

# Changes in Young People's Media Repertoires

*Longitudinal Insights from a Communicative Figurational Approach*

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*Young people use digital media for various purposes, such as communication, entertainment, and information. As they grow up, their media repertoires become more complex and diverse. This article examines these media repertoires in more detail, considering the dynamic changes in individual development, social circumstances, and deep mediatization. Using semi-structured interviews with young people and one parent each, as well as a media-actor mapping, the study reveals significant changes in the composition and function of media repertoires from late childhood to early and middle adolescence. Drawing on the theoretical background of communicative figurations, it highlights changes in media ensembles, actor constellations, frames of relevance, and communicative practices. Besides changes in media repertoires for coping with developmental tasks and individual transitions in life, social factors such as the role of family and peers are considered. The empirical findings also point to the added value of qualitative longitudinal data which allows for a comprehensive examination of the complexity of changing media repertoires within a deeply mediatized society and a rapidly evolving media environment.*

**Key words:** media repertoire, children, adolescents, dynamic changes, communicative figurations, qualitative panel study, longitudinal research

## 1. Media Practices of Young People

Adolescence is a sensitive and challenging phase of life characterized by significant changes across various aspects and numerous individual developmental tasks (Eschenbeck & Knauf, 2018). In a deeply mediatized society (Hepp, 2019), it seems undisputed that these changes are also reflected in the media practices of adolescents as media are a fundamental part of their lives. Following Hepp, deep mediatization's basic prerequisite is the *differentiation* of a large number of digital media. Consequently, there are more and more different new devices and applications that adolescents (can) use in their everyday lives. On the one hand, digital media are *omnipresent*, which allows individuals to be permanently connected.

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On the other, there is an increased *pace of innovation*, with new devices and applications appearing at ever shorter intervals and becoming part of the social world. In addition, the *connectivity* of media devices and applications allows individuals to connect with others and engage in social domains independently of time and space. Finally, there is an increasing representation of social life in computerized data, a phenomenon known as *datafication* (Mascheroni & Siibak, 2021).

In a deeply mediatised society, digital media are integral to young people's everyday lives. Depending on their age and stage of life, young people use different devices, applications, and media content in diverse ways (Frey & Friemel, 2023; mpfs, 2022, 2023; Ofcom, 2020). Embedded in all areas of the social environment, digital media play a vital role in the socialization process of children and adolescents, alongside the social domains in which they are growing up (Kapella et al., 2022; Krotz, 2017; Paus-Hasebrink et al., 2019). Like adults, young people use a wide range of devices and applications and engage in a variety of media practices. For instance, the smartphone, which is by far the most frequently used device among young people aged between 12 and 19 in Germany (98 %), combines numerous applications (mpfs, 2023). Additionally, in German households with adolescents in that age group, it is common for them to have access to computers, tablets, and televisions. Video and music streaming services, radios, and game consoles are prevalent in most families as well. About half of these households own smartwatches, while around two in five possess portable game consoles and smart speakers (mpfs, 2023). However, how these media are combined and used in daily life varies greatly among individuals and depends on social circumstances. Media use situations are constitutive elements of the family, especially with younger children (Schlör, 2016), and become ritualized events in everyday family life (Oberlinner et al., 2018). These constellations change as children grow older: as adolescents become more independent in their media practices, they choose more independently from the media affordances that are available and decide on the scope and purpose of their media use. Gradually, the importance of other social domains—such as peer groups or school—for the development of media usage behavior is also increasing (Paus-Hasebrink et al., 2019).

Embedded in these social circumstances, the concept of *media repertoires* refers to this combination and focuses on the entirety of different media that a person regularly uses (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006). Even though media repertoires can be seen as “relatively stable cross-media patterns of media practices”, they still undergo constant change (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017, p. 367). The repertoire concept promises an integrative perspective to reflect plurality and individuality of adolescents' media socialization processes as well as the multifunctionality of digital end devices and media convergence. Additionally, it aims to investigate which media repertoires are functional or dysfunctional for social integration in different social domains (i. e. school and peer groups) throughout the course of life (Kammerl et al., 2022; Kramer et al., 2023). It seems evident that especially in adolescence—a critical period marked by ongoing changes—teenagers adapt their media repertoire to individual developments, challenges, and social circumstances. Consequently, investigating changes in media repertoires during this period of their lives becomes especially interesting. Existing research, however, predominantly focuses on adults. For this reason, we address the following questions: How do media repertoires change from late childhood to early and middle adolescence? What kind of age-specific challenges and topics are reflected in these changing media repertoires? What role do the social domains of family and peers play in this process?

The questions are answered on the basis of findings from our project "Connected Kids—Socialization in a Changing Media Environment".<sup>1</sup> We conducted repeated interviews with thirteen children over a five-year period, gathering complex data about their media repertoires. Using this data, we identify the media used in their daily lives, explore the social contexts in which they use them, and discern which media topics are of interest to them, thereby shaping their frames of relevance. In addition to existing representative cross-sectional studies (mpfs, 2022, 2023; Smahel et al., 2020), we can offer qualitative and longitudinal data on how children's media repertoires evolve from late childhood to adolescence.

