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MEDIA USE – AN ORDINARY DAY

ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on how the idea of 'an ordinary day in the life' can serve as an entry point for understanding media use. I discuss how everyday media use can be conceptualized as mundane and meaningful, and as most easily noticed when changing. Building on day-in-the-life interview segments from qualitative studies, I discuss methodological merits and challenges of this approach. The analysis follows media users an ordinary day from morning to night, as they wake up with the smartphone, navigate across social domains, and seek connection and companionship. I argue that seemingly mundane media use practices are made meaningful through the connection they entail, and particularly discuss the conflicted position of smartphone checking in everyday life. The chapter empirically substantiates the arguments made in Chapter 1 about the centrality of smartphones in digital everyday lives.

Can you envision an ordinary day in your life, without media in it? This chapter is about how media take part in what we experience as regular, uneventful, ordinary days – just a day in the life. The time from morning to night, repeated over and over again, is the most basic and inescapable temporal framework for our everyday lives with media. Places, people, interests and activities that are part of our ordinary days are likely to be integral to our media use, and the media that matters most to us are likely to be ingrained in our daily routines. The main research question I discuss in the chapter is how digital media technologies transform the ways in which people navigate in the temporal structure of an ordinary day, from morning to night. In digital

society, with smartphones at the heart of communication practices, how is an ordinary day with media different than before?

In the former chapter, I defined everyday media use as routinized navigation across social domains, as we rely on media for communication, coordination and orientation in our habitual engagements in our lifeworlds. I further argued that digital media blurs boundaries and intensifies dilemmas about where, when, how and for what to use media. This chapter will substantiate those arguments empirically, by analyzing accounts of ordinary media use through morning, daytime and evening, and further discussing methodological and normative dilemmas: Whether the smartphone has ruined our ability to capture what people do with media an ordinary day, and how norms for media use are negotiated in open-ended, micro-level processes in everyday contexts. I particularly draw on some classic studies of ordinary media use, and on the recent scholarly interest in digital disconnection (Lomborg & Ytre-Arne, 2021; Syvertsen, 2020) as a response to the increased embeddedness of digital technologies in everyday life. My interest here is how people experience connection and disconnection dilemmas as part of daily routines, also constituting moments of reflection on everyday media use and what it means.

Learning about the ordinary day is probably the most fundamental entry-point for understanding media use in everyday life. Consequently, this chapter is based on interview studies that included so-called day-in-the-life segments (del Rio Carral, 2014), with the question: What do you do an ordinary day, from you wake up in the morning until you fall asleep at night, and how do you use media in different situations? A backdrop for the methodological discussions is a broad study with 50 informants mirroring the Norwegian population, conducted in 2016 and analyzed in several other publications, some of which discuss media use in everyday life (Moe et al., 2019a; Ytre-Arne, 2019). More recent materials that are analyzed include a smaller interview study conducted in late 2020, on news and media use during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whereas pandemic disruption will be the focus of Chapter 4, this chapter focuses on people's accounts of less disrupted everyday routines.

The shared empirical context is Norway, meaning that this chapter's notion of 'an ordinary day' is influenced by sociocultural conventions and societal organization in Norwegian society. It might be useful to know that the standard workday is 7.5 hours and ends around four in the afternoon, for many followed by early dinner and leisure activities as well as household chores in the afternoon. Norway is a wealthy country where employment is high, and most families have two parents working outside the home, encouraged by

policies of affordable daycare and extensive family leave. The informants who talk about an ordinary day in the chapter include a student with a part-time job, a single young professional, a working parent in a family household, a middle-aged person with health issues, and a senior citizen. Before examining these stories, I want to highlight some perspectives on why everyday media use matters and how we might study what it means.

