Media Life of the Young

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Abstract

This is a thorough investigation into contemporary young people and their media life. The article conceptualizes a typology of media life, drawing on a theoretical body involving the sociology of generations, life course research, media life and individualization. This empirically derived typology makes a strong instrument for an understanding of the media life of the young, furnishing insights into how they have constructed their use of media. The investigation is based on a robust national survey with Swedes born 1994–2001, conducted in 2010, and focusing on four media: television, gaming, the Internet and mobile devices. Two of the findings are particularly surprising. Firstly, the results reveal that the young generally lead heterogeneous media lives, varying with age and sex. Secondly, although some young people literarily live their life in media, there are also de facto young who live a life without media. This is particularly pronounced for gaming and mobile use.

Keywords
young, generation, media life, television, Internet, gaming, mobile, media usage

Introduction

Young people biologically and sociologically differ from individuals of other ages, generations and life phases. This article acknowledges that young people are processing through adolescence, but also emphasize their generational belonging. Drawing on the sociology of generations (Mannheim, 1952), people's formative experiences with media are assumed to shape generations. Since the mediascape changes, generations may develop media use in different directions, while people in one generation are largely assumed to develop and maintain similar media use. Consequently, generations have often been presented to have relatively homogeneous patterns of media use. This is prevalent regarding the plethora of studies and concepts, which suggest that the contemporary young constitute a generation with a strong digital orientation. What is more, networked information and communication technologies (ICTs) are often seen as integral to the role of media in the everyday life of the young. That is, such use has become ordinary and integrated with many other activities in the routines of their life (Bakardjieva, 2011). Substantial criticism has been directed towards some of these claims, which cast light on numerous complexities and patterns worthy of close analysis (c.f. Westlund and Weibull, 2013).

This article problematizes the notion that media play a pervasive role in everyday life, and it also deconstructs previous assumptions and findings on homogeneity in media use. It further discusses inconsistent uses of the generational concept, in relation to the sociology of generations as well as life course research. Following from these aforementioned criticisms, young people are here seen to be in a specific life phase, possibly constituting a generation, and are most likely to exhibit heterogeneous media lives. The young are approached from a theoretical framework building on media life and the individualization and domestication of media in everyday life. The article aims

to study and conceptualize a media life typology, measuring (possible) heterogeneity in young people's media lives. The typology conceptualizes their media lives by merging the reported frequencies and time spent with different media (i.e. degree of intensity). The article presents an empiric analysis that scrutinizes and conceptualizes the intensity in which various young people command attention to specific media.

Four media life categories were constructed and are outlined in the typology, based on the intensity with which the young interact with these media. These are used for analyzing patterns of homogeneity and heterogeneity depending on age and gender. Thus, the typology forwards a simple yet effective way for scrutinizing the role of various media in the lives of the young. The typology builds on the extensive analysis and conceptualization of self-reported survey data. It draws upon data from a cross-sectional and nationally representative survey with young Swedes born 1994 to 2001 (aged 9–16 years when the survey was conducted in 2010). Thus, 'young' in this study refer to 9 to 16 year olds, whereas tweens refer to 9 to 12 and teenagers 13 to 16 year olds. When discussing young more generally, and regarding other studies, young refer to a wider age span, including both children and other teenagers. Alongside other Nordic countries, Sweden scores among the highest in the world in terms of providing access to the Internet and mobile broadband (World Information Society Report, 2007; ITU, 2011). The country also placed number one in the world rankings of how countries leverage ICTs, performed by the World Economic Forum in 2010, 2011 and 2012 (Dutta and Bilbao-Osorio, 2012). Swedish media companies have certainly also invested in developing contents and services for mobile devices, such as with the salient case of journalism (Westlund, 2013).

Approximately nine out of ten Swedes had Internet access in 2011. Many are daily users, increasingly so from mobile devices. However, usage is still significantly

less frequent among the elderly (Findahl, 2012). The analysis of young´s media life in this article not only involves the Internet and mobile devices (i.e. phones), but also focuses on television and gaming. A number of independent investigations show that television (Bjur, 2009; IP network and RTL Group, 2008) and gaming (ISFE, 2008), play important roles in the everyday lives of tweens and teens, alongside the Internet (Flash Eurobarometer, 2008; Nordicom, 2009; Livingstone et al., 2011) and mobile devices (Axelsson, 2010; Westlund, 2010; Westlund and Bjur, 2013;).

Next follows three sections presenting and problematizing the two first criticisms addressed. These sections posit the theoretical lens upon which the article draws, and they also present research aimed at setting the context of these four media in the everyday lives of the contemporary young. These sections are ensued by a section focusing on the study rationale of the article; this involves a presentation of the empirical focal points at hand as well as a discussion of the methods and materials. Thereafter, the empirical results are presented, providing the means for dissection, scrutiny and conceptualization of the divergent ways television, the Internet, gaming and mobile devices have become embedded in the lives of the young. The conclusions close the article.