## 2. Researching Media Repertoires

The critical examination of existing literature underlines a significant gap in research regarding the longitudinal trajectory of young people's media repertoires. By focusing on this gap, our study aims to unravel the dynamics of these changes over a more extended period, shedding light on age-related challenges in adolescence as a phase of transitions that shape their media practices across time.

Following the concept of media repertoires as proposed by Hasebrink and Popp (2006), one individual's media repertoire encompasses "the entirety of media he or she regularly uses" (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012, p. 759). This contrasts with media ensembles, which include all media present in a social domain. The basic assumption is that media repertoires are "the result of many single situations of selective behavior; they are compositions of many media contacts, including a variety of different media and content" (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012, p. 762). The repertoire-oriented approach follows three principles as its conceptual basis:

- (1) The *user-centered perspective* describes a shift in media use research that focuses on the media user, not the medium itself.
- (2) The repertoire-orientated approach considers not only single media but the *entirety* of media a person uses.
- (3) It is crucial, therefore, to consider the *relationality* of media incorporated in the media repertoire to analyze its individually composed "inner structure or coherence" (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012, p. 760).

The theoretical foundation aligns with the uses-and-gratification approach, which suggests that individuals utilize media according to their needs. In addition, psychological perspectives indicate a link between personality traits and media consumption, while sociological theories, such as Bourdieu's concept of habitus, emphasize the influence of social positions on media use, encompassing the goals and resources for specific media practices. Sociologically-speaking, the changes brought about by deep mediatization (Hepp, 2019) are reflected in the media repertoire, particularly in the use of devices and applications.

Most research on media repertoires focuses on specific aspects, such as information or news repertoires (Merten, 2020; Peters & Schröder, 2018; Schneider & Eisenegger, 2018; Schwarzenegger, 2020; Verboord, 2023; Vulpius et al., 2023), digital media repertoires

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1 The project "Connected Kids—Socialization in a Changing Media Environment" (original German title "Connected Kids —Sozialisation in einer sich wandelnden Medienumgebung") is founded by the German Research Foundation DFG (KA 1611/7-1 and LA 2728/1-1) and is coordinated by Rudolf Kammerl (Friedrich-Alexander-University Erlangen-Nuremberg) and Claudia Lampert (Leibniz-Institute for Media Research | Hans-Bredow-Institut). For more information see: <https://leibniz-hbi.de/en/hbi-projects/connected-kids-socialisation-in-a-changing-media-environment/>.

(Gonser et al., 2014; Hasebrink et al., 2019), social media repertoires (Frey & Friemel, 2023), or (media) theme repertoires (Kleinen von Königslöw & Förster, 2014). Overall, media repertoires have been analyzed primarily for adults, with limited focus on children and young people. The most revealing information on children's and adolescent's media repertoires can be drawn from research on families (Gonser et al., 2014) or couples (Niemand, 2020; Röser et al., 2019). These studies show that parents' attitudes towards and their use of (digital) media are essential for how families use and are equipped with media and, therefore, determine their children's media repertoires. Verboord's (2023) study supports these findings by identifying connections between the development of media and news repertoires and the media use habits of parents and their social networks. Despite this, research also underscores the impact of other social domains on young people's media repertoires, such as peers and school, as well as socio-demographic factors like gender, age, and migrant background (Pahayahay & Khalili-Mahani, 2020; Verboord, 2023). These findings offer broad explanations for the development of differences in media repertoires (Gonser et al., 2014; Rothenberger et al., 2019).

Researching young people's media repertoires can provide deep insights into media socialization processes when approached holistically (Kammerl et al., 2021), including families' media ensembles, parents' attitudes towards media, relevant actors in young people's social environment and socio-demographic factors. However, existing research in this field mostly focuses on the adult perspective.

Changes in media repertoires are often analyzed in the context of transitional phases, considering the role of media repertoires in coping with everyday life (Niemand, 2020; Röser et al., 2019; Ytre-Arne, 2019). Transitions investigated include significant life events experienced by couples, such as separations, relocations, or the arrival of a child, as well as transformations in working lives. These events have been shown to impact the subjective meanings of and practices with media. While reduced and increased time resources are one common cause for changes in media repertoires, other factors such as spatial arrangements, material resources, and social, political, and cultural factors that impact relationships and (re-)orient social norms and discourse are articulated in the studies of Niemand (2020) and Ytre-Arne (2019).

