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On the relativity of old and new media: A lifeworld perspective

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Abstract

It is an old, yet, accurate observation that the ‘newness’ of media is and most probably will continue to be a catalyst for research in media and communication studies. At the same time, there are numerous academic voices who stress that studying media change demands an awareness of the complexities at play interweaving the new with the old and the changes with the continuities. Over the last decades, compelling theoretical approaches and conceptualizations were introduced that aimed at grasping what defines old and new media under the conditions of complex, disruptive media change. Drawing from this theoretical work, we propose an empirical approach that departs from the perception of media users and how they make sense of media in their everyday affairs. The article argues that an inquiry of media change has to ground the construction of media as old or new in the context of lifeworlds in which media deeply affect users on a daily basis from early on. The concept of media ideology (Gershon, 2010a, 2010b) is used to investigate notions of ‘oldness’ and ‘newness’ people develop when they renegotiate the meaning of media for themselves or collectively with others. Based on empirical data from 35 in-depth interviews, distinct ways how the relativity but also relationality of old and new media are shaped against each other are identified. In the analysis, the article focuses on the aspects of rhetoric, everyday experiences, and emotions as well as on media generations, all of which inform media ideologies and thereby influence how media users define old and new media.

Keywords

Everyday experiences, lifeworld, media change, media ideology, mediatization, new media, nostalgia, old media, qualitative interviews

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Introduction

Media and communication studies are profoundly driven by the inquiry into the ‘newness’ of media. The ‘newness’ of media as a catalyst of change explicitly or implicitly informs and shapes modes of inquiry into the role of contemporarily new media technologies or devices and new modes of usage and practices related to them. Furthermore, the impact of new communicative tools, possibilities for communication in public or private settings as well as the transformation and reconfiguration of various social domains against the background of mediatization and social change ‘have an enduring appeal for media and communication scholars’ (Mihelj and Stanyer, 2018). ‘New media’ as a term was strongly featured in research from the 1990s onward and also resonates in the names of relevant journals founded in that period of time (e.g. *New Media and Society* or also *Convergence*, the journal at hand). While the appeal of new media as a keyword has slightly vanished, the logic behind the notion is indeed persistent and updated with more refined keywords that signal departure from the old and into new realms of inquiry (i.e. as reflected by newly founded journals like *Social Media + Society* or *Big Data and Society*). Of course, the discussion of new and old media is almost as old as the coining of the terms, and over the years, significant scholarship addressed the questions of change and continuity, transformation and persistence in a *longue durée* perspective and contributed to a more nuanced understanding of media genealogies (Balbi, 2015; Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011; Scolari, 2013). However, research that more explicitly addresses the complex relationship between new and old media usually does so in highly prolific niches of the field and rather with theoretical and conceptual arguments than empirical work.

This article sets out to offer an empirical basis for established discussions of a mostly theoretical debate by exploring the relation between ‘oldness’ and ‘newness’ in a perspective on media users and how they make sense of media in their everyday.

By turning to reflections and discourses surrounding everyday experiences made with media throughout time, we are able to determine how ‘oldness’ and ‘newness’ of media are – as Natale (2016a: 588) put it – ‘constantly renegotiated’ among different media users in contemporary societies. To develop our argument, we propose to use the concept of media ideology, which allows us to investigate the ideas of ‘oldness’ and ‘newness’ individuals and groups refer to when making sense of media. According to Gershon (2010a, 2010b), people will act on the media according to their attitudes and beliefs toward the media. These ideological grounds need not necessarily to be true, but also can be misled or misinformed. Nevertheless, they influence and ‘guide’ which media and devices people will make use of for specific purposes, which media they will use or from which they will decidedly refrain.

Stemming from empirical insights gained through a series of 35 in-depth interviews, the goal of this article is to address the relativity but also relationality of old and new media from a lifeworld perspective. Old and new are always relative and relational terms: We set out to explore how this relativity of old and new is to be seen and understood based on individual media ideologies over time. We will conclude with identifying seven conceptualizations of old and new media and their qualities from our analysis, which can be used to determine or approach the relationship between old and new media in a nuanced way.