EVERYDAY MEDIA USE AS MEANINGFUL AND MUNDANE

Media is often taken for granted as part of the everyday, its meanings more fully realized when absent. In the 1940s, behavioural scientist Bernard Berelson utilized the opportunity of a newspaper delivery strike in New York in 1945 for the study 'What missing the newspaper means' (Berelson, 1948), a pioneering qualitative analysis of everyday media use, with a real-life media deprivation experiment. Interviews during the delivery strike revealed that people were prone to claim they appreciated the newspaper for educating them on hard news topics, but actually found themselves missing something else when the paper disappeared: The ritual comfort of reading in the morning, the assurance of knowing what was going on in a tumultuous world, the social and practical and community-related information the paper contained, and how it worked as a 'tool for daily living'. By reading the newspaper, people felt that they were part of something, and when missing the newspaper, they felt lost. While Berelson's analysis is filled with practical examples, it is easy to connect this feeling of losing touch with the world to what Silverstone (1993) later framed as the essential role of media in confirming our ontological security.

When we studied media use and public connection in Norway 70 years later, we found many tendencies similar to Berelson's report: People *said* it was important to be informed of the news, but did so by following specific interests, rarely finding time to go deeply into issues, and only occasionally paying more attention – leading us to characterize them as approximately informed and occasionally monitorial (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). They checked the news briefly and ritualistically, confirming that the world worked as expected, before getting on with their day (Moe, et al., 2019b). They also relied on media for practicalities, and integrated news use into personal relationships and everyday conversation, where opportunities for political talk arose (Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021). The difference was that they did all these things in a media landscape where smartphones, social media and online platforms were essential, with the smartphone as the key coordinating platform. When we asked

which medium people would miss the most if it disappeared, many pointed to the internet and digital media for practical purposes, while some chose radio or print newspapers for the cherished everyday rituals they provided (Moe et al., 2019a). The feelings people expressed about smartphones (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020) or social media (Syvertsen & Ytre-arne, 2021) were profoundly ambivalent.

An interesting question raised by Berelson's study, and later discussed in several other classic works on everyday media use, is to which degree the daily routines make media meaningful, rather than the content of the media in question. Berelson asked what the value of the newspaper was, after finding that acts of reading in general seemed to offer considerable gratification, but also suggested a series of qualities offered by newspapers specifically and appreciated for their concrete relevance to everyday living. Likewise, James Carey theorized the ritual view of communication, in which transmission of messages is less important than how ritualized news media use affords confirmation of how the world works, comparable to religious and social rites (Carey, 2009).

A broader point about not conflating meanings of media with meanings of media use is essential to audience and reception research: In Janice Radway's classic study *Reading the romance* (1984), a key finding was the observation that the act of reading romance novels was potentially oppositional to patriarchal structures while the novels themselves were not. Joke Hermes's (1995) study of women's magazine reading as everyday media use, influenced by de Certeau and Schutz, goes as far as to declare that 'Media use is not always meaningful. From time to time it is virtually meaningless or at least a secondary activity' (Hermes, 1995, p. 15), however arguing that magazines yet find relevance through their integration into daily routines (see also Ytre-Arne, 2011). More recently, the idea of media as mundane has inspired a collection of theoretical and empirical analysis of smartphones and digital media in everyday life (Sandvik et al., 2016). In the introduction, the editors define everyday life through the centrality of the term to cultural studies and domestication theory in media studies:

> *Within these streams of research, everyday life is generally approached as meaning those mundane contexts of use where the encoded meanings and affordances of media and media technologies are translated into the lived experiences of ordinary people. (Sandvik et al., 2016, p. 9)*

My perspective in this book is that media use might be mundane and meaningful at the same time. Acts such as checking the phone, checking the news, scrolling through social media newsfeeds, chatting and sending messages,

watching whatever is on the television, having the radio on in the back-
ground, are meaningful even when we are not paying much attention, because
of the broader orientations that these acts represent, to spheres of life that are
important to us. The concepts of media repertoires and public connection, as
discussed in the former chapter and utilized throughout this book, offer useful
perspectives on the debate about how media become meaningful in everyday
life. Both concepts emphasize ideas of totality, relationality and orientation in
people's media use, rather than emphasizing select examples of media texts
as particularly significant. To use media for *orientation* to a public issue or a
social domain can be experienced as very meaningful and significant to vari-
ous projects in life, even though this orientation is carried out through mun-
dane acts and involves soon-forgotten pieces of information.

