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NARRATIVES ON AGEING AND MEDIA USE: RESULTS OF AN AUSTRIAN MEDIA BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY

ABSTRACT

Examining how digitalisation impacts media use, this study focuses on older people, who make up an ever-bigger share of the population. The paper looks at the role of media in older people's biographies and their perception of technological change. Media-biographical interviews were conducted with 21 individuals aged 60+ years to answer these questions. Findings reveal the dominance of traditional media (TV, newspapers, radio) along with the growing use of digital technologies, notably smartphones as a vital daily medium. The effects of digitalisation on older individuals are ambivalent. While on one hand they feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the applications, on the other they also benefit from advantages like the low-threshold information and communication options. The study shows that different ways of dealing with the challenges of digitalisation exist – from learning from the younger generation through to resilience.

KEY WORDS: mediatisation of everyday life, digitalisation, media biographies, media use of older individuals, perception of media change, media-biographical interviews, Austrian study

Narativi o staranju in uporabi medijev: rezultati avstrijske medijsko-biografske študije

IZVLEČEK

Ta študija preučuje vpliv digitalizacije na uporabo medijev in se osredotoča na starejše, ki predstavljajo vse večji delež celotnega prebivalstva. Prispevek prevprašuje vlogo medijev v biografijah starejših in njihovem dojemanju tehnoloških sprememb. Na to temo so bili opravljeni medijsko-biografski intervjuji z

21 posamezniki, starejšimi od 60 let. Ugotovitve razkrivajo prevlado tradicionalnih medijev (televizija, časopisi, radio) ob vse večji uporabi digitalnih tehnologij, zlasti pametnih telefonov, ki so pomemben vsakdanji medij. Učinki digitalizacije na starejše posameznike so ambivalentni. Po eni strani se starejši počutijo preobremenjene zaradi zapletenosti aplikacij, po drugi strani pa imajo od njih tudi koristi, kot so nizkopražne možnosti obveščanja in komuniciranja. Kot kaže študija, se z izzivi digitalizacije lahko spopadajo na različne načine – od učenja od mlajše generacije do krepitve digitalnih veščin.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: mediatizacija vsakdanjega življenja, digitalizacija, medijske biografije, uporaba medijev pri starejših posameznikih, zaznavanje medijskih sprememb, medijsko-biografski intervjuji, avstrijska študija

1 Introduction[1]

The impact of digitalisation on societies is a broad field of current social science research. Much of this research has in the past focused on children and youth (Drotner and Livingstone 2008; Lemish 2022; Paus-Hasebrink et al. 2019), while older people have long been underrepresented (Friemel 2016: 315; Obermeier 2020: 458). However, their media use has recently been studied more intensively (Barczik 2020; Carenzio et al. 2021; Loos and Ivan 2022; Obermeier 2020; Ylänne 2022), not least because the spread and societal implementation of digital media and mobile devices also noticeably impact older adults. In Austria, internet use is strongly correlated with age. While in 2023, there are few to no people without prior internet use among the working-age population, in the group of 65- to 74-year-olds 79% use the internet[2], compared with only 54% of 75- to 84-year-olds (see Statistics Austria 2024a). The internet usage among the older population has steadily increased in recent years (Statistics Austria 2024b). Since about 20% of the Austrian population is over 65 years old (Statistics Austria 2024c), a significant increase in internet usage among the older population can be noted.

This contribution focuses on taking older people's media practices seriously and paying more attention to this previously under-researched group. From a media and communication studies perspective, it asks how older people perceive the media change, the changed conditions of their personal media use and how they deal with the resulting challenges. The empirical basis of the research is 21 media biographical interviews with Austrian individuals 60+. Using semi-structured

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1. This paper is an extended version of the German paper Roth-Ebner and Oggolder 2023.
2. The survey asked whether they had used the internet in the three months prior to the survey.

guided interviews, the media use of the individuals was explored against the background of their respective biographical contexts.

