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SSCM Società svizzera di scienze della comunicazione e dei media
SACM Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research
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SComS aims to build bridges between different research cultures, and publishes high-quality original articles in English, German, French, and Italian. As a general forum for communication scholarship, the journal is especially interested in research that crosses disciplinary boundaries.

Contact

scoms@usi.ch / www.scoms.ch
c/o
Philipp Bachmann
Lucerne University of Applied Sciences and Arts
Institute of Communication and Marketing IKM
Zentralstrasse 9
Postfach 2940
CH-6002 Luzern

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Editorial

Jolanta Drzewiecka*, USI – Università della Svizzera italiana, Faculty of Communication, Culture and Society, Switzerland
Katharina Lobinger, USI – Università della Svizzera italiana, Faculty of Communication, Culture and Society, Switzerland
Mike Meißner, University of Fribourg, Department of Communication and Media Research DCM, Switzerland
*Corresponding author: jolanta.drzewiecka@usi.ch

Dear SComS readers,

The third and last issue of the year offers a diversity of communication topics. The General Section includes a study of parasocial relations with media characters and an analysis of COVID-19 rhetoric in Iran. The Thematic Section presents a rich discussion of issues and processes involved in the persistence of "old media." Diverse topics are also presented in the Community Section including a summary of the SACM award winning dissertation and an introduction to DOCA. Finally, the contributions to the Book Review Section discuss books on Internet memes and the influencer industry. Before our more detailed overview, we are pleased to present an important next step for SComS.

SComS is evolving toward Open Data and Open Research. Since 2017, SComS has been published as a platinum open access journal. One notable feature is the journals' multilingual nature. For authors, the online first publication of articles is particularly advantageous, enabling the timely publication of accepted contributions. With these features, SComS has positioned itself as a dynamic and innovative journal in the European journal landscape. However, the step toward Open Data and Open Research has not been fully embraced yet. With respect to Open Data, SComS currently allows researchers to publish additional information and materials (e.g., codebooks, tables, images, research data) alongside the research article. However, SComS lacks an integrated policy on Open Data that defines its Open Data strategy, mission, and measures. The journal is now addressing this gap in a project set to begin in November 2023. We are in fact delighted to announce that Università della Svizzera italiana is funding the project, titled "Open Data Strategy for the USI Journal SComS (ODSCOMS)," as part of its institutional funding line for Open Science and Open Research Data in 2023. Developing such a policy is crucial to contextualizing the already established practice of publishing supplementary material and laying the legal foundation for future collaborations with existing data repositories. The project will particularly address data protection, copyright issues, and research ethical considerations. We will support the Open Data transition with training activities and guidelines, including workshops and video pills, to encourage researchers to adopt the practice of publishing research data in open formats alongside research results and to overcome fears and barriers. The project, led by Katharina Lobinger and Anna Picco-Schwendener, both from USI Università della Svizzera italiana, will run from November 2023 to October 2024. We are excited to underscore and renew the innovative character of our journal with this initiative.

The first article in the General Section, "Parasocial relationships with morally ambiguous media characters – the role of moral foundations" is authored by Michelle Möri from the University of Fribourg, Dominique S. Wirz of the University of Amsterdam, and Andreas Fahr from the University of Fribourg. The authors analyzed viewers' parasocial relationships (PSRs) with morally ambiguous media characters (MACs). The study examined relationships with eight such characters from recent media productions and represented a variety of moral ambiguity in different

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genres. The findings show that while viewers accept some degree of MACs' immoral behavior, their PSRs are stronger with MACs who are perceived as more moral, regardless of the viewers' own moral foundations. Among the five moral domains, authority and purity were not significant for parasocial relationships formed by the viewers, in contrast to care, loyalty, and fairness, which had a positive effect. The authors argue that viewers probably expect morally ambiguous characters to stand up to authority and act in impure ways. Overall, perceived morality had a stronger effect on viewer PSRs than perceived ambiguity.

Hossein Kermani from the University of Vienna, together with Mona Korshidi and Mohammad Ashtiani Araghi from the University of Tehran authored the article "A case study on the COVID-19 discourse in politicians' speeches: Investigations into the speeches of former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani." It takes a look back into the all too familiar recent history of the COVID-19 pandemic in a research context that has not been previously addressed in our journal: Iran, and the public speeches of its former President Hassan Rouhani. The discourse analysis of 30 speeches from February to April 2020 thus adds to existing research into the use of COVID-19 as a signifier in the discourses of mostly Western political elites, populists, and conspiracy theorists. Rouhani's emphasis on COVID-19 as a "state of exception" echoed a common strategy of the Iranian and other autocratic regimes to legitimize measures of control over society. At the same time, it departed from previous practice by opposing not only dissidents and critics, but also religious figures.

This issue of SComS once again includes a Thematic Section. This time it is dedicated to the theme "Old media persistence. Past continuities in the brand-new digital world." Thus, the Thematic Section explores the persistence of "old media" and, at the same time, highlights the blind spots of discourses that emphasize disruption, revolution, and upheavals and that tend to ignore aspects of resistance, persistence, and continuity. Further information on the theme and the six contributions in this Thematic Section can be found in the introduction provided by the guest editors, Gabriele Balbi, Berber Hagedoorn, Nazan Haydari, Valérie Schafer, and Christian Schwarzenegger, whom we want to thank for choosing SComS as a suitable outlet for these highly relevant and topic reflections that underline the importance of examining innovations through a historical lens.

Two contributions to the Community Section address two very different but equally important topics. The first contribution is a summary of the dissertation by Niels G. Mede titled "Science-related populism: Conceptualization, empirical investigation, and implications for science communication." We have the honor of featuring this short synopsis into the work of Niels G. Mede, who has been awarded the 2023 Dissertation Award by the Swiss Association of Communication and Media Research (SACM). The SACM Dissertation Award recognizes the best Ph.D. thesis in communication and media research completed at a Swiss university or by a Swiss researcher. In his excellent dissertation, the author focuses on science-related populism, a phenomenon that has not been systematically examined despite its potentially dysfunctional effects. The award jury particularly praised the dissertation for providing not only a new theoretical model, a new scale for measuring the phenomenon, and an analysis of the specific Swiss context but also practical advice on how to communicate about science and how the scientific community should approach communication. Congratulations!

The second contribution in the Community Section addresses the aforementioned topic of Open Science. Franziska Oehmer-Pedrazzi, Sabrina H. Kessler, Edda Humprecht, Katharina Sommer, and Laia Castro present the Open Access Database of Variables for Content Analysis (DOCA). This database collects and presents operationalizations of content analyses in communication and media research. The goal is to ensure transparency in method application, and thus adherence to growing quality standards in content analytical research, in the spirit of Open Science and Open Methods. In their contribution titled "Fact Sheet 'DOCA – Database of Variables for Content Analysis': On the relevance, objective, content, and participation possibilities of the database of vari-

Table 1: Submissions to SComS and editorial decisions in 2022, compared to 2021 and 2020

	Submissions (full paper)	Acceptance	Rejection after review	Regular desk rejection	Desk rejection due to plagiarism	Still in process
Total 2022	83	26	11	41	4	1
General Section	52	6	3	38	4	1
Thematic Sections	31	20	8	3	0	0
Total 2021	50	19	7	24	0	0
General Section	38	9	5	24	0	0
Thematic Sections	12	10	2	0	0	0
Total 2020	42	18	7	15	2	0
General Section	33	11	6	15	1	0
Thematic Sections	9	7	1	0	1	0

Note: The numbers for Thematic Sections in 2022 include submissions for the Special Issue on the DACH 21 conference.

ables for standardized content analysis," the authors provide insights into the structure and objectives of DOCA. They complement this highly informative presentation with personal remarks and insights, explaining the resource-intensive setup and the challenges of sustaining DOCA in the long term against the backdrop of the fast-paced academic environment.

The contributions to the Book Review Section evaluate monographs on two important aspects of digital media: the influencer industry and Internet memes. The first review addresses Emily Hund's "The influencer industry: the quest for authenticity on social media" published by Princeton University Press. Nils S. Borchers praises the book for its "vivid and knowledgeable" historical approach detailing the chronological emergence of the influencer industry beginning in the 1990s as well as analyses of specific cases. Throughout, the book examines the production of authenticity as industrial construct. While it focuses on the influencer industry in the U.S., the reviewer notes similarities to Western Europe that make the book relevant to non-U.S. readers. He also notes that the "Influencer industry" will be particularly useful to readers interested in the history of the industry as well as its internal dynamics.

Michael Johann reviews "Memes – Formen und Folgen eines Internetphänomens" by Joanna Nowotny and Julian Reidy. The book examines Internet memes by discussing their referentiality, humor, political uses, and how they enter the mainstream. The reviewer praises the book for its comprehensive analysis and the richness of cases. The focus on the "darker" aspects provides a useful counterpoint to the romanticization of memes in most literature, in his view. But it also limits the book, as the readers might expect a more balanced approach. Overall, the book receives a very positive evaluation as detailed and thought-provoking.

As started last year, we want to seize the opportunity in this last issue of the year to give an overview of the number of submissions to SComS in the previous year, 2022. We are happy to see an ongoing increase in submitted manuscripts as shown in Table 1. Compared to 2021 there is an increase from 50 to 83 in 2022. This is partly due to a special issue (see below) which received far more submissions than the regular Thematic Sections. Nevertheless, the General Section itself expanded from 38 to 52 submissions. The overall acceptance rate of manuscripts submitted to SComS in 2022 was 31 %, which rose to 68 % without manuscripts that were rejected on editorial grounds for a lack of fit with the scope of SComS, a low general quality (desk rejects) or due to cases of (self-)plagiarism.

In 2022 SComS hosted one special issue dedicated to the DACH 21 conference (ed. by Thomas Zerback, Mark Eisenegger, Thomas N. Friemel, & Mike S. Schäfer) and one Thematic Section titled "Changing Communication of Higher Education Institutions" (ed. by Silke Fürst, Daniel Vogler, Isabel Sörensen, & Mike S. Schäfer). Those received 31 full paper submissions in total. With 20 accepted and published papers they reach an acceptance rate of 65 %.

Total downloads of articles reached a new all-time high. After an exponential growth from 2019 (5500) to 2021 (22 000), in 2022 a total of 24 200 articles were downloaded. Additionally, SComS is read in the printed edition created by Seismo Press.

A scholarly journal running a double-blind peer-review procedure could not work without the engagement of dedicated reviewers. The further increase of submissions led to an even higher demand for reviewers in comparison to recent years. We sincerely thank all reviewers who reviewed manuscripts in 2022 providing invaluable feedback to authors: Gregory Adamo, Philippe Amez-Droz, Dorothee Arlt, Hanan Badr, João Pedro Baptista, Martin W. Bauer, Petra Bernhardt, Bernd Blöbaum, Lisa Bolz, Nils S. Borchers, Cornelia Brantner, Jonas Brendebach, Andrea Cerase, Christoph Classen, Sarah Davies, Jennifer Davis, Philip Di Salvo, Tobias Eberwein, Mark Eisenegger, Birte Fähnrich, Nayla Fawzi, Lena Frischlich, Stefan Geiß, Florian Greiner, Valerie Hase, Uwe Hasebrink, Christiane Hauser, Brigitte Huber, Olaf Jandura, Torsten Kahlert, Anne Kaun, Guido Keel, Katharina Kleinen-von Königslöw, Ulrike Klinger, Nadine Klopfenstein Frei, Carmen Koch, Benjamin Krämer, Rebekka Kreling, Uwe Krüger, Corinna Lauer, Nathalie Le Bouëdec, Melanie Leidecker-Sandmann, Benedetto Lepori, Juliane Lischka, Katharina Lobinger, Anna Marchi, Sarah Marschlich, Tristan Mattelart, Hendrik Michael, Ilaria Moschni, Kathrin Friederike Müller, Brigitte Naderer, Peter Nagy, Minh Hao Nguyen, Liliana Oliveira, Daniel Pfurtscheller, Colin Porlezza (2), Patric Raemy, Nelson Ribeiro, Joan Ramon Rodriguez-Amat, Katharina Schlosser, Philipp Schrögel, Anne Schulz, Lisa Schwaiger, Christian Schwarzenegger, Julia Serong, Dario Siegen, Marko Siitonen, Denise Sommer, Christian Strippel, Sascha Trültzsch-Wijnen, Heidi Tworek, Florence Van Hove, Niklas Venema, Anna J. M. Wagner (2), Annie Waldherr, Tobias Weidner, Peter Weingart, Bartosz Wilczek, Jing Zeng, Lisa Zieringer, Arne Freya Zillich, and Fabian Zimmermann.

