EMERALD POINTS

MEDIA USE IN DIGITAL EVERYDAY LIFE

BRITA YTRE-ARNE

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"Now that digital media connect or disconnect our everyday lives within and across contexts, then the task of their users is to navigate these new opportunities, smartphone in hand, so as to enjoy new choices, face the at-time intense tensions and dilemmas that result, and orientate to a changing world as resourcefully as possible. In this carefully-researched book, Brita Ytre-Arne puts people at the heart of her insightful and empathetic dissection of modern life."

—Professor Sonia Livingstone, Department of Media and Communications, London School of Economics and Political Science

"In *Media Use in Digital Everyday Life*, Brita Ytre-Arne provides an insightful account of how we have woven the smartphone into every fabric of our everyday lives, and how our lives have been variously reconstituted in this process. A most helpful read for scholars and students alike."

—Professor Pablo J. Boczkowski, Department of Communication Studies, Northwestern University

"Digital media and their infrastructures have comprehensively changed everyday life for all of us. Brita Ytre-Arne's book provides an excellent basis for understanding these transformations, not only by clarifying the concept of everyday life in relation to media, but above all through the sophisticated analysis of the changing use of media and the associated dynamics and disruptions in the formation of everyday life."

—Professor Andreas Hepp, ZeMKI, University of Bremen

"Ytre-Arne carefully unwraps how smartphones have impacted the way we work, play, and interact with the world around us. By lifting the veil over the rituals, routines and often ambivalent and messy experiences of people, Ytre-Arne invites us to critically reflect upon the taken-for-grantedness of mobile communication in everyday life. As such, *Media Use in Digital Everyday Life* is a must-read for those wanting to understand digital culture in its full complexity."

—Associate Professor Mariek Vanden Abeele, MICT research group, Ghent University

MEDIA USE IN DIGITAL EVERYDAY LIFE

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More specifically, the book is situated at the intersection between three research projects: *Media, Culture and Public Connection* led by Hallvard Moe was a broad study of cross-media use and public connection in Norway; *Intrusive media, ambivalent users, and digital detox (Digitox)* led by Trine Syvertsen is an ongoing project on digital disconnection, and my project *Media Use in Crisis Situations* expands studies of pandemic news use into a broader interdisciplinary project. I would like to thank all the excellent scholars and nice people involved in these projects, and the many informants who have shared their experiences with media in everyday life.

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INTRODUCTION: MEDIA USE AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN DIGITAL SOCIETIES

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the research questions, approaches, and arguments of the book, asking how our everyday lives with media have changed after the smartphone. I introduce the topic of media use in everyday life as an empirical, methodological, and theoretical research interest, and argue for its continued centrality to our digital society today, accentuated by datafication. I discuss how the analytical concepts of media repertories and public connection can inform research into media use in everyday life, and what it means that our societies and user practices are becoming more digital. The main argument of the book is that digital media transform our navigation across the domains of everyday life by blurring boundaries, intensifying dilemmas, and affecting our sense of connection to communities and people around us. The chapter concludes by presenting the structure of the rest of the book, where these arguments will be substantiated in analysis of media use an ordinary day, media use in life phase transitions, and media use when ordinary life is disrupted.

Can you remember your first smartphone, and did it change your life? I bought my first smartphone in the early summer of 2011, right before the birth of my first child. I can safely say that life was never the same again. Although the new phone was hardly the most significant change that happened, it became part of how I reconfigured everyday life.

My coincidental timing of these events might be a personal particularity, but the early 2010s, only a little more than a decade ago, was a period in which smartphones became part of everyday life for lots of people. This happened in Norway where I live, and in other countries in the Global North, soon followed by broader proliferation worldwide (Avle et al., 2020). In 2021, it was estimated that more than 90 per cent of people had smartphone access in a growing number of countries around the globe (Deloitte, 2021). 'Smartphones changed everything', wrote the *Wall Street Journal* in 2020: 'smartphones upended every element of society during the last decade, from dating to dinner parties, travel to politics. This is just the beginning' (Kitchen, 9.9.2020). But while all of this was happening, people lived their lives, using smartphones along with other media old and new, interwoven with what was going on in their lives, and in the world around them.

This book explores the role of media in our everyday lives in digital societies, after the proliferation of smartphones and in conditions of ubiquitous connectivity. I analyze everyday media use across platforms, content types and modes of communication, taking the perspective of how we live our lives with media – how we manage plans and practicalities, keep in touch with friends and family, seek information and entertainment, work and learn, take part in shared experiences, and connect to our social lifeworlds. We might do all of this in the space of one single day, and we might experience such a day as 'ordinary' – just normal everyday life. But media technologies are also part of our less ordinary days, important to how we manage life-changing transitions and special events in our personal lives, and to how we relate to local communities, political processes or global events. We use media to connect to each other, and to society – throughout an ordinary day, across the life course, and in times of disruption.

The smartphone is emblematic of how our everyday lives with media are changing in a digital and hyper-connected society, and as such it is essential to the topic of this book. A central question I discuss is what it means that most of us now have a smartphone to reach for, from where we are and what we are doing, to manage multiple aspects of our daily lives: A mobile, flexible device we rely on to communicate, find information, entertain and assist us, often used in combination with other media, but also a device that enables tracking and surveillance of our movements and engagements, informing feedback loops based on our personal data. How has digital media use in everyday life changed after the smartphone?

To answer these questions, I draw on classic scholarship on media and communication technologies in everyday life (Baym, 2015; Silverstone, 1994), and on recent analysis of digital ambivalence and disconnection (Syvertsen, 2020). With a user perspective, I situate smartphones and other kinds of digital platforms as part of broader *media repertoires* (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017), with an interest in the totality and internal relationships of any kind of media that people use and find meaningful in their everyday lives. I further understand everyday media use as central to *public connection* (Couldry et al., 2010), to how we orient ourselves to a world beyond our private concerns.

The book provides an updated perspective on media in everyday life after digital media has become increasingly embedded and ingrained in society. A purpose for the book is to fill a gap between classic (but old) discussions on everyday media use, and recent (but sometimes narrowly focused) studies of new technologies. Our understandings of everyday media use are still shaped by theories developed before the internet, before digital and social and mobile media. This book highlights rather than discards these understandings, but moves forward in tackling dilemmas of technological transformations, and by considering recent crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. I untangle how media becomes meaningful to us in the everyday, connecting us to each other and to communities and publics. The book offers empirical, methodological and theoretical insight on media use in digital everyday life.

WHY EVERYDAY LIFE?

'Everyday life' is one of those concepts that everyone understands, but which is still difficult to define. The term is not internal jargon belonging to a particular research field, but instead recognizable across a range of contexts – we might even describe it as an 'everyday' term. One of the early ideas behind this book was to answer the questions: 'But what do you mean by everyday life?' and further 'Why do you [meaning media use researchers] go on about everyday life?'. These are good questions. Let us start with the latter: Why everyday life? More precisely, why would someone interested in media use find it important to refer to everyday life for contextualization?

In media and communication studies, interest in everyday life has a long history. The idea of everyday life has been central to approaches and research interests in cultural studies (Gray, 2002; Morley, 1992), media phenomenology (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2013; Scannell, 1995) or media ethnography (Hermes, 1995; Radway, 1984). The term has been particularly central to

theories of *domestication* (Haddon, 2016; Silverstone et al., 2021) focused on processes of gradually integrating media technologies in the home. Roger Silverstone wrote a classic volume on *Television and everyday life* (Silverstone, 1994), arguing that in order to move past debates on television as 'good' or 'bad' and actually understand what it is, we have to consider television as embedded in tensions and dynamics of everyday life. Shaun Moores (2000) applied everyday life as a framework for understanding the historical development of broadcast media, and Maria Bakardjieva (2005) analyzed the domestication of computers and internet technologies in everyday life. Elizabeth Bird (2003) wrote *The Audience in Everyday Life* to argue for the relevance of ethnographic methods to understand our media-saturated reality, while Tim Markham (2017) wrote an introductory textbook titled *Media and Everyday Life* to present topics and thinkers in media studies through their relevance to daily life.

All of the above are books on media with 'everyday life' in the title. Moreover, the term keeps popping up in journal articles on a variety of topics regarding media use: A comparative study of why people read print newspapers in the digital age refer to how different media are integrated into everyday life (Boczkowski et al., 2021), while a study of people who prefer online media at home find that digital alternatives are perceived to be better integrated into domestic everyday life (Müller, 2020). In analysis of how and why we follow news, the idea of the everyday provides a way of situating ordinary users at the centre of attention, by discussing everyday news use (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2019) or everyday public connection (Swart et al., 2017). In debates about datafication and emergent technologies, the notion of the everyday is used to highlight human and social experiences with for instance self-tracking (Lomborg & Frandsen, 2016), smart homes (Hine, 2020) or algorithmic media (Willson, 2017).

What do these different contributions have in common? They refer to everyday life to signal a position, because referencing 'everyday life' holds some empirical, methodological or theoretical implications. The term can be invoked to answer the 'so what'-question: A compelling reason for why we need to study media at all is its relevance to everyday life (Silverstone, 1999). Today we can adapt this argument to why we need to study the smartphone – it is part of everyday life. Through such statements, we frame the smartphone as a technology and research topic that is recognizable and relevant to experiences and dilemmas each of us encounter. The smartphone has transformed society, but it has done so through our everyday interactions.

Similarly: Why does it matter if people read international news or look at cat videos online, watch Netflix or Linear TV, listen to music on Spotify or

prefer vinyl records? If you are interested in media business models or media policies, and find the choices users make a bit puzzling, you might need to look into motivations and contexts in everyday life to gain a deeper understanding of what goes on. Attention to everyday contexts can both complicate and enhance insights gained from other types of tracking and measurements of media use (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2020). To understand new technologies, or connect critiques of these phenomena to people's experiences, everyday life is an essential framework: It is easier to grasp the idea of 'the Internet of Things' (Bunz & Meikle, 2018) as having to do with whether your refrigerator needs internet connection, than through concepts such as machine learning or smart sensors.

Sometimes the position signalled by referring to everyday life is explicitly normative. A key example is the debate on everyday experiences with *datafication,* or 'the quantification of human life through digital information, very often for economic value' (Mejias & Couldry, 2019). The idea of so-called 'big data' as more precise or valuable has been met with critical questions (Boyd & Crawford, 2012), and with concern for how audience engagement can be harvested and utilized for opaque purposes (Ytre-Arne & Das, 2020). In criticizing these developments, the notion of 'everyday life' is central to put the human experience of living in datafied conditions front and centre (Kennedy & Hill, 2018), or to focus on the people rather than systems (Livingstone, 2019). This interest further corresponds to feminist (D'Ignazio & Klein, 2020) and postcolonial critiques (Milan & Treré, 2019) of datafication and power.

We can also signal analytical and methodological interests by referring to everyday life: The term is used to prioritize context over generalizability, and ordinary user perspectives and experiences over media professionals and institutions. This could imply attention to small acts of engagement in social media (Picone et al., 2019), and inclusion of seemingly mundane practices of media use (Hermes, 1995; Sandvik et al., 2016). An everyday life perspective is a backdrop for cross-media research (Lomborg & Mortensen, 2017; Schrøder, 2011) rather than pre-selecting which media to study based on the researchers' preconceived notions of what matters. Qualitative researchers and ethnographers also draw on 'everyday life' as a term that points towards preferred methods: Talking to people about a day in the life (del Rio Carral, 2014), 'capturing life as it is narrated' (Kaun, 2010) with diary methods, and exploring experiences and reflections in informants' own words. Some quantitative studies of media use also use the term (Hovden & Rosenlund, 2021) and research on everyday media repertoires can combine qualitative and quantitative approaches (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017).

I am also someone who often explain and position my key research interests through the notion of everyday life. A long-running interest in everyday life has informed my preference for qualitative and user-focused methods, in the studies I draw on in this book and in other projects. I have used the term 'everyday life' in the title of publications (Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Ytre-Arne, 2012), and also explored how media use changes with biographical disruption to everyday routines (Ytre-Arne, 2019) or discussed audience agency in everyday encounters with digital and datafied media (Ytre-Arne & Das, 2020; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021a). For me, the everyday signals a perspective on why and how to study media use: it is important because it is part of daily life, it is interesting because everyday life is diverse and meaningful, and it is impossible to be done with because it changes constantly. I do not think there is any necessary contradiction between an everyday perspective versus a societal or political perspective on media use – instead, everyday life is where political dimensions of media are experienced, interpreted, and acted upon. This point runs as an undercurrent through the analyses of this book and is highlighted in the concluding chapter.

WHAT IS EVERYDAY LIFE?

We have established that media are part of everyday life, and that research on media use is interested in everyday life. That is not to say that definitions everyday life abound in the literature referenced above, or in the field at large. Even classic contributions observe that commenting on the topic of everyday life might seem simplistic (e.g. Silverstone, 1994, p. 19). There is considerable variation in how precisely or extensively the concept is explained: Some works develop distinct philosophical understandings (e.g. Bakardijeva in Sandvik et al., 2016), or ground the term in substantial discussion of different theoretical positions (e.g. Cavalcante et al., 2017). Some authors define the term and how it connects to methodological and analytical frameworks in their studies). Others explain adjacent concepts to the everyday, such as the study mentioned above of why people still read print newspapers (Boczkowski et al., 2021), which draws on theories of ritualization, sociality and cultural contexts.

Nevertheless, everyday life is theorized in disciplines from human geography (Holloway & Hubbard, 2001) to psychology (Schraube & Højholt, 2016). Some central philosophical contributions are Henri Lefebvre's *Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), which formulates a Marxist-inspired argument about the importance of this sphere of human conduct in the face of capitalism and technological change, and Michel De Certeau's *The Practice of*

Everyday Life (1984) which emphasizes the concept of potentially subversive tactics in people's navigation through daily life. Another key work is *The Structures of the Lifeworld* (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) which formulates Alfred Schutz' theory of the *lifeworld* in which everyday life is enacted, including spatial, temporal and social dimensions, and how we move through 'zones of operation' where people and places beyond our immediate surroundings are yet within 'restorable reach' to us, through the familiarity or routines in the everyday which we take for granted (1973). This understanding has been particularly important to phenomenological and sociological studies of media and technologies in everyday life.

Such philosophical works on everyday life are briefly to comprehensively referenced in studies of everyday media use, providing a background understanding that is made more or less explicit. For instance, Herman Bausinger (1984) set out to discuss the role of media in daily living, drawing on Schutz and a growing empirical as well as philosophical interest in everyday life as a research topic. He observed that media are not used in isolation from one another or from personal relationships. Making an example of the intricate details of negotiating media use in family dynamics at home, he argued that 'The media are an integral part of the way the everyday is conducted' (Bausinger, 1984, p. 349) and made several points that have later been picked up in discussions of media ensembles (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017) and of media use as mundane but yet meaningful in everyday settings (Hermes, 1995; Sandvik et al., 2016). In her study of early internet use at home, Marija Bakardjieva (Bakardjieva, 2005) provides a thorough theoretical discussion of how Scuhtz and Lefebvre's theories relate to communication technologies, developing the idea of a critical phenomenology to understand users as well as systems.

Roger Silverstone's work on everyday life also references Schutz' understanding of the lifeworld, and further invokes Anthony Giddens' sociology of the self in a discussion of whether this lifeworld is different in conditions of late modernity (Silverstone, 1993). Silverstone references debates about order and chaos in a world of complex societal issues and new communication systems, juxtaposed with an observation that television is something we have seemingly come to take for granted, as a technology and social phenomenon and as part of our everyday lives. Connecting these threads, Silverstone emphasizes the significance of routines and familiarity in in keeping the chaos of the world at bay and upholding a sense of order:

> *Routines, rituals, traditions, myths, these are the stuff of social order and everyday life. Within the familiar and taken for granted, as well as through the heightened and dramatic, our lives take shape and within those shapes, spatially and temporarily grounded*

> *and signified, we attempt to go about our business, avoiding or managing, for the most part, the traumas and the catastrophes that threaten to disturb our peace and sanity. (Silverstone, 1994, p. 18)*

In this understanding, everyday habits institute and reaffirm a sense of *ontological security*, a concept Giddens applies to describe feelings of trust and continuity in people's experience of the world and sense of self, central to how people position themselves in the world and give meaning to life (Giddens, 1991). Ontological security is also a key concept in Annette Markham's more recent theory of digital communication as echolocation, emphasizing ping-backs when we send out messages through digital media, and in return have our continued existence in the world confirmed (Markham, 2021). Her discussion underlines how feelings of being connected or disconnected through digital media can harbour existential anxieties related to the confirmation of the self.

Across these theories of everyday life, some key dimensions stand out. Everyday life has to do with the organization of time (temporal dimensions), space (spatial dimensions), and people and activities (social dimensions) through which we make meaning and relate to the word and our position in it (existential dimensions). I draw on these dimensions to further situate media use in everyday life, emphasizing how we use media for routinized navigation across social domains.

SITUATING MEDIA USE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

To understand media use – here applied as an umbrella term for all kinds of relationships and engagements with media and communication technologies – we need to situate media use as part of everyday life, in people's lifeworlds. Drawing on the ideas introduced above, of familiarity and routines, and of spatial, temporal, social and existential dimensions, we can envision many different roles and positions for media. I am particularly interested in how we use media to orient ourselves as we move through our everyday lives, as part of what I call *routinized navigation across social domains*. What does this mean, exactly?

Everyday media use is *routinized* because we do not invent it from scratch – we rely on repeated actions that we are familiar with, regarding media use as well as other aspects of everyday living. Imagine waking up in the morning and not repeating anything you have done before – instead of making the same type of coffee and checking the same apps on your smartphone. Like other habits and routines, familiar and repeated media use practices are particularly essential to the ontological security of everyday life emphasized by

Silverstone, Markham and others. Habits are also a central concept in media and communication psychology (LaRose, 2010, 2015), and central to studies seeking to grasp user patterns over time or across demographics. We build everyday habits in many forms and around many activities – including media use.

Everyday life encompasses multiple social *domains* – such as work and family life – that are meaningful to us and that we engage with frequently, and that also form important contexts for how we use media. There are rich research literatures that explore meanings of media use in different social domains, for instance focused on life phases such as adolescence or experiences such as parenthood (e.g. Boyd, 2014; Das, 2019; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Transitions between life phases, such as a student graduating or a worker retiring, are so significant because the social domains of our everyday lives change with these events. These social domains are essential to the meaning we find in life, making the conduct of everyday life an existential project. We engage with social domains in many ways – including media use and communication.

