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How to research cross-media practices?
Investigating media repertoires and media ensembles

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1 Introduction

In a time of 'deep mediatization' (Couldry and Hepp, 2016: 34-56) – the progressing entanglement of various social domains with media (Livingstone, 2009: 1) –, cross-media approaches to investigating media use are becoming increasingly relevant. In this respect, we have to consider cross-media practices on at least two different levels. The first level refers to the 'individual', whose cross-media use can be characterised as a particular 'media repertoire' (Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012). The second level refers to 'social domains' (communities, organisations etc.) that can be understood as communicative figurations characterised by a particular 'media ensemble' (Hepp and Hasebrink, 2014). Typically, cross-media research focuses either on the individual *or* on the social domain. These perspectives rarely speak to each other. In contrast to such a delineated approach, we propose the interlacement of both perspectives to help clarify the conceptual and empirical relation between media use as individual practice *and* as part of a figuration. At the level of the individual, media repertoires are composed of media-related communicative practices by means of which individuals relate themselves to the figurations they are involved in. At the level of figurations, media ensembles are characterised by the media-related communicative practices of the actors involved in the particular social domain under analysis. Therefore, both perspectives are necessary if we want to understand cross-media practices in everyday life.

In this article, we will propose a conceptual framework that allows for a theoretical and empirical integration of both the individual and the social domain. As a point of departure we will firstly reflect on the overall discussion surrounding cross-media approaches and relate it back to what we call 'deep mediatization'; that is the present stage of mediatization that is closely related to the far-reaching spread of digital media. Secondly, we will then elaborate on the conceptual distinction between cross-media practices on the level of individuals and on the level of figurations. Our main argument here is that it is helpful to combine both perspectives in order to arrive at a more holistic understanding; taking a figurational approach to what is loosely called the '(social) domain' in mediatization research helps us to fruitfully combine these perspectives. Thirdly, we will specify our understanding of media repertoires and discuss a methodological framework for empirical research on these patterns of cross-media practices. Fourthly, we will move to the level of the figuration, which is characterised by a certain actor constellation, frame of relevance, and communicative practices entangled with a media ensemble. In order to reconstruct this media ensemble it is necessary to understand it as part of such a complex structure and to investigate the perspectives of the different actors in the actor constellation. Finally, we will conclude on how these two perspectives of the 'individual' and the 'figura-

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tion' can be 'triangulated' (Flick, 2014: 89-90) for an overall analysis of cross-media practices.

2   Deep mediatization and the necessity of cross-media research

To take a broad view, 'cross-media' (Bjur et al., 2014: 15) research is nothing new. We can find an ongoing discussion on peoples' use of a variety of different media in audience studies, for instance. We can track this discussion back at least to the early days of uses-and-gratifications research. Elihu Katz, Hadassah Haas and Michael Gurevitch, for example, discussed the '"interchangeability" of the media over a variety of functions', which for them 'orders television, radio, newspapers, books, and cinema in a circumplex' (Katz et al., 1973: 164). Taking an approach from the perspective of everyday media uses, Hermann Bausinger, very early on, called for a 'meaningful study of the use of the media' that does not focus on single media use but investigates the 'media ensemble which everyone deals with today' (Bausinger, 1984: 349). Another important precursor of the present methodological discussion surrounding cross-media research was the HICT project (Households Uses of Information and Communication Technologies, University of Brunel) (Morley and Silverstone, 1990). Later on came the argument that the 'multiplication of personally owned media' (Livingstone, 1999: 62) makes a cross-media perspective even more necessary. In applied media research there is also a tradition of posing cross-media questions; for example, when it comes to the daily succession of media use (cf. for example Reitze and Ridder, 2011). At this point we can only agree with Kim Schrøder (2011: 5) when he says that audiences have always been 'inherently cross-media'.

However, what we call 'deep mediatization' has given cross-media research an additional necessity. By describing contemporary mediatization as 'deep', we want to indicate that with the recent wave of digitalisation, mediatization has entered a new stage (Couldry and Hepp, 2016: 34-56; Finnemann, 2014: 312-315.): it is no longer expedient to grasp the social impact of 'the media' merely as the influence of a distinct domain (i.e. journalism) which is separate from other domains of the social world (Livingstone, 2009: 2-4). No matter which domain of society we consider, its formation is in one way or another related to the technologically based media of communication – which are all becoming digital. Using the term deep mediatization makes us sensitive to how far mediatization has developed into what has been called 'mediatized worlds' (Hepp and Krotz, 2014: 6) and a 'mediatized way of life' (Vorderer et al., 2015: 259).

