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How to conduct interviews on media repertoires as routine practices – problems and empirical experiences

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How to conduct interviews on media repertoires as routine practices – problems and empirical experiences

1 Introduction

Against the backdrop of a changing media environment, the practices individuals apply on a daily basis and in different life spheres have altered dramatically. Small investors, for instance, increasingly rely on the internet to follow financial market trends online or to gather information on the background of companies before investing in their stocks. However, it is an open question whether or not the individual is conscious or rather unaware of these changed practices since the use of different media might be inherent to their daily routine. This potential lack of awareness makes it difficult to research the role these Transforming Communications play in the individual's conduct of life. Therefore, the purpose of this methodical chapter is to identify an interviewing strategy for cross-media studies that meets the requirement of openness so as to ensure the respondents' freedom to set their own relevance structures, while at the same time maintaining the thematic focus on the interviewees' media repertoire.

Openness is the main principle that distinguishes qualitative social research from the quantitative approach. While in quantitative empirical research the investigator sets the relevance structures with the help of pre-formulated categories, the aim of qualitative empirical research is to avoid imposing a structure, but to reconstruct actors' subjective relevance through the principle of openness (e.g. Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2009; 140). In the same vein, we aim to reconstruct the relevance individuals attach to their media repertoires and to media change in their conduct of life with respect to disturbances and coping.

To this end, we consider different interviewing strategies representing varying degrees of explicitness when stating our media-related research interest, different levels of detail in interview questions targeted at the individuals' changing media repertoires, and different points in the course of the interview when we state the respective questions. We explored four different strategies in a pre-test based on ten semi-structured interviews with members of the middle-class – nine couples and one single person. The interviews were conducted within the scope of our KoFi research project on disturbances and coping in the middle classes. Apart from long term asset building, we included the life spheres of work, intimate relations, parenthood, and civil society engagement. We applied a two-step approach by firstly asking, how members of the middle classes cope with occurring disturbances in these life spheres, and secondly, how the individuals' media repertoires and the changes thereof shape both the disturbances experienced and the applied coping strategies. Based on these pilot interviews, we come to the conclusion that one of these interviewing strategies is most suitable to the research interest of our project.

Following this introduction, we first locate our study in the wider realm of qualitative social research and previous discussions concerning the problem of openness in qualitative interviews in methodical standard works, as well as the handling of the phenomenon of media change and media use in empirical studies focusing on the impact of media in individuals' conduct of life by using qualitative interviews. Afterwards we describe the different interviewing strategies we considered for researching the role of Transforming Communications for disturbances and coping of members of the middle classes before presenting our findings. We conclude with reflections on how the identified interviewing

strategy can help when researching similar phenomena, the implications of our findings have for qualitative interviewing strategies, as well as how they can contribute to other qualitative methods of data collection.

2 Methodical Problem and State of Research

2.1 The tension between openness and thematic focus

Our qualitative approach is centred on the principle of openness and focuses on the interviewees' subjective relevance system. We translate this orientation into our research questions by asking: Firstly, which role does the interviewees' media repertoire play in their conduct of life with respect to disturbances and coping? Secondly, how does the individual experience media change?

An interviewing strategy which explicitly stresses media repertoires and media use would impose the researcher's "thematic relevance" (Schutz 1973: 186 ff.). Articulating our research interest in media, we would probably urge the interviewees to talk only about media related topics. Such a 'media centric' approach (Deacon/ Stanyer 2014, 2015; Hepp/Hjarvard/Lundby 2015; Lunt/Livingstone in print, 2016) does not allow us to find out which role media repertoires play in the individuals' general daily conduct of life.

Nevertheless, an open approach faces an evident problem: Without a thematic stimulus the interviewees might not talk at all about their media repertoire and media changes in respect to their conduct of life. A main problem in this context is the routine character of practices in general. According to Schutz und Luckmann a large part of our daily practices are routinized and based on "habitual knowledge" (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 107 ff.). These more or less "automatically" conducted practices are primarily a "means to an end". Such habitual knowledge has a paradoxical structure of relevance: "It is of the greatest relevance and yet of, so to speak, subordinate relevance. It is a determining characteristic of routine that it can be performed without it coming to one's attention, therefore without it becoming thematic in the cores of experience. Routine is continually ready to be grasped without coming into the distinct grasp of consciousness proper. Habitual knowledge is continually, yet marginally relevant." (Schutz/Luckmann 1973: 109). In view of these remarks, media use can be regarded as a special routine practice, because media, as the word literally implies, are often used as "means" and not as "ends". For example, using a telephone is usually not an end but a means to get in touch with someone.