A specific interest I explore in this book is how we use media across and in-between social domains, for what I refer to as *navigation*: Everyday media use entails navigation across multiple social domains because an ordinary day can encompass an array of activities and locations, in which we enact different social roles with different people. Everyday life can be messy and disorganized, with too many things to juggle at once, or feel too fast- or slow-paced, but whether we have plans for everything or go with the flow, some form of coordination and navigation is required, both physically and metaphorically. We conduct such navigation in many ways – including media use and communication. Digital technologies have become fundamental to this navigation – practically and specifically, but also socially and existentially.

So, to summarize: We have already established that media are part of daily routines, and that such routines are essential to everyday life in. We can also discuss if and how the social domains of everyday life are mediated or mediatized, and how deep these processes run (Couldry & Hepp, 2017; Hepp, 2020). But my main interest in this book is how our *navigation* across the social domains of everyday life changes with digital media – how we use digital media to *connect* to different social domains, *orient* ourselves to what goes on there, *coordinate* activities and *communicate* across contexts. Media use is essential to the navigation of everyday life, and the role of media in this navigation holds implications for how we experience our lives as meaningful, for how we understand and situate ourselves in the world. How we conduct this navigation is changing with the digitalization and datafication of the media, particularly after the smartphone.

ANALYZING MEDIA USE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The theories of everyday life that are most central to media and communication studies originate from an era of television, and the domestic sphere is the social domain that has received the most attention. Family dynamics and the spatiality of the home are central to analyses ranging from Morely's discussion of who controls the remote control (Morley, 1992) to what happens when the people watching television also have tablets and computers (D'Heer & Courtois, 2016). However, we can no longer simply declare, as Silverstone could in his classic volume, that 'Television is a domestic medium. It is watched at home. Ignored at home. Discussed at home' (Silverstone, 1994, p. 24). Instead, streaming and mobile and social media makes a mess of the boundaries formerly established when living room locations and scheduled programming were organizing principles for watching television. Similarly, a question in earlier internet studies of whether and how people would actually want to make space for computers in their homes (Bakardjieva, 2005) is made more complicated not just by laptops and smartphones, but also by connective household devices and wearable technologies. The home is still important, but our navigation with media inside and beyond the home has changed.

A broader point is therefore that the proliferation of digital media has made it more difficult to make assumptions about how to situate media in everyday life, while media might be more important than ever to how we navigate across our daily lives. This also has implications for the analytical concepts and approaches we invoke to study everyday media use.

To analyze media in everyday life, it is possible to select a particular platform, medium, genre or media text, and look for its applications and meaning in everyday settings, similar to investigations into how the cultural role of television played out in people's everyday lives. But to account for the increased potential for variation in everyday media use, it is more relevant to start with people and how we live our lives, and then explore how media matters. Much of the scholarship already discussed in this chapter argues for the value of less media-centric approaches to media studies – media might need to be de-centred in order to understand what it means. I will particularly draw on two conceptual approaches to situate media use in everyday life through a user perspective: Media repertoires and public connection.

Media repertoires is a concept intended to capture the totality and meaningful relations between media a person uses regularly (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012; Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017). Following the essential insight that 'audiences are inherently cross-media' (Schrøder, 2011), a key value of

repertoire approaches is to focus less on singular experiences with reading *The Guardian*, watching *Game of Thrones* or using TikTok, and instead figure out how these or completely different elements are relative to each other in the context of a person's everyday media use. Consequently, media repertoire approaches explore which media users have a routinized relationship with, how they prioritize between different possibilities, and how people compose and reflect upon the totality of their regular media use. Media repertoire research has moved from figuring out how to establish elements of repertoires towards growing interest in repertoires as dynamic and reflexive constructs, analyzing how they emerge, are maintained and change over time (Peters & Schrøder, 2018; Vandenplas et al., 2021; Vulpius et al., 2022; Ytre-Arne, 2019).

Public connection is a concept that describes people's orientations to society, in a broad sense – how people connect to public life, politics, culture or community (Couldry et al., 2010; Nærland, 2019; Swart et al., 2017; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). The advantage of a public connection approach – as opposed to a pre-determined focus on whether people follow hard news or traditional politics – is to explore more openly what issues people are interested in, and how they follow those interests, across but also beyond journalism (Couldry et al., 2010; Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021). Media is important to public connection, but not the only means of societal orientation, and mediated public connection can take many forms. Joelle Swart and colleagues define public connection as 'the various shared frames of reference that enable individuals to engage and participate in cultural, social, civic, and political networks in everyday life' (Swart et al., 2017) and suggest that inclusiveness, constructiveness, relevance and engagement are dimensions in how media becomes meaningful in everyday life.

Both of these perspectives imply that there is no universal answer to when, how, or why media matters in everyday life – it is contextual and relative. Both perspectives are easily opened up to analysis of the heightened complexities that digitalization have brought to everyday media use. In this book, I draw on media repertoire approaches to analyze everyday media use from the perspective of individual users, and on the public connection concept to discuss how people connect to society through everyday media use.

A MORE DIGITAL EVERYDAY LIFE

A different way of situating media in everyday life is to ask if one shapes the other, and if so, which way around. A useful parallel can be found in debates

on how digital technologies shape our social realities. Nancy Baym argues in *Personal Connections in the Digital Age* (2015) that perspectives such as technological determinism or social constructivism need a middle ground, and draws on theories about social shaping of technologies (and media domestication) to emphasize how we interact and negotiate with media technologies, over time and with tensions, in cultural and social contexts. A similar dynamic applies to media use in everyday life with advanced digital technologies. We can simultaneously consider how digital media use shapes everyday life, and how everyday life shapes digital media use.

Arguments for why digital media use shapes everyday life are not hard to come by. Social, mobile and digital media has transformed how people socialize, learn, work, relax, and conduct practical tasks, with the smartphone as a coordinating centre aggregating personal communication streams for multiple spheres of life. Scholars have framed the evolving role of social media and digital platforms as a culture of connectivity (van Dijck, 2013) or a digital environment in which we live our lives (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2021). Digital anthropologist Daniel Miller theorizes the smartphone as a 'transportable home', arguing that we should regard it 'less as a device we use, than as a place within which we now live' (Miller, 2021). This metaphor allows us to think of the smartphone as a place where lots of different activities take place, from the mundane to the special, a place where we might invite others in or be alone. Some argue that we live in media (Deuze, 2012) or that the construction of reality itself is mediatized (Couldry & Hepp, 2017). With the datafication of society, practices and dilemmas of interacting with digital platforms, and of being tracked and surveilled as part of opaque power dynamics, become increasingly relevant across a range of everyday contexts and social domains (Das & Ytre-Arne, 2018; Dencik et al., 2017; Kennedy et al., 2015; Møller Hartley et al., 2021).

On the other hand, everyday life shapes digital media use. Media are not the only components of the lifeworld, following the understanding of it developed above, meaning that the everyday lives in which we use media are shaped by many other factors. Things happen, within or beyond our control: A series of planned, sudden, expected, accidental, incidental, repeated, extraordinary, small and big events have direct impact on how we live our lives and use media. A key interest for Giddens is how individuals reflexively work to integrate such events into coherent understandings of the self (Giddens, 1991). Likewise, different societal contexts, and differences in privileges and resources and freedoms to shape everyday life, pose restrictions as well as opportunities. Some of these contexts we can negotiate, some we might work to change over time, others appear beyond control.

A recent and striking example is the COVID-19 pandemic: It might be impossible to separate our experience of the event from the mediation of it, but it was a virus spreading across the globe and a series of counter-measures that impacted people's lives, including uses of digital media, and that affected people differently and accentuated already established divides (e.g. Milan et al., 2020). The pandemic is an example of how norms for and meanings of media use are made visible in precarious situations, when established practices are uprooted by change. It illustrates how everyday circumstances have profound impact on media use and that there are severe inequalities affecting the current crisis as well as more long-term divides. These restrictions and inequalities also affect our uses of digital media to understand the changing world around us.

It has become impossible to imagine everyday life as we know it without digital media, while interest in what this fundamentally means is growing – as seen for instance in the debates on ubiquitous connectivity (van Dijck, 2013), deep mediatization (Couldry & Hepp, 2017) or digital disconnection (Bucher, 2020; Syvertsen, 2020). The growing scholarship on digital disconnection problematizes the meanings of connection and disconnection (e.g. Baym et al., 2020; Bucher, 2020; Kuntsman & Miyake, 2019), but the cultural resonance of digital detox also hinges on ideas of meaningful sociality and presence away from the digital. Empirical studies find that disconnecting users refer to more meaningful personal relations as a perceived benefit (e.g. Brennen, 2019; Pennington, 2020), while there is an abundance of arguments in media and communication studies against presumptions of digital communication as separate or inferior to other aspects of social life (Baym, 2015; Boyd, 2014; Fortunati, 2005).

So, when we say that everyday life is more digital than before, we might consider the existence and proliferation of relatively new devices such as the smartphone or various forms of connective technologies in our surroundings, or we might think of the ways in which social and digital media take part in how we constitute our identities and social relationships, and interact with each other at home, at work and in a range of everyday settings. This book takes a dynamic middle perspective similar to what Baym (2015) calls social shaping of technologies, and investigates experiences and dilemmas of media use in digital everyday life.

WHOSE EVERYDAY LIFE?

Everyday lives are significantly different, but everyone has one. This makes media use in everyday life both a very inclusive topic and one that is riddled

with unequal power positions. It is problematic to write about how 'we' interact with media, as I do in this introductory chapter, because inequalities and divides are fundamental to the role that media play in *different* everyday lives. Dimensions such as gender, class, age or ethnicity, and the uneven distribution of resources between the Global North or Global South, form intersectional patterns that affect digital media use in everyday contexts. In particular, the debate on datafication strongly accentuates these perspectives (Boyd & Crawford, 2012; Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Milan & Treré, 2019). Several studies of digital media use in non-Western contexts demonstrate the need to be careful about generalizing, and instead develop contextualized understandings of empirical cases and key concepts (e.g. Boczkowski, 2021; Costa, 2018).

However, everyday media use is also a topic where it is possible to read a study from one historical period, cultural context, or global power position, and recognize resonant themes as well as significant differences to one's own experiences. To situate media use in everyday life is useful to this purpose, because it makes visible rather than obscures some of the sociocultural conditions and normative expectations surrounding media use. This book draws on cross-national studies of everyday media use (e.g. Boczkowski et al., 2021; Carolus et al., 2019; Treré, 2021) as well as single-country studies from geographical and cultural contexts that are different to those analyzed here, but is influenced by my positionality as a media researcher in a small Northern European country.

Empirically, the book is based on extensive qualitative research on digital media use in Norway. Norway is a wealthy welfare state in the Global North, with an active media policy, high ICT penetration, high levels of news use and an advanced digitalized society (Newman et al., 2021; Syvertsen et al., 2014,). Norway is also a very small country with a dispersed population, with many cultural similarities and some differences to its Scandinavian neighbours and the rest of Northern Europe. The Norwegian case is obviously not representative of everyday lives elsewhere or everywhere, as no single country study could possibly be. However, Norway is a suitable case for qualitatively exploring how technological transformations affect media users across everyday contexts, because of the wide and deep proliferation of media technologies in Norwegian society. In the book, the Norwegian cultural and social context is part of the empirical materials as well as my interpretation of them, and I comment and reflect upon some aspects of the Norwegian case and context in the empirical chapters. The main categories that form the three empirical chapters – the ordinary day, across the life course, major disruption – are intended to be relevant and applicable more broadly, even though they can be filled with extensive variation.

An empirical background for the book is a broadly oriented cross-media interview and diary study, with 50 informants mirroring the Norwegian population (Moe et al., 2019a; Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021), while new empirical materials include smaller case studies focusing on media use amongst new mothers, and media use during the COVID-19 pandemic. These originate from several research projects conducted over the past years, as explained in further detail in the methods appendix. All studies are relatively diverse in terms of the socioeconomic background of informants, in a Norwegian context, and with the exception of the sample on new mothers, there is variation in gender and age groups. The larger sample in particular includes informants with various forms of immigrant or minority backgrounds.[1]

CONCLUSION: EVERYDAY LIFE AFTER THE SMARTPHONE

After more than a decade with the smartphone, what is different about everyday life?

In this book I argue that everyday life is – as before – an experienced lifeworld, a sphere of temporal, spatial, social and existential dimensions, in which we conduct routinized navigation across social domains. Digital, social, and mobile media transform how this navigation takes place – and blurs boundaries set by these temporal, spatial and social structures. We have a lot more choice than before in terms of when, where and how to use media, but this also raises dilemmas and intensifies negotiations of social norms. These tensions are encountered and enacted in workplaces, schools and public areas as much as through quarrels about the remote control in the living room, increasing the mobility and reducing the domesticity of media use in everyday life.

The smartphone is emblematic of this development, due to three important characteristics: It is adaptable, aggregating and always nearby. *Adaptability* refers to how smartphone use can be adapted to different personal preferences, tasks and settings, making it a go-to platform for a growing number of purposes across digital platforms and services. *Aggregating* refers to how smartphones connect and integrate these purposes and forms of communication in one single device that forms the centre of a personalized and networked ecosystem of digital communication technologies. *Always near*, or proximity, refers to how we come to rely on the smartphone as an extension of ourselves, kept near to the body also at night and through different social settings, picked up too frequently to remember. So, we increasingly conduct our routinized navigation across social domains through the smartphone, the centrepiece of our digital everyday life.

In Chapter 2, I substantiate the arguments above about media use after the proliferation of smartphones, focusing on the timeframe of one ordinary day for media users. Based on day-in-the-life interviews, I analyze experiences of waking up with the smartphone, navigating across social domains through digital media use, and negotiating norms and contexts for when and how to use different media. I draw on the arguments introduced here about the adaptable, aggregating and always-near status of the smartphone, but also situate smartphone use in light of broader media repertoires and modes of public connection, by following media users with different everyday lives.

In Chapter 3, I progress from ordinary days to instead discuss periods in which everyday life is changing. I discuss destabilization and reorientation in media use as part of transitions in the life course. Here, I argue that life events are turning points in which we also reconfigure our media repertoires and modes of public connection, and that the adaptable, aggregating and always-near smartphone is particularly easy to turn to in processes. The empirical analysis focuses on the experience of parenthood, but provides two broader arguments: one on destabilization and reorientation of media use, and one on how norms for digital media are negotiated in contexts of changing roles and responsibilities.

In Chapter 4, I push the arguments on destabilization further by discussing the COVID-19 pandemic as an example of global crisis that disrupted everyday life, and affected the ways we use the media for navigating in precarious situations. The pandemic called for re-configuration of everyday media use, but of a different nature and on a different scale as opposed to the life course perspective discussed in Chapter 3. I analyze how the pandemic destabilized media repertoires into becoming more digital, less mobile and still social, and discuss new terminology for pandemic media experiences including doom-scrolling and Zoom fatigue.

The last chapter, Chapter 5, concludes by summarizing the main arguments and contributions of the book, and particularly underlines the political dimensions of digital media use in everyday settings.

NOTE

1. All informant names in the book are pseudonyms.

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MEDIA USE – AN ORDINARY DAY

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on how the idea of 'an ordinary day in the life' can serve as an entry point for understanding media use. I discuss how everyday media use can be conceptualized as mundane and meaningful, and as most easily noticed when changing. Building on day-in-the-life interview segments from qualitative studies, I discuss methodological merits and challenges of this approach. The analysis follows media users an ordinary day from morning to night, as they wake up with the smartphone, navigate across social domains, and seek connection and companionship. I argue that seemingly mundane media use practices are made meaningful through the connection they entail, and particularly discuss the conflicted position of smartphone checking in everyday life. The chapter empirically substantiates the arguments made in Chapter 1 about the centrality of smartphones in digital everyday lives.

Can you envision an ordinary day in your life, without media in it? This chapter is about how media take part in what we experience as regular, uneventful, ordinary days – just a day in the life. The time from morning to night, repeated over and over again, is the most basic and inescapable temporal framework for our everyday lives with media. Places, people, interests and activities that are part of our ordinary days are likely to be integral to our media use, and the media that matters most to us are likely to be ingrained in our daily routines. The main research question I discuss in the chapter is how digital media technologies transform the ways in which people navigate in the temporal structure of an ordinary day, from morning to night. In digital

society, with smartphones at the heart of communication practices, how is an ordinary day with media different than before?

In the former chapter, I defined everyday media use as routinized navigation across social domains, as we rely on media for communication, coordination and orientation in our habitual engagements in our lifeworlds. I further argued that digital media blurs boundaries and intensifies dilemmas about where, when, how and for what to use media. This chapter will substantiate those arguments empirically, by analyzing accounts of ordinary media use through morning, daytime and evening, and further discussing methodological and normative dilemmas: Whether the smartphone has ruined our ability to capture what people do with media an ordinary day, and how norms for media use are negotiated in open-ended, micro-level processes in everyday contexts. I particularly draw on some classic studies of ordinary media use, and on the recent scholarly interest in digital disconnection (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Syvertsen, 2020) as a response to the increased embeddedness of digital technologies in everyday life. My interest here is how people experience connection and disconnection dilemmas as part of daily routines, also constituting moments of reflection on everyday media use and what it means.

Learning about the ordinary day is probably the most fundamental entry-point for understanding media use in everyday life. Consequently, this chapter is based on interview studies that included so-called day-in-the-life segments (del Rio Carral, 2014), with the question: What do you do an ordinary day, from you wake up in the morning until you fall asleep at night, and how do you use media in different situations? A backdrop for the methodological discussions is a broad study with 50 informants mirroring the Norwegian population, conducted in 2016 and analyzed in several other publications, some of which discuss media use in everyday life (Moe et al., 2019a; Ytre-Arne, 2019). More recent materials that are analyzed include a smaller interview study conducted in late 2020, on news and media use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas pandemic disruption will be the focus of Chapter 4, this chapter focuses on people's accounts of less disrupted everyday routines.

The shared empirical context is Norway, meaning that this chapter's notion of 'an ordinary day' is influenced by sociocultural conventions and societal organization in Norwegian society. It might be useful to know that the standard workday is 7.5 hours and ends around four in the afternoon, for many followed by early dinner and leisure activities as well as household chores in the afternoon. Norway is a wealthy country where employment is high, and most families have two parents working outside the home, encouraged by

policies of affordable daycare and extensive family leave. The informants who talk about an ordinary day in the chapter include a student with a part-time job, a single young professional, a working parent in a family household, a middle-aged person with health issues, and a senior citizen. Before examining these stories, I want to highlight some perspectives on why everyday media use matters and how we might study what it means.