Reflecting the specificity of different phenomena of media-related changes and their particularities, it is nevertheless striking that they are all confronted with certain *trends* that characterise the changing nature of the present media environment. If we understand the 'media environment' as the entire body of available media at any given time (Hasebrink and Hölig, 2014: 16; Jensen and Helles, 2015: 292; Livingstone, 2001: 307), then we can distinguish in a first rapprochement at least five of these trends: first, the *differentiation* of a vast amount of technologically based media of communication; second, an increasing *connectivity* of, and through, these media offering the possibility to individually and collectively 'link' across space and time; third, a growing *omnipresence* of media that creates the possibility of connecting permanently and everywhere; fourth, a *rapid pace of innovation*, the emergence of 'new' media technologies and services in ever-shorter peri-

ods of time; and fifth, a hitherto unseen level of *datafication*, the representation of social life as computerised data channelled through media devices and their underlying software and infrastructure.

In tandem with deep mediatization, cross-media research has been receiving a wealth of attention as a methodological innovation. Considering the present media environment, any claim concerning the consequences of media change has to fundamentally reflect its diverse character. However, to adequately grasp this diversity involves highly sophisticated methods, irrespective of the specific research question one considers (see Bjur et al., 2014; Jensen and Helles, 2011). From this point of view, we can define *cross-media research* as a conceptual and methodological area of investigating communicative practices, needs and appropriations across a variety of different media in a way that reflects the interrelations between them. Therefore, cross-media research is not just about various media: it is about investigating their *interrelatedness*.

For a perspective like this there are three particular fields of cross-media research worth paying attention to (see Bjur et al., 2014: 16-25): first, research into the functional differentiation of cross-media practices; second, research into situations of cross-media practice; and, third, research into patterns of cross-media practice.

Research on *cross-media functional differentiation* refers back to the original questions of uses-and-gratifications research (Blumler and Katz, 1974; Katz et al., 2000; Rosengren et al., 1985). Here, the focus is on to what extent each medium functionally specialises in fulfilling certain types of needs for its users (Nossek et al., 2015). The methodological challenge is that with the recent trends of a changing media environment the original assignment of certain functions to a certain medium no longer applies: people increasingly use the same device for different purposes, and 'on' a particular device, the same 'media' (apps, interfaces etc.), to achieve different gratifications (Schrøder, 2011: 7-11). Or put differently, with regard to an understanding of deep mediatization as a cross-media phenomenon, the fundamental challenge is that 'the media's functional propensities underpin their relational definitions and our understanding of them as an integrated structure' (Madianou and Miller, 2013: 183). For any method of data collection as well as data analysis it is a challenge to grasp this *interrelated cross-media functionality*, especially as the functionality of each medium is not fixed but becomes defined only in the contexts of its use. This also refers to media organisations and organisations in general.

When it comes to *situations of cross-media practice*, the interest is in socio-spatial and temporal contexts. While long-term research tends to investigate single media practice situations, today the quotidian circumstances of media use are typically cross-media. This has been discussed in relation to various practices such as so-called 'second screen' use while watching television at home (Groebel, 2014: 109-161; Han and Lee, 2014; Shin, 2013), the use of different media in practices of remembering (Garde-Hansen, 2011; Hoskins, 2014; Hajek et al., 2016; van Dijck, 2007) or the use of different media in learning environments (Ito et al., 2009: 29-78; Wolf, 2012). Such situations gain an additional cross-media complexity when we think of so-called 'synthetic situations', which are 'a social "situation"' that 'invariably includes, and may in fact be entirely constituted by, on-screen projections' (Knorr-Cetina, 2014: 45). Examples for this are exchange trading, datafied decision-making in organisations via 'dashboards', or online computer gaming in groups. They are cross-media insofar as *various* media representations are as important as

the fact that they are mediated forms of communication (chat, telephone calls etc.) in and of themselves while simultaneously working in tandem. These kinds of examples demonstrate the challenges faced by any methodology when analysing situations of cross-media practice in their *interrelated cross-media situatedness*. The main point here is that any description of such situations needs to include data on the variety of media in use together with the interactions they bring into those situations.

Third, we have the field of *patterns of cross-media practice*. Here, the main focus is on how media-related practices (of use, work, production, networking etc.) spread across a variety of different media. This is what our two concepts of the media repertoire (when it comes to the individual) and media ensemble (when it comes to the figuration of a social domain) refer to. With regard to empirical approaches, the challenge at this point is how to reconstruct these repertoires and ensembles in their entirety, while the main focus is on the *interrelatedness of cross-media communicative practices*.

Taking this overall systematisation as a starting point, in the following we want to discuss the conceptual implications of investigating cross-media practices in more detail. First, we will place emphasis on interrelating the perspectives of the individual and the social domain as part of cross-media research projects (section 3). Second, we will elaborate on the particularities at the individual level (section 4) and at the level of social domains (section 5). Finally, we will demonstrate how this conceptual framework allows for the integration of the two distinct levels and how it can contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of cross-media practices in everyday life.