We hope you will enjoy reading this issue.

Jolanta Drzewiecka, Katharina Lobinger,
and Mike Meißner

SComS
General Section

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Parasocial relationships with morally ambiguous media characters – the role of moral foundations

Michelle Möri*, University of Fribourg, Department of Communication and Media Research DCM, Switzerland
Dominique S. Wirz, University of Amsterdam, Amsterdam School of Communication Research ASCoR, The Netherlands
Andreas Fahr, University of Fribourg, Department of Communication and Media Research DCM, Switzerland
* Corresponding author: michelle.moeri@unifr.ch

Abstract
Parasocial relationships are examined in diverse contexts and with various media characters, from news presenters to fictional movie heroes. A popular character trope in recent productions is the morally ambiguous media character (MAC). MACs disrupt the dichotomy between hero and villain, simultaneously exhibiting moral and immoral behavior. MACs attracted the attention of researchers, but little is known about parasocial relationships with them. This study examines these relationships by applying a multidimensional morality approach. The five moral domains of care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity are considered for the media character and the viewers. The role of these moral domains in parasocial relationships with morally ambiguous media characters was examined through an online survey ($N = 250$). The results show that moral behavior generally and moral behavior in care, fairness, and loyalty increased the strength of parasocial relationships, regardless of the viewer's moral foundations. The characters' behavior in authority and purity did not influence the viewers' general morality perception nor their parasocial relationships with them. The study contributes to the existing literature about MACs by considering viewers' parasocial relationships, their moral foundations, and the perceived morality in each of the five moral domains.

Keywords
parasocial relationships, moral foundations, moral intuitions, morally ambiguous media characters (MAC), affective disposition theory, online survey

1 Introduction

Some media users imagine themselves being the seventh member of *Friends,* some have romantic feelings toward Darcy from *Pride and Prejudice,* some experience life on the edge with their cinema hero James Bond, and some empathize with Leslie Knope's struggles in her political career in *Parks and Recreation*. Audience members can build relationships with media characters as if these were part of their social circle (Tukachinsky, Walter, & Saucier, 2020). Parasocial relationships (PSRs) describe different kinds of social relationships audience members develop toward media characters (Giles, 2002); like social relationships, these can range from falling in love with the protagonist of a romantic movie to supporting an avatar in a video game. Early research often focused on non-fictional characters such as news presenters or talk show hosts (e.g., Perse, 1990; Rubin, Haridakis, & Eyal, 2003; Rubin, Perse, & Powell, 1985), while nowadays PSRs are often analyzed with real people, such as influencers or celebrities, in the context of social media (e.g., Beautemps & Bresges, 2022; Kowert & Daniel, 2021; Sokolova & Kefi, 2020). In studies about viewers' parasocial engagement with fictional media characters in television, a significant number of studies analyze viewers' favorite media characters (e.g., Branch, Wilson, & Agnew, 2013; Cohen, 2004; Eyal & Te'eni-Harari, 2013; Hoffner, 1996; Lather & Moyer-Guse, 2011; Rosaen & Dibble, 2008;

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Schmid & Klimmt, 2011), often resulting in the study of classical movie heroes.

In addition to classical heroes, another character trope is popular in entertainment content (Kleemans, Eden, Daalmans, Ommen, & Weijers, 2017; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012): Walter White in *Breaking Bad,* Annalise Keating in *How to Get Away with Murder,* and Jaime Lannister in *Game of Thrones* are famous among viewers. These characters cannot be considered classical heroes because they are characterized by moral ambiguity. They use violence, manipulate others, or exceed the limits of the law, but unlike traditional villains, they are not depicted as sheer evil and are liked despite their immoral behavior (Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2013; Oliver et al., 2019). *Morally ambiguous characters* (MACs) differ from traditional heroes and villains, who would be positioned at the opposite ends of a continuous morality scale. MACs fall somewhere along the continuum between the poles. These characters either fluctuate between moral and immoral behavior (Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012) or violate morality in some domains while upholding moral standards in others (Eden, Daalmans, & Johnson, 2017; Eden, Oliver, Tamborini, Limperos, & Woolley, 2015). Unlike heroes, MACs may exhibit behavior that violates commonly held moral intuitions to overcome obstacles or succeed in challenges (Oliver et al., 2019). For example, Annalise Keating is a successful defense attorney for hardened criminals, but she pays the price for her success. To defend her reputation, she rescues guilty defendants from punishment and does not hesitate to manipulate or blackmail others to achieve her goals. Despite those kinds of moral violations, MACs differ from traditional villains or antiheroes because they possess redeeming qualities (Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2015). Annalise Keating, for example, is characterized by many positive attributes: She is a valued colleague at work; she is highly reliable and loyal to her friends; she supports the students in her classes at university; and, in general, she is a strong advocate for justice. Further, MACs can be categorized into more specific types, for example, ranging from perfect hero to perfect villain (Tamborini et al., 2018) or while considering their role in the plot, differentiating morally complex protagonists from antagonists (Frazer & Moyer-Gusé, 2023).

Morally ambiguous media characters and how viewers process and react to them have attracted the attention of researchers (Kleemans et al., 2017). For example, studies have analyzed why MACs are liked, why viewers accept their immoral behavior, and how viewers react to such behavior (e. g., Eden, Grizzard, & Lewis, 2011; Grizzard, Huang, Fitzgerald, Ahn, & Chu, 2018; Grizzard, Francemone, Fitzgerald, Huang, & Ahn, 2020; Kleemans et al., 2017; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012; Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2013; Shafer & Raney, 2012; Tamborini et al., 2018). Several constructs, such as transportation (Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012), suspense (Eden et al., 2011; Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012), and identification (Frazer & Moyer-Gusé, 2023; Raney & Janicke, 2013; Tsay & Krakowiak, 2011), have been shown to contribute to entertainment experiences with MACs. However, little is known about parasocial relationships with MACs, even though the PSR is a crucial concept in entertainment research (Dibble, Hartmann, & Rosaen, 2016; Klimmt, Hartmann, & Schramm, 2006). While suspense, transportation, or identification are relevant during media exposure (Cohen, 2001), PSRs outlast the viewing situation (Tukachinsky, 2011). The analysis of PSR provides a long-term perspective that considers factors outside the direct viewing situations. PSRs are not only crucial to viewers' enjoyment of media content (Klimmt et al., 2006), but can also affect future media consumption (Dibble et al., 2016) and have persuasive effects (e. g., Sokolova & Kefi, 2020; Tukachinsky & Sangalang, 2016). Thus, understanding the role of PSR in viewers' evaluation of MACs is essential and expands the existing research by including a concept that outlasts media exposures. Therefore, the first goal of this study is to analyze viewers' parasocial relationships with morally ambiguous media characters.

In people's everyday lives, the perception of morality can be divided following the moral foundation's theory (MFT; Haidt & Joseph, 2008) into *care*, *fairness*, *loyalty*, *authority*, and *purity*. This perspective moves away from the idea that morality can be classified on a unidimensional continuum from immoral to moral. Instead, a person's behavior can be seen as more moral or less, considering distinct types of moral concerns (Haidt & Joseph, 2008). This multidimensional approach to morality has also been applied to the perception of media figures, providing a more nuanced picture of MACs (Eden et al., 2015; Grizzard, Fitzgerald, et al., 2020; Grizzard et al., 2018; Kleemans et al., 2017). An individual's sensitivity to morality violations varies across these domains (Graham et al., 2011). With that, the individuals' liking of a MAC depends on their specific behavior in cherished domains (Eden et al., 2015; Grizzard, Fitzgerald, et al., 2020; Grizzard et al., 2018; Kleemans et al., 2017). Based on this theoretical background, media users should like characters who uphold morality in the domains viewers consider essential and dislike those who do not. For example, it can be assumed that viewers with a strong sensibility for fairness should tend to dislike Annalise Keating because of her behavior, which is often guided by her subjective perception of justice and repeatedly violates general standards of fairness. This combination of considering viewers' moral foundations and the five moral domains when analyzing a media character's behavior is barely done in existing research. Thus, the second goal of this study is to consider this multidimensional approach to morality and analyze the role of morality domains in parasocial relationships with MACs. Taking these two goals together, the study's twofold research question is:

› RQ: How does a character's behavior in different moral domains affect the intensity of parasocial relationships, and to what extent is this dependent on viewers' moral foundations?

2 Theoretical background

The affective disposition theory (ADT) may be used to explain why MACs are liked. Character liking is strongly linked to the viewers' perceptions of a media characters' morality (e. g., Grizzard, Huang, et al., 2020; Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2015; Shafer & Raney, 2012). Following the ADT, viewers enjoy media content when liked characters succeed, and disliked characters fail (Zillmann, 2006; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). To form their affective dispositions toward media characters, viewers use their moral judgments to evaluate the characters' actions (Raney & Janicke, 2013; Zillmann & Cantor, 1977). The success of morally ambiguous characters who display clearly immoral behaviors challenges ADT's predictions (Raney, 2004), as viewers positively engage with MACs despite their immoral actions. This resulted in a lot of research analyzing viewers' engagement with morally challenging characters (e. g., Eden et al., 2011; Frazer & Moyer-Gusé, 2023; Kleemans et al., 2017; Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2015; Oliver et al., 2019; Raney, 2004). These studies used and tested different approaches to why viewers can positively engage with immoral characters and underlined the importance of the relationship between morality and character liking.

While character liking is particularly relevant for entertainment processes during media use, PSRs outlast media exposure and can influence attitudes and behaviors beyond the immediate situation (Dibble et al., 2016), thereby contributing to the existing research about viewers' connections with MACs. PSRs are defined as enduring bounds between viewers and media characters going beyond media exposure and similar to social friendships (Dibble et al., 2016; Tukachinsky et al., 2020). The extension beyond the viewing situation differentiates them from parasocial interactions (PSI). PSI refer to the viewers' feeling of being in real reciprocal interaction with media characters during media exposure (Hartmann & Goldhoorn, 2011). While PSI are relevant during the viewing situation, PSRs persist and may potentially affect viewer's morality perceptions beyond media exposure. PSRs can also be differentiated from viewers' character liking or identification. Character liking describes viewers' affective disposition toward a media character (Dibble et al., 2016). PSRs go beyond mere liking, as they describe the viewers' perception to be friends with the media character, to share personal stories, or to support the media character emotionally (Tukachinsky, 2011). Identification is a more fleeting feeling of experiencing the story from the character's perspective (Cohen, 2001). In this study, we focus on viewers' PSRs with MACs because we are interested in potential influences that outlast media exposure and because extant research has demonstrated that media users do form PSRs with media characters even if they act immoral, as we will elaborate in the next paragraph.

Viewers form PSRs with a variety of media characters (Liebers & Schramm, 2019), not just with classical heroes; PSRs have been shown to develop with disliked characters (Bonus, Matthews, & Wulf, 2021; Tian & Hoffner, 2010), with villains (Brodie & Ingram, 2021), or with MACs (Oliver et al., 2019). PSRs with disliked characters might be best understood as a form of love-hate relationships rather than friendships. For example, Tian and Hoffner (2010) showed that viewers also form parasocial relationships with disliked characters from a drama show. These PSRs were weaker than the ones viewers formed with neutral or liked characters (Tian & Hoffner, 2010). Another study found the same pattern and additionally showed that these relationships become increasingly polarized over time, depending on the new information viewers get about the characters (Tamborini, Weber, Eden, Bowman, & Grizzard, 2010). An important influence on these PSRs stems from viewers' responses to the moral or immoral behavior of the characters (Eden et al., 2011; Kleemans et al., 2017). A study showed that PSRs with villains and heroes depend on the morality of their behavior. For both character types, immoral behavior weakened viewers' PSRs with them (Bonus et al., 2021). Thus, parasocial relationships can evolve with positively and negatively portrayed characters, but the morality of a character's behavior influences the intensity of the relationship. This relationship was already analyzed in several contexts and with different types of media characters, and shall be re-analyzed with MACs in this study. Based on this literature, we assume that this positive relationship between moral behavior and PSRs is also true for morally ambiguous media characters:

› H1: The more moral the general behavior of a morally ambiguous media character is perceived to be, the stronger viewers' parasocial relationships with the media character will be.[1]

The moral foundation's theory (Haidt & Joseph, 2008), which conceptualizes morality along the domains care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity, has been applied to the perception of media figures. For example, in the model of intuitive morality and exemplars (MIME), the five moral domains are integrated to analyze the connection between media and morality (Tamborini, 2013). These domains have also been used to explain viewers' degree of character liking (e. g., Eden et al., 2015, 2017; Grizzard et al., 2017; Kleemans et al., 2017). Instead of categorizing characters as simply "good" or "bad," researchers have used the validated character moral foundations questionnaire (CMFQ: Eden et al., 2015; CMFQ-X: Grizzard et al., 2020) to examine the morality perception of media characters regarding the five moral domains (Grizzard, Fitzgerald, et al., 2020). For example, Eden et al. (2015, p. 201) showed that heroes are evaluated as being "more moral than villains across all five domains." Characters who violate morality standards in authority and purity may however still are perceived as heroes, while media characters who violate standards in care and loyalty are perceived as villains (Eden et al., 2015).