The Intensive and Individualized Media Life of the Young

This section discusses relationships between media structures and individuals, organized into two subsections. The first presents how the transformation of media and ICTs increasingly facilitates individualized and intensive uses of media in everyday life. With media having become seemingly omnipresent, it discusses how people nowadays can be seen as living media lives. The second subsection discusses media life and individualization, specifically focusing on television, the Internet, and mobile and gaming, problematizing how heterogeneous patterns emerge.

Media life

Half a century ago, McLuhan (1964) suggested that media would eventually become *extensions of man*. His ideas have been widely discussed and criticized during the decades that have followed. Nevertheless, contemporary ICTs and media have certainly become better equipped for providing people with individualized opportunities for media use. The uses of media were earlier confined to specific places and occasions (e.g. watching the household television when the eight o'clock news broadcast was aired), but have now become more ubiquitous and personal. Media that were previously restricted by the physical boundaries of the home have now become increasingly unlocked from such restrictions. Furthermore, although media such as the television previously involved one television set per household, such screens are now often available in several rooms, catering to the individualized needs of the different household members. Both hardware and software have become more individualized and ubiquitous. People not only individually select and purchase, but also personalize and carry ICTs such as mobile devices with them at all times.

Elliott and Urry coined the term *miniaturized mobilities* to signify how portable ICTs such as mobile devices, tablets and laptops have been developed to suit contemporary life on the move (Elliott and Urry, 2010: 28), being empowered with an always-on connection that facilitates information access, communication as well as creating and distributing content. The mobile device enhances both the instrumental capacity and expressive identity of its owner, and is par excellence an example of technology that conforms to mobility and individualism. It results in a technology that can be framed as both material and symbolic (Silverstone, 1999), as ICT facilitates

communicative expression and culture as well as forms tangible expressions of culture (Boczkowski and Lievrouw, 2007). Research on the use of mobiles among the young in Sweden, for instance, has shown that mobiles empower them to additional and complementary social interaction as well as being an entertainment tool (Thulin and Vilhelmson, 2007). Ultimately, many ICTs can be seen to have become extensions of man, with their pervasiveness resulting in a blurring of boundaries between different spaces and domains, such as work and private.

The ever-presence of media in everyday life indicates that people have developed truly intensive patterns of use. Therefore, some suggest that one should not view people as simply using media, but rather as if they are living media lives. Deuze (2009: p. 468) proposes that "our life should perhaps be seen as lived *in*, rather than *with*, media − a *media life"*. He reasons that the experiences people gain in life are framed by, made immediate by, and mitigated through media. Media life draws on related theoretical concepts in social theory and media studies (Deuze, Blank and Speers, 2010). Concepts such as liquidity (Bauman, 2000, 2006), mobility (Urry, 2007) and convergence culture (Jenkins, 2006) are important bricks in this construction of media life. Traditional media research perspectives are criticized, since these reproduce dichotomies, such as between society and media, regarding production, use, and content (Deuze 2011, 2012). The relationship between media and those formerly known as the audience no longer only involve what people read, watch or listen to, but also what people do (Meikle and Young, 2012).

Nowadays, numerous screens accompany contemporary individuals, and these are increasingly offering ubiquitous access to friends, information and diversion through the Web and its cloud. The domestication of ubiquitous ICTs has resulted in these moving into the background of everyday life, becoming naturalized, hidden and perhaps even

invisible technologies. This is often referred to as 'ubiquitous computing' or 'ambient intelligence' (Berker et al., 2006), and clearly resonates with the media life perspective and its emphasis on dissolving boundaries between media and individuals. Deuze (2009) argues that a disappearance of media is taking place as they fade out from consciousness because of their immediacy. As everything in everyday life becomes mediated, media itself, in some sense, becomes more and more invisible. It can be hypothesized that people cease to note the presence of media in their lives, except when they do not function properly, such as with electricity shortages resulting in batteries running out for laptops and mobile devices. While acknowledging such naturalization, this article also acknowledges that media and ICTs play a pronounced and highly visible role in everyday life for instrumental and expressive functions (Westlund et al., 2011). This follows up with convincing accounts of how ICTs such as the mobile device, similar to cars and mechanical time-keeping, are so widely domesticated in society that people take them for granted (Ling, 2012).

These accounts convey that media has become integral to everyday life, that media has become something that people take for granted, and also that humans live media lives. Although media and ICTs can obviously be pervasive and omnipresent, it is uncertain whether this is the role these entail in people's everyday life. Drawing inferences from the body of qualitative research into how ICTs have become appropriated and are being used in everyday life (Bakardjieva, 2011), this article contributes with an analysis that was performed by employing the quantitative method. It makes an attempt towards empiric analysis and the conceptualization of media life that discloses possible heterogeneity. Whether composition is uniform is scrutinized in terms of the intensity with which people use media, regarding four media, and depending on age and gender. It should be noted that this typology does not attempt to

encompass all dimensions of media life, such as how people themselves create and share media.