MORNING: WAKING UP WITH THE SMARTPHONE

What is the first thing you do in the morning? You reach for the smartphone.
Maybe the smartphone is the thing that wakes you, when the alarm goes off,
and the first thing you touch, when you try to find the snooze button. The
first words you read are likely to be on the smartphone screen. If something
happened overnight, in the world or in your life, the smartphone will tell you
about it. To reach for the smartphone is your first step towards considering
what the day brings, and your first engagement with the world outside. If
your smartphone suddenly stopped working overnight, you might find your-
self missing all the things Berelson's newspaper subscribers mentioned when
their paper was not delivered – but on top of that you might have missed your
alarm and overslept.

Let us look at some examples of how people start their days with the
smartphone.

Gina is a student and bartender in her 20s who lives alone in a Norwegian
city, interviewed in autumn 2020, for a study about news use and everyday life
during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview started with a question about
media use an ordinary day, which she replied to by describing a period with
few pandemic restrictions, an ordinary day in her life as a student studying on
campus. Very early in the interview, it became clear that the most important
aspect of her daily media use was to check the phone 'every ten minutes, all
day', starting the moment she woke up:

> *If going to university, I would typically wake up at seven thirty or*
> *so. The regular things are to check the mobile phone, mainly to turn*
> *off the alarm, but also to see if I have any important messages, any*

> *important e-mail, notifications that stand out. If I have plenty of*
> *time and not much to do that day, I will run through more stuff…*
> *but if I have a place to be, I only do the most important things.*

In the same study we interviewed Sven, a psychologist in his 30s, whose daily routines appeared a bit more affected by pandemic restrictions on socializing, but who still could go out to work as part of the ordinary day he described. He talked through his whole day with media before remembering to mention that he woke to a radio alarm and listened to radio every single morning. What he did say, in response to what he did first thing, was checking the smartphone:

> *From I get up in the morning… I guess I check the phone if something*
> *has happened, if there are any notifications when I wake up, and then*
> *I run to catch the bus, there is no time. I do listen to audiobooks, but*
> *that is not like checking the news. And then I spend all day in front*
> *of a screen.*

Karla, a mother of three working in education, recalled her pre-pandemic morning routine like this:

> *I would get up between six or seven. Read some news, if I have the*
> *time, using the mobile to check… say three online newspapers. And*
> *then breakfast and getting the kids and myself ready for the day.*
> *Depending on how I got to work, and where I was going that day,*
> *I could check Facebook or more news on the bus, and that is how*
> *I find relevant things for work or just because they are interesting,*
> *through social media. If I drive, I listen to podcasts.*

The study also involved informants who did not have ordinary working hours. Tom was a middle-aged man who had participated in a work training programme after experiencing severe illness, and who was engaged in various interests and hobbies, but also had much time alone at home an ordinary day. He said the following of how he structured his mornings with media:

> *Get up, have a shower… I do check Facebook right away. Then I sit*
> *down with coffee and listen to online radio, music… and focus on*
> *the tasks for the day, checking the calendar on my mobile, checking*
> *plans for the day. Often that leads to checking some websites, what*
> *is going on in the world? And maybe these things continue until*
> *lunch. I subscribe to an online newspaper, I could be going into*
> *things a little deeper, reading the articles and not just the headlines.*

Someone who did not actually mention the smartphone as part of the morning routine was Inger, a woman nearing 70 who worked and volunteered, and was occupied with taking care of grandchildren and spending time with her husband. She had a smartphone and was an eager internet user, but in the mornings, she preferred television:

> *I get up and turn on the TV. Usually the TV 2 News Channel. We watch that a lot, usually all day, but sometimes we switch to another station. […] I do my own thing in [mentions community organization], now often from home, but I always keep an eye on the news. Mainly on TV.*

A shared pattern found in these stories is to wake up, *check in*, and then get on with things. The moment in which people turn to media – preferably smartphones, alternatively radio or television – represents a first orientation towards the world beyond the household, a way of checking in with what is happening in social and societal spheres of relevance, essential to starting the day. These orientations are meaningful even though the acts of media use involved might seem trivial and mundane.