Further research on couples' media repertoires by Röser et al. (2019) shows that with the introduction of a new medium, there are shifts in the functions and uses of all media. Furthermore, Niemand (2020) emphasizes the role played by emotional factors (e.g., emotional crises as drivers for change) and body-related changes like illnesses or the limitation of physical abilities impacting media use. Of course, changes or transitions in the lives of adolescents, such as the birth of a sibling, parental separation, relocation, or the transition to school, could have a similar influence on their media repertoires. Changes in parent's lives and, consequently, their media repertoires naturally have an impact on their children and adolescents' lives as well. Ytre-Arne (2019), on the other hand, highlights the significant role of the smartphone in reorientation processes, primarily due to its practical characteristics (small and portable) and its multiplicity of uses. Conjuring the idea of smartphones as *intimate technology* (referring to Hjorth & Lim, 2012), it becomes something that is "kept close to the body and used in the most private as well as public spaces" (Ytre-Arne, 2019, p. 499). These findings could also be applicable among young people because, as already pointed out, their own smartphone is the most important device within their individual media repertoire (mpfs, 2023).

In a study on the significance of media repertoires for students' identity, Kleinen von Königslöw & Förster conclude that media topics (like sports, politics, or drama) are important for role orientation or identification with a theme or a group, serving as a "social

kit" (2014, p. 206), and for distinction and self-identification in relation to these themes. As developing a personal identity is one essential developmental task in adolescence, we consider the relevance of media topics in our research on young people's media repertoires. In addition, Frey & Friemel (2023) focus on social media repertoires of 15 to 19 year-olds and argue that content is mainly consumed and not shared via social media such as Instagram, Pinterest, TikTok, and X (aka Twitter). It is perhaps useful, then, to incorporate different levels of transformation in media repertoires as suggested in the literature above: Time and duration of media use seems to change due to altering circumstances. Research has identified an increase in time spent using smartphones (or other personal devices) during transitional phases. Additionally, the relevance of individual components of the media repertoire can change, which is related to changes in emotional experience, the social context of media use, the way media is spatially arranged, and the media-specific affordances of the devices themselves.

To summarize, the literature review emphasizes the need for empirical insights on media repertoires in adolescence, particularly to analyze their interconnection with coping mechanisms for life challenges and everyday tasks during this sensitive and challenging stage of life (Arnett, 2007). Paus-Hasebrink et al. (2019) propose adolescence as a period of transition, potentially marked by significant disruptions and changes in media use. Further empirical studies are needed to explore how young people navigate these shifts in their media repertoires.

Fundamental changes occur at different levels, with a variety of developmental tasks pending at any given time (Eschenbeck & Knauf, 2018). Cultural and historical context significantly influences the societal expectations placed on young people, determining which specific developmental tasks take center stage at different points in their lives (Paus-Hasebrink et al., 2019). Following Paus-Hasebrink et al. (2019) and Havighurst (1974), we can categorize the most important developmental tasks facing young people in Western societies as follows: detachment and independence from parents; forming and navigating social connections with peers; gaining first experiences with sexual or romantic relationships; making decisions about education or work; and dealing with the physical changes that take place during puberty (Havighurst, 1974; Weichold & Silbereisen, 2018).

The exchange of media content and discussions surrounding media topics serve as anchor points for identity negotiation processes in young people. This is particularly evident as children develop greater autonomy leading to media use and media-related discussions becoming potential flashpoints for (conflictual) family interactions (Eggert & Wagner, 2016; Kammerl et al., 2022). Adolescence is considered a critical time for identity formation, a "meta-developmental task" that influences all other aspects of development (Paus-Hasebrink et al., 2019, p. 55). Research suggests that developing a media identity plays a significant role in this process (Baig et al., 2019; Genner & Süß, 2017; Hugger, 2014). To address and cope with these developmental tasks, adolescents use the range of available media options. Young people select media devices and content based on their interests and preferences, considering how these options can assist them in dealing with the everyday challenges they face. Current media developments, however, harbor both opportunities and risks for the personal development of adolescents (Brüggen et al., 2017; Hasebrink et al., 2020; Knop et al., 2015). For example, the use of digital media offers new opportunities that can support their developmental tasks, especially regarding social connections with peers, decisions about school or work, and even exploring their future roles in society. However, digital media use also presents risks, including exposure to detrimental or harmful content or challenges to data sovereignty (Hasebrink et al., 2020; Müller et al., 2020). This suggests a link between how young people navigate developmental tasks and their evolving media

choices. Our longitudinal design, following socialization processes over five years, allows us to more effectively investigate this dynamic relationship.

### 3. Methodology and Methods

To record the media repertoire of children and adolescents as part of the media-related socialization process, a longitudinal and qualitative approach was chosen for our project “Connected Kids—Socialization in a changing media environment”. Against the theoretical background of the communicative figuration approach (Hepp & “Communicative Figurations” Research Network, 2017), we are looking at the individual media repertoires of children and adolescents, entangled with the social domains in which they are integrated (in our context: family, peers and school). The concept provides a valuable framework for understanding the entanglement of actors with the social domains they inhabit. It emphasizes the way people in social domains like family, peer groups, and school use communicative practices to construct a shared reality. It acknowledges the autonomy of individuals in shaping their understanding of the world, while also recognizing the significant influence of social conditions. Communicative figurations describe communicative interdependency networks that, in addition to a specific *constellation of actors* and a *relevance framework*, are also characterized by a shared *media ensemble* and associated *communicative practices*. While the media ensemble comprises all media present within the figuration, the media repertoire is actor-specific and includes the individual media (practices) as they play out across figurations (Hepp & “Communicative Figurations” Research Network, 2017).