2 Older individuals in a mediatised world

Media profoundly impact our daily lives to an unprecedented extent, determine how organisational processes work, and ultimately influence all social areas. At the same time, social life shapes the way media are developed, created and adopted. Crucially, these processes are influenced by diverse economic, political, cultural, social, and individual contexts. This reciprocal, long-term and overarching process is scientifically described as "mediatisation" (Couldry and Hepp 2017; Hepp and Krotz 2014; Hjarvard 2013). Similarly to other meta-processes such as globalisation and individualisation, it spans all fields of action and social levels and concretises itself in the public sphere and in politics, as well as in social institutions and organisations, social relationships, gender relations, everyday life, employment, consumption and lifestyle. The extent of the social significance of digital communication can be seen not only in the enormous increase in the number of internet users in recent years (Statistics Austria 2024b) but also in the growing diversity of the respective usage options that influence people's lives. As a result, this ultimately leads to the inevitability of using these technologies to accomplish everyday routines and participate in social life. However, not everyone can meet these requirements, especially older people who often face difficulties using digital technologies like keeping up with the constantly evolving technological innovations, managing information overload or understanding how to operate touchscreens.

Along with the increasing relevance of digital media the field of media and communication research has expanded. Initially, technical and media-economic aspects, particularly questions of new distribution channels for classical media were at the centre of interest regarding digitalisation (Oggolder 2015: 183). In the following, changes and erosions in the traditional media landscape were investigated under the term convergence (Bruhn Jensen 2022; Jenkins 2006). With the buzzword Web 2.0 (O'Reilly 2005), the usage of the so-called Social Web, later referred to more generally as social media (van Dijck 2013; Fuchs 2021; Meikle 2016), finally became the dominant research area. In addition, the research shifted towards a greater interest in what users do with the new technologies and how they integrate them into their daily lives (Berker et al. 2006; Hartmann 2013; 2023; Röser and Dominiak 2023). The research on media repertoires, understood as the entirety of media people regularly use, has contributed to the debate, highlighting the complex and networked media use in

a rapidly changing media landscape in greater depth (Hasebrink and Domeyer 2012). This includes the question of and call for resilience or digital resilience, which is the ability to deal with the media change and its threats, and to master the associated challenges (Steinmaurer 2019: 31). Given the increasing number of older people using the internet, exploring how they handle digital technologies is more than relevant. Hence, recent research has increasingly taken this fact into account, be it in cross-generational research on mediatisation or in detailed questions about daily media practises of older people. Numerous studies deal, for example, with older people using digital technologies, especially smartphones (Busch et al. 2021; Caliandro et al. 2021; Rosales and Fernández-Ardèvol 2019). Questions about the digital divide concerning older people have arisen in relation to the necessity of using digital media (Friemel 2016; Hargittai 2002). On the other hand, there are also studies that emphasise positive effects of digital technology for older people, for example focusing on mental well-being and health-promoting initiatives (Forsman et al. 2018; Hill et al. 2015).

Stressing the necessity of a generational approach in researching mediatisation, Bolin (2020: 74) claims that mediatisation is both "a *social* and a *historical* process" (emphasis in original). Hence, media-biographical questions gain relevance for our research. It is equally important to take older people's usage behaviour seriously and not to ridicule it in contrast to the seemingly virtuoso use of digital technology by so-called digital natives who grew up with digital media (Dastane and Haba 2023; Palfrey and Grasser 2008; Prensky 2001). A media biographical approach considers that older people also used media at a young age, namely precisely those that were available to them then and sometimes new ones. The focus is on how older people perceive the current media change and how they remember and experienced earlier phases of media innovation (television, CDs, VCRs, private television, newspapers, mobile phones, etc.) in contrast to it. The concept of media biographical research, which is prominent in the (German-speaking) fields of media and communication studies and media pedagogy provides an appropriate framework for investigating these kinds of questions (Aufenanger 2006; Ganguin 2008; Hoffmann 2011).

3 Media biographical research

Traditional media usage research usually focuses on the quantitative aspects of media usage. It measures how much time specific individuals or groups dedicate to a particular medium. Vollbrecht (2015: 8) notes that based on this research, we know for example how much time children or older people spend on average per day in front of the TV or computer, and we can even break it down by socio-

economic categories or gender. However, the author goes on to criticise that the subjective meanings of media use are not taken into account. This marks the starting point for scientific biographical research (Klaus and Röttger 1996; Sander and Lange 2017; Vollbrecht 2015), which considers people's everyday experiences and tries to approach their lifestyles more closely.