3   A figurational approach as a conceptual link between individuals and social domains

Research on audiences, media use and appropriation is characterised by a remarkable discrepancy: On the one hand, most concepts related to media use refer to the individual as the key level of analysis; individuals seek and obtain gratifications, select between different media options, expose themselves to particular services, interpret and appropriate media content according to their social and cultural contexts, and so on. On the other hand, many studies are based on quantitative approaches that lead to findings on the level of aggregate audiences instead of reconstructing individual 'needs' and media practices. As a consequence of this discrepancy empirical evidence that considers the key assumptions about the consequences of deep mediatization remains highly contradictory. For instance: some scholars assume that the ongoing differentiation of the media environment leads to an increasing fragmentation of publics. To support their argument, they refer to aggregate data on decreasing audience figures for journalistic media (Webster and Ksiazek, 2012). Other scholars, referring to data on individual patterns of media practices, emphasise that people use a diversity of media services to strengthen their public connection (Couldry et al., 2007). It is difficult, therefore, to integrate empirical evidence on both the individual and the aggregate levels.

In order to arrive at a comprehensive picture of cross-media practices, it is important to overcome this conceptual gap. This means that we need to clearly distinguish the two levels in order to avoid misinterpretations that can be caused by confusing them. In addi-

tion, we need to develop a perspective that helps to explain the relationship between them. Regarding the latter, we start from the consideration that people do not just act individually; typically, they act in relation to certain 'domains' of the social world that they are involved in. These domains can vary in scope: for example, individuals are involved in their family, their friends, the workplace, certain fan groups, and the national public. One core result of mediatization research is that processes of media-related change are not the same across society; they differ partly in a fundamental way respective to the social domain under consideration (cf. i.e. Hjarvard, 2013: 17f.; Lunt/Livingstone, 2016: 464-466).

As we argued elsewhere (Couldry and Hepp, 2016: 57-78; Hepp and Hasebrink, 2014), in reference to Norbert Elias (1978), we can understand such social domains as *figurations*. Figurations – which we can describe in the context of media and communication research as *communicative* figurations – are characterised by at least three features:

- *Constellation of actors:* A communicative figuration has a certain constellation of actors that can be regarded as its structural basis: a network of individuals who are interrelated and communicating with each other, for example the members of a family or the citizens of a national public.

- *Relevance frames:* Each communicative figuration has dominating frames of relevance that serve to guide its constituting practices. These frames define the 'topic' and thus the character of a social domain. For instance, for a family the dominant frame is a certain form of relational belonging that includes raising children; for the national public this might be opinion-building on issues of public concern.

- *Communicative practices:* Figurations are based on specific communicative practices that are interwoven with other social practices. In their composition, these practices typically draw upon and are entangled with an entire media ensemble. For instance, within the media ensemble of contemporary families the smartphone has become a core instrument for organising everyday family life and for the surveillance of children. For national publics social media platforms increasingly complement or even replace a formerly dominating journalistic mass media.

With regard to our objective to understand cross-media practices in a period of deep mediatization the concept of communicative figurations helps to bridge the above-mentioned gap between the level of individuals and the level of social domains. Individuals' cross-media repertoires are (at least partly) structured according to the figurations that they involve themselves in. And the figurations of social domains are based on the actor constellations as well as the communicative practices of the individuals that constitute them.

Investigating individuals' media repertoires in relation to figurations' media ensembles offers a sophisticated conceptual starting point for cross-media research. However, by making such a conceptual move we need to elaborate on how to conceptualise and empirically approach media repertoires and media ensembles. Finally, we will demonstrate how these two approaches can be successfully integrated.

4   Individuals' media repertoires

Research into media use traditionally focuses on single-media types such as television, newspapers or the internet, on single genres such as news or soap operas, or on specific topics or products. In doing so, the interrelated entirety of different media to which individuals refer is often ignored. In order to contribute to the bridging of this gap in research at the level of the individual, we have proposed the concept of 'media repertoires' (Hasebrink and Popp, 2006). This concept refers to the entirety of media that a person regularly uses. Media repertoires can be regarded as relatively stable cross-media patterns of media practices. A repertoire-oriented approach to media use is characterised by the following principles (Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012):

- *User-centred perspective:* the concept of media repertoires focuses on the user; rather than taking the media-centred perspective that asks which audiences a particular medium reaches, this concept emphasises the question concerning which media a particular person uses.

- *Entirety:* the repertoire-oriented approach stresses the need to consider the whole variety of media regularly assembled by a person; this will help to avoid misinterpretations resulting from approaches that emphasise single media.

- *Relationality:* within a repertoire-oriented approach, the interrelations and specific functions of a media repertoire's components are of particular interest since they represent the repertoire's 'inner structure' or 'coherence'; this reflects our basic assumption that the media repertoire of an individual is not just the mere sum of different media he or she uses, but a meaningfully structured composition of media.