Television, Internet, mobile and gaming in young people's eclectic media life

Assessments of the contemporary young's media lives are truly challenging in light of their individualized use of diverse media. The young have been portrayed as living a life skewed towards digital media. For instance, Oblinger and Oblinger (2008) suggest that the young do not think in terms of technology but rather what is enabled by technology (Tapscott, 2008), whereas Herring (2008) argues that the technologies that the young use have become transparent to them (Deuze, 2012). However, the role played by digital media should be empirically assessed in relation to other media.

Thus, the article aims to investigate several media at once, rather than only one medium. This cross-media approach presents opportunities for understanding how various media are used in relation to each other in the matrix of available media (Bjur et al., 2013; Hartmann, 2006; Finnemann, 2008; Schrøder and Larsen, 2010; Westlund and Färdigh, 2011), adding to their overall media life. This article posits that a nuanced understanding of the media life of the young is gained by a cross-media approach involving not only the Internet but also other media.

This study focuses exclusively on the role of television, the Internet, gaming and mobile devices among the young. These four media inhibit different characteristics, which also have changed significantly over time. Broadcasted television is a traditional mass medium which is typically considered passive and entertainment-oriented. It emerged as a household technology, gathering the family to watch the same programs (Kortti, 2011). However, the technology has become more individualized and television

content more abundant (Klym and Montpetit, 2008). Television offerings are increasingly freed from fixed hours, while a proliferation of differently sized screens have disconnected television from fixed social spaces. Individualized television viewing makes a core consequence of this spatial and temporal 'disembedding' (Giddens, 1990; Bjur, 2009). Longitudinal research has evidenced that families with teens represent a more rapid breakdown of commonly shared television experiences than among families with smaller children and tweens (Bjur, 2009; 2012). The emergence of smart and networked television sets, accessing repositories with television shows and movies through streaming, fuels the growth of new usage patterns (Bjur et al., 2013)

A similar facilitation of individualization applies to computers and mobile devices. These were also characterized by shared possession and usage in their earlier days of diffusion (and still are in the global south), but are now often acquired and used as truly personal media. Although the Internet has enabled both information- and communication-oriented practices since the commercialization of the World Wide Web in the early nineties, it was not until the start of the 21st century that the mobile device developed such features (Goméz-Barosso et al., 2010). The mobile generally plays an important role for peer-based interaction of the young and for their transition into adult life (Oksman and Rautianen, 2003; Lenhart, Ling, Campbell and Purcell, 2010). Nevertheless, it is used in heterogeneous ways (Martensen, 2007). Gaming, on the other hand, has developed in parallel between consoles for television and computers, and since the nineties it has also become integrated with the Internet and mobiles. Caron (2007) stresses that gaming forms a symbolic barrier between the identities and behaviour of generations, and here, the young are the experts. Aarsand, on the other hand, has concluded that gaming among the young is a process that takes place both at home and at school. Apart from the hands-on gaming, there is also an essential social

dimension of discussing their gaming experiences (Aarsand, 2007). A palpable trend here suggests that these four media are not defined to the boundaries of the household or one particular screen, but can potentially be accessible for individuals through multiple screens and locations.

Contrary to popular conceptions, research has shown that many young people spend more time with television than the Internet (Buckingham, 2008). In this context, it is worth noting that there is clearly much variation in media use when one compares the United States with the Nordic countries, the global south or elsewhere. There is also heterogeneity among the young in their use of specific media. The daily reach for television was lower among teenagers and young adults (15–34), when compared to those aged 3 to 14 years (IP network and RTL Group, 2008). On the contrary, regarding gaming (ISFE, 2008) and the use of mobiles (Flash Eurobarometer, 2008), usage actually goes up with an increase in age. Regarding the Internet, one Swedish study concluded that young aged 12–16 years had less multifaceted patterns than other teenagers and young adults (Zimic, 2010; Livingstone and Helsper, 2007). A broad body of literature also suggests differences in media usage between girls and boys (Nordicom, 2009; Livingstone et al., 2011). For instance, a recent empiric analysis of how young Norwegians use the four aforementioned media showed differences among boys and girls, while also evidencing four distinct user types, some of which were rather equally composed of boys and girls (Endestad et al., 2011).

Young People's media life: Problems with generation and life phase

Media clearly plays a prevalent role in the lives of the young, providing a means for communication with peers and family, as well as offering entertainment, gaming, news, and shared mediated experiences. The adolescence period is one in which media habits are formed, possibly shaping distinct generational patterns that are maintained as

individuals grow old. However, these behavioural patterns possibly change as they enter other phases of life and are also presented with new opportunities from the changing mediascape. One may scientifically approach the young either in terms of a phase in life and/or as comprising a generation. Both approaches may be legitimate, and it is certainly a daunting challenge to determine which is most appropriate. However, many researchers do worse by not even addressing the issue.