Therefore, media use as a form of habitual knowledge can be highly relevant for individuals' conduct of life, but not as part of their conscious minds. This implies that an "activating" thematic stimulus set by the interviewer is necessary in order to reconstruct this habitual knowledge of the interviewees. Consequently, for our purpose, an interviewing strategy is required that allows for both openness for the interviewees' relevance structures as well as sufficient thematic guidance.

2.2 Discussion in Methodical Standard Literature and Pertinent Empirical Studies

The principle of openness is discussed in most of the methodical literature as the core principle of qualitative empirical research. It is the main factor that distinguishes qualitative from quantitative social research ensuring the respondents' freedom to set their own relevance structures during the interview (e.g. Helfferich 2011: 114; Gläser/Laudel 2010: 31; Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2009: 140). If interview questions reveal the concrete research interest, this steers the interviewee's response behaviour and interviewees do not freely state their opinions and experiences, but answer according to

the relevance structures set by the interviewer. As a result, the conditions for understanding from an outsider perspective are not given and biases occur, distorting the meaning and interpretation patterns we aim to retrieve from the respondent's interview account (Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr 2009: 31).

In order to avoid such biases, but, at the same time, ensure one gains the desired knowledge, scholars suggest different interview forms. Przyborski and Wohlrab-Sahr (2009), for instance, and Nohl (2012), advocate narrative interviewing strategies with open ended questions in the beginning and more precise ones in the end. Similarly, Froschauer and Lueger (2003) suggest dividing the interview into a first narrative phase for exploration followed by a second phase of enquiry for clarification (69ff.). According to them, the thematic focus can thus be ensured by enquiring more precisely about the topic of interest as the interview proceeds and when the risk of influencing the respondents' answers is less severe. Although, when using these narrative interviewing strategies, researchers can adhere to the principle of openness, Nohl (2012) argues that even with this interviewing form, habitual knowledge as the one we are interested in cannot be retrieved as interviewees cannot reflect this kind of knowledge at all. According to Nohl as an advocate of the Documentary Method, researchers uncover this implicit knowledge in a heuristic analysis of the interview data.

As opposed to Nohl (2012), Witzel and Reiter (2012), however, argue that the respondents are indeed able to reflect upon implicit phenomena. In order to stimulate this reflection, they aim at producing a most natural, everyday conversation (see also Helfferich 2011: 115). Thus, authentic statements shall be generated that provide the condition for interpretation through others. Nevertheless, in spite of this common awareness of the difficulty of balancing openness and thematic guidance, neither Witzel and Reiter (2012), nor Nohl (2012), nor Przyborski/Wohlrab-Sahr (2009) state how to concretely introduce the researcher's thematic interest in the interview – whether during the entire course of the interview or towards the end. They do not discuss the fact that by stating their research interest in their interview question, they might steer the interviewees' response behaviour.

In the same vein, authors of empirical studies on media use neglect the problem of influencing their respondents by introducing their research interest to them. As Röser (2016) states, the thematic focus on media use is openly revealed in most of the studies (ibid: 491). Hence, there is hardly any problem awareness for the implicit character of media use, and, although in communication studies qualitative interviewing is a well-established (Loosen 2016) and most often used method of data collection (Röser 2016), the difficulty of studying media use without imposing one's own relevance structures on the respondent is hardly reflected on in respective empirical studies. Most commonly, researchers dedicate whole sets of questions in their interview guides and specific enquiries to the use of certain media such as communication media. This was done, for instance, by Kirchner (2014), who investigated, with the help of semi-structured interviews, the use of social network services by partners in long distance relationships by Linke (2010), who used joint partner interviews, diaries and separate interviews to research media use in couples' everyday lives, by Ling (2006), who looked at the use of ICT in the daily interaction among couples in 'intact families' by using joint partner interviews, or by Döring/Dietmar (2003), who with the help of semi-structured joint partner interviews studied the way couples communicate with each other. Others do not specify how they introduced the media topic in their interviews, nor give any information on the concrete interview topics. Examples include Clark (2013), who conducted in-depth and focus group interviews as well as observations to research how individuals negotiate the introduction of new media in their home lives, Röser/Peil (2012), who investigated the domestication of the internet with the help of joint partner interviews and representative data on internet use, or Voß (1999), who looked at work and everyday practices of individuals working in

autonomous work arrangements. This neglect of precise information on the questions posed during the interview again shows a lack of problem awareness of the balance between thematic guidance and the principle of openness.