EVERYDAY MEDIA USE AS MEANINGFUL AND MUNDANE

Media is often taken for granted as part of the everyday, its meanings more fully realized when absent. In the 1940s, behavioural scientist Bernard Berelson utilized the opportunity of a newspaper delivery strike in New York in 1945 for the study 'What missing the newspaper means' (Berelson, 1948), a pioneering qualitative analysis of everyday media use, with a real-life media deprivation experiment. Interviews during the delivery strike revealed that people were prone to claim they appreciated the newspaper for educating them on hard news topics, but actually found themselves missing something else when the paper disappeared: The ritual comfort of reading in the morning, the assurance of knowing what was going on in a tumultuous world, the social and practical and community-related information the paper contained, and how it worked as a 'tool for daily living'. By reading the newspaper, people felt that they were part of something, and when missing the newspaper, they felt lost. While Berelson's analysis is filled with practical examples, it is easy to connect this feeling of losing touch with the world to what Silverstone (1993) later framed as the essential role of media in confirming our ontological security.

When we studied media use and public connection in Norway 70 years later, we found many tendencies similar to Berelson's report: People *said* it was important to be informed of the news, but did so by following specific interests, rarely finding time to go deeply into issues, and only occasionally paying more attention – leading us to characterize them as approximately informed and occasionally monitorial (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). They checked the news briefly and ritualistically, confirming that the world worked as expected, before getting on with their day (Moe, et al., 2019b). They also relied on media for practicalities, and integrated news use into personal relationships and everyday conversation, where opportunities for political talk arose (Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021). The difference was that they did all these things in a media landscape where smartphones, social media and online platforms were essential, with the smartphone as the key coordinating platform. When we asked

which medium people would miss the most if it disappeared, many pointed to the internet and digital media for practical purposes, while some chose radio or print newspapers for the cherished everyday rituals they provided (Moe et al., 2019a). The feelings people expressed about smartphones (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020) or social media (Syvertsen & Ytre-arne, 2021) were profoundly ambivalent.

An interesting question raised by Berelson's study, and later discussed in several other classic works on everyday media use, is to which degree the daily routines make media meaningful, rather than the content of the media in question. Berelson asked what the value of the newspaper was, after finding that acts of reading in general seemed to offer considerable gratification, but also suggested a series of qualities offered by newspapers specifically and appreciated for their concrete relevance to everyday living. Likewise, James Carey theorized the ritual view of communication, in which transmission of messages is less important than how ritualized news media use affords confirmation of how the world works, comparable to religious and social rites (Carey, 2009).

A broader point about not conflating meanings of media with meanings of media use is essential to audience and reception research: In Janice Radway's classic study *Reading the romance* (1984), a key finding was the observation that the act of reading romance novels was potentially oppositional to patriarchal structures while the novels themselves were not. Joke Hermes's (1995) study of women's magazine reading as everyday media use, influenced by de Certeau and Schutz, goes as far as to declare that 'Media use is not always meaningful. From time to time it is virtually meaningless or at least a secondary activity' (Hermes, 1995, p. 15), however arguing that magazines yet find relevance through their integration into daily routines (see also Ytre-Arne, 2011). More recently, the idea of media as mundane has inspired a collection of theoretical and empirical analysis of smartphones and digital media in everyday life (Sandvik et al., 2016). In the introduction, the editors define everyday life through the centrality of the term to cultural studies and domestication theory in media studies:

> *Within these streams of research, everyday life is generally approached as meaning those mundane contexts of use where the encoded meanings and affordances of media and media technologies are translated into the lived experiences of ordinary people. (Sandvik et al., 2016, p. 9)*

My perspective in this book is that media use might be mundane and meaningful at the same time. Acts such as checking the phone, checking the news, scrolling through social media newsfeeds, chatting and sending messages,

watching whatever is on the television, having the radio on in the background, are meaningful even when we are not paying much attention, because of the broader orientations that these acts represent, to spheres of life that are important to us. The concepts of media repertoires and public connection, as discussed in the former chapter and utilized throughout this book, offer useful perspectives on the debate about how media become meaningful in everyday life. Both concepts emphasize ideas of totality, relationality and orientation in people's media use, rather than emphasizing select examples of media texts as particularly significant. To use media for *orientation* to a public issue or a social domain can be experienced as very meaningful and significant to various projects in life, even though this orientation is carried out through mundane acts and involves soon-forgotten pieces of information.

MORNING: WAKING UP WITH THE SMARTPHONE

What is the first thing you do in the morning? You reach for the smartphone. Maybe the smartphone is the thing that wakes you, when the alarm goes off, and the first thing you touch, when you try to find the snooze button. The first words you read are likely to be on the smartphone screen. If something happened overnight, in the world or in your life, the smartphone will tell you about it. To reach for the smartphone is your first step towards considering what the day brings, and your first engagement with the world outside. If your smartphone suddenly stopped working overnight, you might find yourself missing all the things Berelson's newspaper subscribers mentioned when their paper was not delivered – but on top of that you might have missed your alarm and overslept.

Let us look at some examples of how people start their days with the smartphone.

Gina is a student and bartender in her 20s who lives alone in a Norwegian city, interviewed in autumn 2020, for a study about news use and everyday life during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview started with a question about media use an ordinary day, which she replied to by describing a period with few pandemic restrictions, an ordinary day in her life as a student studying on campus. Very early in the interview, it became clear that the most important aspect of her daily media use was to check the phone 'every ten minutes, all day', starting the moment she woke up:

> *If going to university, I would typically wake up at seven thirty or so. The regular things are to check the mobile phone, mainly to turn off the alarm, but also to see if I have any important messages, any*

> *important e-mail, notifications that stand out. If I have plenty of time and not much to do that day, I will run through more stuff… but if I have a place to be, I only do the most important things.*

In the same study we interviewed Sven, a psychologist in his 30s, whose daily routines appeared a bit more affected by pandemic restrictions on socializing, but who still could go out to work as part of the ordinary day he described. He talked through his whole day with media before remembering to mention that he woke to a radio alarm and listened to radio every single morning. What he did say, in response to what he did first thing, was checking the smartphone:

> *From I get up in the morning… I guess I check the phone if something has happened, if there are any notifications when I wake up, and then I run to catch the bus, there is no time. I do listen to audiobooks, but that is not like checking the news. And then I spend all day in front of a screen.*

Karla, a mother of three working in education, recalled her pre-pandemic morning routine like this:

> *I would get up between six or seven. Read some news, if I have the time, using the mobile to check… say three online newspapers. And then breakfast and getting the kids and myself ready for the day. Depending on how I got to work, and where I was going that day, I could check Facebook or more news on the bus, and that is how I find relevant things for work or just because they are interesting, through social media. If I drive, I listen to podcasts.*

The study also involved informants who did not have ordinary working hours. Tom was a middle-aged man who had participated in a work training programme after experiencing severe illness, and who was engaged in various interests and hobbies, but also had much time alone at home an ordinary day. He said the following of how he structured his mornings with media:

> *Get up, have a shower… I do check Facebook right away. Then I sit down with coffee and listen to online radio, music… and focus on the tasks for the day, checking the calendar on my mobile, checking plans for the day. Often that leads to checking some websites, what is going on in the world? And maybe these things continue until lunch. I subscribe to an online newspaper, I could be going into things a little deeper, reading the articles and not just the headlines.*

Someone who did not actually mention the smartphone as part of the morning routine was Inger, a woman nearing 70 who worked and volunteered, and was occupied with taking care of grandchildren and spending time with her husband. She had a smartphone and was an eager internet user, but in the mornings, she preferred television:

> *I get up and turn on the TV. Usually the TV 2 News Channel. We watch that a lot, usually all day, but sometimes we switch to another station. […] I do my own thing in [mentions community organization], now often from home, but I always keep an eye on the news. Mainly on TV.*

A shared pattern found in these stories is to wake up, *check in*, and then get on with things. The moment in which people turn to media – preferably smartphones, alternatively radio or television – represents a first orientation towards the world beyond the household, a way of checking in with what is happening in social and societal spheres of relevance, essential to starting the day. These orientations are meaningful even though the acts of media use involved might seem trivial and mundane.

The stories also illustrate how ordinary media use is situated in the temporal, spatial and social structures of everyday life. These structures form contexts and sometimes impose constraints on situations in which the individual connects to society. One recurring theme is *intermittence*: Moments for media are found in-between requirements to put wheels in motion to get oneself and family members out the door. These moments are sometimes cut short ('there is no time'), sometimes flexible ('if I have time') or open to prioritization ('if there is something important'). A related theme is therefore *orientation*: checking in with what is happening in social life and in the news, planning ahead, keeping an eye out, feeling in tune with what is happening in various information streams. Presumably, checking news or messages can be interesting or entertaining, but it mainly comes across as something one just does, a daily ritual affording a feeling of being on top of things. A potential contrast to the idea of checking in with the world through media is the role that media also plays as background, to create an ambience or mood around the house, and more directly for *companionship* in order to feel connected while alone.

Several other studies have found similar patterns and themes in how people use media in the mornings, specifically to this time of day, to being at home, or to getting ready to move forward with activities. Sonia Livingstone and Alicia Blum-Ross use the ordinary day as a framework for an introductory chapter in their study of family life and parenting in a digital age, starting

with how technologies and tensions around them are part of how families wake up in the morning (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Morning news use comes up in many studies as a habitual and often appreciated practice (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2019; Ørmen, 2016), also broadening the scope from newspaper reading to checking social media and digital platforms (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Toff & Nielsen, 2018). A few years ago, the Reuters Digital News Report included a survey question asking *where* people were when they checked news on the smartphone: In Norway, 57 per cent reported on having done so in bed and 45 per cent in the bathroom (Sakariassen et al., 2017). Furthermore, digital media ethnographers have studied how people adapt media similar to switching on and off the lights to make for morning and evening moods at home (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2013), or use smartphones as digital companions (Carolus et al., 2019) or network structuring devices (Burchell, 2015) from the moment they wake up. The broader context is that the smartphone is an intimate technology (Hjorth & Lim, 2012) and a key tool for self-tracking through the flows of daily life (Lomborg et al., 2018).

With the smartphone so central to morning routines, we might ask how its role is similar or different to the morning newspaper in Berelson's study. There are multiple shared capacities in how people check in with the world – socially, practically, politically – through routinized morning media use, independent of platform. However, digital media offer more personalization as well as constantly updated information streams that are not just designed to fill the time available, but moreover to expand it by hanging on to the user's attention as long as possible. This is a contrast to the newspaper on the doorstep, which one might spend more or less time reading, but that nevertheless has a definite number of pages. And while the newspaper is also a tool for daily living, the smartphone more directly mixes all kinds of personal messages – and with that expectations and obligations and communication loops – into the morning checking routine.

As shown through the idea of checking cycles (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015; Ytre-Arne et al., 2020), the quick check-in with the world on the smartphone is both familiar and rather unpredictable in scope. In any case, it warrants repetition at regular intervals. It is therefore significant to notice that several of the stories above introduce morning media use as the start of recurring processes to be repeated and expanded throughout the day: Gina checks the phone every ten minutes, Sven says he spends the whole day in front of a screen, Tom fills the day with deliberate Facebook checking. The dilemmas of connectivity and distraction start first thing in the morning, and continue throughout the day.

DAYTIME: NAVIGATING WITH DIGITAL MEDIA ACROSS SOCIAL DOMAINS

People continue to reach for their phones throughout the day, then, but what else is happening? Let us continue some of the stories, and look deeper into the role digital media plays in navigating between social domains in everyday life.

Gina, the student and bartender, typically travelled to campus, sometimes for class or just to read, which she tried to do for five or six hours. This was one of several times in the interview in which she laughingly self-deprecated about her incessant phone checking:

> *It could be just checking or staying on the phone for half an hour. At lunch, if I eat alone or with friends from class, I am on the phone a lot. We talk about things we see on the phone, or maybe I just check the news, it really varies a lot… If I don't have work I might hit the gym after school, and bring the phone. I check it between every set. It is so stupid, because there is no point in checking so often, but it is a habit, to relax in-between I check the phone. And I use it to plan things and I do need bus tickets to get around… I must take it with me. I had an idea maybe I should leave the phone at home, but that would be impractical.*

This quote illustrates experiences of the smartphone as adaptable, aggregating and always nearby – it is no wonder that leaving it at home appears too radical and impractical to consider seriously. The phone is a rare and constant presence across all the activities that fill her day: morning routines, studying at university, socializing with friends, working out at the gym, going to work. In speaking of the smartphone, Gina framed her phone checking as silly and compulsive, but also as relaxing and practical, and as a vehicle of societal and personal connection.

Sven, the psychologist, said he spent most of his day working in front of a computer, particularly using videoconferencing a lot for conversations with patients and colleagues, but also checking Reddit for 'news and funny things' at lunch. He tried to manage his daily media use through a series of self-imposed regulations and prioritizations between different platforms for professional and personal communication:

> *I have rules for which channels for communication I relate to, the timing for each thing, in a way. So, if someone calls, I call them back, I reply to texts, but I don't reply to e-mail right away.*

> *If someone contacts me on Messenger I just assume it is not important, so I might reply if I have time or just don't bother. I have placed heavy limits on how much I allow my phone to tell me things. I deleted social media apps. If I need a social medium, I use the browser, so the threshold is higher when it is less convenient. I need to exercise self-control or I will disappear into the screen, you know?*

Karla, the woman with three kids and a job in education, appeared less concerned about being sucked into the screen, as there were many practical aspects of her work and family life that instituted even more compelling temporal restraints around her time with media. However, she emphasized that digital media was part of her workday, distinguishing between personal and professional uses:

> *At work, my media use varies a lot. I have hectic days, so there is little personal media use, but I do use media as part of work, quite a lot actually. Social media such as Facebook and SnapChat are part of my job. Also looking for news related to my field, through the day. And then I go home, and it is just one thing after the other with dinner and football practice and kids needing to go here and there. Of course, I use the phone a lot in-between, if I have five minutes.*

With 'one thing after another', her afternoons were heavily scheduled, leading her to continue the intermittent phone-checking practice established early in the morning. An important sociological theory on the organization of time in daily life is Arlie Russel Hochschild's theory of gendered inequalities through different shifts: first paid labour outside the home, followed by a second shift of housework and childcare, also demanding planning and coordination tasks that could evolve into a third shift of managerial and emotional duties (Hochschild & Machung, 1989/2003), not easily distributed according to ideals of gender equality (Smeby & Brandth, 2013). The study with mothers which will be discussed in the next chapter offers further examples of how smartphones become central to such coordinating work in family households.

Other informants had days with fewer external constraints on their time, instead structuring a routine for themselves through different forms of media use. Tom talked about how he filled time while waiting for his job training programme to resume after pandemic disruption, using media to approximate regular hours:

> *After lunch, and at lunch, I check Facebook. The phone is with me all the time. Like most Norwegians I am just glued to it, you know. […] Yes, I watch a lot more TV. When the pandemic hit, my*

> *programme first went into work-from-home mode… I got used to that, but when that period was over, I guess I replaced the hours by watching tv.*

Inger talked about her days as fairly flexible, as few of her obligations or activities recurred every day or at fixed hours. She watched quite a lot of television, and used several social media platforms for communication with family, but appeared considerably less smartphone-centric than the younger informants.

As these stories exemplify, one of the essential changes that digital media bring to everyday life is increased potential for blurring of boundaries between social domains. As we increasingly rely on digital media, we are faced with more opportunities to connect to domains beyond our physical location – to work from home, to interact with people who are not with us, to get news from a different place, to coordinate upcoming plans, to check in with multiple information streams. Such blurring of boundaries does not equal complete conflation, and it does not imply that physical context or people's awareness of different domains cease to matter. Instead, people move across domains of work, family, leisure and socializing, while adapting their media use to different spheres of life and to shifting situations in the spatial, temporal and social structures.

We can observe, for instance, how all of the stories operate with some idea of working hours, although this varies considerably in content, form and how it relates to media use. In a discussion of digital disconnection and work, Karin Fast (Fast, 2021) develops the distinction *at* work, *for* work, *from* work to situate how ideas of disconnection from digital technologies play out in working life. Similarly, the stories above have examples of using media *for* work, and of managing communication flows *to* work or to disconnect *from* work. Some stories include detailed strategies for tailoring communication streams to engagements in different social domains, particularly focusing on the smartphone. This is very similar to what we found in analysis of the larger interview sample with 50 informants (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). The potential for distraction and disturbance is at the centre of critiques regarding digital technologies, while possibilities for connection and community are also important to the prominence these technologies have taken in everyday life.

EVENING: MEDIATED COMPANIONSHIP

As the day is drawing to a close, what is happening? Some of the informants continued in the evenings as in the afternoon: moving between exercise or leisure activities, either for oneself or children, mixed with housework and practicalities, and meals and phone-checking breaks. A shared pattern was that

at some point the activities would wind down a little, giving way to time for socialization and relaxation, while digital media use continued in an accompanying role until bedtime. The focus of the day gradually day moved towards entertainment or shared experiences, whether with family at home or by taking part in broader cultural communities, while the practice of checking in through digital media platforms – news or social media or anything on smartphones – continued. The role of media as company was important to people living alone, but also to those who had partners or children. Such mediated companionship included both smartphones and more traditional domestic media with television at central to the idea of relaxing at home.

Gina said she often ended her day by working late at the bar, but if she had the night off she often watched TV at home, particularly streaming services. She explained that she was not fond of more complex television series or movies that demanded focused concentration over long periods of time, and instead preferred to multitask on different screens:

> *It is really typically for me to watch TV with the computer next to me, and be on the phone on top of that. And when I turn on the TV and the computer, I stay on the phone, particularly TikTok… right up until I go to bed, maybe just TikTok for an hour until nearly midnight… That's a lot of media use!*

Sven often socialized with friends in the evening, and also had family nearby he liked to visit, but he said there had been remarkable less of these activities during the pandemic. Exercising or meeting a few friends were still options, but he had also spent more evenings at home watching TV, or using different kinds of sound media for companionship:

> *Now with the corona, when I get home… there has been lots of streaming. Netflix and stuff. Radio in the morning, I forgot to say that, it wakes me up and is on until I leave the house. But I always put on some kind of sound at home. When I go to bed, I surf and listen to audiobooks.*

Karla said she checked news on her phone in the afternoon when she had a few minutes between coordinating the family schedule. She felt sufficiently updated on news when the evening came, so she did not prioritize recapping news formats such as main broadcasts, although she continued to check things on the phone. Furthermore, family sociability guided the choice of media:

> *I don't watch Dagsrevyen [main evening broadcast of public service broadcaster NRK], because I caught most things in the day, I find.*

> *It varies what we do in the evening. Watching a movie, talking with my husband, maybe checking news in-between. Watching a movie is something to do together.*

Her description of television viewing as 'something to do together' resonates with accounts from other informants living in households with partners and children, and with an idea of social relations driving media repertoires found amongst several informants in our broad study (Moe et al., 2019a). Gathering the family around a shared experience through television viewing was framed as a more sociable supplement or contrast to individualized screen use, as part of a cultural rehabilitation of the status of television (Syvertsen, 2020). Tom also watched TV in the evenings, particularly fantasy and sci-fi television series, and played videogames in the weekends, with friends or alone. Inger did not say much about what she did in the evenings, because at this point her story of the ordinary day had derailed into a detailed discussion of what she watched on tv, and how she oversaw family communication because her husband did not like to use messaging apps. This kind of ending – or not-really-an-ending – to a story of a day in the life with media is in itself not uncommon, as I will discuss further when I look into methodology regarding daily media use.

