



JÖNKÖPING UNIVERSITY

*School of Education and  
Communication*

Doctoral Thesis

# **Communicating a sense of public safety**

The case of the Swedish Police  
Authority's strategic social media  
communication

Jens Alvé<sup>n</sup> Sjöberg

Jönköping University  
School of Education and Communication  
Dissertation Series No. 048 • 2025





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Jens Alvéén Sjöberg

Doctoral Thesis in Media and Communication Science

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Published by  
School of Education and Communication, Jönköping University  
P.O. Box 1026  
SE-551 11 Jönköping  
Tel. +46 36 10 10 00  
[www.ju.se](http://www.ju.se)

Printed by Stema Specialtryck AB, year 2025

ISBN 978-91-88339-82-9 (printed version)  
ISBN 978-91-88339-83-6 (online version)





# Abstract

When public authorities address the complex societal matter of public safety through digital media, they do more than just disseminate information. They actively shape the conditions for civic dialogue, trust, and involvement. Understanding how authorities communicate is essential, as their communicative practices carry significant societal implications. However, research still overlooks how public authorities use digital media to engage, participate, and foster dialogue around public safety. This dissertation adopts a participatory perspective to examine how public authorities communicate complex societal matters on digital media.

The Swedish Police Authority serves as the empirical case, with a focus on its social media communication aimed at creating a sense of public safety (*trygghetsskapande*). Owing to its legal mandate and societal responsibilities, the Authority provides a relevant context for exploring how institutional communication can influence perceptions of public safety. Comprising four interrelated studies, the dissertation examines the Swedish Police Authority's social media communication from multiple perspectives. The dissertation combines qualitative methodologies, such as interviews, framework analysis method, phenomenography, and qualitative content analysis, and critical making workshops as a participatory and explorative method, together with theories of experiences and sensemaking, to theoretically understand a sense of public safety. The findings demonstrate how public authorities, specifically the Swedish Police, can make sense of and enhance their social media communication regarding a sense of public safety through a bidirectional way of communicating.

The dissertation emphasizes the importance of public authorities communicating more openly on social media in order to (co)create a sense of safety with the public. It makes theoretical and methodological contributions with the critical (un)making model on bidirectional communication and co-creation, thereby enriching scholarship in media studies, organizational, and strategic communication.

# Sammanfattning

När offentliga myndigheter tar itu med den komplexa samhällsfrågan om allmän trygghet genom digitala medier gör de mer än att bara sprider information. De formar aktivt förutsättningarna för medborgardialog, förtroende och engagemang. Det är viktigt att förstå hur myndigheter kommunicerar, eftersom deras kommunikationsmetoder har betydande samhällsliga konsekvenser. Forskningen förbiser dock fortfarande hur offentliga myndigheter använder digitala medier för att engagera, delta och främja dialog om allmän trygghet. Denna avhandling antar därför ett deltagande perspektiv för att undersöka hur offentliga myndigheter kommunicerar komplexa samhällsfrågor i digitala medier.

Polismyndigheten fungerar som empiriskt fall, med fokus på dess kommunikation i sociala medier som syftar till att främja en känsla av trygghet (*trygghetsskapande*). Tack vare sitt lagstadgade uppdrag och sitt samhällsansvar utgör myndigheten ett relevant sammanhang för att undersöka hur institutionell kommunikation kan påverka uppfattningen om allmän trygghet. Avhandlingen består av fyra sammanhängande studier och undersöker Polismyndighetens kommunikation i sociala medier ur flera perspektiv. För att förstå dessa perspektiv kombinerar avhandlingen kvalitativa metoder, såsom intervjuer, ramverksanalys, fenomenografi och kvalitativ innehållsanalys, samt critical making-workshops som en deltagande och utforskande metod, tillsammans med teorier om erfarenheter och meningsskapande, för att teoretiskt förstå en känsla av allmän trygghet. Resultaten visar hur offentliga myndigheter, särskilt polisen, kan förstå och förbättra sin kommunikation i sociala medier när det gäller känslan av allmän trygghet med fokus på dubbelriktad kommunikation.

Avhandlingen betonar vikten av att offentliga myndigheter kommunicerar mer öppet på sociala medier om begreppet trygghet, för att (sam)skapa en känsla av allmän trygghet hos allmänheten. Den bidrar med teoretiska och metodologiska insikter genom den kritiska (o)skapande (*critical (un)making*) modellen med fokus på dubbelriktad kommunikation och samskapande, vilket berikar forskningen inom medievetenskap, organisationsvetenskap och strategisk kommunikation.

# Acknowledgment

After a little more than six years, this dissertation project has come to an end. It has been a journey with many mixed emotions, and I want to refer to this as a roller coaster ride. Thus, I put a comma here because how public authorities, especially the Swedish Police, communicate and use social media is something that opens up for future research interest, from different angles that I hope to continue to examine. On this note, I would like to express my gratitude to many people who made this dissertation possible over the years.

First, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my main supervisor, who has always been there for me with tireless support, sharing knowledge, and offering valuable academic guidance. *Muito obrigado*, Renira Gambarato! And to my co-supervisor, Cecilia Cassinger, who joined the project in 2022 and has been a great source of support and knowledge sharing throughout this dissertation work. *Tusen tack* Cecilia! I would also like to express my gratitude to Peter Berglez, who played a vital role at the outset of this dissertation, serving as a co-supervisor until 2022 and as the academic leader of Media and Communication Science (MKV) at Jönköping University.

Additionally, I would like to express my gratitude to all my colleagues at the School of Education and Communication (HLK), especially the MKV unit, for making this journey smoother. It has greatly helped me find focus and a sense of belonging when I haven't had the time or opportunity to be at Jönköping. I would also like to express my gratitude to my former and current doctoral colleagues at HLK and the former Department of Strategic Communication (now known as the Department of Communication) at Lund University for all the engaging discussions, courses, seminars, and other shared experiences — you know who you are! Furthermore, I would also like to thank all academic colleagues I have met during conferences, seminars, and in the review process (both known and unknown) for their help in developing me as a scholar.

I would like to thank the Swedish Police and the Police Region South employees who participated in this project—without you, this would not have been possible. *Tusen tack för ert deltagande!* I also hope that being involved in this project has helped you, as police officers, become more

aware of the importance of digital communication and the work of creating a sense of public safety. To the public (whoever you are) who participated in Paper II, thank you for sharing your experiences and thoughts about the Swedish Police, a sense of public safety, and social media for this dissertation.

A big thank you to all my friends for helping me see aspects of life beyond my dissertation, such as hangouts, festivals, music events, cinemas, movies (like those hosted by Mattias Olsson), renovations, and more. To Draken for all the hangouts in Malmö. I also want to sincerely thank Karen Ann Blom and Josefín Rostedt, the crew of HLK's Doctoral podcast, for the invaluable conversations on and off the podcast that have helped me overcome the dissertation mountain—thank you both for making this journey smoother and more enjoyable! And to Martina 'Tina' Gnewski, I am so grateful for having met you through a doctoral course in strategic communication, and for being able to call you my friend today. I genuinely do not know how to thank you enough except to say thank you for all the times we have spent together in Malmö working on our dissertations, side projects, dog walks, and hangouts. You have truly made this journey easier and have also contributed to a collegial atmosphere while working extensively from Malmö.

It almost goes without saying, but I want to sincerely thank my mother, father, sister and her family, my brother-in-law and his family, and my parents-in-law for their tireless support and love throughout this journey. Without you, I wouldn't have made it! Furthermore, this dissertation is also dedicated to my father, who worked as a police officer for 47 years, and who encouraged me to research the Swedish Police and their public safety communication.

Finally, I would like to express my greatest gratitude to my wife, Josephine, and to our son, Albert. Both of you are the anchors in my life that turned this dissertation into a job rather than a life's work, and you highlight what is truly important—like spending time together, traveling, reading Sickan, building Duplo and Brio train tracks, and many other things. For that, I am incredibly grateful to have you in my life, and I love you so much! <3

Jens Alvéen Sjöberg  
Malmö, November 2025

# List of Papers

This compilation dissertation comprises four papers. Two Web of Science articles (Papers I and II) are published under the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY 4.0). Paper III is a peer-reviewed chapter in the anthology ‘*Through the lens of dread: Exploring meaning-making of fear in the mediasphere*’ published under the license of Tallinn University Press. A manuscript of Paper IV is under review. The papers are attached after the appendix.

## Paper I

Sjöberg, J., Berglez, P., & Gambarato, R. (2023). “Malmö is not Sweden's Chicago”: Policing and the challenge of creating a sense of safety through social media strategies. *Nordicom Review*, 44(1), 44–64. <https://doi.org/10.2478/nor-2023-0003>

## Paper II

Sjöberg, J., Cassinger, C., & Gambarato R. (2024). Communicating a sense of safety: The public experience of Swedish Police Instagram communication. *Journal of Communication Management*, 28(3), 365–383. <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-03-2023-0033>

## Paper III

Alvén Sjöberg, J., & Gnewski, M. (2025). Social media communication to create public safety and oppose public fear: Insights into how Swedish public sector organizations convey a sense of public safety via Instagram. In M. Maran, M-L. Madisson, & A. Ventsel (Eds.), *Through the lens of dread: Exploring meaning-making of fear in the mediasphere* (210–240). Tallinn University Press.

## Paper IV

Alvén Sjöberg, J. (In a peer-review process at a scientific journal). Making sense of public communication from below: A critical making approach to the Swedish Police Authority’s use of social media to convey public safety.

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**Papers I–IV**



# *Chapter I*

# Introduction

What the hell are the police doing? The public can see that we're actually doing something in the streets and squares of the city. We make efforts like that, and [social media] is also a kind of insight into the work and everyday life of the police, and it's also a good sounding board for us if we want to attract new police officers. So, it could also motivate someone to be interested in the profession. . . . So, we've decided to share knowledge about what we do and to be present in our communities, [and] creating a sense of public safety is difficult because it's constantly changing.  
(Police officer, Police Region South)

This quotation is drawn from an interview I conducted in the autumn of 2020 with a police officer from Police Region South, Sweden. The interview focused on the Swedish Police Authority's (hereinafter referred to as the Swedish Police) role, purpose, and practices concerning social media communication. Specifically, it explored how the organization interprets and utilizes social media, the implications of such communication, and the strategies employed to create or sustain a sense of public safety. The quotation illustrates the challenges the Swedish Police encounter in their efforts to communicate their activities effectively to the public<sup>1</sup>. In this regard, it resonates with Statskontoret's (2017) observation that the police, like other public authorities, are required to cultivate relationships with citizens to effectively fulfill their institutional responsibilities, which extend across both digital and non-digital domains.

In addition to the aforementioned quotation, my interest in researching public authorities—particularly the Swedish Police—and their external communication stems from their increasingly prominent presence on social media in recent years. However, this activity often appears to lack a clearly articulated communicative purpose in relation to complex societal matters, instead prioritizing the dissemination of information as a means of fostering public trust (Eriksson & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2021). The Swedish Police's

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to point out that the public is not a homogeneous group but should instead be seen as diverse and dynamic groups of different people in an area or country. See the work of Bentele and Nothhaft (2010), Jackson and Bradford (2009), Pieczka (2019), and Strömbäck (2014) for further insights into what the public is and how it can be understood.

use of social media consequently invites both questions and criticism, as their content and underlying motives, given the organization's societal responsibilities and mandate, hold significant implications for public trust, safety, and institutional legitimacy.

## Public Authorities, Communicative Challenges

This dissertation examines how public authorities communicate with the public through social media. Public authority is financed by tax revenue and operates as a permanent entity with its own set of instructions outlined in regulations or legislation (Luoma-aho & Canel, 2020; Statskontoret, 2025). The term 'public authorities' is employed here due to its precision in capturing these organizations' structural characteristics, societal responsibilities, and public obligations, making it more appropriate than broader designations such as 'public sector organizations' (PSOs). Accordingly, the terms 'public agency' or PSO will not be used in the *Kappa*. Nonetheless, existing research on public agencies and PSOs will be drawn upon to inform and delineate the conceptual and analytical scope of this study. Moreover, the reason for focusing on public authorities in this *Kappa* is because this compilation dissertation centers on the largest public authority in Sweden—the Swedish Police.

Public authorities' digital communication shapes democratic participation and engagement. In contemporary democracies, the public is not just a passive receiver of information (Pieczka, 2019)—people are expected to engage in public discussion, hold institutions accountable, and participate in collective decision-making (Strömbäck, 2014). When public authorities communicate about the complex societal matter of public safety and the experience of it through digital media, they do more than simply inform the public; they also create the environment for civic dialogue, trust, and involvement. Therefore, the rationale of this dissertation is that existing research has overlooked how public authorities use digital media to communicate, participate, and engage in the experience of public safety. Understanding this is crucial, as the way in which public authorities operate and communicate have far-reaching implications for society. For instance, how public authorities, such as the police, share information on social media can shape public trust (Williams et al., 2018), legitimize police activities

(Walsh & O'Connor, 2019), mitigate crises (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016), and influence perceptions of safety (Paper I).

Public authorities differ from other organizations because they must operate at the national, regional, and municipal levels (Luoma-aho & Canel, 2020). Luoma-aho and Canel also state that public authorities employ a diverse workforce of civil servants and appointed officials who are either politically elected or appointed. This means they have responsibilities in both the nondigital and digital realms, which also reinforce public authorities as socially constructed, and to function, communication and interactions are required<sup>2</sup>. Public authorities also depend on taxes or public funds to support the operations of public services. Notable distinctions exist between the institutional arrangements (legal and regulatory structures), roles and responsibilities, tasks, levels of political commitment, and social obligations and authority within various societal contexts (Ivarsson, 2021; Luoma-aho & Canel, 2020). Swedish authorities often employ an organizational configuration as a single-council authority, wherein the director-general bears sole responsibility for the organization's activities, public obligations, and societal functions and responsibilities, such as *creating a sense of public safety*. These acts must be fulfilled by public authorities (Ivarsson, 2021).

However, previous research on how public authorities (and PSOs) communicate on social media remains limited, particularly in relation to participation (Lovari & Valentini, 2020) and complex societal matters. Fredriksson and Pallas (2020) note that the current media use of public authorities provides insight into the interconnectivity and interdependence of individual communication aspects within their social context. It also elucidates how alterations in one aspect can give rise to consequences, effects, and changes in the context in which media occurs. This indicates that media use in the public sector has become normalized in all areas, including those where media was not previously commonly used for control, producing digital media, and bolstering and differentiating itself from other organizations (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2020), for instance, public authorities' use of social media.

Eriksson and Ivarsson Westerberg (2021) have observed an increase in communication activities by public authorities, which are regarded as either

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<sup>2</sup> For more about organizations as human-made entities, their functions, and communication, see Alvesson and Jonsson (2022), Craig (1999), Fredriksson (2021), and Heide et al (2021).

a supporting activity or a core function depending on the authority's mission and how it interprets it today. In this context, the use of digital media has become a pivotal component of their communication work to share information and create engagement. For instance, police authorities' use of social media has dramatically increased, but it remains without clear communication objectives, especially when it comes to communicating about key societal tasks. This makes it difficult to understand the digital communication efforts of public authorities and the effects of these.

Nonetheless, for public authorities to remain accessible and effectively engage with the public, they must utilize a range of media and communication channels (Cassinger, 2021; Eriksson & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2021). This includes the strategic use of social media for various purposes. However, the adoption of social media by public authorities also gives rise to challenges and tensions between their core mission, the goal of accessibility, and elements of organizational self-promotion (Rasmussen, 2021). These challenges and tensions often stem from strategic documents and policy decisions that leave ambiguities regarding *what*, *why*, and *for whom* public authorities communicate. As a result, public authorities and PSOs more broadly may lack a comprehensive understanding of how to communicate effectively with the public (Lovari & Valentini, 2020), especially when defining appropriate approaches to complex societal matters. For example, efforts to create a sense of public safety through social media highlight potential limitations in the clarity and effectiveness of their communication strategies. This observation leads to a brief discussion of the concept of a sense of public safety as a complex societal matter, which forms part of the problem and analytical scope of this dissertation.

### *“Sense of Public Safety”*

Due to gang violence, other crimes in the public space, and a high terror alert (jumping between three and four on a scale of five; Säkerhetspolisen, 2023, 2024, 2025), the sense of public safety is under constant pressure in Sweden. This problem affects public authorities like the Swedish Police in their community work and how they communicate about it to the public. Briefly, the concept of creating a sense of public safety is viewed<sup>3</sup>, in this dissertation, as a complex societal matter based on the Swedish

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<sup>3</sup> I will further unpack its theoretical dimension in Chapter III.

government's concept of Trygghetsskapande. A sense of public safety focuses on decreasing the public's fear or insecurity of being affected by or becoming a victim of crime in the public space and increasing the sense of public safety (Ceccato et al., 2019; Government Offices of Sweden, 2017). Moreover, a sense of public safety involves subjective and collective experiences due to safety's inherent complexity and ambiguity (Hermansson, 2018; Zou & Meng, 2020). This implies that a sense of public safety, as a complex societal matter, is something that is experienced rather than objectively defined; it is shaped by perception and interpretation. Consequently, it carries an intersubjective dimension, a perspective that is acknowledged and examined throughout this dissertation and the included papers. In this regard, a sense of public safety constitutes a complex societal matter for which no straightforward solution exists, aligning with the characteristics of what has been described as a wicked problem (see Alford & Head, 2017; Grint, 2005, for a discussion of the concept).

As this dissertation examines how public authorities communicate with the public through social media, the Swedish Police has been selected as the empirical case. This choice is motivated by the police's fundamental societal mandate to ensure public safety for all. Its statutory duties are to promote justice, security, and safety by fostering public order, safety, and protection and other assistance to the public (Police Act [*Polislag*], SFS 1984:387: §1; Polisen, 2018, 2023a, 2024). The Swedish Police have simplified their definition of creating a sense of public safety by focusing on minimizing the fear of being exposed to crime in the public space (Polisen, 2018). In this case, it includes police visibility, relationship- and trust-building activities, and cooperation with other actors in the local community through crime control and prevention activities (Polisen, 2023a, 2024), which become a response of and a goal for the authority to reduce crime and create public safety.

Besides the police's own definition, the Swedish authority of the National Board of Housing, Building, and Planning (Boverket, 2023) has a definition of a sense of public safety. It defines it as a concept about feelings triggered<sup>4</sup> when individuals interpret their surroundings based on their experiences and with other individuals or media descriptions of the risk of being exposed to

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<sup>4</sup> As a side note, the term "trigger" also connects to the In Flames song "Trigger" from their 2002 album, *Reroute to Remain*, which has had a significant impact on the author.

crime or threatening situations. Political and societal discussions also influence a sense of public safety by paying attention to how the issue of public safety is governed in and through the Swedish welfare state (Brandén, 2022) and how politicians utilize the concept to foster a sense of “national pride” among the public during debates (e.g., Hermansson, 2018). Based on these arguments, I will limit the definition to focus solely on public safety, excluding, for example, safety at home. Consequently, I will use “a sense of public safety” in this dissertation.

### *Lack of Co-Creation Approach to Public Authority Communication*

Returning to a broader perspective on public authorities, it is important to note that this issue is not unique to the Swedish Police. Public authorities more generally must navigate the competing demands of maintaining authority, transparency, clarity, and participation while ensuring compliance with relevant laws, regulations, strategy documents, and policy directives during their digital engagement with the public, as discussed by studies like Eriksson and Ivarsson Westerberg (2021) and Ivarsson (2021). Furthermore, public authorities’ communication can lead to overconfidence in what social media can accomplish for their work (for internal or external purposes) and because of the lack of co-creation perspectives in their messaging (Lovari & Valentini, 2020)—posing a communicative challenge for them. This is a core aspect of social media that leads me to address the co-creation of communication processes where public authorities and the public are involved in shaping the communicative meaning and practice of, in this case, a sense of public safety in the public space.

In this context, I approach co-creation from a media and communication perspective, which emphasizes communication as a process of meaning-making and relationship-building between organizations and the public as active participants (Botan & Taylor, 2004). This perspective aligns closely with my conceptualization of public safety as an experienced phenomenon. The absence of co-creation is problematic, as it contains our understanding of how public authorities engage in meaningful communication with the public. Additionally, Tuurnas (2020) suggests that the importance of co-creation lies in the interaction between public authorities, in this case, and the public to increase engagement and participation even if it does not always need to involve dialogue or lead to impressive results. This understanding heightens the challenges public authorities face in

communicating with social media about complex societal matters with the public.

The problematization demonstrates that public authorities cannot be separate from social media because the public is present there. However, previous research has not paid enough attention to how social media changes the communication of public authorities (Cassinger & Thelander, 2020), such as police authorities and their use of social media (Walby & Wilkinson, 2023). The focus has been on transmission and top-down views of communication. This results in a lack of bidirectional and co-creation approaches (Botan & Taylor, 2004; Lovari & Valentini, 2020), which affects public authorities' communication on social media concerning complex societal matters. In other words, the extant research cannot account for the whole meaning of communicating complex societal matters, such as creating a sense of public safety on social media. This is both a theoretical and an empirical problem. Understanding the relationship between public authorities and the public on social media is vital for upholding democratic processes and trust in society. This leads me to the aim and the research questions of this dissertation.

## The Aim and Research Questions

The aim of this dissertation is twofold. First, it seeks to examine how public authorities communicate complex societal matters through digital media platforms. Second, it aims to develop a participatory approach for capturing bidirectional processes of digital communication between public authorities and members of the public.

This warrants investigation because the conduct of public authorities on social media can have profound consequences: it may either reinforce distrust, fear, and insecurity in a fragile public space (for instance, challenged by high terror alerts or ongoing gang wars) or strengthen relationships and public safety. Public authorities, especially those dealing with law and order, must therefore understand and balance their authoritative and, at the same time, communicative role when communicating a sense of public safety through digital media. To accomplish the research aims, the social media communication of the Swedish Police regarding the creation of a sense of public safety is selected as an empirical case due to the societal responsibility that the authority is required to fulfill by law, thereby enabling the collection of rich data. The Swedish Police has also been chosen since

the authority has significantly increased its presence on social media in recent years.

### *RQs of the Sub-Studies*

In line with the aim of this dissertation, four research questions were formulated, each corresponding to one of the sub-studies. These sub-studies, presented as separate papers, examined various aspects of the Swedish Police's social media communication in relation to creating a sense of public safety

***RQ Paper I: What are the strategies applied by the Swedish Police through their social media communication to create a sense of safety?***

**Paper I** explores the Swedish Police's strategies for creating a sense of safety through social media. The reason for this is the lack of research about the digital creation of a sense of safety because previous police social media studies have generally focused on proximity policing, informing citizens, proactive police work, crime reduction, surveillance, and preservation of trust.

