, close-knit bonds that offer emotional support, like the strong, trust-based relationships one has with friends and family members, can be seen as a prerequisite for integration. These strong ties indicate the depth to which social relationships are embedded within the fabric of social structures and institutions. This observation underscores the significance of the social context in shaping interpersonal relationships and behaviours.

Table 3. The relation between Granovetter's ties and theory on embeddedness

	Between individuals	Collective
Weak	Casual relationship that provides new information and opportunities, e.g. market relationships, i.e. distant, cold, one-shot, non-affective ties.	Weak ties are important for the process of embedding. Weak ties enable bridging different social groups and connecting individuals to new resources and opportunities that are not available within their immediate social circles. These weak ties provide access to information and resources that are embedded within larger social structures and institutions.
Strong	Intimate relationships that provide emotional support, such as close, personal, or special relationships characterised by trust, often include ties with friends or family.	Strong ties can be viewed as the prerequisite for embeddedness. Strong ties refer to the extent to which social relations are embedded within social structures and institutions. It emphasises the role of social context in shaping social relations and behaviour.

2.1.2   Social media as social

Having outlined the social context, let us now explore what research say about the social nature of social media.

The "digital" can be described as *a total social fact* (Fish et al., 2011; Lury and Marres, 2015). The internet as we know it today touches upon "every aspect of organized human life", and can be seen as a "phenomen[on] which extends[s] to the whole of social life" (Mauss, 2005, p. 70, cited in Fish et al., 2011). This is why social media has become an increase in focus across different disciplines (Berg 2015).

In the field of information systems, research has taken a structuration perspective to "help reveal how technical systems [such as social media] can support or hinder human interaction" (Evans and Brooks, 2005, p. 215). Structuring can help us to explore how online and local social structures generate responses to environments - in other words, how context is constructed (Baker and Welter, 2020).

But talking about groups on social media as a single community can be misleading. Hannerz (2016) raises the point that social media can be seen as a sphere for online co-sociality, consisting of several parallel social movements rather than a single community.

With the expansion of social media use, the traditional boundaries between social spheres have disappeared (Berg, 2015), and in communication, we are now much less constrained by barriers related to time and space. Aslesen et al. (2019) raise the point that virtual spaces can both reinforce and create new linkages of knowledge. Because of this, the distinction between the geographical and the virtual becomes more blurred (Berg, 2015; Aslesen et al., 2019). Therefore, the internet cannot be seen as a placeless "cyberspace"; rather, we should acknowledge that it is used by various people, in real-world locations (Martin et al., 2000) as an extension of the material world, and that it enables a local place's social relations to stretch across the world. These social processes are important for understanding how changes due to digitalisation occur, instead of only describing outcomes in given localities (Fahmi and Savira, 2021).[1]

Zhao (2006) argues that social interaction yields a set of conditions that govern interpersonal contact in a given environment. Moreover, such an environment may be viewed as a combination of both the "contact situations" that directly affect a specific social encounter and the "zones of operation"

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[1] The text in 2.1.2 is partly retrieved from Study I (Appendix 1, para 2.2.) and is placed here to provide an overall picture of what is being studied.

that define the different segments of the lifeworld over time and space. Through the development of the internet, this environment has undergone substantial changes, resulting in (1) the creation of a new spatiotemporal zone - the zone of the "there and now", (2) a new means of communication - e-mails, and (3) a new social gathering place - the online social network (Zhao, 2006).

Birkbak and Carlsen (2016) have explored the notion that web algorithms function as gatekeepers for how and what we perceive on social media. By automating orderings, web algorithms prioritise issues and identify corresponding publics at the same time. As we navigate our environments in the digital age, web algorithms play a prominent role in our navigation (Birkbak and Carlsen 2016), and there is a connection between data and data-related emotions (Fussey and Roth, 2020). Data-related emotions occur when people make decisions or feel emotions based on the use of digital technologies. The use of social media platforms collects data from users while also affecting their emotional state, which can result in solidarity or social engagement between users (Fussey and Roth, 2020). It has been noted that social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter can evoke emotions such as love, affection, and empathy, or the opposite.

Having outlined the social context, let us now continue with discussing the spatial context.

2.2 Spatial context

The spatial context is used to discuss entrepreneurship in given places (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). However, definitions of the relevant spatial context vary in the literature. Often, it is referred to as geography or location (Zahra et al., 2014). Welter (2011) defines the spatial context as the sum of geographical environments; exploring the attributes of physical business locations encompasses a range of geographical environments, including countries, communities, neighbourhoods, industrial districts, and clusters. This examination can extend to evaluating the support infrastructure surrounding businesses, as well as the unique characteristics of local communities and regions (Welter, 2011). Anderson and Gaddefors (2016) view places as structural qualities that shape agency and are shaped by agency. As such, communities consist of people interacting and building connections in a given place.

For the purposes of this thesis, I view the spatial context in terms of structures (Giddens, 1984) in specific places (Tuan, 1977). Structures include norms, but also entail access to local resources (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016). Places are a form of object to which qualities, meaning, intimate experience and values are attached (Tuan, 1977; Korsgaard et al., 2015b). Using the perspective that the spatial context consists of established structures, including norms and access to resources, can offer several benefits; such a choice acknowledges that physical places are not just empty landscapes but are shaped by various social and economic factors. By considering both norms and resource access, it is possible to provide more contextually relevant analysis. This approach acknowledges that spatial contexts vary widely, and that what works in one place may not apply to another due to differences in the structures present in these places.

In many cases, individuals within a geographically bounded community share commonalities, such as historical backgrounds, cultural ties, collective identities, legal frameworks, and sometimes even socioeconomic status or religious affiliations, reflecting a form of *gemeinschaft* (Tönnies, 1957). In a recent study conducted by Haugh (2022), the significance of place in community entrepreneurship was investigated. Haugh's research demonstrated that in various locales, community initiatives are intimately intertwined with and shaped by the unique historical and spatial characteristics of their surroundings, forming a crucial component of community entrepreneurship. This finding extends the insights of scholars like Jack and Anderson (2002), who explored entrepreneurial embeddedness, community dynamics (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016), and the role of place (Anderson, 2015; McKeever et al., 2015). The individuals' local knowledge regarding the use of the landscape (physical, cultural and historical), as well as the local interest regarding well-being of residents and concern for the rural community, contribute to this organising process (Korsgaard et al., 2015a; Müller and Korsgaard, 2018).

Building on understandings of the intertwined relationships between individuals and their communities, I transition (in subsection 2.2.1 below) to the perspective of structuration theory, a framework that delves deeper into the dynamics of this interplay.

2.2.1   Structuration theory

Structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) offers a comprehensive framework for understanding the relationship between individuals and society. At its core, structuration theory argues that individuals both shape and are shaped by the social structures in which they are embedded.

Structuration in a local place refers to the process by which the social and physical elements of a specific geographic area are organised and interconnected, shaping the way in which individuals and communities within that place interact, behave, and make sense of their environment (Giddens, 1984).

According to Giddens, social structures are not external forces that dictate human behaviour, but are instead the result of ongoing interactions and practices. These structures exist in the form of rules, norms, institutions, and resources that provide the context for social life. At the same time, individuals engage in social practices that reproduce, transform, or challenge these structures. This interconnection can be referred to with the concept of recursive links (Welter, 2011).

The concept of "duality of structure" is central to structuration theory. It suggests that social structures are both the medium and the outcome of human actions. Individuals draw upon existing structures to guide their behaviour, yet their actions also contribute to the reproduction or alteration of these structures. Thus, social structures are not fixed or predetermined, but are continually shaped and reshaped through human agency. Structuration theory offers a nuanced perspective on the relationship between individuals and society, recognising the reciprocal influence between them. By considering how social structures and human agency interact, structuration theory provides a framework for analysing and explaining social phenomena.

With a basic definition of structuration outlined, I will now transition into another central concept for understanding the spatial context; place.

2.2.2   Place

Place is experienced through intimate interactions with surroundings (Tuan, 1977). A closely related concept, space, is broadly defined by Tuan (1977) as involving processes of movement and mobility. Place is intimately experienced through interactions with the surrounding environment, akin to an infant child's perception of their mother as a "safe place" (Tuan, 1977, in Korsgaard et al., 2015b). This dichotomy implies that space is more abstract, while places are imbued with qualities, meanings, intimate experiences, and

values. Places encompass localised material, social, and economic relations, making them unique and meaningful to those who have attachments to them (Korsgaard et al., 2015b).

The relationship between space and place is intricate. Increased movement in space has spurred growth in some areas, primarily urban centres, while other places face threats as capital, labour, resources, and information concentrate in central hubs, leaving peripheral regions depleted (Johnstone and Lionais, 2004).

Scholars emphasise that places are socially and materially constructed entities (Cresswell, 2006). Places are not static; they are continuously shaped by human interactions and the meanings attributed to them. These interactions define and redefine places, and can sometimes lead to conflicts over identities and values. A place is not merely a geographical location; it is shaped by the practices that occur within it and the relationships that engage with it (Korsgaard et al., 2015b). Consequently, the natural and material environment of places both enables and constrains localised practices. Thus, the recreation of places is a result of complex interrelations between social and material factors, rather than being solely determined by material factors.

For these reasons, it is interesting to consider "place" in order to understand how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in the entrepreneurial process. I will now (in subsection 2.2.3) discuss how social media and place have been discussed previously.

2.2.3   Social media and place

Contemporary research recognises that a physical location is inherently rooted in a specific geographic area but that it is also subject to interpretation, negotiation, and socialisation within online communities (Waite, 2020). The notion of digital place-making (Basaraba, 2021) conceptualises place as a relational construct, where place emerges from the constant interconnectedness, entanglement, and immersion of human beings in their surroundings (Seamon, 2012).

Terms like "net locality" (Gordon and Silva, 2011) aim to make sense of the fusion of digital information and online connections with local places. Online communities have the potential to enhance the adaptability of geographic communities by enabling entrepreneurs to tap into diverse and dispersed resources that may be present or dormant (Sankaran and Demangeot, 2017). Through online interactions, the spatial context becomes

mediated and materialised within digital realms (Lundgren and Johansson, 2017).

While most studies on digital media and place-making processes have centred on urban areas (Özkul and Humphreys, 2015), Lundgren and Johansson (2017) extended their examination to digital media in rural contexts. They uncovered the "co-construction of place" through discussions about offline events, where rural residents utilised online spaces to convene, exchange experiences, and recreate and affirm their rural identities. Consequently, online communities can be viewed as a social arena with both social and spatial characteristics, which I explore further in this thesis.

2.3   My theoretical framework

The theoretical framework outlined provides a view of entrepreneurship from a socialised perspective, emphasising the importance of social and spatial contexts. I acknowledge that entrepreneurship is not an individualistic endeavour, but a social phenomenon shaped by interactions, networks, and the surrounding environment.

The choice of framework entails challenging the individualistic view of entrepreneurship, asserting that it is constructed through peoples' interactions and that it should be understood as a social phenomenon. I emphasise the role of social interactions, networks, and collective dynamics in shaping entrepreneurial activities.

Social context is defined in terms of ties and embeddedness within social relationships and structures. The concept of strong and weak ties, introduced by Granovetter (1973), is highlighted as a key aspect of social context and resource accessibility. Embeddedness is explored as a critical factor influencing entrepreneurship, with strong ties indicating deeper integration into social structures. The influence of embeddedness on resource mobilisation and acquisition is discussed, emphasising its multidimensional aspects.

The spatial context is defined in terms of structures in place, encompassing norms and access to local resources. Places are described as socially and materially constructed entities, shaped by human interactions and the meanings attributed to them. The relationship between space and place is mentioned, with an emphasis on how places are continually shaped by practices and relationships.

Structuration theory, as developed by Giddens (1984), is also introduced as part of the framework for understanding the relationship between individuals and society. The concept of "duality of structure" is explained, emphasising that social structures are both influenced by and influence human actions. Structuration theory provides a nuanced perspective on the reciprocal influence between social structures and human agency.

This framework is developed for considering how social media influences the social and spatial contexts of the entrepreneurial process. It provides a foundation for investigating entrepreneurship as a social and spatially embedded phenomenon, and integrates various theoretical perspectives and concepts to offer an understanding of the complex dynamics at play in entrepreneurial activities. This framework sets the stage for a comprehensive analysis of how social and spatial contexts shape entrepreneurial processes and outcomes.

In Table 4, I present entrepreneurship in terms of engagement with the social and spatial context (Baker and Welter, 2020). I define the social context as consisting of ties (Granovetter, 1973) and embeddedness (Jack and Anderson, 2002). I define the spatial context as constituted by structures (Giddens, 1984; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016) and place (Tuan, 1977).

This framework, taken together, helped me develop an understanding of my empirical material, in order to achieve the aims of this study.

Table 4. Theoretical framework: Exploring entrepreneurship from the perspectives of social and spatial contexts.

Entrepreneurship	
Social context	*Spatial context*
Ties (Granovetter, 1973) Embeddedness (Jack and Anderson, 2002)	Structures (Giddens, 1984; Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016) Place (Tuan, 1977)

3. Methodology

This chapter is organised into five sub-sections, each contributing to an understanding of the research methodology employed in this study.

The initial sub-section delves into the rationale behind selecting qualitative methods and adopting an inductive approach, shedding light on the underlying arguments for these choices.

The following section is dedicated to present the chosen sample. Within this section, I elucidate the methodology used in selecting the specific locations and online communities under study. Furthermore, I explore the impact of the 2020-2022 pandemic on the research process.

The third sub-section takes readers through the systematic steps involved in collecting the research material.

Moving forward, the fourth section of this chapter focuses on the analysis undertaken, offering an overview of the analytical procedures and techniques employed to derive findings from the collected material.

Lastly, in the concluding section, I present reflections on the research quality and ethical considerations regarding the chosen methodology.

As each research study has its own distinct methods chapter, I will in this section summarise the most important underpinning for the study as a whole. Information on the methods used in each study is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. An overview of the methods used in the studies

	I	II	III	IV
Approach	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative	Qualitative
Fieldwork	Ethnographic and netnographic	Ethnographic and netnographic	Netnographic	Ethnographic and netnographic
Empirics	A group of local entrepreneurs and a Facebook group	A rabbit farmer and an animal rights activist Facebook group	Two Facebook groups	Four Facebook groups and local entrepreneurs
Organised with	NVivo	NVivo	NVivo	NVivo
Analysis technique	Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis	Thematic analysis

3.1   Arguments for the selected methods

This study focuses on *understanding* a phenomenon, in accordance with a social constructionist approach. The aims of such an approach contrast with for example prediction (often central in positivist and neo-positivist approaches) emancipation (in critical, feminist/gendered studies, or action research), or deconstruction (in postcolonial analysis, discourse analysis, or post-modernist studies). When focusing on understanding, common-sense knowledge is interesting to discover, since it can be viewed as constituting the very fabric of social meaning (Berger & Luckmann 1967).

This study takes a social constructionist stance ontologically, referring to reality as subjective and mediated by our senses. It is when we engage with objects and different events taking place in the world that we produce meaning (Crotty, 1998). Epistemologically, I consider meaning (or knowledge) as subjectively constructed in interaction between our senses and the world. It is not discovered. This is where I position myself in the interpretivistic strand.

Interpretivism is based on the premise that the researcher is part of the research, and interprets data. The interpretivist accepts that reality and knowledge are not objective, but rather influenced by the people within a

particular context. While positivistic researchers generalise their findings, an interpretivist can contribute to an "analytical generalisation", but not to subject-generalisation (Thomas, 2011).

My ontological stance considers reality as subjective and as mediated by our senses, and epistemologically views knowledge as subjectively constructed through interaction. Qualitative research methods align well with this perspective because they allow researchers to explore and interpret subjective experiences and meanings (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007). The users of these methods recognise that knowledge is constructed by individuals within their unique contexts. As such, there is ontological and epistemological alignment in the present thesis.

Furthermore, the interpretive strand of research acknowledges that researchers are not detached observers but are actively involved in interpreting data. Qualitative research embraces subjectivity and recognises that the researcher's perspective inevitably influences the research process. This aligns with the idea that reality and knowledge are not objective but are shaped by the people within a particular context. Qualitative research methods excel at delving into the contextual elements that shape individuals' meanings and actions.

In research regarding entrepreneurship in context, where social activity is central (see e.g. Korsgaard et al., 2015a; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2018; Nordstrom et al., 2020), qualitative methods offer a means to delve deeply into the experiences and perspectives of the individuals involved.

As argued, the selected qualitative and inductive research approach is well-suited to the goals and philosophical underpinnings of the thesis. This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of subjective experiences and contextual factors, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon in question.

3.2 The cases

In this section, I provide the reasoning behind my choices. I start by arguing for selecting a case study and offering definitions for "rural" and "place." Following that, I outline the criteria used in the selection of cases. I then present the respective cases. In order to answer how social media influences the social and spatial contexts of the entrepreneurial process, I have conducted a case study. Case study may incorporate a number of methods,

but does not necessarily constitute a method in itself (Thomas, 2011). Stake (2005, p. 443) puts it this way:

> Case study is not a methodological choice but a choice of what is to be studied […] by whatever methods we choose to study the case. We could study it analytically or holistically, entirely by repeated measures or hermeneutically, organically or culturally, and by mixed methods—but we concentrate, at least for the time being, on the case.

My research aim - how social media is influencing entrepreneurial processes - was the *object* of the research, while the *subject* was the empirical situations I have selected: the library revolt, the rabbit farm and the grocery store. Each one is quite different from the others, but they all present examples of how social media is used in the entrepreneurial process, i.e. the object. So, using the typology developed by Thomas (2011), this thesis is a multiple case study possessing both subject and object. It involves key examples of how social media influences the social and spatial contexts of the entrepreneurial process.

I have selected two rural places for my study. Rural areas often have smaller and more tightly-knit communities compared to urban environments. This sense of community plays a significant role in how people experience a place. The social interactions and relationships formed within these communities become intertwined with the rural landscape, affecting how residents and visitors perceive and connect with the place (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016). Therefore, I find it especially interesting to have the rural environment as an empirical focus for this dissertation exploring the social and spatial context in entrepreneurship. Typically, "rural" is defined using quantitative criteria such as population density, distance from urban areas, infrastructure availability, service density, or agricultural production (Nelson et al., 2021). Nevertheless, in this thesis, I adopted a different perspective on "rural", and treated it as a social and spatial concept, consistent with the approach of Korsgaard et al. (2015). The perspective on "rural" as a social and spatial concept adds depth and richness to the understanding of rural areas, allowing for a more context-sensitive analysis.

In this thesis, "place" is defined as experienced through intimate interactions with surroundings, as proposed by Tuan (1977). This concept emphasises the importance of the local environment and how individuals connect with and experience a particular location.

When selecting cases, I defined the following criteria: 1) the geographical place should be limited in size (Anderson, 2000); 2) it should be easy to access (Neergaard and Ulhøi, 2007); 3) there should be a distinct social media activity that could be directly linked to the cases.

The social media platform I selected was Facebook, due to its vast political and practical relevance. 2,7 billion people in the world are connected to Facebook, and it is increasingly being referred to as an "infrastructure", with its main contributions actually including personal administration, rather than *only* a social medium (Bucher, 2021). Groups on Facebook were selected due to their role in community building (Bucher, 2021), and so as to make a practical selection of material.

The selection of Facebook groups was based on three criteria: 1) the Facebook groups were originally created and joined by people from the selected geographic regions. This is particularly useful for studying how social media influences entrepreneurship in particular places, addressing the spatial aspect of my research. 2) The Facebook groups are connected to the specific organisation selected for the case. 3) The Facebook groups should be public, meaning that anyone on or off Facebook can see who is in the group and what they post. I only selected public groups, since if members in a closed group write something in confidence in that group, I believe it would be ethically questionable to use that information in research. Therefore, this thesis is based only on openly available Facebook data.

The first case, Ravenville, was selected due to the intriguing story about the so-called library revolt there, its limited size, easy accessibility, and distinct patterns of social media activity directly linked to the case. Ravenville is situated in mid-Sweden, in the "Swedish rust belt", a region characterised by its sizable iron and (later) steel industry from the 1600s to the mid-1900s. It is a place limited in size (roughly 200 inhabitants), which makes it convenient to study (Anderson, 2000). In study one, two Facebook groups are selected in Ravenville; one for the entire village and one specifically for the library revolt (see Table 6).

The second case, the rabbit farm in Larkville (fictive name), was selected on the basis of some adjusted criteria. After selecting Ravenville as the case for my first article and delving into the positive aspects of social media's role, I was compelled to investigate its potential negative effects. This was a fourth criterion for selecting the case for article 2. This led me to connect with a rabbit farmer whose story had garnered attention in the Swedish media, due to negative experiences of social media presence. The rabbit

farmer lives in Larkville, about two hours' drive from Ravenville, outside of a small town of roughly 4 500 inhabitants. Larkville is limited in size, easy to access, and distinct social media activity patterns directly tied to the case. The case of the Rabbit farm is connected to one Facebook group and one page; one page for the business and one group for animal rights activists (see Table 6).

For the third case, I returned to Ravenville. While closely monitoring the library revolt's unfolding events for article 1, I also observed the emergence of a grocery store development within the community. This coincided with the onset of the pandemic, which presented challenges for both my ethnographic research and the grocery store's business development. Despite these limitations, I recognised that the grocery store's growth was an intriguing example of entrepreneurship in an environment with limited opportunities for social interaction. Consequently, I decided to include the grocery store as the third case, to offer a perspective on the influence of social media in shaping entrepreneurship in Ravenville. The third case was then selected due to Ravenville's limited size, easy accessibility, and due to the distinct social media activity patterns directly linked to the case. The grocery store is connected to two Facebook groups; one for the village and one specifically for the grocery store (see Table 6).

The purposeful selection (Neergaard, 2007) described above facilitated the development of theoretical insights within the research process (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009).

Table 6. The selected Facebook groups

	Ravenville village group	Ravenville library group	Ravenville grocery store group	Rabbit farmer, business page	Animal rights activists' group
No. of members*	1700	1200	764	2000 likes	2000
Started in	2009	2015	2021	2013	2017

This number is not static, but changing as members are leaving and joining the groups.

3.3   The collection

As I am interested in how social media influences the social and spatial contexts of the entrepreneurial process, I needed methods for collecting material both from the places selected and from Facebook groups. For this reason, the focus was to follow an ethnographic (Johnstone, 2007) procedure, with a focus on interviews and focus groups. Additionally, I saw the need for pursuing netnographic (Kozinets, 2019) work as well. Table 7 presents an overview of data collection modes and purposes, based on the framework of Bruce (2007). The purpose is to collect empirical material step by step, and to explore entrepreneurship both in localities and online.