Youth as a life phase

Young people conjure images of creative and energetic individuals. This is a period in life when people go to school, and develop as individuals both biologically and socially. From a life course perspective, adolescence is a phase in life where individuals are maturing and form their identities (Eriksson, 1968). As they transcend from being a child to a teenager, friends rather than family become their primary group. They engage with friends in social interaction about their everyday life, sharing their victories and defeats (Rubin, 1985). Tweens and teens typically engage in much social activities and communication with peers. Moreover, research on young Swedes suggests their view of themselves is highly influenced by how they envision their own future (Adamson et al., 2007). Stald (2008) discusses that the identities of the young continuously change, while Weber and Mitchell (2008) add that not only the identities of the young but also technologies are in flux.

Savage et al. (2006) argue that if youth is regarded as the transitional period between dependent childhood and independent adulthood, then people are nowadays young up until their thirties. Findings from Statistics Sweden (2012) confirm this in various ways. For instance, from the 1980s to the present, the average age among Swedes for giving birth to their first child has increased by approximately three years (to 28.9 among women and 31.4 among men in 2011). In addition, people´s life courses

have obviously changed. This has caused scholars to broaden the spectrum of decisive birth years intended to signify the young. This presumably results in more heterogeneity in groups presented as young.

Youth as a generation

The homogeneity and heterogeneity complexities are also relevant to research into media lives from the perspective of sociology of generations. Building on the legacy of Mannheim (1952), generations are groups of people who experience similar socio-historical conditions in a common way. He emphasized that the experiences from youth are particularly important in shaping generations. Following from this, the media with which people build a relation in a formative phase of their life are assumed to play a continued importance for them (and their media life) as they become older. The accumulation of specific shared experiences with media is assumed to bring people within a generation closer to each other, while at the same time becoming more distant from other generations (Gumpert and Cathcart, 1985). Empirical studies analyzing inter-generational differences indicate such heterogeneity in terms of media memories (Volkmer, 2006a, 2006b) and media use (Bolin and Westlund, 2009; Westlund and Färdigh, 2012; Westlund and Weibull, 2013).

In addition, a myriad of studies are presented as reports on the 'young generation', but which do not build sufficiently on sociology of generations or apply methods that facilitate presenting the young as a generation. These are best described as studies of the young, not as generational studies (as they are presented). Moreover, these studies have presented the young as a technologically- or digitally-oriented generation (Montogomery, 2009; Savage et al., 2006; McCrindle, 2009). Many seem to have been seduced by and believe in the idea of the generational divides presented by such studies.

For example, Prensky (2006) discusses that digital natives have grown up with digital technology, whereas digital immigrants were introduced to digital media later in their lives. Tapscott, on the other hand, has juxtaposed the so-called net generation with the television generation, suggesting that their respective media life orientations are significantly indifferent. The active and interactive media use of the net generation was presented as leading to increased intelligence, whereas the passive media use of the television generation was seen as stimulating dumbness (Tapscott, 1998, 2008).

Ultimately such studies make up a large portion of research into young´s media life, and they tend to involve both normative and unsupported statements on the young as well as the perceived benefits of different media. These normative perceptions of media are linked to the negotiation of media use between parents and their children. The young are constructed as digitally-oriented generations because they constitute appealing consumer groups (Costa and Damásio, 2010; Tufte, 2007; Willett, 2008). Stereotypes are also common in consumerist thinking and market segmentations (Barber, 2009; Ekström and Tufte, 2007).

Shortcomings and implications

Although generational constructs of young people have certainly gained traction in academia (and beyond), these are applied in ways that are strikingly inconsistent with research deriving from the sociology of generations; they seldom even refer to findings from such publications. The least common denominator between the two concerns homogeneity, since both generally present generations as having shared experiences and behaviours. From a generational perspective, the young will presumably persist with their experiences and behaviours over time. However, the life course framework has shown that behavioural patterns may change substantially as people enter another phase in life. The cross-sectional nature utilized in of most of these studies does not make it

possible to determine contemporary media use patterns of the young as a generational phenomenon vis-á-vis a phase in their life. Consequently, scholars should be cautious about constructing the young as a digital generation. Obviously, only the future can tell whether the contemporary young, portrayed as digitally-oriented generations, will maintain or change their media lives as they grow older. Nevertheless, it is an important issue to consider and examine. In conclusion, many studies presenting the young as digitally-oriented generations are seemingly disentangled from both life course research and the sociology of generations.

Furthermore, much research on the young and media have recently emphasized their digital orientation. However, simplistic views on the young as a homogeneous generation have been widely criticized (Zimic, 2009, 2010). Buckingham (2008: 15) problematizes the rhetoric often found describing the young as digitally-oriented generations: 'It represents not a description of what children or young people actually are, but a set of imperatives about what they should be or what they need to become' (Buckingham, 2008: 15). Herring (2008) argues that the young themselves have actually criticized researchers for portraying them as too digitally-oriented. She discusses that they have a double consciousness, being aware of both their own and adult perspective on use. Even though it has often been held as true that the contemporary young are postmodern, with a desire to break free and express their individuality through (digital) media, clearly not everyone has accommodated such practices into their everyday lives. Hence, the article suggests that one be critical when the young are presented as omnivores who command all their attention to the digital mediascape.