This concept of media repertoires places emphasis on cross-media practices at the level of the individual. By stressing the fact that individuals combine different media, and in doing so create a 'structured pattern' of communicative practices, the question at hand is how this pattern can be best investigated and understood. Our answer refers to the figurational approach introduced above: The individual is engaged in different social domains that we analyse as communicative figurations. Each figuration with its specific actor constellation, relevance frame and communicative practices moulds a part of the individuals' repertoires; in turn, each individual contributes to their respective figurations with their communicative practices. Depending on the diversity of the figurations the individual is involved in, the repertoire is more or less diverse and might even include media practices that, from an external observer's perspective, do not seem to be compatible with each other, e.g. practices that are linked with a professional academic domain and those that are linked with a group of football fans.

In order to guide empirical work on media repertoires, we developed a methodological framework with the following main categories (see Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012):

Components of media repertoires: Any empirical approach to media repertoires has to start with identifying the 'components' that make up the individual's repertoire. There are two basic options for this first step: a) the researcher predefines some specific media practices and asks which of them are relevant to the individual; b) by means of open questions the researcher explores relevant media practices. While the first option is usually applied within standardised research designs, the second characterises a qualitative ap-

proach that adheres to a strictly user-centred perspective. What exactly the 'relevance' of media practices may be depends on the research question. For instance, if we are interested in cross-media repertoires in general we can ask about any media that the individuals regard as relevant in any respect of their everyday lives. If we are specifically interested in practices of public connection, we can ask about any media that the individuals regard as relevant in order to connect themselves to a particular facet of public life. Or, more specifically, if we are interested in practices of political opinion building, we can ask about any media that the individual regards as relevant in this respect. The repertoire-oriented approach leaves open the question of what the exact empirical indicators for relevant components are. Within research on media use the most prominent indicators refer to actual behavioural contacts with, or episodes of exposure to, certain media; the frequency and the duration of use, for example. In our understanding, there are other indicators that can be used to analyse media repertoires; for example, attitudes towards or preferences for certain kinds of media, the degree to which certain media are embedded in everyday routines, or different forms of attachments to specific media products, e.g. habits or 'addictive' behaviours or loyalties.

Relations between the components of media repertoires: Once the relevant components of media repertoires have been identified we have to analyse their interrelations. Possible indicators that reflect different aspects of the repertoire's relationality are the following: the proportions of use devoted to different media; the personal relevance attributed to the components of the repertoire; the diversity of the overall repertoire; the degree of complementarity between different components of the repertoire, and the compatibility or, to give it a slightly negative slant, the competitiveness of parts in the repertoire.

Subjective sense of a media repertoire: A final step in the empirical analysis of media repertoires is to reconstruct the way in which they make sense to individuals and the practical meaning they have within their everyday lives. This means investigating the relations between the individuals' social contexts, their individual values and ambitions, and their everyday practices on the one hand, and their patterns of cross-media practice on the other. In this respect the communicative figurations in which the individuals are involved are of key concern. Their specific actor constellations, relevance frames and joint communicative practices help us to contextualise and understand individuals' media repertoires.

In order to illustrate this analytical framework, we will briefly present a pilot study carried out in Germany (Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012). This study focused on a group of individuals whose cross-media practices were most likely to be affected by deep mediatization. It consisted of five media users between twenty and thirty years old with a higher level of formal education. The reason for selecting a rather homogeneous sample was to avoid being overwhelmed by the well-known differences between younger and older or between higher or lower educated respondents and instead to investigate more subtle distinctions and inter-individual differences that occur within just one social milieu. In this study we were interested in overall media repertoires from the individuals' perspective. To these ends, we applied a qualitative methodology with no predefined components for the subjects' repertoires. We combined different methods of data collection, namely media diaries, qualitative interviews and sorting techniques. This 'methodological triangulation' (Denzin, 1989: 237-241; Flick, 2014: 390) allows us to assess the more behavioural

and habitual aspects of media use as well as aspects related to attitudes towards and the meanings of media use.