If we can assume a mutual penetration of everyday life and media, it is challenging to separate media reception from the meaningful structures of everyday life (Mikos 2017: 151). Such a separation would reduce people to mere recipients. However, as Mikos points out, people are not audiences by nature but by their everyday cultural practices (ibid.). This aspect is essential for the age group examined here since this media generation represents a heterogeneous group. However, Taipale et al. found "more support for aged heterogeneity in the use of *digital media*, while the use of traditional media platforms seems to become rather more homogenous with respondent age". Therefore, they argue for using "the concept of aged heterogeneity [...] with caution in relation to older internet users" (Taipale et al. 2021: 9).

Nonetheless, media use is the result of a long-term socialisation process that also leaves its biographical imprint (Sander and Vollbrecht 1989: 168). Hepp et al. (2017: 110) emphasise "that the concept of media generation refers to a type of 'social location' that is constituted via characteristic media-related experiences and involvements". Thus, media generations do not simply summarise birth cohort generations, but "belonging to a media generation must always result from an individual's personal media biography" (ibid.). Based on people's everyday experiences, media biographical research asks about the significance of media in life and their role in shaping everyday life (Sander and Vollbrecht 1989: 162). In contrast to quantitative research designs, it does better justice to the heterogeneity of media use in old age, as it is based on the life worlds of individual subjects (Vollbrecht 2015: 8), allowing them to speak for themselves. According to Vollbrecht (2015: 8, 11), despite the subjective approach, statements about collective media experiences are also possible: On the one hand, by comparing the narratives with one another, and on the other hand, because the statements made by the research subjects reveal collective patterns of which they are a part (Beck et al. 2017: 78).

The respondents' narratives do not claim to be factual, as "no one lies more smoothly and more convincingly than memory" (Vollbrecht 2015: 10–11, translated from German). This is particularly true of memories of media use practices, which are essentially routine and therefore largely below the conscious perception threshold (Sander and Vollbrecht 1989: 173; Vollbrecht 2015: 14, 16) – and it is even more true for memories that date far back.

Special media-related events representing a break in everyday life generate more attention and are thus more easily remembered. Therefore, they gain biographical significance (Hoffmann 2011: 273; Sander and Vollbrecht 1989: 170), such as the moon landing followed on TV, the introduction of the computer in the workplace, or the first smartphone. Experiences and stories from life can be reconstructed and made accessible by telling experiences and stories from life, including less eventful memories. Despite the unreliable realism of memory, biographies still express life stories and identity because current evaluations, impressions and memories stem from biographical experiences and meanings assigned over time. Beck et al. (2017: 81) cite the Thomas theorem in this context, which states that a situation people define as real also has real consequences.

4 Study on media biographies of older people

The study on the media biographies of older people was initiated in project seminars with media and communication students at the University of Klagenfurt as part of a teaching research project. This type of course follows the principle of research-led teaching by interweaving theoretical and research-practical approaches. Thus, the research questions, the interview guide and the sample selection were developed jointly with the students based on appropriate method inputs. The project leaders (authors of this article) tested the interview guide with a person from the target group in a trial interview, then revised it and made it available to the students. After receiving interview training, each seminar participant conducted a media biographical interview with someone from their extended circle of acquaintances, recorded it and transcribed it. The interviews were conducted from May 2019 to January 2021, mainly at the interviewees' homes. Due to contact restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, two interviews took place as video calls.[3] The project leaders then analysed the interviews.

Since the project aimed to explore the media biographies of older people, the research question was therefore:

What is the significance of media in the lives of older people in the context of their biography?

Accordingly, we formulated subordinate questions:

1. Which media were important in which life phase and how were these media appropriated?

2. How were/are media used in different life stages to structure daily life?

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3. Of course, the students were free to make the data they collected available for the research project. Additionally, the project adhered to general ethical research standards, such as the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity guidelines.

3. How were technological media developments perceived throughout life?
4. To what extent was/is media education relevant in one's own youth and for subsequent generations?

4.1 The sample

Owing to the circumstance of a teaching research project, the respondents were acquired using convenience sampling. The sample consists of 21 older adults between 60 and 93. The relatively wide age group corresponds to the open access to media biographical research since contextual conditions (such as age or employment) play an important role in the interpretation of the data. With 13 women and eight men, the gender ratio is not balanced but sufficient for contextualisation (see table 1).

Table 1: Interviewees.