Media change and the challenge of grasping the old and the new

Questions of media change have found significant scholarly attention over the last years. Since the proliferation of the premise that lifeworlds are becoming mediatized (Couldry and Hepp, 2017;

Hepp, 2013) and that communication as a field has to deal with a distinct mediation of everything (Livingstone, 2009), ‘media change’ has increasingly become a ‘hashtag’ (Lunt and Livingstone, 2016) that is used to bind together most different strands of research. While media and communication research in general is strongly motivated by an interest in the ‘newness’ of media and finds updated legitimation for its questions in the impact and transformation expected to be brought about by new means and modes of communication, naïve ideas of linear relations between the emergence of new media and change have been conceptually overcome. Thanks to theoretical concepts which argue for a long-term perspective and deepened analysis, such as mediatization (Deacon and Stanyer, 2014; Hepp et al., 2015; Krotz, 2007), media evolution (Latzer, 2009; Scolari, 2013; Stöber, 2004), media historiography (Balbi, 2015; Coopersmith, 2010; Gitelman, 2006; Peters, 2009), remediation (Bolter and Grusin, 1999), or media archeology (Huhtamo and Parikka, 2011; Manovich, 2001; Roberts and Goodall, 2018), the dialectic between continuity and change has been emphasized. New media are tied to their predecessors on multiple levels such as contents, processes, features, aesthetics, materialities, designs, functionality, and social uses, and old media are reformed as they are challenged by the new. Overall, the body of literature conveys a nuanced depiction of dimensions that media change comprises both regarding the change of media and technology and society at large. This makes it rather futile to adhere an ontological clear-cut definition of new media based on the newest media that determine everything that came before old (Natale, 2016a; Peters, 2009; Silverstone, 1999).

Simone Natale condensed such iterations in the interesting phrase that in fact ‘there are no old media’, as ‘[m]edia operate in circuits of value where their attributes and qualities, including newness and oldness, are constantly renegotiated’ (2016a: 588). Old media are reconfigured, and their meaning, their uses, and their position in media ecology are renegotiated continuously in the light of the new and vice versa. Natale demonstrated that neither the materiality nor the social use or technology render fruitful to distinguish old from new media. The ‘oldness’ of media does not predefine their usefulness and functionality, their social use often continues in niches or different contexts, and media have time and time again been reintroduced, or they are imitated by new technologies (Hertz and Parikka, 2012; Natale, 2016a: 587–591). Instead, Natale proposed to consider the notion of old media as relational, ‘which relates to the way we perceive, experience, and integrate media in our everyday life’ (2016a: 586).

In line with this argumentation, we believe that it is specifically the idea of constant renegotiation that holds potential for inquiries into media change. Approaching the complexities of media change as well as ‘oldness’ and ‘newness’ from a lifeworld perspective might produce insights that diverge from those we gain from other media- and technology-centered approaches or a focus on broader social developments (Fickers and van den Oever, 2018). We will subsequently focus on people as media users whose intention is to cope with media change in their everyday affairs. We aim to reconstruct how they establish media ideologies, that is, personal beliefs, attitudes, and strategies about media (Gershon, 2010a: 391), defining what constitutes old and new media and the values and meanings that are attributed to them. By investigating personal experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and emotions, it is possible to understand how media users renegotiate ‘oldness’ and ‘newness’ personally as well as collectively with others. Consequently, we do not argue that the personal perception is isolated because it is the result of collective efforts of renegotiation on multiple levels of society within different social arrangements and cultural contexts individuals are embedded in (Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Natale, 2016a).

Media ideologies and the interplay of rhetoric, everyday experiences, and emotions

The concept of media ideologies as used by Ilana Gershon (2010a, 2010b) focuses on a set of beliefs regarding media that enables an understanding of how and why people use media technologies for various communicative ends based on their ‘attitudes and strategies about the media’ (2010a: 391). According to her, people’s uses and practices related to specific media are influenced and shaped by their perceptions of said media, whereas the perception of one specific medium is shaped against the totality of media at an individual’s disposal at certain times. Individual beliefs about media will shape how they utilize particular media, while they decide to use other media differently or not at all. Gershon (2010a) refines and probes the concept based on empirical work on how people use specific media for breaking up with their partners. Media ideologies, however, can be employed in a variety of contexts to examine how people feel and think about media and to point to the grounds on which they judge the value of media (Boczkowski et al., 2018).