Study Rationale

The presence of media in everyday life has, in one sense, become omnipresent and naturalized. However, in another sense, it is marked by individualization as people

develop develop distinct and indifferent relationships to the array of media readily available. Much research has presented simplistic stereotypes of the young as a digital and technologically-oriented generation. Nevertheless, one finds heterogeneous, individualized and transformative patterns of media use when scratching the surface of some research focusing on the media lives of the young. Ultimately though, to our best knowledge few researchers have done more than literally scratch this surface. Thus, the article´s research question involves scrutinizing possible heterogeneity in young people's media lives. This calls for a media life typology that adequately addresses nuances in the media life of the young, and which here, takes departure in their (self-perceived) everyday media life. The article proposes a scientifically rewarding conceptualization that distinguishes individuals and groups on a continuum involving four categories.

To produce such an assessment, one must clearly analyze their exhibited media usage patterns based on robust data materials. The article scrutinizes and conceptualizes heterogeneity in media life based on quantitative data on tweens (aged 9–12 years) and teenagers (aged 13–16 years). This article aims to conceptualize an empirically and theoretically grounded media life typology that encompasses four different media activities. The article firstly investigates the degrees to which television, the Internet, mobile and gaming are present in young people's media life, and secondly scrutinizes heterogeneity in terms of age and gender.

Methods and materials

A quantitative approach, rather than a qualitative, was chosen in order to make generalization possible. The empirical investigation at hand has made use of data from a nationally representative survey, which was conducted by the Swedish Media Council (Ministry of Culture). The authors coordinated the survey template, introducing a

number of new questionnaire items of relevance to the 2010 edition of this bi-annual survey project. The field work was carried out through a postal-based survey. A total of 2000 surveys were sent to a simple random selection of Swedes aged 9–16 years, resulting in 1181 valid respondents, and a net response rate of 60 per cent.

Utilizing self-reported survey data marks a common approach in studies of media behaviour and has proven useful. Obviously, difficulties are involved regarding ensuring that the questionnaire responses reflect usage patterns. On the other hand, this is a challenge faced by all respondents and hence the responses are comparable. Another difficulty emerges in light of the media life perspective, which problematizes that media have become so interwoven into the textures of everyday life that people may not be aware of its presence. This provoking thought may certainly be correct, in the everyday, routinized and seamless use of media. However, as respondents are probed to reflect on their media use when asked to fill in a questionnaire, they may be able to recall and articulate their use patterns. The analysis and conceptualization builds upon how the young appreciate their usage of four different media.

Construction of media lives

Media life is described and operationalized based on *frequency of use* and *usage time* of television, gaming, the Internet and mobile devices. The questions asked related to frequency: "How often do you use x?" and time "How much time do you spend using X?" Both measures involve five-step scales: 1) *Frequency*: Daily, Several times a week, Once a week, More seldom, Never) and 2) *Time*: 5 hours or more, 3-4 hours, 1-2 hours, Less than an hour, Non-user). These variables have been merged into an index with values between 0 and 12, which forms an interaction variable of the two. The index multiplies the values of the two individual variables, *frequency* (0-4) and *time* (0-3, where the value 3 is 3–4 hours and 5 hours or more compounded). To facilitate use of

the index and in order to produce heuristic mean values, the index has been flattened (recoded) into values rising linearly from 0 to 8.

The index has been designed to give priority to frequency over time, as this was seen as more integral to everyday life. Thus, daily use is a prerequisite for reaching the top index value of 8 (on the flattened scale), which denotes a 'life in media' in this conceptualization of media life. This conceptualization involves three additional sorts of media lives, which, in descending order, are: 'Life with media´ corresponds to the value of 6 (several times a week, 3 hours or more) and 7 (daily use, 1–2 hours). Values 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 denote a 'life around media'. Finally, 'Life sans media' represents those who have reported non-usage (frequency and/or time). The findings section will present the results covering all four levels of media life, while emphasizing the two extreme ends of the media life continuum. The extreme end, which connotes a life in media, is seen as important in light of the large body of literature assuming and indicating such media use patterns. The life sans media end is critically important, since it casts light on the shortcomings of making stereotyped conclusions.

This article studies media life regarding four relatively distinguished media, while acknowledging that cross-mediality and blurred boundaries are seen as apparent traits of the contemporary mediascape (Westlund, 2011; Westlund, 2012). Although media life provides a set of tools with apparent advantages, the media life typology cannot rule out the fact that media use is a complex phenomenon. Nonetheless, the media life typology has a powerful ability to make the complex discernible, especially to render heterogeneity visible.

Findings on the Media Life of the Young

The media life typology aims to identify how integrated different media practices are in everyday life. The typology efficiently illustrates the place various media have in

people's life, and the consequential heterogeneity this bears for groups and generations. On the one end are people intertwining media with everyday life, leading a *life in media*, while those described as having a *life sans media* are found on the opposite end. Positioned in between these extremes are those who have either a *life with media* or a *life around media*.