The stories also illustrate how ordinary media use is situated in the temporal, spatial and social structures of everyday life. These structures form contexts and sometimes impose constraints on situations in which the individual connects to society. One recurring theme is *intermittence*: Moments for media are found in-between requirements to put wheels in motion to get oneself and family members out the door. These moments are sometimes cut short ('there is no time'), sometimes flexible ('if I have time') or open to prioritization ('if there is something important'). A related theme is therefore *orientation*: checking in with what is happening in social life and in the news, planning ahead, keeping an eye out, feeling in tune with what is happening in various information streams. Presumably, checking news or messages can be interesting or entertaining, but it mainly comes across as something one just does, a daily ritual affording a feeling of being on top of things. A potential contrast to the idea of checking in with the world through media is the role that media also plays as background, to create an ambience or mood around the house, and more directly for *companionship* in order to feel connected while alone.

Several other studies have found similar patterns and themes in how people use media in the mornings, specifically to this time of day, to being at home, or to getting ready to move forward with activities. Sonia Livingstone and Alicia Blum-Ross use the ordinary day as a framework for an introductory chapter in their study of family life and parenting in a digital age, starting

with how technologies and tensions around them are part of how families wake up in the morning (Livingstone & Blum-Ross, 2020). Morning news use comes up in many studies as a habitual and often appreciated practice (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2019; Ørmen, 2016), also broadening the scope from newspaper reading to checking social media and digital platforms (Boczkowski et al., 2018; Toff & Nielsen, 2018). A few years ago, the Reuters Digital News Report included a survey question asking *where* people were when they checked news on the smartphone: In Norway, 57 per cent reported on having done so in bed and 45 per cent in the bathroom (Sakariassen et al., 2017). Furthermore, digital media ethnographers have studied how people adapt media similar to switching on and off the lights to make for morning and evening moods at home (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2013), or use smartphones as digital companions (Carolus et al., 2019) or network structuring devices (Burchell, 2015) from the moment they wake up. The broader context is that the smartphone is an intimate technology (Hjorth & Lim, 2012) and a key tool for self-tracking through the flows of daily life (Lomborg et al., 2018).

With the smartphone so central to morning routines, we might ask how its role is similar or different to the morning newspaper in Berelson's study. There are multiple shared capacities in how people check in with the world – socially, practically, politically – through routinized morning media use, independent of platform. However, digital media offer more personalization as well as constantly updated information streams that are not just designed to fill the time available, but moreover to expand it by hanging on to the user's attention as long as possible. This is a contrast to the newspaper on the doorstep, which one might spend more or less time reading, but that nevertheless has a definite number of pages. And while the newspaper is also a tool for daily living, the smartphone more directly mixes all kinds of personal messages – and with that expectations and obligations and communication loops – into the morning checking routine.

As shown through the idea of checking cycles (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015; Ytre-Arne et al., 2020), the quick check-in with the world on the smartphone is both familiar and rather unpredictable in scope. In any case, it warrants repetition at regular intervals. It is therefore significant to notice that several of the stories above introduce morning media use as the start of recurring processes to be repeated and expanded throughout the day: Gina checks the phone every ten minutes, Sven says he spends the whole day in front of a screen, Tom fills the day with deliberate Facebook checking. The dilemmas of connectivity and distraction start first thing in the morning, and continue throughout the day.

DAYTIME: NAVIGATING WITH DIGITAL MEDIA ACROSS SOCIAL DOMAINS

People continue to reach for their phones throughout the day, then, but what else is happening? Let us continue some of the stories, and look deeper into the role digital media plays in navigating between social domains in everyday life.