A critical element in people’s perception of new media we want to stress is that they are introduced into existing media environments within people’s lifeworlds and thus are at any time relative to historical, social, and cultural contexts. Gershon hence remarked that

[e]ach new medium is instantly enmeshed in a web of media ideologies – old media determine how new media will be perceived. At the same time, every new medium alters how the already existing media are understood to shape communication. (2010b: 287)

Beliefs about and attitudes toward the media that resonate in such culturally and socially informed media ideologies lead to different accounts of ‘newness’ and ‘oldness’ often diverging from ontological attributions. However, the personal ‘web of media ideologies’ existing within the horizon of people’s lifeworlds remediates what is considered ‘new’ about these allegedly new media by relating them to media already implemented in everyday media routines and uses (Bolter and Grusin, 1999; Fickers, 2014: 42; Gershon, 2010b: 287–289). Hence, remediation from an actors point of view is not only about new technology imitating old technology but ultimately about integrating ‘cultural agreements’ and ‘social meaning’ attached to media (Bolter and Grusin, 1999: 58) into the personal web of media ideologies. According to Natale (2016a: 591–596), three dimensions become significant for how people make sense of media in their lifeworlds: (1) rhetoric, (2) everyday experiences, and (3) emotions. We argue that these three dimensions and their interplay are also key for the formation and change of media ideologies.

Rhetoric

The introduction of media is usually accompanied by a ‘rhetoric of the new’ in society and academia (Natale, 2016a: 594). This rhetoric shapes media ideologies by limiting the contingency of the imaginary about what a medium can or cannot be through fantasies (Marvin, 1988: 7; Natale and Balbi, 2014). Based on the work of Taylor (2004), Majid Yar employs the term ‘cultural imaginary’ to describe how such fantasies are publicly debated, and the ‘social imaginary is given a concrete form in the sphere of cultural production’ (2014: 2). People are confronted with political debates, academic expertise, popular culture, advertising, and so on, about new technology, which together ‘shape our cultural imaginary in decisive ways, seeping into the interstices and cracks of collective consciousness’ (Yar, 2014: 3–4). The cultural imaginary of so-called new media often manifests in utopian or dystopian public rhetoric, recent cases being cultural imaginaries of the

Internet (Fisher and Wright, 2006; Hetland, 2012), artificial intelligence (Dubhashi and Lappin, 2017; Shanahan, 2015), or big data (Pentzold et al., 2018). These cultural imaginaries, we would argue, suggest specific readings of what new media mean and do and subsequently guide how people approach and think of media innovations.

Everyday experiences

Everyday experiences with media change are not only determined by existing media ideologies but also shape them in return when they are applied to new media. Gitelman points out that in the past media ‘acquired and possessed meanings in the circumstances of their apprehension and use, and that those meanings, many and changeable, arose in relation to the social lives of people and of things’ (Gitelman, 2003: 62). As outlined earlier, this use of new media devices and applications depends on the remediation guided by existing media ideologies. That sometimes even leads to situations in which ‘people develop media ideologies that can be at odds with the assumptions embedded in the technologies themselves’ (Gershon, 2010b: 286). At the same time, unexpected positive or negative experiences might alter ideological beliefs about certain media. We find this, for example, with digital stress when people who once embraced being permanently online and connected decide to reduce their media usage or sometimes even do ‘digital detox’ to abstain from smartphone and Internet use (Hesselberth, 2018; Kaun and Schwarzenegger, 2014; Selwyn, 2003). Needless to say, that the ‘need to detox’ and calls for abstinence are themselves based on media ideologies, marking a transition within the personal web of media ideologies.

Emotions

Emotional attachment to the media is an important factor in coping with media change. This seems especially right for media that are regarded as companions over people’s life course or in relevant life stages (Bolin, 2016: 256–261; Naab and Schwarzenegger, 2017; Natale, 2016a: 593–596; Natale, 2016b). The nostalgic sentiment that is felt qualifies media as personally valuable even though they might be old or technologically outdated (Kaun and Stiernstedt, 2014; Lizardi, 2015; Niemeyer, 2014). The often nostalgic evaluations of what was desirable about ‘old’ media people grew up with becomes a vital element in media ideologies with the potential to critically address technological, social, and cultural shortcomings of new media and life in the digital age (Bolin, 2016; Menke, 2017). With the advent of new technology that exerts social and cultural change, a disruption people and societies might experience is stemming from a certain feeling of loss, for example, regarding obsolete beloved old media (Boym, 2001; Davis, 1979). The subsequent nostalgic feelings add to media ideologies and help to cope with such changes (Menke, 2017). The experience with old media might also be considered as more authentic than with new media, mainly because their presence has been normalized and is considered a natural element of one’s lifeworld (Deuze, 2012).