Participants were asked to keep a semi-structured diary for one week recording all their media activities. The respective template asked participants to answer the following questions for each episode of media use: 1) time and duration; 2) type of media used (TV, radio, etc.); 3) specific media products (programmes, websites, etc.); 4) specific contents and topics; 5) situational contexts; 6) additional notes, for example, on motivation, mood, evaluation of the media product. The completed diary was then used to guide a semi-structured interview which touched upon all aspects of our analytical framework (see above).
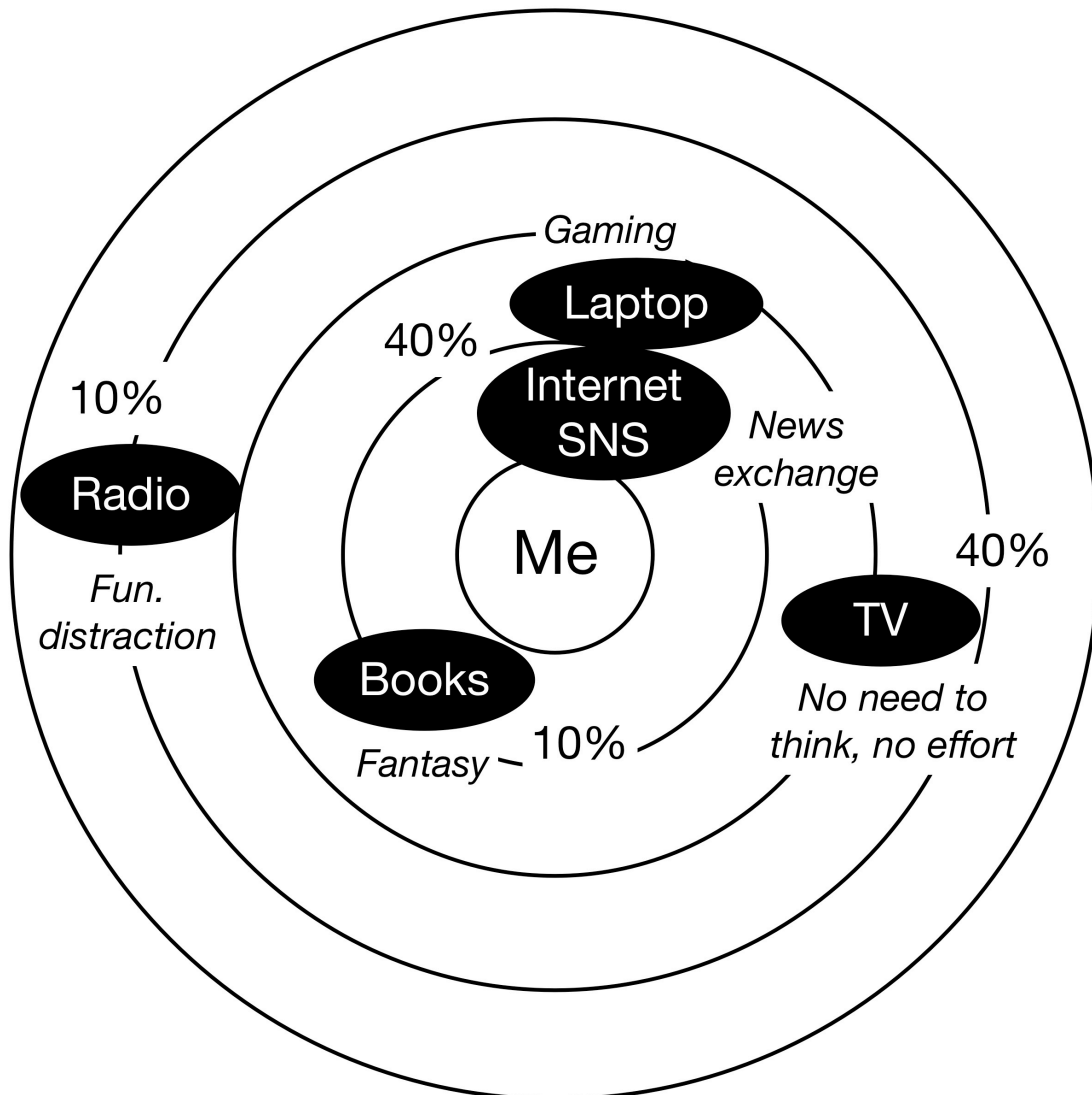
In order to facilitate discussion of the complex and often unconscious matters related to the description of media repertoires sorting methods were included in the interviews. Figure 1 provides an example of the kind of data we were able to collect by using the following steps:

- Step one: participants were given a set of cards and asked to write each element of their media repertoire on one of them. They were completely free use as many cards as they felt necessary and to decide which kinds of media they referred to. The participant documented in Figure 1 wrote four cards at first (laptop, television, radio, books); as the interview progressed, however, she added a fifth card (internet/SNS) and linked it with laptop, arguing that the new card indicates what she actually does with her laptop. The outcome of this stage of the interview was that we were able to identify the most relevant components of the participant's media repertoire.

- Step two: participants were asked to sort the cards on a large board within a set of concentric circles with the word 'Me' in the centre. The cards were laid out according to the personal relevance of each component of their media repertoire. The example in Figure 1 shows the most relevant media as internet/web.de/SNS, followed by books, television, and radio.

- Step three: participants were given a number of tokens and asked to distribute them among the (in the case of Figure 1, four) media elements relative to the amount of time each one was used. This distribution can be registered in terms of percentages of the overall time allocated for each medium. One important finding in this example was that the amount of use is not fully consistent with the perceived relevance; thus, these indicators are conceptually, as well as empirically, distinct aspects of media repertoires.

- Step four: participants were given another set of differently coloured cards and asked to write down the main functions of the components they had mentioned or the roles that they played in their everyday lives.