ID	Sex	Age	Profession
1	m	63	Clerk for major customers in an electrical supply company
2	m	65	Machinist/postal worker
3	m	72	Bank employee in a senior position
5	f	60	Social educator
6	f	63	Elementary school teacher/principal
7	f	64	Apprenticeship as a hairdresser/assembly line worker
8	f	75	Waitress
9	f	76	Employee with secondary education
10	f	76	Secretary (part-time)
11	f	84	Secretary
12	f	86	Housewife
14	m	64	Construction worker
15	m	66	Business and tax consultant
16	m	77	Mason/material inspector
17	m	79	Commercial employee/municipal secretary
18	f	61	Psychotherapist and teacher
19	f	64	Office employee
20	f	73	Waitress
21	f	86	Commercial apprenticeship/housewife
22	f	93	Teacher
23[4]	m	60	Customs officer/prevention officer in the field of media

4. Two interviews were excluded since we did not have the permission to share the data. This is why the numbers 4 and 13 are missing.

4.2 The interview technique: Media biographical interviews

For the current research project, the well-established guided interview method in biographical research (Biermann and Kommer 2004: 20) was chosen as the data collection method. Unlike the more open narrative interview variant, the guideline gave the students an important orientation aid and facilitated the subsequent analysis. The interview guideline consisted of open, partly episodic questions that encouraged storytelling and were meant to capture specific memories or stories. At the end of the conversations, short questions were asked aimed at gathering demographic data. The guideline was divided into the following thematic blocks:

- Media use in childhood and youth
- Media use in adulthood and work
- Media use currently/during retirement
- Media (routines) in everyday life
- Media events and media development
- Media literacies
- Media education
- Short questions

The separation into life stages could not be maintained in the interviews due to the non-linear nature of human storytelling. Nevertheless, the categories helped in structuring the conversations. During the interviews, a visual representation of various media in the form of a media collage served to explain the project's understanding of media and provided a memory aid during the conversation. Immediately after the interviews, students filled out a questionnaire regarding the interview process (postscriptum) detailing problems, particular occurrences and initial impulses for analysis. Data analysis was performed using ATLAS.ti software, which facilitates navigation in the data and provides a better overview of the analysis. The analysis was carried out using deductive-inductive coding, with coding being an integral part of the interpretative process. A coding guide was created based on the interview guide (deductive). This was applied to the data material in a line-by-line coding process. Additional codes were created inductively, i.e., from the data material. The codes were then condensed into categories and distinctive key passages were defined. In addition, a short case overview was created for each interview. Relevant categories formed coding networks that showed relationships between codes and provided a better overview of the data. The approach is inspired by data analysis following Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1997) and includes the steps of open and axial coding. The categories were condensed in the process of writing to provide

responses to the research questions and were substantiated with concise examples from the data material. Additionally, the coding networks developed during the analysis and notes from the post-scripts were also taken into consideration.

5 Narratives of ageing and media use

Life stories are also media stories (Baacke et al. 1990). Media accompany our daily lives, structure our daily routines and shape our relationships and identities. As the results of the interview study show, the use of media is linked to biographical circumstances and often changes with the beginning of a new phase of life. New media are added, the significance of media already established in the media repertoire changes, or they are used differently. This was particularly evident in the interviews, using music as an example. For many interviewees, their interest in music during their youth was closely tied to new technological developments. The cassette recorder, which became popular in the 1970s and was used to record favourite radio music, is mentioned by many interviewees in this context. Also moving into one's own apartment often represents a turning point in media use, as many study participants associate this with acquiring new media equipment. A 76-year-old pensioner recounts:

And then, when I got married, of course, we had an apartment with, with, well, a standard apartment where there was a bathroom and later on, there was also a television set and a telephone. But I only got to experience all of that after I was already married. Yes, one can't even imagine that kind of thing today. (IV 10, f, 76)[5]

The family's economic status is another example of how media usage and biographical context are intertwined. This is closely linked to the presence of and access to media. The older interviewees, in particular, described their circumstances in childhood and youth as very modest. An interviewee born in 1943 states that she had no access to media as a child; her family didn't even have electricity in their house until the mid-1950s. For a 79-year-old pensioner, radio, books and the newspaper were a refuge in his meager childhood: "For me, it was because we didn't have much else. We hardly got any toys, and I remember finding reading quite easy, so I enjoyed doing it." (IV 17, m, 79) The "having nothing else" aspect comes up repeatedly among the older respondents, emphasizing their modest living conditions compared to today. The following quote from a 72-year-old pensioner illustrates this clearly:

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5. Quotations from the interviews were translated from German to English for the purpose of this paper.

