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## ***Media Literacy Education for All Ages***

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### **ABSTRACT**

This special issue of the *Journal of Media Literacy Education* explores the role of media literacy across the lifespan. Media literacy education interventions must be designed to meet the needs of individuals of different ages by understanding the life roles and goals that they have across the lifespan. Different pedagogical strategies are required to effectively address the media literacy competencies of young children, teens, adults, parents, and older adults. In old age, media literacy education may support cognitive functioning and social relationships and help people critically assess health-related information and services. Adopting a life course perspective enables the examination of media literacy competencies which unfold over time in response to changing historical conditions, social institutions and policies. This article reviews the literature to identify the current state of media literacy for different age groups, the present and future needs, and the media education content and instructional methods that have been used with children and adolescents, adult, and older people.

**Keywords:** *media literacy, human development, life course, lifelong learning, children, adolescents, adults, older people*

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Media literacy education research and practice in the United States and beyond has primarily focused on children's and young people's media use, practices, cultures, and media literacies as well as on the instructional methods and pedagogy of media literacy aimed for children and young people. Adults—particularly older adults—have received less attention (Abad, 2014; Hakkarainen, Hyvönen, Luksua, & Leinonen, 2009; Livingstone, Van Couvering, & Thumim, 2005; Petranova, 2013; Rasi & Kilpeläinen, 2015). In today's mediatized society, digital technologies and the media play central roles in learning, well-being, everyday life, and participation throughout an individual's lifespan. The world's aging population, the increasing knowledge about the malleability of the brain even into old age, and the current emphasis on lifelong and life wide learning call for media literacy education that addresses media literacies across the life course and life span (see also Hobbs, 2010).

In the current understanding of media literacy, besides the competencies of accessing, analyzing, evaluating, and creating media messages across a variety of

contexts (Aufderheide & Firestone, 1993; Ofcom 2019a, 2019b; Potter, 2016), the creative and playful forms of multimodal media content production are emphasized, as well as abilities to reflect on one's communication behavior, to act and participate in society (e.g., Cannon, Potter, & Burn, 2018; Hobbs, 2010; Rasi, Kangas, & Ruokamo, 2019; Tuominen & Kotilainen, 2012), and to promote one's digital well-being (Gui, Fasoli, & Carradore, 2017).

Media literacy education for all ages means, first of all, that we support people of all ages in developing adequate media literacy, as well as the many closely interrelated competencies described with concepts such as multiliteracy, news literacy, health media literacy, digital literacy, coding literacy, as well as media and information literacy (MIL) (Baron, 2019; Hobbs, 2010; Martin, 2019; Palsa & Ruokamo, 2015; Rasi et al., 2019; Tuominen & Kotilainen, 2012). Developing a comprehensive understanding of media literacy means resorting to multi- and interdisciplinary approaches that draw on numerous fields and disciplines, such as education, reading and literacy, public health, literature and the humanities, sociology, human development and psychology, cultural studies, library and information science, journalism, communication and new media studies, social studies of technology, human-computer interaction, and audience studies (Hobbs, 2010; Livingstone, Papaioannaou, del Mar Grandío Pérez, & Wijnen, 2012). To better understand and support adults' and older people's media literacies, the scope of fields and disciplines needs to be further broadened to include adult education, gerontology, and educational gerontology.

Second, developing media literacy education for all ages means meeting the needs of people of various ages. In this endeavor, a "one-size-fits-all program" will not work (Hobbs, 2010, p. 20). Individuals' media literacy education needs and interests change over the course of their lives. For example, in infancy and childhood, media literacy education is expected to support well-being, self-expression, play, participation, and needs for safety (Finnish Ministry of Education and Culture, 2013). In old age, media literacy education may be especially important for cognitive functioning, social relationships (Castro Rojas, Bygholm, & Hansen, 2018; Chen & Schulz, 2016; Vaportzis, Martin, & Gow, 2017) and for obtaining and critically assessing and using health-related information and services (Strong, Guillot, & Badeau, 2012; Xie, 2011). In addition, media literacy education interventions can be tailored to meet the needs of individuals of different ages by understanding the life roles that they have across the lifespan. For example, in their middle years, individuals may have roles such as child, student, leisure user, citizen, worker, partner/spouse, homemaker, parent, and retiree (Reed, 2013).