Gina, the student and bartender, typically travelled to campus, sometimes for class or just to read, which she tried to do for five or six hours. This was one of several times in the interview in which she laughingly self-deprecated about her incessant phone checking:

> *It could be just checking or staying on the phone for half an hour.*
> *At lunch, if I eat alone or with friends from class, I am on the*
> *phone a lot. We talk about things we see on the phone, or maybe*
> *I just check the news, it really varies a lot… If I don't have work*
> *I might hit the gym after school, and bring the phone. I check*
> *it between every set. It is so stupid, because there is no point in*
> *checking so often, but it is a habit, to relax in-between I check the*
> *phone. And I use it to plan things and I do need bus tickets to get*
> *around… I must take it with me. I had an idea maybe I should*
> *leave the phone at home, but that would be impractical.*

This quote illustrates experiences of the smartphone as adaptable, aggregating and always nearby – it is no wonder that leaving it at home appears too radical and impractical to consider seriously. The phone is a rare and constant presence across all the activities that fill her day: morning routines, studying at university, socializing with friends, working out at the gym, going to work. In speaking of the smartphone, Gina framed her phone checking as silly and compulsive, but also as relaxing and practical, and as a vehicle of societal and personal connection.

Sven, the psychologist, said he spent most of his day working in front of a computer, particularly using videoconferencing a lot for conversations with patients and colleagues, but also checking Reddit for 'news and funny things' at lunch. He tried to manage his daily media use through a series of self-imposed regulations and prioritizations between different platforms for professional and personal communication:

> *I have rules for which channels for communication I relate to,*
> *the timing for each thing, in a way. So, if someone calls, I call*
> *them back, I reply to texts, but I don't reply to e-mail right away.*

If someone contacts me on Messenger I just assume it is not important, so I might reply if I have time or just don't bother. I have placed heavy limits on how much I allow my phone to tell me things. I deleted social media apps. If I need a social medium, I use the browser, so the threshold is higher when it is less convenient. I need to exercise self-control or I will disappear into the screen, you know?

Karla, the woman with three kids and a job in education, appeared less concerned about being sucked into the screen, as there were many practical aspects of her work and family life that instituted even more compelling temporal restraints around her time with media. However, she emphasized that digital media was part of her workday, distinguishing between personal and professional uses:

At work, my media use varies a lot. I have hectic days, so there is little personal media use, but I do use media as part of work, quite a lot actually. Social media such as Facebook and SnapChat are part of my job. Also looking for news related to my field, through the day. And then I go home, and it is just one thing after the other with dinner and football practice and kids needing to go here and there. Of course, I use the phone a lot in-between, if I have five minutes.

With 'one thing after another', her afternoons were heavily scheduled, leading her to continue the intermittent phone-checking practice established early in the morning. An important sociological theory on the organization of time in daily life is Arlie Russel Hochschild's theory of gendered inequalities through different shifts: first paid labour outside the home, followed by a second shift of housework and childcare, also demanding planning and coordination tasks that could evolve into a third shift of managerial and emotional duties (Hochschild & Machung, 1989/2003), not easily distributed according to ideals of gender equality (Smeby & Brandth, 2013). The study with mothers which will be discussed in the next chapter offers further examples of how smartphones become central to such coordinating work in family households.

Other informants had days with fewer external constraints on their time, instead structuring a routine for themselves through different forms of media use. Tom talked about how he filled time while waiting for his job training programme to resume after pandemic disruption, using media to approximate regular hours:

After lunch, and at lunch, I check Facebook. The phone is with me all the time. Like most Norwegians I am just glued to it, you know. […] Yes, I watch a lot more TV. When the pandemic hit, my

programme first went into work-from-home mode… I got used to that, but when that period was over, I guess I replaced the hours by watching tv.

Inger talked about her days as fairly flexible, as few of her obligations or activities recurred every day or at fixed hours. She watched quite a lot of television, and used several social media platforms for communication with family, but appeared considerably less smartphone-centric than the younger informants.