In summary, all three dimensions unfold an impact on media ideologies, yet, as we will show, not all in the same extent depending on individuals’ lifeworlds and biographical experiences. As Natale put it ‘defining a particular medium or artifact as old is a decision that is culturally driven and that, crucially, may inform debates about technologies in the public sphere as well as the process of media domestication in everyday life’ (2016a: 587). Over a life course of witnessing public rhetoric of ‘newness’, gaining experiential knowledge from (non-)use of media as well as

building affective attachments to media, people develop media ideologies to cope with media change. Consequently, it is necessary to contextualize individual experiences over time, beginning with the media generation and media environments individuals grew up in and in which their media ideologies originate.

Media generations

Referring to media generations in regard to media ideologies traces back to the concept of a generation's actuality introduced by Karl Mannheim (1928). He argues that being born in a certain year defines one's historical location, yet, '[g]eneration as actuality first appears when individuals who occupy the same historical location share the same experiences and become realized as a generation also for themselves' (Bolin, 2014: 110). This actuality leads to what Mannheim calls 'generation units' that are no longer only defined by their year of birth but more importantly by 'shared experiences and the self-positioning as a community that can construct collective patterns of orientation and behavior' (Naab and Schwarzenegger, 2017: 95). As outlined in the literature, this also holds true for shared media experiences (Aroldi, 2011; Björkin, 2015; Bolin, 2017; Naab and Schwarzenegger, 2017). Bolin also stresses that an important factor in Mannheim's work on media is what he calls 'fresh contact', meaning that young people in formative life phases are less experienced than older people, hence, are more deeply impacted by things such as new media. More importantly, Mannheim assumes that '[a]ll later experiences then tend to receive their meaning from this original set, whether they appear as that set's verification and fulfilment or as its negation and antithesis' (1928: 111).

Media ideologies emerging with 'fresh contact' accordingly are more or less the starting point of all later remediations of new media in a person's life, which is why media of formative phases in childhood and youth are of such significance to most people and contribute to a generation's actuality at that time and especially later in life (Bolin, 2016; Lizardi, 2017). Bolin (2016) and Lizardi (2017) show that nostalgia becomes an important factor, both for individuals and in public debate about old media. In reaction to the rhetoric of the new, a rhetoric of the old is constructed circling around the extrusion of old media and related experiences by (often less appreciated) new media and new experiences. We argue that this rhetoric of the old is not only pushed by the media industry used to market nostalgic products and culture (Reynolds, 2011). It is also constructed within specific social arrangements of these generations in which they come together and renegotiate what constitutes them as a generation through their past media experiences.

Method

To investigate perceptions of media as old or new in a lifeworld perspective, we conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with 35 participants in 2016. Eighteen participants were members of German Facebook groups concerned with remembering the past, such as 'We kids of the 80s' or 'Vinyl fans'. According to a theoretical sampling strategy, participants represented four different main groups of memory-related social media collectives: groups (a) sharing experiences as members of a generation, (b) recalling and discussing their members' lives in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), (c) debating past media experiences, formats, contents, and vintage technologies, as well as (d) remembering one's hometown. This was complemented by interviews with informants who were recruited among friends and families of students in a research seminar.

These informants did not participate in online collectives dedicated to the commemoration of the past or past media experiences. We decided to include these two distinct subsamples to have perspectives from informants not primarily concerned with media memories, media change, and the relationship between old and new media compared to perspectives from informants that engage in online discussion about these aspects. This allowed us to search for common patterns across the subsamples as well as to identify and distinguish peculiar differences. To allow rather distinct media generations growing up in different media environments to be part of the sample, we aimed at informants in their 20s and informants around 50 years of age and older in both subsamples. This allows us to consider the role of generation-specific media experiences and their relation to differences in media ideologies. In the Facebook subsample, there are nine informants in their 20s, eight above 50, and one who is 37. In the nonmember subsample, we have 6 in their 20s, 10 around 50 and older, and 1 who is 33. For the analysis, we excluded both informants who were in their 30s to maintain a distinct generational demarcation.

Interviewing the informants about their assessment of media change and their everyday media experiences within their media environments allowed us to identify elements of underlying media ideologies in their descriptions. These descriptions are at the same time reflections about what media are and do in the informants' lifeworlds and how they are collectively renegotiated, for example, in their 'oldness' and 'newness'. Areas of the conversation were (1) their perception of media change, (2) media of their past and their (nostalgic) feelings about them, (3) nostalgia and memory in general, (4) collective/generational identity as well as shared experiences related to media, as well as (5) community formation and communication in the Facebook groups (with informants who were member of such groups).