In Europe, and beyond, several studies have aimed to evaluate the state of media literacies of children, adolescents, and the adult population (Petranova, 2013). Various media literacy frameworks have been used, each capturing one or more aspects of media literacy, while a comprehensive measurement of citizens' media literacy targeting all of its cognitive, emotional, and social competencies (see, e.g., Hobbs, 2010) has not yet been achieved. Since media literacy is a highly context and age-dependent set of multidimensional competencies, it is probably not even a meaningful task to create universal criteria (Livingstone et al., 2012; Schilder, Lockee, & Saxon, 2016).

Effective instructional methods and pedagogy of media literacy may somewhat differ for children, adolescents, adults, and older people. Research literature on the pedagogies of media literacy for children and adolescents highlight the importance of collaborative, creative, playful, and multimodal media production practices as well as analytic, reflective, inquiry- and project-based learning practices (e.g., Cannon et al., 2018; Kupiainen, 2013; Martens & Hobbs, 2015; Song, 2017; Tuominen & Kotilainen, 2012). In addition, the importance of cross-curricular work, involving several teachers who work with students studying the same topic or phenomenon, has been discussed (see Rasi et al., 2019).

On the other hand, to develop instructional methods for older people's media literacy education, the field of geragogy can be a useful resource. Geragogy (cf. pedagogy) has been defined as the practice of fine-tuning teaching and instructional styles to aid the learning experiences of older adults (Findsen & Formosa, 2011). Besides developing age-appropriate instructional methods of media literacy, developing media literacy education for all ages may also require reassessing and developing the agencies related to providing such education. Who, for example, should be responsible for providing media literacy education for the parents of young children or older homebound people?

Due to the wide scope of fields and disciplines involved, the theoretical frameworks that are and could be informing media literacy education for all ages are numerous. It is beyond the scope of this editorial article to comprehensively review these theoretical frameworks. However, to be able to better reflect on the articles in this special issue, we will briefly look at some of them. In the United States and beyond, media literacy education has used theoretical frameworks rising from sociocultural, socioconstructivist, and connectivist learning theories as well as media studies, and cultural studies (Brooks, 2015; Hobbs & Jensen, 2009; Rasi et al., 2019). However, these theoretical approaches usually look at media literacies in a particular moment in time while failing to explore how media literacies develop over one's life course.

The life course perspective provides a useful theoretical framework to explore media literacy development "as unfolding over time, influenced by accumulating life experiences, changing historical conditions and events, and social institutions and policies" (Cooney & Curl, 2019, p. 530; see also Phillipson & Baars, 2007). It means understanding individuals' media literacies and relationships with media both socially and individually constructed and developing over time and place. In terms of research methods, the life course perspective means drawing on longitudinal methods. This perspective has been praised for the way in which it acknowledges both collective experiences and the diversity of experience (Larkin, 2013). The predominant theme of the life course perspective is that "stages in life are not necessarily standardised, chronologically or biologically fixed, sequential or gendered but are subject to a variety of social, historical and cultural influences" (Larkin, 2013, pp. 9–10). It has also been argued that the life course divisions into children, adolescents, adults, or working age and retired people have become increasingly fluid and permeable, as people of all ages share similar, consumerist preoccupations with food and diet, fitness and health, lifestyle, and leisure (Gilleard & Higgs, 2005; see also Larkin, 2013).