This sorting method was not used in order to produce visual data as an objective in its own right. Nor do we regard the components written on the cards as the final description of the individuals' media repertoires. The main function of these methods was to facilitate a discussion about media repertoires during the interview. While writing the cards, placing them on the board, and attributing functions, the participants reflected on their decisions. As a consequence, the main data for the analysis were the verbal comments (similar

to think-aloud protocols), while the results of the sorting method were archived by taking photos and served as helpful additional indicators for the reconstruction of the respective media repertoire.

Figure 1: Example for the visual reconstruction of a media repertoire

Note: The figure displays a summary and translation of the results of the four steps of sorting cards by a selected participant of the study presented in Hasebrink and Domeyer, 2012; the original steps have been documented photographically.

All the data collected were then analysed by means of qualitative content analysis. For the analysis we applied the approach of thematic coding as it is a tried and tested approach originating in grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 1999; Corbin and Strauss, 2008); this means that original data from all sources (media diary, interview, sorting cards) were attributed to thematic categories; the main categories were based on the general analytical framework presented above. The coding procedure was open for new

categories that were inductively derived on the basis of the empirical data. Based on these categories each case was analysed in detail on an individual level. For each category, the relevant material was paraphrased and then summarised by a consolidated description of the media repertoire. On this basis, the media repertoires of different individuals were compared in order to identify types of media users.

Space limitations mean that we cannot go into the finer details of our findings here, so, by way of illustrating our general argument that media repertoires are structured along the communicative figurations in which individuals are involved we will present our findings for one particular participant whose description of her media repertoire explicitly referred to a variety of figurations. Even though she was still a young student she had already reached a level of professional success with the potential to forge a promising career. She seemed to successfully combine two worlds, the life of a young sociable student who enjoys the flexibility and light-heartedness of the student milieu, and the life of a career-oriented professional. It is with a high degree of self-confidence that she describes a corresponding media repertoire that includes a combination of 'girlie' television series while at the same time regularly reading a quality newspaper and watching television news, particularly for information on politics and the economy. In our terms, this repertoire is clearly structured along the two distinct communicative figurations that shape her everyday life.

In summary, this methodological approach provides structured descriptions of individuals' media repertoires, i.e. the principal media they rely on, the functional interrelatedness of these media, the general principles according to which the individual composes his or her repertoires, and the meaning of this repertoire within the individual's everyday life. As the individual involves him or herself in a variety of social domains the structure of his or her media repertoire is shaped by the media ensembles of the respective social domains. We will elaborate on the place of media ensembles within social domains in the following section.

5   Figurations' media ensembles

Methodologically speaking, moving from the media repertoire to the media ensemble of a certain social domain's figuration involves a fundamental shift in the level of analysis: we are no longer focusing on the appropriation and uses of media by individuals, but on entire collectivities and organisations and the media which are used within them. In a cross-media perspective this has two consequences. On the one hand, the media ensemble of a particular figuration can be much more limited than the media repertoire of an individual. For example, while an individual might use – besides a mobile phone – various kinds of digital and online media for personal communication, the media he or she uses in the figuration of a certain group of friends might be restricted to SMS and mobile phone calls. On the other hand, as each figuration involves various individuals using different media within it, the media ensemble in its totality might include media that certain individuals do not use. As a consequence, the *characteristic* media ensemble of a figuration can be more extensive than the media repertoires of the many individuals who constitute it. This, for example, is the case if we consider the figuration of an organisation, where certain media are only used by some of the individuals involved and different media are used by another

group of individuals within the same figuration and where differences exist from one department to another.