***RQ Paper II: To what extent does the Swedish Police organization's communication on Instagram contribute to the public's experience of a sense of safety?***

**Paper II** examines how the public experiences the Swedish Police's Instagram communication concerning creating a sense of safety publicly. Instagram was chosen because of its focus on the image (Manovich, 2017), and it is a platform increasingly used by the Swedish Police. In addition, there are scarce studies that exclusively focus on Instagram regarding police social media communication, for instance, Walby and Wilkinson's study (2023), and none concerning how a sense of public safety is experienced.

***RQ Paper III: How do the Malmö police and the City of Malmö convey a sense of public safety through their Instagram posts?***

**Paper III**, a book chapter, studies how the Malmö police and the City of Malmö convey a sense of public safety via their Instagram in today's mediated and digital society. The organizations were selected because of their responsibilities to address and work with complex societal matters and their presence on social media.

*RQ Paper IV: How do Swedish police employees make sense of their social media communication related to a sense of public safety in critical making workshops?*

**Paper IV** introduces a participatory methodological approach for examining how Swedish Police employees make sense of their strategic communication with the public from a bottom-up perspective. Critical making workshops were employed, which is a method traditionally utilized in design and sociotechnical research but seldom applied in strategic communication studies.

On the next page, Figure 1 illustrates how the four papers interrelate and collectively contribute to the aim of this dissertation.

## Contribution of the Dissertation

The contribution of the dissertation is both theoretical and methodological. It advances the fields of media studies as well as organizational and strategic communication in two ways. First, it contributes to scholarship by examining how public authorities communicate complex societal matters—such as a sense of public safety—through digital media. Specifically, it demonstrates (i) how the Swedish Police employ social media to articulate the complex societal matter of creating a sense of public safety, and (ii) how members of the public experience the Swedish Police's social media communication in relation to the creation of a sense of safety. Second, the dissertation offers a methodological contribution, consisting of a *critical (un)making model* that captures participatory, exploratory, and iterative processes that involve complex societal matters, such as creating a sense of public safety. The dissertation proposes that the critical (un)making model is a useful way of understanding bidirectional communicative processes and generating novel ideas that emerge through engaged participation, exploration, and iteration present in unfolding and reconfiguring processes.

This approach emphasizes the importance of (i) adopting a playful approach engaging diverse stakeholders, (ii) fostering shared sensemaking, (iii) utilizing experience-based and ad hoc methods, (iv) maintaining openness to multiple interpretations and reflections, and (v) extending communicative practices beyond social media platforms to strengthen and improve communication processes related to complex societal matters, such as cultivating a sense of public safety.

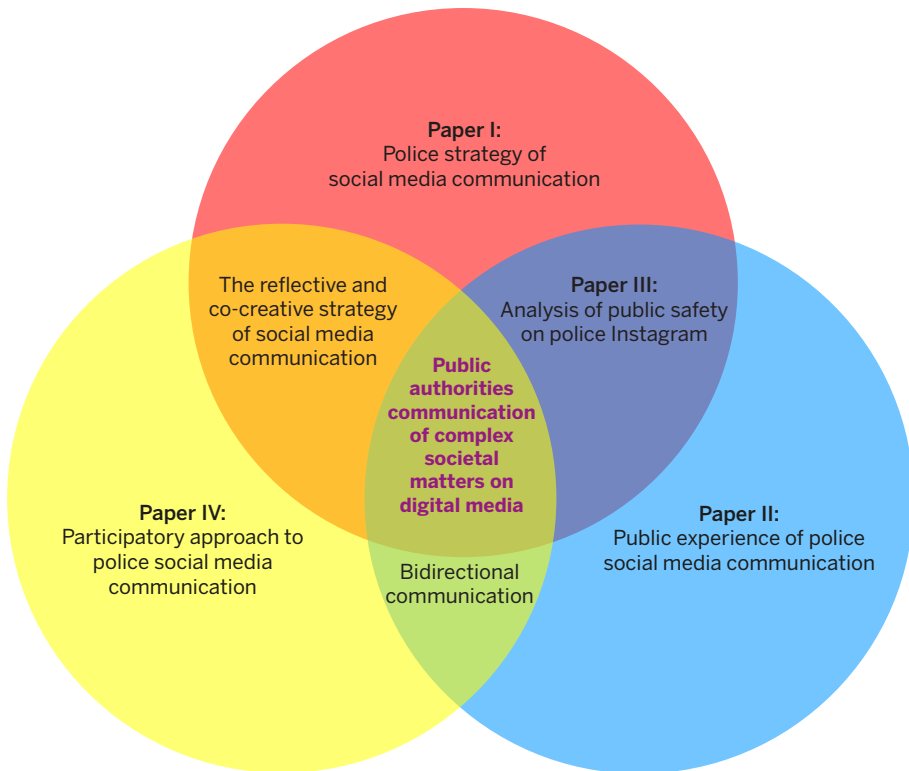


Figure 1. Overview of the dissertation.

## Outline of the Dissertation

The dissertation is structured into eight chapters and four articles (three scientific articles and one chapter for an anthology) in the following order.

Chapter II presents *Perspectives from Previous Research*, and this is to understand the dissertation's position and what it examines. Chapter III, *Theoretical Framework*, focuses on the meaning of a sense of public safety, experience, and sensemaking. The chapter concludes with an explanation of how the different theoretical sections are connected and shaped the theoretical framework of the dissertation—making sense of public safety. The fourth chapter focuses on the *Methodology*, where I present the research design, methodological strategies, and approaches used in the dissertation. The choice of methods is explained and reflected upon, as is how the empirical material was collected and analyzed. I also reflect on research quality and ethics. After that, in Chapter V, I provide a more detailed explanation of *The Swedish Police as an Empirical Case* and *Police Region South (PRS)*, the specific case for this dissertation. Chapter VI presents the *Summary of the Papers*, where short presentations of each paper's findings and contributions are given based on the research questions. In Chapter VII, I discuss and reflect on the *Findings*, which include three themes: (i) *Integrating Operational and Communicative Policing into Social Media*, (ii) *Fostering Public Engagement Through Police Communication on Social Media*, and (iii) *Bidirectional Communication as Sensemaking*, as well as *Critical (Un)Making as a Model for Capturing Co-Creation* based on the case of the Swedish Police and their social media, supported by Papers I–IV. Finally, Chapter VIII concludes the dissertation by revisiting its overall aim and presenting the theoretical and methodological contributions, practical recommendations, identified limitations, and directions for future research.

The *Kappa* ends with Papers I–IV:

- **Paper I:** “Malmö is not Sweden’s Chicago”: Policing and the challenge of creating a sense of safety through social media strategies (*published*)
- **Paper II:** Communicating a sense of safety: The public experience of Swedish Police Instagram accounts (*published*)
- **Paper III:** Social media communication to create public safety and oppose public fear: Insights into how Swedish public sector organizations convey a sense of public safety via Instagram (*published*)

- **Paper IV:** Communicating a sense of public safety through social media: A participatory approach in a public sector organization (*in review*)

# *Chapter II*

## Previous Research

To further clarify the scope, aim, and contribution of this dissertation—and to position it within existing scholarship— I will present key perspectives from previous research. First, I outline studies on public authorities’ social media communication and the role of connectivity, highlighting the limitations of prior research that has predominantly adopted top-down perspectives. I then address how this narrow focus overlooks the everyday meaning-making practices of both employees and the public, emphasizing the importance of incorporating bottom-up perspectives. This discussion leads to an argument for adopting a participatory approach to better understand communication as a socially constructed process. Subsequently, I discuss how this approach provides deeper insight into two interrelated dimensions of communication: (i) its sociocultural construction and (ii) its digital mediation. The chapter concludes by examining the specific challenges faced by the police when communicating through social media.

### Public Authorities’ Social Media Communication

Social media is crucial for police<sup>5</sup> and other public authorities in managing and cultivating relationships with the public (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016; Schneider, 2021a, 2021b). Social media platforms permit public authorities to become both producers and distributors of media content. Furthermore, the incorporation of social media has become pervasive in the daily operations of public organizations (Eriksson & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2021; Lovari & Valentini, 2020), both internally and externally. This integration facilitates the sensemaking, dissemination, and participation of information within the organization (Madsen, 2022) and beyond its boundaries (de Graaf & Meijer, 2019). The rapid development in the media sector, such as social media advancements, has been driven by social and technological factors that have enabled individuals and organizations (no matter the sector) to communicate or interact instantaneously. This facilitates collaboration and the rapid sharing of information (Burgess et al., 2018).

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<sup>5</sup> In this dissertation, the terms “police authority” and “police organization” are used interchangeably to refer to the same concept.

Furthermore, previous research on public authorities shows that they are pressured to be more open to digital interactions with the public (de Graaf & Meijer, 2019; Lindgren et al., 2019), and this pressure thereby shapes organizations' (public and private) understanding of what digital media can do (Beverungen et al., 2019). On this notion, public authorities think they are interacting with the public, but instead, they mostly describe themselves or what they do in a transmissive manner without the public in mind (Eriksson & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2021; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016). As a result, public authorities mostly take the form of few-to-many (Lovari & Valentini, 2020) instead of many-to-many, the latter a core function of social media (van Dijck, 2013). This reinforces social media as a double-edged sword of communication, depending on its utilization and perception by the user (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014). For instance, social media communication frequently occurs across multiple media platforms today because that is where the public is. This creates a demanding and challenging environment for public authorities due to a lack of resources<sup>6</sup> and communication strategies, as they are still obliged to disseminate information by law (Ivarsson, 2021). For example, previous studies show public authorities often shape their social media content in a friendly or trendy way in order to stay popular by disclosing personal aspects of the organization in the hope of getting closer to and building relations with the public (Cassinger & Thelander, 2020; Schneider, 2021b) to humanize the authority's work in order to build relationships with the community (Bullock et al., 2021; Rasmussen, 2021) or trust (Williams et al., 2018), but not in a manner that focuses on a sense of public safety.

Although social media is emblematic of a digitalized society, facilitating a seamless exchange of information and interaction, it is imperative to acknowledge its potential negative aspects. These involve unthinking communication and ethical and structural issues, which refer to the dark side of digitalization (see Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2021). Another issue is the influence of the private sector on public authorities. This phenomenon, in turn, exerts a significant influence on the manner in which public authorities communicate with their respective target audiences, thereby altering the communication style, media usage, and approach employed by them (Enbom et al., 2014; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2020). For instance, this issue has been a

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<sup>6</sup> One dimension of this problem lies in public authorities' use and the influence of New Public Management (NPM). However, NPM is outside the scope of this dissertation.

recurring theme when it comes to the Swedish Police in various news reports. It leads to communicative challenges for authorities on how to use social media and what to communicate based on societal demands, expectations, and responsibilities (Cassinger & Thelander, 2020; Olsson & Eriksson, 2016). This communicative challenge or problem is reinforced by the blurring between the digital and the nondigital, a consequence of ever-present connectivity (van Dijck, 2013).

### *Relevance of Connectivity*

van Dijck's (2013) perspective on connectivity is still highly relevant ten-plus years later. This is because the connectivity concept leads to a discrepancy between public authorities' communication process, social media dynamics, and integration of complex societal matters for/with the public. For instance, the Swedish public is highly connected to social and digital media platforms today (see Internetstiftelsen, 2024), which affects public authorities like the Swedish Police in how to reach it. Public authorities must align their actions with their stated intentions of transparency and consistency (Fredriksson & Edwards, 2019), as exemplified by the police officer's quote at the beginning of Chapter I. Furthermore, social media has become a valuable strategic communication toolbox that grants organizations (and their employees) greater freedom and control over the dissemination of information, in contrast to other media platforms, if resources are allocated for this task (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014, 2023). Still, it can also be problematic for public authority members due to a lack of communication on social media (Lovari & Valentini, 2020). From a connectivity perspective, social media can jeopardize the organization's strategic value and purpose and how communication is used and valued (cf. Zerfass et al., 2018). This phenomenon engenders communication challenges for public authorities (Andersson et al., 2021; Eriksson & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2021) due to an absence of comprehensive understanding of the capabilities and limitations (Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2021), and the role or framing of strategic communication (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2016) in the use of social media from the standpoint of how, what, and why. Rasmussen emphasizes the critical need of public authorities, particularly within the legal system, to "operate in social media within the limits of appropriateness" (2017: 99) to avoid cultivating mistrust or uncertainty.

These factors highlight the lack of comprehensive studies examining public authorities' communicative process of using social media to create meaning around complex societal matters, in this case, how public authorities communicate to create a sense of public safety within the community.

## A Note on Top-Down and Bottom-Up Communication

It is important to acknowledge that part of the problem stems from the gap between the top-down communication practices of public authorities and the inherently bottom-up nature of social media.

As Christensen and Christensen state, “Regardless of the exact production conditions, the use of member voices to represent the organization is likely to involve more or less explicit attempts to discipline the appointed speakers” (2022a: 498). Additionally, the communication processes of public authorities are often based on their purpose, but, as with organizations in general, they face challenges related to the strategic aspects of what, how, why, and to whom they communicate in order to communicate strategically and meaningfully outside of their organizational space (Christensen & Christensen, 2022b; Falkheimer & Heide, 2023). This, in turn, highlights that organizations and employees face challenges in coordinating and balancing strategies, areas of action, and responsibilities when communicating internally or externally, which causes communication to shift between strategic and nonstrategic (see Raupp & Hoffjann, 2012) or between transmission or meaning-making (Heide et al., 2021).

The above arguments expose the differences in communication processes between public authorities and social media. Grint (2005) notes that the top-down perspective is part of dealing with complex dimensions of a problem or an issue that affects society. Simonsson and Heide (2021: 267) posit that focusing on “managers as key actors [in research] generates a focus on top-down oriented communication processes and neglects the importance of horizontal, informal communication processes and coworkers as communicators,” aka a bottom-up perspective.

### *Top-Down Perspective on Public Authorities Communication*

On this notion, a top-down mentality (or a transmission communication perspective; see chapter 1 in Carey, 2009) still influences organizational

members' communication internally and externally. This top-down mentality is exemplified by how communication can be expressed to be perceived as acceptable by others but can reduce the value of employees' communication and thus lead to member perspectives on the organization being devalued (Christensen & Christensen, 2022a). Lovari and Valentini (2020) add that it is a common practice in (and a criticism of) the whole public sector to take a transmission communication perspective with their social media, which informs their social media use. Additionally, Andersson et al. (2021, 2024) highlight the role and opportunities social media provides to public authorities, especially Swedish police officers, in how they communicate their work to the public. Andersson et al. (2021, 2024) indicate that the ways in which public authorities and their employees use social media reveal a gap between top-down communication, which focuses on information dissemination and organizational control, and bottom-up communication, which is more personal and employee-driven.

As a concrete example, and based on what this dissertation focuses on, the Swedish Police<sup>7</sup> has a highly vertical top-down structure throughout the organization, from the National Police Commissioner to the police units on the ground. This is exemplified by using a top-down perspective to make sense of their operations (Kihlberg & Lindgren, 2021). This perspective is reinforced by political decisions like the Police Act (SFS 1984:387) and Sweden's goal to excel in digitalization, which affects all parts of society (Regeringskansliet, n.d.)<sup>8</sup>. It also depends on the authority's own decisions based on their role in society, such as Police Operational Strategies (Police, 2023a, 2024) aimed at staying close and visible to the public in both digital and nondigital spaces, reducing crime, and creating a sense of public safety. This is exemplified by how the Swedish Police act on social media, based on the Police Communication Policy (Polisen, 2015) and in their Social Media Handbook (Polisen, 2022).

The challenge between top-down and bottom-up communication is reflected in how employees and management value and understand the role of organizational communication (Simonsson & Heide, 2021). Luoma-aho and Canel (2020) suggest that this creates a discrepancy in the communication mindset between the public sector and the public. The discrepancy (between

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<sup>7</sup> For further details on the Swedish Police, see Chapter V.

<sup>8</sup> The Swedish digitalization goal will not be further explored in this dissertation.

top-down and bottom-up) is highly visible in how Swedish Police behave and communicate to establish relationships, through social media communication, with the public to fulfill their duties effectively.

### *Social Media Communication as a Bottom-Up Perspective*

Since the terms ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’ denote different approaches to understanding communication, it is important to acknowledge that tensions between these perspectives influence “communication on strategy formulation (i.e., how communication about daily practices eventually impacts the strategic decisions of organizations)” (Hallahan et al., 2007: 13). Consequently, how the police and other public authorities communicate to the public involves more than merely balancing and interpreting various strategic documents and policy decisions (see Fredriksson & Edward, 2019). It also involves the need to build relationships with the public in communicating different types of content from a local level (Williams et al., 2018) by emphasizing a form of bottom-up perspective on how police members communicate (Andersson et al., 2024; Paper IV). Social media communication has become a relevant way to do so due to today’s connected and mediated way of living, where digital and nondigital spaces are interconnected (van Dijck, 2013). However, public authorities’ communication processes still indicate a discrepancy between top-down and bottom-up ways of communicating. The bottom-up perspective entails reducing organizational control such that workers can communicate according to their own preferences within the organizational setting (Heide et al., 2018, 2021). This approach also fosters the perception of communication as a strategic entity and of communicators as valuable assets (Simonsson & Heide, 2021). The bottom-up perspective also underscores the usefulness of social media as a communication tool for complex societal matters or responsibilities, including promoting a sense of public safety, for instance by taking a local perspective on social media communication based on the members who work on the ground.

However, even with bottom-up communication, public authority members must reflect on the purpose of their social media communication (Cassinger & Thelander, 2020) so as not to jeopardize their relationships with the public. Based on this, a bottom-up communication perspective becomes a way to strategically communicate the authorities’ work and responsibility (and their purpose) to the public (Paper IV), which is a fundamental aspect

of strategic communication (Falkheimer & Heide, 2014, 2023). This perspective on bottom-up communication prompts me to provide a concise overview of participatory approaches and their relevance to this dissertation.

## Relevance of a Participatory Approach

This dissertation adopts a participatory approach to explore how police employees and the public make sense of police social media communication, particularly in relation to the creation of a sense of public safety. This approach aligns with traditions such as participatory design, participatory research, participatory processes, participatory culture, co-production research, and action research. Although these terms vary across disciplines, they share a common objective: to examine how diverse actors collaboratively generate knowledge to address complex societal challenges (Bradbury et al., 2019; Martin, 2010) and to translate innovations into meaningful practices within everyday contexts (Ehn et al., 2014). A participatory approach is about doing research in the real world to gain deeper insights by observing participants' ways of interacting (Tuurnas, 2020), fostering engagement (Johnston & Taylor, 2022), and building trust to establish strong relationships (Shani & Coghlan, 2021) for co-creating research. All stakeholders become partners in the process, and the values of the relationship are fundamental to co-creating meaning (Botan & Taylor, 2004).

Furthermore, a participatory approach acts as a learning environment where knowledge is shared democratically with abductive reasoning to improve accountability and transparency in a co-learning process (Lindhult & Axelsson, 2021). Ehn et al. (2014) add that participatory processes include both human and nonhuman entities in society in an ongoing relationship. In this context, participatory approaches connect to social constructivism<sup>9</sup> (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2009) and illustrate that meaning is created through communication and interaction, influenced by sociocultural contexts involving improvisation (Craig, 1999). This perspective agrees with Falkheimer and Heide's (2023) acknowledgment that organizations, both public and private, are social entities because they rely on people, structures, purposes (and goals), identity, and communication to operate.

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<sup>9</sup> See Chapter IV for an in-depth look at the dissertation's social constructionist approach.

### *Media and Communication Perspectives on Participation*

In this dissertation, I adopt a media and communication perspective on participation, with particular attention to organizations and strategic communication. First, I draw on Henry Jenkins' (2006) assertion that we are now both producers and consumers due to digital advancements, emphasizing engagement through a participatory approach to various media platforms and multiple events and discussions. In addition to Jenkins' account of participation, I also draw inspiration from Gambarato et al.'s (2020) work, which focuses on the sociological approach to participation within transmedia storytelling and situates them in relation to systems theory. From this perspective, the authors argue that participation extends beyond the evolving relationship between users and media producers and that interaction does not inherently constitute participation, as illustrated in the following passage:

For instance, audiences can interact on social media and reply to posts related to the transmedia story they enjoy. This is interaction, but this does not imply that they are participating in the development of the transmedia story. In contrast, when audiences can, for example, suggest plot progression via social media channels, and these suggestions are incorporated by the transmedia producers, interaction and participation are in place. (Gambarato et al., 2020: 47)

Carpentier presents a different approach to participation. Moving beyond a sociological orientation, Carpentier (2016) emphasizes a political approach that highlights the importance of power relations, such as power distribution and power-sharing, and decision-making in the complexity of participatory processes. From this standpoint, the logic of power diverges from ordinary social interactions, thereby differing from the sociological approach. Carpentier (2015, 2016) also underlines the importance of access, interaction, and participation in participatory processes. In response to overly simplistic models of participation, he proposes a four-level analytical toolkit, comprising field, actors, decisions, and power organized into 12 steps that illuminates how participation can function in media and communication settings (Carpentier, 2016).

Kaun and Uldam's (2017) perspective on participation aligns with Carpentier's political approach, as their study examines the role of social media in civic—particularly political—participation through Swedish volunteer initiatives during the 2015 migration crisis. The authors argue that understanding political participation and civic engagement on social media requires examining participation through the interplay of dimensions of power relations, practices, affordances, and discourse. Therefore, they introduce an analytical model for studying social media participation that avoids techno-determinism and mediacentric biases by emphasizing these four interconnected dimensions. Kaun and Uldam further argue that although each dimension matters individually, it is their interplay that reveals who participates, who is heard, and how phenomena such as virality, media interconnections, and online–offline dynamics take shape. Otherwise, the understanding of the interaction between platform technologies, user practices, dominant discourses, and broader power relations becomes limited or missed (Kaun & Uldam, 2017).

Although Carpentier's (2015, 2016) and Kaun and Uldam's (2017) views on participation as a political approach provide valuable insights, they will not be further applied in this dissertation. Instead, I adopt the sociological approach, as it more closely aligns with the dissertation's focus on how participants are engaged and mobilized. This perspective resonates well with Jenkins' (2006) and Gambarato et al.'s (2020) research on participation, as well as the views of Andersson et al. (2024) and Falkheimer and Heide (2014, 2023) on strategic communication as a two-way process. A participatory approach therefore presents opportunities and challenges for organizations and their members in understanding and co-creating strategic communication to go from a top-down to a bottom-up communication mindset (Heide et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the sociological approach to participation emphasizes that developing sustainable relationships among the involved actors is essential. For instance, with a strategic communication focus, interactions and contacts between participants are valued more than just achieving the organization's goals (Johnston & Taylor, 2022). Implementing the sociological approach to participation, with a focus on strategic and organizational communication in media and communication studies, facilitates reflection from a bottom-up perspective as a participatory process (Sjöberg, 2016; Paper IV) and enables the exchange of knowledge and experiences between participants (Ratto,

2011). This occurs within a particular sociocultural communicative context, as Craig (1999) postulated. In this case, it is important to understand how public authorities handle, enhance, learn from, and make sense of communicative challenges related to complex societal matters, especially from a strategic and communicative perspective (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2022; van Ruler, 2018).