These results demonstrate that moral ambiguity can affect perceptions of media characters differently, depending on the moral dimensions that are upheld or violated by the media character. We include perceptions of the media characters' behavior regarding the five morality domains in hypothesis 2. Thereby, we extend the findings of Eden et al. (2015) from viewers' perceptions of media characters to PSRs. We assume that some morality domains have a stronger impact on the general perceived morality of a character than others, and that it is finally the general perceived morality that determines the intensity of PSR. Thus, we postulate that the general morality evaluation of a character mediates the relationship between the char-

1 In the preregistration, this hypothesis was reversed (i.e., the more moral the violations, the less intense the PSR); it was adjusted to facilitate the interpretation of the coefficients in the results section as higher values now mean more moral.

acters' morality in specific domains and PSR. Based on Eden et al. (2015), care and loyalty are supposed to have a strong impact on both PSR and general perceived morality. The characters' morality in these two domains is supposed to positively influence the viewers' general morality perception, which, in turn, increases viewers' PSR. For authority, purity, and fairness, we expect a lower impact on general morality and PSR, as immoral behavior in these domains was not punished by viewers in Eden et al.'s study (2015). We assume that the general morality positively influences PSR, but that the characters' behavior in authority, purity, and fairness does not influence their general morality nor directly the viewers' PSR with them.

Overall, we assume that the effect of the characters' perceived morality in each domain on PSR is mediated through the general morality evaluation, which is affected by the character's evaluation regarding care and loyalty but not regarding authority, purity, and fairness. Or, in other words, we postulate that a character's moral behavior regarding care and loyalty affects PSR because it affects the overall morality evaluation, while the character's behavior regarding the other domains is not relevant for general perceived morality and thus does not affect PSR.

› H2: The influence of the characters' morality in each domain on the strength of parasocial relationships is mediated through the general perceived morality for a) care and b) loyalty, while c) authority, d) purity, and e) fairness do not influence PSR nor general morality.[2]

Besides the characters' moral behavior in the five moral domains, also the viewers' moral foundations in each domain should be considered when analyzing viewers' relationships with media characters. Existing research about media characters already included the multidimensional approach to morality by applying the five moral domains to media characters (e.g., Eden et al., 2015; Grizzard, Fitzgerald, et al., 2020). By including the viewers' moral foundations (Haidt & Joseph, 2008), the role of morality in relationships between viewers and media characters can be analyzed more nuanced. For example, a study by Bonus et al. (2021) showed that other factors besides perceived morality, morality expectations, and the media character's status (hero vs. villain) must influence viewers' parasocial relationships. They examined the impact of morality and the expectation of moral violation on PSRs with heroes and villains in *Star Wars*. While viewers had stronger PSRs with each hero than with each villain, different patterns emerged after watching the new movie. Immoral and moral behavior and positive and negative moral expectancy violations strengthened but also weakened PSRs with some media characters, and the patterns were not consistent for heroes or villains. Bonus et al. (2021) concluded that, probably, not all viewers perceive the characters the same way; a character can be a hero to one person but an antihero to another. The authors assumed that factors on an individual level could influence these evaluations (Bonus et al., 2021). Therefore, we strive to include the five morality domains from the viewer's perspective with the moral foundations. Following the moral foundation's theory (MFT), higher scores on a dimension (e.g., authority) indicate a sensitivity toward this specific domain. Based on their moral foundations, viewers may react differently to the immoral behavior of a media character. For example, a viewer with high sensitivity for purity would evaluate a purity violation like drug use as worse than another viewer with low sensitivity for purity (Grizzard, Fitzgerald, et al., 2020). We assume that:

› H3: The more important a morality domain is for a viewer – a) care, b) fairness, c) loyalty, d) authority, e) purity – the stronger his / her parasocial relationship with media characters he / she perceives as moral in the same domain.

3 Method

To answer the research question and test the hypotheses, an online survey was conducted

2 This hypothesis was adapted during the review-process. The analysis of the original hypothesis can be found on OSF: https://osf.io/395tb/

with 250 participants. Before, a pretest was used to determine the morally ambiguous media characters for the main study. The following subchapters present the study's design, the pretest, the measures, and the final sample.

3.1 Research design and procedure

An online survey was conducted with participants from the research panel *Sosci Panel.* In the online survey, participants' moral foundations were measured first. Then, participants were confronted with a list of eight MACs from several recent television series. These characters were selected based on a pretest (see section 3.2). All eight characters were considered morally ambiguous because they conducted both moral and immoral actions during the narrative. The participants were asked to indicate all the characters they knew from this list; they were then randomly assigned one of these chosen characters. This procedure allowed us to capture different intensities of PSR. If participants could directly choose their favorite character from the list, the selection would be strongly biased toward strong PSRs. As the goal was to analyze the influence of morality on PSR, we strived to have a high variance of PSRs in our sample. Participants were presented with a short description of the character, illustrating an equal number of moral and immoral actions to emphasize the character's moral ambiguity. Participants then answered questions about their PSR with the character, the character's perceived morality in general, and the five morality dimensions. The final part of the questionnaire collected sociodemographic characteristics.

3.2 Pretest

To choose fictional media characters perceived as morally ambiguous, a pretest was administered in June 2021 (see OSF: https://osf.io/395tb/). Using platforms and blogs (e.g., Coriaty, 2016; Maidy, 2018), a preselection of possible MACs was made with the search terms "morally ambiguous character," "moral ambivalence," and "moral ambiguity." To ensure that participants were familiar with the characters in our study, the search results were compared with "top" lists (e.g., Netflix's most-watched shows), and only characters from recently successful productions were included. This preselection resulted in a list of 27 fictional media characters. In the pretest, participants could select up to five media characters from the list. For each selected media character, character liking and perceived morality in general (Tamborini et al., 2013; Weber, Tamborini, Lee, & Stipp, 2008) according to the five morality dimensions (short CMFQ-X: Eden et al., 2015; Grizzard et al., 2020) were asked. After these ratings, a description of the media character was presented, and participants were asked to indicate how accurate they found this description. The descriptions were used to activate the moral ambiguity of characters in participants' memory in the main study. The evaluation in the pretest helped assess their quality and identify descriptions needing an adaption before the main data collection.

A total of 100 people participated in the pretest; six participants were unfamiliar with any media characters on the list and were not included in the analysis. The other 94 participants ($M_{age}=26.1$, $SD_{age}=4.92$; 79% female, 50% students) evaluated between one ($n=7$) and five ($n=46$) media characters and made a total of 365 evaluations.

Several criteria drove the choice of media characters for the main study, as follows. 1) Number of evaluations: Only characters that at least ten participants had evaluated were chosen to ensure that the final character sample comprised popular characters likely to be known by participants. 2) Distribution of perceived morality: Since this study is interested in investigating PSR with MACs, only characters at the center of the general morality continuum were included. For the moral domains, they could show very (im) moral behavior in certain domains, as this is exactly what an MAC could be. Overall, neither very moral nor very immoral, but in certain domains very immoral, and in others, very moral. 3) We checked for participants' character liking and did not have to exclude any characters due to very low character liking (all > 3.00). 4) Gender and television show: All characters in the final sample were from different shows to provide diversity. The sample was balanced between male and female characters. 5) Genres: Since the criteria above applied to a larger sample of male than female characters, the final selection of male characters was based on the genre of the show according to the IMDb classification; characters from different genres were chosen to ensure diversity.

Those five steps resulted in a selection of eight media characters for the main study: Jaime Lannister (*Game of Thrones*), Sherlock Holmes (*Sherlock* [BBC]), Lucifer Morningstar (*Lucifer*), Mike Ross (*Suits*), Blair Waldorf (*Gossip Girl*), Annalise Keating (*How to Get Away with Murder*), Piper Chapman (*Orange Is the New Black*), and Claire Underwood (*House of Cards*). The ratings for the character description we provided in the pretest were checked for these eight characters. The two less suitable descriptions were those of Jaime Lannister and Piper Chapman. Both were slightly below five on a seven-point Likert-type scale rating (Jaime Lannister: $M = 4.96$, $SD = 1.61$, $n = 23$; Piper Chapman: $M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.32$, $n = 9$),[3] indicating that the description did only somewhat accurately represent the media character. Therefore, these two descriptions were revised (but not retested) before including them in the main survey.

3.3 Measures

Unless otherwise noted, all items were measured using a five-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (e.g., "not applicable at all" or "do not agree at all") to 5 (e.g., "totally applicable" or "fully agree"). After data-cleansing, the number of participants assigned to each character was almost equal: Jaime Lannister (32), Sherlock Holmes (33), Lucifer Morningstar (30), Mike Ross (33), Blair Waldorf (31), Annalise Keating (28), Piper Chapman (31), Claire Underwood (32).

3.3.1 Participants' moral foundations

The Moral Foundations Questionnaire assessed the participants' moral foundations, comprising the five moral domains of care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity (Graham et al., 2011, 2013). This multidimensional approach to morality measured to what extent people vary in how they endorse, value, and apply these five moral dimensions (Graham et al., 2011). High scores represent more-pronounced moral beliefs regarding the specific domain. Some items had a strongly skewed distribution, and adjustments had to be made to achieve sufficient Cronbach's alpha values. These low reliabilities for the MFT scale were an issue in other research (e.g., Davies, Sibley, & Liu, 2014; Iurino & Saucier, 2020) and newer studies (e.g., Harper & Rhodes, 2021; Zakharin & Bates, 2021) show other factor solutions for the MFT than the six-factor solution proposed by Graham et al. (2011, 2013) and used in this study. This could explain the low reliabilities. As described in the preregistration, we opted for a single-item measure with a close-to-normal distribution and a good theoretical fit to the construct in cases where no sufficient Cronbach's Alpha could be obtained for an index. Originally, each dimension was measured with six items: authority: ($M = 2.71$, $SD = 0.69$, $\alpha = .72$) and purity ($M = 2.47$, $SD = 0.81$, $\alpha = .73$). For the domain of care, two items had to be dropped to achieve acceptable scale reliability (care: $M = 4.31$, $SD = 0.62$, $\alpha = .67$).[4] For fairness, Cronbach's alpha was .58, and no satisfactory value could be achieved by dropping an item. "Justice is the most important requirement for a society" was chosen as a single item ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.70$). For loyalty, Cronbach's alpha was .52, and no satisfactory value could be achieved by dropping an item. "People should be loyal to their family members, even when they have done something wrong" was chosen as a single item ($M = 2.45$, $SD = 1.18$).

Other studies showed that single-item measures can result in valid measurements (Allen, Iliescu, & Greiff, 2022; R. A. Matthews, Pineault, & Hong, 2022). However, as we intended to measure the domains with several items, and items were dropped based on the

3 Piper Chapman was rated by ten participants (see point 1), but one of them only rated character liking and the morality question, not the description's appropriateness. Thus, $n = 9$ only applies for the rating of the character's description. For the other characteristics of Piper $n = 10$.

4 With the six original items of this subdimension, Cronbach's alpha value was .62. When dropping two items, "One of the worst things a person could do is hurt a defenseless animal" and "It can never be right to kill a human being," a value of .67 could be achieved and was used for further calculations.

low internal consistency of the dimensions, we ran several robustness analyses to evaluate the generalizability of our analyses using the single items (see section 4).

3.3.2 General perceived morality

The general perceived morality of the MACs' actions was assessed using two items from previous research about MACs (Tamborini et al., 2013; Weber et al., 2008). The two items (e.g., "The character's overall behavior was moral") measured the extent to which each character's behavior was considered moral or immoral (M = 2.84, SD = 0.85, Spearman-Brown = .69).

3.3.3 Characters' moral domains

In addition to generally perceived morality, the perception of each character's morality regarding the five moral domains was measured using the Character Moral Foundations Questionnaire (CMFQ-X: Grizzard et al., 2020). The questionnaire is based on the Moral Foundation Questionnaire (see below) and comprises the same five moral domains as the scale for the viewers: care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity. The items were recoded so that high scores represent greater morality in the specific domain.