Data was collected from a total of 32 families<sup>2</sup> in North and South Germany in 2018, 2019, 2022, and 2023. The sample is based on a design of two cohorts: in the most recent survey in 2023, the younger children were between ten and eleven years old, while the older children were between 14 and 15 years old. In this paper, we focus on the older cohort (Figure 1), as we particularly want to trace changes in the media repertoire during the adolescent years. The older cohort comprised 13 teenagers.<sup>3</sup> The partial sample included seven girls, five boys, and one person who self-identified as diverse from t4 onwards (formerly as female). All teenagers transferred to secondary school shortly before the first interview, with ten of them attending a grammar school (“Gymnasium”), two a district school (“Stadtteilschule”) and one a middle school (“Realschule”).<sup>4</sup> Each of them have younger or older siblings. In one family, the mother lives with her children and a new partner; in another, the parents separated between t2 and t3 and the children now live mainly with their mother.

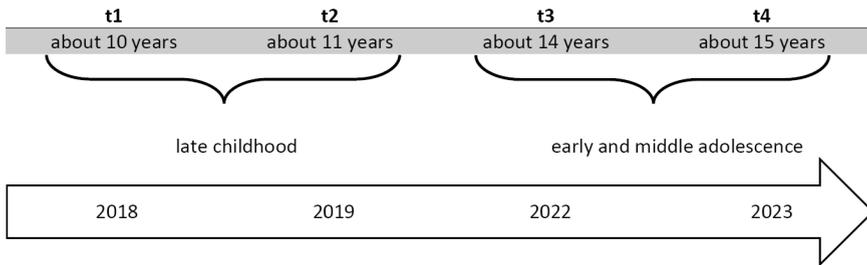
Tracing changes in media use over time and identifying their causes requires a comprehensive view of children's and adolescents' media practices and individual media use in the context of their social relationships (Kammerl et al., 2021). In pursuit of this aim, we employed a combination of visual and verbal data collection methods. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with the children and one parent each, following a user-centered-perspective and a repertoire-orientated approach. During the interviews, we created a media-actor-relationship-map with the children, which is of particular note for the present analysis of media repertoires. Before the first interviews, the families were asked to send pictures of the media the children regularly use to the research team. During

2 A total of 27 families took part in all four surveys.

3 One family decided not to participate in t4. However, the data from this case collected in t1, t2 and t3 is included in the analysis for this article.

4 One girl switched from grammar school to secondary school and back again between the first and second survey.

Figure 1: Overview of the Sample and Interview Waves



the interview, the children sorted these pictures into concentric circles to categorize the importance the device or media application holds for them (*very important*, *less important*, *unimportant*). They were also asked to assign symbols representing *parents*, *siblings*, *teachers*, and *friends* to the pictures of their media to show with whom these are used. This image sorting provided insights into how different elements of a child's media repertoire connect, including the importance of specific media and the people involved (parents, siblings, teachers, friends) in their media use.

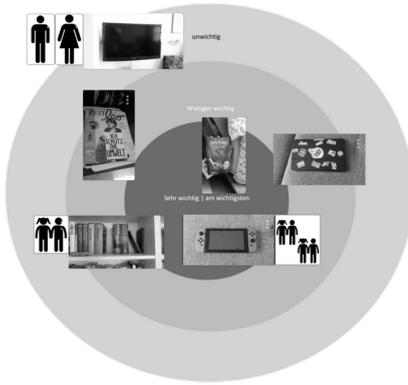
To capture evolving media habits, families in subsequent interview waves sent pictures of newly adopted media applications beforehand. These pictures were then incorporated into the sorting task during the interview. Media that were no longer used by the children as they grew older were discarded during the mapping of the media-actor relationship. In the fourth survey wave, we decided to integrate the most popular social media applications as pictograms (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, and Snapchat). Figure 2 uses the example of Jakob to illustrate the designs of the media-actor relationships over the four survey waves. This case will also be used repeatedly as an illustration in the results described below. On the one hand, this laying technique served as a conversational stimulus for the guided interviews with the children and their parent. On the other, the interview content provided more in-depth information about the media repertoire and media-actor relationships. In each survey wave, young people were asked about changes in their media repertoire. All collected data were gathered, transcribed, and evaluated using individual case analyses as well as qualitative content analysis (Kuckartz & Rädiker, 2023). For the individual case analysis, we prepared case descriptions containing all the important information about a case for the respective survey wave. In the synopsis of these documents, the change in the media repertoire over time became clear at the individual case level. The data was also coded using qualitative content analysis. The codes for the media repertoire and changes to this repertoire were particularly relevant for this article.