Nevertheless, there are challenges in applying a participatory process when conducting research with public authorities. The challenges are mainly due to decisions and societal and organizational responsibilities (Ivarsson, 2021) that make it difficult for public authority members to fully participate in this type of research (Martin, 2010; Tuurnas, 2020). Regardless of whether participation is approached from a sociological or political perspective, scholars have raised questions about the role of the researcher and the power dynamics embedded in decision-making processes, particularly with respect to their implications for access, interaction, and participation. These considerations are central to understanding a research problem from a participatory standpoint (see e.g., Carpentier, 2015, 2016; Kaun & Uldam, 2017). A participatory approach becomes relevant when a problem is widespread and can be combined, co-created, and reflected on with a focus on learning and knowledge sharing from a collaborative setting (Lindhult, 2022). Based on these explanations, I argue that a participatory approach can address, enhance, learn from, and make further sense of the communicative challenge that authorities face in communicating a sense of public safety on social media from a media and communication perspective.

## A Social Constructionist View on Communication

The dissertation's understanding of participation, grounded in a sociological approach, is aligned with Carey's conception of communication as a ritual process. As Carey explains, "[a] ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time" and "the representations of shared beliefs" (2009: 15). That view can be connected to Craig's (1999) view that communication is a socioculturally constructed phenomenon occurring in today's interconnected society (see van Dijck, 2013, for example), which converge on social media.

### *Communication as Socio-Culturally Constructed*

Communication is dynamic and constantly develops through dialogues in and outside organizations. I thus draw on one of Craig's (1999) views: that communication is socioculturally constructed<sup>10</sup> by reproducing and constructing social order from our inherent aspect as human beings through dialogue. This perspective shows that communication is socially constructed and highlights the central role of people in this, at both the individual and collective levels, in the meaning-making of communication. Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009) hold that society (in this case, authorities and their communication) is a social constructivist product. Hallahan et al. (2007) posit that communication entails creating and exchanging meaning between actors. This, in turn, means that communication is constructed and understood in how members of the authority act and communicate on behalf of the organization to the public. Falkheimer and Heide (2023) emphasize that this communicative standpoint involves adapting, listening to, and interpreting social and cultural contexts to create meaning, to influence, or to change people's behavior through dialogue.

Communication has psychological, social, and cultural dimensions, and its interpretation involves a degree of ambiguity (Hallahan et al., 2007). Therefore, Weick's (1995) sensemaking<sup>11</sup>—making sense of what we do in an organization by seeing and then doing—and Craig's (1999) view of communication as socially reproducing, links to my participatory approach<sup>12</sup> by emphasizing a bottom-up perspective on the strategic communicative mindset that communication made in organizational settings becomes central to the organization's behavior, goal, and existence (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023; Zerfass et al., 2018). To further elucidate the scope of this dissertation and my stance on communication, that is, as socially constructed and dialogue-bound in how organizational members communicate and make sense of it with the public, communication as digital media also needs to be unpacked.

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<sup>10</sup> See Chapter IV for an in-depth look at the dissertation's social constructionist approach.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter III for an in-depth look at the dissertation's approach to sensemaking.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter IV and Paper IV for an in-depth understanding of my participatory approach in this dissertation.

### *Digital Communication*

The second perspective is *digital communication*, which is rooted in media technology development (like social media) and its social and cultural impact on us. In order to understand digital communication, I once again turn to van Dijck's (2013) concept of connectivity. Van Dijck points out that the boundaries between digital and nondigital space have been blurred by our constant connectivity, for example, through smartphones and social media as the digital facet of communication. This connectivity thus ties into the mediatization of public authorities, whereby digital communication influences how authorities communicate with the public and with collaborative actors. Connectivity is highly prevalent in Sweden due to the government's digitization plan (mentioned earlier), which is directing society toward more digital communication. This view is reinforced by the medialization that has emerged among authorities due to sociocultural conditions (Fredriksson & Pallas, 2020).

Furthermore, this means that digital communication takes place on platforms that suit an organization based on its hopes to retain control but still be seen as accessible (Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2021), consistent and transparent (Fredriksson & Edwards, 2019). Since communication also happens in digital settings on social media, public authorities thus mix transmission and dialogue-based communication that suits them strategically. This, in turn, ties in with how employees communicate, as they often communicate what the organization has predetermined whether consciously or unconsciously (Christensen & Christensen, 2022), in this case, how the police communicate a sense of public safety on their social media.

## Communicative Challenges With Social Media

Previous research on public authorities shows they are having difficulty keeping up with and responding to the public's use of social media (Lovari & Valentini, 2020). Police authorities are especially interesting because of their duties and missions in a democratic society, how they use social media, the platforms they select, and their view of communication based on authority, decisions made, and laws.

Williams et al. (2018) observed that police use of social media for community purposes often falls short and becomes a channel for information

dissemination rather than an arena for dialogue. The study by de Graaf and Meijer (2019) showcases how police face many value conflicts in terms of how they use social media, such as transparency, participation, and efficiency. This affects the relationship between the police and the public due to differences in digital maturity and their use of social media platforms. A consequence of this is that police often use social media for mass communication due to the organizational framework instead of as an arena for dialogue and insights from the public, which de Graaf and Meijer (2019) as well as Ralph et al. (2022) highlight.

On this note, police officers exhibit selective use of social media when engaging with users by demonstrating a degree of empathy (albeit infrequently), while disregarding those who challenge their legitimacy in order to uphold the police image (Kudla & Parnaby, 2018). Studies like those of Bullock et al. (2021) and Sachdeva et al. (2016) indicate that social media interactions between police officers and the public can boost engagement, reduce crime, and possibly enhance public safety. Police social media can therefore motivate the police and the public to collaborate more effectively and support community safety (Sachdeva et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2018); however, public safety remains mostly a byproduct of police social media. Still, this depends on police authorities and their understanding and use of social media as a communicative and participatory space. However, previous studies, such as de Graaf and Meijer (2018) and Walby and Wilkinson (2023), have shown that their understanding and use of social media is not always clearly reflected in actual police social media activity. This presents a challenge for the police, as the public often perceives police behavior (Jackson & Bradford, 2009) or the intent behind police communication differently from how the police themselves understand it (Ralph et al., 2022). Therefore, police authorities must further reflect on their social media processes—what they want to communicate, to whom, and why—even if officers must weigh the opportunities and limits of social media when engaging with the public (Bullock et al., 2021), especially when dealing with and communicating on complex societal matters

Furthermore, previous studies of police social media have mainly focused on (i) visibility activities (Rolandsson, 2020) to legitimize police work in the community (Grimmelikhuijsen & Meijer, 2015; Walsh & O'Connor, 2019), (ii) engaging in trust-building (Williams et al., 2018), (iii) narrating or controlling the police's own story (Walby & Wilkinson, 2023) to deal with or

avoid public criticism (Kudla & Parnaby, 2018; Ralph et al., 2022), (iv) performing and managing the police image (Bullock, 2018; Schneider, 2021a), (v) upholding social order as well as being trendy online (Schneider, 2021b), or being funny or personal online with inspiration from the private sector in terms of content and style, such as humor or journalism (Rasmussen, 2017, 2021; Rolandsson, 2020) to boost popularity (vi) or by giving different voices from the organization as ambassadors (Andersson et al., 2021, 2024), or (vii) increasing attractiveness (Olsson & Eriksson, 2016), for instance by showcasing the ‘cuteness’ of the police via their animals, such as police dogs (Wood, 2020).

In the case of the Swedish Police, they mainly use Facebook, Instagram, and X (formerly Twitter) as their social media platforms for communication and sharing information (Eriksson & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2021). On these platforms, they focus on content like recruitment campaigns, employer branding, crime trend updates, prevention tips, and building relationships and public trust. Swedish police officers see social media as an information tool to build engagement and reputations that the public can relate to and to promote low bureaucratic control barriers, according to Rolandsson (2020). What prior research shows in many cases aligns with the Swedish Police’s social media. Thus it strengthens my position on the lack of social media communication efforts aimed at conveying the complex societal matter of creating a sense of public safety. Brandén (2022) too notes that the meaning of a sense of public safety is rarely examined and therefore requires more research to capture its full scope outside the field of criminology. Current definitions of a sense of public safety often overlook the importance of its communication aspects, which is why extremely few studies (besides mine) have focused exclusively on using social media for this purpose. This highlights the ambiguity and complexity from a communication perspective in how the Swedish Police work with and communicate a sense of public safety on social media.

Consequently, these research perspectives make evident that public authorities and, especially, police authorities must reflect on *what*, *why*, and *whom* they communicate with/to know *how* to communicate a sense of public safety on social media. This is to avoid jeopardizing the relationship with the public and to have a more explicit communicative process with their

social media because public authorities work for the public (e.g., Eriksson & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2021; Luoma-aho & Canel, 2020).

# *Chapter III*

# Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I will present the dissertation's theoretical framework with support from previous research on the topic. I will further unpack the concept of a sense of public safety, which I briefly introduced in the problematization in Chapter I. Thereafter, I will present a sense of public safety as an experience. After that, I will focus on making sense of experiences by presenting how sensemaking is used theoretically. This is to understand how public authorities communicate in order to examine communicative processes in which public authorities convey a sense of public safety on digital media, in this case, the Swedish Police and the public.

## The Meaning of a Sense of Public Safety

In order to understand the meaning of a sense of public safety as a complex societal matter from a theoretical perspective, safety<sup>13</sup> can be described as preventing unintentional harm and assessing potential risks and dangers that we (individuals or society) face (Boholm et al., 2016; Möller et al., 2006). Safety is mainly associated with personal safety, as it varies according to each person's predefined perspective and is about feeling safe based on historical happenings and previous experience (Furedi, 2019). Additionally, safety has a collective and political meaning (Hermansson, 2018) rooted in social and public agreements about what it is and how we should engage with it, which gives it an intersubjective meaning (Ceccato et al., 2019; Pain & Townshend, 2001). Eizenberg and Jabareen (2017) posit that safety is also tied to social sustainability discourse due to its effects on society (on micro, meso, and macro levels). Security<sup>14</sup>, on the other hand, focuses on mitigating intentional harm through concrete measures (Boholm et al., 2016). This means that security is about tangible measures at collective levels that involve aspects such as the use of camera surveillance (CCTV) (see Gerell, 2020), lighting, speed bumps, traffic controls, and the presence of authorities in the public space (Cassinger & Thufvesson, 2022; Sahlin Lilja, 2022). In this way, security is linked to crime prevention activities, such as police

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<sup>13</sup> Safety refers to *trygghet* in Swedish.

<sup>14</sup> Security refers to *säkerhet* in Swedish.

conducting traffic controls to reduce speeding and drunk driving, using camera surveillance in a crime-dense area, neighborhood watch, or visiting schools to confiscate weapons and drugs. Safety and security are thus closely linked in managing different types of risks and hazards, but they should be seen as different concepts with differing meanings (Boholm et al., 2016). Further description of the concept of security is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

### *The Intersubjective Meaning*

The understanding of safety versus security leads me to define safety as dynamic, with an emphasis on the intersubjective meaning where a *sense* becomes an important part of understanding it as *a sense of public safety*. Furthermore, the intersubjective meaning of a sense of public safety is contingent upon expectations, perceptions, and previous experiences with individual and collective agreements and behaviors about what safety in public space means or should mean (Zou & Meng, 2020). A sense of public safety also encompasses deliberate design measures in public spaces that enhance safety perceptions by mitigating various types of risks that can compromise public safety (Cassinger & Thufvesson, 2022) as well as public authority communication (Ho & Cho, 2016) and trust (Kunnel, 2021). Accordingly, a sense of public safety varies and is challenged by societal events and situations as well as gender, mode, and location, which makes the intersubjective meaning dynamic, vague, and difficult to fully define and measure (Brandén, 2022; Ceccato et al., 2021). This creates a conflict between what a sense of public safety means and how it can be created theoretically and practically. To this, Brandén adds

that it is precisely because of the promise of protection in a time of uncertainty and governmental precarization that safety offers, of immunizing the safe “us” and the current order, that safety ... has become a neoliberal “solution” to a range of socio-economic and political challenges today. (2022: 90).

The explanations above pose significant challenges for public authorities in terms of their actions, awareness, and communication strategies regarding the intersubjective meaning and vagueness of a sense of public safety and how it can be achieved.

Previous research on public safety has primarily focused on a sense of safety generated by a visible police presence, such as through foot patrol officers (Borovec et al., 2021) or proactive policing initiatives (Holmberg, 2005). It has also examined collaborative projects involving various community actors aimed at understanding and addressing public safety from a more holistic perspective (Pain & Townshend, 2001). A sense of public safety is influenced by the actions and inactions of authorities in society, making it a dynamic and changing phenomenon. Additionally, a sense of public safety has become a measure of societal symptoms that need quick fixes, which is almost impossible when dealing with this type of complex societal matter (Brandén, 2022). The discrepancy between public expectations and authorities' actions results in disappointment and undermines understanding of what fosters a sense of public safety. To illustrate this discrepancy, previous research has stated that the police, as a homogeneous group, and the public, as a heterogeneous group, are evident in their disparate perspectives on what creates a sense of public safety, and these differing perspectives are frequently overlooked by both parties (Jackson & Bradford, 2009; Sachdeva et al., 2016). This discrepancy can connect to the diverse political meaning of a sense of public safety and how politicians can help to create public safety (Hermansson, 2018). In this way, a sense of public safety is dynamic.

The phenomenon of public safety extends to the operation of the welfare state<sup>15</sup> and the relationship of trust between the public and public authorities (Rothstein, 2000, 2001). Establishing trust between the public and police authorities becomes paramount to prevent crime and enhance public safety (Ceccato et al., 2019; Jackson & Bradford, 2009), particularly a sense of public safety. This aspect assumes significant importance when considering public authorities' responsibility to ensure public safety within public spaces (Cassinger & Thufvesson, 2022).

Consequently, a sense of public safety is defined in this dissertation as dynamic and as having an intersubjective meaning based on social and cultural agreements about how we experience it. This means that a sense of public safety is dynamic because it involves vagueness, trust, and risk awareness based on individual and collective experiences, which affect

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<sup>15</sup> For example, the welfare state encompasses health care, education, legal systems, and tax systems that are designed to promote the well-being of its citizens. To acquire a more profound comprehension of the welfare state, I recommend taking a look at Rothstein's research.

public authorities and how they strategically communicating a sense of public safety to the public. Thus, our experiences become central in understanding a sense of public safety because we are shaped by cultural and social events and dimensions. This leads me to move on to the next part of the chapter.

## A Sense of Public Safety as an Experience

“An experience has pattern and structure, because it is not just doing and undergoing in alteration, but consist of them in relationship” (Dewey, 2005: 45–46). This means that experience has theoretical and philosophical dimensions based on how we understand it. Dewey (1997) states that experiences are necessary for us to understand our reality and behavior, underscoring the notion that experience is an active process in which we engage with our environment, thereby shaping our learning and growth based on the past. Accordingly, experiences are imbued with feelings, but feelings themselves are not distinct entities within them (Dewey, 2005). These feelings, characterized as a unified whole of an experience, mean that the experience is a dynamic process in which we appropriate our surroundings and create a sense of our reality in a subtle play between its elusive and disappearing dimensions (Nora, 1989). For instance, this can be described as moving in a foggy area with flashing lights that guide one between what one experienced and thought one experienced. Because our experiences are used to confirm certain social behaviors, we reproduce them without thinking about how they actually relate to the context we are in (Souza, 2022).

To elaborate further, Bornemark (2020) highlights that we must consider how we experience situations and surroundings and what we know, which involves trust of ourselves and others (humans and organizations), as well as the role of communication in how it shapes our experience (Carey, 2009). This is exemplified by the Swedish Police’s use of social media to share local updates, highlight local initiatives, and collaborate with other societal actors in efforts to engage the public, foster trust, and cultivate a sense of safety within communities (see Papers I–III). Our experience is based on retrospective reflections, personal growth, and critical thinking, which can be developed; however, it can also mislead us in our perceptions (Dewey, 2005; Nora, 1989), especially regarding what constitutes a sense of public

safety. This suggests that how we experience is inherently characterized by vagueness due to the fact that our surroundings always affect us intentionally or unintentionally (Souza, 2022). In this way, vagueness becomes a limitation of experience. For instance, vagueness is present in our perception and experience of a sense of public safety and what is going on around us. Thus, how we experience a sense of public safety is in a constant tug-of-war based on insecurity and a lack of risk awareness (Möller et al., 2006), which, at worst, leads to public fear (Furedi, 2019). Our sense of public safety or fear is influenced and reshaped by our surroundings and social or past events, making the experience dynamic. For this reason, I will briefly discuss fear, which is also dynamic and the antithesis of a sense of public safety.

### *Fear as the Diametrically Opposite of a Sense of Safety*

The experience of fear symbolizes the diametrically opposite state of experience regarding a sense of public safety. Fear always lurks around the corner, diminishing or challenging our sense of public safety (Furedi, 2019). In this way, fear affects the well-being of communities because it influences our perceptions of safety, trust, and security (Pain & Townshend, 2001). Experiences of fear are influenced by societal and cultural phenomena related to crime or mediatized events or rumors and heighten public anxiety and fear in public spaces (Furedi, 2019). In this way, the experience of fear constantly challenges us and affects society at large<sup>16</sup> but some groups more than others (Ceccato et al., 2021). It increases individual and collective instability and uncertainty, which affects our sense of public safety consciously and unconsciously (Paper III; Lotman, 2013). Furthermore, fear ties into a critique of how society functions today: the unwillingness to improve problems tied to the welfare of society (Best, 2021). Best adds that:

fear draw[s] our attention to the way that risk seems to figure more prominently in our thinking. As our lives become safer and longer – thanks to all those vaccinations, antibiotics, smoke detectors, and airbags – we have the leisure to try to make further improvements, to avoid other threats, but are we actually afraid, in

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<sup>16</sup> Unlike a deterioration in public safety at the national level, a deterioration in safety at the international level should be seen as a crisis. Risk and crisis are beyond the scope of this dissertation; however, I recommend Frandsen and Johansen's (2020) work on risk and crisis communication in the public sector for a better understanding of this issue.

the sense of experiencing actual fear? This is less clear. (Best, 2021: 295).

The above quote ties in with the discussion on the role of society in addressing public safety and fear and with the Swedish issue of crimes that affect our experience of safety or fear (Brandén, 2022; Sahlin Lilja, 2022). Brandén (2022) emphasizes the importance of involving municipalities and authorities in planning and working to increase public safety and reduce fear in public spaces. In the Swedish situation, at a macro level, gang-related crimes and violence, crimes against the elderly, rape, threats, and hatred via social media emerge as major factors in the experience of fear (Brå, 2022, 2023; Sahlin Lilja, 2022).

Insecurity and fear in public spaces are key factors in understanding complex societal matters, particularly in relation to a sense of public safety. These emotions directly shape how people perceive safety, trust authorities, and engage with their communities (Brandén, 2022; Furedi, 2019). Within this context, fear can be understood as linked to a wicked problem. According to Grint (2005), a problem is considered wicked when it becomes so large and multifaceted that simple solutions are inadequate and efforts to address it may give rise to new challenges. In the long term, the experience of public fear challenges society (at the macro level) in several respects (see Furedi, 2019) and in addressing the root problem. Furthermore, a wicked problem is influenced by decision-makers' perceptions and responses, and this impacts how they address the issue (Grint, 2005). Alford and Head agree with this standpoint and add "that wicked problems [also] come in various shapes and sizes, each requiring a particular handling" (2017: 409). For example, Swedish authorities are struggling to cope with gang violence and experiences of fear among the public. Gang violence and the connected actions of public authorities are a 'wicked problem' because they relate to other problems such as questions of education, job opportunities, housing, integration, and the dismantling of the welfare state, which in turn affects creating a sense of public safety. Theoretically, this means that efforts to manage and reduce public fear and instead create a sense of public safety are based on societal knowledge and perceptions, policy decisions, and public authorities' actions.

### *Experiencing: a Continuous Bridge of Interpretive Processes*

This comprehension of how we experience fear or safety in public spaces must be regarded as continuous processes that shape our experiences (Dewey, 2005; Nora, 1989) of how societal matters. A sense of public safety is intersubjective and dynamic due to our interpretation of contemporary and societal events. This means that our experience is a process based on how we interpret and connect past events to present ones (Dewey, 1997, 2005), in this case, relating to what and how we perceive a sense of public safety. Bornemark (2020) adds that our experience should be seen as a bodily, psychological, and reflective interpretive process that happens in interaction and communication. I agree because public fear and safety are interlinked with our feelings and experiences and based on our surroundings.

In this case, experience as a theoretical dimension serves as the foundation for comprehending a sense of public safety and its relationship to police social media. Furthermore, this view on experience ties into Karl Weick's (1995) sensemaking as a theoretical concept for a comprehensive understanding of this dissertation's theoretical framework.

## Making Sense of Experiences

To focus on sensemaking is to portray organizing as the experience of being thrown into an ongoing, unknowable, unpredictable streaming of experience in search of answers to the question, 'what's the story?' Plausible stories animate and gain their validity from subsequent activity. (Weick et al., 2005: 410)

The quote further elucidates the theoretical dimension of experiences of a sense of public safety by adding Weick's sensemaking to this dissertation's theoretical framework. Weick (1995) posits that sensemaking as a theory is what the name describes: sensemaking is to create meaning around something. Sensemaking is thus a process that connects to our experiences by extracting clues from our past to the present with input from the environment in an ongoing manner. In this way, sensemaking helps us understand the challenges we plausibly face by actively making sense of incomplete and often contradictory information and situations based on *identity, retrospective, enactment, social, ongoing, extracting cues, and plausibility*, which are the seven sensemaking characteristics (Weick, 1995).

The comprehension of the sensemaking process requires discerning the significance of small actions at micro levels, which can engender substantial consequences at meso or macro levels (Weick et al., 2005). This can be shown in how police officers, based on their experiences and understandings, use social media, which in turn has a ripple effect on whether it contributes to creating a sense of public safety in the community. Madsen elaborates that “sensemaking is dynamic and changes in interactions with other organizational members[, r]ather than being something an individual employee is for or against” (2022: 432). In this way, the strength of sensemaking as a theory relies on its dynamic, social, and communicative structures (Weick et al., 2005). Strong emotions, uncertainties, and identity crises serve as a mechanism for comprehending the challenges we face in sensemaking processes (Heide et al., 2021).