Four of the domains showed satisfactory scale reliabilities: Care (M = 2.80, SD = 1.06, α = .77), fairness (M = 2.73, SD = 1.01, α = .81), loyalty (M = 3.23, SD = 0.91, α = .73), and authority (M = 2.11, SD = 0.78, α = .67). For purity, the Cronbach's alpha was .55, and a single item was chosen "Character seems like s/he would do something disgusting" (M = 3.22, SD = 1.31). That the measurement of purity can be problematic was shown in other research about the moral domains (Gray, DiMaggio, Schein, & Kachanoff, 2023).

3.3.4 Parasocial relationships

Parasocial relationships (M = 2.61, SD = 0.89, α = .92) were examined using Tukachinsky's (2011) parasocial friendship scale. The two dimensions of parasocial friendship support (e.g., "If the character were a real person, I would be able to count on the character in times of need") and communication (e.g., "If the character were a real person, I could have disclosed many things about myself to the character") comprise 13 items (Tukachinsky, 2011). The PSF scale covers relational aspects of parasocial processing (Dibble et al., 2016), distinguishing PSR from PSI.

3.3.5 Character liking

The viewer's general liking of the MAC (M = 2.97, SD = 0.91, α = .81) was measured with four items. The items (e.g., "I like the character") are based on previous research on the liking of morally ambiguous media characters (Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2013; Tamborini et al., 2018; Tsay & Krakowiak, 2011).

3.4 Participants

Participants were recruited through a non-commercial research panel (SoSci Panel: https://www.soscipanel.de/) in February 2022. The software G*Power was used to conduct a power analysis before data collection. Our goal was to obtain 1-β = .80 power to detect a small effect size of f^2 = .05 at the standard .05 alpha error probability for an interaction effect (three predictors, F-tests, multiple linear regression: fixed model, R^2 deviation from zero). We attempted to recruit 250 participants, assuming that not all would complete the survey.

In total, 271 participants finished the survey, with 21 excluded from the final analysis. Of these 21 participants, 16 were excluded due to a failed attention check, three because of too many missing values (> 40 %), and 2 resulted from taking too long to complete the survey (more than two standard deviations from the mean). This resulted in a final sample of 250 participants; 61 % were female, 37 % male, and 2 % non-binary. The participants' age ranged from 18 to 82 years old (M = 40.92, SD = 14.41), and most were employed (50 %), followed by 18 % who were students, 8 % who were self-employed, and 8 % who were retired.

4 Results

In the first step, Pearson zero-order correlations were calculated for the primary constructs (Table 1). The general perceived morality of the media characters and the strength of PSRs are positively correlated with four morality domains, namely care, loyalty, puri-

Table 1: Pearson zero-order correlations for the main constructs

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1 PSR											
2 General Morality	.58***										
3 Participant: Care	–.01	–.04									
4 Participant: Loyalty	.12	.03	.09								
5 Participant: Authority	.09	–.01	.14*	.31***							
6 Participant: Purity	.04	–.02	.28***	.42***	.60***						
7 Participant: Fairness	.06	–.01	.25***	–.09	.02	.05					
8 Character: Care	.40***	.44***	.01	.07	.11	.07	.05				
9 Character: Loyalty	.55***	.51***	–.03	–.01	.01	.00	.04	.41***			
10 Character: Authority	.11	.08	–.23***	.05	.20**	.06	–.05	.24***	.09		
11 Character: Purity	.17**	.23***	–.18**	.09	.14*	.08	–.04	.42***	.10	.56***	
12 Character: Fairness	.59***	.60***	–.03	–.04	–.06	–.06	.06	.52***	.51***	.06	.19**

Note: $n=250$; Parasocial relationships: 1 = low level of PSR, 5 = high level of PSR. All morality variables: 1 = very immoral behavior, 5 = very moral behavior. *p < .05, **p < .01, ***p < .001.

ty, and fairness, but not with authority. Participants' moral foundations and perceptions of the character's behavior in the same moral domain show no correlation except for authority. The viewers' general evaluation of a character's behavior in a moral domain was not related to their moral foundation for care, loyalty, purity, and fairness. Viewers with a stronger value for authority were related to a more positive evaluation of the media character's behavior regarding authority.

Before testing the hypotheses and ensuring the reported patterns were consistent across media characters, we conducted a multilevel analysis with the character as a grouping variable. A null model was calculated to assess the intraclass correlation (ICC), showing how the variance is distributed between the individual and the character level. As the value of the ICC is .118, about 12 % of the variance in PSRs can be attributed to the character. The variation at the individual level was of interest, and we proceeded with regression analyses for the pooled data.

4.1 Main analysis

To test the first hypothesis, a regression was run with the general perceived morality of a character as the independent and viewers' parasocial relationships as the dependent variable. For the second hypothesis, five mediation models were calculated using the PROCESS macro for R (Hayes, 2017). In each model, one of the media characters' five moral domains was used as the independent variable: care (model 1a), loyalty (model 1b), authority (model 1c), purity (model 1d), and fairness (model 1e). In all models, general morality was the mediator, and parasocial relationships were the dependent variable. To test the third hypothesis, five moderation models were calculated with the viewer's moral foundation in the domains of a) care, b) group loyalty, c) authority, d) purity, and e) fairness as the predictors; PSR as the dependent variable; and the perceived morality of the media character in the domains of a) care, b) group loyalty, c) authority, d) purity, and e) fairness as the moderators. For the moderation analysis, all variables were mean-centered. For the models with single-item measures, additional robustness checks were run to ensure the generalizability of the results.

The first hypothesis, assuming a positive effect of the general perceived morality of the media character on viewers' PSRs, was supported. The more viewers perceived the media character's behavior as moral, the stronger their PSR was with that character ($B = 0.60$, $SE = 0.05$, $t = 11.07$, $p < .001$, $F(1,248) = 122.50$). The second hypothesis assumed a mediation effect of general morality between the moral domains of a) care and b) loyalty on PSR, but not for c) authority, d) purity, and e) fairness. The results (Table 2) show that characters whom viewers perceived to behave morally in care and loyalty were also considered more moral in general, and viewers formed stronger parasocial relationships with them. Their morality in care and loyalty

Table 2: Influence of the media character's morality in each domain on parasocial relationships, mediated through the general morality of the media character

	M: general morality[a]			*DV: parasocial relationships*[b]		
	B	*SE B*	*p*	*B*	*SE B*	*p*
Model 1a						
characters' care	0.35	0.05	<.001	0.16	0.05	.001
general morality				0.51	0.06	<.001
Model 1b						
characters' loyalty	0.48	0.05	<.001	0.34	0.06	<.001
general morality				0.41	0.06	<.001
Model 1c						
characters' authority	0.09	0.07	.186	0.07	0.06	.261
general morality				0.59	0.05	<.001
Model 1d						
characters' purity	0.08	0.04	.044	0.04	0.04	.236
general morality				0.59	0.05	<.001
Model 1e						
characters' fairness	0.51	0.04	<.001	0.33	0.05	<.001
general morality				0.36	0.06	<.001

Notes: M = moderator, DV = dependent variable. Total indirect effects are only indicated when they are significant. 5000 bootstrapping. n = 250. Model 1a: [a]: R^2 = .19, p < .001, F(1, 248) = 58.13. [b]: R^2 = .36, p < .001, F(2, 247) = 68.96. Indirect effect: B = 0.18. Model 1b: a: R^2 = .26, p < .001, F(1, 248) = 89.38. b: R^2 = .42, p < .001, F(2, 247) = 88.41. Indirect effect: B = 0.20. Model 1c: a: R^2 = .01, p < .186, F(1, 248) = 1.76. b: R^2 = .33, p < .001, F(2, 247) = 61.95. Model 1d: a: R^2 = .02, p < .044, F(1, 248) = 4.10. b: R^2 = .33, p < .001, F(2, 247) = 62.06. Model 1e: a: R^2 = .36, p < .001, F(1, 248) = 139.93. b: R^2 = .42, p < .001, F(2, 247) = 90.49. Indirect effect: B = 0.18.

increased viewers' PSRs directly and through an increased general morality (H2a/b confirmed). The same pattern was found for the characters' fairness, leading to the rejection of H2e. The characters' moral behavior with regard to authority did not influence viewers' general morality perception of them, nor did this behavior influence their PSRs with these characters (H2c confirmed). For purity, the characters' behavior in purity had a weak but positive effect on viewers' general morality perception. Viewers evaluated characters' behaving morally pure as more moral in general. However, this moral behavior in purity did not increase viewers' PSRs directly nor through an increased general morality perception (H2d partially confirmed).

The robustness checks (see supplementary material, Table 5) showed that for the domain of purity, the results are not robust and need to be interpreted with caution. The direct effect of a character's purity on general morality was only found for the items "do something disgusting" and "violate standards of purity and decency." For the purity construct overall, and for two other items ("live a healthy lifestyle" and "be a smoker"), there was no direct effect on general morality.

The third hypothesis assumed a moderation effect between the viewer's moral foundations and the character's perceived morality in a domain on the strength of PSRs. It was assumed that viewers with a stronger sensibility for a morality domain should have stronger PSRs with media characters they perceived as moral in the same domain. For all morality domains, no interaction effects on PSRs were found between viewers' and characters' morality (Table 3; hypothesis 3 is rejected). The strength of PSRs is not dependent on the viewer's moral foundations in combination with the behavior of the media character in the same dimension. The direct effect of the perceived media character's moral behavior on PSRSs was significant for care, purity, loyalty, and fairness but not for authority. In particular, the moral conduct of the media character regarding care, loyalty, and fairness is positively related to PSRs. This underscores the importance of characters' moral behaviors for viewers to engage in PSRs, independent of viewers' moral foundations. Again, moral behavior regarding authority does not seem essential for PSRs with these media characters.

Table 3: Influence of the participants' moral foundations on parasocial relationships, moderated by the media characters' behavior five moral domains

	B	*SE B*	*t*	*p*	*95% CI*
Model 2a					
Viewers' Care	–0.03	0.08	–0.37	.713	[–0.200, 0.135]
Characters' Care	0.34	0.05	6.89	<.001	[0.242, 0.436]
Care Viewers * Characters	–0.05	0.08	–0.67	.503	[–0.198, 0.097]
Model 2b					
Viewers' Loyalty	0.10	0.04	2.47	.014	[0.020, 0.175]
Characters' Loyalty	0.53	0.05	10.40	<.001	[0.433, 0.636]
Loyalty Viewers * Characters	0.05	0.04	1.32	.189	[–0.027, 0.237]
Model 2c					
Viewers' Authority	0.08	0.08	0.98	.326	[–0.082, 0.247]
Characters' Authority	0.10	0.07	1.37	.171	[–0.044, 0.244]
Authority Viewers * Characters	0.09	0.10	0.91	.365	[–0.102, 0.277]
Model 2d					
Viewers' Purity	0.02	0.07	0.35	.727	[–0.112, 0.161]
Characters' Purity	0.13	0.05	2.69	.008	[0.034, 0.219]
Purity Viewers * Characters	0.05	0.05	0.96	.336	[–0.054, 0.156]
Model 2e					
Viewers' Fairness	–0.00	0.07	–0.03	.976	[–0.134, 0.129]
Characters' Fairness	0.51	0.05	11.22	<.001	[0.419, 0.597]
Fairness Viewers * Characters	0.12	0.07	1.70	.090	[–0.018, 0.249]

Notes: Model 2a: $R^2 = .16$ ($p < .001$). Model 2b: $R^2 = .32$ ($p < .001$). Model 2c: $R^2 = .02$ ($p = .175$). Model 2d: $R^2 = .03$ ($p = .042$). Model 2e: $R^2 = .35$ ($p < .001$). All variables are mean-centered. $n = 250$.

The robustness checks show that the results are stable for the care domain, using the chosen four-item index with good reliability, the six-item index despite bad reliabilities, and all items as single-item measures (see supplementary material, Tables 6 and 7). Also, for fairness, using the index shows the same results despite low reliability and all items as single-item measures (see supplementary material, Tables 6 and 8). For the domain of loyalty, the results are not robust and depend on the chosen item, so they need to be interpreted with caution and cannot be used to generalize for the loyalty domain overall (see supplementary material, Tables 6 and 9).