When I was a child, none of that existed. No cell phones, no internet, no regular television. A camera was a coveted object and developing film was expensive. Newspapers and radios were standard, and occasionally, we would buy a magazine, which we then practically "dissected" among five or six of us. Nowadays, having a cell phone at elementary school age is already normal, toddlers grow up with television. (IV 03, m, 72)

Occupation also shapes media usage. For example, media has a different meaning for a 63-year-old former elementary school principal and teacher, who experienced distance learning during the COVID-19 lockdowns, than for a 64-year-old former construction worker who never dealt with media in his job. Unlike the teacher, who is up-to-date with media technology, the retired construction worker does not use the internet and only has a basic mobile phone without smart functions. The data suggests that the type of employment is a significant factor when it comes to dealing with digital media. Among the respondents with good usage skills, six out of seven had computer work experience. Conversely, the computer did not play a role in the work environment for the four people with the lowest media literacy. In the intermediate competency range, occupational activities vary widely.

5.1 Media usage patterns of older adults

For most people in our study, life with media begins with radio, books and newspapers in childhood, with books often not being owned but rather borrowed from school. In the transition to adolescence, cassette players, record players and televisions became relevant, with the latter often acquired only in adulthood. Television, in its early days in the 1950s and 1960s, was a fascinating and exclusively communal viewing experience. Many interviewees reported meeting up with neighbours for joint TV viewing as they had no device in their homes. Alternatively, if a device existed, the neighbours would come over for a visit. A 60-year-old retiree emphasised the difference to today's TV use in the interview:

[...] the television was primarily the medium that brought us together harmoniously back then. Nowadays, it's different because almost everyone has their own TV in their room and watches whatever they feel like. (IV 05, f, 60)

The lament for the loss of communal media usage is furthermore a common theme in many conversations, especially regarding the use of digital or social media, and particularly concerning young people.

In adulthood, the media repertoires of our respondents continued to include books, radio, newspapers, magazines and sometimes vinyl records. For many,

these were expanded further to include computers and the internet, although initially they were mostly used for work. In exceptional cases, the computer was not acquired until the person reached retirement age. Most of the study participants only had a landline telephone at home or used it at their workplace in adulthood. Later, the mobile phone was added. However, most of the interviewees began to use a mobile phone only in retirement. Two-thirds of the respondents also have a smartphone. The only older adult in our sample who does not have a mobile phone explains this with her visual impairment. Tablets and laptops also complement the current media repertoires of some interviewees. Regarding mobile applications, the instant messaging app WhatsApp is in the first place. More than half of the respondents use this medium. The instant messenger is mainly used to maintain contact with acquaintances, friends and family. The function of sending and receiving pictures has great importance. A 79-year-old pensioner who intensified his contacts through his smartphone explains why:

WhatsApp is the medium that's really great for me because I can send something, take a photo. For me, at my age, it's the greatest thing there is. I have to say, I do maintain contacts where you really need that medium. (IV 17, m, 79)

For half of those interviewed, the smartphone has become an indispensable part of daily life. A 61-year-old interviewee describes it as a companion throughout the day, "like a good friend" (IV 18, w, 61). The motives for enthusiasm for the smartphone vary depending on the individual's life situation: it is about getting help quickly, finding information rapidly, maintaining low-threshold contacts, or appreciating the multi-functionality.

When asked about the most important media in their daily lives, some people name radio and television, highlighting the ongoing significance of traditional media. In the life course of older people, TV, newspapers and radio prove to be constants. Even though nearly everyone has adopted digital media, traditional media remain a part of their individual media repertoire in different forms and intensities. A minority of those interviewed can be considered media-savvy, as they are technologically up-to-date and use technology such as smartwatches or voice assistants (Alexa). Online conferences, computer or mobile games and social media platforms also play a role for a small portion of the sample.

In the conversations, the structuring function of media is revealed. The typical daily routine of a 63-year-old pensioner illustrates this exemplarily:

So, I wake up between six and seven in the morning, bring the newspapers indoors and make myself a coffee. After breakfast, I grab my phone to check the headlines. Then I get dressed and take care of some household chores.