With regard to implicit knowledge, Streit (2011) stresses the difficulty in asking individuals about their routine practices. In order to yield this kind of knowledge, she therefore employed an open interview question to start the interview, and subsequently asked the interviewees to describe typical days, for instance, in their work life. With the help of these "experience questions" (Patton 2002: 350), she managed to retrieve implicit knowledge that the interviewees were unlikely to reflect upon otherwise. Therewith, she intended the respondents re-live their daily routines and thus recollect activities that they are usually not aware of, such as media use. However, Streit is not the first researcher who called attention to the implicit character of media use. Kuebler (1987) had earlier highlighted this phenomenon. When discussing the enquiry of media use in biographic interviews, he stated that in biographical reconstruction media play only a marginal role. According to Kuebler, respondents are not conscious of media use and do not readily recollect media use. Media have become a natural part of their daily routine, but have not reached the deep, biographical dimension of remembrance. Whereas events that have changed e.g. time structures or leisure activities such as the purchase of a TV are remembered more easily, slow changes remain unnoticed (ibid.: 56f.). Therefore, he perceives questions targeted at the share of media reception in the constitution of daily life as the production of a scientific artefact since this methodical procedure predetermines the meaning media have for the individual (ibid.: 57). The stimuli effect of, for instance, associations connected with characters and idols prominent from TV can be used by the interviewer to trigger memories of and experiences with media. However, these should only be used to locate or enrich a statement, and not in order to provoke a certain response. Therefore, again, the question of how to precisely introduce the topic of interest and, hence, to maintain the thematic focus remains unclear.

From this review we can conclude that a problem awareness in the methodical literature exists with regard to the balancing act between adhering to the principle of openness on the one, and maintaining the thematic focus on the other hand. What is less discussed is the implicit nature of media use as a routine practice as had been outlined by Kuebler in 1987, but which has been neglected in the following years. Although scholars found ways of enquiring about such routine practices with the help of experience questions that encourage respondents to reflect upon their daily routines, in most of the empirical studies researchers do not reflect upon the risk of influencing the interviewees' response behaviour by openly stating their topic of interest in the interviews. We address this research gap with considerations on alternative interviewing strategies that come into question and an exploration of a selection of those.

3   Interviewing Strategies

We developed different strategies to research the role of changing media repertoires as a source for disturbances and as potential coping strategies in the middle classes' conduct of life with the help of semi-structured interviews. These strategies differ in two respects, firstly with regard to the way of naming media repertoires and media change as a research interest, and secondly, with regard to the way of enquiring about the respondents' media use and the relevance media have in their daily routines.

On the first variable, the options are: to explicitly name the respondents' media repertoire as our research interest; to implicitly state this as being of interest; or to not mention it at all. The first option has the advantage that the respondents are fully aware of the purpose of the study, and thus have the opportunity to reflect upon the role that media play in

their conduct of life. However, at the same time, explicitly mentioning this research interest, limits the interviewees from independently setting the relevance of media to their conduct of life. They might address the topic merely in order to satisfy the researcher. Analogous to the bias of "social desirability", this response behaviour could be labelled as "researcher's desirability". The second option of only implicitly mentioning media change as one research interest among others slightly diminishes the risk of this bias because it disperses the focal point. Nevertheless, only the third option of not mentioning the media-related research interest at all allows fully unimpaired assessment of whether or not the middle class couples perceive their media repertoires as relevant for their conduct of life. At the same time, however, media could play a crucial role in their daily practices although the couples are not aware of it, or simply do not conceive it as significant for the study, and therefore do not mention it.

Consequently, the second variable of the way of enquiry is another important factor. Again, there are three different options to be considered. The first option is to pose media-related questions after each set of questions dealing with one of the previously identified life spheres, targeting the media repertoires in the respective domain. In this way, the topic can be taken up for each of the life spheres if it was not mentioned and elaborated upon sufficiently by the interviewees before. Thus, the relevance of media set by the respondents can be controlled for, while at the same time there is no risk of fully omitting it in cases where the couples do not bring up the subject themselves. However, to the detriment of this approach, questions focusing on the respondents' media repertoires after the first set of questions could influence the relevance the interviewees attach to media in the subsequently discussed life spheres, resulting in biased response behaviour. Consequently, the relevance the interviewee attaches to the role of their media repertoire is distorted. The second option is to ask for media repertoires only in the end of the interview after all of the different life spheres have been addressed. These questions would encompass all domains and would make the respondent reflect upon the media impact in a comparative way without disturbing the flow of the interview for those who do not mention by themselves media as relevant for their conduct of life. Nonetheless, a disadvantage of this strategy could be the detachment of these media-related questions from the respective life spheres, requiring each interviewee to recollect them themselves. A third option is, again, to not ask for the middle class couples' media repertoires at all. On the one hand, this strategy bears the advantage of leaving it solely to the interviewees to determine the media's relevance for their conduct of life. On the other hand, this approach runs the risk that media repertoires are not mentioned by the respondents at all.