4.2 Exploratory analysis

The viewers' affective disposition toward a media character is an important mechanism in explaining the processing of MACs (Eden et al., 2011; Raney, 2004; Raney & Janicke, 2013). Character liking is strongly related to the viewer's morality perception of a media character; characters who uphold moral standards are generally liked more, but once viewers have started to like a character, they are also more likely to excuse moral violations (Grizzard, Huang, et al., 2020; Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2015; Shafer & Raney, 2012). One could thus argue that the relationship between moral evaluations of the characters' behavior and PSR is just a reflection of character liking. Even though viewers can form PSRs with disliked characters (Bonus et al., 2021; Tian & Hoffner, 2010), the parasocial friendship scale used in this study focuses on positive PSR. Therefore, a hierarchical regression was run to control if the morality of a character's behavior still influences PSR when controlling for the viewers' mere liking of the media character. Results show that character liking significantly contributes to PSR ($\beta = .76$, $p < .001$, $F(1, 235) = 329.21$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .58$). After introducing the gener-

Table 4: Comparison of quadratic vs. linear regression fit for the characters' perceived morality on parasocial relationships

Outcome: PSR	*B (SE)*	*t*	*p*	F^a	R^2	*p*
General morality						
linear model	0.60(.05)	11.07	<.001	122.5	.33	<.001
quadratic model	–0.15	–3.00	.003	67.72	.35	0.001
Character: care						
linear model	0.34(.05)	6.88	<.001	47.32	.16	<.001
quadratic model	–0.07(.04)	–1.63	.104	25.15	.16	<.001
Character: loyalty						
linear model	0.09(.04)	2.14	.034	4.57	.01	.036
quadratic model	–0.05(.03)	–1.41	.159	3.29	.02	.039
Character: authority						
linear model	0.12(.07)	1.69	.093	2.84	.01	.093
quadratic model	0.05(.08)	0.69	.493	1.66	.01	.19
Character: purity						
linear model	0.13(.05)	2.70	.007	7.29	.02	.007
quadratic model	–0.06(.04)	–1.60	.111	4.94	.03	.008
Character: fairness						
linear model	0.52(.05)	11.45	<.001	131.2	.34	<.001
quadratic model	–0.03(.04)	–0.68	.498	65.68	.34	<.001

Notes: $N=250$. a df for linear models = 248, for quadratic models = 247.

al morality of a character, the change in R^2 is significant ($p<.001$); thus, moral evaluations contribute to PSR beyond the effect of mere character liking. In other words, character liking ($\beta=.64$, $p<.001$) and the character's morality ($\beta=.23$, $p<.001$) both significantly contribute to PSR ($F(1,234)=192.22$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.62$). This underlines the importance of considering the character's morality when analyzing PSR with MACs, and that considering PSRs supplement the findings regarding liking and MACs.

It can be argued that it is not the perceived morality of the characters that lead to a PSR but rather the perceived moral ambiguity. To test this, we ran exploratory analyses to analyze the role of the perceived moral ambiguity of media characters' behaviors. Moral ambiguity is thereby conceptualized in two ways. First, ambiguity can mean that a character's behavior is perceived as neither immoral nor moral (e.g., Krakowiak & Oliver, 2012). We ran quadratic regressions to examine whether viewers have stronger PSRs with characters perceived as ambiguous in this sense. We posited that morality evaluations indicate moral ambiguity around the mean of the scale and that this ambiguity would strengthen or weaken PSRs. In this case, quadratic regressions should better fit the data than linear models. Our data did not support this assumption, demonstrating that moral ambiguity – in the sense that the media character is assessed as neither very moral nor very immoral – does not influence PSR (Table 4). The characters for this study were selected based on their location on the immoral–moral continuum in the pretest. There is a lack of very immoral or very moral characters to test this assumption.

Moral ambiguity could be indicated by exhibiting behavior that is immoral in one domain but moral in another domain (e.g., Eden et al., 2015, 2017). To analyze this kind of ambiguity, we built a mean index for the perceived moral behavior of the MACs across the five domains ($M=2.63$, $SD=0.67$). To account for the variance in the perception of morality across all domains, we calculated a new variable with the standard deviation from this mean and used this standard deviation as a predictor. Lower values indicate morally consistent behavior regardless of the level of morality. Higher values stand for differences in perceived morality across the five domains and, thus, moral ambiguity ($M=0.87$, $SD=0.36$). A linear regression shows a significant effect of this kind of moral ambiguity ($B = 0.81$, $SE\ B = 0.15$, $p < .001$) on PSR ($F(1, 248) = 30.76$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .11$). The more ambiguous a viewer perceives a MAC to be, the stronger is the PSR with that character. When including morality and moral ambiguity in the same model as predictors for PSR ($F(1, 247) = 66.62$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .35$), the character's morality is a stronger predictor ($B = 0.54$, $SE\ B = 0.06$, $p < .001$) than the ambiguity ($B = 0.37$, $SE\ B = 0.13$, $p = .007$). Regarding PSRs, the perceived morality of a character's behavior is more important than the perceived ambiguity.

5 Discussion and conclusion

Parasocial relationships with media characters are a core element in media use and media enjoyment (Tukachinsky & Stever, 2019). Besides often analyzed classical movie heroes, morally ambiguous characters are another prevalent character trope in entertainment productions and entertainment research (Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2015). While there is much research about MACs, for example, about viewers' identification with these characters or their liking, there is a lack of studies investigating viewers' more enduring bonds with MACs in the form of PSRs. The present study extends the literature by investigating how morally ambiguous behavior relates to the strength of viewers' parasocial relationships.

The results demonstrate that viewers who evaluate the media character as more morally have stronger PSRs with them (H1). While other studies have already shown this effect for character tropes like heroes or villains (Bonus et al., 2021; Tian & Hoffner, 2010), we demonstrate that this is also the case for MACs, who have a special role when it comes to moral behavior. As a lot of research about morality and media characters refers to the ADT, existing research focused on viewers' liking of MACs or their identification with them (e.g., Frazer & Moyer-Gusé, 2023; Raney & Janicke, 2013; Tsay & Krakowiak, 2011). This study expands the existing literature by examining viewers' PSRs as long-term connections with MACs, as PSRs are not limited to exposure and can develop beyond the mediated contact between viewer and media character (Dibble et al., 2016). In line with ADT (Zillmann & Cantor, 1977), our findings suggest that viewers' moral judgments of the media character's behavior do influence not only short-term affective dispositions during media use but also long-term dispositions in the form of PSRs. This underlines the importance of morality for viewers' processing of the mediated encounter with MACs beyond media exposure. More research is needed to analyze how other factors, such as the character's role in the story (e.g., protagonist vs. antagonist) or the development of (im)moral actions over time, influence PSRs with MACs.

In our study, perceived morality predicts viewers' PSRs with MACs better than their perceived ambiguity. Further, perceived morality is positively related to PSR even when controlling for character liking. Moral evaluations, thus, contribute to PSR beyond their effect on mere character liking. To better understand this influence, future studies would need to consider recent developments in this research area. For example, the role of moral disengagement in viewers' relationships toward MACs (e.g., Frazer & Moyer-Gusé, 2023; Krakowiak & Tsay-Vogel, 2013), the interdependence of characters (e.g., Grizzard, Francemone, et al., 2020), or viewers' moral expectancy toward MACs (e.g., N. L. Matthews & Bonus, 2023).

Considering the characters' moral behavior in different moral domains, divergent patterns emerge for the five moral domains (H2). The characters' behavior with respect to care, loyalty, and fairness positively influences viewers' general perception of them being moral and their parasocial relationships with that character. If a character behaved morally with respect to authorities, this did not influence viewers' general morality perception nor their PSR with this character. This expands the assumptions of Eden et al. (2015), who showed that viewers perceive characters violating authority and purity differently than characters violating care or loyalty. Our study shows that care, loyalty, and fairness are important for viewers' overall assessment of a character's morality and also for their parasocial relationships with this character.

For the characters' behavior in purity and the effect of this behavior on viewers' general perception of their morality, inconsistent results were found. In all models, the characters' purity did not influence viewers' PSRs. In the main analysis with the one-item measurement, only one aspect of the characters' purity was considered, and the concept could not be represented in its full breadth. It is possible that items like "live a healthy lifestyle" or "be a smoker" are not ideal when applied to MACs. Probably viewers expect MACs to act somehow impure without punishing them for their impure behavior or by accepting this as normal for this character trope. This would need to be addressed in future studies analyzing the moral domain of purity for MACs, for example, by including viewers' moral expectancies toward MACs or by testing other items covering a media character's moral behavior in purity.

This study analyzed the five moral domains for viewers and media characters. Among the five dimensions of morality, authority stands out. We find that respecting authority does not contribute to PSRs. Standing up against dominance hierarchies is accepted behavior, and a character's submission to authority can negatively affect PSRs. Our results are consistent with the findings of Eden et al. (2015). They found that characters violating morality standards in authority were still perceived as heroes, despite their immoral behavior. This aligns with typical movie heroes who often disobey authorities, for example, to avoid harming others or taking a stand against injustice. Immoral behavior about authority is accepted and can strengthen PSRs with these media characters (Bonus et al., 2021).

Viewers' moral foundations (Haidt & Joseph, 2008), i. e., the extent to which they value care, fairness, loyalty, authority, and purity, do not influence the association between the perceived moral behavior of a media character and a viewer's PSR with the character. The assumption that viewers who value a particular morality domain have stronger PSRs with media characters they perceive to be moral in the same domain was not confirmed (H3). We did not find evidence that violating morality standards in a domain important to a viewer negatively affects the PSR. When individuals have a strong sensibility for a moral domain, there was no negative effect of a MAC's immoral behavior on the individuals' parasocial relationship with them. A possible explanation could be that other factors not controlled for in this study can influence the relationship between perceived morality in the different domains and the PSR. This might be, for example, the importance of a morality domain in the context of the particular show. In a reality-based jurisdiction drama, the moral foundation of fairness might be considered far more critical than in a humorous fiction production with a shallow theme, leading to a different evaluation of a character's behavior. Thus, this context should be considered in future studies.

The selective moral disengagement theory (Bandura, 2016) could also explain the lack of influence of viewers' moral foundations on PSRs. This theory postulates that individuals internalize personal standards of morality. Through different mechanisms, they morally disengage and justify immoral behaviors normally standing against their personal standards (Bandura, 2016). Applied to MACs, this would mean that viewers adapt their usual moral sensibilities assessed with the MFT when disengagement cues are available. For example, Raney (2004) suggested that individuals might overcome their moral sensitivities for typical hero protagonists, as viewers want to enjoy the plot and are motivated to like the character; thus, they might be more generous when the hero shows behavior that would usually violate their moral standards. Some researchers have already applied moral engagement theory to MACs (e. g., Frazer & Moyer-Gusé, 2023; Shafer & Raney, 2012; Tsay & Krakowiak, 2011), and future studies should analyze the role of viewers' PSRs in this process.

Overall, the analyses showed that besides the general morality, it is worth analyzing morality more nuanced, as done in this study with the use of the five domains for viewers and media characters. The different results for the five domains emphasize that a character's immoral behavior can have diverse effects, dependent on the moral domain that was violated. This aligns with the findings of Kleemans et al. (2017). They showed that violations of certain morality dimensions are less predictive for viewers' PSRs than the global moral evaluation. As with PSRs, we analyzed a concept that has relevance beyond the viewing situation; these differences were important. It might be that processes like increasing moral deliberation or shifting moral priorities explain viewers' PSRs with MACs (Kleemans et al., 2017). To do so, future studies should analyze these processes during media exposure and apply long-term measures, so that possible shifts and their impact on PSRs can be examined.

When interpreting the results, it is important to note that we evaluated the *perceived* morality of a media character from the viewer's point of view and not a neutrally assessed morality. It could be argued that a character's violation of morality in a domain of importance to the viewer has an impact on the perceived morality of the character rather than on the strength of the parasocial relationship the viewer develops with that character. The correlation analyses showed no negative correlation between viewers' moral foundations and their perceptions of MACs' behaviors in the same moral domain, thereby contradicting this hypothesis. Still, our assessment is the *subjective* perception of the viewers. Future studies could also include a more neutral assessment of the media character's behavior in the five morality domains to overcome this subjective influence.

A strength of this study is the variety of moral ambiguity represented in the chosen media characters. We analyzed eight MACs from recent and well-known entertainment productions. As the representation of morality can vary in different genres (Bilandzic, Hastall, & Sukalla, 2017; Daalmans, Hijmans, & Wester, 2017), we included media characters covering a variety of genres: action, adventure, comedy, crime, drama, fantasy, mystery, and romance. Future research might extend this approach by investigating the influences of characteristics such as the genre, the context of the series, and the character's gender or physical appearance. Additionally, the recent development in the literature about MACs should be considered, and MACs should be analyzed more nuanced. For example, following the approach of Tamborini et al. (2018), categorizing them into perfect heroes, imperfect heroes, morally equivocal characters, imperfect villains, and perfect villains (Tamborini et al., 2018) and also respecting the characters' role in the plot, for example, if they are a protagonist or an antagonist (Frazer & Moyer-Gusé, 2023).