The introductory overview of the findings in Table 1 reveal differences in the four media: 11 percent live a life in gaming, which is slightly lower compared to television (14%) and the Internet (16%), while mobile use (18%) has evidently generally gained the most traction among the young. It is worth noting that if the index had captured only those using it five hours a day, the life in media with the mobile would be even more distinguished compared to the other media. A life sans media is seemingly uncommon regarding television and the Internet; 12 per cent of the young report that they live without mobile devices and gaming is excluded from the media lives of 16 per cent. Nearly half of the young occupy a life *with* television, approximately one-quarter a life *with* the Internet, while the figures for gaming and mobiles are 17 and 12 per cent, respectively. This means that television, followed by the Internet, play the most central parts in the media life of the young.

Table 1. Approximately here

The applied index shows that the media life of the young varies substantially from one media to another. Living a life in media is most common regarding the mobile, whereas a life sans media is most common for gaming. Evidenced by the applied index, apart from these inter-media variances also exists a strong inter-group variance for the young. Although some of the young are drenched in media, others remain restricted from use. This indicates that media life of the young is a less homogeneous affair than

regularly described. In particular, the presence of young people living a life sans media is remarkable considering contemporary discussions on the ever-presence of media in everyday life. This provokes the question whether we are really dealing with *one* media generation and one life phase. Can heterogeneity be explained by differences in age, and if so, in what ways? Or is a great part of heterogeneity better explained by scrutinizing the differences in media life among boys and girls? The next section devotes attention to these questions.

The media lives of young boys and girls

Some of the aforementioned studies have evidenced differences in media life between boys and girls, as well as between tweens and teens. The mean values reported in Figure 1a-d are used to present the varying media lives regarding gender and age for the four media. The four graphs carry descriptive summary statistics in the form of mean values for males and females and across the ages of 9 to 16 years. The mean value for the whole group of the young is higher for television (5.5) than for gaming (3.7), mobile (4.1), and the Internet (4.6). Consequently, the mean values reveal television to be, on average, more central to the media life of the young than is gaming, the Internet and the mobile. This is no doubt, on average, a true picture. However, one must ask oneself whether it is fruitful to treat the group of 9 to 16 year olds as one "young generation".

Figure 1a-d evidence homogeneity as well as heterogeneity in media life depending on age. Television and gaming are characterized as relatively homogeneous when comparing the 9 to 16 year olds. Young people have obviously already domesticated television and gaming into their lives prior to the age of nine. They also maintain the position of these media in their lives fairly constantly in their first years of

adolescence. These media are typically introduced and used in the domestic context of the household, primarily for entertainment.

Figure 1a-d.   Approximately here

On the contrary, there is substantial heterogeneity regarding the roles played by the Internet and mobile use at different ages. There are remarkable linear patterns of growth in usage as individuals turn older. This life cycle development is actually most pronounced for mobile devices; the mean value of 1.95 among 9-year-olds increased with every year of age, with 16-year-olds scoring 6.44. Although this substantial increase for the mobile tripled, the corresponding increase in the Internet doubled (from 3.06 to 6.36). The mean values used to evidence media life clearly demonstrate how the Internet and mobile devices gain traction in young people's everyday life as they grow in age.

Regarding gender differences, Figure 1a and 1c evidence few differences between boys and girls for television and the Internet. For television, the mean value among girls was 5.62, compared to 5.36 for boys, and for the Internet, the mean values were instead 4.77 and 4.47, respectively. Mobile use, on the other hand, is marked by gendered differences: boys score 3.59 and girls 4.62. Thus, the mobile occupies a slightly more pronounced role in the media life of young girls than of young boys. The opposite gender pattern is valid for gaming, which shows a significantly more forwarded position for boys (5.02) in comparison to girls (2.38). Interestingly, Figure 1b and 1d reveal that gender differences grow with increased age for both gaming and mobile use. This development is especially significant for gaming, where the curves for boys and girls diverge more clearly.

To conclude, the data at hand provide support for discussing the media life of boys and girls in a similar way regarding television and the Internet, but not for mobile and gaming. Those conclusions do, however, only make reference to the degree of integration in everyday life; they do not account for differences in what boys and girls do with respective media regarding content and functionalities. As for age, heterogeneity seems to be the most accurate description of the ruling condition of the media life of the young.

Heterogeneous media life

The media life perspective discloses that various media play different roles and uphold diverging positions in the everyday life of the young. This section further examines such differences by unfolding media life by age. It attempts to utilize the media life conceptualization for a profound analysis of the disparities in media life at every decisive birth year of the transitional period of 9 to 16 years. Thus, it goes beyond mean value scores and displays eventual heterogeneity concealed in averages. Figure 2a-d comprises graphs illustrating the diffusion of the four different media lives for each of the four media and over age. These graphs show that young people domesticate television and gaming early in life. The fraction of the young living a life sans television and gaming is minimal. Hence, they develop a more individualized media life over time, commanding increasing attention to the Internet and mobiles.