Based on these two variables with three different options each, nine different strategies arise to investigate the role of media repertoires and media change as both sources of disturbances, and strategies of how to cope with them (see table 1). These are to neither state the research interest, nor to ask questions targeting media, or to not state the media related research interest, but to ask such questions either in the end of the entire interview, or after each set of questions. Other strategies are to explicitly state the media-related research interest, to not further enquire unless the respondents address the topic themselves, or to again ask corresponding questions at the end of the interview, or after each set of questions dealing with one of the identified life spheres. Finally, media change can be stated implicitly as one research interest among others, and then again, questions dealing therewith can be asked not at all, at the end of the interview, or after each set of questions.

From these options we decided against the strategies of not stating the interest in media change. Nevertheless, asking focused questions on the topic either at the end of the interview, or after each set of questions appeared illogical and would have confused the interviewees. In the same vein we dismissed the reverse strategies of explicitly or implicitly stating media change as the research interest (thus raising awareness) but then

not at all or hardly following up on the topic, since we deemed this as inconsistent. Consequently, four strategies remained, namely: strategy 1, which involves neither stating media change as the research interest, nor following up on the topic by asking questions on it. This represents the most open interview form as it leaves it completely to the respondents whether or not they address the topic of media change and media repertoires; strategy 2, which means explicitly stating the media focus and enquiring about this after each set of questions with regard to the respective life sphere. This represents the least open interview form and has a strong focus on media repertoires; strategy 3, which involves implicitly stating the media interest and posing corresponding questions at the end of the interview. This is a looser form giving more space for the couples to set their relevance structure, and; strategy 4, which means implicitly stating the interest in the respondents' media repertoires and following up on this with the help of related enquiries after each set of questions on one of the chosen life spheres. This provides both orientation towards changing media repertoires as well as room for their own relevance structures.

Table 1: The four implemented strategies to research the role of changing media repertoires in a pre-test

	Media related questions		
Research interested stated		Not at all	At the end of the entire interview	After each set of questions
	Not at all	1		
	Explicitly			2
	Implicitly		3	4

In order to explore these different interview forms, we conducted ten semi-structured interviews between June 2015 and January 2016. One of these interviews was conducted with a single person, whereas the others were joint partner interviews.[1] All interviewees were living in a shared household with their partners in Bremen and its surroundings and were between 34 and 64 years old. Moreover, they are biological parents or caregivers of children between the age of 5 and 19, of whom at least one attends school. Three of the interviews were conducted in university offices, and the others took place in the interviewees' private homes. All interviews were conducted in German and transcribed verbatim.

Having conducted ten interviews, we explored interviewing strategy 1 thrice, strategies 2 and 3 twice each, and the strategy 4, again, thrice. Interviewing strategy 1 was conducted three times due to practical reasons that followed from the research process, while interviewing strategy 4 was conducted three times because it turned out to be the preferred option. Although ten interviews constitute only a small sample, they provide a sufficient basis for our purpose of exploring a topic that researchers have hitherto not explicitly reflected on.

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[1] We opted for joint partner interviews instead of separate interviews based on the assumption that there is some kind of division of labour among partners with regard to the life spheres. Thus, interviewing them together provides us with a maximum expertise for each life sphere.

4   Findings

We now present our findings about the four interviewing strategies starting with strategy 1, then considering the strategies 2 and 3 before discussing strategy 4.

Interviewing strategy 1: neither stating media-related research interest, nor following up on the topic during the course of the interview

With the first interviewing strategy, we neither mentioned media change as the research interest, nor posed corresponding questions during the course of the interview. Thus, we left it entirely to the respondents to address the topic if they perceived it as relevant for their conduct of life, and introduced the topic of our project as follows:

"We are interested in how this conduct of life[2] has changed in your personal perception and your experience, but also in practical questions of how you arrange your everyday life against this backdrop, and how you deal with changes and challenges."