This study included only media characters evaluated as morally ambiguous in a pretest. Following the multidimensional view of morality (Eden et al., 2015; Grizzard, Fitzgerald, et al., 2020), these eight characters are diverse in their moral domains. We conceptualized morality as the overall evaluation across these domains and as the variance between the domains. Our results suggest that the degree of the character's moral ambiguity was less critical for the strength of the viewers' PSRs than the overall morality of their behavior. This underscores that MACs' immoral behavior can be accepted to a certain degree – especially when it concerns malicious behavior against authorities – yet viewers still develop stronger PSRs with MACs they perceive to be moral. To better understand the role of ambiguity compared to morality, further studies should include various media characters ranging from those considered highly immoral to those who exhibit high moral behaviors.

This study has several limitations that necessitate discussion. First, the study used a cross-sectional design with a possible self-selection bias. The data for this study cannot show causality between morality, moral ambiguity, and parasocial relationships. As moral foundations are relatively stable traits (Graham et al., 2012), it seems plausible that they influence subsequent PSR and the perception of characters. Still, further studies with experimental designs would be needed to shed light on a causal relationship between morality perception and parasocial relationships. As studies showed that the moral evaluation does not need to be stable, and viewers can adapt them during the course of a narrative (Bonus et al., 2021; Eden et al., 2011; Kleemans et al., 2017) this should additionally be considered in future studies to analyze the constant interplay between moral evaluation and PSR.

Second, the study's design has some limitations. It created a possible self-selection bias, as participants were confronted with a list of MACs from popular productions on streaming platforms. They were asked which media characters they knew well and then randomly assigned to one of these characters. A particular form of self-selection was unavoidable, as participants could not answer questions about a character they did not know. The advantage of this approach is that we did not need to confront participants with an experimental stimulus, the effect of which would have been particular to the moral or immoral actions shown in the stimulus and would not allow for a generalization. Due to the study's design was a different time lag between observing the media character and the self-assessment in the survey for each participant. We attempted to minimize this effect by including only media characters from the most-streamed and successful series during data collection. Additionally, the chosen approach resulted in the targeted variance of viewers' PSR with the characters. The overall mean of the sample was slightly below the midpoint of the scale. Most of the participants reported medium PSRs, which needs to be considered when interpreting the results, as viewers with very strong PSRs were not represented in the sample.

Third, using single-item measurements for participants' moral foundations regarding fairness and loyalty and the media characters' perceived moral behavior in the purity domain limits the interpretation of the results. The Moral Foundations Questionnaire has been validated and used for research worldwide. Moral foundations are considered a universal construct with differences in the importance of the moral domains across regions worldwide (Graham et al., 2012). However, the five-factor structure failed to replicate in several studies, and relatively low reliabilities were often found (e.g., Harper & Rhodes, 2021; Zakharin & Bates, 2021), especially for purity (Gray et al., 2023). In our study, participants from Germany, Austria, and Switzerland were recruited – three countries with similar cultural backgrounds. It is possible that the scale did not align closely enough with the context.

For viewers, insufficient scale reliabilities were achieved for care, fairness, and loyalty. The robustness analyses showed that the results for care and fairness are robust. For viewers' fairness, five of the six items (i.e., the importance of someone acting reasonably or providing everyone with the same rights) are strongly left-skewed with means of 4.19 and above on a 5-point Likert-type scale (see details on OSF). The ceiling effect with a slight variance may have led to insufficient scale reliability in this case. For loyalty, the results need to be interpreted with care, as different results were found when using different single items or the overall scale. When taking a look at the items, some explanations can be found. The distribution of items was strongly skewed (skewness > –/+ 1), and some of the items developed in the U.S. context are probably not suitable for the context they were applied in. Especially the items relating to loyalty to one's country (e.g., "I am proud of my country's history") can be problematic in Germany due to historical events. That's also why an item that refers to loyalty regarding family and not the home country was chosen for the main analysis.

Only purity had insufficient scale reliability for the characters' moral domains measured with the CMFQ-X (Grizzard, Fitzgerald, et al., 2020). The purity domain was discussed in other research, and other better-suiting domains were suggested (Gray et al., 2023), so these results align with these discussions. In general, more research is needed using this validated scale to test the appropriateness of the scale for different character tropes, in different genres, and in different types of media productions.

Taken together, this study integrates the multidimensional view of morality on both sides, for viewers and for morally ambiguous media characters. The results show that the moral behavior of MACs regarding the five morality domains can have different effects on viewers' parasocial relationships: While the characters' moral behavior in care, loyalty, and fairness increases viewers' general perception of their morality and their parasocial relationships with them, the morality of their behavior in authority and purity seems less important for viewers general morality assessment and their PSRs with them. Immorality caused by violations regarding authority and purity is more readily accepted than care, loyalty, and fairness violations. Additionally, moral behavior appears to be more critical for the strength of PSRs than the level of moral ambiguity. This study adds to the existing literature by analyzing the character trope of MAC with regard to the relationship between moral or immoral behavior on viewers' PSRs. This relationship was analyzed with a non-student sample and a selection of MACs. Morality was considered a multidimensional construct, enabling a more nuanced analysis of these complex character types. This resulted in different patterns for the morality domains, which opens up promising avenues for further research.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Open data

This study was preregistered at OSF. The original preregistration and the data supporting this study's findings are available at: https://osf.io/395tb/

Supplementary material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the authors (unedited). https://www.hope.uzh.ch/scoms/article/view/j.scoms.2023.03.3969

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A case study on the COVID-19 discourse in politicians' speeches: Investigations into the speeches of former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani

Hossein Kermani, University of Vienna, Department of Communication, Austria
Mona Khorshidi, University of Tehran, Department of Planning for Social Welfare, Iran
Mohammad Ashtiani Araghi, University of Tehran, Iran
*Corresponding author: hossein.kermani@univie.ac.at

Abstract
This paper aims to analyze former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani's thirty speeches on COVID-19 delivered between February 2, 2020 and April 27, 2020. We apply Laclau and Mouffe's theory of discourse analysis to investigate and analyze Rouhani's rhetorical and discursive strategies in making meaning of COVID-19. Findings showed that COVID-19 discourse in Rouhani's speeches has mainly revolved around three nodal points: "the country", "the enemy", and "the state of exception". Thus, the structural articulation of COVID-19 discourse resembles the hegemonic discourse in Iran. Our results also explain how Rouhani used COVID-19 as an empty signifier to reinforce the hegemonic discourse in Iran while trying to redefine his relations with the state-leaning organizations. Furthermore, we analyzed the rhetorical practices that Rouhani employed to articulate the COVID-19 discourse. This paper contributes to a growing body of literature into discursive aspects and implications of a global pandemic by providing empirical evidence form an understudied context: Iran.

Keywords
COVID-19, Iran, discourse analysis, coronavirus

1 Introduction: A discursive approach to COVID-19

The outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic placed the world in a state of concern and shutdown unprecedented since the 1918 Spanish flu pandemic (Kachanoff, Yochanan, Kapsaskis, & Gray, 2020). Medical attention to the virus has been considerable. A growing body of research on this pandemic in the social sciences ranges from the study of communicative practices (Everett, Colombatto, Chituc, Brady, & Crockett, 2020) to assessment of conspiracy theories (Frischlich, 2020), digital inequalities (Khilnani, Schulz, & Robinson, 2020) and the spread of misinformation (Xie et al., 2020). A line of study examines how people, particularly political leaders, impose meanings on the coronavirus as an empty signifier. Indeed, from a linguistic and discursive perspective, there is a struggle over the meaning of COVID-19.

However, the majority of research on this issue is Western-centric and focused on the discursive practices through which political elites frame the crisis, construct social reality, and develop new understandings of long-standing social phenomena such as identity and citizenship. Some studies examine the factors that contribute to politicians' success in persuading people to follow health regulations. For example, Sergent and Stajkovic (2020) show that U. S. residents may have responded more positively to early orders from female governors to stay home. Another line of study has addressed how political actors construct or redefine enduring social concepts under these unfamiliar and unprecedented circumstances. Andreouli and Brice (2022) found that the discourse of the British government seems to challenge the dominant model of the neoliberal citizen. In another study, Berrocal et al. (2021) examine discursive constructions of solidarity and nationalism in the initial statements of lead-

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ing politicians in 29 countries. Several studies focused on redefinitions of identity in politicians' speeches, such as Haslam, Steffens, Reicher, and Bentley (2021) who demonstrated the importance of leaders cultivating a shared sense of identity and mitigating group divisions during the pandemic.

A number of studies on framing and agenda-building strategies in politicians' speeches seek to understand how politicians communicate rhetorically with the public, define the new situation, and announce and legitimize actions taken to mitigate risk. After analyzing speeches of leaders from five countries with the highest (nominal) GDP, Krishnatray and Shrivastava (2021) discuss four dominant frames developed by political leaders to appropriate the situation: "prevention-protection," "the Other," "solidarity," and "hope and comfort." Similar findings are offered by researchers comparing the political rhetoric of national leaders during the COVID-19 pandemic in larger samples (Dada, Ashworth, Bewa, & Dhatt, 2021; Montiel, Uyheng, & Dela Paz, 2021). From a different perspective, Crayne and Medeiros (2021) focus on leadership styles during the pandemic. They argue that charismatic leaders aim for a "brighter future" and people-centered solutions, while ideological leaders focus on the past and "going back to normal," and pragmatic leaders focus on the present to deal with situations as they arise.

Furthermore, recent research suggests that many officials adopted a military-style posture when discussing the potential spread of the virus. Benziman (2020), Molnár et al. (2020), and Chapman and Miller (2020) note that many politicians refer to the pandemic as a "battle," thus normalizing high casualty rates, harsh policies, and the relinquishment of personal agency. Finally, Spector (2020) describes how the speeches of heads of state can strategically deploy the meaning of crises to advance political interests. By combining objective descriptions of existing problems with subjective attributions of urgency, certain goals are legitimized over others.

While there is also a growing body of literature on how politicians in non-democratic societies shape discourses during the pandemic (Musolff, Breeze, Kondo, & Vilar-Lluch, 2022), more research has to be done if we are to better understand how political leaders communicate the crisis in non-Western societies. To this end, we examine Rouhani's speeches. Iran was among the countries that suffered from COVID-19 early and on a large scale. Despite controversial arguments claiming that the actual numbers of victims were much higher, the Iranian Ministry of Health (Official Statistics of COVID-19 in Iran, 2023) reported 146 230 deaths and 7 611 138 cases till May 29, 2023. Because of the seriousness of COVID-19, Rouhani mentioned it in most of his speeches in the early months of the crisis. Therefore, Rouhani's speeches provide a corpus of speeches that can be analyzed to determine how politicians in authoritarian countries, such as Iran, construct discourses on COVID-19 and in how far they may differ from those in democratic countries.

2 Language and discourse of politicians' speeches

Poststructuralist and postmodern thinkers have documented the importance of language in giving meaning to human actions and practices through discourses (Foucault, 2010; Willig, 2014; Young, 1981). Politicians in any society hold a privileged position and their speeches legitimize institutional power. They deliberately and strategically choose their words and compose them. As Randour, Perrez, and Reuchamps (2020) explain, most articles (64 %) analyzing political discourse in the last 20 years focused on discourse of political elites. Among the different types of political actors, members of the executive branch (president, prime minister, ministers) and candidates for office have received most attention (57 %, 54 % respectively).

Based on van Dijk's (1997) definition of political discourse, the main body of the existing literature is devoted to politicians' speeches at official events or socio-political events. For example, a binary discourse of good and evil emerged in the speeches of U.S. presidents (Daghrir, 2013; Hughes, 2019). In addition to studies of democratic societies (Allen, Bara, & Bartle, 2013; Chung & Park, 2010), the speech of political actors in authoritarian states may inject the ruling ideology to order, justify and legalize their policies rather than attempt to capture people's hearts (Carreon & Svetanant, 2017, p. 640). Previous studies focused mainly on Iranian presidents' speeches delivered at official functions (e.g., presidential elections and United Nations General Assembly), and they generally reinforce the hegemonic discourse in Iran that emphasizes national pride and empowerment and is based on hostility toward the U.S. (Alemi, Tajeddin, & Rajabi Kondlaji, 2018; Jahangiry & Fattahi, 2012). This study contributes to our understanding of how discourse works in non-democratic contexts (Carreon & Svetanant, 2017; Sullivan & Sapir, 2012; Takal, 2018).