As these stories exemplify, one of the essential changes that digital media bring to everyday life is increased potential for blurring of boundaries between social domains. As we increasingly rely on digital media, we are faced with more opportunities to connect to domains beyond our physical location – to work from home, to interact with people who are not with us, to get news from a different place, to coordinate upcoming plans, to check in with multiple information streams. Such blurring of boundaries does not equal complete conflation, and it does not imply that physical context or people's awareness of different domains cease to matter. Instead, people move across domains of work, family, leisure and socializing, while adapting their media use to different spheres of life and to shifting situations in the spatial, temporal and social structures.

We can observe, for instance, how all of the stories operate with some idea of working hours, although this varies considerably in content, form and how it relates to media use. In a discussion of digital disconnection and work, Karin Fast (Fast, 2021) develops the distinction *at* work, *for* work, *from* work to situate how ideas of disconnection from digital technologies play out in working life. Similarly, the stories above have examples of using media *for* work, and of managing communication flows *to* work or to disconnect *from* work. Some stories include detailed strategies for tailoring communication streams to engagements in different social domains, particularly focusing on the smartphone. This is very similar to what we found in analysis of the larger interview sample with 50 informants (Ytre-Arne et al., 2020). The potential for distraction and disturbance is at the centre of critiques regarding digital technologies, while possibilities for connection and community are also important to the prominence these technologies have taken in everyday life.

EVENING: MEDIATED COMPANIONSHIP

As the day is drawing to a close, what is happening? Some of the informants continued in the evenings as in the afternoon: moving between exercise or leisure activities, either for oneself or children, mixed with housework and practicalities, and meals and phone-checking breaks. A shared pattern was that

at some point the activities would wind down a little, giving way to time for socialization and relaxation, while digital media use continued in an accompanying role until bedtime. The focus of the day gradually day moved towards entertainment or shared experiences, whether with family at home or by taking part in broader cultural communities, while the practice of checking in through digital media platforms – news or social media or anything on smartphones – continued. The role of media as company was important to people living alone, but also to those who had partners or children. Such mediated companionship included both smartphones and more traditional domestic media with television at central to the idea of relaxing at home.

Gina said she often ended her day by working late at the bar, but if she had the night off she often watched TV at home, particularly streaming services. She explained that she was not fond of more complex television series or movies that demanded focused concentration over long periods of time, and instead preferred to multitask on different screens:

> *It is really typically for me to watch TV with the computer next to me, and be on the phone on top of that. And when I turn on the TV and the computer, I stay on the phone, particularly TikTok… right up until I go to bed, maybe just TikTok for an hour until nearly midnight… That's a lot of media use!*

Sven often socialized with friends in the evening, and also had family nearby he liked to visit, but he said there had been remarkable less of these activities during the pandemic. Exercising or meeting a few friends were still options, but he had also spent more evenings at home watching TV, or using different kinds of sound media for companionship:

> *Now with the corona, when I get home… there has been lots of streaming. Netflix and stuff. Radio in the morning, I forgot to say that, it wakes me up and is on until I leave the house. But I always put on some kind of sound at home. When I go to bed, I surf and listen to audiobooks.*

Karla said she checked news on her phone in the afternoon when she had a few minutes between coordinating the family schedule. She felt sufficiently updated on news when the evening came, so she did not prioritize recapping news formats such as main broadcasts, although she continued to check things on the phone. Furthermore, family sociability guided the choice of media:

> *I don't watch Dagsrevyen [main evening broadcast of public service broadcaster NRK], because I caught most things in the day, I find.*

It varies what we do in the evening. Watching a movie, talking with my husband, maybe checking news in-between. Watching a movie is something to do together.

Her description of television viewing as 'something to do together' resonates with accounts from other informants living in households with partners and children, and with an idea of social relations driving media repertoires found amongst several informants in our broad study (Moe et al., 2019a). Gathering the family around a shared experience through television viewing was framed as a more sociable supplement or contrast to individualized screen use, as part of a cultural rehabilitation of the status of television (Syvertsen, 2020). Tom also watched TV in the evenings, particularly fantasy and sci-fi television series, and played videogames in the weekends, with friends or alone. Inger did not say much about what she did in the evenings, because at this point her story of the ordinary day had derailed into a detailed discussion of what she watched on tv, and how she oversaw family communication because her husband did not like to use messaging apps. This kind of ending – or not-really-an-ending – to a story of a day in the life with media is in itself not uncommon, as I will discuss further when I look into methodology regarding daily media use.