Two remarkable cases demonstrate the ambivalent outcome of this interviewing strategy. In the case of a middle-aged couple with both partners working in IT, media use was mentioned as both disturbances and coping strategies in several of the identified life spheres without having been asked to do so. This applied, for instance, to both the domains of work and family:

IP01: That [i.e. work] interferes strongly with private life or family life. Due to the fact that we're so well connected and own several smartphones which are always somewhere nearby, it actually always happens to me that I also read work-related emails. Partly I do this on purpose. So it happens that I'm standing on a football field attending a match or picking up a child and then reply to an […] email if these are things for which a quick reply is required or something like that. (P1: 90-97)

Apart from the fact that their media repertoire increased the blurring of boundaries between work and family, the couple also made use of media in order to manage both life spheres:

IP01: Well, sometimes you have to be [at your workplace] on another or a second day, so then I have to make sure that this same day I don't have any appointments in the afternoon and say, "[IP02], you have to pick up the children" or something, so this is very much about communication.

IP02: Mh, well good, we have [figured out] this already to some extent with the joint calendar and so on, that's already a lot, yes. These organizational tricks, all these organizational tricks are of course already [something]; many others don't do that (…).

IP01: Yes, here come all our cool IT tools. (…) Well, we have a Google calendar, so really online, which we have on our smartphones and our computers that we're mostly using at work. (…) There is my calendar in which I have my private appointments or everything in one, my private appointments, and work appointments. [IP02] can see all of this and reversed, I can also see that. That means, if a colleague asks me, "Can we make an appointment for July 17?" I say, "Oops, [IP02] has a meeting [at work] that day, that's going to be difficult in case one of the kids is sick or something." That means, I can already consider this and I don't have to write an email or call first in order to ask whether I can schedule an appointment for this day or not. (P1: 938-968)

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[2] The concept of "conduct of life" was previously explained to the interviewees.

As these quotations illustrate, the media environment and the couple's media repertoire play a crucial role both in their work lives, as well as in how they reconcile family and work. Accordingly, the issue of media use came up naturally without any incentive needed.

However, this did not apply to another interview that was conducted employing the same interviewing strategy of neither stating the focus on media environment and repertoire as the research interest, nor asking follow-up questions on the topic. Hence, one respondent interviewed individually did not mention media in any respect throughout the entire course of the interview (P4). This was the case, in spite of her being a medical professional working in her surgery in the third generation. Based on this long tradition of running the practice in her family, we can assume that she must have witnessed major media related changes and developments, at least at her workplace. Not having been informed about our interest in media environments and repertoires, and hence, not having been encouraged to reflect upon respective changes, she did not consider these in her account. Therefore, it is likely that a stimulus drawing her attention to media change would have stimulated her to reflect upon the topic and led to a different, more yielding outcome for our purposes – despite the apparently low relevance she attaches to media in her conduct of life. As a consequence, the risk of media change not being mentioned at all seems to be too high for conducting the interviews according to this first interviewing strategy.

Interviewing strategy 2: explicitly stating the media-related research interest plus enquiries after each set of questions dealing with one of the life spheres

Conducting the interviews according to the second interviewing strategy, we explicitly stated media change as the main research interest using the following formulation:

"We are interested in how this conduct of life has changed in your personal perception and your experience, but also in practical questions of how you arrange your everyday life against this backdrop, and how you deal with changes and challenges. We are particularly interested in the role that media change, i.e. increasing mediatization, e.g. in the form of an increase of digital media, such as email, or SMS impacting the individual's everyday life, plays for these changes as well as for dealing with these changes."

Subsequently, we enquired about the respondents' media repertoire after each set of questions dealing with one of the identified life spheres. The interviews conducted in this way showed that highlighting the interest in the respondents' media repertoires and their change over time when introducing the topic, led to the respondents strongly focussing on the media aspect, particularly, for the first set of questions.

Interviewer: Alright, I would like to start with the life sphere of occupation and career, and in the media it's always discussed that there are many changes: they talk about acceleration, more mobility, more flexibility are discussed and I'm first of all interested in how you experience this in your everyday working life?

IP03: Do you want to start, yes?

IP04: Well, there is constant accessibility, right? Just through the mobile phone you're always available or at least contactable and reachable. And through email contact, well that's all much faster and, yes, graspable. (P2: 1-11)

The example shows that although the initial question was not clearly targeted at media, the respondent focussed on media use which had been explicitly stated as the main research interest in the introduction to the interview. Although this choice could also reflect the relevance the respondent attaches to media in this specific domain, this seems unlikely since other interviewees chose a broader start into discussing this life sphere, or talked about further disturbances later on. In the present case, the media focus tended to limit both interviewees' responses to the topic of media, leading them to neglect other

factors that might have changed and caused disturbances in their work life, and likely overshadowing their own relevance structure. Although this constraint dissolved or was less prominent with regard to domains discussed later, the narrow concentration initially limited the respondents in their reflections and response behaviour.