METHODOLOGICAL AND NORMATIVE DILEMMAS: THE ORDINARY DAY AND THE SMARTPHONE

The stories of an ordinary day with media analyzed in this chapter are based on selected segments from qualitative semi-structured interviews, asking people to talk through what they do an ordinary day and include which media they use in different situations. This technique, building on day-in-the-life interviews (see for instance del Rio Carral, 2014), has been the opening segment of most interviews I have done with media users, across several projects. It offers a way of learning about a person's media use in the context of their daily life, noticing which media they mention and how they situate these in daily routines, and possibly gaining an understanding of recurring or important aspects of their experiences and their self-presentations as media users. One can find cues and examples to follow up on later on, with more probing, as well as for adapting other question segments in the interview to the informants' habits and interests. Instead of asking people in so many words to describe their media repertoires, or to explain their public connection, stories of media use an ordinary day are fruitful to analysis of these conceptual interests, which share an entry-point of exploring media use and

societal orientation as experienced by the individual. Many informants will talk rather freely about their ordinary day, getting comfortable in the interview situation through a topic on which they obviously know more than the interviewer.

In 2016, my colleagues and I conducted the larger study this chapter is partly building on – we interviewed 50 people twice and had them write a media diary in-between, broadly exploring everyday media use and public connection (Moe et al., 2019a; Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021). The first interview, in which we wanted to get to know our informants, started with a typical day-in-the-life segment, working from an interview guide that instructed all interviewers to spend time on these stories and extensively probe into examples of media mentioned, as well as learning about daily activities. As could be expected, our informants talked a lot about smartphones, but nevertheless there was something surprising about the role that smartphones seemed to occupy, not just in their daily lives but also in how they told their stories. We interviewed a hairdresser struggling to impose screen time rules in the family, a military officer worried about privacy and tracking, a carpenter and new father wondering if kids still knew how to play outside, an immigrant worker talking about how there was an app for everything but too much triviality in social media, and a young logistics worker and an elderly lady who both complained about how rude others were when using smartphones in company. Several stories of what these people did an ordinary day derailed into complaining about smartphones – regarding personal uses, social norms, or societal implications. Sometimes the follow-up on the ordinary day felt tiresome after talking through the morning rituals, because people seemed done with explaining their daily media use after they had started talking about how they used smartphones, all the time and for everything.

These experiences indicate that supplementary methods are useful and even necessary to explore daily media use. The broad study in question had a media diary that offered extensive detail into how issues in news or culture intermingled with other activities and events in people's lives. In addition to diary methods (Kaun, 2010; Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021), there are many potential techniques for exploring daily media use as part of qualitative user studies: media timelines (Örnebring & Hellekant Rowe, 2021), visualizing clock-based diagrams of the day (Thorhauge in Sandvik et al., 2016) or card-sorting exercises to explain priorities and interrelations (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017). An interesting approach to cross-media research developed by Stine Lomborg and Anne Mette Thorhauge combines smartphone data logs with qualitative interviews, to draw on opportunities offered by the

smartphone but also allow users to fill in blanks and reflect upon meanings of smartphone-centric practices (Thorhauge & Lomborg, 2016). With these methods, they find that smartphone use appears both as an in-between activity and as interlacing with other activities throughout the day, but also that it is considered unsuitable in some situations (Thorhauge & Lomborg, 2016). In journalism research, Tim Groot Kormelink argues that people generally need some support to access and express their experiences with news use (Groot Kormelink, 2020), as some dimensions are difficult to verbalize, such as material and sensory aspects (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2019). Importantly, these approaches are not proposing to replace the interview, which remains a central space for exploring meaning, but supplementary techniques are relevant to grasp the complexity of daily media use.

In the interview study that provided the stories that are analyzed in this chapter, the day-in-the-life segment was merely intended as an opening – possibly providing some useful background – before delving into the main interview segments of pandemic news and media experiences (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). Consequently, it could be seen as a shortcoming that this study did not draw on supplementary techniques to bring forward further dimensions of everyday media use. Yet, as the interviews were fairly long and thorough, some of the day-in-the-life-stories had extensive probing, and several informants verbalized and explained in considerable detail what they did with smartphones, for instance. Smartphones seem to steal attention away from other habitual forms of media use, such as radio or television, and uses of these media appear to have continued centrality in the domestic lives of the informants while being less highlighted in their accounts.

On the other hand, day-in-the-life interviews are exceedingly useful to understand how people interpret, justify and situate different acts of media use in different everyday situations, constituted by temporal, spatial and social structures. Such insights are key to understand normative and pragmatic negotiations about where, when, how and why people use different media, not necessarily though clear-cut personal policies or instrumental decisions, but as part of the messiness of everyday life, with both routines and serendipity, and conflicting demands on time and attention.

There are many societal debates about norms for digital media use, including discussions of screen time in families, uses of tablets and computers in schools, norms for meaningful leisure experiences, or the conflicted role of digital tools in modern workplaces. While polemic opinions abound in mediated and cultural discourse on such topics, an everyday perspective is needed to understand how people actually negotiate norms and ideals in contexts.

As the screen time debate indicates most clearly, temporal limitations on media use easily fail if 'time' is considered independently of social activities and spatial surroundings of screen use, leaving parents and children frustrated (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2018). The next chapter will delve deeper into these issues through analysis of digital media use in family settings.

CONCLUSION: SMARTPHONE CHECKING IS EVERYDAY LIFE

In this chapter, I have analyzed media use an ordinary day, asking what people do with media in the morning, daytime and evening, and how media use becomes meaningful within the structure of everyday life. Different forms of media use make sense within the different social domains people engage with, from following news relevant to one's occupation to trying to gather the family around a shared television experience, and media offer companionship and distractions in many different situations throughout the day. Classic insights about how family dynamics are negotiated through television viewing, or how newspapers offer more than information, resonate with the experiences of informants discussed here. On top of, as part of, and accompanying these practices is the presence of the smartphone, as checking begins the moment of waking up and continues until falling asleep. Through the smartphone, people check in with news and societal events, with work and education, with friends and family, with entertainment and culture, with personal and public spheres.

While methodological innovations to the day-in-the-life interview are called for, it is worthwhile to stop a moment to reflect on what it means that people are asked what they do an ordinary day, and reply by saying 'I check the phone'. One interpretation is both literal and obvious: Maybe checking the smartphone *is* what they – and many of us – do in daily life in digital societies. Given the rapid proliferation and relative newness of smartphones as a media technology, this constitutes a dramatic change that tells us something about an important development in society and in our lives.

'Television is part of the grain of everyday life', Silverstone wrote (1993, p. 594), concluding his analysis of how this situation had come about, emphasizing the integration of television into time, space and sociality. Instead of television, people now talk and think about the smartphone, including the practicalities and dilemmas it entails. They do so to the point where phone checking overshadows other activities and breaks apart more organized and detailed stories of what an ordinary day is like. This is a testament to the position of the smartphone as essential, conflicted and disruptive in everyday

life. While checking the phone is often an in-between or secondary activity (Thorhauge & Lomborg, 2016), often not the most valued or dedicated part of everyday situations, phone checking creeps into everything. We should not underestimate how smartphones are changing our navigation through social domains, as it is kept close to the body, aggregating different information streams and modes of communication, accompanying other kinds of media use with more confined boundaries, and situating normative media use dilemmas in a growing range of everyday situations. The smartphone represents a profound reconfiguration of everyday life.

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3

MEDIA USE IN LIFE TRANSITIONS

ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses how media use changes when everyday life undergoes change, focusing on major life transitions. I briefly introduce different perspectives on evolving media repertoires across the life course, and argue for the relevance of studying periods of destabilization and reorientation, when elements of media repertoires and modes of public connection are temporarily or more permanently transformed. I argue that easily adaptable media technologies such as smartphones tend to become more important in unsettled circumstances, as easy-to-reach for tools for new forms of self-expression, information-seeking or social contact, in accordance with shifting social roles and everyday circumstances. The primary empirical material analyzed in the chapter is a small qualitative interview study with mothers, about their media use the first year with a new-born.

When something important changes in your life, what happens to the ways you use media? This chapter analyses how transformations in everyday media use relate to other changes in life, focusing on significant transitions between life phases. Whereas the former chapter discussed media use an ordinary day, what we perceive as 'ordinary' is not constant all the way through our lives. Instead, our perceptions of the ordinary day are likely to be closely intertwined with the most important circumstances of our life at present, connected to the past and to the future through our biographical narratives. This means that processes of change in everyday life are of particular significance to understand everyday media use.

Examples of life transitions can include starting or leaving school, changing or losing jobs, entering or dissolving intimate relationships, living and relocating different places, experiencing illness or loss, or having children be born and grow up to leave home. Some life transitions represent unwelcome hardships and struggles, others are fulfilments of desired long-term goals or happy turns of events. Likewise, different expressions and trajectories of life transitions can more or less conform to or differentiate from societal norms and expectations, in various cultural contexts.

This book emphasizes an understanding of media use as central to our routinized navigation across social domains in everyday life. Life transitions can imply that all these elements – our routines, our modes of navigation, our social domains – change partially or all at once. This can be overwhelming and challenging, exiting or promising, difficult or draining, but often highly emotional and meaningful in some capacity. As such, life transitions highlight the existential dimensions of everyday life, and represent moments of crisis or reflection in biographical continuity, in Anthony Giddens (1991) terms. A key interest for Giddens is how we form narratives of the self, also as we are tasked with the work of integrating occurring events and contradictory experiences into a coherent story of who we are. In a more digital society, social and digital media represent potential tools for expression and negotiation of changing identities (Ytre-Arne, 2016) but also more practical means of assistance as we manage daily communication in unsettled circumstances.

This chapter investigates the role of digital media as part of life transitions, particularly focusing on smartphones, but also discussing social media, news, books and podcasts, and generally taking a cross-media perspective. I draw on a qualitative interview study, conducted in Norway in 2020, with new mothers talking about changing media use the first year with a new-born, meaning that this particular life transition is at the centre of analysis. This case study cannot be taken as universal to any kind of life transition, nor as representative of parental media use in other contexts – it is a small study, and connected to the cultural circumstances of having children in a Northern European welfare state with extensive family leave policies. However, the analysis provides insight into how some mothers adapt their uses of digital media in conjunction a life transition many undergo, one that is characterized by extensive societal norms as well as considerable variation in circumstances and experiences.

In the chapter, I first introduce some perspectives on how media use changes in conjunction with life transitions, and situate the particular significance of digital media use to changing everyday circumstances. I develop an analytical perspective on *disruption, destabilization and reorientation*, before analyzing

changing media repertoires amongst new mothers. This analysis particularly highlights the relevance of understanding communicative dilemmas and normative negotiations of digital media use in specific everyday settings, drawing on the research literature on digital disconnection and ambivalence.

LIFE PHASES, MEDIA GENERATIONS AND EVOLVING REPERTOIRES

How does media use change from childhood to old age? The intersection of age and media use have inspired significant bodies of research, particularly with very extensive scholarship on children, adolescents and young people, and also a growing interest in elderly users and generational differences (see for instance Ahn & Jung, 2016; Lüders & Gjevjon, 2017; Sarwatay & Raman, 2021). In-between the young and the old, we might find studies aiming for a range in representation of age groups, or zooming in on particular media practices or demographical criteria that combine age with for instance gender, occupation, ethnicity or geographical location. An interest in age and media use does not necessarily entail an explicit interest in everyday life in different life phases, but such ideas often form part of the background or analysis nevertheless. One of the things that belonging to an age group might indicate, however crudely, is a basic idea of what we presume everyday life might look like, for a child or a young adult or a senior, and this might have a series of repercussions on their media use when it comes to preferences, capabilities and opportunities.

At a conceptual level, two central answers to the question of how age connects to media use are found in the idea of life courses versus media generations. Theories of life courses emphasize the sequential development of phases of life, such as adolescent versus middle aged, whereas the idea of media generations emphasizes biographical cohorts coming of age in different sociocultural circumstances, such as millennials versus boomers. Both perspectives are, however, interested in connections between individual life trajectories and societal conditions: A life course perspective underlines how 'aging is a sequence of life phases and transitions that is constructed in a reciprocal process of political, social and economic conditions' (Heinz et al., 2019) while the idea of media generations underline how habits and interests are developed in particularly formative years of shared historical circumstances, inspiring feelings of belonging or identity (Bolin, 2016; Ghersetti & Westlund, 2018, Vittadini, 2014).

There are also strands of research looking into life transitions – shifts between life phases – or focusing specifically on the question of what change

in media use means. Particularly relevant to this chapter, a body of work in sociology and communication studies focuses on parents and parenthood, analyzing the role of media technologies as part of what it means to have and raise children in digital society (Clark, 2011; Das, 2019; Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Moreover, research on media repertoires has underlined the need to understand why and how repertoires emerge, transform and disappear, thereby bringing the question of change to the forefront (Peters & Schrøder, 2018; Vandenplas et al., 2021; Vulpius et al., 2022). These studies highlight interconnections between different factors that drive change in media repertoires, including social, technological and spatiotemporal dimensions, all of which correspond well with an interest in everyday life as the context for media use. We might ask, however, when something extraordinary happens to us, if that is part of *everyday* life? And, consequently, if media use in life transitions is fundamentally different from everyday media use?

DESTABILIZATION, REORIENTATION AND DIGITAL MEDIA EXPANSION

In the introduction to this book, I referenced the theories of Alfred Schutz about the lifeworld (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) as a sphere in which we live our lives and experience the world around us, encompassing both ordinary and extraordinary circumstances. In Chapter 2, I discussed everyday media use as potentially mundane, routinized, and integrated in what we experience as an *ordinary* day. Major life events are almost by definition *not* the same as ordinary days, but some transitions go on for quite some time, while other aspects of our lives – and the everyday lives of people around us – go on as normal. Furthermore, many life transitions are a type of project that entail restructuring of our daily activities, including establishing new routines, and engaging with social domains differently. Think of examples such as retiring from work or moving to a new place – essential aspects of everyday life alter radically, but everyday life does not cease to exist or matter. I therefore suggest to consider life transitions as periods representing partial or dramatic changes to what we perceive as ordinary in our lives. This means that it is not productive to consider life transitions as separated from everyday life, but instead as particularly significant moments of reconfiguration and awareness of everyday experiences. Here, the ideas of *destabilization* and *reorientation* are useful.

In a former article, I developed the notion of destabilization of media repertoires in conjunction with life events (Ytre-Arne, 2019), and hinted at

the particularly central position of digital media such as the smartphone for reorientation. The article concluded:

> *More than other forms of media use, the smartphone appears intimately connected with the physical, cognitive and emotional processes of dealing with biographical disruption in the context of everyday life. This suggests that factors such as well-being, and physical and psychological dimensions of using media technologies, should be studied along with the spatiotemporal, material and socio-political factors of change in media repertoires. It also speaks of the adaptability of smartphone use to subtly but persistently fill time-gaps and become part of different everyday situations, meriting further empirical and theoretical analysis. Not only does the combination of smartphones and babies seem to have a nearly explosive force in uprooting established media repertoires and modes of public connection. Smartphone use is also key to the reorientation that follows, and to new routines that are gradually established as the life course progresses. (Ytre-Arne, 2019)*

The theory, then, is as follows: Disruption entails destabilization. This does imply that every element of media repertoires change all at once, but the elements and their relations are unsettled from the fixed routines of everyday life, when temporal, spatial, social and existential dimensions of the lifeworld are perceived to be in a partial state of flux. Processes of destabilization entail moments of heightened awareness and reflection, nudging people to more actively reconsider the media they use and the meanings they provide, for instance pursuing or abandoning interests, or connecting to new social domains. The particular role of digital media in this context can be conveyed through the notion of *expansion*, emblemized by the capacities of the smartphone as adaptable, aggregating and always near. The smartphone is easy to turn to in shifting circumstances, finding and filling small moments of free time between obligations and external demands, and serves as a go-to tool not just for mundane coordination but also for more existential re-orientation. Digital media might be used differently in life transitions, but are likely to remain and grow in importance through processes of destabilization and reorientation.

WELCOMING NEW LIFE IN DIGITAL SOCIETIES

To analyze changing media use in conjunction with life transitions, and particularly explore the role of digital media technologies, I draw on a small

qualitative interview study conducted in Norway in 2020. This was one of several case studies in a research project exploring dilemmas regarding ubiquitous connectivity (Karlsen & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Syvertsen, 2022). To understand how such dilemmas play out in specific contexts, we were interested in what we called 'precarious situations', here understood not in terms of an economic precariat but as particular circumstances in which something important was at stake, representing values or pursuits that digital media could be perceived to infringe upon. As such a case, new parents in the postnatal period are in the middle of emotionally intense and life-altering circumstances, orienting themselves to new roles and responsibilities, looking towards the future of their newborn children, and facing societal norms pertaining to multiple aspects of life, including uses of digital media.

The special character of the early newborn period is emphasized in cultural discourse and by health professionals alike, connected to ideas of giving vulnerable children the best possible start in life. There is considerable interest in the role of digital technologies in childhood and parenting (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Health authorities and organizations providing advice to new parents utilize the internet and social media for reaching out – sometimes while also advocating for the benefits of disconnection. Digital media are part of new self-expressions, needs for information-seeking, and modes of social contact upon entering parenthood. New parents might choose or be forced to rely on digital media for support and connection, underlining intersectional power relations and ambivalent experiences, and the embeddedness of digital platforms in social life (Das, 2019; Hodkinson & Das, 2021). While public discourse on parents' use of smartphones or social media might convey simple ideas of right and wrong, the experiences of new parents are likely to be more complex.

My interview study focused on mothers who had given birth in the past year and a half, and explored their recollections of experiences with everyday media use before and after having a child, with a particular interest in the early new-born period. The informants were eight Norwegian women from early 20s to late 30s, most around 30 years of age, which is also the average age for first-time mothers in Norway. They had different education levels from high school to university degrees, and different family circumstances: Some were first-time mothers, some also had older children, not everyone was living with a partner. They all worked or studied as their main occupation, and were or had recently been on paid leave, although for different periods of time, shared in different ways with partners. Interviews were conducted in the summer and fall of 2020, digitally due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which also constituted a backdrop for the women's experiences. Some had giving birth under heavy

pandemic restrictions in hospitals, had older siblings sent home from locked down schools and kindergartens, or found work-from-home regimens to blur boundaries between family leave and work.