METHODOLOGICAL AND NORMATIVE DILEMMAS: THE ORDINARY DAY AND THE SMARTPHONE

The stories of an ordinary day with media analyzed in this chapter are based on selected segments from qualitative semi-structured interviews, asking people to talk through what they do an ordinary day and include which media they use in different situations. This technique, building on day-in-the-life interviews (see for instance del Rio Carral, 2014), has been the opening segment of most interviews I have done with media users, across several projects. It offers a way of learning about a person's media use in the context of their daily life, noticing which media they mention and how they situate these in daily routines, and possibly gaining an understanding of recurring or important aspects of their experiences and their self-presentations as media users. One can find cues and examples to follow up on later on, with more probing, as well as for adapting other question segments in the interview to the informants' habits and interests. Instead of asking people in so many words to describe their media repertoires, or to explain their public connection, stories of media use an ordinary day are fruitful to analysis of these conceptual interests, which share an entry-point of exploring media use and

societal orientation as experienced by the individual. Many informants will talk rather freely about their ordinary day, getting comfortable in the interview situation through a topic on which they obviously know more than the interviewer.

In 2016, my colleagues and I conducted the larger study this chapter is partly building on – we interviewed 50 people twice and had them write a media diary in-between, broadly exploring everyday media use and public connection (Moe et al., 2019a; Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021). The first interview, in which we wanted to get to know our informants, started with a typical day-in-the-life segment, working from an interview guide that instructed all interviewers to spend time on these stories and extensively probe into examples of media mentioned, as well as learning about daily activities. As could be expected, our informants talked a lot about smartphones, but nevertheless there was something surprising about the role that smartphones seemed to occupy, not just in their daily lives but also in how they told their stories. We interviewed a hairdresser struggling to impose screen time rules in the family, a military officer worried about privacy and tracking, a carpenter and new father wondering if kids still knew how to play outside, an immigrant worker talking about how there was an app for everything but too much triviality in social media, and a young logistics worker and an elderly lady who both complained about how rude others were when using smartphones in company. Several stories of what these people did an ordinary day derailed into complaining about smartphones – regarding personal uses, social norms, or societal implications. Sometimes the follow-up on the ordinary day felt tiresome after talking through the morning rituals, because people seemed done with explaining their daily media use after they had started talking about how they used smartphones, all the time and for everything.

These experiences indicate that supplementary methods are useful and even necessary to explore daily media use. The broad study in question had a media diary that offered extensive detail into how issues in news or culture intermingled with other activities and events in people's lives. In addition to diary methods (Kaun, 2010; Moe & Ytre-Arne, 2021), there are many potential techniques for exploring daily media use as part of qualitative user studies: media timelines (Örnebring & Hellekant Rowe, 2021), visualizing clock-based diagrams of the day (Thorhauge in Sandvik et al., 2016) or card-sorting exercises to explain priorities and interrelations (Hasebrink & Hepp, 2017). An interesting approach to cross-media research developed by Stine Lomborg and Anne Mette Thorhauge combines smartphone data logs with qualitative interviews, to draw on opportunities offered by the

smartphone but also allow users to fill in blanks and reflect upon meanings of smartphone-centric practices (Thorhauge & Lomborg, 2016). With these methods, they find that smartphone use appears both as an in-between activity and as interlacing with other activities throughout the day, but also that it is considered unsuitable in some situations (Thorhauge & Lomborg, 2016). In journalism research, Tim Groot Kormelink argues that people generally need some support to access and express their experiences with news use (Groot Kormelink, 2020), as some dimensions are difficult to verbalize, such as material and sensory aspects (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2019). Importantly, these approaches are not proposing to replace the interview, which remains a central space for exploring meaning, but supplementary techniques are relevant to grasp the complexity of daily media use.