Again, it is helpful to illustrate this by way of an example, in this case migrant communities. Diasporic communities can be considered as particular figurations of collectivities. Through research into the Moroccan, Russian and Turkish diaspora in Germany and their media use we can demonstrate that networking within these communities is a cross-media phenomenon (Hepp et al. 2012; Hepp 2013: 94-97). Here the communication networks of direct communication play a vital role since the communicative networking of migrants takes place not only locally - through, for example, family conversations, club meetings, associations and other spaces and events - but also through a reciprocal mode of mediated communication that does not occur in just one locality conducted via (mobile) telephone, written letters, email or (video) chatrooms, connecting to relatives in a home country, to other migrants of the same background, and to migrants of other backgrounds both in Germany and abroad. All of this must also be considered in terms of communication networks based on professionally produced media communication: the connection to the German-language area through television (to learn the language), or access to media content from a home country via satellite TV, internet radio or (online) newspapers, through all of which access to the corresponding communication network in a home country is maintained. Finally, we have found that virtualized media communication in the form of computer games is of importance especially among younger migrants. The communicative networking within this figuration takes place *across* these media and to understand the dynamics of identity construction within these diasporas means that we can build an overall picture of how these different media build an *ensemble* that is, by virtue of its interrelational properties, characteristic for the respective figuration.
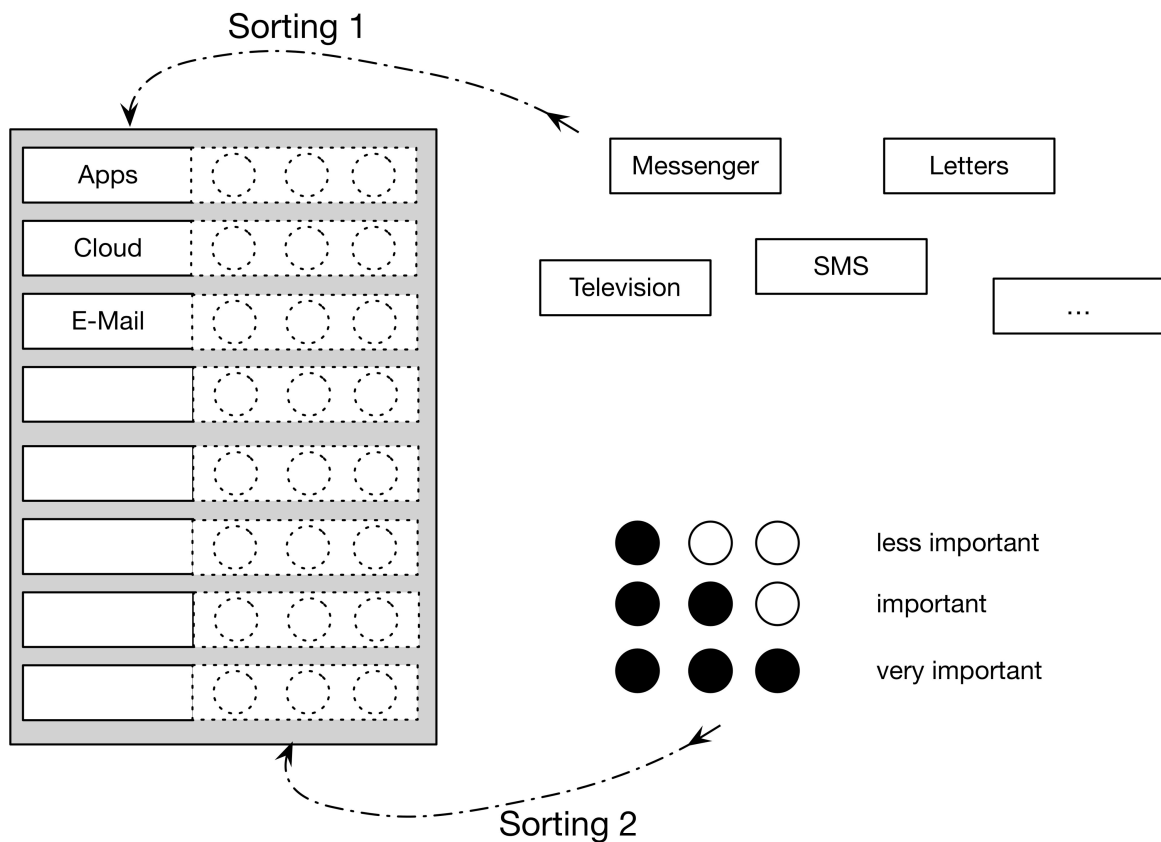
On the basis of this example we can argue that the media ensemble of a communicative figuration does not simply equate to the intersection of the involved individuals' media repertoires. As a consequence, – beyond some commonalities regarding the identification of relevant components, interrelations between these components and their links to everyday life – we need a different kind of method to reconstruct a figuration's media ensemble. While methods of cross-media sorting are helpful, the appropriate tool must also be able to offer a representation of the media used in the figuration under analysis. As far as we know, within qualitative media and communications research such a methodology is yet to be developed. On the basis of our own experiences with other sorting methods (see the section above) and with qualitative network analysis that uses drawings to visualise communicative networks (see Hepp et al., 2016), we have developed a sorting technique that methodologically triangulates with group interviews. This works as follows:

- All interviewees are 'natural' members of the figuration under consideration. So, as a matter of principle they are selected on the criterion of being part of the collective (group, family etc.) or organisation (company, news room etc.) being investigated. To lower the chances of overlooking a certain medium that is part of the figuration's media ensemble our proposed methodology works best if we select individuals who hold different positions or play different roles within the figuration (family members with different roles, members of organisations with different positions within them etc.).

- The group interview should begin by reconstructing the media ensemble. The task at this point is to ensure that all interviewees are asked to 'paint a picture' of the broad

range of media that are used within the figuration and to elaborate on what their different purposes might be. The main point here is to gather a comprehensive list of the different media they use – this corresponds with the task to identify the relevant components of media repertoires (see above) – and to collect information on the role that these media play within the respective figuration. Consistent with experience gained from other one-to-one interview situations (cf. Klein et al., 2017), it is helpful to stage this section of the group interview towards the beginning as it provides an additional focus for further media-related research questions that are asked in the subsequent sections of the interview.