Table 7. Collection and purposes of empirics

Collection Method	Specific Research Purpose
Observation	Create an understanding of selected places.
Interviews	To explore the entrepreneurial process in given places.
Netnography	To explore the entrepreneurial process online.

I will now continue with presenting the steps in collecting material through the ethnographic method in 3.3.1, and then through the netnographic method in 3.3.2.

3.3.1   Ethnography

Ethnographic research designs embrace a cyclical approach to investigation, which aligns with ethnography's adaptable method of collecting data. This stands in contrast to a linear design, which adheres to a predetermined path and demands a more rigid approach to data collection (Johnstone, 2007). Or as Brewer (2000, p. 6) puts it:

> Ethnography is the study of people in naturally occurring settings or 'fields' by methods of data collection which capture their social meanings and ordinary activities, involving the researcher participating directly in the setting, if not also in the activities, in order to collect data in a systematic manner but without meaning being imposed on them externally.

As proposed by Hammersley (1998), I have conducted a research process that involved studying human behaviour in natural, everyday contexts, avoiding any artificial or experimental conditions imposed by the researcher. My primary method of material collection was through interviews and observation. To maintain flexibility and prevent the imposition of predefined categories on peoples' words and actions, I employed a semi-structured approach to data collection.

Interviews
Following the guidance presented by Johnstone (2007), I conducted semi-structured interviews. In the initial interview, I began by explaining my purpose and how I intended to use the interview data. I also discussed the measures in place to ensure confidentiality and anonymity, seeking explicit permission for tape recording and note-taking.

To establish rapport and ease the subject into conversation, I started with general background questions, allowing them to comfortably engage with simpler inquiries.

When addressing the primary topic of interest, I crafted broad and open-ended questions, such as "Tell me the story of...," avoiding leading questions that might unintentionally bias responses. Instead of asking, "When you said... did you mean...," I opted for more neutral prompts like "What did you mean when you said..."

To delve deeper into respondents' answers, I used probes strategically, prompting them for specific examples or further elaboration. I also recognised the power of silence during the interview, at times allowing moments of quiet to encourage the subject to share more insights.

Towards the end of the interview, I thoughtfully closed by asking, "Is there anything further you would like to tell me?" This provided the respondents with an opportunity to add any additional information or thoughts.

After the interview, I diligently reviewed my recordings or notes, filling in any gaps and documenting my own impressions. The transcripts were

imported into NVivo for further analysis. Below in figure 1, I show an example of the *ad verbatim* transcripts imported into NVivo.

Interview Rabbit farm

[00:00:00] **Josefina:** [...] Men om vi bara börjar den här gården, den här platsen. Hur kom du hit till att börja med?

[00:00:20] **Farmer:** Det kan jag faktiskt berätta. Jag gick i skolan när jag var liten, så bodde jag inne i ett villaområde och då var det så mycket barn i den årskullen, så hälften av dem som bodde där fick lov att gå i skolan här ute på landet och jag gick där. Och då åkte vi skolbuss och skolbussen gick förbi här ute., och jag tyckte liksom att det här var den finaste platsen på hela jorden, så har ju detta hus här omkring. i är säkert i 20 år innan jag hittade det här, nej inte 20, det ska inte säga, men i alla fall i kanske 15 år innan jag hittar den här platsen. Så bara blev det så.

[00:01:02] **Josefina:** Vad roligt!

[00:01:03] **Farmer:** Ja, det var verkligen kärlek vid första ögonkastet, och jag var ju mycket här, en av mina klasskompisar bodde ju här det faktiskt här i det här huset. Det var en kille så vi lekte inte. Men men ändå. Så var det!

[00:01:22] **Josefina:** När var det du hittade det här huset, vilket år?

[00:01:24] **Farmer:** Jag flyttade hit 2003 och då var jag.trettio då när jag flyttade hit. Kan det stämma? ja, det gör det. . ,Så kan det göra. och jag hade letat hus typ sedan jag var liten , jag tjatade på mamma och pappa till att vi skulle köpa en bondgård, och vi var,. Vi är var väl och titta på några också, men det var liksom inte deras grej. nej inte lika mycket som min grej. Så sen flytta jag hit då.

Figure 1. Ad verbatim transcripts on Swedish imported into NVivo

Observation

Ethnography also represents a research approach distinguished by its extensive fieldwork, in which the researcher frequently becomes deeply engaged as an observer (Johnstone, 2007). This involvement often extends over time, resulting in the creation of a comprehensive and intricate narrative documenting the researcher's exploration of a specific social milieu or cultural context (Johnstone, 2007).

During my research in the field, I wrote field notes to capture my observations and reflections. These field notes served as a record of my experiences and findings. I recorded the location, date, and time of each observation or interaction. The observations was conducted so that I could create an understanding of the place. I noted contextual factors that might have influenced the situation. I included my own thoughts, emotions, and interpretations as an observer. The observations also included casual conversations with residents in Ravenville.

3.3.2 Netnography

Because of the Covid-19 pandemic, I was unable to engage in traditional ethnographic fieldwork to a full extent during the writing of my thesis. However, I found the netnographic method to be invaluable in this situation and for the stated aim. Netnography allowed me to study and understand how social media influences the social and spatial aspects in entrepreneurship without the need for physical presence or direct in-person interactions.

Through netnography, I could analyse and interpret online interactions, discussions, and behaviours within the digital realm, providing valuable insights into the influence of social media on entrepreneurship. This approach offered an alternative and effective means of conducting research when traditional ethnographic methods were not feasible due to the pandemic's limitations. I will now continue with presenting my netnographic procedures.

While previous research is connected to a specific setting, this study also includes a "netnographic" (Kozinets, 2015) approach by adopting the participant-observational approach and taking online interactions as fieldwork. This makes it possible to pursue cultural contextualising of online data, based primarily on the observation of text in selected social media outlets.

Social media constitute a powerful force, influencing contemporary societies' politics, routines, and power distribution (Kozinets, 2019). As we spend more time and make more connections on the internet, we leave a trail of "digital bread crumbs" (Aiden and Michel, 2013), constituting a personal historical record of what and how we have communicated. What we leave online when surfing the web are online traces that reflect our social interactions online. All these online traces are an expression of our sociality in the 21st century and show a change in how we communicate, coordinate and perceive our reality (Berg, 2015).

When we approach social media with a netnographic method, we want to explore the "social systems of shared meaning" (Kozinets, 2019, p. 15) that we can view online, which goes hand in hand with the social constructionist understanding of entrepreneurship as a social process. It is the interplay between the local change mechanisms of entrepreneurship on the one hand, and online social systems as a part of entrepreneurship on the other, that is of interest here. This also reflects how we socially construct our knowledge and experience online (see e.g. Xun and Reynolds, 2010; Lin et al., 2018). The social media landscape opens a window to social spheres and we can see a "bundle of potentials" (Kozinets, 2020, p. 416) that can be activated, with concrete economic, social, and political implications.

For this study, the NCapture plugin for Nvivo was used in order to capture the online data. The full posts, links, images, reactions and comments are documented, but the identities of individuals connected to the online material are not captured in the extracted data. NCapture is a free web-browser extension for Chrome that facilitates the collection of web content for importing into NVivo. Material from the Facebook groups could be extracted as datasets. The resulting NCapture files (.nvcx) not only contain the captured content but also store metadata, including URLs, capture timestamps, descriptions, memos, and coding information specified during capture.

When approaching the Facebook groups, I followed six steps: I opened the desired web content in my browser, clicked the NCapture button located at the top of my browser, selected the appropriate capture type based on the content I was viewing, reviewed and adjusted the file name, assigned codes to categorise the content, and finally clicked "Capture" to save the content as an NCapture file (.nvcx) for import into NVivo. Subsequently, I imported the captured content into NVivo.

In Figure 2, I show an example of how the datasheet can look when importing it into NVivo. Every post gets a unique post ID, but there are no identities included. The datasheet shows when the post was created, as well as the number of likes. In the rows below the original post, the comments are included with metadata regarding likes and shares.
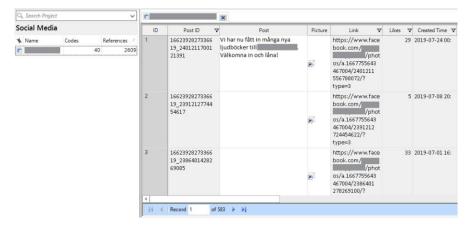
Figure 2. Screenshot from Nvivo. The dataset is generated from NCapture. Some names are removed in the screenshot for privacy reasons. In the example above, we see row 1 as an original post. Rows 2 and 3 are comments connected to the post. The content of the comments are further on right in the sheet.

As shown above, it is possible to attain a large volume of data using this approach. The challenge is to see what is important for what one is studying. Therefore, I selected relevant keywords when going through the material. However, for the grocery store group and library group, I included all posts and comments, as I perceived the groups to be interesting as a whole for understanding developments.

3.3.3 Summary

With the steps presented above, I have collected 1 095 posts. This data, in combination with the interviews, constitutes the material used in this thesis. It is the basis on which I develop an understanding of how social media influence the social and spatial contexts of the entrepreneurial process.

Table 8 summarises the material included in this thesis. In the first case, the library revolt in Ravenville, I conducted interviews with three respondents and audio-recorded the interviews, which I later transcribed verbatim. Additionally, I took field notes and pictures during observations of the library. Within the library's Facebook group, I analysed a total of 538 posts to gain insights into the community's interactions and discussions.

In the second case, the rabbit farm in Larkville, I conducted a two-hour semi-structured interview with the farmer. Similarly, I audio-recorded the interview and transcribed it verbatim, while also taking field notes. In the

Facebook group of animal rights activists, I examined 340 posts, focusing on keywords such as "rabbit", "farmer", "Anna" (representing her real name), and "the farm." It is worth noting that no posts were captured and analysed on the farmer's Facebook page, as they had been removed, because of the threats and harassment by which she had been targeted.

For the third case, the grocery store in Ravenville, I collected field notes and engaged in discussions with residents. Within the Facebook group of the village, I delved into 112 posts, concentrating on keywords like "store" "goods", "market", and "grocer* (*y/ies)" within the business-oriented Facebook group, I analysed all 105 posts to gain an understanding of the community dynamics and interactions in that specific context.

Table 8. Overview of the material collected.

Case	Ethnography	Netnography
The library	Interviews with three respondents Audio recordings and verbatim transcripts Field notes	*FB group of the library* Full set of posts in the group: 538
The rabbit farm	Semi-structured interview Audio recordings and verbatim transcripts Field notes	*FB group animal rights activists* 340 posts analysed Keywords: rabbit*; Farmer; Anna (represents her real name); The farm *FB page business* 0 posts analysed *(removed by the farmer)*
The grocery store	Field notes and discussions with residents	*FB group village* Keywords: Store; Goods; Market; Grocer* (*y/ies). Number of analysed posts: 112 *FB group business* Full set of posts in the group: 105

The materials, including transcripts and social media data, were imported into NVivo, as illustrated in Figure 3. In this figure, number one denotes interviews and the identification of localised Facebook groups for exploration. Number 2 corresponds to transcripts and the process of using NCapture for downloading, which transformed the materials into a format suitable for my analysis. Number 3 represents the amalgamation of materials from both methods within a single project in NVivo. Each article is allocated its own distinct project in NVivo, enabling me to code and follow the analysis procedures. The subsequent section, 3.4, will delve into the presentation of the steps involved in my analysis.

Figure 3. A graphical illustration of the material collection.

3.4 Analysing the material

In this section I present how I have analysed the material. I have used inductive coding and thematic analysis for all four studies. In addition, I have used temporal bracketing analysis in study 3 as a prior step. I will for this reason go into the details regarding thematic analysis and briefly discuss temporal bracketing analysis.

I adopted an inductive coding approach in the development of this thesis. This method proves most valuable when conducting exploratory studies or when there are no readily available theoretical concepts to guide the exploration of the subject under investigation (Skjott Linneberg and

Korsgaard, 2019). Systematic coding procedures empower the inductive researcher to maintain transparency and provide credible interpretations of the empirical data (Gioia et al., 2013). When employing inductive coding, it is common to create multiple codes, often characterised by their precision and specificity, which is advantageous for capturing the intricate and diverse nature of the data.

In the initial phase of coding, I started with a descriptive coding approach within the first cycle. Subsequently, these initial codes underwent a second cycle of coding, where higher-level categories were developed based on the initial set of codes, aligning with the methods advocated by Gioia et al. (2013). In the second-cycle coding, I furthered my analysis with pattern coding, exploring patterns that emerged across the codes from the first cycle. Based on the cycles of coding, I continued with developing themes. A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question, and represents some level of patterned response or meaning within the material (Braun and Clarke, 2006). As I progressed in the coding process towards higher-level categories, I found it beneficial to draw upon existing theories and concepts related to my research objectives. The themes were then developed into a coherent story (Saldaña, 2015) and presented in the separate articles. Table 9 shows an overview of my process. This systematic approach ensured that the material was rigorously analysed, resulting in the development of meaningful themes and a coherent story that could be effectively shared through separate articles.

Table 9. Phases of the analysis

Step	Phase	Description of the process
1.	*Initial descriptive coding*	In the initial phase of coding, I began with an inductive, descriptive coding approach within the first cycle.
2.	*Second cycle coding: Patterns*	I developed higher-level categories. I engaged in pattern coding to explore and identify patterns that emerged across the codes from the first cycle.
3.	*Theme development*	I proceeded to develop themes based on the cycles of coding.
4.	*Integration of theories and concepts*	I found it beneficial to draw upon existing theories. This integration helped ground the study within the existing literature.
5.	*Story development and presentation*	The developed themes were then transformed into a coherent story and were presented in separate articles.

The process presented above was accomplished with the help of NVivo. All the material was imported into NVivo (as presented in section 3.3). Below in figure 4, I show an example of nodes developed in the process. All content captured was in Swedish - however, when coding, some words were kept in Swedish for capturing the full nuance, while some, such as those shown below, were in English since I found it useful to use them as concepts in coding.

⊟ ◯ Place	2	396
⊟ ◯ Social	2	192
⊟ ◯ Social	1	186
◯ Encouragement	1	146
◯ Engagement	1	35
◯ Networks	1	5
⊟ ◯ Spatial	1	196
◯ Geographical place	1	173
◯ History	1	7
◯ Place in decline	1	6
◯ Rural	1	10

Figure 4. Example of codes in Nvivo

I believe that coding facilitated a deeper exploration of the material and assisted in the generation of analytical ideas (Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). The goal was to segment and then to abstract the material at a higher level (Gehman et al., 2018). Further, the process outlined above was instrumental in understanding contexts (Welter, 2011), which is the overall aim of this dissertation.

As for study 3, it also included an element of a temporal bracketing analysis as the initial step (Langley, 1999). This method involved dividing the material into distinct periods to analyse how actions in one period influenced the subsequent ones. This division allowed for the creation of a cohesive narrative. The netnographic method provided not only the content but also the timing (time stamps) of events in the dataset, ensuring accuracy in establishing event sequences. Three phases emerged in the grocery store

process: brainstorming, mobilisation, and realisation. Brainstorming involved generating ideas and exploring possibilities, mobilisation focused on gathering resources and preparing for action, and realisation encompassed implementing plans or ideas. These stages played pivotal roles in the overall process, contributing to project success or problem resolution. The phases were interrelated, with some events occurring at the intersection of two periods. Subsequently, coding became a core element of processing the material, following Saldaña (2015). An inductive process was then employed in the first coding cycle, emphasising ongoing actions, interactions, and emotions in response to situations or problems (Corbin and Strauss, 2008). Pattern coding, which identified emergent themes and explanations across the material, was also used, following the steps presented in Table 9.

I have now presented the steps in the research process, and will continue with discussing the quality of the research.

3.5   Research quality

To assess the quality of research is a challenging task, particularly within the realm of business administration; the ongoing debate concerning rigor and relevance, both within academia and in society at large, adds complexity to any such assessment.

Numerous methods exist for considering the excellence of qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1986; Wigren, 2007; Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2018). Nonetheless, there exists no widely accepted consensus on quality standards (Wigren, 2007). For researchers operating within the interpretative paradigm of inquiry and adhering to the belief that "[t]he qualitative researcher is not an objective, authoritative, politically neutral observer standing outside and above the text" (Denzin and Lincoln 2000, p. 1049), other methods than standardised ones are required to address quality in qualitative research.

Drawing on an interpretative perspective (Golden-Biddle and Locke, 1993), influenced by Berger and Luckmann (1967) as well as Morgan and Burrell (1979), I posit that the quality of an ethnographic study hinges on its trustworthiness, which, in turn, is contingent on its authenticity, plausibility, and criticality, as suggested by Wigren (2007). Ultimately, the purpose of social constructionist research is to comprehend how individuals within a social group, as they engage in social processes, bring forth their distinct

realities and imbue them with significance; in this approach, the central point of inquiry revolves around the exploration of meaning (Rosen, 1991).

Discussing research quality within the framework as presented by Wigren (2007) aligns with the fundamental purpose of social constructionist research, where the purpose is to comprehend the construction of meaning in social contexts and the authentic experiences of individuals within these contexts. In this thesis, I have therefore chosen to discuss research quality within the framework presented by Wigren (2007), in terms of authenticity, plausibility and criticality. These three criteria are held to be "salient and specific criteria of the 'convincingness' of qualitative research" (Alsharari and Al-Shboul, 2019, p. 44), and serve as a means for the researcher to be transparent towards readers in terms of the credibility of the research process (Wigren, 2007). The three criteria are primarily used for discussing quality of ethnographic methods. As this thesis also include materials analysed through netnographic methods, I have chosen to discuss quality within this framework as well. Below, I present a discussion in respect to each of the three selected quality criteria in turn.

3.5.1 Authenticity

A text is considered authentic when readers can discern that the researcher has immersed themselves in the field and sincerely shares their first-hand experiences, acquired through active observation and active participation in the daily life of that environment (Wigren, 2007).

Social constructionist research emphasises understanding how individuals within a social group bring forth their distinct realities. Authenticity is essential in this context as it ensures that researchers capture and represent the genuine experiences, perspectives, and narratives of the individuals being studied. Authenticity implies that researchers need to establish a close connection with their subjects, fostering trust and open communication.

My ethnographic approach involves immersion in the field, through interviews, field notes and observations. This demonstrates a genuine effort to understand the context deeply. The use of audio recordings, verbatim transcripts, and field notes contribute to the richness and authenticity of the research by capturing the real voices and experiences of the participants.

I view authenticity in netnography as the extent to which the data collected from online sources accurately represent the experiences, opinions, and behaviours of the online community being studied.

I have also considered the ethical aspects of collecting data from online communities. Respecting the privacy and consent of online participants is vital to maintaining the authenticity of the data and so as to adhere to ethical research practices. As I mentioned in section 3.3, all identities are removed when downloading the material, so that no violation of privacy occurred.

By collecting a large volume of online data (1 095 posts) and integrating it with interviews, I aimed at developing a comprehensive understanding of how social media influences the social and spatial contexts of the entrepreneurial process, further enhancing the authenticity of the findings.

3.5.2 Plausibility

Plausibility is about bridging the gap between empirical observations and theoretical insights (Wigren, 2007). High-quality netnographic and ethnographic research should present findings that are not only grounded in real-life experiences but also offer theoretical insights that make sense. Plausibility ensures that the research contributes meaningfully to existing knowledge.

The plausibility of research findings is vital in social constructionist research because it deals with the subjective and interpretive nature of social phenomena. Research must be plausible to be considered valuable. Plausibility ensures that the interpretations and constructions of meaning made by the researcher are grounded in empirical material. Plausibility indicates that the conclusions drawn from the research are rooted in the experiences and perspectives of the participants, making them credible.

My systematic data analysis techniques, such as coding and thematic analysis, help in organising and interpreting the data in a way that is coherent and theoretically meaningful. This contributes to the plausibility of the theoretical insights derived from the material.

I have explored my material with relevant theoretical frameworks (e.g., social constructionist understanding of entrepreneurship) to ensure that the findings make sense within the existing body of knowledge and add to the discussion.

I have chosen to apply plausibility in netnography as relating to the logical and coherent interpretation of the data collected from online sources.

Data analysis techniques, such as my thematic analysis, can help ensure that the interpretations of online data are plausible. It is essential to maintain transparency in the analysis process, as presented in section 3.4 and in the included studies separately.

3.5.3 Criticality

Criticality means that the text offers its readers the possibility to take a step back and challenge taken-for-granted assumptions (Wigren, 2007).

Social constructionist research focuses on exploring meaning and the processes through which individuals construct their realities (Crotty, 1998). Criticality is crucial because it encourages researchers to engage in reflexive and critical analysis of their own perspectives and potential biases (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2011). Being critical allows researchers to acknowledge their positionality and the influence of their own beliefs and values on observations made and conclusions drawn. This self-awareness helps in producing research that is more objective and impartial.

My use of qualitative coding techniques and thematic analysis allows for a nuanced exploration of various factors, including institutional rules, social hierarchies, and individual agency, which adds to the criticality of the research through pertaining to emerging dynamics. By addressing negative aspects of social media's impact on entrepreneurship and exploring the relationship between the local and online environments, I am challenging assumptions and shedding light on potential drawbacks and complexities.

Alvesson and Sköldberg (2018) claim that it is pragmatically fruitful to assume the existence of a reality beyond the researcher's egocentric community (paradigms, consciousness, text, rhetorical manoeuvring), and that we as researches should be able to say something insightful about this reality. By combining ethnographic and netnographic approaches, and by addressing both positive and negative aspects of social media's influence on entrepreneurship, I explore taken-for-granted assumptions in entrepreneurship and especially challenge the notion that social and spatial contexts would primarily be connected to place.

I also view criticality in netnography as the researcher's ability to critically analyse and question the data, and the interpretations made. Throughout the process, I have been reflecting on my own biases, perspectives, and preconceptions that might influence the interpretations. Being aware of potential biases and addressing them is essential for criticality.

3.5.4   Ethical considerations

Ethical considerations are crucial in any research endeavour, as they ensure that the research is conducted in a responsible and morally sound manner. The selected methods have both strengths and weaknesses in relation to ethical considerations. Below, I present a discussion on ethics in relation to my selected methods.