In the interview study that provided the stories that are analyzed in this chapter, the day-in-the-life segment was merely intended as an opening – possibly providing some useful background – before delving into the main interview segments of pandemic news and media experiences (see Chapter 4 for further discussion). Consequently, it could be seen as a shortcoming that this study did not draw on supplementary techniques to bring forward further dimensions of everyday media use. Yet, as the interviews were fairly long and thorough, some of the day-in-the-life-stories had extensive probing, and several informants verbalized and explained in considerable detail what they did with smartphones, for instance. Smartphones seem to steal attention away from other habitual forms of media use, such as radio or television, and uses of these media appear to have continued centrality in the domestic lives of the informants while being less highlighted in their accounts.

On the other hand, day-in-the-life interviews are exceedingly useful to understand how people interpret, justify and situate different acts of media use in different everyday situations, constituted by temporal, spatial and social structures. Such insights are key to understand normative and pragmatic negotiations about where, when, how and why people use different media, not necessarily though clear-cut personal policies or instrumental decisions, but as part of the messiness of everyday life, with both routines and serendipity, and conflicting demands on time and attention.

There are many societal debates about norms for digital media use, including discussions of screen time in families, uses of tablets and computers in schools, norms for meaningful leisure experiences, or the conflicted role of digital tools in modern workplaces. While polemic opinions abound in mediated and cultural discourse on such topics, an everyday perspective is needed to understand how people actually negotiate norms and ideals in contexts.

As the screen time debate indicates most clearly, temporal limitations on media use easily fail if 'time' is considered independently of social activities and spatial surroundings of screen use, leaving parents and children frustrated (Blum-Ross & Livingstone, 2018). The next chapter will delve deeper into these issues through analysis of digital media use in family settings.

CONCLUSION: SMARTPHONE CHECKING IS EVERYDAY LIFE

In this chapter, I have analyzed media use an ordinary day, asking what people do with media in the morning, daytime and evening, and how media use becomes meaningful within the structure of everyday life. Different forms of media use make sense within the different social domains people engage with, from following news relevant to one's occupation to trying to gather the family around a shared television experience, and media offer companionship and distractions in many different situations throughout the day. Classic insights about how family dynamics are negotiated through television viewing, or how newspapers offer more than information, resonate with the experiences of informants discussed here. On top of, as part of, and accompanying these practices is the presence of the smartphone, as checking begins the moment of waking up and continues until falling asleep. Through the smartphone, people check in with news and societal events, with work and education, with friends and family, with entertainment and culture, with personal and public spheres.

While methodological innovations to the day-in-the-life interview are called for, it is worthwhile to stop a moment to reflect on what it means that people are asked what they do an ordinary day, and reply by saying 'I check the phone'. One interpretation is both literal and obvious: Maybe checking the smartphone *is* what they – and many of us – do in daily life in digital societies. Given the rapid proliferation and relative newness of smartphones as a media technology, this constitutes a dramatic change that tells us something about an important development in society and in our lives.

'Television is part of the grain of everyday life', Silverstone wrote (1993, p. 594), concluding his analysis of how this situation had come about, emphasizing the integration of television into time, space and sociality. Instead of television, people now talk and think about the smartphone, including the practicalities and dilemmas it entails. They do so to the point where phone checking overshadows other activities and breaks apart more organized and detailed stories of what an ordinary day is like. This is a testament to the position of the smartphone as essential, conflicted and disruptive in everyday

life. While checking the phone is often an in-between or secondary activity (Thorhauge & Lomborg, 2016), often not the most valued or dedicated part of everyday situations, phone checking creeps into everything. We should not underestimate how smartphones are changing our navigation through social domains, as it is kept close to the body, aggregating different information streams and modes of communication, accompanying other kinds of media use with more confined boundaries, and situating normative media use dilemmas in a growing range of everyday situations. The smartphone represents a profound reconfiguration of everyday life.