Occasionally, I take a few breaks and either continue reading the newspaper or check the teletext. In the evening, "Kärnten heute" [regional TV news] and "ZIB" [national TV news] are part of the "mandatory programme." The rest of the evening, we entertain ourselves with various shows. (IV 01, m, 63)

Fixpoints for many respondents are the morning newspaper in a print version and the evening news broadcasts on television. In between, radio and mobile phones play the most prominent role. The emphasis on newspapers and news aligns with the result that information is by far the most significant motive for media usage. In second place is the motive of connectedness and communication.

5.2 Older adults' perception of media development

The older adults in our study perceive media transformation as rapid and drastic. They describe their first television experiences as particularly fascinating. In their education or professional life, the computer meant a significant change for some of those interviewed, as illustrated by the statement of a 61-year-old pensioner who got to know the PC at the end of her studies:

Yes, that was very unusual, and I remember at the beginning, my husband also helped me somehow. Then you always had to quickly save so that all your work wouldn't get lost. But there was a bit of magic behind it, that you could just write things and it all gets saved. And then you could print it. That was really something special. (IV 18, f, 61)

An 84-year-old retired secretary tells how the computer was introduced at her workplace. This statement also reflects the turning point in everyday (working) life:

I remember the PC. Oh my, it was such a huge thing! And so heavy, I tell you. At first, people didn't want to accept it and said that this thing wouldn't last long and they didn't believe it would catch on. (IV 11, w, 84)

The fact that the respondents are consciously aware of media development is evident in the many comparisons made between "back then" and today's media usage, both in terms of the availability of media and specific ways they use them. The following quote from a 76-year-old is an example of many interview statements:

There wasn't much then. I read children's books, I learned. I was a good student because I didn't have any distractions, and I did my homework by the light of a kerosene lamp. Because there was no electricity, you can't imagine that. And yet, we still turned out alright. Even without this flood of media. It was just a different time. (IV 09, f, 76)

By stating that the interviewer could not imagine this, the respondent is highlighting the significant difference she perceives between the living conditions

of her generation and the younger generation, as well as between "back then" and "today." A woman of the same age addresses the "pull" that is created by new media technologies:

> I remember back in the '90s, when you walked through the city, you'd see people with cell phones. I recall saying, "Well, everyone's running around with a cell phone, I don't need something like that, I really don't need it." And then later, of course, we got caught up in that whirlwind, and now, nothing works without a cell. (IV 10, f, 76)

Based on the results, attitudes toward media change can be described as ambivalent since they are partly positive, partly critical, or negative. In the overall view of the results, however, the problems of media change are addressed more frequently than the opportunities. Above all, the interviewees perceive the addictive potential of digital media critically. Occasionally they mention other disadvantages, such as information overload, data security concerns, the loss of "real" encounters, constant availability and more. The heterogeneity of the statements points to the complexity of the phenomenon. Digital media are mentioned positively, especially concerning their ease of use and low-barrier information access. They are also praised for fostering connections with others, providing simple communication channels and saving time. Overall, a critical attitude towards media development predominates; the interviewees sometimes feel overwhelmed by the technical progress or are uncertain about specific applications. However, some interviewees take a more relaxed or pragmatic approach. They see it as necessary, even as an older person, to deal with new developments in order to be able to participate in social life. An 84-year-old pensioner sums it up when the interviewer asks her about her iPad:

> Oh, it had to happen. Resisting wouldn't have helped! At first, I resisted this internet so much. Until my kids gave us the first laptop four years ago. Oh, what a change that was! I was so overwhelmed at the beginning. I discovered a completely new world. I used to call my grandchildren up to five times a day because I had questions and felt so uncertain. But now, I feel more than comfortable with it. And, you know, I couldn't even imagine life without the internet anymore. (IV 11, f, 84)

5.3 Attitudes of older people towards media literacy

As far as assessing one's skills in dealing with digital media, the results are again very heterogeneous. Most respondents claim to be doing well or partly well. According to their assessment, a minority of the study participants have no skills in dealing with digital media. Some who use the internet also have

uncertainties and fears, especially concerning data misuse and internet fraud. The following answer from a 65-year-old retiree, when asked about his opinion on technological innovations, illustrates the scepticism regarding the internet:

I think we're being overly monitored with all this technology. Nowadays, you have to agree to everything. They say it's anonymous, but I don't quite believe that. Regardless of whether you give out your email address or your phone number, you have to agree everywhere just to use discounts. Then, after a while, you're bombarded with advertisements, and you wonder where these people got your data from. (IV 02, m, 65)