In terms of people's media literacy, use, practices, and cultures, drawing on a life course perspective means understanding that there is diversity both between and within the age groups. For example, digital technologies and media take up considerable time in the everyday lives of children and young people as they communicate, consume, interact, and learn through digital technologies (e.g., Eleá & Mikos, 2017; Hobbs & Moore, 2013), whereas older people use, for example, the Internet less than those in younger age groups, and for somewhat different purposes (Anderson & Perrin, 2017; Ofcom, 2019a, 2019b; Rasi, 2018). However, this does not mean that there is no diversity within the age groups. There is diversity in, for example, how actively children and adolescents create and share their writing, videos, music, and photography online, and this is diversity often related to their socioeconomic status (Hobbs & Jensen, 2009).

Media literacy education researchers are well-aware of concepts such as "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" (Prensky, 2001), which indicate that individuals' media literacies are influenced by the particular generation or age cohort to which they belong. However, there is a continuing debate on how "generation" should be understood. For example, Gilleard and Higgs (2005) argued that treating a generation as a cultural field, instead of a birth cohort, noting that it:

...enables actors to be treated as individuals who will inevitably vary in their level of engagement with emerging and established generational fields. Each individual member of a birth cohort need not serve as 'a representative' of this or that generation (p. 71).

In line with this approach, the concepts of "digital natives" and "digital immigrants" have received criticism for failing to capture generational diversity resulting from, for example, breadth of use, experience, gender, and educational levels (e.g., Helsper & Eynon, 2010). Furthermore, growing up in a digital age does not automatically amount to having the complex skill sets required for full participation in a 21st-century world (Alvermann & Sanders, 2019). Therefore, the contribution of the life course perspective to media literacy education could be to help us recognize the various social, historical, cultural, as well as individual factors that affect the media literacies of people of all ages. Second, it can help us recognize how media literacies develop over the whole life course, for example, how levels of media literacy accumulate as we progress through life.

A more psychological outlook links media literacy education with human development across the lifespan. The developmental psychological perspective has been applied in media literacy education, for example, by drawing on Piaget's cognitive development theory and Kohlberg's moral development theory (see, e.g., Palmer, Bresler, & Cooper, 2001). Drawing on Piaget and Kohlberg, Graber and Mendoza (2012) discussed the need to match media literacy contents and instructional methods in curricula to children's and adolescents' moral and cognitive developmental stages, calling for "a commitment to what is developmentally appropriate" (p. 87). The authors suggest, for example, that matching curricular content to the child's developmental stage can mean that when children are in the Piagetian pre-operational stage, heavy emphasis is placed on

hands-on activities and play (see also Lamdin & Lamdin Hunter, 2012). Furthermore, we can look at individuals' media literacy levels from a developmental perspective. For example, Potter (2016) proposed a media literacy scheme based on the following eight developmental stages: (1) Acquiring Fundamentals (year one of life); (2) Language Acquisition (years two to three); (3) Narrative Acquisition (years three to five); (4) Developing Skepticism (years five to nine); (5) Intensive Development; (6) Experiential Exploring; (7) Critical Appreciation; (8) Social Responsibility. According to Potter, many people stay in stage 5 for the rest of their lives, and stages 6–8 can be regarded as advanced.

This introduction to the *JMLE* special issue on media literacy education for all ages discusses the current state of research and practice through looking at each of the age groups separately: children and adolescents, adults, and older people. To orient the reader to the issues of media literacy in human development, we will answer the following questions:

- What is the current state of media literacy for different age groups?
- What are the media literacy education present and future needs of this age group?
- What kind of media education contents and instructional methods have been applied within this age group?

In addressing these questions, we will provide a brief overview of the seven research articles and three Voices in the Field articles included in this special issue while also reflecting on issues related to the aforementioned questions.

### **Children and Adolescents**

The Finnish Youth Research Society has examined media literacy research in Finland and found that the most common themes are children's (0–12 years old) relations to the media, media use, and pedagogies of media literacy education. The most needed research fields would be children's media relations in contemporary society, parents' media relations, and adults' media literacy skills. Three priorities about future media literacy education research and practices are as follows (see Vilmilä, n.d.; Kupiainen, 2019, p. 922):

Priority 1. Media-driven media education research, which examines the media as the environment where children and young people live, function, experience emotions, and grow. What does it mean for children and adolescents to live in a media society and culture?