Ethnography

Ethnographers face a challenge in defining the boundaries of informed consent; this complexity arises not from a desire for covert research but from the inherent nature of ethnographic studies (Atkinson, 2009). Ethnography's value lies in its unpredictability; if the outcomes were entirely foreseeable, there would be little point in conducting the research. The strength of ethnography lies in its potential to uncover unexpected, critical insights about the subject, which cannot be planned. Nevertheless, an ethical dimension must be an integral component of the foundation of the research process, starting from the initial formulation of the research problem and extending through to the interpretation and dissemination of research results (Hesse-Biber and Leavy, 2006).

With the above discussion, I have chosen the following questions as a starting point for considering ethics regarding my ethnographic method. First, is there only minimal risk of harm? Second, are the integrity and the autonomy for research subjects adequately secured? Third, is the method adequate? And fourth, is the knowledge produced relevant enough? I will now present my thoughts on these questions.

Is there only minimal risk of harm? From the very outset, I recognised the importance of informed consent and transparency. I began each interview by clearly explaining the purposes of the research and how I intended to use the data gathered. I took the time to discuss the measures in place to ensure confidentiality. Seeking explicit permission for tape recording and note-taking was a crucial step in respecting the participants' autonomy and safeguarding their privacy, which suggests an acceptable level of ethical consideration in data collection.

Are the integrity and the autonomy for research subjects adequately secured? I took measures to ensure confidentiality and anonymity during interviews. The use of open-ended questions and probes allowed interviewees to express themselves freely. I also recognised the power of silence during the interview process, allowing moments of quiet to encourage

participants to reflect and share additional insights voluntarily. These approaches respected the participants' agency and ensured that their voices were heard, as suggested by Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2006).

Is the method adequate? The methods involved interviews and observation in a natural, everyday setting. I found the use of semi-structured interviews and field notes suitable for the ethnographic approach employed, emphasising participant observation and in-depth data collection. After the interviews, I reviewed my recordings and notes, filling in any gaps and documenting my own impressions. This rigorous approach to material management and analysis was essential to maintain the integrity of the research process.

Is the knowledge produced relevant enough? I have discussed the importance of studying the influence of social media on entrepreneurship and its impact on contemporary societies. The use of the ethnographic method to explore the social systems of shared meaning in place is relevant to the stated research aim. Therefore, the knowledge produced is likely to be relevant to the research field. The ethnographic research approach seeks to provide fresh insights in the field of entrepreneurship by illuminating broader societal shifts in values (Johnstone, 2007). This is achieved through an exploration of the pivotal role which entrepreneurship plays in shaping the relative worth of diverse human endeavours, ideas, time, money, goods, and services through its role in initiating connecting change.

Netnography

The debate over what constitutes private versus public information online is a central issue in netnography (Xun and Reynolds, 2010). Some argue that online anonymity, facilitated by techniques like using nicknames, can provide protection without the need for informed consent (Elgesem, 2002). Others contend that the line between public and private online is blurry (Abril et al., 2012), putting users at risk. There are practical concerns about obtaining consent. Additionally, responsibility is placed on internet users to determine what information they make public (Xun and Reynolds, 2010).

Netnography, like ethnography, often focuses on a limited number of subjects, raising questions about generalisation. However, this focus is seen as a strength, since it allows for in-depth understanding (Kozinets, 2019). Some suggest that researchers may need to narrow their focus further due to the vast amount of data. Nevertheless, netnography faces challenges,

including limited adoption, lack of coverage in textbooks, and the presence of contentious issues (Kozinets, 2019).

I have once again chosen the following questions as a starting point for considering ethics with respect to my netnographic method. First, is there only minimal risk of harm? Second, are the integrity and the autonomy for research subjects adequately secured? Third, is the method adequate? And fourth, is the knowledge produced relevant enough?

Is there only minimal risk of harm? Since the research involves the analysis of online interactions and does not capture the identities of individuals, it is likely that there is only minimal risk of harm to the research subjects, since their privacy is protected. In this thesis, the identities of individuals cannot be connected to the online material. With this precaution, I want to demonstrate a commitment to ethical data handling and privacy protection, which is essential when working with online data.

Are the integrity and autonomy for research subjects adequately secured? As stated above, the identities of individuals are not captured in the extracted data, which helps secure their integrity and autonomy. However, there may still be ethical concerns related to the use of social media data. It is essential to consider issues such as data ownership, and the potential for unintended consequences (e.g., harm to individuals mentioned in posts). With this in mind, I have been especially careful in presenting data, and also storing the material. Additionally, I have only used online material that are public.

Even though I aim to protect privacy by not capturing identities, the potential for de-identification and re-identification of individuals in social media data is a known concern. But since I am interested in entrepreneurship as a process, not focusing on individuals or opinions, I have not included any material which can be linked to one specific person without their consent. The rabbit farmer has agreed to be a part of the study and knows that she is an identifiable object. The same applies to the people I have interviewed from the library; they agreed to be a part of the study and know that there is a chance they can be identifiable, also since they have been interviewed in several news outlets in Sweden.

When conducting research in online communities, it is important to respect the rules and norms of those communities (Kozinets, 2019). I have been passive in the Facebook groups, in order to avoid disrupting the natural flow of discussions, or causing harm to the community or its members.

Is the method adequate? I consider the method as adequate for the purpose of the research, especially in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic,

when traditional ethnographic fieldwork was not feasible. Netnography is an appropriate method for studying the influence of social media on entrepreneurship when physical presence and direct interactions are not possible. With the process outlined in Chapter 3, including the use of specific software tools (e.g., NVivo, Ncapture) and the steps taken during data import, I enhance the reproducibility and trustworthiness of the research. I also acknowledge the importance of understanding both local and online contexts. With these procedures, I want to demonstrate sensitivity to the complexity of the research environment, which is crucial for producing meaningful findings.

Is the knowledge produced relevant enough? I have discussed the importance of studying the influence of social media on entrepreneurship and its impact on contemporary societies. The use of the netnographic method to explore social systems of shared meaning online is relevant to the stated research aim. The study aims to understand the interplay between local change mechanisms of entrepreneurship and online social systems, which is an important and relevant topic. Therefore, the knowledge produced is likely to be relevant to the research field. As digital technologies are embedded ever more widely into societal infrastructures and social practices, they generate an abundance of information about social life, and enable the application of appropriate analytical techniques (Savage, 2009; Marres, 2017).

4. Studying the phenomenon

The abstracts for each of the papers forming the foundation of this thesis will be introduced in this chapter. As discussed in previous chapters, there are several differences between the studies, with each one offering a unique perspective on, the overarching aim in this thesis is to develop understanding of how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in the entrepreneurial process. Presented below are the abstracts of the four papers that constitute this thesis. In Table 10, I provide an overview of the four studies, including details such as the title, authors, outlet, objectives, research questions, theoretical frameworks, and methods.

Table 10. Overview of studies I-IV

Study	I	II	III	IV
Title	How online communities are important for rural entrepreneurial change – the library revolt	When social media backfires - intrusive ties in entrepreneurship	Exploring the social and spatial role of social media for community entrepreneurship	Exploring social media echo chambers in entrepreneurship
Authors	Josefina Jonsson, Johan Gaddefors	Josefina Jonsson	Josefina Jonsson	Josefina Jonsson Hanna Astner
Outlet	Journal of Enterprising Communities: People and Places in the Global Economy	International journal of entrepreneurship and innovation	*In 2nd round review for ERD*	TBD
Aim	… to discuss how entrepreneurial processes in rural areas can be shaped not only through local community relations but also by online interaction.	… explore the potential negative impacts of social media for entrepreneurship	… explore how social media matters to social and spatial aspects of community entrepreneurship	… explore the engagement between echo chambers on social media platforms and entrepreneurship
Research Questions	How does an online community interact with a local community during the entrepreneurial process?	How do the negative aspects of social media matter to the entrepreneurial process?	How do social media interactions influence the process of community entrepreneurship?	RQ1: How does social media echo chambers work as social and spatial contexts? RQ2: How does embeddedness work in social media echo chambers
Theory	Communities, and context	Context, embeddedness and Ties	Context, embeddedness, community entrepreneurship	Embeddedness and context
Methods	Ethnography and netnography	Ethnography and netnography	Netnography	Ethnography and netnography

4.1 Paper I

This study aims to discuss how an online community interacts with a local community in the course of the entrepreneurial process. By adopting a contextualised perspective on entrepreneurship, this study acknowledges the social and spatial dynamics of the process.

The inductive approach employed in this study is empirically grounded in the case of "the library revolt." This study analysed interviews conducted in a selected region in Sweden and followed a netnographic method to capture social interactions online. Through qualitative modes of inquiry, this study seeks to shed light on the social aspects of the entrepreneurial process.

This study demonstrates how social media functions as a contextual element in entrepreneurship. By presenting interactions between an online community and a rural community, it illustrates how entrepreneurial processes in rural areas can be influenced not only by local community relations but also by online interaction. The study highlights how an online context, where actors are situated with their own unique sets of resources, contributes to rural development. As part of an ongoing process of structuration, we can observe that actors gain access to online resources, thereby contributing to the changes occurring in a local community.

This study contributes to the discourse on the role of context in entrepreneurship studies. Rural entrepreneurship predominantly focuses on local social bonds and actions, whereas this study includes online social bonds as an integral part of the entrepreneurial environment.

4.2   Paper II

Jonsson, J. (2023) 'When social media backfires – intrusive ties in entrepreneurship´, *The International Journal of Entrepreneurship and Innovation*, 0(0). https://doi.org/10.1177/14657503231196104

This study examines the significant impact of social media on modern society, emphasising its role in both physical and online social interactions. The study acknowledges that the internet, in its current form, permeates all aspects of human life and has become an indispensable part of society. Social media is highlighted as a crucial tool for businesses and organisations - however, the study also discusses the growing trend whereby social media activism increasingly targets businesses.

The case study presented in the study focuses on a small rural rabbit meat business that initially benefits from its social media presence, but later faces negative consequences due to online and local animal rights activists aiming to shut down the farm. This case study offers valuable insights into how social media affects small businesses and how online interactions can influence local dynamics.

The study places this research within the context of recent studies that adopt a contextualised approach to entrepreneurship, emphasising a social perspective on entrepreneurship in the 21st century. It highlights the transformative role of social media platforms like Facebook in changing the way people interact, network, and coordinate professionally and socially. The positive and negative effects of social media usage for entrepreneurs and organisations are mentioned.

The central research question of the study is articulated as follows: how do the negative aspects of social media impact the entrepreneurial process? The study explores the role of social media within the social context in entrepreneurship and introduces the concept of "intrusive ties" to describe how online interactions can have detrimental effects on firms when digital activists become integrated into the entrepreneurial social context.

4.3 Paper III

Jonsson, J. (2023) 'Exploring the social and spatial role of social media for community entrepreneurship.' The manuscript is in the second round of review in *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development.*

In this study, I acknowledge how social media has become an integral part of modern society, connecting people worldwide and transforming the dynamics of social power and community interactions. This has led to discussions about social media's impact on entrepreneurship. Social media plays a significant role in supporting entrepreneurship by facilitating marketing, crowdfunding, networking, and active engagement among entrepreneurs. However, its relation to the spatial and social context of community entrepreneurship remains relatively unexplored.

Community entrepreneurship, which focuses on entrepreneurial activities within specific geographical communities, is influenced by the spatial context in which it operates. This study aims to investigate the significance of social media in the social and spatial aspects of community entrepreneurship. While social media has challenged traditional entrepreneurship theories, its role in community entrepreneurship remains understudied.

The study focuses on a two-year case study of a rural grocery shop's development, primarily using Facebook content as empirical material. It departs from conventional entrepreneurship theories and explores how social media interactions should be integrated into entrepreneurship research.

The study's aim is to explore how social media interactions influence the process of community entrepreneurship, led to insightful findings that shed light on the interplay between social interactions, spatial factors, and the entrepreneurial process. The account from the case showed how online communities operate as frameworks for collective effort, resource allocation, and coordination. The analysis revealed three central themes. Firstly, social media played a pivotal role in facilitating communication, resource sharing, and collaboration among online community members. Secondly, the concept of collective agency emerged, underscoring how online communities can aggregate individual contributions into a powerful force for change. Thirdly, the study illuminated the dynamic nature of context, with both local and online dimensions intertwined in the entrepreneurial process. This research introduces the concept of online community entrepreneurship, characterized

by participants who connect over shared interests rather than geographic proximity. It highlights the social nature of their goals, the diverse and asynchronous nature of their participation, and the global accountability that arises from their online interactions.

This study enriches our understanding of entrepreneurship by highlighting the transformative role of online communities, transcending traditional boundaries and forging a new path for entrepreneurial endeavours. As the digital landscape continues to evolve, recognizing and comprehending the intricate relationships between online interactions and physical contexts becomes paramount for grasping the full spectrum of entrepreneurial activities in contemporary society.

4.4 Paper IV

Jonsson, J. and Astner, H. (2023) 'Exploring social media echo chambers in entrepreneurship.' This manuscript was accepted to the ISBE's conference in Birmingham, England, 8-10 November 2023.

This study delves into the phenomenon of echo chambers on social media and their implications for entrepreneurship. Social media has become an integral part of society, connecting billions of people worldwide and serving as a platform for sharing information and opinions. However, it has been criticised for fostering echo chambers, where individuals are exposed only to views that reinforce their existing beliefs, stifling dissenting voices and exacerbating polarisation.

The study focuses on understanding how echo chambers interact with entrepreneurship, viewing entrepreneurship as a collaborative social endeavour deeply influenced by its context, which increasingly includes social media platforms. Social media has become pivotal in various entrepreneurial activities such as marketing, crowdfunding, networking, and resource mobilisation - however, its potential to create echo chambers has been underexplored.

While research in sociology and psychology has explored echo chambers in various contexts, there remains a gap in understanding their impact on entrepreneurship. Existing studies have mostly focused on large companies and municipal organisations, neglecting small businesses and grassroots initiatives. This gap leaves unanswered questions about the effects of echo

chambers on resource creation and destruction in small business development and the complex interactions within echo chambers.

The study's primary aim is to investigate how echo-chambers on social media work in entrepreneurship. We selected a rural setting for its case studies to examine the tranquil yet digitally connected nature of such environments. The research is guided by two research questions; first, how does social media echo chambers work as social and spatial contexts? And secondly, how does embeddedness work in social media echo chambers?

To address these questions, the study conducts investigations involving two cases: one wherein an echo chamber plays a pivotal role in establishing a rural grocery store and another where the presence of an echo chamber dramatically alters the trajectory of a rural farm business. The findings of these cases are yet to be presented in the conclusions.

In summary, this paper delves into the multifaceted impact of social media platforms on entrepreneurial endeavours, where echo chambers can function as both enablers and impediments. The experiences of a rabbit farmer and a grocery store owner serve as contrasting examples of these interactions.

Echo chambers, at their core, create distinctive social and spatial environments in which individuals who share common beliefs and values engage in the mutual reinforcement of their existing perspectives. They foster a sense of belonging, validation, and identity, ultimately influencing the actions taken by their members. The digital nature of these chambers empowers them to wield significant influence over entrepreneurial outcomes, spanning both online and local domains.

The concept of distributed agency, influenced by the online and local dimensions of echo chambers, plays a pivotal role in shaping the dynamics and outcomes of entrepreneurship. Echo chambers offer individuals the platform to exercise their agency on a broad scale, with their choices and actions within these chambers exerting a substantial impact on the entrepreneurial process.

Two distinct forms of embedding, forced and desired, represent two sides of the same coin. Forced embedding occurs when external factors compel entrepreneurs to become part of communities or contexts they had not initially intended to join. Conversely, desired embedding involves entrepreneurs intentionally seeking or participating in communities aligned with their goals. Both modes of embedding underscore the reciprocal

relationship between entrepreneurs and their surroundings, where entrepreneurs actively shape and are shaped by their environment.

In essence, this paper offers insights into how social media echo chambers function as dynamic settings for entrepreneurship. It highlights the critical role that various forms of embeddedness—be it forced or desired—play in shaping entrepreneurial outcomes. The study underscores the multifaceted nature of these interactions and the significance of agency and context within the entrepreneurial process.

5. Discussion

In this chapter, I will answer my three research questions and discuss my overall aim for this thesis. Section 5.1 addresses the practical implications of social media for entrepreneurship, by answering research question 1: what role do social media play in entrepreneurship? This is discussed by presenting social media as, firstly, a catalyst, and serving as a positive force for the local community. Secondly, social media can be an obstacle, creating a disabling context. Thirdly, social media can be an enabler, opening up opportunities. Finally, social media can be an amplifier, increasing the intensity of opportunities/barriers.

In section 5.2, I continue by addressing research question 2: how do the metaphors of "embeddedness" and "ties" aid our understanding of the role of social media in entrepreneurship? In this part of this last chapter, I discuss how social media can either strengthen ties, foster embeddedness, and facilitate entrepreneurial activities or, conversely, create barriers, disrupt embeddedness, and hinder entrepreneurial efforts.

In section 5.3, I address research question 3: how is the social and spatial context formed for entrepreneurship? I argue that entrepreneurship acts as a transformative force that interacts with and influences both online and local, social and spatial contexts, creating a complex interplay that shapes the way communities evolve and individuals interact within them.

Finally, in section 5.4, I discuss the overall aim of the thesis: how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in the entrepreneurial process, and explore the theoretical and practical contributions.

5.1 The role of social media in entrepreneurship

This sections answers research question 1: what role do social media play in entrepreneurship? To address this question, I have opted to examine the role of social media as a force, exploring its potential for interaction and influence, which can drive significant changes. A force doesn't inherently have a role; instead, it can be implicated in a process or situation. When I delve into the role of social media in entrepreneurship, I am elucidating its impact on the entrepreneurial process.

Table 11 summarises the main theoretical contributions and the types of forces presented in studies I – IV. The following types of forces which social media can embody (fuel, barrier, enabler, and amplifier) represent how social media can assume various roles within an entrepreneurial process, contingent upon the specific context in which it unfolds.

Study I elucidates how social media can function as a *fuel*. Through analysis of interactions between an online community and a rural community, the study underscores how entrepreneurial processes in rural areas are influenced not only by local community relations (e.g. Gaddefors & Anderson 2017), but also by online engagement. Study I reveals that the online context, which provides actors with distinct resources, significantly contributes to rural development. Actors actively gain access to online resources, which contribute to the ongoing process of structuration, leading to changes in the local community. In this context, I argue for social media as a positive force, a kind of fuel, for entrepreneurship. Social media has the capability to function as a positive force for local communities. It can act as a catalyst by covering local events, businesses, and cultural initiatives. Through platforms like Facebook, communities can share their achievements, celebrate diversity, and support local causes. This digital visibility not only promotes a sense of pride and belonging, but also nurtures connections between community members. Positive stories and shared experiences can inspire others to become involved and contribute to the improvement of their local area.

Study II illustrates social media as a *barrier*. I contrast the positive image in study I, by taking a critical look at the negative effects of social media, and acknowledge its role in shaping the social dynamics constraining entrepreneurship. The study emphasises the importance of including social media interactions as part of the social context for entrepreneurs and introduces the concept of intrusive ties to explain how, in study II, the animal activists forcefully embed themselves into the farmer's Facebook page and

dramatically change the trajectory of the entrepreneurial process. In consequence, I have defined the disabling, negative aspect of social media as playing the role of a barrier that can impede or hinder entrepreneurship. Furthermore, cyberbullying and online harassment can escalate into significant barriers to entrepreneurship, discouraging individuals from fully participating in digital spaces.

Study III elucidates the role of social media as an *enabler*. The focus is on exploring the interplay between social media and place in the context of community entrepreneurship. The findings highlight the structural characteristics of social media and its potential for enabling entrepreneurship. The study's participants were located both locally and online, with the latter modality offering opportunities to explore social and spatial contexts. Overall, this research provides insights into the role of context (Baker & Welter 2020) and entrepreneurship in a digitised society. One of the most significant functions of social media is its role as an enabler. It opens up opportunities by connecting individuals to a global network. Through platforms, individuals can establish a strong online presence, showcasing their skills and expertise. Additionally, social media enables grassroots movements and activism, allowing individuals to unite behind causes they care about, mobilising support, and effecting real change on a larger scale.

Study IV shows how social media can function as an *amplifier*, by presenting how it is enhancing connectivity, expanding the concept of agency, and shaping the interplay between agency and structure. Echo chambers have the potential to influence various resources for entrepreneurship - sometimes positively, by bolstering financial resources, personal connections, and access to local networks, but in other instances instead causing financial setbacks and community hesitance. Facilitated by social media, social dynamics steer individuals with diverse initial objectives to become immersed within particular communities or echo chambers. Moreover, the study underscores social media's pivotal role in shaping the interplay between agency (individual actions and decisions) and structure (the context of echo chambers). Social media acts as an amplifier through altering how entrepreneurs navigate their digital and local environments, accentuating the complex relationship between these elements. These amplification effects can have both positive and negative implications for entrepreneurship, a finding which underscores the need for critical

assessment, diverse perspectives, and meaningful dialogue to harness the true potential of distributed agency in the entrepreneurial context.

Table 11. Main findings to thesis aim and type of force from studies I-IV

	I	II	III	IV
Theoretical contribution	Online community building	Intrusive ties	SM as redefining social context and place	Forced and desired embedding
Type of force	Fuel	Barrier	Enabler	Amplifier
	Positive force for the local place	*Disabling context*	*Open up for opportunities*	*Increasing the intensity of opportunities/barriers*

Collectively, these studies offer practical insights into how social media can serve as a fuel, barrier, enabler, and amplifier in entrepreneurship. They shed light on the multifaceted impact of social media on entrepreneurial processes, providing knowledge for entrepreneurs and stakeholders seeking to harness its potential while mitigating its negative aspects.

If we view social media as a *fuel* (Study I), we find that it can benefit local business promotion. Entrepreneurs can use social media platforms to promote their local businesses, share product updates, and engage with the community. For instance, a small bakery can use Instagram to showcase its latest pastries and engage with customers through comments and direct messages. Social media can additionally be a platform for advertising and organising local events. A community centre can create a Facebook event for a neighbourhood clean-up day, encouraging residents to participate and fostering a sense of community.

If we view social media as a *barrier* (Study II), it can be beneficial for, to name one example, anti-bullying campaigns. Organisations can use social media to raise awareness about cyberbullying and share resources for victims. They can run campaigns that encourage reporting and support for those affected by online harassment.

If we view social media as an *enabler* (Study III), it can be beneficial for online freelancing. Freelancers and independent professionals can leverage platforms like LinkedIn and Twitter to showcase their skills, build a personal

brand, and connect with potential clients or employers. Additionally, we can see the potential for crowdfunding campaigns. Entrepreneurs looking to raise capital for their projects can use crowdfunding platforms like Kickstarter, which rely heavily on social media for promotion and engagement with backers.