All interviews were fully transcribed and subsequently coded by employing structuring content analysis by Mayring (2000). Main categories were deductively derived from theory and comprised (1) media ideology with the subcategories (1.1) rhetoric, (1.2) everyday experience, and (1.3) emotions, and (2) context categories with the subcategories (2.1) cultural setting, (2.2.) social arrangements, and (2.3) individual lifeworld conditions. Further subcategories were added inductively to also ensure openness for perspectives emerging from the material in the coding process related to authenticity, nostalgia, materiality, nature/technology relationship, inter-generational ambitions, media quality, and so on. For the sake of anonymity, all names used in the presentation of findings and quotes are pseudonyms.

Findings

In the interviews, we aimed to differentiate the informants' perceptions of media change to identify the beliefs, attitudes, and strategies, that is, media ideologies, that people draw from when they make sense of the 'newness' and 'oldness' of media and their role in one's everyday affairs. In the following analysis, the origin of personal media ideologies is traced back to the three dimensions of (1) social arrangements, (2) cultural contexts, and (3) individual lifeworld conditions that are disclosed by the informants when they talk about their perception of media change. These dimensions will be specified by outlining the roles of (1) rhetoric, (2) everyday experiences, and (3) emotions that become relevant in the personal and collective construction of what old and new media are. Finally, we will outline seven types of conceptualizations that result from the informants' accounts of old and new media stressing how they relate them to one another and evaluate their qualities.

The rhetoric of the new and the qualities of the old

First, the data indicate that the informants are aware of the complexity of media change. It is assessed neither as solely good nor solely bad, and specific features of media that are available in today's media environment are considered as both useful and problematic.

In general, the informants perceive media change to be a reason for the acceleration of society and a 'shrinking' of the world. Both developments do translate into the informants' lifeworlds and are articulated in the interviews. However, the way the informants describe their personal experiences seems to be informed by the typical public narratives about the world as a global village in the age of digital acceleration. This rhetoric describes the 'newness' as a revolutionary transition from a slow and limited world to one without boundaries and restraints. Along these lines, the informants describe the amount of information about the world as well as the speed at which they are confronted with it on a daily basis as challenging and exhausting. There is a strong feeling that the impact of new media on everyday life is out of one's control due to their omnipresence. Especially, the confrontation with a constant news circle about events all around the world affects people's lifeworld experiences and is regarded as overwhelming:

Every day, due to the new media, like satellite TV with 10.000 channels and the Internet with its newsfeeds and so on. The amount of news pattering upon us that we almost can't handle anymore! You start thinking that it was not that bad in the past. We did not witness much because we had to watch the news in the evening or had to wait for the newspaper the next day. (Mr Gebhart, 66, hometown remembrance group)

New media are contrasted with old media concerning how they have accelerated the daily usage of media as well as how they have led to what can be described as an 'information overload'. Informants repeatedly mentioned overwhelming everyday experiences that confronted them with both a cognitive as well as an emotional challenge, which they consider to be caused or facilitated by what they coin new media. 'New' in this regard is not limited to the Internet or mobile digital media but is rather a category covering all media which contribute to an experience of acceleration and constant information in contrast to the past the informants remember as 'the before'. This point in time – the time of the old media – is usually the childhood or youth of the informants and thereby highly relative and related to the media generation. For Mr Gebhart, it was the time where no 24/7 news station or constantly updated online news existed. From a lifeworld perspective, the 'newness' of media is thus less linked to a set of technological innovations per se but rather to a shift in regard to how the everyday life is perceived as changed by them. While satellite TV, the Web, and smartphones are ages apart in terms of media invention, they all feed to the overall experience of acceleration.

The informants often argue in nostalgic terms and reference their old media to voice critique about what is considered wrong with all the new media that followed. What we find here is that experiences of slowness are romanticized and put in contrast to a contemporary world perceived as accelerated by new media. It seems like the public debates about change have also become templates to describe the experiences individuals make in their lifeworld. The familiar rhetoric of the good old/bad new dichotomy resonates in the narratives of informants when they describe their personal experiences with media.