Figure 2a-d. Approximately here

As illustrated, the mobile and the Internet enters young people's media life in the life phase where individuals transcend from tweens to teens. This is a period in life when peers grow increasingly important besides family, and when individuals expand their circles in physical space as well as in symbolic content spaces. The Internet and mobile

well suit their needs, as these carry affordances for individualization and are also closely related to dialogical practices. Ultimately, the mobile and the Internet appear to gain prevalent significance, becoming deeply intertwined into the textures and folds of young teen's everyday life.

Conclusions

This article has analyzed and conceptualized the contemporary media life of the young. The presented typology of media life constitutes the main scientific contribution to current knowledge on the young and media. The typology makes a strong instrument for an understanding of the media life of the contemporary young, which here has focused empirically on television, gaming, the Internet and mobile devices. Although these four sorts of media are not all-inclusive, they have reportedly generally gained significance in the everyday life among the young. Nevertheless, tremendous differences exist depending on media, age and gender. Two main conclusions may be drawn based on the findings.

Firstly, the results show that young boys and girls command different attention to gaming, the Internet and mobile devices. For gaming, there is homogeneity over different ages, but strongly marked heterogeneity with reference to gender. For the Internet, the opposite is true. For the mobile, on the other hand, the heterogeneity is expressed through a higher variation in mean values for both gender and age. Ultimately, the media life typology reveals extensive heterogeneity among the young. The only exception is television, which plays a more equally important role to both genders and over different ages. This gives fuel to previous criticism towards portraying the young as a generally homogeneous 'generation'. In terms of media life, even the young are typically best characterized as a heterogeneous group. Generally, one must keep in mind that there are pronounced differences in media life among the young

depending on age and gender. Thus, analyses of cross-media patterns stand out as critically important.

Secondly, the findings contradict popular assumptions that young people lead lives deeply immersed with media. Certainly, some young individuals live their lives with these media, devoting to them intensive frequency and an extensive duration of time. Nevertheless, the appearance of young people living a life without media makes a surprising and noteworthy result. This finding obviously raises concerns about the growing body of literature suggesting that media occupies an ever-presence in the daily life of the young (and other members of the public). Relatively few tweens have developed a pronounced media life regarding mobile devices, the Internet and gaming. Young teenagers, on the other hand, demonstrate a much higher domestication, particularly concerning their orientation towards the Internet and mobile devices. Television obviously constitutes an important element among both tweens and teenagers, a finding that may suggest that habits once formed with television are sustained. Much of the difference between mobile devices and television presumably relate to the first being personal and the latter being more of a household technology.

The article shows differences depending on media, gender and age. Focusing on age, it poses the question of whether one may treat the young as constituting one generation occupying one life phase. As discussed earlier, the legacy of Karl Mannheim and the sociology of generations posit that generations establish a strong bond and similarity; they also tend to persist with their formative behaviours and values. The pronounced heterogeneity in media life reported on here certainly limits the soundness of labelling these young as a generation. Such intra-generational differences instead call for analyzing the presence of so-called generation units (Mannheim, 1952) and generational cohorts (Westlund and Färdigh, 2012), which give significance to groups

within a generation. The pronounced differences in media life among tweens and young teens lend support to this conclusion. The life course approach, contrary to the generation approach, suggests that people change needs and interests over the course of their life. The findings actually cast light on a possible miniaturized life cycle process among 9–16 year olds, who develop a significantly different media life over the course of these years.

This touch base with an intriguing issue that goes beyond what the data in this study actually support. Nonetheless, one may speculate that the media lives that young teens develop best reflect their individually shaped formative phase with media. Following from this, they may possibly persist with the direction of their media lives developed as teenagers. Consequently, this miniaturized life cycle process may prove to have crucial significance for the shaping of more homogenous and generationally contingent media lives occupied later on in life. The young of this study, in other words, exhibit divergent media lives incommensurable to a generation. However, a future study when they have grown up may actually find that they have developed generational behaviours.

Future research projects should utilize fine-grained tools to empirically scrutinize the scope, characteristics and heterogeneity of young people's media lives. Longitudinal studies should be conducted to shadow and examine how people develop and potentially transform their media life over time. In addition, a time-series of cross-sectional data and approaches with mixed methodologies should be encouraged. Returning to the introductory media life discussion on a presumed decreased visibility of media in everyday life, one may clearly question whether the young can deliver accurate self-reports on their use of media. This calls for future research to compare the self-reported media life of the young with that of their parents, analyzing both

similarities and discrepancies in their reports. Refined research based on behavioural measurement data could here constitute a rewarding additional body of reference (Bjur, 2013). The bottom line is that a more detailed inquiry is needed on whether differences between the media lives of different groups diminish or are further articulated by an increasingly abundant media landscape. It is important to incorporate more nuanced aspects of usage that go beyond frequency and volume of use with an analysis of the type of use, functionalities and content orientation. What seems to lead to emancipation and broadened access to media might be a catalyzer of divides, within generations and over the course of life stages.