Priority 2. Media education research, which concentrates on children and adolescents focusing on what happens in children's and adolescent's relation to the media and the significance of this relationship. Perspectives of media use, media-related emotions and mental images, and child and adolescent cultures are considered.

Priority 3. Education-driven media education research supports the development of media skills, meta skills, and critical-thinking skills, and the shaping of courses of action and thought models. Learning and growth environments can be examined from the perspectives of institutions, the home, culture, and peer relations.

Systematic research on the media use habits of children and adolescents has helped media literacy for this age group to advance. The EU Kids Online network carried out research in 2010 to study 25,000 European 9–16 years old Internet users and their parents in 25 European countries (Livingstone, 2019; Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Olafsson, 2011). The network's research examines the ways children use new media focusing on online risk and safety issues. In 2013–2014, the Net Children Go Mobile survey repeated most parts of the previous EU Kids Online research with 3500 European 9–16 years old Internet users in seven countries with a focus on mobile devices. In the same year, an EU Kids Online follow-up qualitative survey was conducted. On the basis of the EU Kids Online surveys, five conclusions were drawn: (a) the more children use the internet, the more digital skills they gain; (b) not all internet use results in benefits; (c) children's use, skills, and opportunities are also linked to online risks; (d) not all risks results in harm; (e) the role played by parents, school, and peers along with the national provision for regulation, content provision, cultural values, and the educational system are also important (Livingstone, 2019).

Terms used to describe digital and media literacy competencies vary worldwide. Instead of the term digital literacy, the European Union prefers to use the term digital competence. The European Commission–Joint Research Centre–Institute for Prospective Technological Studies (JRC-IPTS) has developed a DIGCOMP framework for digital competence based on recommendations of the European Union (2006) on key competencies for lifelong learning. Several scholars in the field have also contributed to this work (Ferrari, 2013). The framework includes knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to digital competences. It pays special attention to citizen's needs in information society, such as the need to be informed, to interact, to express themselves, to feel safe, and to be able to manage problematic situations with technological tools within digital environments.

An educational research approach to media literacy is focused on the production of various digital media and becoming literate in the 21st century (Kafai, Fields, & Searle, 2018). Being digitally literate means understanding how to (a) access digital media; (b) navigate digital media; (c) read digital media; (d) create digital media (Baron, 2019). Coding is one of the 21st century's need-to-know skills, and computational thinking is the conceptual underpinning of coding. Coding literacy is very topical issue to understand how technologically driven, digital world works (Martin, 2019).

In their article in this volume, Valtonen, Terde, Mäkitalo, and Vartiainen examine media literacy education at the K-12 level, providing an overview of some computational mechanisms and technical perspectives for media literacy education. The authors suggest how to integrate media literacy education with computing

education to improve students' skills and readiness to cope with the modern media environment, which has radically changed.

In this special issue, three articles deal with adolescents' media literacy—all are from United States college and middle school, formal contexts. Alvermann and Sanders (2019) define adolescents as 12–18-year-olds. The term adolescent is commonly used to refer to a lifespan of the ages of 13–21, although definitions may have cultural variations (Loh & Lim, 2019). There is growing research interest dealing with adolescents using various web-based resources and digital literacy skills (Alvermann & Sanders, 2019).

Threadgill and Price focus their research on media literacy education for college students. Applying psychometric analyses using the Critical Evaluation and Analysis of Media (CEAM) scale, they measure self-reported practices dealing with credibility, audience, and technical design elements of online news, advertisements, and entertainment media. Their findings indicate that first-year college students have adequate practices in recognizing audience in media messages and questioning news credibility, though their questioning the credibility of advertisements requires improvement.