This initial focus on the explicitly stated research interest in media repertoires is particularly evident since the couple in this interview did not bring up the media topic in other life spheres again unless specifically asked for it. Thus, enquiring about their media use after each set of questions discussing one life sphere proved to be useful.

Interviewer: How about media communication in the family? Do you use new media there?

IP03: Oh, we have a lot of media ((laughing)).

IP04: What do we have?

IP03: We have a lot of media ((laughing)), the two of us, don't we? Well, so that we can also communicate through email, well organize family issues through email. Especially if it's external, like the choir is writing, or what the violin instructor [wrote], that I can [forward this to you.

IP04: [Yes, yes, yes. Or also through telephone and SMS. (P2: 550-563)

Here another enquiry was necessary to again stimulate reflection upon media use in the life sphere of parenthood and family life, although the partners widely used media to organize their daily life. In spite of this substantial and daily presence, the media focus faded into the background over the course of the interview showing that these enquiries are beneficial to remind the respondents, and assure the continuation of this thematic priority.

Interviewing strategy 3: implicitly stating the media-related research interest plus enquiries at the end of the entire interview

Following the third interviewing strategy, we mentioned media change implicitly as the research interest applying the following formulation:

"We are interested in how this conduct of life has changed in your personal perception and your experience, but also in practical questions of how you arrange your everyday life against this backdrop, and how you deal with changes and challenges, and also which role the increasing mediatization of everyday life might play for this."

We followed up on the topic only in the end of the entire interview. In some cases this implicit stimulus and the lack of frequent enquiries on the media subject led to the respondents forgetting about this research interest over the course of the interview. Neglecting the topic might or might not reflect the relevance the respondents' attach to media in their conduct of life, but could also indicate that this focus fades into the background if not taken up occasionally on the part of the interviewer as discussed above. However, in other cases respondents interviewed with this third interviewing strategy did also talk about the impact of a changing media repertoire on their conduct of life, referring to the implicit stimulus set in the introduction to the interview topic.

IP05: I think this topic of flexibility, mobility and so on has many qualities that I appreciate, but one real burden is that the possibilities are SO gigantic. You used to have a phone from Telekom, it wasn't called Telekom, it was called the Post. Usually it worked, but if it didn't, you called somewhere and someone came, tightened a bolt and left again. Or you didn't have a phone, then you had different problems. But NOW. Oh God! Which provider? Which call rate? With a mobile phone there are three million call rates and I realize, basically, this is too much for me. I don't have time for that. And then

I realize – and this was an aspect you also mentioned at the beginning: digital world. I believe everything we accelerate: transcribing, typing with the computer and so on. All this always returns as a problem in the form of this flood of possibilities. (P3: 1712-1721)

Possibly, the interviewee would have mentioned this irritation in her conduct of life irrespective of the impulse to reflect upon a changing media environment and her own media repertoire. However, there are indicators that the implicitly stated research interest stimulated the consideration thereof. The reference to the impulse given in the introduction to the interview implies that this has inspired the respondent to make the connection between her reflections and the changing media environment. At the same time, the implicitly set stimulus did not overshadow her own relevance structure, which is supported by the fact that the topic came up in the course of her statement, and was not triggered by a direct enquiry. Consequently, the implicit naming of the media-related research interest can produce an adequate balance.

With this third interviewing strategy we further observed that the enquiry about media-related topics only at the end of the interview came as a surprise for the interviewees, who were attuned to the announced five sets of questions, and tended to be tired by the end of the interview. Thus, it is likely that they answered the respective questions in a less elaborate and committed way than previous ones. Moreover, it can be assumed that at the end, the respondents were no longer aware of, or were not able to recollect all aspects of the previously discussed life spheres and, hence, responded in a way that does not allow for separate conclusions for the different life spheres under study. Consequently, the interviewees might neglect crucial aspects, rendering the retrospective questions less yielding.

Interviewing strategy 4: implicitly stating the media-related research interest plus enquiries after each set of questions dealing with one of the life spheres

Applying the fourth interviewing strategy, we stated our interest in the role of changing media environments and repertoires for the respondents' conduct of life only implicitly using the same formulation as in interviewing strategy 3:

"We are interested in how this conduct of life has changed in your personal perception and your experience, but also in practical questions of how you arrange your everyday life against this backdrop, and how you deal with changes and challenges, and also in which role the increasing mediatization of everyday life might play in this."