If we view social media as an *amplifier* (Study IV), we can use it in, for example, influencer marketing. Organisations can partner with social media influencers to amplify their products or services to a wider audience. Additionally, it can be used for local community engagement. Local government agencies can use social media to amplify their efforts to engage with the community. They can live-stream town hall meetings, share important announcements, and gather public feedback on social platforms, increasing transparency and participation.

5.2   Embeddedness and ties in the 21st century

This section answers research question 2: how do the metaphors of "embeddedness" and "ties" help us comprehend the role of social media in entrepreneurship?

The implications for embeddedness (Jack & Anderson 2002; Korsgaard et al., 2022) and ties (Granovetter 1973) are shown in the exploration outlined in Studies I-IV and the associated findings. "Unwanted embedding", as presented in my thesis, represents a significant aspect of the "new spatiotemporal zone," (Zhao 2006). In the era of digital connectivity, entrepreneurs find themselves navigating an unprecedented spatiotemporal realm defined by instant, location-independent interactions. Consequently, this paradigm shift questions established ideas around embeddedness and ties experienced by individuals in place.

The interplay between embeddedness and ties in the realm of entrepreneurship is intricately connected to how social media is utilised and the specific contexts in which it operates. This dynamic relationship can yield a spectrum of outcomes, spanning from the reinforcement of ties, the nurturing of embeddedness, and the facilitation of entrepreneurial activities to the establishment of barriers, the disruption of embeddedness, and the hindrance of entrepreneurial endeavours.

In Figure 5 presented below, I illustrate an instance of what we might describe as an "intricate network of ties" in contemporary society. The varying colours within the illustration symbolise distinct clusters. In the

realm of social media, these clusters could correspond to specific Facebook groups, while on a local scale, they might align with a locally embedded group of people. Among these connections, some people may interact both locally and online, while others exist solely online.

Within this intricate web of connections, I have positioned the organisation (corresponding to the three distinct cases discussed in this thesis). The organisation's interactions contribute to development in entrepreneurship.

With this illustration, I aim to illustrate the intricate interplay between physical location and social media, which takes place over a tapestry of parallel social movements (Hannerz, 2016). Each of these movements presents an opportunity for organisations to establish connections (Jack, 2005). Social media groups often encompass thousands of members, each representing a potential connection, while in physical locations, ties may span various social groups. The nature of these ties can lead to developing strong ties, followed by a process of embedding (Jack et al., 2004).

Figure 5 seeks to visualise the complexity that can arise from this interplay. Depending on the organisation placed at the centre, the web of ties will take on a unique configuration. The overarching point is that there exists a multitude of ties both in physical locations and on social media platforms, each with the potential to influence entrepreneurship in diverse ways.
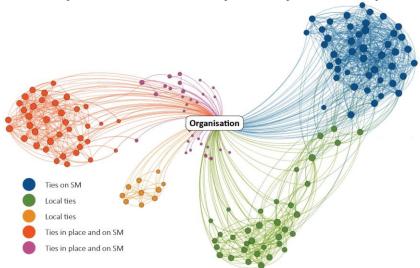

Figure 5. An example of online and local ties

Social media's role transcends mere virtual interaction; it intricately weaves itself into the fabric of our social and spatial contexts, influencing the creation and evolution of ties, and ultimately shaping resource accessibility and consequently the trajectory of local development, as shown in the four studies.

As discussed in Chapter 2, the concept of embeddedness, influenced by the depth of an individual's connections, is a critical factor in entrepreneurship (Jack & Anderson 2002). Embeddedness pertains to the nature and extent of ties an individual has in their socio-spatial context (McKeever et al., 2015), impacting venturing processes. Embeddedness can be seen within social and cultural frameworks (Vestrum, 2014), as either enabling or hindering entrepreneurship. It both creates opportunities and imposes limitations (Jack and Anderson, 2002).

Weak ties are crucial for becoming embedded, serving as initial steps to access larger social structures (Granovetter, 1973), potentially evolving into established relationships. Strong ties are prerequisites for embeddedness, allowing individuals to access information and resources (McKeever et al., 2015).

In the studies comprising this thesis, I contend that embeddedness can manifest both in local places and online. The initial establishment of online or weak ties has the potential to evolve into strong ties, facilitating the process of embedding. These strong ties foster a heightened sense of belonging and possess the capacity to either facilitate or hinder resource allocation.

In essence, the implications surrounding embeddedness and ties underscore the intricate interplay of forces that shapes entrepreneurial processes in the digital age, rendering it a subject ripe for exploration and ongoing research.

5.3 Rethinking the role of social and spatial context

This section answers research question 3: how are the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurship formed?

With the preceding discussion, it becomes clear that social media's functions are multifaceted and can have both positive and negative impacts on individuals and communities. The social context is fundamentally shaped by the intricate web of ties (Figure 5). In the digital age, social media platforms play a pivotal role in forging these online ties, both "nice" and intrusive ones. Social media facilitate also offer fertile ground for these weak ties to mature into profound and enduring connections (i.e. strong ties).

On the other hand, spatial context encompasses an array of elements, including physical structures, societal norms, and the availability of resources within a given geographic area (Welter 2011; Zahra et al. 2014). Social media's impact extends even to this dimension. By fostering the cultivation of weak ties, which themselves are constituent components of the broader social context, social media effectively interlaces the virtual and physical realms. This intertwining, in turn, holds the potential to either invigorate or impede local development initiatives and access to vital resources.

In Figure 6, I illustrate how the dimensions of online and local social context, as well as online and local spatial context, are connected in entrepreneurship. My contribution lies in studying the above part of figure 6 (i.e. online social and spatial), and how the online and local contexts are interacting. I will go through the online social context (see 5.3.1) and online spatial context (see 5.3.2), as illustrated in figure 6, and end with a discussion on the relation between the online and local contexts.
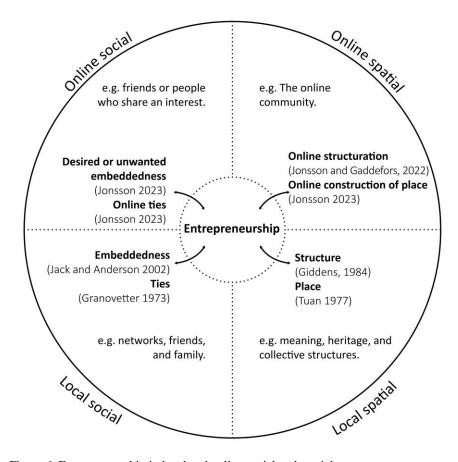
Figure 6. Entrepreneurship in local and online social and spatial contexts.

5.3.1   Online social context

"Online ties" refers to the casual relationships formed in the online context that can provide individuals with new information and opportunities. These relationships are typically characterized by that they are elusive, distant, easy, and can occur in a large volume on social media. This type of weak ties online, involves connections with people who are not close in terms of proximity or emotions. These individuals may not have strong personal bonds or deep connections as in strong ties (Granovetter 1973). They are not characterized by a strong emotional attachment, but rather based on a common interest. Online ties involve one-time or infrequent interactions rather than sustained or ongoing engagement. These ties do not involve

strong emotional connections or deep feelings; they are more transactional or informal, but can still provide valuable information and opportunities for business or other purposes (Jack et al., 2004).

Online ties can however be, "nice" or "intrusive". Intrusive ties refers to social connections or relationships that are established online without mutual consent. When they come in high frequency they may be problematic. Intrusive ties are unwanted and can involve online interactions, messages, comments, or threats that come in large quantities and are directed at an individual, in our case a business owner, without their agreement or desire for such engagement. Intrusive ties blur the line between the private and business spheres, often affecting the individual's personal life and the way they conduct their business. Intrusive ties can result from online interactions and actions by individuals or groups who engage with an entrepreneur at a high frequency, impacting the entrepreneur's social context and potentially causing harm or disruption.

Embedding may be "desired" or "unwanted". "Desired embedding" refers to a deliberate and purposeful effort to create or participate in online communities that align with individuals' specific goals. It involves individuals, actively seeking out and becoming part of a particular social or professional network that shares their interest. The key characteristics of desired embedding includes intentional participation, alignment of interests, and collaboration and mutual support. Entrepreneurs intentionally and proactively take steps to form or join specific communities. Members within these communities come together to work collaboratively, pooling their skills and resources to achieve shared objectives. This collaborative approach may lead to the generation of ideas and solutions, enriching the creative process through diverse perspectives. Desired embedding underscores the importance of intentional community and collaboration in the pursuit of common objectives, allowing individuals to curate their experiences to align with their entrepreneurial aspirations.

"Unwanted embedding", on the other hand, refers to when a community is being overtaken by people that bring in an unwanted mission. It occurs when someone unwanted disrupt the established dynamics of a particular community, forcing existing community members (in our case including the entrepreneur) to respond to these changes. The outcome of unwanted embedding can vary, depending on factors such as the nature of the external influence, the resilience of the original participants, and their willingness to

adapt to the altered circumstances. For understanding the online social context, we need to acknowledge the intricate relationship between online ties, desired or unwanted embeddedness, and entrepreneurship.

5.3.2   Online spatial context

For this thesis, I have defined the online spatial context as "online structuration" and "online construction of place" (see figure 6). In this thesis, the spatial context is viewed as structures (Giddens, 1984), in specific places (Tuan, 1977). This perspective recognizes that physical places are not empty landscapes but are influenced by social and economic factors (Anderson & Gaddefors, 2016). Considering both norms and resource access in place, allows for a context relevant analysis, acknowledging that spatial contexts vary, and what works in one place may not apply to another due to differences in the structures present.

For this thesis, I view the online spatial context as a collection of distinct (digital) places on social media (Evans 2015). Just as in physical locations, these online places possess their own structures, encompassing the norms and accessibility to digital resources. This perspective underscores the fact that these places are not devoid of influence; rather, they are shaped by social interactions and technical systems. For this reason, I present online structuration, and online construction of place (see figure 6) for discussing the online spatial context.

"Online structuration" refers to the process by which individuals in a community actively engage in shaping and reconstructing both their online and local contexts to bring about desired changes. This process involves creating and participating in temporary online social groups or co-socialities, through social media platforms like Facebook, with the intention of influencing and modifying the local structures in their community. It is a concept influenced by the idea of "structuring processes" as described by Giddens (1984), where individuals actively work to modify the local social structure and expand their influence through their interactions on social media. This online structuration, in combination with local efforts, contributes to the re-structuring of place and highlights the interplay between geographical and virtual places in contemporary community development.

"Online construction of place" refers to the process by which individuals, use online platforms, such as social media (e.g., Facebook), to shape and define their perceptions of a particular physical location or context (e.g. paper II Ada's rabbit farm). Through their online activities and

communication, individuals express their views of a place and act accordingly. This online construction of place involves the individuals using digital communication tools to challenge a physical location and the people associated with it. They can engage in online discussions, petitions, and social media posts to express their perspective, and in doing so, they influence the perception of the place by highlighting its perceived issues. This process demonstrates how online interactions can shape the way people view and understand specific physical locations, even when though they sometimes haven't visited the location.

Advances in technology and communication can rapidly alter the structuration of a local area. Access to the internet, social media, and other digital tools can change how people connect and engage with each other. The social relationships and physical elements of a specific geographic area can be organised in a new way and become interconnected through social media, influencing how individuals and communities within that place interact, behave, and make sense of their local environment.

5.3.3   The relation between online and local contexts

The formation of the online social context depends on the assembly of individuals with shared interests, often in engagement with the entrepreneurial process. Within this realm, the online social context comprises online ties, which can be weak, "nice" ties or intrusive ties, and can evolve through a process of embeddedness. These connections possess a fluid and adaptable nature, and entrepreneurship can either leverage the benefits of these weak ties or encounter obstacles posed by intrusive ones. This is where I elaborate the work of e.g. Korsgaard and Anderson (2011), Korsgaard et al. (2022), and Gaddefors and Anderson (2018).

The contours of the online spatial context are shaped by the actions and dialogues of group members. This constitutes a dynamic process of online structuration, wherein social and online elements are organised. Throughout this process, entrepreneurship can play a pivotal role in shaping opportunities or imposing constraints.

Conversely, the local social context primarily encompasses households, family, and friends, often characterised by strong or weak ties. As individuals become embedded within their local social context, they gain access to resources. However, as the social and spatial contexts undergo online transformation, it can change the local social context. Depending on online

experiences, whether positive or negative, the ties within a local community can be renegotiated, leading to the expansion or contraction of one's social network.

The local spatial context encompasses not only physical infrastructure, such as roads, buildings, parks and utilities, but also cultural and historical elements (Welter 2011), that are pivotal in the process of structuration. The arrangement of these components influences not only how people navigate the area and interact with each other but also the cultural and historical aspects that define the community (Tuan, 1977; Korsgaard et al., 2015b). Economic factors, too, play a role in shaping where individuals live, work, and socialise. As entrepreneurship engages with online social and spatial contexts, as well as local social and spatial contexts, the process shapes how residents perceive their physical infrastructure and economic factors within the community.

Thus, the process in entrepreneurship interacts with, and influences both online and local social and spatial contexts, creating a complex interplay that shapes the way in which communities evolve and in which individuals interact within them.

Individuals on social media can overlook the unique local parameters that define a place and its entrepreneurship. We know from previous research that, especially for rural communities, a sense of place is important in the creation process (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2018). However, individuals who are not embedded within the local community may develop an understanding of how things should or ought to be, yet they may lack full awareness of the local opportunities and constraints that exist. This situation can have its advantages, as local actors are not restricted by the limitations of their immediate context; they are free to challenge the established local structure. However, it also has the potential to mislead entrepreneurs or expose them to risky ventures. This external perspective might appear liberating, freeing local actors from the constraints of tradition and familiarity and encouraging them to envision possibilities beyond the ordinary. Nevertheless, intrusive ties, or unwanted embedding might result in an unwanted trajectory for the entrepreneurial process.

In some cases, pursued embedding or "nice" online ties can indeed infuse a local community with a positive force, and more opportunities. By introducing fresh viewpoints and novel approaches, external perspectives can serve as a force (e.g. fuel or enabler) for shaking up conventional norms

and prompting local entrepreneurs to question the status quo. It can instigate a process of re-evaluation and adaptation, potentially steering local entrepreneurship towards exciting and unexplored avenues.

However, the very same detachment that brings about these opportunities also introduces a level of risk. Echo chambers can show a one-sided story, working as an amplifier of beliefs in a Facebook group. Hence, a delicate balance must be struck. While external input can invigorate and stimulate ideas, it should ideally be complemented by an appreciation of the context in which entrepreneurship operates. Local actors possess an innate familiarity with the nuanced interconnections between the community, resources, and opportunities, which can act as a safeguard against hasty decisions and misguided endeavours. Embracing external inspiration while remaining rooted in the local fabric is key – fostering a synergy between novel possibilities and the wisdom of local experience.

5.4   A discussion of the aim

The overall aim of this dissertation is to develop an understanding of how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurial processes. Social media influences how individuals and communities connect, interact, and make sense of their environment, both online and offline. Entrepreneurship, in turn, can be a driving force in shaping these contexts, and finding the right balance between external influences and local knowledge is one of the keys to successful entrepreneurship within a given context.

I have defined the online social context as "desired or unwanted embedding" and "online ties". This, together with local ties and embeddedness make up the social context in entrepreneurship. For the social context, social media platforms play a role in shaping social connections, facilitating the formation of online ties (nice or intrusive) among individuals and communities, which can evolve into an embedding process online. The online social context, can be shaped by and is shaping entrepreneurship.

I have defined the online spatial context as "online structuration" and "online construction of place". This, together with local structures and place make up the spatial context in entrepreneurship. The online spatial context is seen as a collection of distinct digital places on social media. These online places have their own structures, shaped by social interactions and technical systems. This is encompassing physical structures, societal norms and

resource availability in place, and social media extends its influence, potentially altering how people interact with their physical surroundings. Entrepreneurship, influenced by online dynamics, has the potential to reshape how residents perceive their physical environment and economic factors within the community.

Entrepreneurship itself serves is a process of change (Steyaert, 2007), interacting with and influencing both online and local social and spatial contexts. It plays a pivotal role in shaping the development of communities and how individuals interact within them. Ties, particularly those from outside the local community, may bring fresh perspectives that challenge local norms or bring inspiration. Yet they also run the risk of lacking an intimate understanding of local dynamics, potentially leading to missteps. Thus, striking a balance between external innovation and local wisdom becomes crucial. While external input can stimulate innovation, local actors possess valuable knowledge about the context, acting as a safeguard against hasty decisions and ensuring the preservation of local nuances and traditions.

5.4.1 Theoretical contributions

My thesis expands on the concepts of embeddedness (e.g. Jack & Anderson 2002) and ties (Granovetter, 1973) by exploring their multifaceted nature, their relationship with social media, and their impact entrepreneurship in both physical and online contexts. My emphasis on the dynamic aspects of these concepts contribute to an understanding of their role in entrepreneurship.

I show how social media can both strengthen ties (online ties) and facilitate embeddedness (pursued embeddedness) while also generating barriers (unwanted embedding) and disruptions (intrusive ties) within the entrepreneurial context. By this, I extend the concept of embeddedness and ties beyond physical spaces, emphasising its manifestation in the online realm. I discuss how initially weak ties established online can evolve into strong ties (online embedding) and, in turn, influence resource allocation and entrepreneurial endeavours (the forces).

Furthermore, the above discussion makes a significant theoretical contribution by delving into the multifaceted functions of social media regarding the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurship. I recognise the complex nature of social media, and acknowledge its potential for both positive and negative impacts on individuals and communities.

I underscore the integration of online and local contexts, with a focus on the pivotal role of social media in shaping ties, both weak and strong, in both the online and local social and spatial dimensions. I emphasise how social media acts as a bridge between virtual and physical realms, influencing local development initiatives and access to essential resources.

I have viewed entrepreneurship as a change process (Steyaert, 2007), and when the forces in the online contexts are introduced, I highlight how technological advances and communication tools can rapidly reshape the structure of local areas. Entrepreneurship is portrayed as actively engaging with and creating an online spatial context with tangible local effects.

Within the online social context, the dynamic nature of ties, encompassing both weak and intrusive ties, is emphasised. This discussion recognises that entrepreneurship can either benefit from these connections or encounter obstacles posed by intrusive ties, providing valuable insights into the role of social media in the entrepreneurial process.

I also acknowledge the significance of local social and spatial contexts, characterised by strong interpersonal ties and physical infrastructure. This discussion highlights how online transformations can impact these local contexts, leading to the renegotiation of ties within local communities and influencing residents' perceptions of their physical and economic surroundings.

Ultimately, my overall discussion presents entrepreneurship as a change process that interacts with, and is influenced by both online and local social and spatial contexts. This complex interplay sheds light on how communities evolve and how individuals interact within them, offering a theoretical framework for understanding the dynamics of the digital age's impact on our social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurship.

5.4.2   Practical implications

Social media provides entrepreneurs with access to a wide range of ideas, and perspectives from around the world. This exposure can inspire new ways of thinking and problem-solving, potentially leading to the development of unique business concepts.

External perspectives facilitated by social media can challenge traditional local business norms and practices. Entrepreneurs might be encouraged to question established methods and explore alternative approaches, fostering a

culture of innovation and adaptability. This might result in the opportunity to challenge local norms.

While external perspectives can be refreshing, their holders may not fully understand the local economic, cultural, and historical factors that shape the entrepreneurial landscape. This lack of awareness can lead to misguided ventures that fail to consider the unique challenges and opportunities of the local market.

Local entrepreneurs possess an innate understanding of the community, market trends, and cultural nuances. This familiarity allows them to make informed decisions, mitigating the risks associated with purely external viewpoints.

With this study, I suggest that an effective entrepreneurial approach involves a synergy between external inspiration and local experience. Combining novel ideas from external sources with the insights of local entrepreneurs can lead to well-informed, innovative yet contextually relevant business strategies.

Entrepreneurs who are influenced by external perspectives should consider implementing changes gradually, allowing time for the local community to adapt and for potential issues to surface before major investments are made.

The implications of integrating social media and external perspectives into entrepreneurship underscore the need for a balanced and thoughtful approach. Entrepreneurs should draw from the innovation which external viewpoints can offer, while being cautious not to disregard the local context's intricacies. The key is to adapt and integrate external ideas in a way that aligns with local culture, resources, and needs, ultimately leading to more successful and sustainable entrepreneurial endeavours.

5.5   Conclusions

In conclusion, this chapter has provided answers to the three overall research questions for this thesis, and has discussed the overall aim of the thesis. It has shed light on the multifaceted role of social media in entrepreneurship, highlighting its potential as a catalyst, barrier, enabler, and amplifier within the entrepreneurial process. The theoretical contributions of the thesis have expanded our understanding of embeddedness and ties in the digital age, emphasising their dynamic relationship with social media and their implications for resource allocation and entrepreneurial activities.

Furthermore, my overall discussion has illustrated how social media intricately weave themselves into the fabric of our social and spatial contexts, influencing the formation of ties and shaping the trajectory of local development and resource accessibility.

Overall, this thesis has provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics of social media's impact on entrepreneurship and the interplay between online and local social and spatial contexts. It highlights the need for a balanced approach that harnesses the positive aspects of social media while mitigating its negative effects, and underscores the importance of local knowledge in entrepreneurial endeavours. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by the digital age for entrepreneurship and communities alike.

5.6   A research agenda

In the evolving field of embeddedness, ties, context, and entrepreneurship, a cohesive research agenda unfolds. This exploration encompasses the dynamic impact of social media on these concepts and their far-reaching implications. As I look ahead, the following integrated research directions emerge.

Future research can extend its gaze across temporal dimensions, tracing the evolutionary path of embeddedness and ties. This journey will unveil how these concepts adapt to the ever-shifting technological development and the changing dynamics of social media platforms.

The development of social media platforms can invite exploration into their influence on embeddedness and ties within entrepreneurial ecosystems.

Artificial intelligence and algorithms can command attention in future studies. These investigations will aim to dissect their roles in shaping ties and embeddedness, particularly concerning resource allocation and the entrepreneurial process.

Cross-cultural perspectives can provide an enriched understanding of how embeddedness and ties manifest diversely across cultures and geographic contexts. This research can spotlight how social media acts as a bridge, connecting and influencing these variations.

The socio-economic impact of social media-driven entrepreneurship on local economies, job creation and community development can command research attention, both in terms of positive and negative consequences.