However, even if sensemaking is a dynamic process that relies heavily on previous experiences and interpretations to comprehend our environment, it has some limits. These include dimensions of *Erfarenheter* and *Upplevelser*<sup>17</sup> in how we make sense of organizational life; Gulbrandsen and Just (2022) further posit that Weick’s sensemaking disregards how organizations seek to explain their past and envision their future strategically. In this aspect of sensemaking processes, there is always the risk of a distorted perception of reality in how we should understand and experience situations. This, in turn, hinders our ability to navigate and reflect on the complexity of our surroundings when rapid or regulatory action is required of public authorities (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2021). This can lead to overconfidence regarding what a sensemaking process can do for an organization and its members. Alvesson and Jonsson further argue that not everything necessarily needs to be understood from the perspective of making sense of how the organization works and is experienced. Sometimes, there is value in non-sensemaking and the absence of a sensemaking process, as this can facilitate *doing* in organizations without inhibiting employees’ actions by over-reflecting and ascribing meaning (Alvesson & Jonsson, 2021). Furthermore, sensemaking processes can create instability and jeopardize the cognitive and social dimensions among employees if the purpose of the process is unclear (Heide et al., 2021).

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<sup>17</sup> *Erfarenhet* (in Swedish) refers to people’s knowledge of previous actions, and *Upplevelse* (in Swedish) pertains to the feelings and understanding of what we experience. In this dissertation, I will focus on *Upplevelse* to understand how we experience things.

Another critical dimension is that sensemaking lacks acknowledgment of power relationships, inequalities within organizations, and the power effects these have on individuals (Helms Mills et al., 2010). Even if Weick et al. (2005) address some dimensions of power in connection to whether it is expressed, increases, decreases, or influences others, Helms Mills et al. argue that “Weick’s approach is also limited by an under focus [sic] on issues of power, knowledge, structure, and past relationships” (2010: 188). The authors also highlight that ongoing constraints with sensemaking are present due to individuals’ constant discussions with past experiences, beliefs, and values without a reflective understanding of the effects of dominant organizational identities and rules have on their sensemaking process (Helms Mills et al., 2010).

Even if the uncritical aspect of the power dimension in sensemaking theory is a problem, it is not an issue for this dissertation because it is not within the scope of what is being examined. Instead, sensemaking is focused here on the experiences of how public authorities communicate a sense of public safety in and through social media. This notion leads me to unpack Weick’s (1995) seven sensemaking characteristics with support from Heide et al. (2021) and Weick et al. (2005) in Table 1 (shown on the following two pages) to demonstrate the relationship of sensemaking to a sense of public safety as the theoretical framework of this dissertation.

<b>Weick’s sensemaking characteristics</b>		<b>Making sense of the experience of a sense of public safety</b>
(I)	Identity	This sensemaking characteristic of identity is dynamic and changeable because it involves reflections on what changes and uncertainties will mean for me, based on past experiences, thoughts, and perspectives. It thus relates to how we behave in both work and private life, influencing and reshaping our identity, in this case, about the perception of public safety.
(II)	Retrospective	The retrospective characteristic means that we are not empty shells because we use past experiences to make sense of what a sense of public safety means individually and collectively here and now. See Paper II for more on this.

(III)	Enactment	Enactment means that we socially construct the context of which we are part. Thus, we create different meanings of what a sense of public safety is depending on the social context, such as at work or with family.
(IV)	Social	This characteristic means that sensemaking is a social process that never occurs in isolation but in communication and interaction with others. In this way, interaction and communication socially shape our actions and our understanding and experience of a sense of public safety.
(V)	Ongoing	Ongoing means that sensemaking does not start or end but is continuous based on constant interruptions and impressions from past experiences and events into the present. Thus, a sense of public safety is ongoing and affected by interruptions and past experiences in our present.
(VI)	Extracting cues	This characteristic means we extract cues or bits of information to understand our (individual and collective) environment. This means that we extract cues, such as body language, tone of voice, and other nonverbal signals, statistics, and reports in our environment and then interpret all of that in order to make sense of what a sense of public safety will mean intersubjectively.
(VII)	Plausibility	Sensemaking is predicated on plausible, coherent, and socially credible records rather than accuracy, which becomes essential, in this case, in making sense of our experience of a sense of public safety. This is because we tend to simplify rather than elaborate when taking action. For instance, this illustrates the dilemma between public fear and a sense of public safety, depending on what is plausible or accurate for the Swedish Police to communicate in and through their social media communication (see Papers II and III).

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*Table 1.* The relationship of sensemaking to a sense of public safety. Made by the author with inspiration from the work of Heide et al. (2021), Weick (1995), and Weick et al. (2005).

Weick's (1995) seven sensemaking characteristics in Table 1, which I have demonstrated in Paper IV, indicate that sensemaking is not something that occurs in a vacuum but is a dynamic and interactive process of comprehending the world around us (Heide et al., 2021). This underscores

the importance of communicating both *how* and *why* during the sensemaking process, as posited by Madsen (2022). In this context, it is necessary to understand how individuals experience police social media communication with regard to creating a sense of public safety, and why such experiences are significant.

## Summary of the Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this dissertation is built around experience and sensemaking—making sense of public safety—two concepts used to understand the meaning of a sense of public safety. This is because experiences and sensemaking are connected as ongoing processes of how we understand our world, which is also present in various ways in Papers I–IV, with regard to a sense of public safety. In order to more clearly illustrate my interpretation of the theoretical framework regarding the relevance of experience and sensemaking in understanding a sense of public safety, I represent them as theoretical processes illustrated in Figure 2 (see next page). These processes illustrate the manner in which experiences and sensemaking are interconnected as ongoing, theoretical activities that influence the understanding of a sense of public safety as experienced, dynamic, and intersubjective.

The red circle represents how we experience a sense of public safety and how our perception shapes it. It is connected to the smaller green circle, which represents the intersubjective meaning of a sense of public safety, and is also linked to the blue one. The blue circle represents sensemaking, whereby our experience of reality is seen as an ongoing performance that emerges as we make retrospective sense of the situations we encounter and the outcomes we create. Furthermore, the sensemaking circle means that through interactions and with our previous experiences of situations, environments, and emotions, we form an ongoing process of a sense of public safety. In doing so, the blue circle becomes larger and more present in both the green and red circles. In this way, our experiences and sensemaking theoretically become central to this dissertation (and the included papers I–IV), in particular, to understand the role of public authorities in making a sense of public safety in today’s interconnected society and how they communicate that in social media.

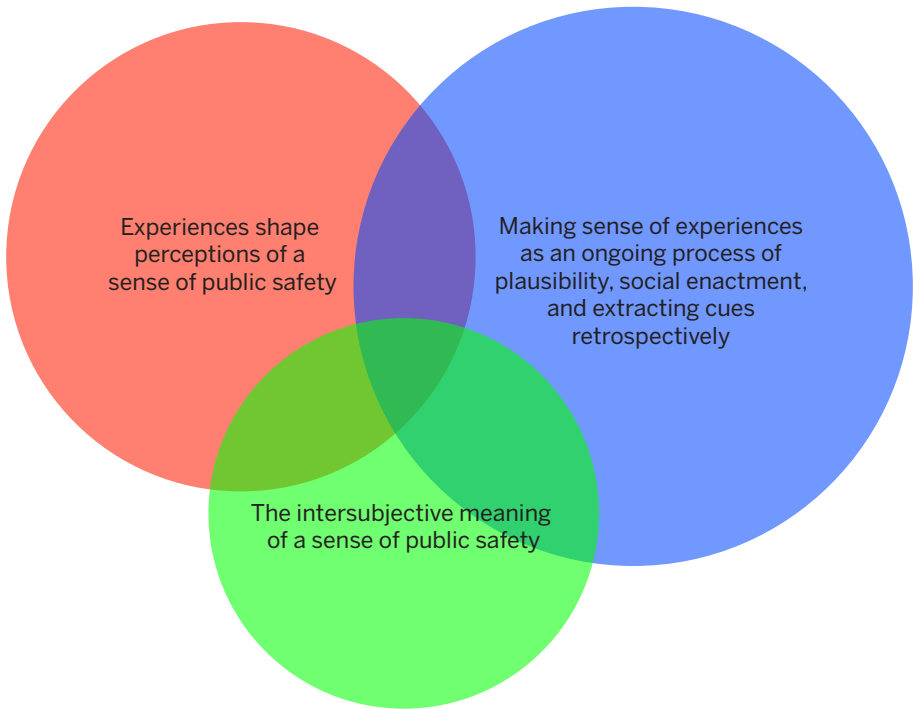


Figure 2. Making sense of public safety.

To conclude this chapter, this dissertation's theoretical framework of a sense of public safety is dynamic, with an emphasis on the intersubjective meaning that is created when we make sense of our experiences. To summarize, a sense of public safety is dynamic and intersubjective and made sense of and experienced from:

- *the social and cultural dimensions of situations,*
- *the aspects of vagueness and interpretive perspectives, and*
- *individual and collective awareness of uncertainty, risk, and fear.*

All of these shape the way we make sense of public safety as a communicative challenge for public authorities, especially when it is decided by law to do so. In the next chapter, I will present and reflect on this dissertation's methodological choice and procedure.

# *Chapter IV*

# Methodology

In this chapter, I present the methodological considerations of the dissertation. The chapter addresses the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of the study's research strategy, design, and methods. After that, the qualitative research strategy of the dissertation is discussed, and I reflect on the qualitative methodologies for the empirical collections and the modes of analysis used in Papers I–IV. The chapter concludes with a reflection on the quality of the research and its ethical considerations.

## A Social Constructionist Approach

Social constructionism is a sociological theory of knowledge proposed by Berger and Luckmann (1966), which argues that knowledge is created and maintained through social interactions, relationships, language, and culture. It implies that knowledge is not inherent or fixed but constantly negotiated and constructed through social interactions (mentally and shared) and the use of language representations to question what is real (Sohlberg & Sohlberg, 2019; Wenneberg, 2001). Wenneberg (2001) continues by stating that social constructionism has research implications for understanding, discovering, questioning, and conceptualizing the world from a social perspective, thereby making the researcher an active participant in the process. The social constructionist approach is constantly evolving because language and societal structures are in flux, which can be viewed both as a strength and a limitation of the approach (Thomassen, 2007). This dynamism also characterizes participatory processes. Social constructionism, as the overarching research paradigm for this dissertation, aligns closely with its aim of examining how public authorities communicate complex societal matters through digital media.

The social constructionist epistemology maintains that knowledge is constructed through our mental and linguistic interactions, which in turn prompt critical reflection on what is regarded as 'real' (Thomassen, 2007; Wenneberg, 2001). This means that we socially construct our reality depending on social aspects, interpretation, understanding, and explanation of our surroundings and their relevance within the social groups we are active in (Lynch, 2016; Wenneberg, 2001), such as work or family.

Epistemology is thus shaped by our interactions (Sohlberg & Sohlberg, 2019), which is the view of knowledge on which this dissertation is based. For instance, from an organizational perspective, knowledge is co-created by how employees in formal and informal settings make sense of what they are doing to develop novel perspectives on their work in relation to the ‘reality’ as an ongoing process (Weick, 1995). In this way, communication is socially constructed, a creative and integral function, and part of our doing to understand the world, individually and collectively (Craig, 1999).

Social constructionist ontology is grounded in human interactions and experiences because social constructionism posits that meanings are not inherent but rather created through mental, structural, and linguistic representations developed over time, thereby forming a shared reality (Sohlberg & Sohlberg, 2019; Wenneberg, 2001). The argument for this is that social constructionism emphasizes that reality exists through knowledge, meaning that humans create knowledge socially (Wenneberg, 2001). For example, this implies that the empirical material collected for the papers was interpreted and contextualized within a sense of public safety in Sweden. In line with the social constructionist view, communication is here understood as the (re)production of social order (Craig, 1999). This view “challenges many commonplace assumptions, especially our tendencies to take for granted the absolute reality of our own and others’ personal identities, to think of social institutions as if they were inevitable natural phenomena” (Craig, 1999: 146).

### *Social Constructionism To Understand a Sense of Public Safety From a Media and Communication Perspective*

Social constructionism does not posit an objective reality or absolute knowledge. It is therefore suitable as the research paradigm to examine how police employees and members of the public make sense of their experiences of public safety and how the police authority communicates about safety via social media. From this perspective, the questions of what, who, and how, along with past experiences, are crucial in understanding how the police utilize social media. A social constructionist approach emphasizes how knowledge is shaped by cultural and social contexts in combination with our experiences (Dewey, 2005; Sohlberg & Sohlberg, 2019). This dissertation

examines to how the Swedish Police's social media communication strategy concerning public safety is made sense of by police officers and the public.

On this notion, the influence of social constructionism on the participatory approach, discussed below, stems from its focus on social interpretations and meanings derived from experiences, norms, and values that prevail in society (Lindhult & Axelsson, 2021). This makes it particularly valuable for qualitative research (Lindhult, 2022) and, even more so, for the participatory process approach applied in this study. However, even if a participatory process approach can lead to socially informed, fair decision-making and improve societal outcomes, it remains challenging to consciously give voice to and involve all participants in the research (Bradbury et al., 2019; Martin, 2010).

From a media and communication perspective, organizations do not act separately from this understanding because they are socially constructed. Lynch adds that social constructionism influences “rules, roles, and norms [that] are both conventional and constraining: they can change and are changed both by official rulings by legislative bodies and in a more gradual and casual way through cultural drift and local negotiation” (2016: 104), which results from institutionalized actions. Since organizational communication is socially constructed, this aligns with the view that strategic communication is shaped by the actors involved (whether acting from a top-down or bottom-up perspective or consciously or unconsciously) to clarify organizational goals and the purpose of the work (Falkheimer & Heide, 2023), as well as to increase organizational engagement (Johnston & Taylor, 2022). In this way, it highlights how Swedish Police employees socially construct and make sense of public safety, alongside the authority's obligations in society, and how to communicate it effectively digitally with the public.

Criticism of social constructionism has emphasized that language as a social phenomenon is in constant development and, therefore, challenges reality and manifests social groups' or organizations' view of realities that can reinforce stereotypes and prejudices (Sohlberg & Sohlberg, 2019; Wenneberg, 2001). Another criticism of social constructionism is that everything is perceived as relative, also referred to as relativism (Wenneberg, 2001). For instance, because organizations and their communication are socially constructed, they also reproduce frustrations, misbehaviors, and

misunderstandings internally—patterns that ultimately influence the public (Beverungen et al., 2019; Trittin-Ulbrich et al., 2021). Another criticism concerns the question of the nature of reality and whether knowledge is subjective or objective, and scientific value (Lynch, 2016). Lastly, criticism of social constructivism point to the problem of defining ‘truth,’ as it becomes a question of social power and resources (Wenneberg, 2001).

## Qualitative and Participatory Research Strategy

The research strategy employed in this dissertation is based on a qualitative case study, as this approach allows for “... in-depth contextual analyses of one or a few instances of a naturalistic phenomenon, such as a person, an organization, a program, an event, a geographical location, or a decision” (Tracy, 2020: 61). In this study, the case consist of the Swedish Police and their use of social media communication to create a sense of public safety. A qualitative approach is characterized by inductive reasoning, which means that one departs from a set of observations (empirical material) from reality and then formulates a theory on these observations (Thomassen, 2007). By contrast, deductive reasoning means that one departs from a theoretical starting point and logical precondition to find out if the premises that one takes for granted are true or not (Sohlberg & Sohlberg, 2019; Thomassen, 2007). Then, there is abductive reasoning as a third choice, which is a mix of inductive and deductive reasoning to grasp systematic experiences as well as abstractions of empirical observations of coherence to construct knowledge (Sohlberg & Sohlberg, 2019).

In this dissertation, a mix of inductive and abductive reasoning is used. The research strategy that this dissertation employs has resulted in the application of different methods for collecting empirical material for the four papers: semi-structured interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014), photo-elicitation interviews (Harper, 2002), qualitative content analysis (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004), and participatory processes approaches in the form of critical making (Ratto, 2011; Sjöberg, 2016; Somerson & Hermano, 2013). I will now present the methodologies used in Papers (I–IV).

## *Qualitative Interviews*

In Papers I and II, qualitative interviews were used to understand how police employees and members of the public understand and experience police social media communication and the societal task of creating a sense of public safety.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews (Paper I)**

Semi-structured interviews are an appropriate method to use when seeking to investigate how people understand a phenomenon based on their worldview and knowledge (Kavle & Brinkman, 2014). Semi-structured interviews involve asking questions of how, what, and why, along with follow-up questions based on specific themes in a flexible manner. In Paper I, semi-structured interviews were used to gain a deeper understanding of and insight into the phenomenon of creating a sense of public safety and police social media strategies.

I conducted three pilot semi-structured interviews with police employees from PRS in the late spring of 2020. These pilot interviews were 38–66 minutes long. The purpose of the pilot interviews was to test and modify the interview guide. Malmqvist et al. (2019) argue that pilot interviews are an important and valuable way to streamline a study's implementation, minimize flawed interview questions or an inappropriate research design, and make qualitative empirical collection more precise. Via the pilot interviews, minor clarifications and updates to interview questions were made, but no change in the research design or the overall theme of the interviews was made.

The collection of empirical material started at the end of 2020 and continued during 2021, resulting in 20 semi-structured interviews. The interviews allowed me, to ask thematic questions on how police employees understand their view on trust, crime prevention, and creating a sense of public safety and what social media strategies they use when communicating with the public. The most interviews were conducted in digital settings via Teams or Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, some of them were conducted in person at police stations or public spaces within PRS. The interviews lasted between 55 and 125 minutes and were held in Swedish, but subsequently transcribed and translated into English. The strength of using semi-structured interviews for this paper was the flexibility for the

respondent and me, as a researcher, to ask questions and have a conversation about the police social media and different police concepts and tasks in a relaxed setting, even if most of the interviews were done digitally.

Nonetheless, semi-structured interviews have limitations, and the most important one is the purpose of the interview, which can easily be forgotten and thus make the material harder to work with or useless (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). This never happened in this study, but it was something that I considered and a reason I conducted the pilot interviews. Another limitation is when and how the interviews are conducted, which makes the situation unique and could affect the participant. This is because the researcher is a visitor during the interviews, which can create a power imbalance between the researcher and the interviewee (Czarniawska, 2014). Another challenge for me was the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced me to reschedule several interviews and to use the university's digital platforms for most of the empirical collection. On a few occasions, Zoom could not be used due to Swedish Police firewalls—identifying it as nonsecure software—which led to changing to Teams or rebooking the interview for a physical meeting. All of this could have affected the interviewees negatively due to the extra work and frustration of not being able to do the interview smoothly, resulting in a technical imbalance between the researcher and the interviewee. However, the interviews went smoothly in 90% of the situations. The respondents were interested in the interview topics, but also clear about not revealing sensitive information when sharing certain examples (i) as they saw me as an outsider and (ii) that the police culture revolves around being secret and trained to say “no comments” to the press, as stated by some of the respondents as a critique of the police organization.<sup>18</sup>

In addition, semi-structured interviews are usually held in a sedentary situation outside the individual's entire context, thus making it difficult to know whether the interviewee is giving honest answers or giving answers that the researcher wants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). In this dissertation, the interviews were conducted either digitally during the daytime, often from their offices, or nondigitally at police stations or public spaces close to a police station within PRS. The proximity to their work environment helped

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<sup>18</sup> To acquire a more profound comprehension of the Swedish Police culture, I recommend taking a look at Malin Wieslander's research.

support their answers along with the semi-structured questions even if the interviews were in a staged situation (Czarniawska, 2014). Another criticism of using semi-structured interviews is the challenge of upholding legitimacy, perceptions, and assumptions of what the interviewing focuses on instead of producing knowledge. On this notion, Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) suggest breaking away from the mindset of “now I will be part of an interview.” Instead, focus groups can be used to solve that problem (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2014). However, focus groups were impossible for this paper because of the difficulties with the availability of the police interviewees. Therefore, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the most appropriate method for police employees to participate according to their own availability.

### **Photo-Elicitation Interviews (Paper II)**

I believe photo elicitation mines deeper shafts into a different part of human consciousness than do words-alone interviews. It is partly due to how remembering is enlarged by photographs and partly due to the particular quality of the photograph itself. Photographs appear to capture the impossible: a person gone; an event past. That extraordinary sense of seeming to retrieve something that has disappeared belongs alone to the photograph, and it leads to deep and interesting talk. (Harper, 2002: 22–23)

Photo-elicitation interviewing (PEI) was used in the empirical collection for Paper II. However, before I describe the methodology, I want to address the fact that pilot interviews were also conducted in this study to test and decide on the structure of the interview guide (Malmqvist et al., 2019). I conducted pilot interviews with friends and family members in three sessions and with three bachelor students at Jönköping University (JU) in two sessions during the fall of 2022. This was done to get further input to improve or modify the questions and research design. The pilot interviews resulted in minor adjustments to the questions for clarification purposes.

PEI, as a method for collecting the empirical material, focuses on images to encourage participants to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in a reflective way (Harper, 2002). The PEI approach contributes to a learning process for both the interviewees and the researcher (Richard & Lahman, 2015). Here, the method was used to capture the public’s experiences and

understandings of police social media communication on Instagram in connection to communicating a sense of safety. This was done by presenting two to three posts from Malmö Police's Instagram account (posts 1 and 2 were often discussed but not necessarily post 3, depending on the availability of the interviewees). The posts were shown in printed form or on an iPad. The goal was to capture how members of the public experienced the content and what meanings or emotions it evoked. PEI is typically understood to uncover underlying or unconscious beliefs and attitudes, which can be difficult to articulate through other methods, and using images provides a more engaging and interactive way of collecting rich and extensive empirical material (Harper, 2002; Richard & Lahman, 2015). In addition, PEI as a method allows the researcher to understand how participants interpret and experience the images due to how they talk about the posts based on their cultural background, language characteristics, and personal experiences (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004).

Nevertheless, PEI as a method also faces limitations. First, the selected images may not resonate with participants' experiences of the police, which could lead to the collection of unrepresentative answers. A second limitation concerns confidentiality, which highlights the methodological challenge of creating a sense of intimacy due to the empirical setting where the researcher and participants must meet, look at, and discuss the images (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004). This challenge is one reason why qualitative methods such as PEI can make it difficult for researchers to recruit interviewees (Clark-Ibáñez, 2004; Richard & Lahman, 2015). Another limitation with PEI, posited by Richard and Lahman (2015), revolves around research ethics and whether participation is safe. In this case, verbal consent was collected from all participants, and no personal or sensitive information was collected to uphold the rules of research ethics in accordance with the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR; European Commission or EC, 2025) and VR (2017, 2024). In addition, the empirical material was stored safely using JU ShareFile, a platform for storing sensitive research data. The final limitation of PEI is that it may be time-consuming and expensive to implement as it requires developing and selecting appropriate visual materials. To mitigate this limitation, screenshots from the Malmö Police's Instagram (approved to use the Swedish Police) were used in the study.