We enquired about the respondents' media use after each set of questions dealing with one of the previously identified life spheres. The implicit statement that media was one among other research interests led some respondents to take up the topic in their narrative. Others did not talk about their media use spontaneously. This differing response behaviour implies that the stimulus was not so strong that it overshadowed their own relevance structures, but that it left room for them to discuss individual chances and disturbances. When respondents mentioned media use in the depictions of their everyday life, these statements provided the interviewer with links for further enquiry on the topic, thus, enabling natural conversation.

IP17: (…) The new media enable me to do a lot of coordination work of my job myself – independent of space and time. Therefore, I'm more flexible, but therefore I'm also more out and about, and out and about in shorter intervals. I would say there are many more…, or basically it applies to me that the options of doing several thingsincreases, with it the problem of choice increases – what I am doing is rather becoming too much. But the coordination work necessary for doing these things has all become much easier due to the new media.

Interviewer: Could you describe again what are, or which are these media that play a role

for you? (P9: 22-32)

However, also for those who did not initially mention media during the interviews, media related enquiries did not come by surprise. Also in such cases, asking for media repertoires was not perceived as unnatural, and did not disturb the course of the interview, since these questions were not posed before the topic was either raised by the interviewees themselves, or at the end of each section of interview questions. Consequently, the media focus did not artificially create supposedly desired responses.

Interviewer: (…)You've mentioned before that sometimes there are business trips. Do you use something like Skype or any…

IP19: No.

Interviewer: … other media?

IP18: No. We're, I, well, ((laughing)), a friend of mine recently said that I'm a media dinosaur.

Interviewer: OK. ((laughing))

IP18: So in the sense of, that actually already distinct, doesn't exist anymore. I'd also be so difficult to get hold of and so on. (P10: 856-869)

Another reason for the lack of this "interviewer's desirability" could be the fact that media use was initially mentioned only as one among other research interests. Hence, interviewees might have perceived it as more legitimate and might have felt more comfortable about not being able to extensively talk about media. At the same time, enquiring about media use with regard to every life sphere ensured that respondents who did not attribute high relevance to media did not drop the subject entirely, as was sometimes the case with interviewing strategy 3, when such questions were posed only in the end of the interview.

Consequently, this fourth interviewing strategy allowed interviewees' to express their individual relevance structures. Illustrative evidence for this claim is the interview account of a couple in which one partner is to a much higher degree involved with media and media use than the other. They readily stated their different weighting of media for their daily routines in the different interview sections. This can be shown in relation to the life sphere of work. Asked about the changes in his everyday work life, the husband, an employee of an internationally operating industrial enterprise, immediately identifies changed media repertoires as a driver for changed working practices:

IP15: Yes, OK. Yes, I'm working for […] here in the factory in Bremen and there very, very much happens at a very, very high pace regarding the topic of change. Everything is getting more and more centralized. Areas get pooled together; you work…, before you maybe worked only for the [main] factory, by now Germany-wide. It even stretches to, to world-wide and due to technology, like e.g. IT, computers, smartphones and so on, it is becoming…, it is a lot what we as employees are facing, in my opinion. (P8: 45-51)

[…]

IP15: What has also changed, is very strongly that the technology in the environment…, well, we work a lot, a lot now with video conferences, telephone conferences, a lot is done via internet; you activate your computer screen, and then, so to speak, you work in a room-spanning way on documents and you more and more, let's say, collect information instead of developing and researching it. (P8: 79-84)

This interviewee's description reveals that media change and media use are highly relevant aspects of the interviewee's everyday work life. In the course of the interview, this corresponds with his strong attention to media technology and media change:

IP15: We are only end users via smartphone or computer and type something, but in the background also very, very much happens digitally. Current control is largely…, companies all work digitally, information gets exchanged. In my opinion, all this is also part of the topic of digitalization. (--) I believe this digitalization changes society very, very much. But it's, I think it's no longer stoppable. It also has, in my opinion, many advantages for us human beings. The problem, which I see, is that many basic conditions are not set, such as the wording of the law, in which certain things are simply regulated, like data security and such things. There we have still way too much freedom. And in my opinion, this digitalization is like the Wild West, like in the Wild West. (P8: 3126-3136)

In contrast, his wife who works part-time as a freelancer in children's education and the care sector does not mention media in respect to her work at all. Only after explicitly being asked about media use does she mention "WhatsApp" as part of her everyday work life:

IP14: Yes, that's also such a topic. WhatsApp, right, is this, do you know this?

Interviewer: Yes.