College students are also the focus of Baleria's exploratory phenomenological research. She investigates story sharing with the goal of how to increase college students' sense of belonging and level of curiosity in a digital space. According to her findings, a semi-structured micro-intervention with an other in a digital space made college students value story sharing as a means to navigate differences, find commonalities, and establish small-scale relationships. The time and structure in relational micro-interventions across differences can influence digital media literacy, the sense of belonging, and the level of curiosity.

In her *Voices from the Field* article, Ciccone describes how to teach middle school adolescents to communicate better with peers online. She argues the importance of having adolescents practice engaging in challenging and professional conversations utilizing the new media literacy (NML) framework. In that pedagogy cycle of reflection, it is essential to ask students how their contributions inform, persuade, and move conversations forward. She identifies best practices as follows: (a) develop a sequence of activities; (b) play with logistics; (c) allow students to articulate what is valued; (d) take time to reflect; (e) remember that things will go wrong.

Abrams and Schaefer examine three adolescent-researchers' digital literacies in their article using collaborative autoethnographic research. Six research team members participated in data collection and analysis by exploring their own meaning-making practices. The research results show that in the discourse, perspective/attitude was the most prevalent attribute. The voices of the adolescent researchers create opportunities to rethink the implications and applications of practices in adolescents' lives.

## **Adults**

There is a growing body of research literature concerning adult media literacy and overall, the evidence demonstrates that many adults lack basic media literacy competencies. Large-scale statistical reports by, for example, the

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), the Office of Communications (Ofcom), Pew Research Center, and the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC) provide information particularly on the use-aspect of media literacy. On a global scale, the state of adults' digital skills has been studied in OECD's international Survey of Adult Skills (2013, 2016) that covers 33 countries worldwide. The study assessed adults' problem-solving skills in a technology rich environment, which means the ability to use digital technologies and tools to access and evaluate information, communicate with others, and perform practical tasks for personal, work, and civic purposes. The results revealed that nearly half of the adults have low proficiency in problem solving in technology rich environments and are able to use only familiar applications to solve simple problems. One in four adults has more sophisticated problem-solving skills and is able to handle unpredictable situations and evaluate search results from Internet search engines. Only 5.4% of adults in participating countries scored at the highest level of skills, which means being able to manage challenging and complicated processes in unfamiliar media- and digital technology environments, use several applications simultaneously and combine information from several sources.

There may also be cultural differences in the media use habits of adults that have an impact of the development of media literacy competencies. With a focus on British adults 16 years of age or older, Ofcom publishes an annual report about their media use, attitudes, and understanding. The quantitative survey is accompanied by an annual qualitative report about adults' media lives that presents more rich and detailed information from a longitudinal ethnographic video study that began in 2005. The most recent Ofcom survey report (2019a) revealed that mobile phones are increasingly integral to adults' everyday life and one third of adult Internet users use it as the only device to go online. When users between 25 and 64 are examined, almost everyone uses a mobile phone. The Pew Research Center's (PRC) results (2019a) from American context are similar. Approximately 81% of adults in the United States have a smartphone and 37% use mostly their smartphones to go online. Both in Britain and the United States, the range of online activities undertaken by Internet users varies both by age and by socio-economic group (Ofcom, 2019a; PRC, 2019a). The amount of Internet users has continued to grow in China also; approximately 58% of the population are using the Internet and 72% are between 20 and 59. A vast majority, 98% of all the users, use mobile technologies to go online. Chinese are active users of various everyday mobile services, such as bike sharing or taxi-booking apps, or reserving bus or train seats. Major reasons for Internet non-use are a lack of digital and literacy skills. The most important facilitators for non-users to go online are free training and social support from one's family (CNNIC, 2018.)