#### 4. Empirical Findings on Dynamic Media Repertoires

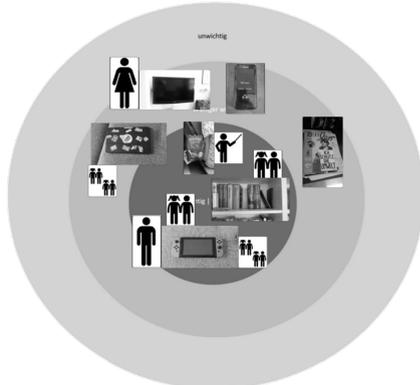
The analysis of the media-actor relationships indicates that the children primarily based the importance of the individual media on how often and how long they used them regularly. However, there were instances where social desirability seemed to influence their responses. For example, some children categorized books as more important, possibly reflecting their parents' emphasis on the importance of reading. It was also important to them that they explain the enjoyment they gained from specific media, what function they fulfill in their daily routines or the purposes they served in their lives. The children often compared the pertinence of one medium to another, indicating that the relationships between individual

Figure 2: Jakob's Media Repertoire from t1 to t4

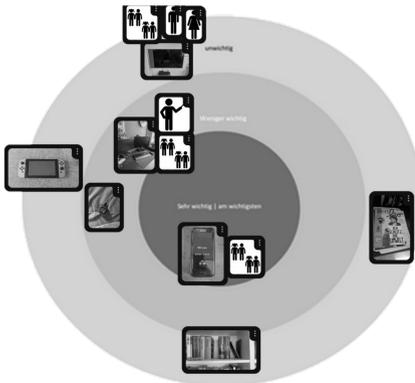
Age 10 (t1)



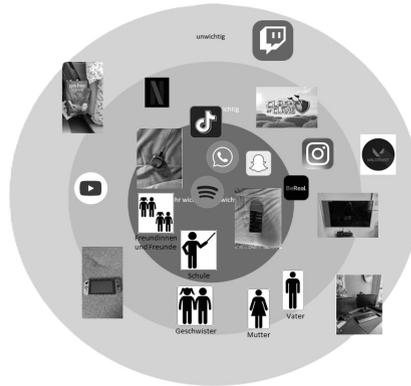
Age 11 (t2)



Age 14 (t3)



Age 14 (t4)



components are equally significant. Generally, the descriptions of media repertoires became more precise with age, reflecting a deeper understanding and, in some cases, even more thoughtful considerations of the role media played in their lives.

Our sample reveals significant shifts in media repertoires across the four survey waves. To better trace these changes, they are itemized as follows, based on an analytical distinction derived from the constitutional elements of communicative figurations (Kammerl et al., 2021):

- (1) media ensembles (the overall media landscape within their social groups and the specific media young people choose from them),
- (2) actor constellations (the people and social domains (family, friends, school) that influence and are involved in their media practices),

- (3) frames of relevance (the media-related topics that guide their media use and choices) and
- (4) communicative practices (the way young people and others communicate about media within their social interactions).

#### 4.1 *Media Ensembles*

Data from the first wave shows that the children include various components of the familial, peers' and schools' media ensembles in their media repertoire. As figure 2 demonstrates, our case study Jakob includes books, two different magazine subscriptions, the family's TV and tablet, as well as his own Nintendo Switch games console and his smartphone. In the interview he also mentions a school computer occasionally. Overall, the first survey waves reveal a dominance of the familial media ensemble on the children's media repertoire. This is evident in their use of print media at home (such as books, comics and magazines), along with board games, digital reading pens, audio devices (radios, stereo systems, smart speakers), televisions, game consoles, and computational devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, smartphones). A few adolescents also mentioned drones, 3D printers, and cameras.

The greatest change, particularly regarding digital devices, is evident between the second and third survey. During this period, many families replaced smartphones, tablets, laptops, or PCs with newer devices or acquired devices specifically for their children. This may be due to several factors, including the children's age, the two-and-a-half-year time span between surveys, or the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated shift to remote learning.

Typical applications originating from different media ensembles include video and music streaming services (e.g., YouTube, Netflix or Spotify), games, educational apps, camera apps, and image editing applications. Generally, children who own smartphones tend to use a wider variety of applications as they get older. This coincides with a rise in social media use (e.g., WhatsApp, Instagram, TikTok) among older children. The data suggests a trend away from shared devices like family TVs, laptops, or tablets. As parents acquire personal devices for their children, digital media consumption shifts towards the options available on these new devices. This trend is also evident in the decline of print media use, as children increasingly engage in digital reading practices on e-readers or apps on smartphones and tablets.

As adolescents age, the influence of different social domains and their media ensembles broaden the possibilities of available media devices and practices for their media repertoires. In the initial survey waves, the media ensembles of their peers have less impact, with children occasionally accessing friends' gaming consoles or smartphones. However, this influence intensifies as adolescents acquire their own devices. By contrast, the formation of their media ensembles at school plays a less significant role. While some children mention using computers or tablets at school, textbooks remain the primary media format used in these settings.