3 Fixing the web of meanings: Laclau and Mouffe on discourse theory

Laclau and Mouffe (2001) provide a valuable conceptual framework for analyzing discourse, including nodal points. A nodal point is "a privileged signifier that fixes the meaning of a signifying chain" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 112). Signs whose meanings are not yet (even partially) fixed and are open to different attributions of meaning are floating signifiers. Floating signifiers can become moments through the process of articulation. Articulation is "any practice establishing a relation among elements such that their identity is modified due to the articulatory practice" (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 105). Moments or key signifiers, in Rear and Jones' (2013) sense, are fixed signs that do not have central positions within the discourse as nodal points. In other words, discursive positions (elements) are transformed into meaningful moments through the process of articulation. Finally, the empty signifier acquires meaning only through its positioning in relation to other signs (Rear & Jones, 2013). Later, Laclau adopted the concept of rhetoric to point to the depth of the contingent structure of language (Bush, 2012) such that the meaning "of the world is not discovered, but constructed, through rhetorical practices" (DeLuca, 1999, p. 338).

Laclau (2014) pointed to the role metaphors and metonymies in chains of equivalences / differences. Equivalence describes the extent to which signifiers are connected in intertextual chains to produce more or less stable discourses (Rear & Jones, 2013). Thus, each moment in the equivalence chain can be replaced by the others because they all equally face a common enemy (Thomassen, 2016). However, "the discursive turn expands the possibilities and importance of rhetoric" (DeLuca, 1999, p. 344). We will examine what other rhetorical practices work to articulate the COVID-19 discourse. We ask:

- RQ 1: How did Rouhani articulate COVID-19 as an empty signifier?
- RQ 2: Which rhetorical practices were used by Rouhani to articulate the COVID-19 discourse?

4 Method

We began with Rouhani's first public speech after the official announcement of the virus and continued to examine subsequent speeches. The selected speeches were published by Rouhani's cabinet or the "National Organization for Controlling COVID-19" (NOCC) on the official website of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran (President.ir).[1] According to official reports, COVID-19 entered Iran from Qom, a holy city in Iran, on February 19, 2020, and killed 2 people on the first day. On February 23, four days later, Rouhani gave his first speech about COVID-19. In total, we analyzed 30 speeches by Rouhani from February 2, 2020, to April 27, 2020. All speeches went through several rounds of close reading and discursive interpretations. Following the rationale of Laclau and Mouffe's DT, we investigated the texts discursively to identify and analyze the nodal points and key signifiers (moments) as a convenient way of analyzing discourse.

1 Research materials are no longer retrievable from this website but are available upon request by the author.

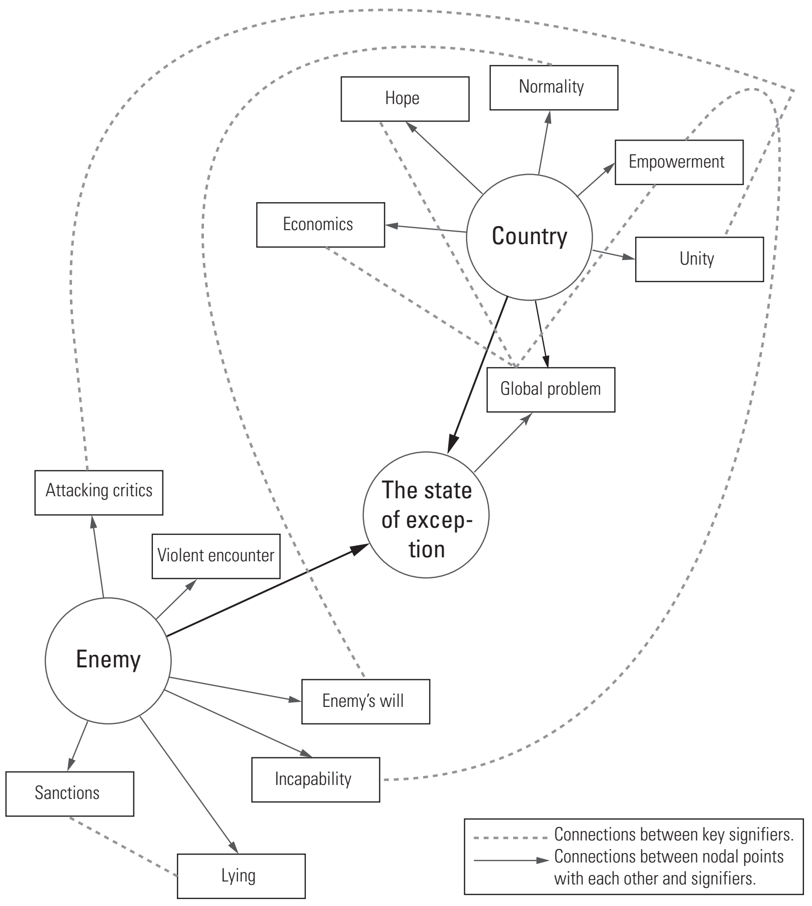
5 Findings: The discursive articulation of COVID-19 in Rouhani's speeches

We focus on the nodal points and key signifiers (moments) (Rear & Jones, 2013). The most central nodal point, which logically connects all other signifiers, is COVID-19. In the beginning, COVID-19 was an empty signifier, but it was repeated again and again in Rouhani's speeches and gradually filled with preferred meanings. This section examines how Rouhani imposed meaning on the empty signifier of COVID-19 and turned it into a nodal point.

COVID-19 has connections to three nodal points at the first level: "the country," "the enemy," and "the state of exception." COVID-19 also has connections to other non-central signifiers at the next levels. In fact, Rouhani constructed the meaning of the three nodal points by connecting them with other signifiers. Here, "the country," "the enemy," and "the state of exception" as the central nodal points form a bridge between the other signifiers and COVID-19 giving the latter its meaning. We show, first, how the three main nodal points were connected to the other signifiers and, second, how they were connected to COVID-19. This is illustrated by the web of signifiers in Figure 1 in what follows, we attempt to capture the nuances and complexities of his remarks.

Rouhani's speeches portrayed the country and the enemy as two antagonistic signifiers connected by "the state of exception." Antagonistic signifiers are used to divide

Figure 1: The discursive map of Rouhani's speeches



Source: Own illustration.

signifiers and prevent them from being able to be fully themselves (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). The conflict and competition between signifiers constantly threaten to destabilize each other's positions in the web of meanings as they seek to displace each other's legitimacy. The antagonistic interpretive framework is anchored in the dichotomy of "us–them" and has a long history in political theory. Carl Schmitt discussed the opposition between "friend" and "enemy" in his characterization of the political (Mehring, 2017). In Foucault's terminology, such an antagonistic divide could be understood as discursive practices of exclusion (Foucault, 1965; Peters & Besley, 2014).

However, in Laclau and Mouffe's (2001) sense, the country can be understood as discursive "us," and the enemy can be understood as "them." As Laclau argues (2008), all social elements locate their identities around dichotomized social space around these two poles. Thus, Rouhani's semantic choices reinforced the cultural discourse of Othering the enemy, where Iran and its culture are associated with positive connotations and the enemy is associated with negative signifiers. The dichotomy of "country" and "enemy" is also crucial for the hegemonic discourse in Iran (KhosraviNik, 2015; Masoudi, 2019). The hegemonic discourse of the Iranian state is essentially an antagonistic discourse (Golkar, 2012; Karimi, 2018). In this sense, the COVID-19 discourse in Rouhani's speeches resembles, to some extent, the hegemonic discourse in Iran.

Nevertheless, "the country" and "the enemy" are connected by another nodal point in this discourse: "the state of exception." It has its roots in the works of Schmitt (Goupy, 2018) and was developed by Agamben (2005, p. 1) beyond legal issues and its relationship to dictatorship to mean the "suspension of the law." Although we follow Agamben in elaborating on "the state of exception," the use of this term in Rouhani's speeches is not strictly limited to Agamben's conceptualization.

Furthermore, it should be mentioned that Rouhani did not always mention such exact terms, i. e., signifiers. We take the liberty to sum up similar signifiers in Rouhani's speeches under some umbrella terms which can capture their shared meaning to a great extent. It is most obvious in the case of "the state of exception." While Rouhani mentioned this term several times, he used other synonyms like "extraordinary time." We then classified all such alike signifiers in a big family as a nodal point or an element. A nodal point, in this sense, is not a single signifier. It is a signifying theme that covers several similar terms which were used interchangeably in Rouhani's speeches. For the purpose of this study, such terms invoked the nodal point which we used, to a great extent. We will come back to this point in the remaining parts of this article.

5.1 The country: The discursive "us" in Rouhani's speeches

Articulating "the country" with COVID-19, Rouhani also connected this nodal point to the other signifiers to construct the discursive meaning of it: "unity," "empowerment," "normality," "hope," and "the economy." Each of these signifiers has a positive meaning, and each represents positive connotations. "Unity" means that the government is unanimous in its approach to this crisis. Rouhani denied any internal discord, publicly stating, "Look at the great divide that Covid has caused in the U. S.; on the contrary, in Iran, we are all more united than in the past" (Cabinet, April 26, 2020).[2] Here, unity is associated with some floating signifiers such as mobilization, collaboration, and victory over COVID-19.

Also, Rouhani stressed the importance of working with the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC)[3] and the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB) in controlling COVID-19. Although Rouhani acknowledged the role of other organizations (e. g., other branches of the government and municipalities), his emphasis on the IRGC has important discursive significance. They have been condemned by democratic forces

2 In this paper, we give the place and time of the speech from which the mentioned excerpts from Rouhani's speeches are taken.

3 The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps is a branch of the Iranian Armed Forces designed to protect the Islamic Republic's political system. However, the United States has considered the IRGC a terrorist organization since April 15, 2019.

inside and outside Iran for their role in suppressing democratic movements in Iran and interfering in the affairs of other countries. During the 2017 presidential campaign, President Rouhani publicly attacked the IRGC (Rouhani lambasts IRGC's role in the economy, 2017). However, Rouhani praised the IRGC on several occasions for its cooperation in suppressing the COVID-19 insurrection. This turn of events can be explained in two ways. First, Rouhani may have wanted to clear the IRGC of the above-mentioned accusations. Second, he may have wanted to show that all sectors of Iranian society were united during this period of crisis. If the government and the IRGC are cooperating, it's probably safe to assume that other adversaries will do the same during this tumultuous period of time.

The same logic could be applied to understand Rouhani's positive encounter with IRIB. During his presidential campaigns, Rouhani repeatedly criticized IRIB. However, when he spoke about COVID-19, he emphasized how IRIB had played an important and constructive role. It appeared that Rouhani had used the opportunity provided by COVID-19 to redefine his relationship with pro-regime forces. This could have been a consequence of the power of these organizations and their ability to threaten Rouhani's presidency. Discussing IRIB, Rouhani highlighted its role in honest informing (HI). Honest informing, then, turned to a signifier chiefly linked but not restricted to IRIB.

The next key signifier was "empowerment," which Rouhani emphatically reiterated in his statements. As part of this signifier, he also emphasized that Iran is a strong country both in providing people with necessary materials, health care, and medical supplies. In line with reaffirming the country's unity and strength, Rouhani tried to show that everything was normal. "Normality" is a key signifier in his discourse on COVID-19. The first peak of the COVID-19 pandemic in Iran collided with Nowruz, the Iranian New Year. Rouhani, as a result, stated,

> Some people have asked me to cancel the New Year vacation. I don't think it is useful or necessary because the New Year is a time for happiness and being with family, and there is no reason to deprive people of this opportunity. We are in the process of controlling the virus. Indeed, there is no reason for concern. (Cabinet, March 11, 2020)

The cancellation of the Nowruz vacation could have been interpreted as a sign of weakness, which could have taken Rouhani's government to task. Continuing the vacation sent a message it was business as usual, not a time of panic or desperation.

"Hope" is the next key signifier that accompanies the theme of the country. By portraying Iran ("the country") as a united and strong country with normal conditions, facilitated messages of hope and optimism. Controlling the pandemic with the least casualties is one of three signifiers that identify the position of hope in the meaning. Another is providing people with necessary materials, health care, and medical supplies. Indeed, Rouhani argued that the country is strong enough to control the virus with little loss of life. He said,

> We are able to control the virus today. We are not worried, and all medical organizations are prepared. Our medical staff and the Ministry of Health have been working hard, and I am sure we will be able to manage this crisis with as few casualties as possible. (Cabinet, April 8, 2020)

The next signifier, quick return to "normality" make COVID-19 appear less dangerous than claimed. So, Rouhani promised that people's lives would soon return to normal. Again, such elements or signifiers were not necessarily used by Rouhani all the time. He used different terms to invoke them, however. We classified all similar terms under umbrella themes.