Usage and skill gaps between users may occur as a result of differences in workplace and leisure habits. Ofcom's qualitative results (2019b) revealed an increasing gap between those who use the Internet merely for basic everyday tasks, and those who are using it for a more diverse range of activities, such as using social media platforms proactively as part of their work. Thirteen percent of UK adults do not use the Internet; this number has not changed since 2014. Further, there has been only a slight change in critical awareness in the past few years; one in 10 users



say they do not think about the truthfulness of online content (Ofcom, 2019a.) In the United States, the offline population has decreased significantly since 2000; currently, only around 10% of the adult population do not use the Internet. Non-usage is linked to demographic variables such as age, educational background, household income, and community type (PRC, 2019b).

It seems that there is variation in the frequency, diversity, and level of how adults use media and digital technologies in their everyday lives. As stated before, adults cannot be generalized into a homogenous group with similar habits and skills (Gilleard & Higgs, 2005; Helsper & Eynon, 2010) with regards to their media literacy either. Nevertheless, having good digital technology skills seems to enable the seizing of different kinds of opportunities in digitalized societies. High-level skills in problem solving using digital technologies promote being employed and having higher wages, whereas adults without experience with digital technologies are less likely to participate in labor (OECD, 2015).

Family factors remains a key driver of media literacy competencies, especially having children, as parents need a certain outlook on media and digital technologies (Sasson & Mesch, 2019). Other enablers of media literacy include the advanced design of digital technologies and contents, adult education opportunities, strong self-efficacy, social networks to support, and work involving the use of digital technologies. Key barriers to media literacy are age, socio-economic status, gender, disability, ethnicity, and poor proficiency in English (Livingstone et al., 2005).

Being able to perform in all dimensions of media literacy is an asset in modern societies and economies (Potter, 2016), but some skills related to media literacy tend to disappear if they are not used. According to the OECD's report (2015), problem-solving proficiency in technology-rich environments seems to peak already at around age 25. In the future, large-scale efforts are needed to ensure opportunities for adults to both learn new skills and to use them. However, age is not the only factor affecting digital literacy skills, and it has been argued that the experience with technology accounts for the observed lifelong changes in digital literacy skills more than cognitive development related to age. The gap in usability-related skills between younger and older generations seems to close over time, but the gap in skills related to creativity and criticism seems to expand (Eshet-Alkalai & Chajut, 2010). The older generations' life experiences, recent growth in having experiences of using technology, and the context of use are affecting their skills and attitudes (Eshet-Alkalai & Chajut, 2010; Rizzuto, 2011).

Adults must perform various kinds of life roles in everyday life (Reed, 2013), which can be seen in the articles in this volume that represent the differing perspectives of adults. Those who are settled in working life are increasingly engaged with digital technologies that mediate information, communication, and social relationships in networked working communities (Oldham & Da Silva, 2015). Others are pursuing further education to promote and maintain their professional development, and some are striving for a new area of expertise. Current flexible, blended, formal, and informal learning arrangements require skills to study in various kinds of learning environments, such as work, home, libraries, museums, social groups, and online spaces (e.g., Gamrat, Zimmermann, Dudek, &

Peck, 2014; Meyers, Erickson, & Small, 2013; Ravenscroft, Schmidt, Cook, & Bradley, 2012).

In this special issue, three articles focus on developing adults' media literacy in university context. Schilder and Redmond present a study that focuses on the changes in critical questioning habits for college-aged students enrolled in media literacy courses. Instead of focusing on assessing students' media literacy skills, the authors base their study on assessing inquiry, that is, the ability to ask questions in response to viewing an advertisement. The results of their experimental study show an increase in students' ability to ask questions related to, for example, production techniques and representation. In addition, the complexity of the questions also increased.

In their Voices from the Field article, Blanton, Cheek and Bellows introduce a professional learning strategy to promote preservice teachers' media literacy during instruction. Through a real-life case, the authors describe the knowledge base of *eCoaching*, as well as the required resources and each participants' roles and tasks during the process. According to the experiences gained during practical implementation, *eCoaching* seems to have potential as a media literacy tool that can be used to support preservice teachers in developing and applying their critical-thinking skills. In addition, this learning strategy promotes confidence through the mediated social presence of the supervisor.