At the start of the interviews, we talked of what life was like at the time, with an explorative approach to everyday media use similar to the day-in-the-life-techniques discussed in the former chapter. Follow-up questions explored how everyday routines and media use had changed since having the baby, and in some cases also before and after pandemic lockdown. The interviews further included retrospective questions on experiences and digital media use in the maternity ward immediately after birth, when returning home with the new-born, and through family leave. Towards the end of the interviews we went deeper into normative negotiations of digital media use in family settings, also looking to the future and discussing topics such as parental mediation (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2018; Clark, 2011) or 'sharenting' (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2017; Damkjær, 2018).

In the following analysis, I will draw on these interviews to substantiate the idea of destabilization as essential to understand changing media repertoires in conjunction with life transitions. I focus on the notion of digital media expansion by examining the role of smartphones and other digital media technologies in reorientation to changing circumstances, and examine the disconnection dilemmas the mothers faced in the immediate postnatal period.

ADAPTING MEDIA REPERTOIRES TO A NEW PHASE OF LIFE

Let us start with a story of a day in the life with media, from Torunn, a first-time mother in her late 20s, on leave from a public sector job and living with her partner in a Norwegian city:

> *I start my day by changing diapers, then making breakfast. I listen to the radio to catch the news. I'm no good with online news, I prefer to listen. Depending on the baby, we might stay home until 11-ish, and then she sleeps, and we go out. I take long walks, but also do things like daytime cinema… it varies from day to day. Then we go home and start dinner. My partner returns, taking over the active role with the baby, while I get time for myself… I can shower or read or something. I read a lot the first weeks, because I got a Kindle right after she was born, in the most hectic period, so I could read with just one hand. Recently, we have tried to put her to bed at night and have some time alone, watching TV or looking at something*

> *on the computer. You cannot do that when she is awake, she needs attention. I find my routines are changing, because when she was younger, she slept so much and did not seek contact like she does now. I used the phone more then, now I would feel bad [...] If she is awake and active, seeking my eye… one would not want to be on Facebook.*

This quote encompasses several experiences that appeared resonant in the informant group: Structuring the day around a gradually more set schedule for the baby, getting out of the house, sharing care with partners. Her mentions of different practices of media use also appeared typical: finding ways to check the news, finding ways to read or watch TV, considering the distractions of smartphones and social media, and, importantly, adapting technological affordances to bodily obligations of care. The latter was a distinct topic in the interviews, and presumably particularly relevant to the experience of new motherhood and the near-constant presence of a baby to care for.

Otherwise, the quote shares several similarities with the stories of everyday media use I analyzed in the former chapter: intermittent checking in small breaks, using sound media for companionship, managing digital platforms and negotiating one's attention – but for Torunn, the new situation of taking care of a baby was a guiding framework around these practices. This also meant that she and the other mothers were more vocal about explaining considerations in making time and finding ways for media use. These themes speak to how media use is situated in the temporal, spatial, social and existential dimensions of everyday life, also in times of transition inspiring heightened awareness of how these dimensions matter.

A particularly interesting topic that comes across in the quote, and in the interviews more broadly, concerns physical negotiations of media technologies into space and time. In the account of Torunn's day this is expressed in the form of a lightweight tablet allowing for reading with just one hand, while feeding or holding the baby. Others mentioned examples such as switching away from former rituals of print newspaper reading, to podcast listening while walking with a stroller and trying to get the baby to sleep. Different strategies for reading on a screen with a low light, while nursing at night, were also a recurring example. The demands of the caring situation pushed towards mobile media and adjustable affordances as more important than before.

With the smartphone is established as the go-to platform for quick communication, information-seeking and practical assistance to users in many different contexts, its significance as a ready resource to new parents can hardly be exaggerated. Googling on the phone for baby-related advice and

information was a commonly described practice, one that also afforded possibilities for finding support and validation. Torunn said:

> *I used the phone a lot the first weeks. I had so many questions. Help with breastfeeding, you can find that on Facebook… There is lots of information, also from solid sources. I even followed some of those groups for people having children around the same time, because sometimes you just want to know if others are experiencing the same things, to read about people in the same situation.*

These new ways of using the phone supplemented other modes of phone use from life pre-baby. Many said they had significantly less or close to no work communication while on leave, meaning that some uses of the phone were temporarily replaced. Most social and practical dimensions of phone use remained with them, however, and the practical benefits of doing things on the phone became even more central.

Beyond the smartphone, informants mentioned various examples of how their media use had changed since having children, sometimes taking up new habits or discarding old ones, but mainly by adapting persistent or emerging interests to shifting circumstances. Some had watched more television and followed more online news while on leave, and some mentioned changing entertainment preferences, including laughing about a growing interest in Supernanny shows or surfing the sales websites for second-hand children's items. Kindergarten teacher Sara talked about which groups she engaged with on social media, gradually moving away from her former student communities towards parent groups, while trying to avoid sending 'too much baby spam' in the direction of her childless friends. Generally, the mothers claimed that their priorities when it came to media had perhaps changed a little, not a lot, but that their days were very different when on leave from work and adjusting to new family situations. Interests in news, reading books, or following social media were therefore adapted rather than discarded.

Looking towards new stages of parenting and family life, the informants considered that digital media use would continue to require management, as part of the parent role and life in the family. Sigrid, a lawyer and second-time-mother, said 'We realized we needed to establish a policy' when she talked about how to navigate children's privacy in social media, a topic several informants were concerned about. Sigrid had instructed grandparents to restrict what they posted on Facebook, and set up private groups for sharing pictures. Others took a different approach: 'We have no *rules*', said Vera, talking about screen use at home, but went on to explain that she found it important to be a good role model to her children by reading books and doing

activities away from screens: 'You have to practice what you preach'. But the idea of being a role model had several nuances that were more complicated than one single norm for smartphone use. Vera also said: 'The five-year-old knows I have a job, and sometimes things are urgent', and underlined how this was also part of the picture of figuring out digital media use in the home. One informant who would soon return to work predicted her that her phone use would change when combining professional and parental roles:

> *I used to be really strict about keeping focus and not looking at the smartphone at work. Now the phone will be… not in use, necessarily, but there on my desk. I will keep a closer eye on it. Because, as I understand it, kindergartens are more in touch with parents than before, there could be messages… the worry that he could fall ill so that I need to pick him up… I think the phone will be much more of a presence. (Eva, administrator, first baby)*

This quote frames the smartphone as a necessary but potentially distractive device, a connection across social domains, and a constant presence. While the smartphone on the desk at work here represents a link to the child in daycare, these roles could be reversed when parents and children were together. The same informant gave a different example of trying to put away the phone to play with her child, while friends were messaging about plans that needed quick clarification. 'The phone is such a big part of our daily life', she said: 'it is extremely difficult to consider not using it'.

Conducted between three months to well over a year after the birth of the baby, most informants gave an impression of settling into new routines in everyday life, often explicitly contrasted with a more chaotic period immediately after birth. The dilemmas of digital media use in this period will be examined more closely in the next section.

EXISTENTIAL CONNECTION AND DISCONNECTION DILEMMAS

As I conducted the interviews, I found it striking that the mothers appeared to agree on the nearly taken-for-granted existence of shared cultural norms for digital media use in the postnatal period, with 'put away the phone' as the most essential tenet. Exploring norms and dilemmas was a central part of the plan for the interview, but specific questions on this topic was not really needed to bring it to light. Instead, the language informants used when explaining their choices and practices appeared to echo cultural discourse on the value of digital disconnection, with justifications such as privacy and presence

(Syvertsen, 2020). Whereas digital disconnection scholarship is also interested in the limitations and problematics of making users responsible (Syvertsen, 2020; Ytre-Arne et al., 2020), the mothers rarely voiced explicitly normative counter-arguments. However, they acknowledged that norms for phone use were hard to follow, and spoke about how emotional and pragmatic concerns played a role in negotiating what to do.

In planning the interviews, I had decided on several specific examples that could be useful to broach the subject of norms for digital media use in the new-born period, such as asking about announcing the arrival of the baby to friends and family, which I assumed would involve smartphones and social media. Some had pre-planned strategies for how to keep news of the birth off social media, but others described losing control of the information flow, or simply not remembering who had notified who. Anette, a health secretary and first-time mother around 30, said:

> *I was very preoccupied with telling my friends she had arrived, but I can't remember the specifics of it. I found it to be… it was a new and scary situation to suddenly be responsible for a child, and social media and the phone… that was kind of a safe spot. Maybe just trying to shut out some of the feelings, it was so scary I just needed to turn it off a bit. I am not sure quite how to express myself…*

As this response indicates, the position of the smartphone should be understood in light of the emotional and existential intensity of new motherhood. For Anette and others with similar experiences, the phone was a connection to the known and safe and taken-for-granted. The disconnection she needed was from the overwhelming emotions and demands of the moment, not from digital media as such. Others talked about phone use in hospital as means of escaping pandemic restrictions that instituted a lonely and scary mood around the maternity ward, with the phone as the one way of remaining socially connected. Second-time-mother Yvonne gave birth in the harshest COVID-19 lockdown and had to stay in the postnatal ward for a couple of days due to a complication. She compared the experience to being alone in a cell:

> *It was quite isolated, actually. I was alone, one could not roam the hallways. Regulations were strict, and of course I used the phone a lot when I was there. Both for media and for calling and talking to family. (Yvonne, youth worker, second baby)*

Most of the mothers had observed posters in the hospital encouraging parents to put the phone away and focus on the baby, and remembered these messages very vividly. A maternity ward in a big city where several informants

lived had a poster in most rooms with the key phrase: 'In this room, miracles happen' followed by recommendations to put away the phone. The informants generally expressed that these posters were a good idea, several referred to them as 'reminders'. However, they had different experiences of how to deal with the no-phone norm in the hospital. Eva said:

> *It felt almost shameful, looking at the phone. I tried not to do it in front of the staff. During birth, my partner had his phone up once, responding to texts from my mother, and I told him to put it away and don't answer her. That was mainly because I thought no, no, that is not done in this place. Not because I myself found it problematic […] I stayed for two nights, and if I heard someone in the door, it was like… hide the phone, I need to look at my child. (Eva, administrator, first baby)*

Ingeborg, a student who was also a first-time mother, had a different experience. She found herself in sync with the idea that the phone should not distract from the miracle of the newborn, and was grateful for finding institutional support for her decision to shut out the rest of the world. This included extended family who were eager for more pictures and updates about the newborn. Ingeborg advocated for the value of digital disconnection as a principle also in her studies and life in general, but found it particularly essential to the emotional intensity of new motherhood:

> *I needed to shield myself from everything. There was a poster in the delivery room saying they recommended no phones, that it was a sacred time you would never get back, and I felt so vulnerable […] I embraced it and needed it, so I did not use my phone at all in the hospital. […] My partner sent a text message to family […] There was little acceptance, they blamed us for not including them. (Ingeborg, student, first baby)*

Several informants said that 'a little phone use is fine, but it should not detract attention away from the baby'. Some operated with distinctions between different purposes of phone use, from what they perceived as frivolous (particularly mentioning social media) to necessary (one-to-one communication with family). Second-time-mother Vera said:

> *I agree you shouldn't go straight to Insta. But we used the phone to let family know he was born, and to take some pictures. And when you have an older child and need to organize the babysitter… and there is downtime… yeah, I used my phone. (Vera, consultant, second baby)*

This admittance of using the phone in 'downtime' is interesting, because the term defies the purpose-driven categories she had just established: The idea of downtime is mainly contextual, possibly encompassing both mindless scrolling and necessary messages. 'When the baby sleeps' was another category for when phone use would be more acceptable, while 'when the baby feeds' was more contested.

The dual understanding smartphones as coordinating devices and sources of digital distractions would continue after leaving the hospital. The next example we discussed in the interviews was norms for smartphone use while feeding the baby. There is a strong breastfeeding ideal in Norway, supported throughout the health care system, advising on the need to direct attention towards small signs of hunger and other forms of silent communication, rather than sticking to a schedule. Similar advice about the value of eye-contact in the feeding situation applies to bottle-feeding. Eva, who talked about hiding her phone from midwives in the hospital, continued to hide her scrolling from her baby when breastfeeding. She talked about her media use with lots of reflection and self-deprecating humour, often contradicting herself and also pointing it out. Regarding feeding, she recognized the norm and the value of eye-contact, but laughingly admitted to 'cheating', although based on careful interpretation of cues from the baby:

> *The phone is there, on the table, but I try not to scroll, at least not any unnecessary media, Instagram and those things. But if he is playing, I might check the weather or send a text or check the news. Sometimes. I try to limit use. And when I am breastfeeding, and he closes his eyes, he does that a lot, I might check the phone, without him noticing. I have to admit it. (Eva, administrator, first baby)*

Awareness of the issue of phone use while taking care of the baby was prevalent in the informant group, but opinions on how to handle this diverged. There were some notable – but not consistent, even in such a small sample – differences between some of the second- and first- time mothers:

> *When the baby is eating, the baby is concerned with eating. Particularly when they are small. I think it is fine to use the phone. He will not be harmed by me reading the online newspaper. (Sigrid, lawyer, second-time mother)*

> *I really stuck with not letting myself be distracted from being in the moment. It was such an emotional time, so picking up the phone… I could not do it. There was always some change to notice with the baby, from day to day […] something big happening before my very eyes. I do not think I am representative. (Ingeborg, student, first baby)*

The issue of social sanctions also came up in this context. Some informants mentioned uncomfortable experiences of being criticized for using the phone while feeding the baby, in one case in the postnatal ward, and by others as one of those things mothers-in-law would be prone to have opinions about. Many connected the specificities of the postnatal period to more longstanding concerns about childhood and parenting in a digital world. Ideals about the social development of children easily come into conflict with immersive media technologies, but also with what pragmatically works in the moment in everyday settings:

> *You should limit screen time, and read to the child instead, but there are so many things you should do and then in reality they do not happen. We had a period where she woke up at five, and of course we let her watch cartoons on the iPad […] Sometimes you have to do what works. (Anette, health secretary, first baby)*

> *It is so easy to waste time on social media. With kids, it is a difficult balance between letting them do their own thing, and being involved in play and interaction so that they develop socially. And then the guilty conscience turns up. Social media can make for poorer social development because parents are too immersed. I am probably guilty myself! (Sara, kindergarten teacher, two children)*

What comes across in these dilemmas is a gap between very broad concerns about the potential harm of digital media, and the embedded and specific positions of digital communication in everyday life. When ideals of no phones are transferred from general discourse to particular situations, questions arise about how the ideals can be managed in the complex contexts of situations, leaving users to try to figure out what works. Digital media use in the newborn period is characterized by the impossibility of adhering to norms that do not fully account for the specificities of the moment, with various personal experiences, emotional reactions, and pragmatic considerations, all juggled by individuals as part of their media use. Some mothers found solutions or strategies that worked for them, others faced negative reactions or guilt, some were playful or self-deprecating, and some challenged the idea of optimizing everything. Eva summarized the dilemma in this manner, which is relevant beyond the situation of new mothers: 'The phone is always with me, but I try to limit use'.

CONCLUSION: NAVIGATING NORMS IN SHIFTING CONTEXTS

This chapter has analyzed the essential and ambivalent position of digital media in life transitions, focusing on periods when everyday life changes.

By exploring how new mothers negotiate norms for digital media use, and adapt media repertoires to changing everyday circumstances, I have underlined the complexities of the decisions people make regarding media use in digital everyday life. People in a myriad of situations turn to digital media for information, support, communication, entertainment, coordination and orientation to communities, while navigating the demands and concerns of the moment they are in. It is therefore essential to understand how values as well as pragmatics are embedded in the situations surrounding everyday media use, making sweeping norms for right and wrong particularly difficult to adhere to.

Connecting to the former chapter, where I argued that everyday routines are most easily reflected upon when changing, this analysis also shows that processes of disruption are fruitful to study to understand everyday media use. I particularly drew on the idea of destabilization and reorientation to highlight how media repertoires are gradually and partially reconfigured in relation to life transitions. Similar arguments could be made regarding people's public connection (Ytre-Arne, 2019). For instance, the experience of parenthood represents potential new orientations to different societal issues or communities, but not necessarily an abandonment of previous interests in the public realm, even though modes of keeping informed of these might be changing.

As this analysis has focused on motherhood, it is important to underline that other life transitions could be characterized by considerations that are different, particular to other life phases or other social roles. Likewise, the socioeconomic, cultural and geographical context in which life transitions take place is likely to be very relevant. For instance, the experience of being on paid leave but planning to return to work is an important framework for the stories of the mothers in this study. This is closely connected to Norwegian family leave and kindergarten policies, while notions of both parents working outside the home are embedded with Scandinavian gender equality ideals. Even in other Northern European contexts, these structures could be very different with different implications for the role of media regarding motherhood (see for instance Orgad, 2019).

Even with the particularities of the case study analyzed here, we might wonder if the idea of digital media expansion could be prone to happen to very different people in very different life transitions. The capacities of smartphones as adaptable, aggregating and always-near speak to vast possibilities for tailoring smartphone use to different situations. It therefore seems probable that digital media – smartphones and others – could fill gaps and serve as tools for reorientation in numerous kinds of transitions and disruptions. The next chapter discusses a societal and global disruption – the COVID-19 pandemic – and how it changed everyday lives and media repertoires.

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4

MEDIA USE IN DISRUPTED EVERYDAY LIFE

ABSTRACT

This chapter analyzes what happens to media use when everyday life is suddenly disrupted, focusing on how the COVID-19 pandemic transformed work, socializing, communication and everyday living. The empirical case is changing media use in Norway during the pandemic, building on a qualitative questionnaire survey conducted in early lockdown, and follow-up interviews eight months later. Expanding on the ideas of destabilization of media repertoires developed in the former chapter, this analysis discusses transforming media repertoires as more digital, as less mobile (but still smartphone-centric) and as essentially social. The chapter further explains new concepts for pandemic media use practices, such as doomscrolling and Zoom fatigue.

Can you remember when you first heard of COVID-19, and did you think it would change your life? 'They started talking about it on the news', said Inger, a Norwegian woman nearing 70, whom we interviewed in late 2020. She continued: 'I still found people were quite relaxed. Who would have thought such a thing could happen to the whole world? It is like science fiction'. 'We talked about it when they speed-built that hospital in China', said Einar, a man in his 40s working in the cultural sector, 'but no one thought it would come here. Former epidemics happened elsewhere'. He added: 'It is like that with a lot of things'. School employee Karla remembered a conversation at work about the need for kids to stay home at the smallest sign of cold symptoms: 'Parents would never get to work! We laughed about it, thinking it was impossible. And then it took three weeks, and the country shut down'.

