

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 repertoires 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 on 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* (Coul-dry 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; Schröder, 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 of 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 Schutz 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 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 world 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 medi- atized, 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 Morley'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' (Schröder, 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 & Schröder, 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 life-world, 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.