#### 4.2 *Actor Constellation*

Across all surveys, the data reveal a trend towards young people using media less frequently with parents and siblings, favoring independent use or consumption with peers. However, print media and audio content (e.g., music and audio dramas) remain primarily solitary activities across the first two waves. Some shared use with siblings was observed. This shift towards solo media consumption coincides with a move away from physical books and physical audio media to e-book and music streaming services installed on their own devices.

In general, siblings are more frequently mentioned as important actors in the first two waves. Watching films and series together is a common ritual among many of the families we interviewed—either on television or via a laptop or tablet. However, in all cases where these rituals are mentioned, the families also reported a decline in this shared activity over time. They attribute this shift to evolving media interests or the adoption of new shared media practices. As adolescents age, their peers gain greater influence, and they gravitate towards watching visual content with friends rather than family.

This trend of prioritizing peers for media activities extends to gaming. Earlier surveys showed more frequent gaming with siblings or parents (mainly the father). However, playing together with parents declines over time, while friends are becoming increasingly important for both online and offline gaming. A similar pattern emerges in the actor constellations around computer and tablet use. Shared use depends on the specific activity (e.g., gaming), mutual interest (e.g., a common interest in photo editing), and device ownership. Family members use shared devices (“family tablets or computers”) more frequently, but a shift towards individual media practices occurs as adolescents acquire their own devices. While peers play a minor role, schools become more prominent actors regarding these devices in the third and fourth waves of surveys, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic’s remote learning period.

Smartphones are primarily used for solitary activities by both children and adolescents. While there are occasional mentions of shared gaming or watching audiovisual content with siblings or friends, these instances are rare. In some cases, the young people also mention communication with siblings or parents via messaging apps, particularly for those living apart or for coordinating daily routines. In contrast, social media platforms, especially in the later surveys, emerge as central tools for staying connected and communicating with friends. As Jakob says about using his smartphone: “And yes, I would even consider my smartphone to be very important because I feel like I do everything with it. There are social contacts, it feels like everything. So it // keeps you in contact with people too or, uh, yes, it feels like everything.” (Jakob, t3)

### 4.3 *Frames of Relevance*

Children and adolescents demonstrate a wide range of media-related interests (frames of relevance) that transcend specific devices or applications. These practices demonstrate a degree of media convergence, meaning they are accessed and explored across various devices and channels. Media topics also become increasingly diverse, individualized, and differentiated as adolescents age.

Gaming emerges as a central interest for most of the children and adolescents in our sample. This interest extends beyond playing games themselves, as many follow gaming content on platforms such as YouTube or Twitch. They listen to podcasts and follow streamers on social media platforms (e.g., Let’s Hugo or Montana Black). This enthusiasm is reflected in conversations about games with family and friends. The types of games that hold their interest evolve with age. Initially, they gravitate towards Minecraft, Roblox, Sing It, or Little Big Planet. Later surveys reveal a shift towards games targeting older audiences, such as shooter games like Call of Duty or Fortnite. Simulation and strategy games, particularly on mobile devices (e.g., Hayday, Clash of Clans, or Subway Surfers), are also popular choices. However, interest in gaming appears to wane in the last two survey waves, especially among girls but also some boys. For those who acquire new consoles, games remain a significant frame of relevance. This is certainly true for Jakob, who has consistently expressed a passion for video games since the first survey. In the third interview, he highlights the important role gaming plays in communication and socialization with his

friends: “So, I have this, I have this open-word game called Horizon Zero Dawn. (laughs) So otherwise I have Minecraft, Fall Guys, Fortnite, and so on, I just play all that with friends. I’m always chatting with friends for three or two hours when I’m playing.” (Jakob, t3)

As described in relation to actor constellations, social media platforms become particularly important for several adolescents. Beyond connecting with friends, they typically follow various content creators and accounts on platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or Pinterest. Their selections align with their personal interests and are influenced by the social domains they navigate online, leading them to content about sports, fashion/lifestyle, or fitness tips. Social media also serves as a news source for some, as Jakob’s mother says: “Because I believe, we also know that everything he acquires in terms of knowledge, including current events or world events, he knows through TikTok.” (Jakob’s mother, t4).

The data reveal a clear shift in audio-visual, audio, and reading content over time. Initially, children gravitate towards content geared towards their age group such as children’s series, films, (audio-)books, or magazines. By the third interview, their preferences shift towards more youth-oriented topics. The fourth interview reveals a preference for adult-oriented content such as True Crime, drama, and comedy. Some teenagers start engaging with societal and political issues, including topics like LGBTQ+ rights, climate issues, and personal finance. The increased use of music streaming services from the third interview onwards coincides with a rise in podcast consumption among some teenagers. They typically listen to podcasts aligned with their existing interests, such as True Crime or gaming, or podcasts featuring popular social media creators.