- This joint reconstruction of the media ensemble takes place with the help of a sorting box (see Figure 2). By using this sorting box, a twofold sorting process takes place. Firstly, the interviewees decide which media are used within the figuration being considered. They move one card with the medium's name and picture into the box for each kind of medium that is used ('sorting 1'). Secondly, they decide how significant this medium is within the figuration and on that basis allocate to the medium one token ('less important'), two tokens ('important') or three tokens ('very important') ('sorting 2'). Besides pre-labelled tokens, there are also cards which can be labelled by the participants however they see fit. This offers the possibility of including certain media as part of the description which may have been overlooked.

- On the basis of this reconstruction of the media ensemble, the latter sections of the group interview are used to discuss more rigorously the role of these media in relation to different concerns within the figuration (for example, their influence on processes of decision making, on maintaining social relationships, on the transformation of the figuration etc.). A typical occurrence as the interview progresses is that the sorting is partially corrected. Accordingly, it is important to take a photograph of the overall sorting result for further analysis of the data at the end of the interview.

Figure 2: Sorting box for group interviews on media ensembles

We developed this methodology so that we could systematically test the different possibilities of representing media and their importance. Based on our experience, it is helpful to make sure that the sorting task remains fundamentally fluid; that is, to not pre-define a certain set of media nor pre-define what 'importance' means in detail. This openness facilitates a negotiation process within the interview group. Part of this negotiation process is to discern which media are part of the media ensemble and the roles they have. Our experience shows that the results of these negotiations present a solid foundation for a richer discussion of the different media-related practices within the figurations being analysed. Staying open-minded about what 'important' actually means has proven to be highly productive as this forces the interviewees to arrive at shared definitions – which very often include different layers of importance (Andrae, 2016).

In addition, this kind of sorting methodology is helpful when comparing the media ensembles of specific figurations of the same kind. The examples we tried this with were three flat-sharing communities and their respective media ensembles (Andrae, 2016). Here, the overall sorting result of the interviewed group offers a visual representation of the respective media ensemble and, therefore, a highly productive starting point for the comparison of different groups with respect to the media that are used when they communicate together.

In cases like this the analysis of data is best carried out on the basis of a grounded theory informed thematic coding procedure (Corbin and Strauss, 2008; Glaser and Strauss, 1999), for which various software applications that, to some extent, automate the process are

available.[2] In such a coding procedure, it is also helpful to include a photograph of the overall sorting results for the interviewed group.

6   Conclusion: A figurational approach to interlink the perspectives of individuals and social domains

As we have argued in this article so far, that the conceptual approach of communicative figurations offers an opportunity to link the perspective of the individual and his or her media repertoires with the perspective of the social domain and its media ensemble. Our main argument, therefore, is that it is helpful to take advantage of a figurational analysis to integrate the two. In this regard, we consider 'theory triangulation' as the crucial issue: the linkage of theoretically based viewpoints when investigating both individuals' media repertoires and social domains' media ensembles. Following Norman Denzin (1989: 239), the starting point of theory triangulation is when 'approaching data with multiple perspectives and hypotheses in mind'. The point we want to make here is to place emphasis on the importance of linking the individual and the social domain in the future development of cross-media research. In terms of the individual, the media repertoire is a core concept to help us better understand individuals' cross-media practices. However, individuals' particular compositions of diverse and sometimes even contradicting media practices can only be fully understood if we reflect the social world in which these individuals act, i.e. the social domains they are involved in and their figurations' particular media ensembles. In terms of social domains, the media ensemble is a core concept to better understand cross-media practices on the basis of which these figurations are constituted. Nonetheless, figurations' media ensembles can only be fully understood if we reflect the media practices of the individuals involved in a social domain. For this reason, empirically speaking, we believe it would be highly productive to interrelate research on individuals' media repertoires and social domains' media ensembles to render a more comprehensive picture of cross-media practices. This is facilitated by an approach that analyses social domains as figurations.

Beyond this conceptual and theoretical contribution of a figurational approach for cross-media research, we have also argued that a methodological triangulation of (group) interviews and sorting methods can help us to understand the effects of cross-media practices on the individual as well as at wider the level of the social domain. As these sorting techniques have proven to be so productive for collecting data on media repertoires and media ensembles we are in the process of programming two sorting apps for mobile devices: one for media repertoires and one for media ensembles. The idea behind this software development is, firstly, to make the sorting process much more efficient and user-friendly. Secondly, and perhaps more interesting for further analysis, the app has the potential to record sorting changes as each interview progresses. This is helpful for documenting an individual's changes of mind and a group's negotiation processes. Finally, apps like these open up the possibility of quickly and easily producing detailed visualisations of the overall sorting results, including an automated structuring of the media repertoires and media ensembles.

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[2] For our research project we used HyperResearch and MAXqda, but other applications are available, for example, AtlasTI.

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