However, there is also appreciation for the potentials that ease of access to information holds. For example, being able to find information without much effort is considered a benefit and a positive element of media change and new media:

You get used to having fast access to information rather quickly. Well, back then you had to read it in a dictionary or had to browse books. Today you type a search word into your iPad and you get everything you need. (Ms Gries, 50, no member)

This example illustrates that when situational conditions change under which ‘newness’ and ‘oldness’ are constructed, possibilities of other normative assessments emerge. Hence, a significant difference found is between media experiences that are perceived as autonomous acts of usage and those in which media are regarded as forcing themselves upon the user. There is an appreciation for the benefits of new media once a perspective of situational use and daily practices replaces the often dystopian imaginaries of the negative impact on the abstract level of society. However, this only happens in situations in which people have a sense of control when dealing with media regarded as new and they do not feel controlled. This is an important premise to contextualize people’s assessment of old and new media guided by their normative convictions anchored in personal media ideologies.

We also find another rhetoric usually employed in public debate that defines the cultural imaginary of the digitalization: the separation of the online and the offline world into two distinct realms of life. This differentiation is based on the narrative that the offline is the world of the ‘old days’ where everything works the ‘old way’, and the online in comparison is less favorable, dulls human experiences and the depth of engagement with the world:

This analog life, the real life in the non-digital world is more and more colonized. Moreover, I think it is sad because I enjoy it much more than having a digital conversation with somebody. (Mr Horn, 21, no member)

The analog/digital dichotomy is employed by informants to voice a critique of the ‘online world’ and thereby is numbing the individual sense-making for the complexity, which is otherwise reflected and understood. This critique reinforces an idea according to which the Internet has created a new world with new rules that exist parallel to the old analog world. Interestingly, this is a distinction often stressed and reinforced by the younger informants in the sample, who grew up with the Internet and have grown up in the digital era. They seem to experience a lack of autonomy because many aspects of their everyday life are interwoven with the ‘online world’. Subsequently, they formulate a longing for un-mediated human experiences and relationships.

‘Oldness’ and ‘newness’ in everyday media experiences

What is considered old or new is always relational because it depends on the individual and generational temporality of comparison, personal media ideology, and the situational circumstances. The dichotomy between old and new is also a traditional way to narrate experiences with media change because it connects to the corresponding vocabulary that always emerges when one tries to describe change. The ‘before’ and the ‘after’ change have to be defined, yet, are always automatically relationally depending on which informant defines them for which media and in which situation, hence, is relative and constantly renegotiated instead of ontological. The observation of how people make use of the old/new dichotomy also allows identifying between which and regarding what aspect of media technologies, users perceive ‘family resemblance’ between media technologies. Further, it allows seeing where such similarities are not perceived even though they would be technologically justified. It also became apparent that when users reflect about media they do not neatly differentiate between materiality, technological, institutional, or content levels of media.

This is best illustrated in relation to questions of media quality. ‘Quality’ comprises very different layers such as content, production, or materiality. Referencing the quality of old media in contrast to new media is based on past everyday experiences. This is not limited to the realm of online communication but is present across all types of media that are of personal value because they had significant meaning in the informants’ past. One example repeatedly addressed is the perceived decline in quality of contemporary series and movies for children that is then compared to the morally valuable and artistically sophisticated ones from the informants’ childhood.

Mainly Disney movies. They are just a good thing. I think they transport a lot of beautiful opinions, beautiful morals. Moreover, I think that is very, very important to teach this to children. Especially now that there is only crap on TV. (Ms Janssen, 26, no member)

In the analysis, it became apparent that in many cases such beliefs within media ideologies are shared across generations, for example, the belief that movies for children should convey morals and good role models. Interestingly, the reference points and examples provided to express experiences of decline, which are juxtaposed to allegedly superior previous media, differ between the interviewed generations and concerning what they experienced in their formative years of youth and young adulthood. While the idea of the relation between old and new is persistent, the point of reference changes over time: For instance, while 26-year-old Mr Janssen thinks Disney movies do fulfill the moral demands, older informants are more critical of these movies and point to typical series of their childhood, such as *Sesame Street*. Yet, both are critical of new series and movies for children. Ultimately, in all these cases, there is a robust nostalgic sentiment about the superiority of old media and the inferiority of new media that diverge in content, style, or format. Moreover, as the quotes show, this nostalgia is not something that is particular for the informants from the nostalgic Facebook groups but is a common way of making sense of media change and doing identity work.