Oliver and Williams-Duncan provide a theology education perspective to examine the teaching of media literacy and describe how the age and career stage of educators may affect their digital literacy learning experiences. The study is based on the demand-resources model from workplace psychology. According to the results, educators perceive that older students may find it difficult to navigate hybrid and digital cultures, but for younger students, the ability to lead in and reflect on digital settings can be especially challenging. From a pedagogical perspective, the authors point out the importance of focusing on the context and experience related to digital technology when designing media literacy education.

Adults with children need media literacy to stay up to date with their children's media use, to be able to talk to children about the content of media, set rules and enforce limitations on time and content, and to watch or use the medium together with their children (Sasson & Mesch, 2019). The fourth article concerning media literacy in various adults' life roles in this special issue emphasizes the parental perspective. In her Voices from the Field article, Hipeli provides insight into the development and implementation of the media literacy and ICT discipline which was introduced in Switzerland in the fall of 2018. A pre-study survey reveals that parents have prejudices and false assumptions regarding the new school subject. The paper emphasizes the importance of interaction and communication between schools and home to raise parents' awareness.

A wider range of media literacy learning experiences are needed for people across the lifespan. Ofcom's report (2019b) revealed that in the British context, adults are increasingly accessing a range of online learning opportunities. Hobbs (2010) claimed that there is a need for various kinds of media literacy teaching and support systems throughout society. Currently, typical avenues for adults include, for example, formal education, work-based learning and informal learning

opportunities via YouTube videos, specialist educational sites, and Facebook groups (Ofcom, 2019b). However, such use is concentrated among those who have good computer skills and is not necessarily empowering those with less confidence or who are less motivated to learn something new. In the near future, education and support should be tailored for adults and particularly to the growing number of immigrants (Hobbs, 2010; OECD, 2016). Another emerging issue is the aging population, which emphasizes adults' role also as a social support and tutors for their aging parents, who need guidance in using digital technologies, such as smartphones and applications needed to run bank errands or to take care of health issues (Tsai, Shillair, & Cotten, 2017).

### **Older People**

To date, there is no comprehensive research on the level of media literacy of people over 65 years of age (Petranova, 2013; Rasi, Vuojärvi, & Hyvönen, 2016), which is the most frequent definition of the chronological age of the older population (see, e.g., Peace, Dittmann-Kohli, Westerhof, & Bond, 2007). Most studies have focused on older people's access and use of digital technologies and media, while the critical understanding and creation of media contents has been least researched within the traditional media literacy dimensions (Livingstone et al., 2005; Rasi & Kilpeläinen, 2015). Older people typically use the Internet somewhat differently, and for different purposes than the younger age groups, albeit there is diversity among older people (e.g., Anderson & Perrin, 2017; Ofcom, 2019a, 2019b). Internet users aged over 65 are likely to undertake a narrower range of online activities and to use social media less than the younger age groups (e.g., Anderson & Perrin, 2017; Ofcom, 2019a). Furthermore, there are significantly more Internet non-users among older than among younger age groups (Ofcom, 2019a; Rasi, 2018). Echoing the life course perspective presented earlier in this editorial article, Schäffer (2007) demonstrated that older people's use of new technologies is influenced by their accumulating experiences. Schäffer studied the media practice cultures of older people and concluded that "they initially approach new technologies by applying the media practices they picked up during adolescence, including the logic inherent in these practices" (p. 36).