This chapter analyzes what happens to media use when everyday life is suddenly disrupted by dramatic societal events, focusing on the COVID-19 pandemic and how it transformed practices of work, education, socializing and conducting daily life. As part of all of these changes, everyday media use was reconfigured.

As in the former chapter, I draw on the notion of *destabilization* to understand processes of disruption and changing media use. I argue that destabilization tends to push towards increased reliance on digital media, as available and adaptable resources for reorientation in daily life. Whereas the former chapter focused on individual life phase transitions that are often expected or desired, such as starting a family, this chapter focuses on the collective shock of a global crisis, affecting people differently in their everyday lives.

To analyze changing everyday media use in the pandemic, I analyze data from two connected studies conducted in Norway: A qualitative questionnaire from the first national lockdown in March and April 2020 (see also Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021b), and a follow-up interview study towards the end of the same year. The questionnaire from early lockdown is analyzed to understand sudden processes of shock, destabilization and reorientation, while the interviews provide insight into how people started to conceive living with the pandemic over time and reconfiguring their lives for the long run. These interviews include some of the same informants who talked about an ordinary day with media (pre-pandemic or in the absence of heavy restrictions) in Chapter 2. The chapter draws extensively on emerging scholarship on changing media use in the pandemic from other countries and contexts.

First, I discuss how the pandemic crisis became part of everyday life. I argue that the early lockdown constituted a shared moment of urgent destabilization of media repertoires, and that the reconfigurations that took place can be characterized as *more digital, less mobile, still social*. After discussing each of these, the next section delves deeper into life with media in the pandemic over time, looking at two pandemic media experiences: 'Zoom fatigue' as overload from multiple domains becoming mediated, and 'doomscrolling' as overload from scary news across digital platforms. Both of these are contextualized in terms of how people reconsidered social and existential dimensions of everyday life in the pandemic, expressed through reconfigurations in everyday media use. I conclude by discussing the notion of 'the new normal' and how profoundly the pandemic has changed media use in digital everyday life.

A GLOBAL CRISIS IN EVERYDAY LIFE

At some point, COVID-19 became part of everyday life. At first, it was an acute health emergency to some and a distant news story to others.

With spreading infections and large-scale lockdowns, the pandemic disrupted everyday life for considerable numbers of people. More than two years later, it is a bit more difficult to discern if the pandemic should be considered a disruptive event with a particular timeframe, or a more profound reconfiguration of society. It is, regardless, an example of a global crisis people all over the world have encountered in the context of their everyday lives.

The World Health Organization declared a global pandemic on 11th March 2020, having pronounced COVID-19 a severe international health risk since January the same year.[1] In Norway, Thursday 12th March 2020 stands out as the singular most dramatic day of the national pandemic timeline[2]: This was the day when everyday life was turned upside down. The first Norwegian COVID-19 case had been confirmed on February 26th,[3] and several new cases followed over the next days, mostly related to ski tourists returning from Italy and Austria after a school holiday.[4] Restrictions on large public events were instituted, along with advice to the population on how to avoid disease. Then things happened fast: The first non-traceable infections were confirmed on March 10th, neighbouring country Denmark declared a national lockdown on March 11th, and in the morning of March 12th municipal authorities in several Norwegian cities decided to close schools and kindergartens.[5] Some hoarded food and toilet paper, workplaces and universities sent people home, and in the afternoon of March 12th, the Norwegian government held a press conference which marked the start of the first national lockdown.

In this press conference, prime minister Erna Solberg announced what would famously be known as 'the most intrusive measures ever imposed in peacetime', including closed kindergartens, schools, universities, cultural events, sports, pubs and bars, hairdressers and fitness centres, as well as strict border control and quarantine measures, and advice to work from home and practice social distancing. In her speech, the prime minster used the word 'hverdag' which means 'everyday' three times, saying: 'In this period, the everyday will be different for all of us', 'For many, the everyday will be turned upside down' and 'These are measures that directly infringe upon our everyday life and the workings of society'.[6]

The Norwegian strategy to control the pandemic had several similarities to that of Denmark, and differed from the response in Sweden (Ohlsson et al., n.d.; Yarmol-Matusiak et al., 2021). Beyond Scandinavia, there were some similarities but also important differences between Norway and other European countries in lockdown in the same period. The first Norwegian lockdown only lasted for some weeks, with several measures gradually lifted towards summer. There was no curfew, and instead the government encouraged outdoors activities, although a short-lived ban on visiting holiday homes

received considerable critique. As the pandemic continued, geographical and socioeconomic differences in Norway came to have strong bearing on the level of infections as well as counter-pandemic restrictions, for instance with the capital Oslo in a tough lockdown all through winter of 2021. Overall, the rates of infections and deaths were comparatively low in Norway, and an evaluation of the government response pointed to both successes (such as securing vaccination) and failures (such as protecting children from the most radical measures).

Before all of this was known, however, people were suddenly sent home on a mid-week afternoon in mid-March 2020, when everyday life was turned upside down. We will see what happened to media repertoires in this situation.

DESTABILIZED MEDIA REPERTOIRES IN EARLY LOCKDOWN

To understand how media repertoires transform when everyday life changes, *destabilization* is an important keyword. Destabilization implies that external circumstances push towards change, or that foundations or frameworks are unsettled, leading people to reconsider elements or compositions of media repertoires. Destabilization could lead to big or small manifest changes in the form of new experiments, new priorities, or even new habits, and to leaving old ones behind. A media repertoire is not necessarily a house of cards that comes tumbling down with one stroke, but perhaps closer to a sandcastle under construction. We could imagine the pandemic as a tidal force or as a slower erosion.

Emerging research on media repertoires in the pandemic emphasize the value of an organic rather than technical approach: The question is not just how compositions changed, but how people interpreted events and adjusted to the pulse of what was happening (Vandenplas et al., 2021). Analyzing news habit reconfigurations in the pandemic, Marcel Broersma and Joelle Swart (2021) underline the complexity of how habits are formed, through a series of emotional, social and contextual cues and negotiations, drawing on media psychologist LaRose (2015) who argued that habit formation is about moving 'from exploration to exploitation' (LaRose in Broersma & Swart, 2021). In a qualitative cross-country study, Emiliano Treré (2021) has analyzed changing media use in this period through the useful categories of *intensification, discovery* and *abandonment*.

When the first national lockdowns were instituted, many aspects of everyday life changed suddenly and dramatically. For some, 'going to work' no longer meant leaving the house in the morning, but instead clearing a place

for a laptop at the breakfast table to try log on to a new digital platform, while simultaneously helping kids with home school assignments. For others, connections to important social domains were not just transformed but lost: They were unemployed, at least temporarily, and arenas for physical public life were effectively shut down, with severe ramifications for social relations and shared experiences. Importantly, the early phase was not yet another dreaded lockdown met with growing pandemic fatigue, but a novel set of strange circumstances invading daily life in an unprecedented manner. People did not know how the pandemic would develop or how long it would go on. Vaccines were a distant hope, knowledge was limited, and the new recommendations were foreign. Neither did people know how they would come to use the media: Platforms like Zoom were still select business applications rather than household names.[7]

In these circumstances, media repertoires were destabilized and reconfigured. In a qualitative questionnaire conducted in the first weeks of lockdown in Norway, we intended to capture immediate experiences and reflections, through an online form soliciting respondents to write in their own words, at their own time, in open-ended answers. The questions we asked as prompts concerned changes to everyday life, for instance if people worked from home or took care of children, and changes to media use and communication. Approximately 550 people replied between March 24th and April 2nd. I will focus on three reconfigurations of media repertoires, under the headings *more digital, less mobile,* and *still social*, and examine each of these in turn.

MORE DIGITAL

Media repertoires became more digital, intensifying the blurring of boundaries between social domains in everyday life. The first lockdown was a period when people quickly transformed their uses of digital media platforms, including chat and messaging, phones and videoconferencing, delivery and shopping services, social media, news and entertainment, and platforms for work and education. Many had to learn new tools as workplaces and schools moved online. Consumption of online news spiked, indicated not just in our study but now firmly established as a general pattern (see for instance Van Aelst et al., 2021; Newman et al., 2021). Streaming and television numbers went record-high.[8] In Norway, as also found in the comparative Reuters Institute Digital News Report, changing media use in the early pandemic has been characterized as an exacerbation of the digital turn (Newman et al., 2021, Kantar 2020).

So, we know that media use became even more digital, but what did this mean for users in everyday settings? In line with the overall arguments of this book, I consider that the adaptability of digital media was essential to the moment of the acute crisis: People were forced to quickly reorient themselves in changing circumstances, and turned to digital media to do so. Smartphones are adaptable, aggregating, and always-near, and these capacities make the phone a ready resource, also when life is unsettled. In early lockdown, a series of other digital devices and platforms joined the smartphone in taking on such roles, their more constant presence grounded in increased homelife.

Individual users reconfigured their media repertoires so that digital media took up more time and attention, more central to a variety of purposes. For instance, people's public connection became more singularly dependent on digital media, whether connecting to public spheres of news and culture, or to work, education and social communities through digital platforms. Some of our questionnaire respondents wrote:

> *I have been thinking about how lucky we are to have today's technology. It really is an important tool in the current crisis. Not just practically, but for human relations! The best experiences these days are found in the blossoming creativity and supportive tone permeating the communication. (On disability benefits, W, 40–49)*

> *With friends and family, the contact runs in social media and on texts, nearly as usual. In addition, we meet digitally on video for social purposes (which is new and nicer than expected). At work: an enormous amount of the same thing to replace meetings, having variable experiences with that. (Manager, M, 40–49)*

> *Time spent on the mobile up by 53 percent, according to the screen time log. I am now on the phone five hours a day, which is a lot. Easy to scroll when you are bored. Reading more online news, checking more newspapers than just the one I subscribe to. I normally do not watch much tv series, as I easily become to immersed and prone to 'binging', but now I watch more series. (Web designer, W, 20–29)*

As we see here, experiences diverged between different aspects of intensified digital media use, with the most positive statements made about opportunities to remain socially connected. Many expressed appreciation for what digital alternatives could offer under the circumstances. But some also experienced digital media as intrusive, distractive and overwhelming. A student who isolated due to COVID-19 symptoms exemplified both tendencies: 'I spend

more time on media than usual, and not in a good way', she wrote, explaining that she found it hard to focus, that it was too easy to binge TV and games, and that she checked online news constantly, even though this made her anxious. When it came to social contact, however, she wrote:

> *Except for a few conversations through the window all social contact has been on the phone and in social media. Usually, I don't care for social media, and spend less time on it than others my age. But now I am constantly following social media. I prefer face-to-face and really miss seeing people, but am surprised at how good the replacement has been! I have been to digital study groups and dinners and had countless video chats. (Student, W, 20–29)*

Reconfigurations of media repertoires required normative and practical reconsiderations. Intensified digital media use was experienced as part of a less organized everyday life, with routines dissolving. Those who were unemployed or strictly isolating experienced significant losses of social domains in everyday life, while others felt that they had too much on their plate. Parents with kids at home wrote about juggling different roles, striving to re-work routines and temporal organization:

> *The dividing lines between weekdays and weekends are diminished, largely due to all the screen time. I can sense this also in the kids, as they are now really stuck in front of a screen all day, except for dinner and a walk we go on every day. (M, teacher, 40–49)*

> *The whole family has become more digital, for work, school and entertainment. We are not concerned about screen time anymore, but thinking of the balance between learning and play. (Teacher, W, 30–39)*

It was not just children whose screen time went through the roof, as respondents reported on more online news, more social media, more digital platforms, more messages, more streaming, more mobile games, more phone- and videocalls. Digital media use expanded to fill the blanks left by cancelled activities, and crept into new contexts and situations, breaking down barriers between work and leisure, and rendering established norms and practices difficult to navigate by. One woman wrote the following about being distracted – by media and by the situation:

> *Finding it hard to focus on one task, whether a game or knitting or a newspaper, and it is usually the smartphone dragging me away. Not because it rings, but because I am checking if there are*

> *any news. Could be related to how I am technically at work but not spending all my time by the computer, because I have nothing specific to do. If I sit down with something that is not work-related, I still have to pay attention all the time. Also generally concerned about the unstable and unpredictable situation, making it hard to focus on trivial matters. My media use has otherwise not changed much – well, I check news a lot more online, I guess I mentioned that. (W, advisor, 50–59)*

The smartphone was instrumental to this tendency, but it was joined by a myriad of other digital platforms that offered news feeds, updates, messages and liveness. Internet and media technologies enabled people to work from home and stay in touch during lockdown, keeping up to date with an evolving global crisis, and was central to the reconfiguration of daily practices, assisting and distracting people in their attempts to cram multiple social domains into heightened levels of everyday messiness.

LESS MOBILE

Media repertoires in early lockdown became less mobile, remaining smartphone-centric but also re-centering the domestic sphere as even more fundamental to media use. For people all over the world, including many of our respondents, lockdown was an experience of being more at home. What *home* meant – student accommodation or family houses, inner cities or rural countryside, big families or single households, stable or precarious conditions – would soon become key to divergent pandemic experiences between different social groups. While health care workers and many other professions continued to go out to work, the prominence of the domestic sphere was accentuated for all through reduced mobility and cancelled activities. This had a series or repercussions on daily media use. One might think that people would use their smartphones less when they were no longer on-the-go, but as we have already seen, that was not the case: 'I definitely use the smartphone A LOT more', one respondent wrote, 'I have not seen my friends since this thing started'.

In a qualitative study from Eastern Europe, conducted in the same period, Sabina Mihelj and colleagues (Mihelj et al., 2021) emphasize the home-bound nature of lockdown life as the key explanation of changing pandemic media use: Individual media use became more dependent on family members, live televised press conferences became a temporal structuring device, print readership diminished as people were not out picking up the paper. They observe how the role of

media in the pandemic was initially framed as an 'infodemic' of abundant misinformation driven by new digital platforms – a notion that has also been critiqued by others (Simon & Camargo, 2021) – but found that everyday experiences conveyed a more traditional image of media in the pandemic in terms of people, at home, watching TV together and trying not to quarrel too much.

In our questionnaire material, 'more at home' was a central topic. Many expressed how much they missed physical social life, sharing sentiments of how ingrained movement between different locations, arenas and activities had been to pre-pandemic everyday life:

> *My partner and I are both doing the home office thing. […] What I find to be the biggest change is that we are much more at home in the evenings. I usually would be out doing things (concerts, cinema, dancing, attending talks, drinking wine, having dinner) about five nights a week, and now I am stuck at home feeling restless. (W, academic, 30–39)*

> *Work situation: Home office. Life situation: Cancelled all plans to travel, attend events and concerts. Staying in touch with friends digitally. (Work qualification program, M, 20–29)*

> *The first days were fine, but as time goes by, I feel the need to physically see the person I am talking to (not just on FaceTime). Going to work gives me a feeling: There is a world out there! (Midwife, W, 30–39)*

Being more at home meant new negotiations of social and spatiotemporal aspects of media use, to adapt to a situation of home as the default place from which all activities would take place, either alone or with partners and children. People had to balance conflicting norms and needs:

> *I'm not a person who talks on the phone a lot, usually just quick messages. So, it's a transition to sit down and have a conversation on the phone. It feels rude to sit in the living room (when my partner is there), so that I have to go somewhere else (he does that too). Then, the phone conversation does not become the main activity, as a physical conversation would be, but instead something I do while cooking or watering my plants. With more people it works better, then it would be on the sofa with a glass of wine and feel more social. (PhD student, W, 30–39)*

These experiences underline that digital media use is also physical: It does not imply freedom from constraints of physical space. Instead, the adaptability

of connecting from anywhere requires effort, even when the 'anywhere' is restricted to home. Less mobile media repertoires did not imply that space became less important, just that locations and options became limited. In this context, smartphones were portable on a smaller scale (inside the home), and remained adaptable and across the variety of purposes they were used for. It is therefore not surprising that people continued to use the smartphone a lot. However, an important shift was that smartphone use increasingly blurred with other kinds of digital media, and even live television, into a stream of constantly available connectivity, requiring new forms of navigation inside the domestic space.

STILL SOCIAL

Media repertoires were still social, as people countered the loneliness of lockdown by accentuating connective capacities of digital communication and shared experiences of media. As we have already seen, our respondents underlined the importance of socializing and connecting, whatever the means. People reached out to others more often through phones and messages, gathered the household around the television, increased uses of social media, and appreciated what they could find of sociable qualities of work-related digital platforms. The importance of public and personal connection through media use was accentuated, as people found it intensely important to follow what was going on in the world, and how people they knew were doing.

Research on pandemic media use has explored the connective capacities of digital technologies in this precarious situation, analyzing digital alternatives for sharing cultural experiences (Rendell, 2020) or keeping in touch with family (Abel et al., 2020). A US survey found that voice or video was more positively received than e-mail or chat messages, arguing that differentiated social presence explains such variations (Nguyen et al., 2021). A Norwegian study explored young people's internet use, finding that digital technologies offered social support while respondents also reported negative outcomes on their wellbeing, such as lack of concentration or sleep (Brandtzæg & Luders, 2021). As opposed to decades of research investigating digital media use with face-to-face as a presumable alternative, at least to some users or contexts, the pandemic lockdown meant this option was no longer accessible. Many of our respondents observed that the situation constituted a moment in which it was possible to reconsider set practices, both in terms of who to contact, how to communicate, and what social contact meant:

> *Lots of phone calls, some video group chats. Facebook messages. I find that video works well. Experiencing that talk on the phone runs deeper than usual. We all have something big in common now. (Technical worker, suddenly unemployed, M, 20–29)*

> *I use Skype and Messenger to keep in touch with colleagues beyond the strictly work-focused collaboration. I also find myself being more considerate in work-emails and meetings, as I get a glimpse into the lives of people working from home. Privately I am connecting more often on social media with people I have not talked to in a long time […]. One does wonder how they are all doing. (Project manager, W, 40–49)*

The extraordinary situation led to reconsiderations of established practices for everyday media use and sociability, taking up or re-instituting new communication modes, and changing or re-affirming values and connections. Even though many found lockdown life demanding, most were careful about balancing their troubles and concerns against the bigger picture of a societal crisis. This directly influenced the portrayals of media as part of lockdown life: The worries people expressed were about what the pandemic would mean for society and for their lives, as they voiced fears for health, jobs and societal stability, and the loss of valuable social contact. Digital communication was not necessarily considered part of this problem – just partly lacking as a solution.