Feeling the authentic old and the artificial new

‘Oldness’ equals authenticity and allows genuine experiences according to the accounts of most informants. Regarding media as technology, a typical image of the authentic is represented in the myth of nature that is projected to old media. ‘Oldness’ as a value is ascribed to media by their materiality and the craftsmanship that brought them into existence. The materiality and production of old media, such as vinyl, tapes, stereos, cameras, film, photos, and so on, is remembered as true to the human experience and therefore as less artificial and more natural than new media. The sound of the analog, wooden materials, and the role of materiality itself, for example, of vinyl compared to an mp3 file, are considered more valuable, characteristic, and something new media are lacking or even destroying:

Well, a lot of it is handmade and made with love. There is sweat on it. Media today are so fast; you can multiply everything and download it for free on the Internet. (Ms Dunkel, 50, 70s/80s generation group)

This myth of nature and authenticity attached to certain media disregards that all technology is opposite to nature; yet, it discloses once again the relationality at play. The media the informants grew up with were experienced as natural artifacts of their lifeworld. Everything from there on is considered the new that is changing the natural order of things and therefore is regarded as an artificial divergence. This pattern is also applied to digital communication that is not considered as equally valuable, sincere, reliable; hence, authentic compared to former ways of communication.

The most common narrative here is the fear that new media might corrupt a happy childhood and are a danger to the development of children who do not learn the authentic ways of having relationships and who are also deprived of their innocence in the world:

I think that my childhood was less burdened by media and was more innocent. Just because I could be a child without the social pressure that children are suffering from today. (Ms Risch, 27, 90 s generation group)

Here, a new rhetoric emerges that is creating a distinction not as much between old and new media but between old and new media environments. Not only do new media introduce new features that change everyday life but there are more media to be distracted by and more ways of mediated communication than in the past. Again, informants depict the imaginary of nature but not only in contrast to old versus new media but even more radically between no media and all old or new media:

Kids today post everything on Facebook only, so people give them likes. Back then, we went outside without makeup, played in the sand and climbed trees. That is what I would rather want for my kids one day instead of all the new media. (Ms Filbrich, 26, 90 s generation group)

This is a perception that, even though it might be partly true, does not mean that media did not have an impact on children's life at the time Ms Filbrich was a child herself. It illustrates that through the nostalgic lens media ideologies are constructed by remediating romanticized pasts instead of applying an 'accurate' assessment. The informants have strong feelings and beliefs about what is right for younger generations based on the experiences they consider valuable from their childhood. However, they actualize their generation by collectively constructing a selective past in which they preserved the innocence of their childhood that was not negatively affected by old or new media.

To make sense of their past, the informants construct a self-concept that is connected to old media as something they either were not depending on or they admire today as superior in creating personal or collective value in comparison with all new media that followed. In return, new media are considered valuable for some practical reasons, such as access to information or keeping in touch with others but are not granted the same emotional value.

The collective renegotiation of 'oldness' and 'newness' in different social arrangements

The collective renegotiation of 'oldness' and 'newness' is depending on the social arrangements in which it is taking place. One example is that conveying media experiences and the resulting emotional attachment to younger generations is often tried but rarely succeeds. Informants repeatedly described how they try to create intergenerational experiences for their children to show them what they appreciate about 'their' old media of the past. However, the emotional attachment usually cannot be passed on to a generation whose media ideologies are shaped by other everyday media experiences:

I have discussions with my children not so much about media change but media use. I have to say that, like many other parents, I try to spark my kids for my old media. To show them that 30 or 40 years ago, when the pace was slower, there were precious things. With more or less success. (Ms Sans, 53, no member)

The analysis shows that collective nostalgic emotions and memories are interwoven with media of shared pasts that can shape similar media ideologies and demarcations between 'oldness' and

‘newness’. Being aware of this commonality and renegotiating its contemporary meaning in contrast to ‘fresh contact’ with new media creates feelings of belonging and certainty. In the example of the investigated Facebook groups, members share memories and generational experiences to make sense of their place in a changing world by means of ‘their’ old media:

What I enjoy is that it is not only my memories that are shared. When I recognize something, many others also recognize it because they have been through the same and did the same things as myself. Also, I think that is a beautiful feeling, and these are wonderful memories. (Mr Wolbert, 26, 90s generation group)

Discussing what is cherished about old media and what is criticized or appreciated about new media not only functions as a way to renegotiate ‘oldness’ and ‘newness’ but also the collective identity of the group itself. This helps the individuals to relate to the group and is a way of coping with the collective experience of media change:

We share the music from the past that comes to our minds. We evaluate: ‘This is good, that is not good anymore’, and everybody has something to add or memories connected to it: first dance, first girlfriend or something else. This is how we remember these times. (Mr Stumpf, 61, music group)

What the analysis shows is that defining ‘oldness’ and ‘newness’ is relative to people’s biography and social arrangements because media are used as a signifier of personal and collective identity. In the examples presented here, the contradictions and paradoxes resulting from this relativity demonstrate the flux state of ‘oldness’ and ‘newness’. Defining media as old or new is part of the renegotiation process that is based on media ideologies and the rhetoric, everyday experiences, and emotions associated with them. However, media ideologies are not attached to media but to individuals and groups among which they might differ drastically and consequently also do their definitions of old and new media.

Conclusion

The debate about what old and new media are and how to define them has its history. Even though concepts to approach these questions moved from simple ontologies to the acknowledgment of a complex interplay between continuities and change, empirical support for how the relation and remediation between old and new media plays out in lifeworlds of media users remains scarce. We proposed a perspective on media users’ attitudes and beliefs ‘guiding’ how they construct notions of old and new in making sense of media. Therefore, we used the concept of media ideology and operationalized it as comprising the three dimensions of rhetoric, everyday experiences, and emotions suggested by Natale (2016a).

We will subsequently systematize which conceptualizations of old and new media we found among the informants that serve as a starting point for further investigations. Our empirical analysis showed that media ideologies are related to and shaped against media experiences from the informants’ past. The media of their childhood and youth are formative and thereby function as the origin of their media ideologies that (to a certain extent) remediate later encounters with ‘fresh contact’ new media. Hence, early experiences with media have particular relevance, and subsequently, for the informants *(1) old media are those media that represent meaningful past experiences*.

Such meaningful experiences with old media are not limited to the individual but are often collectively shared. We find people with similar media ideologies that add to the construction of

collective identity because they are part of a specific generation or group growing up in more or less the same media environments. As a result of this (2) *old media are understood as representatives of a collective past and identity*.

We could also show that (3) *old media are often conceptualized as superior to criticize new media and stabilize valued social norms*; or in return that (4) *new media are often conceptualized as threats to social norms and inferior to the normative supremacy of old media*. This traces back to a romanticizing of old media or old media environments that are then regarded superior in contrast to the cultural imaginary of the dangerous, inauthentic, and unnatural new media. Based on the emotional significance old media have for individuals or groups, we found an understanding of (5) *old media as reliable and valuable companions* and (6) *new media as exchangeable and quickly obsolete*. This critical evaluation and assessment of media can be traced back to people's media ideologies. They are adapting or constructing a rhetoric of the good old/bad new dichotomy by recourse to the public image of the new as well as through own everyday media experiences that inform their media ideologies. The following critique is not limited to the abstract macro level of society but also extends to everyday experiences on the micro level regarding the quality of media's materiality, digital communication, or the news. However, when certain features of new media have practical value and can be used autonomously, the narrative changes and (7) *new media are positively conceptualized as facilitators of information and communication*.

Of course, some limitations of the study must be stressed. First, the very situation of the interviews regarding past media practices and the changing role of media in the everyday live may have prompted informants to reflect about media and to emphasize special moments, the extraordinary and to explain perceived transitions in relation to media change. This is typical for media biographical interviews (Naab and Schwarzenegger, 2017) or oral history approaches (Dhoest, 2015) to past media experiences. We thus need to be careful that the current accounts about media ideologies are not separated but formed by the current ideologies and cannot give unbiased accounts of prior media experiences and evaluations.

Future studies should aim to triangulate self-report data from interviews with other modes of data collection to gain even deeper insights in media practices, which are related to certain media beliefs. While we found common patterns between the two subsamples of the study, it would be worth to continue the investigation both in settings without a preoccupation with media memory and with a wider variety of lifeworlds, for instance in transnational and transcultural comparison, that is, in relation to media environments different from nowadays Europe. However, the lifeworld perspective in our study allowed identifying recurrent conceptualizations that are used to make sense of different media by different individuals and groups and structure the numerous ways in which media, media change, and 'oldness' or 'newness' are renegotiated.

The conceptualizations identified here can inform future empirical studies to investigate how (re)constructions of a dichotomy between old and new media play out in how people make sense of the media relative to their media ideologies and media experiences. This helps to dismiss the question what old or new media are. Instead, it motivates scholars to replace it by the question on what foundations, to what end and with what consequences people distinguish between old and new when making sense of the media.

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