Some existing research points to a lack of critical media literacies, that is, the abilities to understand, analyze, and evaluate media contents among older adults (e.g., Ofcom, 2015, 2019a). Guess, Nagler, and Tucker (2019) concluded that it is possible that an entire cohort of Americans aged 65 years or more are not able to determine the trustworthiness of online news. Eronen and colleagues (2019) concluded that a significant number of 75-year-old Finnish men and women report difficulties in understanding and judging the trustworthiness of health information presented in the media. In terms of older people's media literacy needs, the importance of health literacy and eHealth literacy have been underlined (e.g., Eronen et al., 2019; Xie 2011; Young, Weinert, & Spring, 2012), as older people are seen as one major and potential consumer group for health technologies, information, and services (Gatti, Brivio, & Galimberti, 2017). eHealth literacy has been defined as finding, understanding, evaluating, and applying online health

information to health problems (e.g., Manafo & Wong, 2012; Xie, 2011; see also Hobbs, 2010).

Various media literacy education methods have been applied in supporting older people to use, understand, and create media content and communications. The methods include traditional approaches, such as fixed-length instructor-led courses (e.g., Castilla et al., 2018), learner-centered one-on-one tutoring (e.g., Brown & Strommen, 2018), peer-to-peer teaching (e.g., Sayago, Forbes, & Blat, 2013), intergenerational approaches where significantly younger persons have tutored the seniors (e.g., Gamliel, 2017), and creative pedagogies based on older people's creative content production processes (e.g., Manchester & Facer, 2015). In addition, blended learning and online learning approaches have been used for promoting older people's media literacies (e.g., Manafo & Wong, 2012). Previous research has emphasized the key role of a person-focused and needs-based approach (Vroman, Arthanat, & Lysack, 2015) and ensuring that older people understand the terminology related to digital technology and media (Xie, Watkins, Golbeck, & Huang, 2012). Furthermore, supporting older people's self-efficacy as the users of digital technologies and media, as well as their social support networks have proved important for their learning (e.g., Livingstone et al., 2005; Vroman et al., 2015).

Media literacy education initiatives and interventions for older people are presently provided by numerous organizations, such as non-governmental organizations, community colleges, elderly homes, research institutes, senior centers, social services, universities, libraries, or by collaborative projects between these (see, e.g., Strong et al., 2012; Vaportzis et al., 2017; Xie, 2011). Researchers have underlined the need to provide further education in later life to promote older people's lifelong learning, participation, well-being, and personal fulfilment and for the need to shape the educational institutions in a way that all older people will be able to acquire necessary skills—not just the ones with more prior educational experience (Bond, Dittmann-Kohli, Westerhof, & Peace, 2007; Kunemund & Kolland, 2007). Furthermore, future media literacy education initiatives and interventions should support older people in their diverse life roles, for example, as citizens, recipients of health and care services, learners, consumers, leisure users, leaders, experts, workers, partners, spouses, parents, grandparents, and retirees (see, e.g., Hakkarainen et al., 2009; Peace et al., 2007; Reed, 2013).

In this *JMLE* special issue, Lantela discusses the media literacy of older adults in one of their life roles: as recipients of technology-supported home care services. She draws on critical gerontology and media literacy education to argue that when home technology is used for communication or information exchange, technology use falls within the scope of media literacy education. In her study, she applies the theory of sensemaking (Weick, 1995) to shed light on the viewpoints and experiences of older adults living in sparsely populated areas in Finland and receiving technological home care services. In the spirit of the life course approach presented in the previous sections, she emphasizes that digitalizing care service is not a straightforward procedure, as the use or rejection of technologies is intertwined with older people's past experiences (see also Schäffer, 2007) as well as social, structural, and political issues. She concludes that media literacy

education initiatives aimed toward older people should be based on careful contextualization, and that older people's voices should be considered and heard in the design of initiatives and in public discussions.

## Conclusion

The articles in this special issue focus on media literacies, media literacy education methods, and needs of children, adolescents, adults, and older people. While demonstrating the richness within the field, the special issue also highlights the need to further develop especially older people's media literacy education. For this issue, we only received two submissions dealing with older people's media literacy education, and luckily, we were able to publish one of these. Future research clearly calls for media literacy education that addresses media literacies across the life course and life span. We must confront the challenge of building age-friendly media literacy education that meets the needs of people of all ages.

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