Strategic transitions between online and offline realms in entrepreneurship can be probed, shedding light on how these transformations influence ties and embeddedness in dynamic ways.

Ethical considerations surrounding the use of social media in entrepreneurship can be brought into sharper focus. Researchers can delve into issues of privacy, data security, and digital responsibility, framing them within the entrepreneurial context.

Longitudinal research can be vital for tracking the enduring impact of online transformations on local social and spatial contexts. These studies can illuminate shifts in residents' perceptions and community dynamics in response to digital entrepreneurship.

Interdisciplinary collaborations across fields such as sociology, psychology, economics and technology studies can enrich our understanding of embeddedness, ties and entrepreneurship in the digital era. This interdisciplinary approach can provide a holistic framework for comprehending the complex interplay between technology, online and local contexts, and for better understanding the role which entrepreneurship plays in shaping our social and spatial landscapes.

Epilogue

I have used "the Force" from the Star Wars universe as a metaphor in the title for the intricate and dynamic nature of social media and its influence on the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurship. Just as the Force shapes destinies and fuels moral conflicts in the Star Wars saga, social media influences the course of entrepreneurship and raises ethical dilemmas that individuals, communities, and societies must confront.

In this era of social media, where communication travels at the speed of a hyper drive, the interplay between entrepreneurship and the virtual world is nothing short of intricate.

As my research unfolds, it has showcased discussion of this dynamic relationship, shedding light on how the forces in entrepreneurship and social media drive the evolution of communities and guide individuals in navigating their ever-changing surroundings. In this age of instant communication and interconnectedness, my work provides part of a theoretical framework for comprehending the intricate dynamics of our modern world.

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Popular scientific summary

A lot is happening on social media. One-third of all people in the world are connected to Facebook, and it is considered more of an infrastructure than just a social medium. This affects how we interact and communicate with each other, and it also applies to businesses and organizations. Social media offers a wealth of resources and opportunities for entrepreneurs. Research in this area shows changes in how entrepreneurs conduct marketing, business networking, and information exchange, as well as new possibilities such as crowdfunding for small businesses.

Previous research has shown that entrepreneurship is influenced by the spatial and social context in which it develops. Place is highlighted as having special significance for rural entrepreneurs, as there are different resource offerings compared to a similar organization in an urban setting. But what is the actual relationship between place (the spatial context), the social context, and what happens on social media? Based on this question, this thesis aims to develop an understanding of how social media affects the social and spatial contexts in the entrepreneurial process.

In this thesis, the metaphors "embedding" and "ties" are used to discuss how social media interacts with and shapes these contexts. We often talk about spatial and social embedding in entrepreneurship: one can be deeply embedded in the place they live or in the social contexts they move in. Entrepreneurs benefit from being embedded in their local communities, as these communities can offer crucial resources and support.

Social ties are a prerequisite for embedding. These can be weak ties, such as when you are casually acquainted, or strong ties, such as those with close friends or family.

To answer my aim, this thesis consists of four separate studies that show different perspectives. Study I highlights the importance of embeddedness, online and locally, and emphasizes the significance of local connections and

a sense of place. It also introduces the concept of "online embedding" to discuss the connection between local entrepreneurship and engagement on social media. Study II explores the negative side of online interactions. The study examines a rabbit farmer and animal rights activists to discuss how the entrepreneurial process is affected. The article introduces the concept of "intrusive ties" to illustrate how individuals can force a relationship through social media. Study III examines how a grocery store is organized through social media. This study shows how individuals online and in a local place collaborate to drive local change. Study IV focuses on the role of echo chambers in entrepreneurship. Here, two contrasting cases are used to illustrate how Facebook groups can drive local change that aligns with the beliefs of the group.

Together, these studies show the development of the concepts of embedding and ties, where traditional physical connections are complemented by digital interactions, creating new opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurship. The studies provide a picture of how social media is a force and can act as fuel, obstacle, enabler, or enhancer in entrepreneurship.

The metaphors of "embedding" and "ties" help us understand the role of social media in entrepreneurship. They illustrate the dynamic relationships between online and local contexts and how social media influences the formation of ties, both weak and strong.

I have developed a definition of how we can discuss the social context online, where "online ties" represent casual connections formed through social media, often based on common interests rather than deep feelings. On the other hand, "intrusive ties" are unwanted connections characterized by frequent, often unwanted online interactions that can disrupt an entrepreneur's personal and business life. Entrepreneurs also engage in "desired embedding," where they intentionally seek like-minded contexts for mutual support and collaboration, promoting the realization of an idea. On the other hand, "undesired embedding" can occur when external factors draw individuals into online contexts they did not intend to join.

The online spatial context also involves "online structuring," where individuals actively shape their online and local environments by forming temporary online groups to influence local structures. This interaction between online and local worlds highlights how technology and communication can change how people connect and engage within a geographic area. Additionally, the online spatial context includes "creating

place online," where individuals use social media to express their opinions about a specific physical place and challenge or reshape the perception of the place through online interactions.

The social context online includes both weak and intrusive ties that can develop as entrepreneurs become embedded in them. This dynamic process influences the local social context and can potentially lead to changes in one's social network. On the other hand, the local spatial context includes physical infrastructure, culture, history, and economic factors, which can be reshaped through entrepreneurship's engagement in online contexts. Entrepreneurs can influence how residents perceive and interact within their local environment. External influences can bring new ideas but must appreciate the nuances of the local context to avoid costly mistakes. Entrepreneurs should strive for a balance between external inspiration and local knowledge to promote synergy between innovation and local experience.

Social media affects the social and spatial contexts in the entrepreneurial process in many ways. These studies show a development of the concepts of embedding and ties, where traditional physical relationships are complemented by digital interactions, creating new opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurship. The studies provide insight into how social media acts as a force and can be fuel, an obstacle, an enabler, or an enhancer in entrepreneurship.

So, what is the relationship between place (the spatial context), the social context, and what happens on social media? Well, they mutually influence each other. Social media acts as a link that can shape and reshape our perception of places, while place can influence how we use social media. The social context acts as a mediator that affects how individuals engage and participate in both place, entrepreneurship, and social media. This interaction creates a dynamic and constantly changing relationship between the three components and influences the development in entrepreneurship. When researching entrepreneurship in rural areas, we can no longer solely rely on the local place, as there are more factors influencing development.

Populärvetenskaplig sammanfattning

Mycket händer på sociala medier. En tredjedel av alla människor i världen är anslutna till Facebook och det anses mer vara en infrastruktur än enbart ett socialt medium. Det här påverkar hur vi interagerar och kommunicerar med varandra och det gäller även för företag och organisationer. Sociala medier erbjuder en mängd resurser och möjligheter för entreprenörer. Forskning inom detta område visar på förändringar i hur entreprenörer genomför marknadsföring, affärsnätverkande och informationsutbyte, men även nya möjligheter såsom crowdfunding för småföretagare.

Vi vet även inom tidigare forskning, att entreprenörskap påverkas av den rumsliga och sociala kontext som det utvecklas inom. Platsen lyfts fram som att ha en särskild betydelse för entreprenörer på landsbygden, då det finns andra utbud av resurser än för en motsvarande organisation i en stadsmiljö. Men hur ser egentligen relationen ut mellan platsen (den rumsliga kontexten), den sociala kontexten och det som sker på sociala medier? Grundat i denna fråga, har den här avhandlingen som syfte att utveckla en förståelse för hur sociala medier påverkar de sociala och rumsliga sammanhangen i den entreprenöriella processen.

I denna avhandling används metaforerna "inbäddning" och "band" för att diskutera hur sociala medier interagerar med och formar dessa sammanhang. Vi brukar prata om rumslig och social inbäddning inom entreprenörskap: man kan vara djupt inbäddad i den plats man bor, eller i de sociala sammanhangen man rör sig i. Entreprenörer gynnas av att vara inbäddade i sina lokala samhällen, då dessa samhällen kan erbjuda avgörande resurser och stöd.

Sociala band är en förutsättning för inbäddning. Dessa kan vara svaga band, som när man är ytligt bekant, eller djupa band såsom det man har med nära vänner eller familj.

För att besvara mitt syfte har jag i denna avhandling utvecklat fyra separata studier som visar på olika perspektiv. Studie I belyser vikten av inbäddning inom entreprenörskap och betonar betydelsen av lokala förbindelser och en känsla av plats. Den introducerar också begreppet "inbäddning online" för att diskutera kopplingen mellan lokalt entreprenörskap och engagemangen på sociala medier. Studie II utforskar den negativa sidan av interaktioner online. I studien undersöks en kaninbonde och djurrättsaktivister för att diskutera hur processen för entreprenörskap påverkas. Artikeln introducerar begreppet "påträngande band" för att belysa hur individer kan tvinga sig till en relation via sociala medier. Studie III undersöker hur en matbutik organiseras via sociala medier. Den här studien visar hur individer online och på en lokal plats samverkar, för att driva en lokal förändringsprocess. Studie IV fokuserar på ekokammares roll i entreprenörskap. Här används två kontrasterande fall, för att belysa hur Facebookgrupper kan driva på en lokal förändring som stämmer överens med den övertygelse som finns i gruppen.

Dessa studier belyser tillsammans en utveckling av koncepten inbäddning och band, där traditionella fysiska förbindelser kompletteras med digitala interaktioner och skapar nya möjligheter och utmaningar för entreprenörskap. Studierna ger en bild av hur sociala medier är en kraft och kan fungera som bränsle, hinder, möjliggörare eller förstärkare i entreprenörskap.

Metaforerna "inbäddning" och "band" hjälper oss att förstå sociala mediers roll inom entreprenörskap. De illustrerar de dynamiska relationerna mellan online- och lokala sammanhang samt hur sociala medier påverkar bildandet av band, både svaga och starka.

Jag utvecklat en definition av hur vi kan diskutera den sociala kontexten online, där "online-band" representerar avslappnade förbindelser som bildas genom sociala medier, ofta baserade på gemensamma intressen snarare än djupa känslor. Å andra sidan är "påträngande band" oönskade förbindelser karakteriserade av frekventa, ofta oönskade interaktioner online som kan störa en entreprenörs privata och affärsmässiga liv. Entreprenörer engagerar sig också i "önskad inbäddning", där de avsiktligt söker likasinnade sammanhang för ömsesidigt stöd och samarbete, vilket främjar realiserandet av en idé. Å andra sidan kan "oönskad inbäddning" ske när yttre faktorer drar individer in i sammanhang online de inte avsåg att gå med i.

Den online rumsliga kontexten involverar även "strukturering online", där individer aktivt formar sina online- och lokala miljöer genom att bilda

temporära online-grupper för att påverka lokala strukturer. Denna samverkan mellan online- och lokala världar belyser hur teknologi och kommunikation kan ändra hur människor kopplar ihop och engagerar sig inom ett geografiskt område. Dessutom inkluderar den rumsliga kontexten online, skapandet av plats online, där individer använder sociala medier för att uttrycka sina åsikter om en specifik fysisk plats och utmanar eller omformar uppfattningen om platsen genom interaktioner online.

Den sociala kontexten online omfattar både svaga och påträngande band, som kan utvecklas när entreprenörer blir infogade i dem. Denna dynamiska process påverkar den lokala sociala kontexten och kan potentiellt leda till förändringar i ens sociala nätverk. Å andra sidan inkluderar den lokala rumsliga kontexten fysisk infrastruktur, kultur, historia och ekonomiska faktorer, som kan omformas genom entreprenörskapets engagemang i online-kontexter. Entreprenörer kan påverka hur invånare uppfattar och interagerar inom sin lokala miljö. Externa influenser kan föra med sig nya idéer, men måste uppskatta den lokala kontextens nyanser för att undvika kostsamma misstag. Entreprenörer bör sträva efter en balans mellan extern inspiration och lokal kunskap för att främja synergi mellan innovation och lokal erfarenhet.

Sociala medier påverkar de sociala och rumsliga sammanhangen i den entreprenöriella processen på många sätt. Studierna i denna avhandling visar på en utveckling av begreppen inbäddning och band, där traditionella fysiska relationer kompletteras med digitala interaktioner och skapar nya möjligheter och utmaningar för entreprenörskap. Studierna ger en inblick i hur sociala medier fungerar som en kraft och kan vara bränsle, hinder, möjliggörare eller förstärkare inom entreprenörskap.

Så, hur ser egentligen relationen ut mellan platsen (den rumsliga kontexten), den sociala kontexten och det som sker på sociala medier? Jo, de påverkar ömsesidigt varandra. Sociala medier fungerar som en länk som kan forma och omforma vår uppfattning av platser, samtidigt som platsen kan påverka hur vi använder sociala medier. Den sociala kontexten agerar som en medlare som påverkar hur individer engagerar sig och deltar i både platsen, entreprenörskap och sociala medier. Denna interaktion skapar en dynamisk och ständigt föränderlig relation mellan de tre delarna, och påverkar hur entreprenörskapet utvecklas. När vi forskar om entreprenörskap på landsbygden kan vi inte längre enbart utgå ifrån den lokala platsen, då det finns mer som påverkar utvecklingen.

Acknowledgements

Drawing a parallel between the pursuit of a Ph.D. and running a marathon reveals several similarities. While I have not personally run a marathon, my academic background sparks my curiosity, leading me to explore this intriguing analogy.

Both endeavours represent long-distance journeys that require tremendous endurance and stamina. They demand unwavering dedication and commitment, often necessitating personal sacrifices and lifestyle adjustments.

Support systems are crucial in both contexts. Marathon runners benefit from coaches and cheering spectators, while Ph.D. students rely on advisors, mentors, family, and friends for guidance, feedback, and encouragement. Moreover, there's a sense of community in both endeavours.

However, truth be told, my marathon was considerably smoother than it can be for most. I have had the best possible support imaginable.

Johan Gaddefors, in his role as my primary supervisor, has been an invaluable guiding force throughout my academic journey. His exceptional talent lies in his ability to provide clarity to my thoughts when they become muddled. I can recall numerous instances where a few simple circles and arrows on his whiteboard served as beacons of guidance during challenging moments.

Richard Ferguson, serving as my co-supervisor, has consistently challenged my perspectives through enriching conversations and thought-provoking philosophical inquiries.

Maria Tunberg, my other co-supervisor, has made significant contributions by placing my work within a broader context. She continually prompts me to consider the implications of my research for others and the question *"why* is this interesting?" echoing the wisdom of the late Prof. Alistair Anderson.

I would like to extend my deepest appreciation to the remaining members of my research group: Erik, Hanna, Hina, Karin, and Pelle (in alphabetical order). Their unwavering dedication, enthusiasm, and constructive feedback have played pivotal roles in the success of this project. Additionally, I must acknowledge our former members, Annie and Suvi, both of whom were my office neighbours and warmly welcomed me into this journey. Their support and camaraderie have been greatly appreciated.

I am also blessed with two parents, who wholeheartedly support me, offering not only life guidance but also the boundless love and care they extend to my children. To the both of you, my gratitude knows no bounds.

I am fortunate to have a mother-in-law, and sister-in-law, who assist with day-to-day logistics and share invaluable wine recommendations.

My husband, who has played a pivotal role in shaping my self-perception and offering unwavering support. He has had a profound influence on the person I am today, and our late-night conversations about societal structures, the masterpieces of Dietrich Buxtehude, or the transformative impact of technology on human behaviour, just as we're on the brink of slumber, remain cherished moments.

I am the proud parent of three incredible children, who astonishingly comprehend more about deadlines than one might imagine, but more importantly, who understand how to relish life's moments and engage me in them.

My dear brother and sister, my two role models in life. They are more than just family; they are the best fan club there is.

My dear friends, my unwavering pillars of support, joy, and inspiration in life, have enriched my journey in countless ways. They are more than just companions; they are the living embodiment of friendship's profound impact on our existence.

In this thesis, I have expounded on the significance of context, with a particular emphasis on the social milieu. It is within this social context described above that I've completed my own academic marathon embodied by this book, and for that, I am eternally grateful.

How online communities are important for rural entrepreneurial change – the library revolt

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Abstract

Purpose – This study aims to discuss how an online community interacts with a local community during the entrepreneurial process. By having a contextualized view of entrepreneurship, this study acknowledges the social and spatial dynamics of the process.

Design/methodology/approach – The inductive approach used in this study is empirically anchored in the case "the library revolt". This paper analysed interviews conducted in a selected region in Sweden and followed a netnographic method to capture the social interactions online. By using qualitative modes of inquiry, this study attempts to illuminate the social aspects of the entrepreneurial process.

Findings – This study shows how social media works as a contextual element in entrepreneurship. By presenting interactions between an online community and a rural community, it is shown how entrepreneurial processes in rural areas can be shaped not only through local community relations but also by online interaction. It illustrates how an online context, where actors are located with their own unique set of resources, contributes to rural development. By being a part of an ongoing process of structuration, we can view the actors are gaining access to the resources online, which contributes to the change happening in a local community.

Originality/value – This study adds to the conversation of the role of context in entrepreneurship studies. Rural entrepreneurship largely discusses the local social bonds and actions, while this study includes the online social bonds as a part of the reality in which entrepreneurship is developed.

Keywords Entrepreneurship, Online community, Local community, Context, Embeddedness, Rural

Paper type Research paper

1. Introduction

In 2015, 4,700 books in a rural municipality library were stolen and hidden in a secret archive, as a protest to the closing of the library. In the following days, this story was covered by local and national news media as The Library Revolt in Ravenville.

How could the many online support the few in the small rural town? In this article, we add online activities to the local entrepreneurial process. We tell the story about the Library Revolt; how a group of locals, trying to save and renew the local library, got unexpected support from a rapidly developing online community. We want to explain how a small, rural

community of people started a movement that spread online and how the scale of this online community turned the tide in the rural municipality.

In theory and practice, entrepreneurship is seen as a key driver of rural development (Pato and Teixeira, 2016) or, actually in many rural cases, the mechanism preserving the status quo, that may help these areas in handling the challenges that are related to institutional thinness (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). Cooperation within and in between groups of people located in remote areas is essential to generate new practices and building support to enable entrepreneurship (Johannisson, 1990; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). Most often, the argument for more entrepreneurship is related to the blessings of small business start-ups, including, for example, new jobs and increased tax revenues for the municipality (Müller, 2016). But rural areas are more than production spaces; they are multifunctional spaces for leisure, working, living and recreation (Bosworth, 2012, Markantoni and van Hoven, 2012). The values produced in entrepreneurial processes are multifaceted; Korsgaard and Anderson (2011) emphasize values from individual self-realization over community development to broad societal impact. This is how a local library can be a valuable hub for change in a small rural town.

Entrepreneurship research has emphasized local resources and embeddedness in the creation of values in rural areas (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). Local embeddedness can bridge the structural lack of resources as well as contributing with vital information (Jack and Anderson, 2002). Non-local connections have been brought out to show how rural entrepreneurs go further than the local place in the search for partners, resources and markets (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). Adding to the importance of the local and the non-local, online engagement has been brought into play.

So far, the physical space has dominated the explanations, but we need to develop our understanding of how the virtual space (Aslesen *et al.*, 2019) is part of the local change processes. Fahmi and Savira (2021) state that digitalization shapes how rural entrepreneurs develop their attitude and it is the surrounding factors (social and environmental) which will influence how rural entrepreneurs choose to continue with implementing digital solutions in their venture. So, these surrounding factors, usually referred to as context, is of importance here. But what happens when the context expands and the few in a small rural town engage with the many online?

To sort out the interactions between local and online engagement, we turn to the structuration perspective in the entrepreneurship literature (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Fletcher, 2011). In particular, this perspective helps us to describe who is involved and how engagement in a social movement can be what constitutes a community; in other words, what people gather around. Our story shows how a local change process starts, how a non-local online community takes agency in the process, how the initiative moves between the local and the online community. It questions what the results can be when the initiative moves online and what happened when the online community cooled off. With this background, we ask, how does an online community interact with a local community during the entrepreneurial process?

This study argues that entrepreneurship as a change process is developing because of the interactivity between the online and local communities. In our view, the library is one of many links that together shape a productive socio-spatial context in our rural municipality case. Thus, we acknowledge and will depart from the contextual turn in entrepreneurship research where the place is seen as the nexus where entrepreneurial process and values are realized (Welter, 2011; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). Adding the online sphere to spatial and social context makes it possible to gain new insights regarding how entrepreneurship works in a digitalizing world (Aslesen *et al.*, 2019).

In the next section, we present entrepreneurship as a local change process, emphasizing contextual factors, followed by a discussion about the local and online communities. To advance entrepreneurship research, we provide insights on how the online community and local community develop in dialogue during the library revolt. Our empirical findings illustrate in detail how the dialogue developed over time. In Section 5, we develop our theoretical framework and the contributions.

2. Contexts and communities

Individuals' actions are enabled and constrained by their contexts, but how individuals and contexts change as a result of this interaction is more difficult to explain (McKeever *et al.*, 2015). Welter (2011) gave us four contexts to handle: business, social, spatial and institutional. The business context has received the most attention in entrepreneurship research, and social as well as institutional contexts are well-developed perspectives. The interest in spatial context is increasing (McKeever *et al.*, 2015; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017) and so is the focus on the combination of the socio-spatial context. The spatial context adds to the sense-making in the entrepreneurial process by including a perspective of meaning and heritage (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b).

2.1 Entrepreneurship and context

Entrepreneurship has been described as strongly dependent on social interactions (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Johannisson, 2011). Anderson *et al.* (2012, p.964) view entrepreneurship as "dynamic in bringing together, connecting, interrelated and complicated elements of both self and circumstance". This process perspective of entrepreneurship shows how connecting and embedding are fundamental to entrepreneurship in place (Anderson *et al.*, 2012). But how new technologies such as social media and Facebook influence the connecting in change processes is in need of more thorough investigation.

For understanding what happened in our case, we view the entrepreneurial process as about "'doing contexts'; that is, [entrepreneurs] construct the contexts in which they operate as agentic responses to the environments they confront" (Welter and Baker, 2020, p. 41). We can view the "doing of context" as actions emerging from the different environments the entrepreneurs are embedded in (Welter and Baker, 2020). Gaddefors and Anderson (2019, p. 1) suggest it is "about engagement with contexts rather than simply within a context". We use the "doing of context" to discuss how the entrepreneurial process happens in spatially dependent relations between people.

Research shows that to shape and sustain ventures in a rural context, embeddedness plays a key role (Jack and Anderson, 2002). Welter (2011) emphasized the local collective process in community entrepreneurship. In addition, Fortunato (2014) showed how local and regional elements took part in the process. Peoples' local knowledge about the landscape (physical, cultural and historical) and the local interest regarding the well-being and concern for the rural community are good examples (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a; Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). Thus, social embeddedness and also "placial" embeddedness are enabling factors in entrepreneurship development (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b).