### *Collection of Social Media Post (Paper III)*

The material for Paper III was obtained using manual scraping and the convenience sampling method as a strategy for collecting the empirical material. In this paper, my co-author and I relied on Ditchfield and Meredith's (2018) qualitative approach of manual scraping to collect social media material by taking screenshots of Instagram posts. The material was collected from January 1st to the final day of March 2024 from the following Instagram accounts: @polisenmalmo, @omradespolisenmalmo, and @malmo\_stad\_officiell. Subsequently, we adopted Gill's (2020) convenience sampling method, as the collection strategy aligns with the focus of Paper III to understand how PSOs communicate public safety via social media.

We started the collection phase by taking screenshots of every post that the Malmö Police and the City of Malmö made on the Instagram accounts: @polisenmalmo, @omradespolisenmalmo, and @malmo\_stad\_officiell during March and April 2024. All collected screenshots were saved in a collaborative folder on OneDrive at JU. Subsequently, the material was organized into two spreadsheets and folders, one for the Malmö Police and one for the City of Malmö, prior to commencement of the analytical phase. We obtained permission from the Malmö Police and the City of Malmö to utilize the Instagram posts in our research, a decision motivated by considerations of ethical and publishing reasons. Both authorities provided their consent for the use of the collected posts in the context of our research endeavors.

There are some limitations of the method for data collection in this study. The first concerns manual scraping, as it is a time-consuming method. Second, it relies heavily on what, how, and why the material is collected (Ditchfield & Meredith, 2018). The screenshots were captured on the same premises during the entirety of the process, though not from a single computer. This limitation can be attributed to discrepancies in technical specifications. However, this particular limitation was not addressed in the present paper, as our collaboration occurred during a subsequent phase of the project. Additionally, I cropped and resaved all the posts in Adobe Photoshop according to the technical specifications provided by the publisher. Another limitation concerns the convenience sampling method, which, though easy and efficient, it does not always necessarily give the

most in-depth and reliable information (Gill, 2020). As this paper focuses on the Malmö Police and the City of Malmö's communication on Instagram, this sampling method provides ample information for the project, even with this limitation in mind.

### *Critical Making Workshops (Paper IV)*

For Paper IV, I used the participatory process approach of critical making workshops as a bottom-up method with police employees from the PRS to understand and address a complex problem (for more details on how the method was applied, see Paper IV). The participatory process approach encourages the interpretation and integration of different perspectives to socially construct knowledge aimed at addressing or transforming societal issues collectively (Ehn et al., 2014; Lindhult & Axelsson, 2021) by intentionally giving voice to research participants (Bradbury et al., 2019) and fostering open dialogue (Lindhult, 2022) with a bottom-up perspective (Heide et al., 2018). In this context, critical making as a participatory process aligns with social constructivism because of its strong focus on participation emphasizing the active involvement of participants to bridge gaps between technological and social aspects through critical design, educational, and reflective engagement (Ratto, 2011; Somerson & Hermano, 2013). This is also because, in critical making, the finished “thing” is not the main goal; instead, the focus is on the process that shifts from “‘matter of fact’ to ‘matter of concern’” (Ratto, 2011: 260). Therefore, critical making can be described as a participatory process in social, technological, and design research, which makes it interesting to include this method in media and communication science.

Critical making workshops were thus used for Paper IV as a suitable approach because they combine focus groups, workshops, and reflections in a unified setting to make sense of public communication—creating a sense of public safety and conveying it via PRS social media platforms. Four workshops were conducted between May and June 2023, resulting in 14 police employees from PRS participating. The workshops lasted between 93–116 minutes and were conducted in Swedish. The police employees become the leading actors in the making phase of how they made sense of public communication on social media with an extensive focus on creating a sense of public safety via conversation, interaction, reflection, and documentation of their ideas and knowledge insights on using social media.

This made critical making workshops the umbrella of the *making phase* through abductive, participatory, iterative, and experiential learning processes of previous experience, conversations, and reflections (Ratto, 2011; Somerson & Hermano, 2013).

In these workshops, the foundation of the method for collecting the empirical material focused on two practical scenarios: scenario 1 focused on an unsafe location in a city, and scenario 2 on a large public event to create engagements that the police employees could relate to in their work, individually and collectively. I want to emphasize that these scenarios were predicated on extant research and findings from Paper I, which focuses on Policing and the challenge of creating a sense of safety through social media strategies, as well as Paper II, which takes the focus on the public experience of Swedish Police Instagram communication. By doing so, the critical making workshops focused on the participants co-creating collective knowledge about the communicative challenges to creating a sense of public safety via social media based on their experience and the scenarios in mind. This process became supportive of the critical and social development of skills and abilities, where the participants reflected on the communication processes, impacts, and implications of the scenarios (Sjöberg, 2016), which intentionally gave and amplified their voices (Bradbury et al., 2019). The findings resulted in four overarching categories regarding the participants' sensemaking of creating public safety via social media communication.

Nonetheless, there are limitations in using critical making workshops as a participatory process approach. The overall limitation of the approach is the level of participant involvement. In all participatory research, the role of participants is crucial for understanding, reflecting on, and solving complex problems or societal issues, but it varies depending on the problem. This variation influences the project's design, theoretical framework, and timeline (Eden & Ackermann, 2018; Lindhult & Axelsson, 2021). Although present, this was not a relevant issue in Paper IV because the police employees were active in the workshops to different degrees and discussed, reflected on, and documented their ideas and understanding of the scenarios. However, in workshops two and three, which included only police officers without the presence of other employees, it seemed some participants chose to take a more cautious and secretive approach. The fact that the researcher was not a police officer but someone outside of the authority may have been the reason

for such reluctance. This situation can be linked to police culture (see Wieslander, 2022) regarding being reserved or unsure of what to say and contribute during a workshop. DiSalvo (2014) adds that when using critical making as a methodology, it always involves dimensions of political meaning for the (involved) participants (consciously or unconsciously) and others, concerning implications it can have now or in the future. Therefore, a controlled, transmissive, and top-down communicative mindset becomes more accessible for participants to rely on instead of embracing the bottom-up perspective (Heide et al., 2018), when the focus is on public safety.

Moreover, in workshop three, one of the police officers had to leave early, which could have disturbed the session. As the researcher, this forced me to strengthen the co-creative parts of iterative, critical, communicative, and reflective elements (Sjöberg, 2016) by pushing toward Ratto's (2011: 260) "matter of concern." Here, the participants needed to reflect and write down their thoughts and ideas on sticky notes about a sense of public safety through police social media communication. This ties into another limitation of conducting critical making workshops: the power dynamics and unequal roles between the researcher and participants, which could lead to the researcher or participants using their power to take control of the session (Lindhult & Axelsson, 2021). The issues of power during the workshops correlate to police officers being secretive about telling the whole picture concerning scenario 1, which ties into a lower degree of engagement, motivation, and participation that all participatory research can suffer from (Martin, 2010). This was especially present in workshop two because the workshop consisted only of uniformed police officers who were somewhat reluctant to engage. However, the opposite happened in the fourth workshop, which consisted of communication and media employees within PRS. Here, an open, iterative, and reflective process occurred with a critical mindset of how the police communicate or do not. This ties into the reflective perspective of critical making because isolating only the reflective part during a workshop session is difficult. Often, participants need to reflect afterward individually and collectively to make further sense of the problem or solution they are trying to solve (Ratto, 2011; Somerson & Hermano, 2013). Therefore, the reflective part is the most challenging perspective to fully understand when using this method, making it the most challenging limitation to be aware of.

From a holistic point of view, all the workshops went smoothly, even with the limitations and challenges presented above. I still decided to use critical making workshops for Paper IV because the strength of the methodology emphasizes the participatory/co-creative, iterative, communicative, and reflective processes between the participants and researcher as more equal actors from a social constructivist perspective. The critical making approach is thus useful for understanding and handling complex matters (Ratto, 2011).

### *Methods of Analysis*

To analyze the empirical material in the papers, I used the framework analysis method in Paper I, phenomenography in Paper II, a content analysis method in Paper III, and sensemaking as an analytical lens in Paper IV. By using these analytical methods, I was able to grasp different nuances and empirical perspectives in the examination of the core research question of each paper. These four methods are described below.

### **Framework Analysis**

In Paper I, my co-authors and I used Furber's (2010) and Gale et al.'s (2013) framework analysis method, which is a thematic analysis method. This method consists of the phases of transcribing and familiarization with the interviews, as well as coding and indexing the material where the analytical framework draft is developed. After that, the charting of the material is a thematic framework where the refinement and interpretation phase happens, which included adding interview quotes to the framework with code names Resp-A to Resp-T. The final analysis phase was to synthesize the findings, which consisted of mapping, interpreting, and synthesizing the empirical material into the final theoretical framework (Furber, 2010; Gale et al., 2013). In this process, we concretized the findings of Paper I by finalizing the framework by describing and discussing the findings from the police employees into three dialectally intertwined social media strategies: a sense of safety as a form of transmediality, presence, and transparency (see Paper I for more details).

### **Phenomenography to Understand People's Experience**

In Paper II, a phenomenography analysis approach based on Adams et al. (2011) and Dahlgren and Johansson (2020) was used to analyze the empirical PEI material because it is qualitative research approach that aims

to describe and understand the different ways people experience the world around them. We (my co-authors and I) chose this method to examine how the public experience of the Swedish Police's strategic communication of a sense of safety on Instagram. Furthermore, phenomenography as an analytic method allowed us to uncover the underlying structures of meaning to categorize and understand how members of the public experience police Instagram communication and a sense of public safety. By using this method, the analysis allowed us to identify common themes and patterns in the empirical material in the ways people experience a particular phenomenon (Adams et al., 2011; Dahlgren & Johansson, 2020). In this case, phenomenography yielded three overarching categories of experiencing police communication from conversations about Instagram posts of daily policing in Malmö: a sense of protection, a sense of proximity, and a sense of ambiguity (see Paper II for more details).

### **Qualitative Content Analysis**

In Paper III, Gnewski and I analyzed Instagram posts by the Police in Malmö (@polisenmalmo, @omradespolisenmalmo) and the City of Malmö (@malmo\_stad\_officiell) between the first of January to the last day of March in 2024. In this study, we used the qualitative content analysis of Graneheim and Lundman (2004) to analyze 23 Instagram posts by the police in Malmö and 27 by the City of Malmö. Using this method, we first collected the posts by printing the posts of each account. After that, we moved on to the analysis where we used the manifest dimension, which focuses on the descriptive part of the content, as well as the latent dimension, which focuses on the underlying and interpretative meaning of the content (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Based on the aim of Paper III, this analytical approach allowed us to examine how PSOs communicate public safety via social media in today's mediated society from abductive reasoning. However, we both analyzed the material to maintain a high level of trustworthiness in the interpretations of the manifest and latent dimensions; the trustworthiness of an analysis "will increase if the findings are presented in a way that allows the reader to look for alternative interpretations" (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004: 110). As a result, the material in this study was categorized solely based on the images, title, and text provided by the authors. All comments from followers were excluded from the analysis due to ethical considerations that focus solely on PSOs' role in communicating on social media. As a result, the manifest and latent

dimensions of the Instagram posts (images combined with titles and the provided informational text for each post) resulted in two overarching themes based on Graneheim and Lundman's (2004) definition analysis structure: "Sharing Community Information for the Public" and "Organizational Actions and Presence" (see Paper III for more details).

### **Sensemaking as Analytic Lens**

In Paper IV, I used Weick's (1995) seven sensemaking characteristics as the analytic lens to analyze the four critical making workshops conducted with police employees. These characteristics are grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactment, a social process, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy (Weick, 1995) (see Chapter III and Paper IV for more details). By leaning on these characteristics in the analysis of the two scenarios in the workshops, I was able to grasp how police employees made sense of communicating a sense of public safety via social media in the study. By doing so, the analysis emphasized how the participants made sense of situations and created meaning socially that led to action (Heide et al., 2021; Weick et al., 2005). Sensemaking as an analytical lens, in this case, allows a nuanced and multifaceted perspective from the participants. In this process, practical and past experiences, organizational routines, rules, and interactions become valuable, which aligns with Gulbrandsen and Just (2020) and Helms Mills et al. (2010).

Furthermore, using sensemaking as an analytic lens allowed me to use a back-and-forth approach between the interpretive, engaging, and reflective processes in Paper IV. This can be described as the researcher having dialogues with the empirical material to make sense of the observations and coding (Westlund, 2020). By doing so, different codes were found, such as control, friction, context, prevention, awareness, and authenticity. The codes were then regrouped into themes that led to synthesizing the final understanding of the findings with relevant quotes. The sensemaking analysis resulted in four overarching categories: "Making sense of control," "Making sense of contextualization," "Making sense of authenticity," and "Making sense of friction" to answer Paper IV's RQ.

### *Summary of the Analysis Methods*

In conclusion, the selection of the analysis methods in Papers I–IV ties into the social constructivism paradigm to get a deeper understanding. By using qualitative methodologies to both collect and analyze the empirical material in this dissertation, all the papers examined the Swedish Police’s social media communication creating a sense of public safety from different perspectives on how it is experienced and made sense of by police employees and members of the public. This means the findings in the papers went from a small set of observations to the bigger picture in an iterative process. Thus, they add to the discussion, from a qualitative and participatory approach, of how public authorities’ social media communication of complex societal matters is experienced and made sense socially.

### **Reflection on Research Quality and Ethics**

To further understand the choice of methodologies used in this dissertation, it is crucial to reflect on the research quality and ethics. By doing so, the choice of qualitative and participatory methods used for Papers I–IV puts the research context into a bigger context. It also demonstrates that this dissertation conducted its empirical data collection in accordance with research regulations and guidelines from the Swedish Research Council’s (VR) Good Research Practice (2017, 2024), the GDPR, and the Swedish Authority for Privacy Protection (IMY; 2023). The reasons for using the methodologies in Papers I–IV was to gain insight and understanding and to exchange experiences and knowledge from in-depth perspectives.

I will lean on Tracy’s criteria for excellent qualitative research (2010). These criteria have been used consciously and unconsciously in the dissertation processes in PhD courses, seminars, conferences, and different iterations of the papers that this dissertation builds on. But by doing so, this dissertation connects to Tracy’s argument of “develop a platform from which qualitative scholars can join together in unified voice when desired, and encourage dialogue and learning amongst qualitative methodologists from various paradigms” (2010: 839). Thus, in this section, I will reflect on the research quality with the methodologies and research ethics in mind.

### *Worthy Topic and Rich Rigor*

The study object in this case is the Swedish Police and their social media communication concerning creating a sense of public safety. The criterion of a worthy topic focuses on relevance, timeliness, significance, and the interest of the research community in, for instance, media and communication, policing, organization studies, and the public. I find the choice of the Swedish Police as an object of study of great social interest in how they choose to express themselves. Specifically, the focus is on how the police communicate a sense of public safety, a dimension that has been underexplored in previous research and thus represents a critical rationale for this study. Another reason is that the police are very active on social media (see Chapter V), which results in the intertwining of digital and nondigital spaces (van Dijck, 2023), and their work draws public attention. The dissertation is also relevant from a public benefit perspective, which is that the public can develop a better understanding of how the police operate and how they strive to create a sense of public safety through social media.

Furthermore, Tracy's (2010) criterion of rich rigor highlights questions of the choice of theories, the time for collecting empirical material, and the fact that it is the police's public safety communication via social media that is studied, i.e., the context. This is reflected in the fact that the theoretical framework focuses on the experience of safety, which also ties together the empirical material in the dissertation. Thus, it is the red thread in this project. Nonetheless, this reinforces the choice of collection and analysis methods to examine and understand the context and answer the questions in each paper. This criterion emphasizes the importance of time in relation to the choice of methods for empirical data collection and emphasizes that rushing this stage can compromise the quality of the research. Instead, it suggests reflecting on whether the data will add meaning to the study (Tracy, 2010). For Paper I, the collection phase was not rushed; the opposite happened due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of Paper I, the issue of how and when the empirical data collection will happen became one for me to reflect on in the discussion with the police, which led to a mix of digital and nondigital semi-structured interviews. Here, I could have asked myself whether qualitative interviews were the way forward or not, but given the context of the dissertation, I chose, in consultation with my supervisors, to prioritize qualitative interviews even if it entailed extra work for everyone involved.

Another example is from Paper II, which uses PEI to examine how the public experiences police social media communication as linked to safety. I could have conducted a quantitative study instead where I asked the public how they perceive and experience the police's social media communication and the connection to a sense of public safety to find generalized answers to how the Swedish population understands these subjects. However, that was not the purpose of the study, which was to gain insight into how the public experience the Swedish Police's strategic communication of a sense of safety on Instagram. Due to that, PEI was chosen as the qualitative method to show images, ask follow-up questions, and see how individuals reacted when they saw and talked about the posts studied in Paper II. All this ties into the context of what is studied based on the choice of methods and the time aspect of collecting data, which is crucial for a researcher always to reflect upon. For example, in Papers II–IV, the empirical collection period was between a limited time of some weeks and months due to good planning and easier access to the data. On the other hand, the opposite happened in Paper I due to the pandemic, which resulted in difficulties in finding suitable times to conduct the interviews. Therefore, the empirical collection lasted almost a year.

### *Sincerity and Research Ethics*

Another criterion that Tracy (2010) highlights is sincerity, which ties into previous criteria as well. In this criterion, self-reflection, awareness from the researcher, and transparency around methodological choices and their challenges are important to showcase. Here, the choice of the Swedish Police and their social media connections to communicate a sense of public safety once again becomes essential to reflect upon but from the standpoint of my own connection to what is studied. During the dissertation process, I must admit that I had mixed feelings about the Swedish Police. For instance, based on my father's work life within the police<sup>19</sup>. This has allowed me to understand the complexity of the organization, as well as how it is experienced by the individual. However, my mixed feelings about the police have affected me in the struggle to be more critical in my work and my desire to improve the way the police communicate on social media. In this sense, it forces me to distance myself from what I am studying but keep an

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<sup>19</sup> He has been a police officer for 47 years.

interest in it, which is a challenge that I need to keep working on in my future role as a researcher.

The sincerity criterion also addresses the opportunities to listen, discuss, and reflect on the empirical material during the collection and in the transcription process. This ties into what Kvale and Brinkmann (2014) state about going back and forth in the work process with qualitative material. By doing so, the analysis has become more tangible for me in the various studies that have emerged. Based on this aspect, research transparency becomes important, which Tracy (2010) and the Swedish Research Council's Good Research Practice (2017) argue is an important aspect of doing research because it shows how the research has been conducted. In Papers I–IV, transparency is shown in how the empirical data were collected and the methods used without jeopardizing research ethics. Concretely, besides maintaining transparency in my papers, I have also provided insights from my research with the police during internal meetings and with other researchers at conferences to gather perspectives that this dissertation can contribute to. For example, in Paper IV, I had feedback meetings with three of the four workshop groups to show what the workshops resulted in, to find a shared picture of the workshop, and to allow for clarification and input. This is an essential aspect of participatory research (Lindhult & Axelsson, 2021).

Throughout the dissertation, I have ensured the confidentiality of all participants in the studies. I used informed consent (both verbal and written), emphasizing the purpose of empirical collection, what would be collected, and how the data were stored and managed. This is central to conducting good qualitative research, which also shows that the researcher is taking responsibility for the research beyond a checklist mentality (Markham, 2018; Tracy, 2010). Since Papers I, II, and IV are based on empirical data from police or the public, I have taken ethical measures following VR's Good Research Practice. I have only collected empirical material relevant to the focus of this dissertation, ensuring that no sensitive information such as race, ethnic origin, political opinions, religious beliefs, or data on offenses and criminal convictions was gathered, in accordance with VR (2017, 2024). In this context, this means that all participants from the PRS served as police employees in Papers I and IV. For Paper II, I asked members of the public how they experienced two to three Instagram posts and whether there were aspects of public safety in the way the police used Instagram posts to

communicate. In this case, no sensitive material was collected due to the framing of the questions. Likewise, for Paper III, no sensitive materials were collected due to its focus on public documents, such as Instagram posts by Swedish authorities. However, in this study, we obtained approval from the Swedish Police and the City of Malmö to use the material, and we also removed all comments from followers to focus on how the police and the city communicate public safety through their Instagram posts.

By doing so, I followed the directions of GDPR (EC, 2025), VR's Good Research Practice (2017, 2024), IMY (2023), and JU (n.d.) in the collection phase and on storing empirical material securely<sup>20</sup> throughout this dissertation project. I also used JU ShareFile (JU, 2025)<sup>21</sup> to store the empirical material for Papers I, II, and IV in this dissertation. For Paper III, a shared folder on JU's OneDrive was used to store the material. This decision was based on the material consisting of public documents in the form of the public authorities' Instagram posts and, therefore, follows the JU (n.d.) data directions for storing nonsensitive material.

### *Credibility and Resonance*

Furthermore, this dissertation is based on credibility and resonance. Tracy (2010) explains that these elements include how one's research is written in detail and how it is shown instead of told, how different voices come through, e.g., via participant reflections, how the studies are aesthetically made, and how the research contributes with personal knowledge and experience, as well its transferability. Trustworthiness is essential to the criteria of credibility and resonance, which consist of clarity, depth of description, and multivocal perspectives. All this is included in the dissertation analyses to varying degrees via Papers I–IV. For instance, analyses show different views of the empirical material via quotes together with previous research and theoretical support. This increases the study's credibility on how the Swedish Police's social media communication strategy concerning public safety is made sense of by employees and the public. In doing so, the dissertation shows different perspectives and

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<sup>20</sup> For instance, in episode 13 of the podcast of *HLK's doktorand podd* (Sjöberg et al., 2022), we address and discuss the topics of data management, having a data plan for one's research project, and how to store empirical material securely.

<sup>21</sup> JU FileShare is a file storage service that uses servers located at JU in order to store sensitive and nonsensitive material securely (JU, 2025).

approaches by using multiple and varied voices in the empirical material, thus tying in with multivocality (Tracy, 2010). For example, during the analysis phase with the interview studies (Papers I and II), I found it challenging to decide what role quotations could or could not play in the process, which can impact credibility. Again, this is something I will continue to work on in the future.

Nonetheless, in the papers, different aspects of the participants' reflective perspectives are present, although it was challenging from the perspective of "show rather than tell." For instance, Paper III reports a content analysis study, and therefore, this aspect is almost impossible due to the scope of the study, but in Paper IV, it was easier because the study took a participatory approach. By doing so, it resulted in feedback meetings with three of the four workshop groups.

This dissertation project has also taken the resonance criterion into consideration. It focuses on how all parts of the research are written, structured, and designed to make sense. For instance, the papers are structured in formats and guidelines based on the directives of journals or publishers. By following these structures and guidelines, the plots of the papers are presented in an academic way. When it comes to this dissertation, I partly follow the university guidelines to make this research easier for the reader, which has been my ambition throughout the process, even if to is hard to both be precise and use attractive prose. However, I have taken some design liberties into account in this dissertation. Tracy emphasizes this as "good research provides readers with vicarious experience" (Tracy, 2010: 845). In any case, having good aesthetic perspectives on the text structure and content can increase the possibility that the findings can live on in other contexts or situations, for example, that this dissertation results in practical recommendations, besides research contributions, on how the police can think about communicating a sense of public safety or that my research is placed in formats like podcasts.