In the initial surveys, young people often adopt the media preferences of their social circles or family members. However, as they mature, they develop a stronger sense of self and become more selective in their media consumption. On the one hand, they may distance themselves from media content that does not align with their evolving interests. On the other hand, shared media interests can also create a sense of connection between individuals. These shared media experiences can be seen as communicative figurations, fostering bonds and facilitating interaction.

#### 4.4 *Communicative Practices*

The first survey revealed a complex picture of how young people and those around them communicate about (digital) media. These communicative practices extend beyond simply exchanging messages or content through media such as telephone calls or social media. Young people engage in diverse conversations with others about their media use, the topics they encounter online, and the applications they utilize.

The first wave of the survey highlights parents’ strong influence on media use, as they often determine which media services and content children can access, shaping communication patterns within and outside the family unit. Parents often share their own media preferences (e.g., screen time limits or musical tastes) with their children. Over time, however, young people become more influenced by other social domains and start introducing their own media interests and content into the family discussions, which can spark conversations about responsible media use. As children mature, communication with parents becomes increasingly balanced. Messenger apps and telephone calls gain importance within families, especially as teenagers become more independent. Communicative practices with siblings also impact children’s media repertoires, but the influence varies depending on age, gender, and shared interests.

Smartphone ownership significantly impacts how children communicate with peers. Those who have access to social media apps use them for texting or chatting with friends, as exemplified by Jakob from the first survey wave: “But I do text with the other one/the

other friends. Not all the time, but sometimes, yes” (Jakob, t1). For many, however, instant messaging via WhatsApp with family or friends is not explicitly mentioned until the second interview onwards.

The third survey wave onwards sees a surge in social media app use by most participants. These apps, including Signal, Instagram, Snapchat, TikTok, and BeReal, become primary tools for networking and information sharing among peers. The choice of apps, how they are used, and their perceived importance are influenced by various factors, such as popularity and distribution among peers, shared interests, and evolving needs. This dynamic leads to changes in app preferences across the survey waves. It is important to note, however, that only a small number of young people create and post their own content.

Digital games are another facet of communication across all interview waves, though the extent varies. Some boys, like Jakob, use Discord to chat with friends while gaming, as his mother explains: “Discord, and that’s the main platform and with the um, there//so I think that they mainly communicate rather than play. And that just happens on the side.” (Jakob’s mother, t3).

The first two surveys reveal minimal discussion about media use or communication practices at school (e.g., cellphone bans or class chat rules). However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, communication shifted entirely to digital media platforms like email, Microsoft Teams, or Zoom. These practices waned after the pandemic restrictions eased. Later surveys suggest a gradual influence of schools on adolescents’ media repertoires. This is evident in instances where students bring their own tablets for regular use in school or when media-related topics are addressed in class.

#### 4.5 Conclusions

The study highlights the family as the primary media influence in early adolescence, shaping young people’s initial media repertoires. However, as children acquire their own digital devices, a shift towards independent media use emerges. These devices elevate the importance of digital applications compared to traditional media. Over time, however, this growing autonomy is accompanied by a growing influence from other social circles. Schools and friend groups, with their distinct ensembles, play an increasingly important role in shaping adolescents’ media preferences. This trend reflects a natural progression towards peer orientation in later adolescence. As adolescents mature, a natural gravitation towards peers emerges, reflected in their actor constellation. They increasingly seek connections outside the family, adopting new communication apps to connect with peers, school, and other social domains. This shift in focus is mirrored in their evolving media repertoires while this growing immersion into a deeply mediatised society can be viewed as a key aspect of personality development, a central development task.

As young people participate within various communicative figurations, these groups significantly influence their media choices through their own frames of relevance. These guiding themes are often manifested through media convergence, where content is accessed and explored across different platforms and devices. This involvement in diverse social spheres also coincides with the development of individual identity. Young people increasingly curate their own media content, gravitating towards topics that reflect their evolving identities while moving away from parental influences, child-oriented interests, and adult-imposed restrictions. This is because young people, on the one hand, allow themselves to be influenced by the frames of relevance of other actors, but, on the other, actively distance themselves from them in certain respects.

As they grow older, action-guiding media topics become more diverse, individualized, and differentiated. In this regard, gender-specific preferences are also evident, particularly

around gaming. The creation of affiliations or demarcations of media topics that are perceived as gender-stereotypical is reflected in the relevance frameworks of the social domains. Within the family, media-educational discussions often take place, while with peers, the focus increasingly shifts towards common interests. In schools, the emphasis is often on the use or explicit prohibition of media in an academic context. How and about what they communicate fundamentally determines young people's media repertoires. The separation of different media applications between peers and parents for communication is particularly evident. Especially with the use of social media or (voice) chats in games, specific communicative practices emerge that are exclusively shared with friends. At the same time, communication via messenger apps, serving as a digital lifeline, becomes increasingly important with parents when adolescents are on their own or with peers. Here again, the adolescents' own smartphone, enabling a wide range of functions, is the central device.