The remainder of the chapter discusses two pandemic media experiences – Zoom fatigue and doomscrolling – that encompass some of these ambivalences about digital media use, while also considering what happened after the first lockdown.

LIVING THROUGH SCREENS: ZOOM FATIGUE AND MEDIATED IMPOVERISHMENT

Digital communication can be tiring, especially over time. 'A drink with friends on Zoom can be nice', one respondent wrote, 'but you do not make a night of it'. Another wrote: 'After a week of digital meetings, I got a sense of something unreal. Did we say these things, or did I dream them? Like plastic film between myself and others'. This plastic film – the digital mediation of communication – and the tiredness it caused are at the heart of what has been described as 'Zoom fatigue'. I argue that this pandemic media experience became tangible when multiple social domains were mediated, but that it ultimately was a reflection upon pandemic loss in a broader sense rather than

struggles with technology as such. Further, the notion of Zoom fatigue speaks to the double position of digital media as part of both problems and solutions in pandemic daily life.

Harvard Business Review wrote about Zoom fatigue as a search term on the rise in April 2020, highlighting the distractions of work-from-home settings as well as the constant gaze of videocalls (Fosslien & Duffy, 2020).[9] Academic research in cyberpsychology, human computer interaction and communication studies has explored Zoom fatigue with reference to COVID-19. Jeremy Bailenson identifies four explanations: 'Excessive amounts of close-up eye gaze, cognitive load, increased self-evaluation from staring at video of oneself, and constraints on physical mobility' (Bailenson, 2021). He also observes that just like the term 'googling', the success of Zoom means this brand name will be stuck as the emblem of the problem, while others argue that computer-mediated communication exhaustion is a more suitable term (Nadler, 2020). A recent study takes a similar approach to Bailenson in identifying dynamics of changing social interactions, with different arguments on whether too much or too little eye contact is part of the problem (Aagaard, 2022). One study in applied phycology investigated Zoom fatigue in pandemic work-from-home conditions in several countries, with some interesting conclusions: Participants emphasized the losses they had experienced in lockdown, not finding the pandemic situation comparable to videoconferencing at great frequency in other settings (Nesher Shoshan & Wehrt, 2021). This corresponds with studies investigating experienced wellbeing effects of physical and digital social contact during the pandemic (Newson et al., 2021).

In media and communication studies, the question of what it means to communicate through digital media technologies is one of the most central to the field. Notions of a strict online-offline divide have been critiqued (Jensen, 2011) and the prototype status of face-to-face communication has been questioned (Fortunati, 2005). A key contribution is Nancy Baym's (2015) *Personal connections in the digital age*, providing a historical and thematic overview of key perspectives on digital communication. She uses the phrase 'mediation is impoverishment' (p. 58) to capture assumptions – found in historical discourses and amongst users – of a hierarchy of different forms of communication, with in-person at the top and as the norm. Digital alternatives easily come off as poor replicants with fewer social cues, lacking the ability of body language to convey intentions. Likewise, the presence norm which is central to the idea of digital disconnection (Syvertsen, 2020), references sentiments that experiences away from screens are deeper or more truly social. On the other hand, Baym also argues that alternative social cues are a key feature of digital communication, and that facilitating communication without

co-presence was key to the inception and proliferation of media technologies in society.

Consequently, the phenomenon of Zoom fatigue can be understood as not being exclusively or even primarily about videocalls, but as a reflection on how to uphold meaningful co-presence in challenging circumstances. Conducted in the first month of lockdown, replies to our questionnaire included numerous statements of 'it is not just the same', as people expressed appreciation for digital alternatives while maintaining that face-to-face was superior:

> *I miss the speed of oral communication at work. I miss talking about unnecessary things, asking each other for advice or developing an idea together. With digital tools, we only communicate about the bare necessities. I met friends on a digital platform, did not enjoy, it was like attending a meeting. With the time delay we nearly had to ask for turns speaking. (Journalist, W, 50–59)*

> *I talk a lot on the phone with friends and family, and over social media with larger groups of friends. I don't feel much of a difference in the connection, other than being continually 'starved' for face-to-face conversation and socializing. (Student, M, 20–29)*

These responses frame physical co-presence as a symbol of what was lost when then pandemic uprooted everyday life. People expressed how much they missed immediacy, serendipity, humour, small talk and informality, in the workplace and amongst friends. As one respondent wrote: 'I miss running into colleagues in the hallway… even those I don't know or like'. These aspects were difficult to replicate as the uptake of digital communication tools seemingly steered towards efficiency, with meeting-like behaviour creeping into social settings. In a study of new mothers using digital technologies for support in the perinatal period, Ranjana Das (Das, 2022) develops the concept 'approximation' to explain attempts – fraught by fatigue and unsettled emotions – to replicate lost social contact in heavy pandemic restrictions. This idea holds considerable explanatory power in capturing strategies and ambivalences in the turn to digital technologies.

Suddenly being on Zoom all day was draining, but as we now know, the first lockdown was just the start. As the pandemic went on, overall pandemic fatigue was bound to increase, and also drain people's energy for digital experimentation. This was illustrated when we interviewed some respondents again in late 2020.

Susanne, a communications worker who had been unemployed, had responded to the questionnaire with an account of her hectic digital life in

early lockdown: She reconnected with friends all over the world and attended 'choir practice digitally, Friday after-work drinks, playing cards with my nephew on FaceTime, there are concerts, singalongs and dance parties', while ending with '…but what I really miss is to give people a hug'. When interviewed in late 2020, during the second wave in Norway, she reflected retrospectively about why she had embraced digital socializing:

> *I think it was about managing… We were not able to understand that it would last so long and what it would mean… so, it was more a spirit of continuing to do what we did before, but that is not the case now. The misery of it… I was striving to have just an active* digital *life as I had a* living *life before. (Susanne, works in communication, 40–49)*

She characterized the early lockdown as a period of optimism, togetherness and 'silliness', as people did not know much about the pandemic, but were eager to help each other: 'This spring we were *on*, now we are… more divided'. After first trying to approximate her pre-pandemic life on digital platforms, she had reached a point of more profound reorientation: building a freelance career instead of waiting for a return to her old job, becoming more selective and skeptical in her news use, and more pessimistic about the pandemic development: 'One is getting tired… it has lasted so fucking long and it is so undecided'. She still used digital platforms for work and communication, but prioritized a few physical one-to-one encounters over an intense digital social life.

This story indicates how long-term struggles of coming to terms with the pandemic involve multiple forms of loss and fatigue, problems that go far beyond digital platforms and cannot be solved by them, but that are expressed through feelings and practices of daily media use. A similar argument can be made regarding another pandemic media experience – doomscrolling.

LIVING IN A GLOBAL CRISIS: DOOMSCROLLING TOWARDS AN UNCERTAIN FUTURE

'News is addictive, even more so when the world is unsettled' is a quote from Silverstone (1993, p. 589) on the role of television and ontological security in everyday life. During the pandemic, the term *doomscrolling* came to signify new levels of intensity in the addictive capacities of news, in states of global and personal turmoil in. In the first year of the pandemic, Canadian journalist Karen K. Ho started posting regular reminders on Twitter to 'stop

doomscrolling', a service that was appreciated by thousands of new followers. In the same period, articles on doomscrolling started to appear in Vox, Wired, Wikipedia and on the Merriam Webster Dictionary website. So, what is doomscrolling?

Based on the questionnaire from early lockdown, Hallvard Moe and I wrote a journal article in which we provide a research-based definition of doomscrolling, connecting the term to scholarship on news monitoring, news avoidance and digital news in the attention economy. We define doomscrolling as

> *a combination between (1) the content of dark unsettling news, (2) monitorial news use patterns centered on the smartphone, and (3) attention economy news streams, creating emotional drain through a flow which users find hard to get out of. (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021b)*

Our analysis focused on a specific question on news and information. Here, we saw less of the relative optimism and togetherness that characterized people's uses of digital media for communication and social contact, as discussed previously in this chapter.

News use in early pandemic lockdown, we argued, was characterized by the experience of navigating an endless stream of continually updated and scary news. People lived in an information environment with pandemic news coverage everywhere, on the television screens in the homes they were stuck in, and on the digital devices they depended on for work or socializing. We found a pattern in people's stories: first intensified news use, soon overload and fatigue, then new coping strategies mixing monitoring with avoidance. Similar patterns have been found in other European countries (Broersma & Swart, 2021; de Bruin et al., 2021; Groot Kormelink & Klein Gunnewiek, 2021; Nguyen et al., n.d.) and in Australia (Mannell & Meese, 2022).

When we later interviewed some respondents again, we asked them to recount their pandemic news experiences since they first heard of COVID-19, reaffirming that the first lockdown was a distinct phase where the shock of uprooted everyday circumstances led to intensified news monitoring. As one informant said: 'The greatest change was the need for information. The first days, when so much was happening, it was just about keeping up'. This was Michael, a student abroad who wondered what would happen with his possibilities to continue his education, if and when he should travel to and from Norway, and what was happening to people he knew here and there. Susanne, the communications worker quoted earlier, talked about early lockdown as 'breathing and living inside the news, all the time' – until she, in her own words, 'overdosed'.

Earlier in the chapter, I also quoted informants who recalled the early stages of learning about COVID-19, realizing that the virus crept closer to their own lives. These excerpts emphasized the difficulty of grasping the impact of the pandemic, moving through a process of considering it as a scary but distant event, to disbelief and growing unease, before the shock of the lockdown. Others in the same study said:

> *On March 12th, when the shutdown happened, that made an impression on everyone. Suddenly, what had been further away in Europe was right close to us. Understandably, my generation and the generation before… we have never experienced anything similar. (Kåre, 40s, M, on disability benefits)*

> *I have these flashbulb memories, as they are called, of empty capitals and tourist attractions in Southern Europe, completely void of people… The visual aspects were shocking, they created this 'oh fuck' feeling. (Sven, 30s, M, psychologist)*

Flashbulb memories, the term the latter informant uses, was a concept introduced in psychology in the 1970s to denote memories that are particularly vivid and resilient, concerning significant societal events (Conway, 1995). The textbook example is people who have clear memories of televised images and personal circumstances when learning John F. Kennedy had been shot, and the term has also been used in connection with the September 11 attacks in the United States and the July 22 terror in Norway.[10] Another informant compared the emotional impact of the pandemic to terrorism, saying 'It was like 9/11 one day, and then the next, and then the next… a very emotional and painful experience'. She had family in one of the countries that was severely affected early on, and followed news from home with worry, grief and alarm, also before the lockdown started in Norway.

The feeling of doom instituted by news use could involve concern for oneself and loved ones, but also for the world at large, and for what the pandemic would mean to future prospects. Several respondents talked, in this context, about becoming more selective and critical in their news use as the pandemic went on. A concurrent topic was the practical and mundane dimensions of pandemic news use: Keeping track of shifting guidelines, adapting everyday practices, and trying to plan short and long term. In the early phase news had been essential to this purpose, but eventually people relied more on direct information from workplaces or local institutions, reducing their dependence on news for practical navigation in daily life. These experiences can be understood as moving towards regaining a sense of normalcy (Groot Kormelink & Klein Gunnewiek, 2021), or, in the terminology of this book, as destabilization

followed by re-orientation. However, the unclear endpoint did not allow people to fully slip back into a ritual mode of news use, in which one checks the news to confirm that the world still stands, before getting on with other things (Moe et al., 2019a). Instead, they were living with a crisis that formed an emotionally strained connection between the news and their daily lives. As with Zoom fatigue, doomscrolling exemplifies how changing practices of everyday media use can be expressions of working through societal and personal problems that are not primarily about the media in question.

CONCLUSION: A NEW NORMAL?

Media use is embedded in the ordinariness of everyday habits, and connected to social identities and relationships in our daily lives. When the pandemic disrupted societies across the globe, people in suddenly unsettled circumstances were faced with the additional task of adapting communicative practices in their daily lives, but also turned to media as resources for managing the situation.

This chapter has shown that while the pandemic destabilized media repertoires, people's reorientations were dependent on communicative resources and ideals established beforehand. Communication scholarship predominantly underlines the deep integration of digital communication in social relations (e.g. Boyd, 2014; Couldry & Hepp, 2017), while trends such as digital disconnection revolve around the perceived superiority of interaction away from screens (Brennen, 2019; Syvertsen, 2020). These tensions were accentuated by the pandemic situation, creating an unprecedented situation that contextualized the opportunities and limitations of digital communication. Media use contributed to both problems and solutions in life in lockdown: News updates were critically important but emotionally draining, digital platforms were essential but not adequate, television viewing was distracting but also a needed focal point in the home.

As the pandemic continued, the most intensified aspects of media use diminished as compared to early lockdown, allowing for periods of increased activity outside the home, and for solidified familiarity rather than hasty experimentation in the uses of digital platforms. Instead of 'living and breathing inside the news' or experiencing '9/11 every day', to quote some of the informants, people eventually developed strategies for balancing information needs and other aspects of life.

In the interviews towards the end of 2020, the uncertain timeline of the pandemic was a challenge many grappled with. They did not know if the events of the past months should be considered a scary interlude or a new

world order, if and when they could make plans, and if problems and losses they experienced would come to remain with them over time. The emotional and existential aspects of understanding if everyday life would ever return, be re-invented, or remain in a state of flux, were accentuated through pandemic media use.

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5

THE POLITICS OF MEDIA USE IN DIGITAL EVERYDAY LIFE

ABSTRACT

This conclusion summarizes key insights from the former chapters, and highlights political dimensions of media use in digital everyday life. I particularly underline how our more digital everyday lives intensify communicative dilemmas, in which individuals in everyday settings negotiate with societal norms and power structures through their uses of media technologies. I also discuss how everyday media use connects us to different societal spheres and issues, also pointing to global challenges such as the pandemic and the climate crisis, arguing that everyday media use is key to our understandings of society. I discuss how to analyze this in media use research, emphasizing attention to processes of change and disruption.

With everything that is going on in the world, why care about media use in everyday life? In this concluding chapter, I will summarize and discuss insights from the book, and particularly highlight some of the political dimensions of media use in digital societies. I argue that everyday media use is central to how we engage with societal issues, and that our uses of digital media technologies for navigation across social domains represent negotiations of norms and power dynamics.

The status of everyday life as political can be considered in different ways, depending of our understanding of what political means. It is obvious that everyday life is political in the sense that 'politics' refer to contestations of power. Longstanding traditions of critique and scholarship have highlighted

how power dynamics are constitutive to the organization of everyday life, and further accentuated everyday life as a sphere in which we experience such struggles and tensions. This is particularly central in feminist scholarship on topics such as lived experience (deBeauvoir, 1949) or public engagement (Landes, 1998). In media and cultural studies, feminist perspectives that highlight political dimensions of everyday life are very much part of key studies and traditions (see for instance Cavalcante et al., 2017; McRobbie, 1991; Radway, 1984; VanZoonen, 1994). So, everyday life is political, and political dimensions in everyday life also relate to different uses and interpretations of media.

On the other hand, if we apply a notion of politics that refers more specifically to processes of government and public decision-making, everyday life can easily appear further removed from politics, for many of us. Perceptions that there is such a distance, and that it matters, can even be used to explain what everyday life is, defining the concept through a focus on ordinary people and their experiences, as opposed to elected officials or other elite power positions (see Haddon, 2004; Sandvik et al., 2016, p. 9). Yet, also in this understanding, the connection between everyday life and a sphere of politics is a central point of inquiry, also for media use research. Much of the interest in news use – as well as studies of those who consume less news – is premised on ideas that news foster connections between people and democratic politics (Skovsgaard & Andersen, 2019). Other studies problematize such connections (Woodstock, 2014) or point to how various cultural and socioeconomic structures shape everyday lives and further affect use and non-use of news (Hartley, 2018; Toff & Palmer, 2019; Villi et al., 2021). The conceptual approaches that inform some of the empirical studies of this book, such as public connection, allow for a user-focused exploration of how media use connects people to political matters, asking people about the public world – as they experience it in everyday life (Couldry et al., 2010; Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Swart et al., 2017).

In the introduction, I argued that everyday life is an inclusive topic in the sense that everyone has one. I further wrote that a myriad of scholarly perspectives and works are relevant to understand everyday life, so that we might find points of resonance also in discussions of everyday lives that are very different from our own. However, I also underlined the deep and interlinked inequalities that shape people's different everyday lives, and positioned the Norwegian empirical context of the is book as a small, wealthy Global North welfare state with a strong digital infrastructure. This context shapes the understandings of digital society and everyday media use developed throughout this book, while the different empirical studies represent further prioritizations of some experiences

and user groups. With this starting point, the book is specifically positioned, and the analyses have only touched upon a few political dimensions of media use in everyday life. This concluding discussion will foreground these, after summarizing the main frameworks and arguments.

MAIN FRAMEWORKS AND ARGUMENTS OF THE BOOK

To understand media use in everyday life, I argued in the first chapter, we might consider this as an empirical, methodological or theoretical research interest, signalling positions that prioritize people's contextualized experiences with media in their lifeworlds. Building on theories from philosophy, sociology and media studies, I developed an understanding of media use in everyday life that highlighted routinized navigation across social domains and the role of digital media for this purpose. This understanding draws on conceptualizations of the lifeworld (Schutz & Luckmann, 1973) that encompass temporal, spatial and social dimensions, and on theories that foreground existential aspects of mediated connectivity (Markham, 2021; Silverstone, 1994). I further discussed how the analytical concepts of media repertories (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012; Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017) and public connection (Couldry et al., 2010) can inform explorative empirical research into media use in everyday life, allowing for open and user-focused approaches. Last but not least, the chapter discussed what it means that our societies and media use practices are becoming more digital and datafied, with immersive, algorithmic and intrusive media. Drawing on the notion of a middle ground between technological determinism and social constructivism (Baym, 2015), I argued that digital media use shapes everyday life, and that everyday life shapes digital media use. I also pointed to the growing research literature on digital disconnection (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021) as relevant to understand how dilemmas of digital technologies are entangled in everyday life.

Building on these discussions, the main argument of the book is that digital media transform our routinized navigation across the social domains of everyday life, including our orientation to communities and people around us. The three subsequent chapters substantiated this argument in analysis of media use an ordinary day, media use in life transitions, and media use in societal disruption.

In Chapter 2, I used the idea of an ordinary day as an entry point for understanding media use, particularly highlighting the centrality of smartphones at the centre of digital user practices. Building on day-in-the-life interviews from different studies, I also discussed methodological challenges of this approach,

such as noticing and describing the ordinary, or moving beyond the smartphone. The analysis followed different media users through an ordinary day, as they wake up, navigate across social domains, and seek connection and companionship through everyday media use. I argued that seemingly mundane practices are made meaningful through the social connection they entail, and I situated users' communicative choices regarding digital technologies as part of different everyday settings and experiences. Returning to the ideas from the introduction, I positioned smartphone checking as essential to what we do in digital everyday life: Checking the phone is key to our navigation across social domains, part of different activities, and serves to aggregate and accompany other forms of media use that also remain important, in the age of smartphones.