However, the question of who will read the research is also relevant to highlight as a subcriterion based on Tracy's (2010) arguments for good qualitative research. This means that it is good to have clear target groups in mind in the research community. With my papers, the target groups I had in mind are scholars in media and communication, policing, organization studies, and strategic communication. Still, I also have the Swedish Police,

other public authorities, and the public in mind as target groups when it comes to social media communication and the connection to societal tasks, such as creating a sense of public safety. Because of this, it was central for me to publish the papers in an open-access format to make the findings accessible to people both inside and outside academia. In this way, the findings of this dissertation can reach a larger audience.

### *Significant Contribution and Meaningful Coherence*

Keeping the audience in mind connects to Tracy's (2010) criteria of significant contribution and meaningful coherence. These criteria are about the contribution of the research. In this case, the dissertation, including Papers I–IV, studies what it intends to do with relevant methods. Regarding the contribution of Papers I–IV, there are empirical, practical, methodological, and heuristic perspectives. For example, all the papers have different levels of empirical and heuristic perspectives concerning the Swedish Police's social media communication and creating a sense of public safety. By doing so, the contributions of the papers make suggestions for future research, which can also be relevant to practitioners. Papers II and IV also provide some practical contributions to how the police and other public authorities can think about communicating. Paper IV also adds the methodological contribution of the use of critical making workshops in strategic communication research. On the other hand, Tracy (2010) highlights that qualitative research also encompasses moral implications and contributions. In this dissertation, I have not tackled this as a contribution, since the empirical material does not cover this aspect, even if I am fully aware that the police as a study object involves moral and societal issues, such as violence and abuse of power in policing.

It has been a straightforward process in terms of working with meaningful coherence with this dissertation. This is because I have focused on the police's social media communication and creating a sense of public safety throughout the process. However, with that stated, the choice of methods was not always obvious (as mentioned). For example, I considered using quantitative methods for Paper II to obtain a more generalized perspective of the topic. However, in consultation with other researchers and my supervisors, as well as due to the use of the social constructivist paradigm, I decided to use PEI and phenomenography as methods to better examine how the public experiences police social media communication of a sense of

public safety. Beyond that, in Paper IV, critical making workshops were obvious to use from the start. However, I sometimes questioned the choice of the method depending on Swedish Police involvement in participating in the workshops. In this case, police employees from PRS participated in the workshops within a short time frame. Another limitation and challenge was the work of the literature review (as many different fields study the police, public safety, authorities, and social media). Consequently, it is possible that I may have overlooked existing research to achieve the highest possible quality in my own work. This is due to the possibility of studying a police authority's social media communication and creating a sense of public safety from different directions.

### *Final Words on Research Quality and Ethics*

The connection between the dissertation's aim of examining how public authorities communicate complex societal matters on digital media; the social constructivism paradigm; the choice of methods; empirical material; and the importance of transparency in the research process is fundamental for achieving meaningful coherence. These aspects, along with Tracy's (2010) previously mentioned criteria, have guided me in my work in this dissertation to maintain good research quality and ethics. Next, I will present the Swedish Police and PRS as the specific research case.

# *Chapter V*

# The Swedish Police as an Empirical Case

In this chapter, I will give a more detailed description of the Police Authority and the choice of the specific police region as the case in this dissertation.

## The Swedish Police

The Swedish Police is the largest public authority in Sweden (Statskontoret, 2018, 2025) with around 38,000 employees. Like many other public authorities in Sweden, the Swedish Police is structured as a single-council authority where the head of the organization is solely responsible for the government's activities (Ivarsson, 2021; Polisen, 2023b). The Swedish Police is led by the national police commissioner and the National Police Commissioner's Office and is structured into eight national departments, an independent Special Investigations Department, and seven police regions (Polisen, 2021, 2023b). This means that most police work is organized in one of the seven police regions, which in turn are divided into 27 smaller local police areas in order to be closer to the public (see Figure 3 on the next page, which shows the police regions and police areas in Sweden). These 27 local police areas are, in turn, responsible for a specific geographical area of the country, which ensures that their work is locally rooted and (primarily) affects the people in the area.

The Swedish Police have significant societal and public responsibilities and tasks. The authority has a unique position in society because people have the right to use violence to carry out some of their tasks (Polisen, 2023a, 2023b). In this regard, Swedish Police work is regulated by the Police Act (SFS 1984:387), which addresses how the police should carry out their mission and responsibilities by focusing on promoting and fostering justice, security, order, and public safety. In Figure 4 (see page 70), I display the police's overarching tasks based on the Police Act. The Police Act has been translated into various strategies and policy documents outlining how the Swedish Police should operate, including their roles and responsibilities in law enforcement, crime prevention and security, and creating a sense of public safety in society, for instance, a strategy document that differentiates between the police tasks of crime prevention and creating a sense of public



*Figure 3.* The geographical division of the Swedish Police.  
Made by the author based on information on how the Swedish Police is structured (Polisen, 2023a, 2023b).

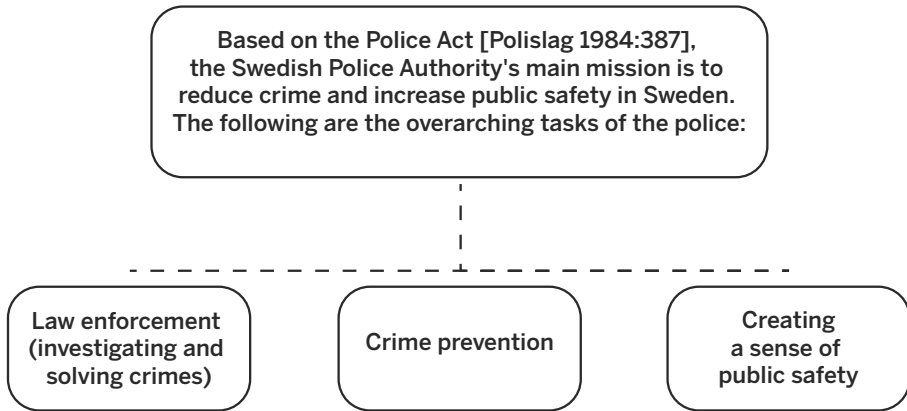


Figure 4. An overview of the Swedish Police's main responsibilities in society. Made by the author based on information from the Police Act (SFS 1984:387).

safety, which are in many cases interconnected (Polisen, 2018). However, the most prominent strategy and policy document is Police Strategy 2025–2027<sup>22</sup> (Polisen, 2024), which consists of four main goals:

- *Strategy I: Successful crime prevention*
- *Strategy II: Increased local presence*
- *Strategy III: Increased efficiency*
- *Strategy IV: The right competence in the right place*

These strategies are closely linked to operational policing, collaboration, and the three overarching police tasks illustrated in Figure 4. Strategies I and II are particularly notable as they focus on crime prevention, digital engagement, and creating a sense of public safety, unlike the other strategies outlined in Police Strategy 2025–2027 (Polisen, 2024). In this context, Strategy II also supports police use of social media by emphasizing increased local presence through both digital and nondigital means to maintain or create a sense of public safety.

The Swedish Police's efforts to address the complex societal matter of a sense of public safety are also connected to the United Nations Sustainable

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<sup>22</sup> For more information on specific police tasks, I refer to the Police Strategy 2025–2027 document and [polisen.se](https://polisen.se).

Development Goals (SDGs). Sweden has committed to aligning its efforts with these goals (see e.g., Regeringskansliet, 2025), specifically, SDG 11: *Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable*, and SDG 16: *Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels* (United Nations, n.d.). These SDGs connect to a broader level of understanding of the communicative challenge and complexity of creating a sense of public safety. With this background, I will now offer a brief overview of the Swedish Police's media presence, considering the significant societal and organizational interest in what the authority does both locally and nationally.

### *Swedish Police Media*

Media interest in police work is very much based on the role and tasks of the police in society, organizational culture, and myth-making. It has resulted in daily coverage in newspapers, radio, television, fictional stories (such as movies and TV series), and social media posts. For instance, Pollack (2001) states that crime sells, meaning that the public's image of the police is often built on media reporting and not on what exactly they do. Based on Pollack's argument, the Swedish Police have taken different roles in their media presence related to their work to minimize crime in the local community and to create a sense of public safety by sharing information about their work (Bjellert & Palm, 2012). When it comes to social media, the Swedish Police have, during the last decade, become more and more active on Facebook, Instagram, and X to extend their local presence and be where the public is. This mentality creates conflicts regarding how the Swedish Police communicate on social media; see Paper II and III for further information. This behavior is a consequence of digital development based on Swedish political digitalization decisions (Regeringskansliet, n.d.) and tasks I–III in Police Strategy 2025–2027 (Polisen, 2024). In this context, police social media activities are vital because their messages must be clear to the public, which they determine through a top-down approach, policies, and strategy documents (Polisen, 2015, 2023a, 2024).

The Swedish Police stand out from other Swedish public authorities in terms of social media. In September 2025, the authority had 275 official social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, X, YouTube, and some podcasts (Polisen, n.d.). The Swedish Police utilize social media mainly for

the dissemination of information and branding (image work of the authority), which I stated in chapter two and in Papers I–IV. To better understand how the police use social media and where communication challenges occur in creating a sense of public safety, I will provide two examples below.

### **Example I: Swedish Police’s Careless Use of Social Media**

The first example that affects a sense of public safety is based on the Swedish Police’s presence and their careless behavior on social media. The Swedish Police use social media (such as Facebook, Instagram, and X) without caring about regulations or communicating respectfully. This problem is ongoing and has been discussed and criticized in various media, with several police officers and official police social media accounts posting rogue and malicious social media posts, including depictions of people in vulnerable situations or collaborations with for-profit companies (see Karlsson, 2021a, 2021b) where officers use social media for personal benefits while wearing police uniforms (Chamy & Ewald, 2022; Eneström, 2024). In this discussion, aspects of ambassadorships and unclear regulations are part of the problem (e.g., Brokropp, 2022), where very dubious posts have been made of content involving political and economic issues and members of the public in vulnerable situations. This problem has (re)started internal discussions and revisions of police social media use and regulations (Ericson, 2024). Part of the problem lies in unclear rules, the authority’s view on social media, and the heavy focus on image work. This is supported by Andersson et al.’s (2024) research on ambassadorship, which shows that Swedish Police officer use of social media is primarily about image management. Ambassadorship is outside the main focus of the dissertation and will, therefore, not be developed further. Still, police use of social media must involve internal trust, support, and regulations that are needed for this to function, especially when it concerns a sense of public safety. Police social media often receives a lot of attention, which influences politicians and societal debates consciously or unconsciously in different ways (Holgerson et al., 2022).

Another factor in this problem of reckless behavior on social media lies in the way the Swedish Police operate, where police processes and myths collide with participatory aspects of social media. The Swedish Police have faced organizational difficulties in learning from past experiences and

competencies and prioritizing their work and responsibilities to the public and society's expectations of the police (Holgersson, 2018; Ivarsson Westerberg, 2020). As a result, this type of problem often manifests itself in the Swedish Police not entirely keeping up with societal developments and frequently asking for more resources but without any major breakthroughs (e.g., Kjöllér, 2022; Olin, 2023). Consequently, it places great demands on the police (employees and the authority), in terms of both their interactions on social media and their actions. These demands have a potential impact on public trust and the creation or maintenance of a sense of public safety.

### **Example II: Easter Riots in Sweden 2022**

My second example of communicative challenges in creating a sense of public safety is based on the actions of the Swedish police during the 2022 Easter riots. In this case, the police communicated their role and the riots in a scarce way, often with mixed messages. The communicative actions of the police contributed to confusion in this tense situation, which had a major impact on the sense of public safety in the country. On the other hand, various media actors, including DN with over 150 news articles (2024) and Svts via its news and in the subsequent TV program "Uppdrag granskning: Påskupploppen" (Henke, 2023), reported on the riots. In addition, various actors posted about the situation on social media. However, the police were sparing with their social media use during the Easter riots. Holgersson (2023) claims in a news article that an important but problematic aspect of how the police handled the riots was that the police blamed others instead of reflecting on their responsibility for why things went wrong and what they could have done to prevent these situations from happening in the first place. This view is in line with Terpstra et al.'s (2019) view of police structural barriers and difficulties in their operational work, which they refer to as abstract police. Terpstra et al. continue:

Abstract police may be less able to realise adequate solutions for the problems of citizens and communities, because internal processes and organisational procedures are fragmented, creating a lack of overview and having a negative impact on feelings of ownership and responsibility. . . . [It] may contribute to new problems of coordination and communication. (2019: 352)

This quote relates to a larger organizational issue about the police that connects to the criticism, often repeated in media reports (see, e.g., Erlandsson, 2022; Lernstad, 2022) of the Swedish Police's actions and organizational practices at the macro and meso levels (see, e.g., Holgersson's report on the police's handling of passport applications, its consequences, and structural problems [2022] or Ivarsson Westerberg's book *Reform in Uniform* [2020] for more about these issues). In this example, the media took a major and necessary role in informing and trying to counteract the rise of public fear. This example reiterates the importance of the police becoming a communicating and learning organization in order not to compromise (i) public trust in authorities and (ii) public safety.

### **Brief Conclusion of the Examples**

These two examples highlight the careless communicative practices of individual police officers on social media and the broader challenges faced by the Swedish Police during crises. In particular, they illustrate the critical role of communication and the associated responsibilities of the police toward the public. Consequently, it is essential for the Swedish Police to comprehend their broader role in media and public communication, as highlighted in studies by Enbom et al. (2014) and Palm and Skogersson (2008). This necessity arises in part because the police and the public often have differing perspectives on policing, as discussed in Jackson and Bradford (2009) and Paper II. Such differences can affect the relationship between the police and the public, as well as public perceptions and understanding of safety (Pain & Townshend, 2001). These considerations lead to the presentation of the specific case discussed in this dissertation.

## **The Specific Case of Swedish Police Region South**

The choice of a case study was based on the fact that the research design has an emphasis on discovering and studying in depth a specific phenomenon, such as organizations or events (Tracy, 2020), and in this dissertation, the case is on the PRS (Polisregion Syd) and their use of social media to create a sense of public safety. In order to understand the reason for PRS and to make a long story short, at the beginning of this dissertation project (autumn of 2019), I was in contact with the Swedish Police, and the authority decided, on a national level, that one region was most suitable to participate in this project. After different meetings with the police, it landed on PRS because

the police regions receive much media attention, work heavily with social media, and, at the time, were responsible for projects concerning a sense of public safety.

The PRS accounts for around 50 of the 275 social media accounts on Facebook, Instagram, and X used by the authority. This makes PRS the second-most social media-intensive and active police region in the country after the Stockholm Police Region (Polisen, n.d.). In addition, PRS is associated with high and complex crime activity and population density (Brå, 2022). With 20% of Sweden's population living in the PRS (SCB, 2022), the region is one of the most densely populated areas in the country. The geographical location of the PRS and its connection to Denmark and continental Europe via Malmö, Helsingborg, and other coastal cities also makes the region an important hub for trade and communication. In addition, Malmö is the largest city in the PRS and the third largest city in the country. Malmö's population consists of 186 nationalities (Malmö stad, n.d.), and the city is notorious for its criminal history, for example, as mentioned in Bjellert and Palm's (2012) study. The PRS, with its more than two million inhabitants, is in many ways affected (as is the country as a whole) by various criminal activities, such as widespread problems with drug use, assaults, threats, sexual offenses, robbery, pickpocketing, sales fraud, card and credit fraud, cybercrime, and gang violence with shootings, murders, and explosions causing insecurity and fear in the community (Brå, 2021, 2022, 2024). These are the arguments for PRS as a case.

### *The Participants From PRS*

To make this dissertation and the case study even more manageable, police employees from three police areas within the PRS participated. This was an agreement made between the PRS and myself to make the empirical collection manageable and to have a wide spread of participating police officers, communication experts, and media strategies with different experiences, professional roles, and geographical perspectives from big cities, rural areas, and middle-sized to small towns. Specifically, the police areas of Kalmar Kronoberg (POKK), Malmö (POMA), and Nordvästra Skåne (PONV) participated in the dissertation through interviews (Paper I), email and phone conversations (relevant for the whole dissertation project), and critical making workshops (Paper IV).

# *Chapter VI*

# Summary of Papers

This chapter summarizes the procedures and main findings of the four studies that this dissertation builds upon, which resulted in three scientific articles and one chapter in an anthology. In Papers I–III, I am the first author (see the appendices for the co-authors’ statements), and in Paper IV, I am the sole author.

## Paper I

In the first article, 20 semi-structured interviews with police employees (police officers and communication professionals within the authority) from the PRS were used to collect empirical material to understand how the police use social media, the concept of creating a sense of safety, and what social media strategies they use or have when communicating about these topics. Therefore, the following RQ was stated, “What are the strategies applied by the Swedish Police through their social media communication to create a sense of safety?”. We used the framework analysis method to analyze the material to find what strategies the PRS uses.

The contribution of this study shows that the police’s strategies for communicating a sense of safety via social media can be divided into three strategies: *transmediality*, *presence*, and *transparency*. However, these strategies need to be interconnected to have the greatest effect, which is often lacking because the police’s overall purpose of communicating via different media is ambiguous. The study shows that creating a sense of safety via social media communication becomes more like a side effect of everything else they communicate because they have no stated strategies or structures from which to start. This is because there is still much “work in progress” thinking and questions among police officers concerning social media and creating a sense of safety. Nonetheless, the study also highlights that the police’s ability to create a sense of safety is hampered by the fact that they communicate only in Swedish. It is problematic and a critical limiting factor for its exclusionary nature in creating a sense of public safety.

## Paper II

In Paper II, PEI (as was explained in Chapter IV) was used to collect empirical material to understand how the public experiences and perceives the police's social media communication on Instagram linked to creating a sense of safety publicly. To answer the RQ of the study, "To what extent does the Swedish Police organization's communication on Instagram contribute to the public's experience of a sense of safety?" we used a convenience sample. This means that those who were available during empirical collection participated, which resulted in a sample of 41 people from the public in Malmö.

A phenomenographic approach was used to analyze the material, which resulted in three overarching categories of experiencing police communication: *a sense of protection*, *a sense of proximity*, and *a sense of ambiguity*. The contribution in Paper II shows that the public perceives the police's social media communication as reassuring and relationship-building but also frivolous and unclear because large parts of the police's social media communication, according to the public, lack a clear purpose. The study also highlights that police social media has become a form of internal communication, not for the public. Therefore, the police authorities must instead use social media as a communicative and interactive process on the public's conditions for further engagement and to minimize wrongdoing, which previous research has stated (Bullock et al., 2021; Schneider, 2021a; Wood, 2020).

The study showcases the importance of public authorities and their social media to understand the responsibility they have, how and why they communicate, and to minimize misunderstandings among the public. This is since the public is not a homogeneous group, but overall aspects can contribute to increased or decreased safety. Public understanding is central to public order, stability, and a sense of public safety so that public authorities can understand what it means in a larger context.

## Paper III

This study, presented as a book chapter, focuses on how PSOs grapple with a decreased sense of safety and increased fear among the public. Social media communication often emphasizes the complex, interconnected problems

related to our digital and nondigital surroundings, affecting public safety in a mediated and digital society. Therefore, the following RQ was stated: “How do the Police in Malmö and the City of Malmö convey a sense of public safety through their Instagram posts?” in order to examine how PSOs communicate public safety via social media in today’s mediated society. This is because a decreased sense of safety is a problem and a challenge that Sweden and these public organizations face today in the public sphere.

Furthermore, the study was focused on the Swedish Police Authority in Malmö and the City of Malmö, analyzing their Instagram posts using Graneheim and Lundman’s (2004) qualitative content analysis to grasp the manifest and latent dimensions of posts. This process resulted in two overarching themes: *Sharing Community Information for the Public* and *Organizational Actions and Presence*. The findings show that the City of Malmö, as a municipality, has a significant responsibility for the well-being of the public and, therefore, primarily focuses on building relationships and trust rather than a sense of public safety. The Swedish Police too have an enormous responsibility. Still, their use of Instagram is mainly to share societal information or is viewed as a PR tool, for instance, to promote the profession or manage the organizational image. The study also shows that although some incentives for two-way communication are present, there is limited behavior from the organizations in question, thus strengthening the impression that police authorities or municipalities are reluctant to accept questions from the public besides the specific ones they have added in their post. This becomes troublesome because the public often has different understandings of the message, which can add to public criticism of the organization.

In summary, this study suggests that a sense of public safety is not strategically clear in the Swedish Police Authority in Malmö and the City of Malmö’s social media communication because both organizations have different duties to uphold and create a sense of public safety in Malmö. Consequently, PSOs’ use of Instagram remains subject to interpretation by the organizations and the public due to a lack of a strategic mindset to create a sense of public safety and oppose public fear.

## Paper IV

The study for Paper IV conducted four critical making workshops, a concept commonly used in design and sociotechnical fields but not typically within a strategic communication context. Each session included three to four police employees to capture participants' sensemaking of social media communication related to a sense of public safety from a bottom-up perspective through discussions, notes, and reflections. The study had the following RQ: "How do Swedish police employees make sense of their social media communication related to a sense of public safety in critical making workshops?"

Departing from this RQ, I analyzed the empirical material by adopting sensemaking as a theoretical and analytic lens to understand how police employees make sense of their social media communication to create a sense of public safety. The analysis phase resulted in four overarching categories that explain how participants made sense of their social media communication of complex societal matters: *Making sense of control*, *Making sense of contextualization*, *Making sense of authenticity*, and *Making sense of friction*. Based on these four categories, the study showcases challenges and opportunities with the use of critical making workshops.

The study addressed the opportunities in utilizing critical making workshops, where the first aspect is seeing the workshops as a learning and reflective arena. This second opportunity, through this study, highlights that critical making workshops enable participants to gain new insights from past examples and from each other. Furthermore, the study also emphasizes that challenges with critical making workshops center on resistance to full participation, with participants often sharing limited or organizationally filtered perspectives on social media and a sense of public safety. Another challenge was the power dynamics and hierarchical structures, particularly regarding the risk of "doing wrong" in employing critical making workshops. Another challenge with the critical making workshops involved the researcher's dual role, which created tension between acting as a co-learner and maintaining the position of a researcher. In this aspect, the workshops heavily depended on the researcher's commitment to a participatory, reflective, and explorative approach, which served as both a limitation and an opportunity.

Thus, the critical making approach can capture deep and multifaceted insights into practical and reflective dimensions based on previous experience, a reflective and learning-oriented mindset, and the purpose of the work in an iterative approach by critically reflecting on the problem, and where all participants are active in the process. This study concludes by illustrating how the critical making workshop process enables researchers and participants to collaboratively engage in sensemaking around complex societal matters. In this context, Swedish Police employees made further sense of their social media communication by co-creating about the complex societal matters of creating a sense of public safety from a bottom-up perspective through participatory and exploratory processes. Finally, the critical making workshop approach enhances the field of strategic communication by providing a clearer understanding of how researchers, organizations, and other stakeholders can facilitate access and interaction regarding the communication of complex societal matters on digital media.