However, older adults show signs of resilience in the discussions by consciously distancing themselves from some media or applications and only using what seems useful and easy to integrate into their current life situation. The following statement by a 66-year-old interviewee puts it in a nutshell:

[...] I, for example, am not on Amazon, I'm not on Facebook, I'm not on Twitter [now X]. I don't need that; I don't want that. That's also my privacy; nobody needs to know where I am right now, whether I'm swimming or not. That's my life, my privacy, and I don't want to give that away, I don't need it. But of course, I do occasionally order from a traditional bookstore even online. (IV 15, m, 66)

As evident from the quote, he consciously distances himself from online offers that he does not trust while still acknowledging the possibilities of digital media within the framework of his sense of security. Another example is a 63-year-old recently retired respondent who deliberately limits her availability: "Also, I make sure that sometimes I'm not reachable at all because I think one shouldn't become so dependent on media." (IV 06, f, 63)

As the quote from the 84-year-old mentioned in section 5.2 shows, children and grandchildren play a significant role in older adults' use of digital media. On the one hand, by enabling access to digital media, for example, by giving them a device as a gift, and on the other hand, by helping them with applications and solving problems. The latter aspect occurs in almost all interviews. This result points to a solid generation-connecting function of digital media. This is further supported by the aforementioned motive of using digital applications (such as instant messaging, email, or online conferences) to maintain contact with family members, especially when they live far away from the interviewee's place of residence. For some, this also applies to contacts with acquaintances and friends. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a 60-year-old respondent used online conferencing to 'meet' with friends even in times of limited contact.

In addition to support from the younger generation, learning by doing and, in some cases, further training at the previous workplace also play a role in acquiring skills for digital media use.

The comparisons between the "old" and the "new" times, often found in the interviews, also contain statements on the use of media by today's younger generation. Many express criticism, especially regarding the increased use of digital media, as evidenced by the following statement from a 64-year-old retiree, who himself has a very conventional media usage: "I do believe it should be regulated more. Children should spend more time looking at their textbooks than their consoles or tablets. I'd like to tell the teenagers: 'Stop for a moment!'" (IV 14, m, 64)

Most people interviewed see media education as an important challenge today. On the one hand, they see the parents as responsible for this, and on the other hand, the school. Some also mention the role model function of parents.

According to the tenor of the interviewees, no media education was necessary during their childhood because then, media played a much smaller role in everyday life than today. Regarding the upbringing of their children, the interviewees report on preventive pedagogical approaches, which were primarily related to television consumption and the amount thereof. Younger interviewees also mention computer gaming regulations.

The interview statements repeatedly refer to the digital-native thesis (indirectly) regarding media skills. The following quote from a 66-year-old business and tax consultant who was asked about the introduction of computers in the workplace illustrates this:

> Although for us, who didn't learn it, dealing with it was very cumbersome. Even though we were the managers, it took us much, much longer to adapt than the younger generation who had already learned it. But I suppose today, the difference is even greater between them and those who essentially grow up as digital nomads. (IV 15, m, 66)

However, there are also pieces of evidence in the data that contradict the digital native thesis, such as the statement of the 60-year-old media-savvy police officer, who is still employed:

"Sometimes, I even feel honoured when certain colleagues, whom I think are already knowledgeable, come to me and ask, 'Do you know how this works, or how I do this on the computer?'" (IV 23, m, 60) Overall, there is more evidence that the younger generation is ahead of older people regarding media use, at least according to the assessment of the interviewees.

6 Discussion

The results of the study support the assumption that in addition to smartphones, traditional media such as television, newspapers and radio still dominate the media repertoires of older people. Most are open to new technological developments, yet they also show resilience by consciously distancing themselves from specific applications and technologies. This corresponds to the theoretical approach of demediatisation (Kopecka-Piech 2023), which describes resistance to the media change. In doing so, the concept does not question the meta-process of mediatisation but points to the ambivalences, fragility and discontinuities it contains.

The study's results also show that the significance and use of media change with the transition to a new stage of life, as Peil and Röser (2023: 48–49) have also found in their case study of household media usage.