2.2 Communities and structuration

Anderson and Gaddefors (2016) view places as structural qualities that shape agency and are shaped by agency. As such, communities consist of people interacting and building connections in a place. However, in our library case, we do not only have a geographical place shaping agency, but also an online. To understand how entrepreneurial change and social context co-evolve, we turn to structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) as a lens to describe

and understand our two interconnected communities. In the field of information systems, research has taken a structuration perspective to "help reveal how technical systems [such as social media] can support or hinder human interaction" (Evans and Brooks, 2005, p. 215). Structuring can help us to explore how the online and local social structure generate responses to the environments; in other words, how context is reconstructed (Baker and Welter, 2020).

If we look at what brings people together, we can use the concept of communities of practice (CoP), where members are self-assigned and held together based on commitment, passion or expertise (Wenger, 2000). The communities are only lasting, when there is an interest maintained in the group and people act upon (Wenger and Snyder, 2000). Often, we refer to community of practice, as being rooted in place (Somerville and McElwee, 2011), but we see a growing interest in online CoP where membership is organized, not as physical meetings, but as involvement in a writing practice (Stommel and Koole, 2010). Members participating in online CoP experience relational value (Faraj *et al.*, 2016; Dubé *et al.*, 2006).

But talking about groups on social media as one community can be misleading. Hannerz (2016) raise the point that social media can be seen as a form of online co-sociality, consisting of several parallel social movements, rather than one community. However, we can use "online community" as an empirical lens for when we zoom out to look at the processes trying to trace connections (Nicolini, 2009). When we zoom in, we can rather see that the social media environment has developed into the state of being a temporary bounded sociality (Perren and Kozinets, 2018) with several social movements.

2.3 Communities, context and entrepreneurship as relational

With the expansion of social media use, the traditional boundaries between social spheres have disappeared (Berg, 2015), and in communication, we no longer are dependent upon barriers related to time and space. Aslesen *et al.* (2019) raise the point that the virtual space can reinforce as well as create new linkages of knowledge. Because of this, the distinction between the geographical and the virtual becomes more blurred (Berg, 2015; Aslesen *et al.*, 2019). Therefore, the internet cannot be seen as a placeless "cyberspace"; rather, we should acknowledge that it is used by various people, in real-world locations (Martin *et al.*, 2000) as an extension of the material and enable a local place's social relations to stretch over the world. These social processes are important for understanding how this change because of digitalization occurs, instead of only describing the outcome in the local place (Fahmi and Savira, 2021).

Wenger (1998) refer to community as a group of people who share domain and practices. He focuses on the participation in joint actions which create the community. Thus, communities can be understood as activities. In similarity to this, we use the "doing context" (Baker and Welter, 2020) to understand entrepreneurial processes as activities and Giddens (1984) structuring to understand how contexts are constantly renegotiated.

The relational aspect is important, as communities both have a vertical structure consisting of ties in a local place, and also a horizontal structure where local communities are inter-connected (Warren, 1961). This connects to Korsgaard *et al.*'s (2015a) view on how entrepreneurs use both local and non-local resources when bridging context(s). Based on Warren's (1961) idea about horizontal and vertical connection, we use the lens of context, as suggested by Korsgaard *et al.* (2015a), to explore these communities, relations and how contemporary technology enables these relations.

3. Our approach

The empirical setting for this study is located in the mid of the Swedish region *Bergslagen*. We have chosen the fictional name Ravenville for the specific town where the story takes

place. Ravenville is situated in a forest landscape and has a long history of mining and processing iron, which dates back to the 1500s.

We combined an ethnographic (Johnstone, 2007) and a netnographic approach (Kozinets, 2019) for collecting empirical material. Interviews and online text material were collected in the autumn of 2019. Three respondents (Table 2) and a defined Facebook group consisting of 1,200 individuals (Table 3) were chosen because of their involvement in the library.

By using qualitative modes of inquiry, we attempt to discuss the social aspects of the process. When focusing on the surrounding conditions, we argue in line with Flyvbjerg (2012) regarding actions being context-dependent. The process design this study takes is appropriate to explore the contexts, content and development of change (Van de Ven, 2007). This will include an event-driven approach, where the focus is to unfold "how does the entrepreneurship process unfold over time?" (Van de Ven and Engleman, 2004, p. 355). By having an inductive approach to examine the selected area, this study will explore the social world from the perspective of the participating individuals.

3.1 Material collection

Our first step in this study was to visit Ravenville. We discussed with locals and made observations. Field notes from discussions in the local grocery shop and photographs worked as a developing base for the empirical field. The second step consisted of identifying and contacting key stakeholders in "the library revolt". We conducted interviews with three respondents and collected netnographic data from social media sources. The length of the interviews varied between 1 and 4 h, and was determined depending on the amount of emerging content. When meeting with the respondents, we focused on a semi-structured interview guide with themes that we wanted to cover. This leads to a dynamic conversation with the respondents and we attained rich material regarding the history and context of the place.

As we are interested in how people create and engage in their context, we followed the language or "online traces" (Kozinets, 2019) as well. As Welter and Baker (2020) put it: "Language is a crucial element that shapes, influences and constructs contexts and to which we need to attend in exploring and explaining differences in entrepreneurship" (p. 130). To track the online traces, we chose a "netnographic" (Kozinets, 2019) approach.

Netnography is a systematic research method for online ethnography, consisting of different research practices (Kozinets, 2019). The *investigative* procedure used in this article indicates a selective approach where we "choose from among the vast and ever-increasing wealth of informational traces created in the act of communications between people on social media platforms, and saved in archives and real-time recordings of social media interaction" (Kozinets, 2019 p.193). When we have an investigative approach, we can select a topic in a forum, follow a hashtag or select a Facebook group that will constitute our narrowing down of the field. This was our way to include online material published on the library's Facebook page. Table 1 shows an overview of the collection and purposes of material from Ravenville and the Facebook group.

In Table 2, we present an overview of the respondents we met, their primary function in the revolt and their relationship to Ravenville. We have chosen to set fictional names to preserve the integrity of the respondents.

To capture the online material from the public Facebook group related to the library revolt, we adopted the NCapture plugin for NVivo. NCapture enabled the download of the full posts, links, images, reactions and comments as a data set to be imported to NVivo. However, the individuals' identities are not captured in the extracted material but are instead given a generated code number. For this paper, we have reviewed 538 posts.

All were collected into a data set in which we continued with the analysis of the material. In Table 3, we present subgroups from the online material, the timing for the collection and people's relationships to Ravenville.

3.2 Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were divided thematically, where we focused on touching upon different themes (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The interviews were processed through a coding technique to turn the material into a communicative story (Saldaña, 2015). The methodological techniques chosen help us to develop an understanding of the library development process and the contextual factors. Quotes from the material are presented to

Collection method	Participant involvement	Specific research purpose and additional comments
Field work: observation	Passive	Locating specific issues to investigate and key individuals to contact
Interviews	Active	To investigate the individuals' perception and use of Facebook To map the entrepreneurial process
Netnography	Passive	Map the online story of the entrepreneurial process To capture the online social dynamics

Table 1.
Collection and purposes of empirics

Material	Primary function	Time	Type	Relationship to Ravenville
Respondent A *Anna*	Initiator of the revolt, participant in the process and coordinator	September 2019	Interview	Born in the area. Have been living in a medium-sized town for 50 years. Moved back in 2014
Respondent B *Bella*	Initiator of the revolt and participant in the process	September 2019	Interview	Born in the UK, moved to the area in 2010
Respondent C *Caren*	Initiator of the revolt and participant in the process	September 2019	Interview	Established local family

Table 2.
Overview of the respondents and relationship to Ravenville

Material	Time	Type	Relationship to Ravenville
Facebook group (1,200 individuals) 1. Local inhabitants 2. Expatriates 3. Summertime residents	Material from 2015 to 2019	Online text material	Created by the organizing group 1. Living in the area 2. Emotional attachment 3. Range from well-established to newcomers
4. Political engaged			4. Emotionally engaged in rural areas in general
5. Library supporters			5. No visible relationship

Table 3.
Overview of the online material and locational relationship

provide authenticity to the text. In this way, we attempt to make sense of the studied communities and provide the reader with insights and details.

With the data set generated by NCapture, we attained the online material in chronological order. In the initial stage, we adopted a descriptive coding technique which helped us categorize the material to get an overview, in agreement with Saldaña (2015). This was done by examining a portion of the empirical material at the time and summarizing it with a representative label. By adopting the coding technique, it is possible to dig into the material and stimulate analytical ideas in the process (Skjott Linneberg and Korsgaard, 2019). The purpose was to divide the material and abstracting it at a higher level (Gehman et al., 2018). When we approached the material, we found it useful to zoom in and out as suggested by Nicolini (2009). We zoomed in to capture the socialization process and zoomed out to view patterns and the effects in the larger perspective. This was important for acknowledging the diversity that occurred online, as well as locally.

With the presented steps above, we want to attain an overall understanding of the process, acknowledging the context and situational factors. If we would have done a longer ethnographic study, it would have opened up for the opportunity to create a deeper understanding of the values and power dimensions (Flyvbjerg, 2012) of the local place. However, we choose to rather focus on the online story and understanding the relations between the local and virtual place.

In the next section, we will continue by presenting our story about *the library revolt*.

4. Library revolt in Ravenville

What happened in Ravenville 2014–2018? In short, our story starts when ten locals, "the friends of the library", decided to engage against the local municipality's decision to close the local library. Next, they started a Facebook group, "the library revolt", to organize their work. After a while, they got unexpected online support. About 1,000 people joined "the library revolt" Facebook group, what became an FB-based movement and an able-bodied player in the library revolt. As a result of combined efforts from locals and the online community, they succeeded in their task. In the aftermath, we saw a passive online community but a continuously engaged local community. Figure 1 is an illustration of the library revolt and the most significant events that took place. In the following sections, we present a detailed account of what happened in and in between the local and online communities.
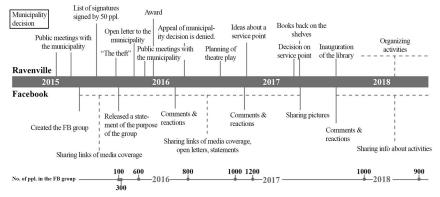

Figure 1.
Process of the library revolt from 2014 to 2018, including the number of participants in the Facebook group

4.1 Local community

This section will chronologically tell the story of the library revolt in Ravenville, divided into three parts: the theft, the parley and the solution.

4.1.1 The theft. The story for this paper began in 2014. In a rural area in mid-Sweden, the municipality officials of Ravenville planned to close the local library and replace it with a book bus, a small library on wheels. The building, in which the library was located, belonged to the church and the municipality rented it to run the library. The library in Ravenville was taken care of by one part-time librarian. The rationality behind the decision was to save money for the municipality by providing full library services only in the more densely populated regions of the municipality. But, ten engaged locals got together and decided to take a stand for the library. In their view, the library was an important social hub for everyone in Ravenville:

> When the church closed a couple of years ago, the library was the only place that you could meet your neighbours and friends outside of the home. It was our only meeting place! (Anna).

Engaged locals reacted and created a local protest group, *the friends of the library*, to organize their resistance towards the library being shut down. The group worked together to write open letters to the municipality, planned actions and attended public forums given by the municipality to raise their concerns. Historically, Ravenville is shaped by a collective understanding of the history of the place and its role for service development:

> If something is to be done, we have to do it ourselves (Bella).

During the spring of 2015, the municipality decided to end the renting agreement with the church and replace the library with a book bus. In August 2015, the evening before the municipality would come to retrieve the books, about 20 people gathered in the library to socialize. At that point, the frustration grew and the local group explored different opportunities of stopping the closure. They decided to hide all of the 4,700 library books:

> She sat and pondered and then she said "I'm making a call" and then she sat here looking at the parking lot and called the church and asked if it was ok if we could have [. . .] and he said yes. [. . .] We just started cheering and I called my husband who came with moving boxes and then it was just to pack the books. And then we just started to move them [. . .]. The church had some papers left. [. . .] It went pretty fast (Anna).

During that evening in August, the 4,700 library books were hidden in a secret archive in the library building. This was an extraordinary occasion for the locals involved. None of them had ever taken action against the authorities, nor stolen anything on this scale. The situation created strong bonds among the participants and strengthened the sense of community.

> We're not saying this to anyone. Nobody in here is allowed to say anything, and we're simply just saying we've taken care of them [the books]. It took a long time before we told anyone or that it came out *(Bella).*

In the following days, the story was covered by local and national news media as *the library revolt* and became publicly known in Sweden. The media covered the story as "4700 books stolen by protesters". But the protesters did not perceive it as anything intentionally illegal:

> And my granddaughter said to me: "Grandma, will the police come and put you in jail?" and I was perplexed! I never thought about what we did as illegal – we just hid the books" (Anna).

During the following months, the local group *the friends of the library* searched for possible solutions on how to find a new library solution for Ravenville in discussion with the municipality and neighbours, continuously sharing their struggle and progress with the

members in the Facebook group. The *friends of the library* discussed possible solutions to open their library and how it would be imaginable. They also got a lot of attention both on Facebook and in Swedish media:

> We got enormous support and attention. The story was covered from the north to the south of Sweden. It was powerful (Caren).

There were many reasons for engaging in the revolt from the start. Among the participating group, some wanted to sustain the tradition of the old library in Ravenville, others saw the library as the social hub in the village and some wanted to enable access to books for the kids in the village. These social ties shaped a subset of connections within the initial revolt group. In Table 4, we show the key motivation of engagement among the three respondents who were central to the revolt.

4.1.2 The parley. For the *friends of the library*, 2015 was a troublesome year, with many drawbacks. Discussions between them and the Ravenville officials continued with open letters to the municipality in question. They talked about how to solve the problem with the missing books and the closed library. The media were still interested in the revolt. There were debate articles about the right to have libraries and on a more general level the lack of services in rural areas. Thus, in the media coverage, we could see how the revolt became a symbol for the rural/urban divide in society.

However, in December 2015, the local group was acknowledged when they were rewarded with a prize "citizens of the year" for their struggle and contribution to fighting for enabling a thriving countryside.

The *friends of the library* continued to have a dialogue with people in the village, as well as with the municipality to find solutions. Many local people wanted to help with finding a location or show their support in different ways. They had ideas on renting other buildings, but as there was no money to cover the costs, it was difficult:

> We went around in the village and tried to see where we could have the library, but with no funding to cover the costs – it is difficult (Anna).

Another significant point for the *friends of the library* was when a nearby theatre group decided to develop a play, based on the story of the library.

> We recognized a lot of the people [in the FB group] from the theatre. They had followed our fight (Bella).

With the story of library revolt, being reframed in a theatre play, *the friends of the library* got even more force infused in their struggle. Through the play, they could feel that they have done something good for the village.

4.1.3 The solution. Amid alternative ideas, a civil servant in Ravenville presented an idea of reframing the concept of a library to a *service point*. The library would be the main activity, but they would add services such as tourist information, cultural events and internet access. With this expansion of services, they would be eligible to attain funding to enable and finance the establishment of a new library. But the idea was not welcomed by *the*

Material	Respondent A	Respondent B	Respondent C
Social ties	Enabling a social life in the village	Enabling a social life in the village	Preserving cultural heritage

Table 4.
Reason for engagement in the revolt among the respondents

friends of the library. They were still angry and disappointed at the municipality people for closing the library:

> When you have a protest movement, you face a wall. It is us against them. [. . .] But it was Anna who saw the opportunity in it (Caren).

In this situation, Anna saw the opportunity in collaborating with the municipality, and she tried to rebuild confidence between the two parties. She had previous experience with working together with municipalities and had an idea of how it could be arranged. By providing the services required, they could cover the cost of the facilities they need for a library. When she was the one who presented the idea to the others in the group, they were instead positive.

In 2017, the old library building was sold, and *the friends of the library* managed to create an agreement with the buyer: they rented the lower floor for establishing a service point with library activities and the buyer's family would live on the top floor. In February 2017, *the friends of the library* got the decision from the municipality that they would get funding for having a "rural service point". The non-profit organization would attain funds for having tourist information, providing internet access and organizing social activities. However, they did not get any funding for having a library. *The friends of the library* decided to take this opportunity and create a service point, where they also could have a library.

The library was liberated through the engagements of the local agents and started to form into a private, non-profit organization based on voluntary efforts. But a lot of work was to be done. When the municipality closed the library, they managed to remove everything – except for the books:

> The municipality had taken everything. So we had to go home to each other and beg for shelves to have anything to put the books in (Anna).

The books were returned to the public and the library opened again with a series of activities and celebrations. The *friends of the library* got attention again in national media and were asked to share the story with a good ending.

4.2 The online community

Section 4.1 shows what we usually refer to as community entrepreneurship: local group of people working together to create change. Below, we present the online story happening parallel to what we viewed in the local place.

4.2.1 The theft. In the summer of 2015, the *friends of the library* created a Facebook group: *the library revolt*. The local group wanted to spread the word about what was going on in the local place and inform people about what they were doing to solve the issues. The people in Ravenville with roughly 200 inhabitants managed to get over 300 people to join the library revolt Facebook group in one day. The number of followers increased continuously and the revolt became known in Sweden. As the number of followers plays an important role in mobilizing action, we can see how the increasing number of participants in the Facebook group was welcomed. The moderators in the group shared the progress: "100 likes on the page! THANK YOU to everyone who supports the LIBRARY REVOLT!" and also encouraging the people in the group to gather more people: "Invite your friends to LIKE the page! Share, share, share!!!" The group rapidly grew: "The library revolt is here. Since the start yesterday, we are now over 300 in the group. Together we can influence and create change". Although the "cost" of joining an online revolt is quite low, we can see this revolt group strive for attaining a large number of followers as a part of their action.

One reoccurring topic in the Facebook group when it started was positive and encouraging comments. The *friends of the library* said that they were in a constant struggle during the process and turned to the Facebook group to share their burdens. The reaction they

got was support for their struggle: "I admire you. Hang in there!" The *friends of the library* were asking if they did the right thing, and got instant positive feedback from the Facebook group. The online community was positive and encouraging to the actions made by the local group "I think you are fantastic who can continue and never give up" and the local group continuously confirmed the support: "Thank you, yes, we really do feel the encouragement!".

Within the Facebook group, we can see different reasons for engagement. Because the group is consisting of individuals from different spheres, joining around a certain cause, they all had different lenses when engaging in the group. In our material, we can see some local supporters wanting to show support for their neighbours. Others have lived in the area and expressed a feeling of disappointment for what has become of Ravenville with the service reduction. We can also see summertime residents who are not embedded in the local place as much, but still express the need for service opportunities when they decide to visit their house. We can also see streams of politically engaged, who use Ravenville as an example of a systematic problem in Sweden. Another group that was visible was the library supporters, who saw this as a threat to the Swedish democratic landscape and access to knowledge. In Table 5, we sum up the different reasons for engagement in the revolt.

4.2.2 The parley. We can see that it is not only the question of the library that was of interest in this Facebook group. Opinions about education, democracy and the urban/rural dived are represented in the material: "Many people argue that it is important to preserve the countryside, but few do anything at all to take their statements seriously" *(Facebook user)*, "They are closing down the rural areas" *(Facebook user)*, "We need a vivid countryside!" or "Having access to books is a cornerstone of democracy" *(Facebook user)*.

The Facebook group rapidly grew into a vivid dialogue of the function of libraries, the exposed rural areas, views of politics and liberation. "They have hidden 4,700 books to save the village library. But the Library revolt is about much more than a collection of books" *(Facebook user)*, "Join our political party! [. . .] We can be strong together all over Sweden!" *(Facebook user)* or "Civil disobedience scares most municipalities - I personally think it is a sign of health that we should use it a little more and not find ourselves in that we, in rural areas, get worse and worse" *(Facebook user)*. These sorts of comments or posts were intertwined with posts from the admin group, who shared the struggles they had with the municipality.

In Table 6, we present examples from the discussion in the FB group. In the material, we found several discussions developing. Some are not at all related to the core question (the Ravenville library), while some make up a massive force of positivity for the cause in question. There are many discussions about Ravenville and rural areas in general, although we can see in our material that not all participating individuals have connections to Ravenville. But the discussion developed into an online representation of what "rural" is and, should be. On the other hand, we can also see individuals offer their opinions and others agreeing or disagreeing with

Who	Reason for engagement	
Local inhabitants	Show support	
Expatriates	Claim identity and protect cultural heritage	
Summertime residents	Protect the area from service reduction	
Political engaged	Protest against service reduction of rural areas in general	
Library supporters	Defend the democratic right of knowledge	
	Symbolic action	
	Claim identity	

Table 5.
Reason for engagement in the revolt among the individuals in the Facebook group

Example	1st level code (Descriptive)	2nd level (Pattern)	Theme	
"Many people argue that it is important to preserve the countryside, but few do anything at all to take their statements seriously." "They are closing down the rural areas." "We need a vivid countryside!"	Declining rural areas	Experiences and opinions regarding life in rural areas	Online representation rurality	Online engagement in a local place: CoP development
"Darn, what a tough and stubborn municipality you live in." "Politicians should listen to the people otherwise they should be replaced!" "Short-term politics by politicians leads to rural poverty!"	Politics			
"You have been and are very capable and energetic. Keep on fighting!" "You're the best. You keep on!" "You can do this!" "Wonderful, sending support from Stockholm!" "I am sharing this in my network!" *(re-occurring phrase)*	Encouragement	Participation	Shared engagement	
"Don't give up. Continue to fight!" "Continue the fight for the countryside!" "Civil disobedience is good and frightful for politicians. I think it is good that we do not settle by having worse off." "Up to battle!"	Fight			
"Every person in this country has the right to the library's offer!" "The right to culture, is that only for the urban areas?" "This is discrimination!"	Equality			

Table 6.
Themes from the library revolt Facebook group

them. This created social bonds about "what we share" online, a kind of temporary bounded sociality developed online. All this together created a temporary bounded sociality among the supporters in the Facebook group.

4.2.3 The solution. When the library got the decision to be a "service point with library activities", the Facebook group reacted positively, claiming that "It pays to resist". The

Facebook posts about the library re-opening got many *likes* and *shares*, which reach far away from the forests in mid-Sweden. After the decision about re-opening, we can see that the comments changed character. During 2015–2016, most comments showed engagement and a willingness to help the revolt further. However, at this stage, the comments reflected a closure or departure. The individuals online wrote in similar ways: "This is great news! Good luck in the future!" or "What a success story! Best of luck" and "Congratulations! Good luck with your project". The *friends of the library* answered these comments with "Thank you for all the support during our journey! We hope to see you at some point!" showing respect to the online community that *had* helped them and a type of exit signal.