IP14: Yes. At some point [during work], the women started saying: Oh, don't we want to open a WhatsApp group, like for us? Otherwise I don't need it professionally, but then, so I can cancel; if one of the children is sick, I have to call eight women, not all of them pick up, I'm stressed whether one is now waiting in front of the door and I'm not there and she doesn't know what's going on. So I gratefully accepted. But there is…, all this nonsense that somehow gets posted. And now, I directly mute it. And in this respect, I use it a little bit in the work context, but when the group has finished, I kindly say goodbye and delete it and am gone. But otherwise I use it for work only to call. (P8: 641-650)

In contrast to her husband, for her media use is not a crucial part of her everyday work life. She explicitly describes media usage as marginal and of minor relevance (»*I use it a little bit*«). In comparison with her husband, her media use corresponds with a generally lower subjective attention to media related topics during the interview.

The reconstruction of the couple's different relevance structures shows that strategy 4 is well balanced between openness and thematic focus: on the one hand, it provides the interviewees with room to express their own relevance structures and on the other hand, it allows the researcher to carefully examine the role of media use and media change. Thus, it is possible to reconstruct the degree to which mediatization and media change shape the individuals' lifeworld.

5   Comparison and decision

After having explored four different interviewing strategies, one of them, namely strategy 4, can be identified as the most suitable for our purposes.

Strategy 1 - interviewing the couples neither mentioning media as being of interest, nor enquiring the respondents' media use during or after the interview - was successful in one, but not in the other of the two interviews conducted in this way. Depending on the respondents' involvement with media, they attached more or less relevance to the changing media environment and their own media repertoire. However, the risk that media

are not mentioned at all is too high for our project targeted at researching Communicative Transformations in middle class couples' conduct of life.

Strategy 2 - being explicit about the research interest in changing media environments and media repertoires, and following up on the subject after each set of questions dealing with one life sphere - proved to be ambivalent. While prominently highlighting the media focus led to an initial bias towards media-related disturbances and overshadowed the respondents' own relevance structure, the frequent enquiry about media environment and repertoires ensured recollection of the topic.

Strategy 3 - the implicit statement of our interest in the role of the changing media environment and repertoire for the interviewees' conduct of life and the enquiry thereof only at the end of the entire interview - again had advantages and disadvantages. On the one hand, the implicit impetus provided orientation without impairing interviewees' own relevance structures, on the other hand, some interviewees forgot about this focus in the course of the interview. This neglect was further induced by the lack of follow-up questions during the interview. Additionally, the occurrence of the media-related questions only after having discussed all the different life spheres was perceived as tiresome on the part of the respondents, who had been attuned to the announced five sets of questions.

Consequently, interviewing strategy 4 - implicitly stating our research interest in changing media environments and media repertoires, and enquiring the role these play in the couples 'doing life' after each set of questions on the different life spheres - appears to be the strategy that best suits the purposes of our project. The set stimulus is subtle and thus, does not dominate the interviewees' response behaviour. Yet, it is strong enough to contain the presence of the media topic throughout the interview. Most importantly, this interviewing strategy allows the respondents' individual relevance structures with respect to media and media use as part of their daily routines to be captured.

6   Conclusions

Studying media use in middle class individuals' conduct of life as routine practice, we were confronted with the difficulty of how to retrieve habitual knowledge through interviewing without imposing our relevance structure onto the respondents. Therefore, we were looking for an interviewing strategy for cross-media studies that meets both the requirement of openness as the main principle of qualitative research, and of thematic guidance throughout the interview. We explored four different interviewing strategies with the help of ten semi-structured interviews covering different life spheres, namely work, intimate relations, parenthood, long term asset building, and civil society engagement, and found one strategy that meets our purposes. By naming media use as one research interest among others and enquiring thereon only after the respondents had brought up the topic themselves or at the end of each set of questions, this strategy allows for the interviewees' habitual knowledge to be addressed and provides room for the individuals' own relevance structures at the same time.

Beyond our project, other projects in this volume dealing with different communicative figurations that aim to address similar research questions with the help of qualitative interviews can benefit from our findings. Furthermore, our paper contributes to the general debate on methodical problems of qualitative social research, and – representing a media-centred approach – to the current controversy of 'media-centric' versus 'media-centred' approaches in media and communication research (Deacon/Stanyer 2014, 2015; Hepp/Hjarvard/Lundby 2015; Lunt/Livingstone in print, 2016). Having reflected on different methodical approaches to studying media repertoires, we conclude that the

chosen media-centred approach is the best strategy to capture the actual relevance of media use in the individual's conduct of life.

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