# *Chapter VII*

# Findings

In this chapter, I will present the dissertation's findings concerning how public authorities communicate complex societal matters through digital media platforms. I will also present the development of the critical (un)making model for capturing bidirectional processes of digital communication between public authorities and members of the public. As mentioned earlier in this dissertation and in the existing literature, public authorities' social media use offers opportunities such as sharing societal information, maintaining the organizational image, establishing a digital presence, and spreading messages more quickly without involving other actors. However, public authorities and their members often overlook the communicative value of social media in terms of how to use it effectively to fulfill their societal obligations while maintaining digital visibility and engagement (Cassinger & Thelander, 2020; Olsson & Eriksson, 2016), which are aspects that contribute to their communication challenges (Lovari & Valentini, 2020).

This chapter begins by critically discussing the findings presented in the individual papers, which examine the Swedish Police's communicative practices for constructing a sense of public safety on social media. These findings are organized into three overarching themes: (i) the integration of operational and communicative policing in digital environments, (ii) strategies for fostering public engagement through police communication, and (iii) the role of bidirectional communication in processes of collective sensemaking. Building on these insights, the chapter introduces Critical (Un)Making as a Model for Capturing Co-Creation—a conceptual framework derived from the empirical analysis that advances theoretical understanding of the communicative dynamics between public authorities and citizens.

## Integrating Operational and Communicative Policing Into Social Media

The first theme highlights that the Swedish Police still struggle to communicate a sense of public safety on social media. One side of this difficulty is the lack of integration between operational and communicative

work (presented in different ways in Papers I and IV). Police employees stated that social media allows them to be digitally present and more transparent and, by doing so, reach a larger audience more quickly than with other media platforms. Many police employees did not realize or consider the importance of integrating operational and communicative policing into the context of social media. Instead, they viewed these aspects separately, especially regarding creating or maintaining a sense of public safety. This often results in it being mainly seen as a byproduct of their social media efforts. Part of this might be due to the Swedish Police's "trial and error" and "common sense" mentalities in using social media. These issues are noticed in Paper I's and IV's findings from police employees' perspective and in Paper II from the public's viewpoint, resulting in wrongdoings and neglecting the Police Act (SFS 1984:387) and Police Strategy 2025–2027 (Polisen, 2024) statements about the role of the police in Sweden on social media. The police mentality ties into the lack of readiness and coordination of the police when conducting operational and communication duties simultaneously, especially in conveying societal messages to the public on social media (see Paper I; Williams et al., 2018). However, those police members who did recognize the value of integrating operational and communicative policing saw it as an opportunity to promote public safety via social media.

Additionally, it is imperative to acknowledge that what the police do on social media is connected to their social responsibility. On a broader level, this means that even if Swedish public authorities have different responsibilities, they also share similarities in organizational structures and communication policies (Ivarsson, 2021), meaning that they need to base their decisions on what is most important to the public. In practical terms, communication policies pose a challenge for the Swedish Police because they must not only balance their bureaucratic structures, limitations, and societal responsibilities, but also address the needs or demands of the public. These tensions have been extensively examined by international scholars (de Graaf & Meijer, 2019; Meijer & Torenvlied, 2016; Ralph et al., 2022) and by Swedish researchers (e.g., Rolandsson, 2020), as well as in Paper II. As stated above, the police's use of social media is limited by bureaucratic structures, which in this case negatively affect their ability to serve the local community. For instance, Paper II demonstrates that the public's ability to interpret and understand the police's intentions on social media is

significantly hindered when their communication lacks strategic alignment with the goal of fostering a sense of public safety. This observation is reinforced in Paper III, which reveals that police communication predominantly centers on disseminating organizational information rather than prioritizing content that cultivates relationships and promotes public reassurance. A plausible explanation for this tendency lies in the complex and ambiguous ways in which police employees conceptualize the creation of a sense of public safety in digital environments. This uncertainty is a governance issue and stems from a lack of clear policies on how the police should communicate with the public.

To conclude this theme, the Swedish Police need to integrate their operational and communication efforts on social media with a clearer focus on creating a sense of public safety for the communities they serve. As indicated by previous research and the theoretical framework, the integration of operational and communication efforts can enhance the strategic effectiveness of public authorities' communication (Gulbrandsen & Just, 2022; van Ruler, 2018), especially in conveying the dynamic, intangible (Brandén, 2022), and intersubjective aspects (Zou & Meng, 2020) of a sense of public safety. Accordingly, there is a need for police employees (and public authority personnel more broadly) to combine operational and communication efforts to adopt a more long-term, public-centered communication strategy. Without such integration, social media initiatives risk being misunderstood or failing to strengthen the public's sense of safety. Achieving this integration begins with the police developing a clearer understanding of their own role and fostering deeper relationships with the public when communicating complex societal matters via social media. This discussion leads directly to the second theme of the findings.

## Fostering Public Engagement Through Police Communication on Social Media

The Swedish Police must understand how to engage with the public on social media to create a sense of safety. The findings show that the Swedish Police focus heavily on information sharing and upholding the organization's image as a strategy to create social media engagement. Fredriksson and Pallas (2020) argue that this media use can either bolster or hamper the sense of control associated with organizational media use. In

using social media, public authorities often prioritize sharing information and posting content on social media that will, in some way, benefit the organization's image (Cassinger & Thelander, 2020; Kudla & Parnaby, 2018). This aligns with prior research on police social media, which emphasizes managing the police image (Bullock, 2018; Schneider, 2021a) or the "authentic" police image (Andersson et al., 2024) by digitally controlling the police narrative to uphold the policing myth (Walby & Wilkingson, 2023) and avoid criticism (Kudla & Parnaby, 2018). For instance, in Papers I–III, the Swedish Police are not justified in their heavy information-sharing approach and upholding the police image instead of communicating with the public. The Swedish Police's social media activities hope to generate engagement among the public and, in the long run, lead to an increased sense of public safety. Still, they do not have a clear strategy for doing so and leave it up to individual employees to find out how (Paper I). As posited in Paper II, due to the lack of engagement with the public, and as previously documented in extant research, this issue can be seen as a recurrent problem with social media in creating community engagement (Bullock et al., 2021) or in reducing lawlessness to increase public safety via social media engagement (Sachdeva et al., 2016). Even if the Swedish Police's social media use is based on employees' communication and narrative of their work (illustrated in different ways in Papers I–IV), the difficulty of creating a sense of public safety is still connected to why public authorities mostly share information that is beneficial for the authority's image work. This perspective of public authority social media behavior also ties into Christensen and Christensen's (2022) argument for conscious or unconscious organizational communication.

Furthermore, findings show that the Swedish Police's social media use is inconsistent in creating a sense of public safety, further complicating this communication process. Part of this is because police employees do not fully understand the complex societal matter of creating a sense of public safety. This, in turn, generates tensions between the Swedish Police's strategic documents (Polisen, 2023a, 2024), official police definitions of creating a sense of public safety (Polisen, 2018), the Swedish Police Act (SFS 1984:387), and individual police officers' perspectives on how the public should interpret and understand the notion of a sense of public safety. Consequently, the authority's social media communication becomes highly contingent upon the discretionary practices of individual employees in

framing and emphasizing issues of public trust and safety. This results in personal or local strategies, as discussed in Paper I. This issue is further highlighted in Papers II–IV. Part of this lies in the discrepancy between nondigital and digital policing in how they engage with the public. The Swedish Police use social media often to manage a lack of local information by strategically publishing content that is either easier to digest or to uphold the organization’s digital presence and image (a form of control) instead of concentrating more on complex societal matters (see Paper III), such as a sense of public safety, rather than via other media platforms (mentioned in Papers I and IV). One reason for this is that the Swedish Police have a unique position, compared with other public authorities, regarding the high demand from the public and media actors for information. For instance, Swedish Police officers commonly present different versions of the profession and their responsibilities on social media to inform and create relationships with the public, as noted in the findings and in research by Bergquist et al. (2015) and Rolandsson (2020). However, it can also create problems when they become too spontaneous or focus too much on voicing the organization (see Andersson et al., 2024), which can give false impressions among the public about policing, for instance, as noted in Paper II.

Consequently, understanding how public authorities, specifically the Swedish Police, communicate on social media requires a comprehensive approach that considers *what* is communicated, *how* it is communicated, and *why*, including the underlying reasons. These questions align with Christensen and Christensen’s (2022b) emphasis on creating meaningful and strategic communication, moving beyond the image-focused approaches often observed in police social media (e.g., Bullock, 2018). Furthermore, these questions also resonate with the sensemaking framework, in which dynamic, social, and communicative structures (Weick et al., 2005) become central to understand how the police communicate a sense of public safety to the public through social media. However, as demonstrated by previous research on police social media use (see Chapter II), these are lacking, creating a communication challenge because police organizations prioritize the management of the police image, following trends and private sector influences to boost popularity rather than encouraging police and public social media interaction. The Swedish Police, like other public authorities, face the challenge of balancing strategic and nonstrategic communication (as

highlighted by Raupp and Hoffjann, 2012), which results in an imbalance in their social media communication—lacking a clearly defined strategy—making social media a secondary task despite increased connectivity, thereby negatively impacting public trust and safety.

In this way, this second theme underscores the scarcity of formal social media strategies among the Swedish Police. Due to it, police employees frequently establish an ad hoc communication process when dealing with a sense of public safety on social media. In this regard, police communication at both the organizational and employee levels lacks a bidirectional process for effectively conveying messages to the public on social media. This observation leads me to the third theme of the findings.

## Bidirectional Communication as Sensemaking

Public authorities frequently rely on a transmission view of information, characterized by a predominantly top-down approach to information dissemination (Luoma-aho & Canel, 2020). This view on communication is reflected in how Swedish public authorities use social media, where social and cultural agreements and Swedish values of openness and information sharing are connected to their responsibilities to serve people and society (see Eriksson & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2021; Ivarsson, 2021). The third theme emphasizes the role of bidirectional communication as a sensemaking process through which the police seek to create a sense of public safety. The findings show that police employees hesitate to communicate due to the fear of revealing weaknesses within the organization to the public. This relates to Ralph et al.'s (2022) study about the English police, who avoid listening to the public and their opinions on what the police should do. As a result, police social media can, instead of creating closeness, lead to further distancing and harm the relationship between authorities and the public, which worsens the communication challenge. Part of this problem is that police social media communication mainly acts as a transmission tool to avoid criticism and exert control, making it a strategic challenge rather than a platform for genuine engagement and interactions with the public. This stems from previous research illustrating that police officers often overlook the importance of digital communication with the public (de Graaf & Meijer, 2019; Ralph et al., 2022) and must thus balance their social media activities

based on the affordances and constraints of their interactions (Bullock et al., 2021). This can be seen as a police sensemaking process.

Another aspect of the findings demonstrates that being communicative on social media adds an extra workload for police officers, and when resources and organizational structures are lacking, it becomes problematic (see Papers I and IV). A central issue in all the Papers (I–IV) is that public authorities' use of social media entails an implicit interpretation of what it means to “communicate” with the public. This dilemma is also noticed by Ivarsson (2021) and Lovari and Valentini (2020). In addition, this approach tends to beautify the organization (Beverungen et al., 2019), leading to misunderstandings about its societal role and communicative responsibilities to the public (Eriksson & Ivarsson Westerberg, 2021; Fredriksson & Pallas, 2020). Police social media accounts, in this way, have become a unidirectional news channels because of the use of a top-down communication mindset to influence the public without fostering bidirectional dialogue or participation. This is problematic because it is crucial to conduct bidirectional dialogue in order to build relationships (e.g., Bullock et al., 2021) and trust (e.g., Rothstein, 2000, 2001) and to combat insecurity (Pain & Townshend, 2001) between the police and the public and create a sense of public safety (e.g., Ceccato et al., 2019; Jackson & Bradford, 2009), which I also demonstrate in Papers I–IV.

An additional side of this theme arises from organizational tension between official duties (Ivarsson Westerberg, 2020) and maintaining a digital presence for the public, as stated by policy and strategy documents (e.g., Polisen, 2023a, 2024). Part of the problem lies in the context of a “no comment” culture (see Paper I), which hampers police employees from communicating with the public in the digital arena, for instance, by posting short, ambiguous, or posting local information in haste rather than bidirectional social media communication that focuses on a community's experience of a sense of public safety. This also relates to the findings in Papers II and III, which reveal that the police continue to struggle with being bidirectional on social media, often using Instagram solely to inform or project a positive image of the organization. Furthermore, in Paper IV, police officers experience communication friction when understanding their social media interactions, particularly when creating a sense of public safety and balancing the organizational tension between their policing duties and their online presence. From the public's perspective, the police's social media

communication is often perceived as lacking clarity and purpose, wherein ambiguous messaging generates confusion rather than providing reassurance regarding public safety (as demonstrated in Paper II). Thus, the Swedish Police, like many other public authorities, need to change their approach to communication strategies from relying on fixed tools and a transmission mindset to viewing communication as relational, long-term, and dynamic processes (Carey, 2009; Gulbrandsen & Just, 2022). This means police social media communication must involve aspects of adapting to, listening, and interpreting social and cultural contexts to create meaning, interaction, and behavioral change in their communication process, which aligns with Falkheimer and Heide's (2023) argument. These aspects are crucial for police and other authorities to enhance and clarify their social media communication, especially to create a sense of public safety and maintain a positive relationship with the public. This also ensures that public authorities' social media platforms serve the public as intended, which can also align with Weick's (1995) sensemaking process.

The findings further suggest that public authorities' use of social media embodies competing interpretations and organizational pressures, revealing the complex and sometimes contradictory dynamics through which they communicate and generate meaning online. This observation resonates with the persistent tension between top-down and bottom-up communication (see Chapter II), which contributes to uncertainty in how individuals experience (Dewey, 2005) and make sense of (Weick, 1995) public authority social media communication, particularly regarding a sense of public safety. In many cases, police employees make sense of police social media by sharing local content and praising or interacting with other Swedish Police social media accounts, making their social media posts, in this sense, somewhat between planned and accidental communication. Papers I, II, and IV support this finding, where the police struggle to see their social media activities as a long-term communication platform for dialogue and participation with the public, especially in terms of creating a sense of public safety. This issue concerning police use of social media is also addressed in prior research, including studies by de Graaf and Meijer (2019) and Ralph et al. (2022). Part of this challenge relates to organizational incentives that encourage police officers to maintain an active presence on social media—both to engage with the public and to conduct digital patrols (see Papers I and IV)—in order to meet institutional expectations regarding digital visibility. This dynamic can

be understood through Dewey's (2005) notion of experience as a basis for action, which operates at both individual and organizational levels. From this perspective, the Swedish Police may be characterized as a non-learning organization, a critique advanced by Holgersson (2018) and Ivarsson Westerberg (2020).

Consequently, the challenges faced by social media officers in public authorities are exacerbated by a lack of transparency in the public sector (Lovari & Valentini, 2020) and insufficient long-term and organizational support and involvement of communication experts as strategic assets (see Simonsson & Heide, 2021) regarding how employees should communicate with the public on social media. The results of the dissertation (Papers I–IV) also indicate that the Swedish Police lack a coherent strategy for communication and participation on social media. This insufficient social media support heightens tensions between police officers and the public when it comes to working and communicating to create a sense of public safety. Therefore, the police need to understand the expectations, perceptions, and experiences stemming from individual and collective agreements and behaviors, as these form the foundation for a sense of public safety (see Zou & Meng, 2020), when communicating it digitally. This connects with Papers I–III and previous research on police social media (e.g., Williams et al., 2018), which suggest that police officers need to focus on trust-building and visibility efforts to promote and communicate a sense of public safety. On this note, it is important to keep in mind that the police and the public often have different understandings of policing and societal responsibilities (see Jackson & Bradford, 2009, for more about this discrepancy). This perspective also supports the argument by Christensen and Christensen (2022a, 2022b) that organizations, in a broader sense, often overlook how and why they communicate. Consequently, organizations like the Swedish Police may end up with conflicting communicative agendas that limit their understanding of the public and negatively impact employees' ability to interpret and communicate complex societal matters on social media effectively.

In this regard, I agree with Madsen (2022) that public authorities face communication challenges involving employees' sensemaking based on 'how' and 'why,' especially when it involves communication for and with the public. For the police's social media communication to become clearer for officers and the public, understanding how, why, and what is crucial. This

will help the Swedish Police (and other authorities) build stronger relationships and trust with the public through ongoing social communication and sensemaking focusing on interpretation, social enactment, cue extraction, and retrospective analysis (Weick, 1995). Therefore, I recommend that the Swedish Police move beyond merely protecting the organization's image or chasing popularity through social media algorithms and followers. Instead, the police should enhance their bidirectional communication on social media by declaring that creating a sense of public safety is their primary strategic communicative goal due to the interconnectedness of the digital and nondigital spaces today. This would force the Swedish Police to move away from the current approach where the authority mainly focuses on sharing information rather than engaging in digital dialogue with the public, which makes it challenging to do so effectively. I also recommend that the Swedish Police establish police officer positions dedicated to social media and digital work focused on public safety matters to address this communication process challenge. This would support social media communication as ongoing among the police (and other public authorities), partners, and the public, making it easier to link various police activities like crime prevention, crime solving, collaborations, and public safety efforts as a continuous dialogue. Contributing to a shift in the focus from creating a sense of public safety to collaboratively creating it—*(Co)creating a Sense of Public Safety*. This transition also supports the initiatives of the UN's SDGs 11<sup>23</sup> and 16<sup>24</sup> of public safety efforts throughout various parts of society (United Nations, n.d.).

### *Summary of the Thematic Findings*

Taken together, the themes highlight how the Swedish Police's social media communication aimed at creating a sense of public safety is characterized by several shortcomings, including a disconnection between operational and communicative policing, unclear communication goals, a predominantly top-down approach, and limited public engagement and bidirectional interaction. The themes link to critical (un)making as part of ongoing communication processes aimed at conveying the matter of creating a sense of public safety digitally, leading me to the next part of the chapter.

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<sup>23</sup> SDG 11: Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

<sup>24</sup> SDG 16: Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

## Critical (Un)Making as a Model for Capturing Co-Creation

As the findings demonstrate (primarily in Paper IV), the Swedish Police employees described how they made sense of using social media with the ambition of creating a sense of public safety through communication. Yet they also emphasized the absence of a clear or consistent approach to achieving this, largely due to the complexity and ambiguity of the task. The co-creative dimensions of their work point to a bidirectional way of generating meaning around societal responsibility that needs to be digitally communicated. Thus, it becomes paramount to reflect upon this bidirectional process by extending the concept of critical making to encompass both making and unmaking as a means of engaging with the communicative practices of public authorities striving to create a sense of public safety on social media. In this context, unmaking refers to processes of *unfolding*, while making involves processes of *reconfiguring*—both occurring within an ongoing social and reflective context.

The reasons for developing a critical (un)making model as a methodological contribution of this dissertation include: (i) the lack of social media strategies (see Paper I), (ii) ambiguities and frictions that emerged during the workshops for Paper IV, (iii) public experiences (see Paper II), and (iv) what police actually publish on social media (see Paper III) regarding police communication efforts to create a sense of public safety. The lack of processes of unfolding the communicative practices of the police is thus a vital aspect that I want to bring forth because the critical making workshops, in Paper IV, were characterized by a consensus mentality among police officers regarding police work and the purpose of social media. Another reason is that processes of unfolding to be able to reconfigure in an improved manner provides a scope for exploring and co-creating the communicative process of creating a sense of public safety. This is because the task is complex, intersubjective, and dynamic in nature but also needs to be communicated by the authorities and understood by the public to maintain a democratic society. An additional rationale for incorporating processes of unfolding and reconfiguring into critical (un)making stems from the participatory approach itself, which enables more in-depth and diverse perspectives on a problem by drawing on participants' varied backgrounds, experiences, contributions, and ways of shaping knowledge

and understanding from multiple viewpoints. This is highlighted, for instance, by the standpoints of Ratto (2011), Record et al. (2013), Somerson and Hermano (2013) on critical making, Lindhult and Axelsson’s (2021) co-creating knowledge, and a bottom-up (e.g., Heide et al., 2018) or sensemaking (Weick, 1995) perspective. These perspectives resonate well with Gambarato et al.’s (2020) sociological approach to participation within media and communication context. Thus, participatory processes can lead to tangible innovations in daily life because society is a mix of human and nonhuman agents operating in an ongoing process.

Based on these arguments, I have added (un) to the “making” because both making and unmaking coexist in the process of first unfolding and then reconfiguring. To gain further insight into this expansion of critical (un)making, it is important to consider the characteristics of critical (un)making presented in Table 2 to justify it as a bidirectional communicative model that can serve to address complex societal matters, such as creating a sense of public safety, by means of co-creation.

<b>Critical (un)making model</b>	
The Role of Reflection and Play	Moving beyond social media platforms (as technologies), critical (un)making focuses on understanding and questioning social factors and past experiences through the exploration of play and reflection. This process fosters a learning experience for participants both during and after the sessions (Somerson & Hermano, 2013). In this case, the approach aims to make sense of unfolding/reconfiguring via co-creation of a sense of public safety.
Embracing Diversity of Interpretations for (un)making	The critical (un)making process underscores the value of participants’ diverse interpretations of addressing societal challenges, thereby enhancing the dynamism of the process. The diversity of interpretations, as stated in Paper IV, should be viewed as resourceful despite potentially leading to the unfolding of existing communication strategies and despite challenges of co-creation at micro, meso, and macro levels. Furthermore, the process of unfolding within critical (un)making thus plays a crucial role where the participants’ different experiences enrich the process by combining agreements and dis-agreements in a shared learning process (Dewey, 2005) of co-creating knowledge (e.g., Lindhult & Axelsson, 2021).