### 5. Reflection of the Media Environment, Social Aspects, and Developmental Tasks in Adolescents' Media Repertoires

Over five years, we observed dynamic changes in children's and adolescents' media repertoires, providing insights into how they navigate through a deeply mediatized society, their social domains, and developmental tasks. We identified relevant changes in media repertoires. Certain media are discarded, or sorted out, while others are introduced, such as personal smartphones, tablets, or specific apps. In some cases, older devices are replaced by newer ones. The study identified a clear shift in media use patterns, consistent with findings from previous research. While reading and playing video games appear to decrease in frequency for many adolescents, communication through social media platforms steadily increases as they mature. Transformations in media repertoires can also be seen in the relevance adolescents assign to individual components of their media repertoire, the actors associated with their media use, and their changing content-preferences.

Some of the changes in the components of media repertoires reflect aspects on three intertwined levels: (1) social transitioning processes on the macro-level, (2) the influences of social domains and actors on the meso-level, and (3) individual developmental tasks on the micro-level.

- (1) On the *macro-level*, digital media seem to be omnipresent in adolescents' lives. The differentiation of a rapidly changing media environment in the context of deep mediatization (Hepp, 2019) is visible in the increasing diversity and dynamic changes in young people's media repertoires. This trend can be exemplified in our sample by the tendency to substitute physical audio(-visual) carriers and devices with music- or TV-streaming services, which are used on multiple digital devices. The COVID-19 pandemic significantly accelerated social and digital transformations for young people, impacting their lives and their media repertoires. Connectivity, as a hallmark of deep mediatization, played a decisive role during this time, enabling them to stay connected with peers and schools. Media habits, devices and applications changed because of altered social life circumstances, both in private and educational settings. With the shift to distance schooling, parents equipped their children with new or better devices adapted to current requirements. This reflects the pace of innovation regarding devices and applications. This shift, at least temporarily, led to an increase in overall media use by children (Petschner et al., 2022). The altered daily routines and the relaxed media regulations in some households during the pandemic further impacted adolescents' media experiences. Shifts in daily rhythms, coupled with less stringent enforcement of media rules, led to changes in their media repertoires, the importance and use of

specific devices and applications in their daily lives, which ultimately also facilitated the datafication trend to a large extent (Mascheroni & Siibak, 2021).

- (2) Looking at the *meso-level* of social domains, we can see a strong influence of the family-led communicative figuration on the children's media repertoires, especially at a younger age. Their media ensemble, common media practices, prevailing attitudes, individual media practices, and parental media education all play significant roles in adolescents' media repertoires. Current research also points to differences in socio-demographic factors that may impact these repertoires. Since our sample tends to be from a higher socio-economic and educational background, these differences were less visible, even over time.
- (3) With increasing age, however, the influence of the family decreases. This can be attributed to the entanglement with the *micro-level* of individual development. One of the core developmental tasks during adolescence is detachment and independence from parents. Using media alone and autonomously becomes a key theme in developing the adolescents' media repertoires. Furthermore, all young people in our study enriched their media repertoires with their own devices, especially smartphones, which for most of them became one of their, or even *the*, most important medium. The acquisition of these personal devices is often related to increased solitary media use. This coincides with the growing importance of identity formation and self-representation, which are considered crucial meta-developmental tasks for adolescents. These evolving needs are reflected in the changes observed in their media repertoires. In the transition from early to late adolescence, the composition of the media repertoire is increasingly driven by individual interests. Our findings illustrate a transition in media preferences and interests, emphasizing the dynamic nature of young individuals' media engagement. Furthermore, we can see that gender impacts media use, especially in late adolescence. Media practices and interests increasingly differentiate between boys and girls, suggesting that gender-related role models and normative expectations are reflected in their media repertoires. Forming and navigating social connections with peers is another important developmental task and a key aspect of socialization in adolescence. In this context, online media are particularly relevant among young people, as the frequency and duration of internet use increases with age and becomes more differentiated. Adolescents seek connection and communication opportunities in digital media, primarily through social media. The importance of these media and which ones are used are measured, among other things, by the media repertoires of their peers. Furthermore, media use significantly contributes to adolescents' general social orientation. For instance, they start to explore current social topics and news through (social) media, news apps, and podcasts.

In conclusion, changes in media repertoires reflect the evolving social and personal challenges and developments faced by young people. Our five-year study has already revealed significant shifts in media use. Looking ahead, it will be fascinating to witness how these repertoires continue to evolve and how future media and technological advancements will be integrated within the context of deep mediatization.

In our view, analyzing media repertoires has proven to be a valuable contribution to socialization research as it complements cross-sectional studies by tracing individual changes over time, highlighting relevant mediating factors and social contexts, and providing insights into the media practices of the next generation of adults. Analyzing media repertoires has proven to be a powerful tool in understanding socialization and we strongly encourage its continued exploration in future research.

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