In August 2017, the library started to have activities and ordinary library services. The *friends of the library* continued to share the activities in the Facebook group, but the engagement quickly declined when the purpose of the group changed. Now, it was no longer a bounded sociality. The group converted to a platform for marketing the activities. We can see a reduction in comments, likes and shares on the posts made after the opening of the library.

To sum up, the *friends of the library* used Facebook as a platform for spreading information about their process, but also for influencing the members of the platform to take action. By raising awareness about their cause, they put pressure on the municipality while at the same time they attained support for themselves.

4.3 Connecting the online and local community
In Section 4, we have so far told one story from the perspective of the Ravenville-based group "the friends of the library" (Section 4.1) and one story from the perspective of the online based group "the library revolt" (Section 4.2). It is now time to combine the two stories, to explain how people in place and people on social media interact to create change in a local place. We focus on the emerging socio-spatial context and how the initiative is moving between people located in the small town and people online.

When we reunite the two communities, we see how they energize each other over time. We can see the participants of the Facebook group all come from different spheres with a diverse set of sense of belonging and identities. In spite of this, they unite around a certain cause and get involved. The process of developing an online social movement, with political goals, amplified the perceived local social movement and energized the local actors to continue their struggle. The community developed online discussions, with a mutual exchange of information and support.

We saw how the two communities interacted in a process of structuring, where agency moved in between the local and online communities. We saw that these communities consisted of several groups, and how the groups were pushing for different agendas, but were united around a cause that was easy to access and affect. When we zoomed out to look at the bigger picture, we saw about 1,000 people engaged in the library revolt in Ravenville. But when we zoomed in, we saw temporary bounded sociality, where agents were joining together not based on what they were agreeing with at the moment – like a temporary fellowship (see Figure 2). In other words, looking close, we saw several social movements developing online. These movements were focused on rural politics, culture, rural areas or democracy, not only in Ravenville but in Sweden in general. Locally, we saw a more homogenous development with a clear goal, to save the library. However, all of these interests were united in the Facebook group and together they shaped temporary social bonds and a common understanding.

In the process of shaping the online community, we saw individuals as embedded in systems of social relations. However, when the purpose of the Facebook group was fulfilled, the social relations online were dispersed because the online agents were not spatially embedded in the local community. The social relations emerging from the Facebook group

were built upon the socially created online community only. When the goals were fulfilled, the community lost its purpose and there was nothing for the people to unite around.

5. How online communities are important for local change?

In this article, we wanted to explain how a small, rural community of people started a social movement that spread locally and online and how the scale of this online community turned the tide in the rural municipality. We have discussed the online and the local communities in the library revolt as two CoP, where individuals were engaged with commitment, passion and expertise (Wenger, 2000). When people in our case were involved in writing up the revolt (Stommel and Koole, 2010), they engaged with their social and spatial contexts (Dubé *et al.*, 2006). This affected how locals understood Ravenville and, as such, the local place was shaped by what happened in the revolt.

To us this is what Welter and Baker (2020) talk about as constructing contexts when individuals engage in the online and local environment or when Gaddefors and Anderson (2019) discuss how agency is distributed. We can view it as a dynamic process of social interaction (Jack and Anderson, 2002; Johannisson, 2011).

We now present four themes we believe are important for further entrepreneurship research.

5.1 Arguments for and importance of embeddedness

Jack and Anderson (2002) showed how embeddedness gives access to local resources and how this mattered for entrepreneurship in rural settings. In our case, the *friends of the library* were well-known people in the village, and they had key roles in the local municipality. They had the sense of place necessary to understand how to frame the revolt in a way that gave them room for manoeuvre. Thus, to be embedded gave them access to different kinds of resources in the local environment. It was the people's local knowledge regarding the use of the landscape (physical, cultural and historical), as well as the local interest regarding the well-being and concern for the rural community that contributed to the development (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a; Müller and Korsgaard, 2018). We saw a group of embedded locals turn into a local community of practice that grew and developed. In addition, we saw how an online community grew and supported the local venture. Thus, we have to include the online sphere in our understanding of embeddedness and local change.

Is "online embeddedness" an empty signifier, a combination of concepts that points to no actual practice? Without doubt, people can be socially embedded online, isn't this the core
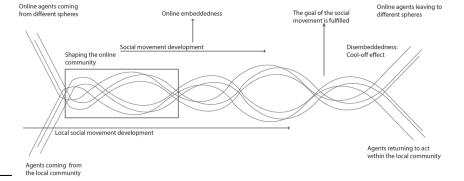
Figure 2.
Process of structuration in the Facebook group during the library revolt

idea behind social media algorithms? Our query is about the possible links between spatial and online embeddedness.

Departing from our case, it is possible to view the developing online community as a virtual place where different people come with their unique set of resources, and sometimes including knowledge of and commitment to a local place. In our case, the Facebook group was started by locals from Ravenville. Thus, some of the people active on Facebook and thus part of the social online community were also connected to the local place, a type of double spatial embeddedness (anchored online and locally). In this way, the spatial dimension of the revolt had a voice online. Depending on what of the different movements people were pushing for on Facebook (for example, rural politics, culture, democracy or Ravenville), the spatial dimension was more or less on the table. Obviously, we saw posts and comments in our Facebook material that were good illustrations of people embedding in Ravenville. But, although the group members showed high engagement, sharing emotions and offering support to the local place, the majority of them had no relation to Ravenville.

We found that time is also important. When the library re-opened, the politically engaged could no longer use the library example in their rhetoric. The summertime residents did not need to engage to secure their summer holiday. The library supporters did not need to use Ravenville as an example for the fall of democracy and knowledge, and so on. In our view, it is the temporary bounded online sociality that shapes the context and will dissolve when there is no unifying purpose.

To sum up, we saw the classic type of social embeddedness, a double spatial embeddedness (anchored online and locally) and a more transitory, fragile type of embeddedness online. The issue of online embeddedness is an intriguing one which could be usefully explored in further research.

5.2 Online structuration

What we have seen in our case is that the *friends of the library* are recreating their contexts by engaging local and online with people, who have chosen to support the cause. The individuals in Ravenville have built a temporary online co-sociality (Hannerz, 2016), that comes to play in their doing of context (Baker and Welter, 2020). This implies that the community of practice that we can observe when we zoom out consists of many subgroups or social movements. If we zoom in, we see them creating a temporary bounded sociality (Kozinets, 2019) in the Facebook group.

Based on our understanding of places as structural qualities that are shaped by and shape agency (Anderson and Gaddefors, 2016), we can see how the online and local social context is reconstructed. In our case, we have seen the people in Ravenville actively enact and construct an enabling online and local sphere for the change they aimed for. This is what Giddens (1984) talked about as a structuring process. His thinking may help us to see how individuals actively work to modify the local structure and create an expansion by engaging in social media. This is an example of how technical systems can enable social interaction (Evans and Brooks, 2005) and function as a platform for structuring processes. When we interact on social media, we are not only sharing our thoughts and ideas, we are also a part of an ongoing process of structuration (Evans and Brooks, 2005). Thus, we can see that the boundary between our experiences from a geographical and a virtual place becomes more blurred (Berg, 2015; Aslesen *et al.*, 2019).

In our case, this temporary bounded online sociality became a part of the re-structuring of Ravenville. We have showed how the friends of the library perceived the online support and acted upon it, to create local change. This conclusion calls for further research about how entrepreneurship is based in local culture versus online culture.

5.3 Online functions in local change processes
In the beginning, Facebook was a practical tool for the local group in Ravenville. They shared information, made plans and agreed-on meetings. Later, Facebook enabled the recruitment of activists and provided a platform for continuous updates on the development of the revolt. Thus, the initial actions were local, but later on reached more urban regions. But by acknowledging the online processes, the socio-spatial context helps us understand the individuals' perspectives in their process of rural entrepreneurship (Fahmi and Savira, 2021). The ongoing digitalization will affect the rural entrepreneurship activities taking place in communities (Lekhanya, 2018; Bowen and Morris, 2019), so by following the expanding social context being shaped online, we can improve our understanding of how entrepreneurship is developing in a rural place.

But what happened after the library re-opened? The effect of the online community cooled off when the group lost its purpose – there was no sense of unity after the goal had been obtained and the temporary sociality was dissolved. The community of practice only lasted while interest remained in the group (Wenger and Snyder, 2000). When individuals online lost interest, the online sphere lost its purpose as a community. However, in Ravenville, the actions continued because they had created a new core interest in the community: the management of the library, showing the importance of local embeddedness (Jack and Anderson, 2002).

Further studies on the role of how online resources in entrepreneurship can empower local citizens in creating local change would be worthwhile.

5.4 Local and online co-creation of change
We know how local place is part of entrepreneurship (Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017). In our case, we saw how local social relations joined with the temporary bounded online sociality (Kozinets, 2019). The social relations we have observed in this case are both offline and online, and both were important for the library development. The online sociality did not consist of one group of people, but several social movements, which shaped the social reality for the local group. The social movements consisted, for example, of politically engaged, library supporters or summertime residents. They all had different incentives to support revolt, but the sum of the engagements was a positive force for the Ravenville residents.

Previous research show how rural entrepreneurship is about using local resources and build value for the rural community (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015b). We have seen how the non-local connections help rural entrepreneurs go further than the local place in the search for partners, resources or markets (Müller and Korsgaard, 2018; Korsgaard *et al.*, 2015a, 2015b). What we have shown in our case is how an online community, consisting of a temporary co-sociality, has affected a local group of people to create local change. It is not only the local structure that hereby engages with local entrepreneurial activity, but we need a socio-spatial perspective that includes online engagements to understand our local change processes. Therefore, we argue for an expansion of socio-spatial contexts to include online social relations. Further research could usefully explore how online and local relations provide a pathway to local problem-solving.

6. Conclusion
In this paper, we told the story of how a group of locals saved the local library, with essential support from a rapidly developing online community. We saw a local group of people co-creating the online community as a part of context for the venture.

When we interact on social media, we are also a part of an ongoing process of structuration. This connects to how we can perceive agency as moving between the local

and the online community. We can view the developing online communities as novel environments where actors are located with their own unique set of resources. By being embedded in the online sociality, we can view the actor's gaining access to the resources online which contribute to the change happening in Ravenville.

Thus, we argue that to understand a local change process, we need to make online CoP a part of the socio-spatial context. We have acknowledged the social reality as being both online and local. This expands the idea of the social context importance for entrepreneurial reality. We have argued in line with the ongoing discussion on a contextualized view of entrepreneurship, by examining the social context of entrepreneurs as both being local and online. By recognizing the empirical case of a library as an entrepreneurial process and the use of Facebook, we can acknowledge the social interactions in entrepreneurship that shape and form the entrepreneurial outcomes. Thus, examining the context of the 21st century as both existing in the local place and online, we can now expect social connections to occur not only in a local setting but also in an online context enabled by technological development.

Continued efforts are needed to make online infrastructure more accessible to entrepreneurs in general, and rural areas in particular. Our conclusions can be used to develop targeted interventions aimed at online community support for entrepreneurship development.

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II

When social media backfires – intrusive ties in entrepreneurship

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Abstract
This study critically explores the potential negative impacts of social media for entrepreneurship, and acknowledges online interactions as a part of the social dynamics surrounding entrepreneurship. The study departs from theories on entrepreneurship as a context-dependent social process and uses Granovetter's concept of ties as a theoretical lens. To develop an understanding of the social aspects of entrepreneurship, this study employs qualitative methods of inquiry and combines a netnographic approach with ethnography. This study illustrates the need to include interactions on social media platforms as a part of the social context for entrepreneurs, and introduces the concept of intrusive ties for explaining how individuals online can, forcibly, make themselves part of the entrepreneurial process.

Keywords
Context, social media, entrepreneurship, embeddedness, ties

Introduction

We live in a time when social life is played out both in physical locations and on online platforms, such as Facebook. In its present form, the Internet has had an effect on 'every aspect of organized human life' and can be considered a phenomenon that touches all facets of society (Fish et al., 2011). Social media is essential for entrepreneurship and organisations, providing numerous benefits (Briones et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2014; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Nah and Saxton, 2013; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). At the same time, we are seeing a rise in activism on social media targeting businesses. As such, this paper explores the case of a small rural rabbit meat business, which first benefits from being present on social media, but then suffers negative effects when animal rights activists engage online and locally, intending to stop the production at the farm. This case is theoretically interesting in that it enhances understanding of how social media matters to small businesses (Olanrewaju et al., 2020) and how social media interactions can affect the dynamics in a local place (Breek et al., 2018).

In recent years, there has been a substantial increase in studies taking a contextualised view of entrepreneurship, providing a variety of different perspectives (Chalmers and Shaw, 2017; Welter, 2011; Welter et al., 2019). In particular, entrepreneurship has been studied from a social perspective (e.g., Greve and Salaff, 2003; Jack and Anderson, 2002). In the twenty-first century, social media platforms increasingly form a part of people's social and professional lives (de Reuver et al., 2018). Social media platforms like Facebook have changed how people interact and coordinate, and have offered new ways of networking (de Reuver et al., 2018). Social media has been stated to be especially important for entrepreneurs with regard to the benefits it offers them (Olanrewaju et al., 2020), and research has found positive effects of social media usage for organisations (Briones et al., 2011; Campbell et al., 2014; Lovejoy et al., 2012; Nah and Saxton, 2013).

However, in recent times, there has also been an increase in activism targeting businesses via social media. Dürnberger (2019) has reported on the experiences of livestock farmers exposed to hate speech through their use of Facebook, and Coleman et al. (2022) have shown how individuals use social media to discuss and spread false information about livestock producers. The case presented in this paper concerns a Swedish farmer, one of many who have been intimidated by animal rights groups in the form of threats, harassment, and other criminal acts both in place and on social media (Ceccato et al., 2021). Threats

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made over the Internet are a recurring problem among Swedish farmers (Ceccato et al., 2021), but little remains known about how this affects entrepreneurship and the surrounding social context.

Although the positive aspects of social media usage are well represented within several strands of research, studies on entrepreneurship and context have little to say about the negative aspects of social media or its role in entrepreneurship. Consequently, the research question informing this project is as follows: *How do the negative aspects of social media matter to the entrepreneurial process?* This study explores social media as a part of the social context in which entrepreneurship is developed. The concept of 'intrusive ties' is introduced as a way of describing how social media interactions can lead to destructive outcomes for firms when digital activists embed themselves in the social context of entrepreneurship.

The study is structured as follows: In section two, the theoretical framework is presented. This includes an overview of entrepreneurship as a context-dependent social process and Granovetter's concept of ties as a framework for discussing relations. In addition, the role of social media is discussed. In the 'Methods' section, the research process is described, including methodological foundations and assumptions. The 'Findings' section presents the case: An account of an entrepreneur (a rabbit farmer) who was subject to a campaign of harassment by an animal rights group. Finally, the 'When social media backfires' section offers a discussion of how the negative aspects of social media matter to the entrepreneurial process, with a summary of the findings, focusing on the two key themes: Intrusive ties and social media as a part of the social context.

Theoretical framework

A social perspective on entrepreneurship

For this study, the social aspects of entrepreneurship are particularly interesting. The study departs from entrepreneurship as a social process (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011). As such, it refers to both how entrepreneurship is situated socially and how it is enacted socially (James et al., 2022). A social perspective views the social as more than just a background to or enabler of entrepreneurship, but rather as the product of the social context, enacted by relations in a social milieu (Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011).

Entrepreneurship is viewed as created in engagement with a context, as a series of intertwined moments (Fletcher and Selden, 2016), and it is the people and resources, their spatial and temporal location, and their presence and absence which constitute entrepreneurship (Stam, 2016). In entrepreneurship theory, contexts have been described as interactive: individuals are said to create and engage in their context, a process referred to as the 'doing of context' (Baker and Welter, 2020). Therefore,

context is not exogenously brought into the entrepreneurial process by researchers, but is an integral part of the process itself (Steyaert, 2016). Entrepreneurship consists of relations that are created in interaction with the context and, according to Granovetter (1973), the quality of those relationships is determined by the strength of the ties within a network.

Granovetter (1973) differentiates between strong and weak ties and shows how the diversity, homogeneity, and heterogeneity of these ties affect individuals' behaviours. Strong ties are characterised by frequent interactions (Granovetter, 1973). Granovetter's hypothesis of strong and weak ties has been used in entrepreneurship research as a means to discuss the relation between the strength of ties and the types of resources accessible (Jenssen and Koenig, 2002). The concept of ties has also been used as a way of discussing how entrepreneurs receive support (Jack et al., 2004), how start-ups are formed (Klyver et al., 2012), and how social networks are important at different stages of business formation (Klyver and Hindle, 2007). Nordstrom et al. (2020) used Granovetter (1985) to study entrepreneurs and their actions – entrepreneuring – as embedded in society. If Granovetter (1973) emphasises that social relations consist of strong and weak ties, *embeddedness* refers to the degree to which these relations are embedded within larger social institutions and structures (Jack and Anderson, 2002).

The degree of embeddedness, which is dependent upon the extent of individuals' ties, provides entrepreneurs with opportunities as well as boundaries for action (Jack and Anderson, 2002). Embeddedness has become an umbrella concept by which to understand interactions between entrepreneurs, individuals, and contexts (Wigren-Kristofersen et al., 2019). Thus, by acknowledging how ties are formed, it is possible to explore further how entrepreneurship is created and how individuals become embedded in different contexts.

Entrepreneurship scholars have provided important insights into the role of social context for the realisation of entrepreneurship (e.g., Casson and Giusta, 2007; Greve and Salaff, 2003; Jack and Anderson, 2002), and research has shown how ties shape individuals' behaviours (Granovetter, 1973) in the process of becoming embedded (McKeever et al., 2015). However, such studies remain narrow in focus, dealing only with the social as it relates to physical place, while contemporary individuals use social media. There remain several aspects of social media usage and its implications for entrepreneurship about which relatively little is known. The next section focuses on unpacking the role of social media in this process.

The role of social media

Many entrepreneurs benefit from social media (Bowen and Morris, 2019; Olanrewaju et al., 2020). Research shows that social media has changed how entrepreneurs carry out their

Table 1. Stages of the research process

Step 1: Orientation	November–December 2021	Observation of online discussions about digital activism and Swedish farmers. A rabbit farmer (Ada*) was one of the recurring targets for activists. Established contact and did a first review of relevant Facebook content.
Step 2: Interview	**March 2022**	**One semi-structured interview (120 min long) with the rabbit farmer (Ada*).** **Audio recordings and verbatim transcripts.**
Step 3: Online discussion thread analysis	**March–April 2022**	*Rabbit farmer:* **1900 likes, 2000 followers. Created FB page in 2013.** *Ada had removed the posts by the animal rights activists group on her FB page. Collected material from her perspective in the interview. Animal rights activists:* **1800 likes, 1900 followers. Created FB page in 2017. Keywords: Ada*, The farm, Rabbits. Number of analysed posts and comments: 2 posts with 238 comments.** ***not her real name*
Step 4: Analysis	**May–August 2022**	**Themes were developed in an iterative process: Spatial, Business, Social, and Institutional.**

activities in various areas, including marketing (e.g., Brink, 2017; Bulearca and Bulearca, 2010; Hensel and Deis, 2010; Jones et al., 2015; Michaelidou et al., 2011), business networking (Smith et al., 2017), information search (e.g., Fernandes et al., 2016; Kuhn et al., 2016; Quinton and Wilson, 2016), crowdfunding (e.g., Datta et al., 2019; Fietkiewicz et al., 2018; Roedenbeck and Lieb, 2018), stakeholder management (Morris and James, 2017), education (Cornelisse et al., 2011; Lekhanya, 2013), and sales (Dias and Franco, 2018). Additionally, more consumers are becoming engaged in the production of goods and services: The field of digital food activism has grown in recent years and has been emphasised as a novel form of consumer activism and food governance (Schneider et al., 2018). As information control online becomes fundamental to the design of food markets, the line between advocacy, advertising, and food provision blurs (Lezaun, 2018). Digital food activism is an example of *the fact that* entrepreneurship is affected by social media engagement, but to discuss *how* it is affected, one needs to go deeper.

As more businesses adopt social media as a part of their activities, online interactions thus become a part of the reality within which they act. Crick and Chaudhry (2010) show that transnational entrepreneurs can benefit from being embedded in both a physical and a virtual context in terms of having access to resources in their country of origin. Pearce and Artemesia (2010) argue that what we do online become a part of our perceived reality and something we need to relate to when it comes to what we do in the physical world.

For a long time, social situations were based on physical co-presence, but tying the conceptualisation of social situations to shared spatial (physical) situations becomes problematic when the conditions for social interaction change (Eriksson, 2016). Zhao (2006) states that individuals' social situations cannot be limited to situations of physical co-presence, as technological advancements have opened

up new ways of connecting and interacting. Thus, this study considers the nexus between online and local social interactions to be a new social 'zone' and, more importantly, explores it as a part of the social context in which entrepreneurship is enacted and where ties can be created. Individuals increasingly participate in social situations that do not involve traditional face-to-face interaction (Zhao, 2006). It is therefore important to consider both online and local social interactions in order to reach a better understanding of the (singular) social reality of contemporary entrepreneurs.

Summary

In this article, entrepreneurship is viewed as a social process, which takes place in context. By taking a contextual perspective (Baker and Welter, 2020), this study strives to create an understanding of how entrepreneurship is developing with regard to the dimensions of context. For this purpose, the study uses Granovetter's (1973) concept of weak and strong ties to discuss the relations, and the concept of embeddedness (Jack and Anderson, 2002) to discuss how social relations relate to context. As Eriksson (2016) points out, in the past, social situations were conceptualised in terms of physical co-presence, but when conditions for social interaction change due to advances in digital communication, tying them to shared spatial (physical) situations becomes problematic. Therefore, both online and local interactions are important for understanding the context and entrepreneurship as a whole. Before presenting the analysis of the case study, first, the research methods used are discussed.

Methods

In order to address the research question informing this study, a qualitative approach was adopted, using the steps

of ethnography (Johnstone, 2007) and an investigative net-nographic approach (Kozinets, 2019). Netnography is a systematised, qualitative research method for online ethnography, consisting of several different research practices (Kozinets, 2019). 'Netnography' represents not only the actual data collection, but rather a set of research tools related to data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation (Kozinets, 2019) for understanding online social interaction.