<p>Emphasizing Experience and Bottom-Up Communication</p>	<p>The ad hoc dimension of critical (un)making stresses a bottom-up approach with unmaking aspects by shifting the focus from right and wrong thinking to iterative, experience-based perspectives. Specifically, this means that the ad hoc dimension, through the critical (un)making process, suggests that participants' experience becomes more vital than blindly following the organization's policy documents, communication guidelines, or the communications department's directives. Instead, these documents and roles should be seen as supporting resources for individual and collective context for communication. By doing so, critical (un)making will allow participants to deepen their understanding through individual and collective knowledge and experiences, aligning with arguments from Bornemark (2020) and Dewey (2005), which will be co-created within the organization for its media communication strategies.</p>
<p>Unfolding Power Dynamics in Co-creating Processes</p>	<p>Critical (un)making also entails unfolding power dynamics, ensuring that all actors are treated equally in the process even in collaborative settings involving external partners or the public. For example, this approach bridges and combines the Swedish Police's operational and communicative efforts to co-create a sense of public safety by allowing different actors (within or outside the police) to further develop their understanding of societal responsibility in a common-ground setting.</p>
<p>Navigating Ambiguity: The Role of Sense-making in Critical (Un)Making</p>	<p>Finally, critical (un)making incorporates Weick's (1995) sensemaking concept to foster a holistic mindset. This approach emphasizes the importance of plausible, bidirectional, ongoing, and social processes where there is no absolute right or wrong in the act of unfolding and reconfiguring.</p>

Table 2. Critical (un)making model

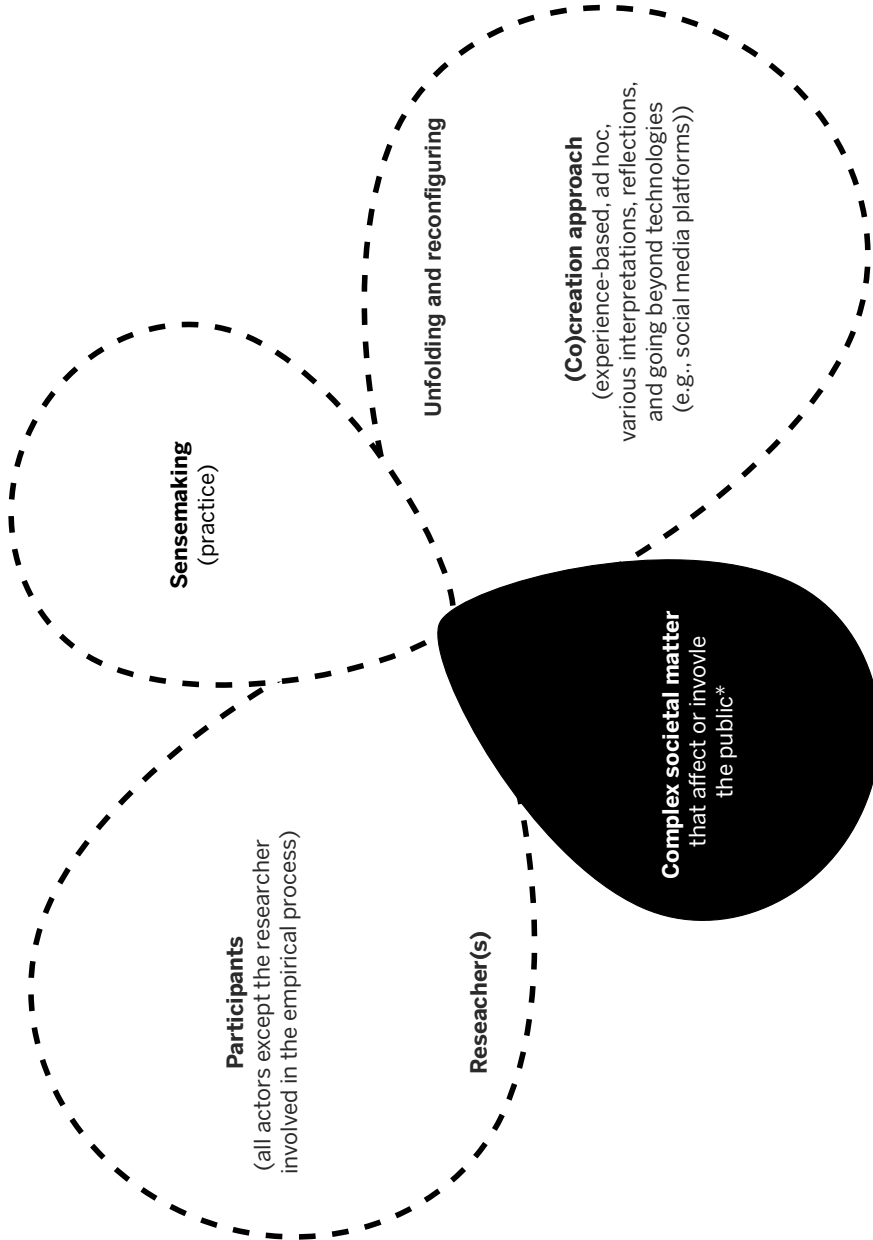
### *The Demonstration of the Critical (Un)Making Model*

Based on the five critical (un)making characteristics outlined above, this dissertation continues to show how critical (un)making as a communicative process for co-creation can be visualized and implemented as a participatory and exploratory method in media and communication science. The process focuses on unfolding and reconfiguring complex societal matters by involving different actors (researchers and participants in the empirical

process), adopting sensemaking as a practice, utilizing a (co)creation approach that is experience-based and ad hoc, open to various interpretations and reflections, and extending beyond social media platforms to address the problem as a communicative process that influences or involves the public space. In the case explored in this dissertation, the process highlights how police employees can make sense of and assume responsibility for their social media communication by unfolding and reconfiguring a sense of public safety by integrating practical experiences with reflective and collaborative approaches in an iterative manner. Figure 5 (see next page) is proposed as the *Critical (un)making model*, represented in the form of an infinity loop (IL) comprising interconnected horizontal and vertical trajectories. The figure illustrates the intended application of the critical (un)making model as a bidirectional communication process for understanding how public authorities engage with complex societal matters or responsibilities.

The left-hand space of the IL represents the actors involved in the empirical process, including both the researcher and the participants. This dimension is fundamental, as the critical (un)making process cannot occur without participant engagement. The actor-space is interlinked with the three other spaces in the IL: sensemaking (top), unfolding/reconfiguring (right), and the complex societal matter (bottom). The right-hand space highlights the process of unfolding and reconfiguring that happens in a (co-)creative, explorative, and iterative setting. Here, participants' experiences gain significance through an ad hoc orientation in which multiple interpretations and reflections—extending beyond social media platforms—jointly shape an ongoing process of unfolding and reconfiguring, thereby facilitating deeper engagement with the underlying problem. Consequently, the outcomes of this process remain inherently unpredictable and cannot be fully controlled.

The top space of Figure 5 emphasizes the dimension of sensemaking. It is understood as a dynamic practice in which actors iteratively move back and forth in making plausible interpretations of complex societal matters—such as creating and sharing a sense of public safety through social media communication. This iterative process enables democratic societies to engage with experiences at both individual and collective levels. In other words, sensemaking entails a continuous, dialogical exchange through which participants interpret, negotiate, and develop shared understandings of the matter at hand. These arguments about sensemaking (in the figure) further



\*In this case, creating a sense of public safety

Figure 5. Critical (un)making model.

align with Weick's (1995) and Weick et al.'s (2005) perspective that it is a process dependent on how well it maintains the fluidity, continuity, and adaptability of different interpretations to achieve plausible meanings rather than fixed, static meanings—particularly regarding how to communicate a sense of public safety digitally. The bottom space in the critical (un)making model represents the complex societal matter itself, depicted as a black drop. This metaphor was chosen because a drop of water is inherently mutable, symbolizing the fluid and evolving nature of societal matters. In this regard, a sense of public safety and creating it are not static but shift over time, shaped by broader societal transformations. Thus, what creates a sense of public safety today may differ significantly in the future.

Finally, the dotted lines illustrate the figure's overall flexibility and connectivity, symbolizing its dynamic nature characterized by continuous actors involved in processes of unfolding and reconfiguring in a (co-)creative, explorative, and iterative setting, and the dimension of sensemaking in an ongoing process to understand and develop knowledge to cope with the problem. That is why most of Figure 5 is dotted, which in this case relates to how police employees unfold and reconfigure meaning in their process to create a sense of public safety through their social media communication for society.

### *Hallmarks and Critical Aspects of the Critical (Un)Making Process*

As a result, critical (un)making as a communicative process for co-creation should be seen as an applicable contribution to work with complex societal matters, in this case, communicating a sense of public safety digitally. However, as with all models, it is vital to indicate possible misuses that could emerge when applying it as a methodological tool.

First, there is a risk of losing the participatory dimension if the researcher fails to create a comfortable atmosphere for participants to participate freely and nonpassively or else neglects the value of the participants' input. This issue can, for instance, occur if there are too few participants or if the researcher has already decided on what to hear and what not, which reduces the research quality (e.g., Tracy, 2010). A key aspect of dealing with this challenge is simultaneously engaging and motivating all participants early to feel that they are (i) part of the research project and (ii) getting something out of the process. This is crucial but also a challenge within participatory

research (Bradbury et al., 2019; Lindhult & Axelsson, 2021). A challenge inherent in the participatory process approach is the presence of uninterested or unreflective mindsets that may result in negativity. Here, I recommend that by eliminating the “right or wrong” dimension, which aligns with Ratto’s transition from “matter of fact” to “matter of concern” (2011: 260), and facilitating learning outcomes and reflection from a bottom-up perspective throughout the whole process (Sjöberg, 2016; Somerson & Hermano, 2013), the issue of unmotivated participants may be mitigated in the research process.

An additional potential challenge with the critical (un)making process is that if it aims to address complex issues too quickly or can be examined in other ways more clearly, the participatory and reflective aspects become unnecessary (Lindhult, 2022). This possibility risks undermining the critical dimension and bypassing the unfolding aspect of critical (un)making. By emphasizing unfolding and reconfiguring in an ongoing process, the strength of the method lies in its ability to enable a greater focus on taking responsibility for addressing the problem (in this, a sense of public safety). On this note, co-creation and participatory processes also involve dimensions of political meaning for the participants (consciously or unconsciously) concerning potential implications for the present and future, which must also be considered when employing this type of research design (DiSalvo, 2014). For instance, during the workshops described in Paper IV, some participants discussed, for example, ambiguous social media posts that could affect public confidence in the police. In this context, the lack of support and guidance from the communications department was identified as part of the problem. This issue also aligns with what Paper II found—that members of the public experienced a lack of a clear communication strategy from the Swedish Police’s social media, especially regarding a sense of public safety now and in the future.

These hallmarks and critical aspects of the (un)making process should be seen as a way to understand how the method can be used to analyze, create, or improve digital communication processes that focus on key societal responsibilities, such as establishing a sense of public safety and how public authorities communicate that on social media. Communication is central to how the actors unfolding and reconfiguring perspectives can contribute to making sense of problems. This aligns with social constructivism’s view of communication as a dynamic process that produces and reproduces shared

sociocultural patterns, which also aligns with Craig's (1999) and Weick's (1995) views on communication. The critical (un)making process establishes a way to address deviations, interpretations, and sensemaking. It also establishes connections among all the actors involved regarding what should be communicated. Throughout the process, it remains aligned with the focal problem. This brings me to the conclusion of this dissertation.

# *Chapter VIII*

## Conclusion

This dissertation demonstrates that communicating complex social matters to the public via social media remains a significant challenge for public authorities. Furthermore, communication is not currently prioritized on an equal footing with other core organizational activities. Public authorities, especially the police, often lack a full understanding of how to engage with the public through social media, particularly when defining appropriate actions and communicating key societal responsibilities, such as creating a sense of public safety. Existing research tends to overlook how public authorities use digital media to communicate, participate, and engage in the experience of public safety. Recognizing this is crucial, as the digital communication practices of the police and other public authorities have far-reaching implications. They play a vital role in shaping democratic participation and engagement. To achieve this dissertation's aims of examining how public authorities communicate complex social matters through digital media and developing a participatory approach to capture bidirectional processes of digital communication between public authorities and members of the public, I have used the Swedish Police and their social media use as an empirical case.

The dissertation emphasizes the importance of enabling employees in public authorities to make sense of their social media communication regarding complex societal matters and to enhance this communication as an ongoing iterative process. The emphasis is on (co)creating a sense of public safety through the application of the critical (un)making model as a communicative process, rather than relying on isolated initiatives aimed at promoting public safety. More precisely, it demonstrates how critical (un)making as a communicative process for co-creation can serve as a methodological approach by unfolding and reconfiguring the communicative challenge faced by the Swedish Police in creating a sense of public safety. In the end,<sup>25</sup> this concludes and highlights the need for public authorities to communicate more openly on social media, keeping the public in mind in order to (co)create a sense of public safety, which is an essential right of all humans.

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<sup>25</sup> This also refers to Linkin Park's song "In the End" from the *Hybrid Theory* album released in 2000, which has had a significant impact on the author.

Furthermore, this dissertation offers theoretical and methodological contributions focused on a critical (un)making model as a communicative process for co-creation, which advances the fields of media studies, organizational, and strategic communication in two ways. First, it contributes by adding theoretical knowledge of public authorities' communication processes of complex societal matters—specifically the intersection of operational, strategic, and communicative dimensions—through which public authorities seek to convey a sense of public safety via digital media. This has been done by demonstrating (i) how the Swedish Police employ social media to articulate their complex societal matter of creating a sense of public safety, and (ii) how members of the public experience the Swedish Police's social media communication regarding creating a sense of public safety. The second contribution offers a methodological addition, consisting of a critical (un)making model that captures a deeper understanding of bidirectional communicative processes and generates novel ideas that emerge through engaged participation, exploration, and iteration present in unfolding and reconfiguring processes. This model emphasizes the importance of (i) adopting a playful approach engaging diverse stakeholders, (ii) fostering shared sensemaking, (iii) utilizing experience-based and ad hoc methods, (iv) maintaining openness to multiple interpretations and reflections, and (v) extending communicative practices beyond social media platforms to strengthen and improve communication processes related to complex societal matters, such as cultivating a sense of public safety.

## Contributions

### *Theoretical Contributions*

This dissertation highlights the need to conceptualize public authority communication as a multidimensional process that intersects operational, strategic, and communicative functions. Rather than treating these dimensions as separate, the findings demonstrate their interdependence in shaping public trust and perceptions of safety in digital environments. The second contribution advances an intersubjective understanding of public safety. Rather than viewing safety as a fixed or unilateral concept, this perspective encourages scholars to conceptualize it as a dynamic, relational process grounded in meaning-making through ongoing interactions between

public authorities and the public. The third contribution underscores the necessity of contextualizing communicative practices within broader socio-cultural dynamics, recognizing that digital communication is shaped by cultural norms, institutional histories, and societal expectations.

### *Methodological Contributions*

This dissertation offers a methodological contribution through a *critical (un)making model*, as illustrated in Table 2 and Figure 5. This model deepens the understanding of complex societal matters by unfolding and reconfiguring engaged, participatory, exploratory, and iterative processes. It aligns with the core research problem by adopting a playful yet reflexive approach that involves diverse stakeholders, promotes sensemaking, draws on experience-based and ad hoc methods, and remains open to multiple interpretations and reflections. Moreover, a critical (un)making model extends communicative practices beyond social media platforms, thereby enhancing and reimagining how communication processes engage with and address complex societal matters.

### *Practical Implications*

Furthermore, this dissertation also provides implications for how the Swedish Police and their employees can implement this research in their social media communication efforts that emphasize the creation of a sense of public safety. They should (i) integrate operational and communicative dimensions of policing with a clear emphasis on public safety; (ii) adopt a long-term communicative perspective oriented toward public and local engagement; (iii) develop communicative processes that prioritize interaction with the public by grounding communication in local experiences that incorporates the aspects of what, how, and why in such efforts; and (iv) move beyond safeguarding organizational image or pursuing popularity metrics. Instead, emphasis should be placed on enhancing bidirectional communication by explicitly positioning the creation of public safety as the primary objective of social media communication, particularly in light of the increasing interconnection between digital and nondigital spaces.

Based on these implications, the Swedish Police should establish a police officer position for each local police area dedicated to social media and digital work focused on public safety matters to address this communication

challenge with support from the police communication department. This would support police social media communication with their partners and the public as a continuous dialogue, making it easier to connect various police activities, such as crime prevention, crime solving, collaborations, public safety efforts, and Sweden's work with the UN's SDGs (11 and 16).

## Limitations and Future Research

This dissertation also faces limitations. The first limitation is that it focuses solely on a single authority (besides Paper III), the PRS, and no other police regions. This means that the local context of the police's social media is limited in terms of a deeper national understanding of a sense of public safety. The second limitation is that I have excluded other media platforms and discussions that may occur in different forums regarding policing online. A third limitation is that the study only captures a snapshot of how the public views a sense of public safety due to the limited sample size. Another limitation of this dissertation is that I have not observed how police officers create their content on social media in practice, i.e., sitting with them while they create and publish posts during the interviews (in Paper I) or critical making workshops (in Paper IV). This would further enhance understanding of how public employees make sense of their communicative role for the public.

Moreover, I suggest that future research incorporates other media platforms, additional public authorities, or organizations within the public sector to gain a deeper understanding of the internal and external communication processes related to complex societal matters. This can be achieved by using the critical (un)making model to further examine the intersection of operational, strategic, and communicative functions among different public authorities, thereby fully capturing the complexity of public authorities' communication processes in shaping public trust and safety from a holistic and longitudinal perspective. Secondly, I suggest that future research should devote further attention, either qualitatively, quantitatively, or participatory, to the importance of contextualizing communicative practices within cultural dynamics, such as involving different members from the public. This entails examining how cultural contexts and collective perceptions of uncertainty, risk, and fear shape the understanding around complex societal matters, thereby strengthening the theoretical foundation for understanding how

public communication not only informs but also co-creates shared meanings—such as public safety—within society. My final suggestion is that future research continues to explore the intersubjective understanding of a sense of public safety by involving political perspectives in the meaning-making process shaped through interactions between authorities and society. This type of research should utilize mixed methods to gain a deeper understanding of the intersubjective understanding of a sense of public safety at both meso and macro levels, to gain further knowledge of the dynamics and complexity aspects of a sense of public safety.

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# *Appendices*

## Co-Author Statement

<b>Title of paper</b>	“Malmö is not Sweden's Chicago”: Policing and the challenge of creating a sense of safety through social media strategies
<b>Publication outlet – journal</b>	Nordicom Review
<b>List of authors</b>	
First author:	Jens Sjöberg (now Jens Alvéén Sjöberg)
Second co-author:	Peter Berglez
Third co-author:	Renira Rampazzo Gambarato

### Contribution of first author:

As the first and corresponding author, Jens was involved and responsible for all the parts of the article: Introduction, background, the literature review, the theoretical framework, methodology, analysis of the empirical material, conclusion, and references. He was also responsible for the design and writing of the article, as well as collecting and transcribing all the empirical material.

### Contribution of second co-author:

As a second author, Peter was involved in making the article's content more critically intellectual. He contributed to the writing in sections of the introduction, literature review, findings, and conclusions throughout the process.

### Contribution of the third co-author:

As the third author, Renira was involved in all parts of the article but focused most on the analysis and development of the findings and conclusions to make the content more critically intellectual throughout the process. She also supported Jens in the work process of using framework analysis to analyze the empirical material.



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Signature, lead author



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Signatures, co-authors

## Co-Author Statement

<b>Title of paper</b>	Communicating a sense of safety: the public experience of Swedish Police Instagram communication
<b>Publication outlet – journal</b>	Journal of Communication Management
<b>List of authors</b>	
First author:	Jens Alvéén Sjöberg
Second co-author:	Cecilia Cassinger
Third co-author:	Renira Rampazzo Gambarato

### Contribution of first author:

As the first and corresponding author, Jens was involved and responsible for all the parts of the article: Introduction, the literature review, the theoretical framework, methodology, analysis of the empirical material, discussion, conclusion, and references. He was also responsible for the design and writing of the article, as well as collecting and transcribing all the empirical material.

### Contribution of second co-author:

As the second author, Cecilia revised the work critically for the important intellectual content in the introduction, literature review, analysis section, discussion, and conclusion throughout the process, primarily focusing on strategic communication.

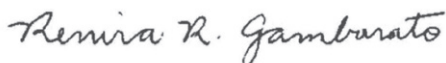
### Contribution of the third co-author:

Renira revised the work critically for the important intellectual content throughout the article as the third author. She was also responsible for developing the theoretical framework and explaining the choice of Instagram throughout the process.



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Signature, lead author



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Signatures, co-authors

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## Co-Author Statement

<b>Title of paper</b>	Social media communication to create public safety and oppose Public fear: Insights into how Swedish public sector organisations convey a sense of public safety via Instagram
<b>Publication outlet – journal/anthology</b>	Anthology from Tallinn University Press: Through the Lens of Dread: Exploring Meaning-Making of Fear in the Mediasphere
<b>List of authors</b>	
First author:	Jens Alvéén Sjöberg
Second co-author:	Martina Gnewski

### Contribution of first author:

As the first and corresponding author, Jens was involved and responsible for designing the book chapter. This involved working with all parts of the chapter: Introduction, the literature review (especially with PSOs' strategic social media communication), the theoretical framework, the methodology, the analysis of the empirical material, and references. Jens took the lead in writing the concluding discussion, which was co-authored with Martina.

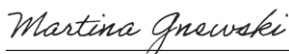
### Contribution of second co-author:

As a second author, Martina was involved in writing the book chapter, where she co-authored the introduction, the parts that concerned Malmö City in the analysis section, and the concluding discussion. Martina was responsible for the literature review on strategic communication and also took a language review role throughout the chapter.



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Signature, lead author



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Signatures, co-authors



# Communicating a sense of public safety

## The case of the Swedish Police Authority's strategic social media communication

When public authorities address the complex societal matter of public safety through digital media, they do more than just disseminate information. They actively shape the conditions for civic dialogue, trust, and involvement. Understanding how authorities communicate is essential, as their communicative practices carry significant societal implications. However, research still overlooks how public authorities use digital media to engage, participate, and foster dialogue around public safety. This dissertation adopts a participatory perspective to examine how public authorities communicate complex societal matters on digital media. The Swedish Police Authority serves as the empirical case, with a focus on its social media communication aimed at creating a sense of public safety (trygghetsskapande). Owing to its legal mandate and societal responsibilities, the Authority provides a relevant context for exploring how institutional communication can influence perceptions of public safety. Comprising four interrelated studies, the dissertation examines the Swedish Police Authority's social media communication from multiple perspectives. The dissertation combines qualitative methodologies, such as interviews, framework analysis method, phenomenography, and qualitative content analysis, and critical making workshops as a participatory and explorative method, together with theories of experiences and sensemaking, to theoretically understand a sense of public safety. The findings demonstrate how public authorities, specifically the Swedish Police, can make sense of and enhance their social media communication regarding a sense of public safety through a bidirectional way of communicating. The dissertation emphasizes the importance of public authorities communicating more openly on social media in order to (co)create a sense of safety with the public. It makes theoretical and methodological contributions with the critical (un)making model on bidirectional communication and co-creation, thereby enriching scholarship in media studies, organizational, and strategic communication.



JENS ALVÉN SJÖBERG has more than ten years' experience in academia and practice across media and digital visual production, strategic media development, and media technology and management. He has also worked for a couple of years in the media sector in Sweden and Denmark. By combining his academic and practical experience, Jens takes, in his research, a participatory and communicative perspective when examining Swedish Police Authority's use of social media to create a sense of public safety. With care, he reflects and discusses this complexity. This is his doctoral dissertation.

ISBN 978-91-88339-82-9 (printed version)  
ISBN 978-91-88339-83-6 (online version)