In Chapter 3, I moved beyond an ordinary day in the lives of media users, to analysis of how media use changes in conjunction with transitions in the life course. Such transitions constitute moments of destabilization, in which media repertoires and modes of public connection are reconfigured and adapted to changing circumstances. This could entail that preferences are reconsidered, that elements are temporarily or permanently discarded, while habits are taken up or amended. In such processes, easily adaptable digital media technologies like the smartphone become ever more important, as easy-to-reach for tools for new forms of self-expression, information-seeking and social contact. The empirical material of the chapter was a small qualitative interview study with mothers about digital media use the first year with a new-born. This analysis particularly brought forward the communicative dilemmas of navigating parenthood in an age of ubiquitous connectivity, demonstrating how presence ideals or notions of digital inferiority come into conflict with practical and emotional considerations.

In Chapter 4, I continued the analysis of everyday media use in times of destabilization, focusing not on individual life transitions but on the societal disruption of the COVID-19 pandemic. Building on a qualitative questionnaire study conducted in the first weeks of lockdown in Norway, and follow-up interviews at the end of 2020, I analyzed changing media repertoires through the keywords more digital, less mobile, still social. The analysis showed that reconfiguring uses of digital media was a central component of coping strategies when everyday life was turned upside down. While the pandemic destabilized media repertoires, people's reorientations to the challenging situation were dependent on communicative resources and relations established beforehand, connected to inequalities and divides. I further discussed how terms such as 'Zoom fatigue' or 'doomscrolling' could express struggles people face in digital communication and information environments, but also are fundamentally indicative of the social and existential aspects of media use as a form

of connection. Experiences of losing meaningful social contact or worrying for the world situation are mediated through these terms, but not problems pertaining to the digital media as such.

In sum, the three analytical chapters followed media users through circumstances that ranged from mundane to extraordinary, framing everyday life not as a stable entity, but as an ongoing and partly unsettled existential project. The analyses explored how media use is embedded in everything that happens in everyday life, whatever everyday life might look like at the moment, with media use taking on shifting functions and meanings. This embedded position is not in itself new, but it has been accentuated as well as complicated with the digitalization of media and of society.

Through the smartphone, we spend considerable amounts of our everyday lives supplementing our various activities with digital media use, or turning parts of our attention to something happening elsewhere. The smartphone can be considered the prime symbol of problematic distraction, but also as a meaningful opportunity to maintain social bonds across geographical contexts. Most people would probably be able to recognize both as true, situated in different everyday moments. There are compelling reasons why ambivalence remains essential to understand uses of the smartphone (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020), and why it is, along with social media (Chia et al., 2021) key to cultural and scholarly concerns about our digital communicative culture.

A central argument I have made is that media use, as other aspects of everyday life, will be most easily noticed and reflected upon when something is changing. Therefore, the book has taken particular interest in moments of disruption and destabilization, often followed by reorientation and reconfiguration. The analyses indicate that digital media become more important when everyday life is changing – destabilization inspires digital media expansion in media repertoires. In circumstances as different as individual life transitions versus a collective societal crisis, digital media appeared as a resource that people would turn to, to make sense of events and practically manage shifting circumstances. The smartphone, in particular, adapts to new situations, provides information and companionship, fills in-between moments, and constitutes an extension of the person, connecting to people and situations beyond oneself. All of these capacities are important in ordinary everyday life, and become even more important when everyday life is disrupted.

This understanding of everyday media use in digital society brings forward several potential political dimensions, regarding the different lives of users facing various kinds of stability and disruption. Drawing on the analyses of the former chapters, I particularly draw attention to two of these:

Digital everyday life intensifies communicative dilemmas, and transforms connections to societal issues.

DIGITAL EVERYDAY LIFE INTENSIFIES COMMUNICATIVE DILEMMAS

The first political dimension of everyday media use I would like to foreground is how our ever more digital everyday lives transform the communicative dilemmas that users encounter in everyday settings. It is an established tenet that digitalization of the media has affected choice and selection of media content, but less attention has been paid to how user decisions – including the most mundane ones – are always made in some kind of everyday circumstance that may or may not play into what people do with media.

I started this book by asking how our lives have changed after the smartphone, a mobile media technology that rapidly became a staple of everyday life, for a considerable number of people. When we pick up the phone, as many of us do all day and every day, we make decisions that feed into power dynamics in digital and datafied society. Through the smartphone, many aspects of our everyday lives can be tracked and surveilled, with impacts that are hard to grasp for individual users. This includes spatiotemporal dimensions such as where we are and when we move between locations, social dimensions such as who we communicate with, as well as sensory, bodily and intimate aspects of our activities. The growing literature on datafication (Flensburg & Lomborg, 2021) includes key research strands on user experiences with datafied media technologies, often taking an everyday perspective to explore how people actually encounter datafication (Kennedy & Hill, 2018; Livingstone, 2019; Ytre-Arne & Das, 2020). Likewise, studies of how people understand algorithms in the media often apply an everyday perspective to explore how people negotiate with and interpret algorithmic interactions (Bucher, 2017; Siles et al., 2020; Swart, 2021; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021b). Whereas critiques of datafication also emphasize global power dynamics and inequalities (see for instance Couldry & Mejias, 2019; Milan & Treré, 2019), everyday media use is essential to how people experience these divides, and essential to debates on privacy, power and feedback loops in datafied society.

Such considerations are part of the communicative dilemmas considered in this book, which has touched on examples such as new parents who try to develop social media sharing policies, or smartphone users discussing how to manage their phone settings. However, my main focus has been on the kind of communicative dilemma where users consider potentially conflicting values

embedded in everyday communication. This is also a form of political contestation, where societal norms meet personal circumstances, intensified by the complexities of hybrid information environments. In pandemic lockdown, uses of media technologies at home became an arena for figuring out how to manage colliding work and family obligations, how to conduct health and risk assessments, how to maintain sociability and connection, and how to stay informed while preserving mental energy. While this was an extraordinary situation, it very clearly illustrates the position of everyday life as the sphere in which existential communicative dilemmas are experienced.

As media technologies have become increasingly interwoven in most social domains across society, everyday considerations about media use take on new levels of complexity. There is intense public discussion about appropriate uses of media technologies, as seen in debates about digital tools in education, screen time in families, or always-on working life. These examples point to questions of when, where, how, how much and to which purposes we should (and should not) use smartphones and other digital media. In public discourse, problematic aspects are easily ascribed as intrinsic to new media technologies, while the values that are seemingly infringed upon tend to be considered separate to media, inherent to the different social domains in which media are used. This is not in itself new, as other historical critiques of media also connect to broader cultural debates and societal values (Syvertsen, 2017; Vanden Abeele & Mohr, 2021). What is made evident with a cross-media everyday perspective, however, is how many different dilemmas are left to be negotiated by users in a range of micro-settings in daily life. In this book, analyses of users in transitional or precarious situations show that normative ideas about media use take part in very different situations, as people navigate between social domains and often rely on mediated communication to keep it all together.

DIGITAL EVERYDAY LIFE TRANSFORMS OUR CONNECTION TO SOCIETAL ISSUES

The second political aspect of everyday media use I would like to underline, again based on the analyses of this book, concerns the role of digital media technologies in shaping our connections to the world around us. Everyday life is the space in which opportunities or hindrances for public connection are found, where people's different resources and experiences shape different modes of connection, to local, national and global issues.

Re-reading classic texts on media use and everyday life, it is striking to find characteristics about the state of the world that appear almost too on-the-nose for 2022. Roger Silverstone wrote, framing his discussion of television and ontological security, about the need to keep chaos at bay, in a world

> *massively transformed by the threats of nuclear holocaust, of environmental disaster, but also by our vulnerability to the exigencies of national and international politics, and by the paradoxes of a planetary communication system that connects and disconnects us in the same breath to a world which is otherwise entirely out of reach. (Silverstone, 1993, p. 574)*

In 2022, there is a new war in Europe after Russia invaded Ukraine, immediate extensive action is needed to face the climate crisis, and there is a pandemic we are not entirely done with. These and other crises demonstrate our immense vulnerability to societal systems, as Silverstone wrote, and there are paradoxes in how media and communication connect us not just to each other, but also to knowledge of these and other threats.

Following this perspective, one function of media use in everyday life is to help us organize our engagement with the threatening chaos of the world, trying to establish practices that enable us to feel some ontological security, at least in the sense of trust to keep going on with things, as everyday life continues. Through everyday media use, we develop habits for how we monitor and engage with our personal lifeworld and the world at large, as we are checking news, checking messages, temporarily disconnecting, sharing, discussing, communicating or coordinating. The literature on public connection indicates how a variety of mediated and non-mediated practices could represent possibilities for connecting to public spheres, but also that these connections vary considerably between users (Couldry et al., 2010; Nærland, 2020; Swart et al., 2017).

We can ask if the connection to societal issues is intensified as media use becomes more digital, mirroring the discussion above on communicative dilemmas and digital user patterns. Like television once brought events of the world into people's homes in new ways, digital media environments are characterized by a multitude of constantly updated information streams spread across platforms (Bengtsson & Johansson, 2020; Boczkowski, 2021; Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2020). The analysis of pandemic media use in this book supports others who have highlighted that intensification is one important keyword for changing media use in the pandemic (Treré, 2021). Likewise, the notion of doomscrolling captures a particularly intense connection – one that is emotionally and cognitively unsustainable over time – between the chaos of

the world and the individual media user. This intensification is possible due to the affordances of smartphones and digital media, and attention economy news streams. However, several studies also find that experiences of disconnection and avoidance seem to follow intensification, as part of changing media use in crisis situations (Groot Kormelink & Klein Gunnewiek, 2021; Mannell & Meese, 2022; Treré, 2021; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021b). This means that a variety of communicative practices can be part of whether, how and when people connect to social and political issues through everyday media use.

CONCLUSION: UNDERSTANDING DIGITAL SOCIETY THROUGH EVERYDAY MEDIA USE

So, with everything going on in the world, why care about media use in everyday life? This book has hopefully provided arguments for why our everyday lives with media are interesting and important, not just to us as individuals, but also to the shared social world we inhabit.

In a digital and datafied society, there is no obvious separation between people's everyday engagements with technologies, and the power relations embedded within these same technologies. Using digital platforms or social media implies that people relate to power structures that they might, at the same time, perceive as opaque, surveilling, problematic or downright harmful (Chia et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2015; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021a). Everyday life is also the sphere in which we encounter and engage with societal issues, from seemingly small matters to concerns about the state of the world, made constantly available to us by media technologies in the hybrid information environment. Everyday media use is central to configuring the routines that our societal orientations rely on, but also part of inequalities that shape different everyday lives and different formations of communities and publics (Milan et al., 2020; Møller Hartley et al., 2021). To integrate and highlight an everyday perspective on media and communication allows us to approach these issues as they are encountered by a range of people, situated in different contexts, as part of lifeworlds and lived experiences.

While practices of everyday media use can be mundane, their role in our daily routines represents central modes of orientation to society, and entail navigation of complex power dynamics. We routinely encounter and negotiate a series of dilemmas of high societal and political relevance – as part of media use in ordinary everyday life.

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APPENDIX: PROJECTS, STUDIES AND METHODS

This appendix provides an overview of the different projects and studies that I draw on in this book. As mentioned earlier, the book originates from an intersection of several research projects I have been involved in. In the different chapters, I provide some information about methods and data, and I reference related publications. Here, I list the relevant projects and studies, and provide more methodological details or cross-references, as well as outlining how the studies are relevant to the analyses in the book. All informant names in the book are pseudonyms.

MEDIA, CULTURE AND PUBLIC CONNECTION

The research project *Media, Culture and Public Connection* (MeCIn, 2015–2021), led by Hallvard Moe and funded by the Research Council of Norway, was a broad study of cross-media use and public connection in Norway. I was responsible for leading qualitative data collection carried out by a team of researchers and assistants. This took the form of two rounds of in-depth interviews intercepted by a media diary, with 50 informants mirroring the Norwegian population, conducted in the fall of 2016.

We have published extensively from the project, including discussions of the research design and methodology that will not be repeated here (see for instance Moe et al., 2019a; Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). Of particular relevance to this book projects are two articles on ambivalent smartphone use (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020) and changing media use (Ytre-Arne, 2019). In the latter I introduce a conceptual framework for destabilization and reorientation in media repertoires, which I apply in this book in analysis of new empirical data (see below) analyzed in Chapters 3 and 4.

In the book, the MeCIn qualitative study otherwise constitutes a background for the methodological and conceptual discussions on everyday media use and public connection in everyday life. I draw on insights from the MeCIn research process in Chapter 2, in my discussion of day-in-the-life interviews in

the age of smartphones. The study has also partially inspired interview protocols used in other studies. There is no new analysis of the empirical materials from the project in this book.

INTRUSIVE MEDIA, AMBIVALENT USERS, AND DIGITAL DETOX

Intrusive media, ambivalent users, and digital detox (Digitox) led by Trine Syvertsen is an ongoing project on digital disconnection, funded by the Research Council of Norway (grant nr 287563). The project investigates and theorizes dilemmas regarding digital media overload, studying norms and policies, users and industry, with many different studies. I have been responsible for some of the studies of media users, and in the book I draw on two of these:

Study: Digital Media in the Newborn Period

This study was planned as one of several qualitative studies interviewing and observing users in precarious situations – situations in which something important was at stake and digital media could be perceived to infringe. The project also includes similar studies of artists and knowledge workers pursuing focused creativity (Karlsen & Ytre-Arne, 2021) and tourists seeking nature experiences in remote locations (Syvertsen, 2022). A sub-study on new parents was considered particularly relevant to understand the role of digital media in what is perceived as a vulnerable and particularly meaningful time in life. Originally, the intention was to combine interviews with parents with observations in maternity wards, and interviews with professionals providing advice to new parents.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, observations in maternity wards or other health care facilities were not possible, and interviews with professionals were difficult to arrange. Two background interviews – with a representative for a midwife association and an organization working with mental health amongst new parents – were conducted right before the pandemic, but are not included in the sample. Instead, the study became an interview study focusing on new mothers, with eight in-depth interviews. The informants were Norwegian women from early 20s to late 30s, most around 30 years of age, with different education levels and family circumstances, including first- and second-time mothers.

I conducted all interviews on Zoom in the summer and fall of 2020, building on an interview protocol developed partly for this purpose and partly in conjunction with the other studies in the Digitox project. The interview guide was used with flexibility, but all interviews touched upon everyday life and media use at the time of the interview, follow-up questions on changes from before and since having the baby, retrospective questions on digital media use in the maternity ward immediately after birth, when returning home with the new-born, and through family leave. Towards the end of the interviews, we discussed the informants' views on digital media in family life and in society in general.

These interviews constitute the primary empirical material for Chapter 3 in this book, on media use in life transitions. The material has so far not been published in other contexts.

Study: Media Use in Early Pandemic Lockdown

When the first national pandemic lockdown was announced in Norway in March and April 2020, the Digitox project initiated a study of changing media use. We chose a qualitative approach to capture reflections and experiences, and selected the format of a written questionnaire so that people could answer when it suited them.

The questionnaire went through intense development and testing, and was published on March 24th, twelve days after the national lockdown was announced. We distributed links to an online form in social media, on project websites and in personal networks, soliciting replies from anyone who wished to participate, and inviting people to spread the questionnaire further. In total, we received 552 replies between March 24th and April 3rd, after which active recruitment of respondents ceased. We monitored replies as they came in, and tried to secure demographic variety by recruiting amongst groups that were underrepresented initially, for instance spreading the questionnaire to young people. Nevertheless, the sample is skewed towards more women than men, more middle class than working class occupations, and more middle-aged respondents.

The questionnaire asked for some background information on age, gender, occupation and living situation. Next, it contained five qualitative questions to be answered in respondents' own words, one on how everyday life had changed, three on media use including news, entertainment and communication with others, and a final question where respondents could tell us anything they found important. The question on communication with others read:

> *Communication with others: How do you communicate with people you do not live with? Tell us if you use your phone, social media or digital technologies differently than usual. How do you experience such contact as compared to communication face-to-face?*

Immediately after closing the survey, I conducted a thematic analysis of replies to this question, before expanding into a broader analysis of the whole material, conducted in collaboration with colleagues.

In this book, the questionnaire material is utilized in Chapter 4 to discuss changing media repertoires in early lockdown. Other publications include an article on doomscrolling and news avoidance (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2021b), building on analysis of a different question focused on news and information. Another article on media repertoires will be published in Norwegian, providing a different analysis to the one in this book, focused more on changing compositions of repertoires and on strategies and rationales explaining these.

MEDIA USE IN CRISIS SITUATIONS

Media Use in Crisis Situations (MUCS) is a research project funded by the Research Council of Norway (grant number 314578) for the period of 2021–2025, for which I am project leader. The project analyses media use in large-scale societal crisis situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the climate crisis, with an interest in how these are encountered in the media as well as in everyday life. Many of the perspectives and arguments developed in this book, particularly in Chapters 1 and 4, are part of the conceptual framework and analytical work of the MUCS project.

Study: News Use During the Coronavirus Pandemic

In 2020, the University of Bergen funded what would become a pilot study to the MUCS project, an interview study on news use during the first year of the coronavirus pandemic. This pilot project was conducted in collaboration with psychology professor Bjørn Sætrevik and his project on risk perceptions regarding the pandemic, and in collaboration with the Digitox project to follow up on the early lockdown study of changing media use. Most respondents to the Digitox questionnaire had consented to be contacted again at a later

date for follow-up, and we primarily recruited informants amongst these. Media scholar John Magnus Ragnhildson Dahl was hired as a researcher to conduct the interviews.

A sample of 12 people participated in in-depth interviews in late fall 2020. The informant group was mixed in terms of gender, age, occupations and in terms of how people had been affected by the pandemic. Interviews were conducted on digital platforms and lasted for 1–2 hours. The interview protocol included questions on what life was like at the moment, on media use an ordinary day (with extensive follow-up), and on reflections on the pandemic situation and changing news interests since first hearing of COVID-19, and up to the point of the interview. The protocol also delved deeper into people's perceptions of risk during the pandemic, and experiences of news avoidance and information overload.

In this book, the interviews are analyzed in Chapters 2 and 4, the first focused on day-in-the-life segments, and the second on perceptions of the pandemic. Two other publications drawing on the interviews are in process: a journal article draft on preoccupations with infection rates, and a book chapter on how people used news media for locally relevant and trustworthy information.

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