Most interviewees first encountered digital technology in their professional activities, and this happened less out of personal interest and intrinsic motivation, but more as a professional duty and obligation. In this context, Quan-Haase et al. (2016: 693), citing numerous other studies, found that seniors – like other population groups – are more likely to adopt technologies if presented with lifestyle benefits. Thus, while professionals may engage with technology due to work-related pressures, seniors are more likely to embrace it when they perceive clear personal gains. Coming back to our interview partners, digital media, particularly in the form of smartphones, are mainly acquired personally in old age. The support provided by young family members plays an important role in this process. Schreurs et al's findings further complement this by emphasizing that such intergenerational assistance is critical not only for acquiring technology but also for gaining experience and improving digital skills (Schreurs et al. 2017: 369). Both studies underline the pivotal role of younger family members as primary sources of guidance. In our media biographical study, one central motivation for engaging with digital media is the expanded ability to stay in touch with family and friends, which corresponds to the results of existing studies (Barczik 2020: 211; Obermeier 2020: 387–389) and is particularly noted in connection with the contact restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic (Haase et al. 2021).

Another prevalent media use motivation for our interview partners is the need for information (also Barczik 2020: 212; Obermeier 2020: 384–387). At the same time, the flood of information and excessive media consumption (especially among young people) are central aspects of concern for the interviewees regarding current media developments. Accordingly, the study participants generally attach great importance to media education for children and young people with the aim of controlling their media use. Looking back, they judge the

need for media control as low or non-existent due to the limited media availability in their childhood and youth. Hence, generational differences are noticeable in the research results. To provide evidence for a "second-level digital divide," a division based on usage capabilities (Hargittai 2002), further intergenerational comparative studies would be necessary.

Overall, the study emphasises that media usage largely depends on biographical conditions such as age and socio-economic and occupational situation. These results align with approaches in media biographical research by highlighting the importance of subjective perspectives (Vollbrecht 2015), and with mediatisation theory by considering the complex contexts of media usage (Hepp and Krotz 2014).

The study does, however, have some limitations. First, the frequent mention of books and reading by the interviewees, in general, may also be considered in light of the social desirability bias (Aufenanger 2006: 521). Second, and most apparent, is that the study is based on a teaching research project with convenience sampling. On the one hand, this has an impact on the quality of interviewing since students are less experienced than scholars in conducting interviews, even though they have received training. On the other hand, the selection of interview partners is limited to a relatively small (geographical) area, which may restrict the applicability of the results to other regions or broader contexts. Nevertheless, the study's results correspond overwhelmingly with those of earlier research in this field (see Coelho and Duarte 2016; Obermeier 2020; Schreurs et al. 2017; Taipale et al. 2021). Our investigation provides a further brick to the theory of mediatisation, points to ambivalences and individual context factors and underscores the relevance of media biographical research with a focus on the individuals, their biographies and their resources. Beyond the referred research results, the project yielded precious added value. The interview transcripts revealed an intergenerational dialogue between the university students and the interviewees – a dialogue from which both sides can benefit. This remarkable side effect of the research could be given greater consideration in future studies or in media education interventions.

7 Conclusion

The media biographies of older people serve as exemplary cases of the mediatisation of daily life and the changing role of media in the lifespan, which is heavily dependent on individual life conditions. Media play important roles in structuring individuals' everyday lives, serving both as companions throughout the day and as a means of staying connected to loved ones, as well as being crucial for acquiring information and keeping up to date. While some media

remained relevant throughout the lifespan (e.g. radio, books), others were added due to certain circumstances (professional requirement, pressure from family). Research results show that media change and digitalisation are perceived as drastic and have ambivalent effects on older people. On the one hand, they feel overwhelmed by the complexity of applications; on the other hand, they also benefit from their advantages. Overall, a critical attitude towards media development predominates, but the research data indicate various ways to address the challenges of digitalisation, ranging from learning from younger generations to avoiding specific functions or technologies. While media education did not play a significant role in their respective childhoods and had a limited role for them as parents, individuals aged 60 and older view media education as an important issue for today's younger generation, particularly in a controlling sense.

All in all, the heterogeneity of data on the media biographies of older people underscores the importance of subjective interpretive approaches in research, as well as the need for more intergenerational studies. The study highlights the importance for older people to keep up with new media developments in order to participate in an increasingly digitally influenced society. Last but not least, it demonstrates the opportunity to bring different generations together in dialogue about their media use – whether in a research setting or in other contexts.

Acknowledgement

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