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Table 1. Media life typology of television, gaming, Internet, and mobile (percent).

	Television	Gaming	Internet	Mobile
Life in Media	14	11	16	18
Life with Media	47	17	26	12
Life around Media	38	57	53	58
Life sans Media	2	16	5	12
Total	100	100	100	100
n	1163	1161	1157	1155

Notes: The Media Life Index has been constructed through combining the reported figures for frequency and duration of media usage, resulting in a nine-step scale from 0 to 8. The maximum value of 8 denotes a life in media, values 6-7 a life with media, 1-5 a life around media, whereas the bottom value of 0 denotes a life sans media.

Figure 1a-d. Media life typology of television, gaming, Internet, and mobile over age and gender (mean values of media life index).
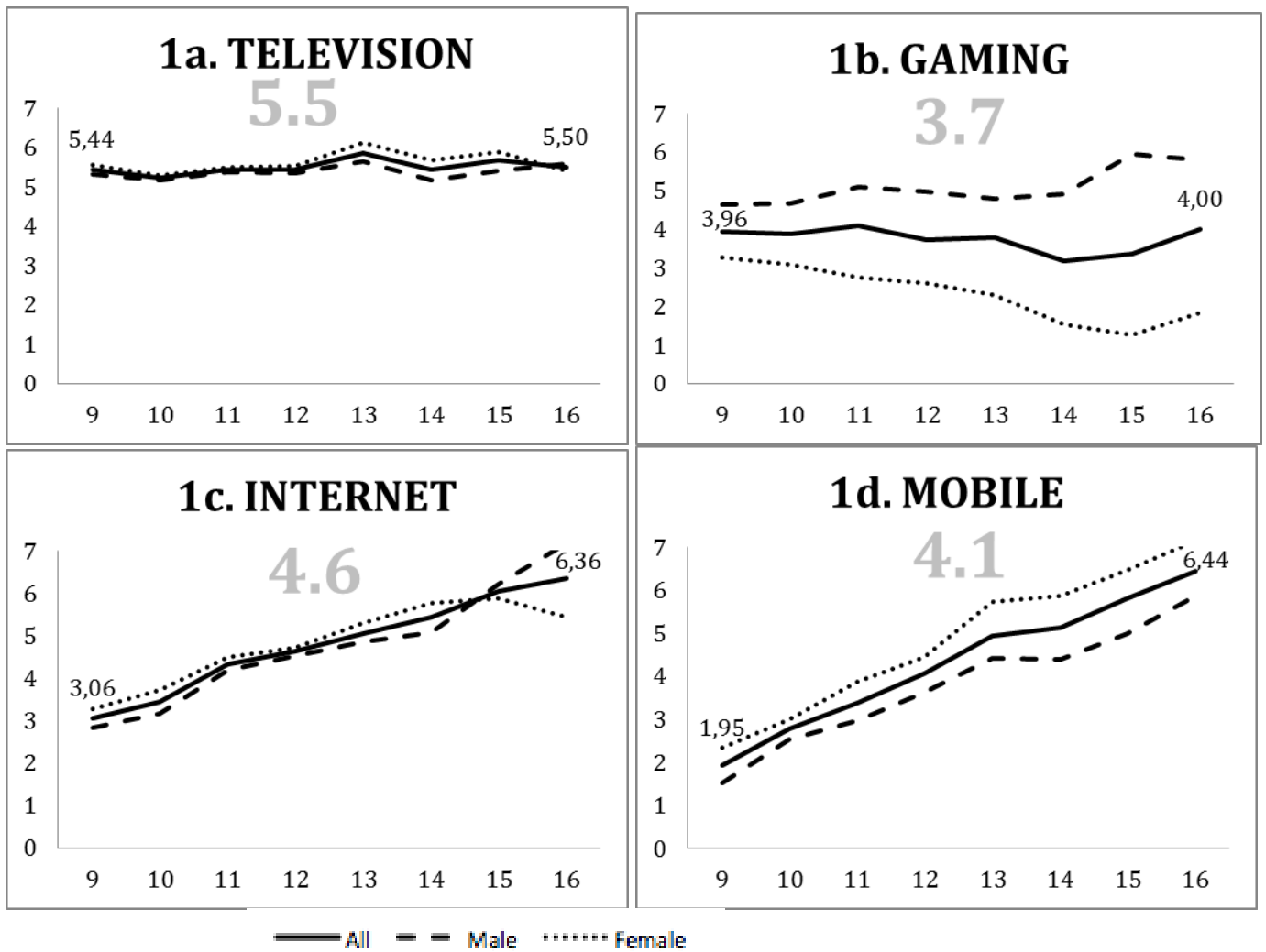
Figure 2a-d. Media life typology of television, gaming, Internet, and mobile over age (percent).