The research design was conducted in four steps (see Table 1). Stage 1: Orientation involved non-participant online observation of media outlets. This helped in selecting an entrepreneur – a rabbit farmer – to establish contact with. The Twitter and Facebook pages and newspaper articles connected to the farmer were observed. Stage 2 included an interview with the entrepreneur at her farm, to create an understanding of the process and the place. Stage 3: Analysis of online discussion threads involved a more systematic sampling approach and deep analysis of the animal rights activist group. To examine engagement patterns in more depth, elements of netnography were used (Kozinets, 2019). For collecting and analysing data concerning social processes, such an approach is appropriate, since it enables insights into critical sociocultural patterns (Kozinets, 2019). Stage 4 included a thematic analysis to develop an understanding of the process. The steps are presented in more detail below.

Case selection

In Sweden, animal rights groups have increasingly engaged in threats, harassment, and other criminal acts directed at farmers, both in place and on social media (Ceccato et al., 2021). Threats made over the Internet are a recurring problem among Swedish farmers (Ceccato et al., 2021). This study dives deep into a single case and explores in detail how such interactions influence entrepreneurship. Using a single case study allows us to question old theoretical relationships and explore new perspectives, in line with Eisenhardt (1989). For this reason, the case of a rabbit farmer in Sweden, Ada (not her real name), was selected. Ada felt that this was an important subject for research, and gave her consent to continue the research.

Collection

In Stage 1, the rabbit farmer's potential contribution to the research was assessed. Following ethical guidelines, Ada was emailed regarding the project and its research objectives and subsequently gave the researcher permission to observe online discussions on Facebook and to interview her. Based on the insights gained from Stage 1, topics for the semi-structured interview (Leavy, 2020) were developed. The interview lasted for 120 min and was recorded and transcribed verbatim. After the interview, Ada

showed the researcher around the farm, which enabled an understanding of the local place, in line with Johnstone (2007).

The animal rights activist group is an open group on Facebook where members post anonymously under the pseudonym that is associated with the group's name. This study involved reviewing relevant posts without compromising privacy and allowing for efficient data collection (Kozinets, 2019). It is the content of the discussions that is of interest to this study, rather than the individuals concerned. In stage 3, the NCapture plugin for NVivo was used, which allowed for downloading the posts with comments and reactions, but without revealing the identities of the users involved.

Analysis

In Stage 4, an interpretation of the material was constructed by moving between the transcribed interview and the Facebook posts, in a process of creating descriptive labels of the content. NVivo aided in strategically systematising the material, which contributed to the thematic analysis sequentially. In moving between the different types of material, an understanding of the complete set of materials was developed (Saldaña, 2015). Four themes were developed concerning how the negative aspects of social media matter to the entrepreneurial process: spatial influence, influence on business, social influence, and institutional influence. The themes were systematically developed through an iterative process of studying theory and revisiting the empirical material. Interpretations were developed concerning how social media can be seen to influence entrepreneurship.

This study thus contributes to the literature on entrepreneurship and context. The aforementioned steps allowed for diving into a single case study to discuss the phenomenon of digital activism concerning often locally embedded rural entrepreneurship. The selected method allowed for taking a closer look at relationships and explaining how individuals make sense of their world. This is important in order to achieve understanding(s) of the context(s) of the studied phenomenon (Welter, 2011). Often, studies on entrepreneurship have adopted a place-based approach, whereas the steps used in this study made it possible to interpret both online and local interactions together as one reality in which entrepreneurship was developed.

Findings

The players

When the rabbit farmer Ada was a child, she used to pass through a local rural area on the school bus. She already knew then that she wanted to live and work in that specific place: '… and I thought this was the most beautiful place on

earth' *(Ada)*. She had no background in farming, but she was always drawn towards that kind of lifestyle: 'I don't know where it comes from. My parents have never been interested in animals or agriculture, and I always have been' *(Ada)*.

Ada had always dreamt of having animals, so when she moved to the farm, she started buying rabbits and chickens to meet her own household needs. Soon after that, she expanded to sheep, dogs, and cats. However, she had no experience with hunting or slaughter. She expanded her knowledge of animal husbandry through educational sessions with her neighbours. She attended courses on how to slaughter chickens, rabbits, and even sheep, and her interest and confidence grew. During her first 6 years on the farm, she had another job in town, but after she met her partner and they had their first child, she wanted to be on the farm full-time and be able to be with her family and their friends. Soon, she started working full-time on the farm and developed local sales networks for her small-scale production. Her business is rooted in an understanding of rabbit meat and small-scale meat production as an environmentally conscious means of food production.

Ada is a well-known person in the local community, as well as among animal producers in Sweden. Her mother-in-law lives down the road from the farm and several of her closest friends live nearby: 'It was a bit like coming home when I moved here. The neighbours came by to say hello, introduce themselves and tell me where they lived, and so on. That's probably how it is in the countryside … you always need each other' *(Ada)*. The neighbours continued to teach her about keeping animals and they all helped each other to improve at what they were doing.

The activists belong to a locally based animal rights group, which was founded in 2017. Their main activities and meetings take place in a larger near-by located city. The group consists of roughly 1800 members and their main goal is to set all animals free. They believe that

Table 2. Contextually based understandings of the farm.

Context	Ada	Animal rights activists
Spatial	The most beautiful place. Childhood dream.	Murder farm. Filled with evil.
Business	Educating. Climate-friendly meat production. A necessity when you have animals.	Unnecessary. Unethical.
Social	Supportive function. Collaboration.	Murder allies.
Institutional	Current legislation is too weak on activism.	Current legislation is too weak on meat production.

Ada's friends and family, as well as allies of Ada's, are a part of the problem: 'All of you who defend her are contributing to murder and should be in jail' *(Facebook user)*. The activists believe that current legislation is too weak on meat producers and constantly petition the regional legislative body to act.

Table 2 illustrates the different understandings of context in this case. We can see that the animal rights activists view all aspects associated with the rabbit farm as problematic, while for Ada it has connotations of sustainability, a good social network, and the realisation of a childhood dream.

The process

In the summer of 2018, Ada attended an agricultural fair to display her products. During the morning, a flood of messages and comments poured into Ada's private and business Facebook pages. Ada became stressed, as she was unable to deal with the volume of messages while working at the fair. Over 100 people posted negative comments to her company's Facebook page and sent direct messages to her during the first night of July. The comments included the words 'killer' and 'torturer'. In order to be able to focus on her work, Ada decided to temporarily shut down her Facebook page in light of the overwhelming number of messages and comments she had received.

Later in July, however, activists came to her farm. One morning, she was in the garden working with the animals as usual when the dogs started barking, and she looked around. She saw no one, so she continued with her work. But as she walked to the farm entrance, she saw two heads peeking out from behind her car. She called out 'Hello?' and the people disappeared down the road. Only a few moments later, 15 people appeared in front of the house, carrying posters and signs bearing the words 'Killer! You should be in jail". "I was so scared that when I tried to call the police, I just shook. I could barely press the numbers on the phone. And I just cried and cried. It was surreal' *(Ada)*.

The group of animal rights activists live-streamed the event on Facebook and one person went around the farm taking pictures. 'They went into the farm because I didn't have any gates or anything, so they went all the way in. They just stood there and said nothing. I came out and told them that they had to leave, but then they just stood there with a sneer and said nothing. They just stood there with their signs. It was so awful' *(Ada)*.

The police arrived, and Ada wrote a post on her private Facebook profile saying that she needed help and company. Friends came and stayed with her during the hours when the activists were on the farm. Ada also has a friend and neighbour who is part of the care group of the Federation of Swedish Farmers, who came as soon as she heard what was happening. 'It is just so scary when you are alone

and a whole group of people comes, and their purpose for being there is to do you harm' *(Ada)*.

After several hours, the police managed to disperse the activists. Ada's neighbour was also a contributing factor: They had parked their vehicles in her garden, and she was infuriated. She stormed out and screamed at them to leave: 'She's about 80 now, from Finland, so … you know, she's not a person you want to mess with' *(Ada)*.

The second time Ada noticed animal rights activists on her farm, she called the police straight away. However, the group of activists went into the farm to take pictures and live-stream their presence on Facebook. She told them to leave but they were persistent: "They just stood there with a grin and said, 'I feel so much evil here' and I just thought – Christ, why do you come here?'. However, it was raining that day, and the activists left quickly after the police arrived.

Activists came to the farm again while Ada was away attending a course. 'I went down to the basement and the taps were running and they had opened the freezers. Both our company freezer and our private freezer. There were also stickers on the driveway and our building. And they had opened the door to our farm shop … So it was obvious that they had been there, and that was probably scarier than anything else' *(Ada)*. After that, she had security cameras and alarms installed on the farm. Before these events, Ada had been used to leaving the door open and leaving her keys in her car, because 'No one is out here anyway – it's just me and my neighbours' *(Ada)*, but she has since become more cautious.

Ada saw it as problematic to continue with her sales via social media and started to sell directly to restaurants and wholesalers instead. Previously, she had relied on small-scale sales directly to customers and used social media as a communication and sales platform. But with the recent developments, she found she could not cope with the harassment and threats that came about as a result of her social media activity.

Later in the autumn, Ada was walking around the farm with her family when they saw something in their parking spot. It was a Molotov cocktail, and the car was scratched and marked with the symbol of a Swedish animal rights activist group.

'During the worst times during 2018, we [the family] slept in the living room. At Christmas, we sat in the bed in the living room and opened the Christmas presents. It was unreal. We told our child that we couldn't sleep upstairs because there were wasps in the bedroom. But I think she understood [what was going on] anyway …' *(Ada)*.

Ada and her family were under secret identities and used protected phone numbers. Her daughter was especially affected, and also became the target of threats: 'She has had a very hard time going to school, I have been with her at school a lot in the whole four and fifth grade. She

only attended a few days a week, a few hours. It's shitty. And she doesn't dare to take the school bus in case someone should come and take her' *(Ada)*. Both Ada and her family are discussed among the activists: 'Her child has a rabbit as a pet, but eats the other rabbits? Is she mental?' *(FB user)*; 'Insane animal torturers!' *(FB user)*. Activists have also made direct threats towards Ada's daughter, with one of them saying that they were going to kill her on her way to school. Activists have not only contacted Ada herself, but have also called her friends and family members and sent threatening letters to them.

Figure 1 presents an overview of the actions that took place during 2018. Ada and the activists are each presented both in the local and online parts of the timeline and the practices (i.e., the actions).

The outcomes

From the process described above, several outcomes resulted. Table 3 presents the local outcomes for both Ada and the activists. Ada developed the local setting to increase its security with camera surveillance, more cattle surrounding the farm, and fences. She also changed how she sold her products: From selling directly to consumers, she developed into selling business-to-business instead and developed contacts with restaurants. The activists, for their part, were able to develop marketing and communication material based on their actions on the farm. They also left their mark on the farm with stickers and damage to the inventory. Another outcome for the activists was that some were sentenced in court for their actions.

Table 4 presents the online outcomes from the actions discussed in the previous section. Ada started an online campaign with the aim to support Swedish farmers and take a stance against the activists' behaviours. She also found a support group online, where she could share her experiences with other farmers in the same situation. The activists received increased visibility and attracted more people to their group, as well as encouraging comments and feedback on their posts. Both sides had to deal with increased criticism of their activities.

When social media backfires

By following a social perspective on entrepreneurship (e.g., Korsgaard and Anderson, 2011) and viewing entrepreneurship as created in engagement with a context (Fletcher and Selden, 2016), this study set out to explore how the negative aspects of social media matter to the entrepreneurial process. The case described above has shown how a social media platform enabled coordinated attacks on Ada's business, both on- and offline, by animal rights activists, and also how individuals online can affect the spatial, business, social, and institutional contexts surrounding the entrepreneur.
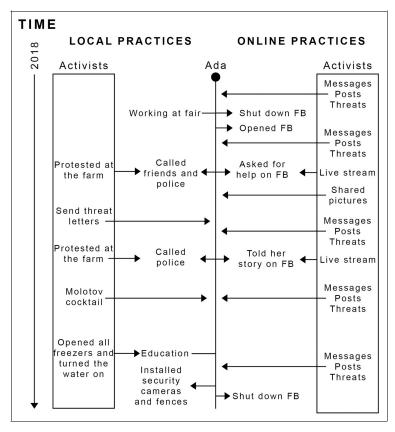
Figure 1. Ada's and the activists' local and online practices in 2018.

The case demonstrates the relationship between local and online contexts and how this influences entrepreneurship. Social media interactions are part of the spatial immediacy and activists share the social space with entrepreneurs. In this new social zone, participants can interact in (almost) real time while their physical bodies are in very different locations. This is similar to physical co-presence (Zhao, 2006), but differs from it in that activists can be located anywhere and still communicate. This results in the continuous presence of ties – social relations – which form the social context.

The concept of intrusive ties highlights the profound impact that social media can have on the social landscape of entrepreneurship. This impact extends to the potential erosion of boundaries between personal and professional domains. The activism does not always take place in physical proximity to the target, but the memories and constant reminders of the activists' presence in the form of online threats will affect entrepreneurs regarding how they act. Therefore, there is a need to understand ties, both online

and local, in order to understand the context in which entrepreneurship develops. Thus, this study adds to the discussion of entrepreneurship and context.

Table 5 shows the differences between online/local spatial and social contexts. There is an ongoing process of intrusive relationship formation online by the activist, who repeatedly interact with Ada to affect her actions. Online interactions become an integral part of the perceived reality, something entrepreneurs must relate to when it comes to their physical actions, as described in the interview with Ada and pointed out by Pearce and Artemesia (2010).

Next, two themes are presented which are of importance for understanding how social media influences entrepreneurship.

Intrusive ties

Korsgaard et al. (2022) state that context embodies norms, resources, and structures that entrepreneurs learn to use and adhere to. However, as shown in the case presented here, relations on social media are neither homogeneous nor

Table 3. Local outcomes.

Context	Ada	Animal rights activists
Spatial	Camera surveillance. A fence around the farm. More cattle surrounding the farm. More dogs.	Left stickers reminding Ada that she was being watched.
Business	Started selling B2B. Closed down her shop.	Developed marketing material based on Ada's business.
Social	The family lived under secret identities. Accompanied her child to school.	Watched by Ada's friends and family. Sentenced in court.
Institutional	Wrote petitions to change legislation on protection against intrusion.	Wrote petitions and filed complaints to the County Administrative Board to change animal welfare regulations.

Table 4. Online outcomes for Ada and the activists.

	Ada	Animal rights activists
Outcome	Campaign and hashtag for supporting farmers. Increased number of likes. Positive comments and feedback on her posts. Became a member of an online support group for farmers. Acknowledged by other organisations. Increased number of threats in comments and messages. Increased criticism.	Likes and shares of their posts. Increased number of group members. Encouraging comments and feedback on their posts. Increased criticism for their actions.

something you necessarily choose yourself. Social media enables individuals to make contact with entrepreneurs, regardless of their physical location or whether they have a mutual standpoint on the question of their business. It enables individuals to make contact with people on a larger scale compared with offline activities, and messages, comments, or threats come in much larger quantities, while the receiver is still one business owner. The business owner in the case experienced the constant presence of other people in the venture development, by the combination of in-place activism with a steady flow of messages online. Even though these interactions do not constitute close,

Table 5. How online and local dimensions are showing different perspectives.

	Social	Spatial
Online	**Intrusive ties -** Co-optation of local business - Larger volume - Larger numbers - Looser connections	Create shared spaces for defining common symbols, rituals, norms
Local	**Ties** - Strong bonds - Access to local resources - Emotional support	Shared place, history, and culture

personal, or special relationships, they are a form of (unwanted) weak ties (Granovetter, 1973), which have been stated as important for the process of embedding (Jack, 2005). Weak ties allow for bridging different social groups and connecting individuals to new resources and opportunities that are not available within their immediate social circles (Granovetter, 1973). As such, weak ties on social media have the potential to amplify the social context for entrepreneurs. When individuals engage in social media and interact online, these interactions shape the social context. By leveraging the extended reach of weak ties, entrepreneurs can gain visibility, and attract a wider audience, but as shown in this study, this visibility and wider audience can be used to do harm.

Recalling that social relations consist of strong and weak ties (Granovetter, 1973) and embeddedness refers to the degree to which these social relations are embedded within larger social institutions and structures (context) (Jack and Anderson, 2002), through the large volume of online interactions in combination with place-based actions, the animal rights activists are creating intrusive ties to the entrepreneur and engaging in a process of embedding themselves in the entrepreneurship. In this way, the ties to the entrepreneur create a blurred line between the private and business spheres. The threats and hatred are directed at Ada as a person, while their content concerns her actions within her business. The activists embed themselves in the farmer's private social sphere, which affects her private life to a high degree, and consequently, the ways in which she develops the entrepreneurship. This is an example of intrusive ties, where individuals interact at a high frequency but without mutual consent to the interaction.
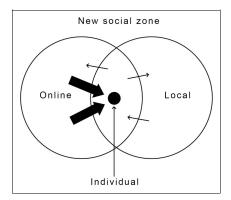
The case demonstrates different types of embedding processes. As Cunningham and Barclay (2020) have shown, embeddedness is manifested in the entrepreneurial process of companies, thus, through an examination of the context in which they operate, we can learn more about their

development. In this case, digital activists are engaging in social interactions online inside their closed groups, while creating bonds through the use of social media. The 'online' is also persistent in the sense that it is always 'there', and the user's activities thus become part of the world and other users' experiences of it (Pearce and Artemesia, 2010). Individuals are embedded in their environments to a degree that depends on the nature, depth, and extent of their interaction with those environments (Jack and Anderson, 2002). These environments are now partially online, and many activists have substantial online social bonds, where norms and structures are being developed. In this case, digital activists engaged in social actions online, which affected how the entrepreneur experienced her context and consequently, her actions offline.

Another embedding process can be seen in the case of the business owner herself. She is highly embedded in the local community both in terms of history, relationships, and formal bonds. In addition to this, both Ada and her family are embedded emotionally in the business to a high degree and they live and work in the same physical location. In this study, the entrepreneur engaged in online social interactions by building her community online and using the available online resources to her advantage for her business.

Social media as a part of the social context

The digital activists engaged in online and local activism against one small business owner. The connections created are social, recurring, and persistent over time. When digital activists send messages and receive replies, it is the start of an interaction. Digital activism is characterised by the extent and volume of actions (Schneider et al., 2018); there is a constant flow of users online who connect with the farmer in several ways. This is how

Figure 2. The new social zone as the nexus between online and local interactions.

intrusive ties are shaped in the dynamic between digital activists and small business owner.

Figure 2 shows how the business owner is located in the nexus of the online and local spheres, which together make up the socio-spatial context. The arrows represent interactions between the individual and the social media users on the one hand and the local community on the other. The online and local dimensions together make up the socio-spatial context and a new social zone, which is an important part of the social context. Being locally embedded in a social structure has been shown to enhance businesses' performance and create opportunities (Jack and Anderson, 2002), while in the case above, embedding in the online context created the opposite result. The concept of 'intrusive ties' can help explain what happens when social media backfires and creates problems for small business owners.

This study demonstrates the magnitude of online versus local interactions. It is easy to organise attacks online in large volumes (bold arrows), while the receiver of such attacks is bound locally by local relationships or the place in which they act.

During the years of being a target of digital activism, Ada has developed an understanding of who these individuals are, including their names and where they live. Digital activism in this case has resulted in intrusive ties, as a form of very weak, involuntary ties, and part of the entrepreneur's context. This is something Ada takes into account when developing her business, although she wishes that she did not need to do so. The choices she makes will affect the surrounding context and her ties with other individuals.

In line with Welter (2011), the social context was formed by the digital activists' actions both online and locally, and the entrepreneur's actions and relations formed the entrepreneurship. Ada had numerous individuals supporting her, from an online campaign and viral hashtag to closed support groups of farmers who had had similar experiences, while at the same time, she experienced a constant threat. To different degrees, entrepreneurs are embedded or disembedded in contexts (Jack and Anderson, 2002), and consequentially, the context in which Ada interacts creates the environment in which she operates, in line with Baker and Welter (2020).

The case illustrates a dynamic relationship between the perceptions, actions, and settings of the individuals involved. The farmer experienced a disabling context, and this influenced her actions, leading her to change her distribution channel (as one example). The development of informal institutions surrounding the farmer influenced both the collective and the farmer's perceptions of entrepreneurial opportunities; this is a dynamic process of entrepreneurship between perceived challenges and opportunities.

Social media has been stated to be especially important for entrepreneurs concerning the benefits (Olanrewaju

et al., 2020), but the risks are seldom discussed in the same manner. However, social media is a force that can be used to either positive or negative effects. This study illustrates how it can backfire when activists online become part of the social context of entrepreneurship through the creation of intrusive ties.

Conclusions

This case illustrates the negative role that social media can play in entrepreneurship. 'When social media backfires' refers to a mechanism by which activists online can become part of the social context of entrepreneurship through the creation of intrusive ties. Online as well as physical interactions are included in the analysis in order to develop an understanding of entrepreneurship as a context-dependent social process, using the case of a Swedish farmer and an animal rights group as a case study. As a means of defining context as more than just a physical reality, this study discusses how access to the entrepreneur through social media creates social connections and influences the social reality upon which the entrepreneur acts and develops the entrepreneurship. The concept of 'intrusive ties' is presented as a way of describing how digital activists can embed themselves in the social process related to entrepreneurship and how this forms the social context.

The socio-spatial context must include both online and local interactions in order to fully understand local processes of change: the social reality of contemporary entrepreneurship is both online and local, and this expands the notion of the importance of social context for entrepreneurship.

Future research can prioritise examining the difficulties associated with the convergence of the private and business domains, particularly emphasising the heightened repercussions that arise when these intertwined relationships are affected by individuals outside of the business. Such work could include investigating the impact of overlapping private and business spheres on the work-life balance of individuals, particularly in industries like farming where personal and professional boundaries can blur. This could involve examining the psychological, social, and health implications of managing multiple roles simultaneously.

Declaration of conflicting interests

Funding

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III

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IV

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This thesis focuses on developing understanding of how social media influences the social and spatial contexts in entrepreneurial development. Three different entrepreneurial processes, all situated in rural areas, are analysed and presented in four separate papers. This work enriches the entrepreneurship literature by revealing the role that non-local engagement plays in local settings, highlighting the impact of social media on enacted social life and entrepreneurial development. Results show the evolving nature of embeddedness and ties in entrepreneurship, where traditional social connections are complemented by digital interactions that reshape social and spatial contexts, creating new opportunities and challenges for entrepreneurship.

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