"Past the peak" is another signifying phrase in the discourse of hope. Rouhani inserted statistics into his speeches to claim that the infection rate was declining. He often spoke of medical personnel a referent and signifier of unity when addressing Iranians. Rouhani thanked the medical personnel in general, urged that their vital needs be met, and finally emphasized their sacrifices. Meeting people's urgent needs is also closely related to providing them with necessary materials, health care, and medical supplies. "Sacrifice" is the signifier that connects the medical personnel to unity more concretely. Rouhani interpreted the sacrifices made by medical personnel as demonstrating solidarity with other Iranians to support the regime, which he connected to Iran's "unity."

There are other signifiers between unity, empowerment, and hope: "the leadership," "the government," and "the people." All three signifiers have firm and decisive positions in the hegemonic discourse in Iran, but their meanings were rearticulated in the COVID-19 discourse. These signifiers are polysemous and move between the three nodal points. Rouhani used COVID-19 as a sign to redefine these nodal points – as signifiers with fixed meanings in the hegemonic discourse – in his attempt to make this discourse more stable.

"Leadership" (in Farsi: رهبری) is a nodal point in Iran's hegemonic discourse. Here it is actually a metonymic signifier referring to "Valiy-e-Faghih" which is an underlying principle in Iran's Islamist discourse. At the time of Rouhani's speeches, the Valiy-e-Faghih was Ayatollah Khamenei. Thus, the signifier referred to him. While "leadership," i. e., Khamenei, has a central position in the state's discourse, Rouhani treated it as an element in articulating a new discourse around COVID-19. He repeatedly distances "leadership" from its position in the Iran's hegemonic discourse and then articulates it within a new web of signifiers.

There are probably two explanations for this. First, Rouhani might have taken the leader's importance for granted in relation to his position in the hegemonic discourse. Second, some Iran analysts said that Rouhani and Khamenei disagreed on how to handle the crisis. By not dealing directly with Khamenei, Rouhani could be showing that his government is strong enough to deal with the crisis without Khamenei's help. Rouhani insisted on following the leader's instructions only once, while emphasizing several times that the leader supported the government's decisions. In this sense, Rouhani resorted to the theme of the leader to determine the government's position and nothing more. He multiple times mentioned the leader's support of his decision without expressing his obedience to Khamenei, as is usual for many Iranian politicians. This shows a clear departure from the hegemonic discourse.

Associating the leader's support with the government, Rouhani defined its meaning in four main ways. First, he talked about the willingness of his government to sacrifice. He repeated this over and over in his speeches. Accordingly, Rouhani stated several times that he and his ministers would not go on Nowruz vacation to deal with the crisis. The sacrifice of the government united the cabinet and the rest of the population. Next, Rouhani defended all of the government's measures. He argued that everything his government did and decided was right. His arguments had two dimensions. On the one hand, he defended the executive branch's activities. On the other hand, he defended the honesty of the government. In this excerpt from a speech responding to the accusation that his government manipulated the statistics, the President said, "We will never increase or decrease the existing statistics. There will be no exaggeration or understatement. We report everything that has happened to our great nation since the emergence of this virus" (Cabinet, February 26, 2020).

Rouhani also emphasized that the government and the people are one entity. He argued that there is no distance between them. Finally, he mentioned the government's support for businesses, particularly those that had suffered during the economic crisis. "The government is responsible for people's health, so it must also be responsible for their businesses," (NOCC, March 24, 2020) he said. He repeatedly mentioned that controlling COVID-19 required the cooperation of all people and that it was their social responsibility. After the first outbreak, President Rouhani made an impassioned plea for the Iranian people to tighten their restrictions. He said,

> The responsibility lies with the people themselves. They are the ones who should try to control the crisis. They should observe health regulations. They should not go on trips. They should stay at home and help others. If people do not cooperate, we cannot do much. (Cabinet, April 26, 2020)

Acknowledging the role of people in addressing the crisis, Rouhani stressed that following medical orders takes priority over carrying out religious orders or rituals. He especially emphasized this when he spoke of closing holy shrines and mosques. Hardline clerics and senior clerics from Qom and Mashhad[4] criticized the government's decisions to close religious sites. They particularly opposed the shutdown of the Masoomeh shrine in Qom, where COVID-19 entered Iran. Nevertheless, Rouhani reasoned with them, stressing the importance of health regulations in combating the virus. He also tried to defuse the situation by saying, "[i]t is a wrong idea to separate people's health, their vital needs, the world, the other world, science, and religion. They are inseparable, and we in the government try to respond to all the needs and requirements of the people" (NOCC, April 5, 2020). The signifier, "medical orders" is related to Rouhani's downright defending his government's action and claiming a state of exception as we will discuss in the next section.

Finally, the "economy" features prominently in Rouhani's discourse. He focused relatively heavily on the importance of economic activities. The economy is as important to Rouhani as religion. Religion as a nodal point in Iran's hegemonic discourse connected to economy. Rouhani said, "[o]ne of our hands should be raised to heaven to receive the grace of God, and the other hand should work for both the health of society and livelihood" (Cabinet, April 22, 2020). Economic activities, then, are as important to Rouhani as praying. The economy is also a node that binds the most important signifiers within the nodal point of the country and connects them to other nodal points. For example, the economy is associated with "normality" when Rouhani emphasized the continuation of economic activities. This is probably why Rouhani refers to the economic difficulties in the early days of the pandemic. In doing so, he links the economic difficulties to the government by focusing on struggling businesses. In fact, he implied that the government had everything under control, so all is normal. He emphasized the government's support for struggling businesses as an example to show his administration could bring everything to normal and there was no crisis.

5.2 The state of exception: Where the "country" and the "enemy" meet

Although "the state of exception" in Rouhani's discourse does not fully coincide with Agamben's conceptualization, we use this term to explore another interesting aspect of this discourse. Also, Rouhani employed a family of similar signifiers to refer to "the state of exception," all of which to emphasize that the situation was critical and abnormal, including "extraordinary situation" and a term common in Iranian politicians' jargon, "the current sensitive situation" (in Farsi: شرایط حساس کنونی). Nevertheless, all these phrases denote a similar signifier.

"The state of exception" as a main discursive theme in Rouhani's speeches, connects the "country" and the "enemy" because it is associated with important signifiers in both domains. In the COVID-19 discourse, "the state of exception" has a paradoxical character because it seems to be the opposite of "normality." In Rouhani's speeches, however, both are articulated. The way Rouhani resolves this paradox is interesting. Whenever Rouhani wanted to point to the great work of his government and defend its activities and decisions, he referred to the situation as "the state of exception," that is, the link between "the state of exception" and the staunch defense of his government's actions. Rouhani used this phrase for example when he defended the closure of holy sites by saying that people should follow medical instructions. He justified these measures by reminding his opponents that these were extraordinary times. However, he also stated that the situation was normal. When the situation was extraordinary, at the same time the government was tactful enough and the country strong enough to deal with it keeping everything "normal." Here, "the state of exception" is associated with "normality" and government "empowerment" at the same time.

With the formulation of "the state of exception," another key signifier emerged, namely "global problems." Rouhani strongly emphasized that COVID-19 was not a prob-

4 The holy cities in Iran where the shrines of Imam Reza (the 8th Imam of the Shia) and Masoomeh (his sister) are located.

lem that Iran was experiencing alone. He made clear the situation was truly a global crisis and other nations were not prepared to deal with it. Here, "the state of exception" is associated with the "enemy." Similarly, "the state of exception" again is associated with "empowerment" through global problems. Rouhani repeatedly pointed out that other countries had difficulties dealing with the crisis, but Iran was very powerful and successful. Rouhani said the situation was critical in many countries, but everything was under control in Iran. In this way, Rouhani managed to reconcile "the state of exception" with "normality." The use of "the state of exception" can be interpreted in two ways: First, it justified the government's decisions and solidified its legitimacy; second, it showed that other countries were weakened in light of Iran's "commendable performance" in the face of the pandemic.

5.3 The "enemy": From the U.S. to local critics

The "enemy" is directly and indirectly connected to the "country" as mediated by "the state of exception." While not as complex as the "country," the "enemy" derives its significance from being distinguished from and compared to the "country." In this respect, the "enemy" plays a crucial role in the structure of the COVID-19 discourse. The previous sections explained that the "enemy" references used in COVID-19 represent Iran's power in the fight against the pandemic. Then another signifier appeared: sanctions, which emphasized Iran's strength and made the "enemy's" actions clearer. Rouhani argued that despite the severity of the sanctions and an exceptional situation, the country is very capable, and its government is resilient enough to handle it. "The enemies did not expect that Iran, under heavy sanctions for two years, would be able to deal with the COVID-19 crisis better and stronger than them" (Cabinet, March 11, 2020). Here, Rouhani more clearly linked the "enemy" to the sanctions and empowerment through the medium of "the state of exception."

Rouhani also used the "will of the enemy" as a key signifier, using it to justify his government's decisions. For example, he argued that it was the "enemy's" will to stop economic activities and that his government would not allow it. He even went so far as to claim that stopping economic activity was a conspiracy of the "enemy" and, therefore, could not happen.

In an earlier discussion, we noted that Rouhani associated the "enemy" with "unity" when he described how COVID-19 had torn many countries apart and Iran had solidified its "unity" in the fight against this virus. In this context, Rouhani repeatedly named the U.S. as the "enemy," but he did not limit his image of the "enemy" to that country. He also referred to the lies spread by the "enemy" and linked them to the sanctions. He said that those who deprived people of food and medicine by imposing sanctions were only pretending to want to help Iran. "If you're honest, at least lift the drug sanctions" (Cabinet, March 4, 2020) he added. In the COVID-19 discourse, Rouhani constructed the "enemy" as a weak and torn liar while portraying Iran as strong, honest, and united. He thus reproduced elements of the hegemonic populist discourse in Iran.

In Rouhani's discourse, the "enemy" is not limited to the U.S. Anyone who disagrees with the government's decisions and criticizes its actions is considered an "enemy." Attacking critics were framed as an important signifier. Rouhani linked them with "unity," underscoring his claim that his opponents are motivated by foreign influence, or the influence of foreign ties, to oppose his regime: "Look how easily we are united today, of course, we have always been united, but sometimes some people threaten and weaken this unity" (NOCC, March 28, 2020). Rouhani again attacked his critics, saying they are liars and are controlled by foreign nations who provide false information about the country to undermine its hope and power.

> Our great nation has given a sharp answer to all chatterers who proclaim in their media, foreign media, satellite TV channels, and cyberspace that the Iranian nation has become tired and is no longer fresh and that the Iranian government and state are no longer functioning. (Cabinet, April 1, 2020)

In his attacks, Rouhani referred to the media and the Internet as the center of spreading misinformation. He repeatedly mentioned IRIB as his preferred source of information.

5.4 Rhetorical practices: The "enemy," COVID-19, and the U.S.

In the previous discussion, we elaborated on another signifier central to the structure of the COVID-19 discourse: the "enemy." Here we explore the rhetorical strategies that Rouhani employed to create a cognitive bridge between seemingly disparate concepts, thereby allowing his message to resonate with the Iranian context. Rouhani used them mainly to frame the "country" and the "enemy" as antagonistic signifiers. In doing so, he paid significant attention to some binary oppositions such as strong / weak, honest / liar, united / scattered, and kind / cruel. For example, he said, "Thank God we are not one of those countries whose patients are left alone on the floor of hospitals. We are strong enough to serve all patients and admit them to our hospitals despite the rumors spread by our enemies. Unlike the Western countries, we have the best equipment for treating the infected" (NOCC, March 28, 2020). In this case, he excluded "us" from "them" by contrasting Iran's power with other countries' inability.

Rouhani also used various military metaphors in the chain of equivalences metaphors to describe this phase. First, he saw the crisis management phase as a battlefield. He called it "front line," "health soldiers," "martyrdom," "command," "victory," "spirit of resistance," and "jihad."[5] Using the language of war made it seem like the country was pitted against an external enemy. Rouhani also used metaphors to win the rhetorical battle with the "enemy." Rhetorically, he addressed COVID-19 as a weapon of the "enemy." Rouhani linked the "enemy's will" to continuous economic activity in this battle. He argued that the "enemy," primarily the U. S. and other Western countries, aimed to use COVID-19 as a weapon against the country and force it to seal off the country, stop economic activities and weaken Iran. In this sense, COVID-19 is a conspiracy by the "enemy" to threaten the "normality" and power of the country.

Rouhani did not stop at this point but rhetorically compared COVID-19 to the "enemy," namely the U. S. and other international superpowers, during his speeches. The rhetorical comparisons help to make his arguments more effective. Rouhani referred to the U. S. and other Western countries as "enemies" in order to legitimize Iran's foreign policy against them. This process took place in three steps. First, he referred to the U. S. and Western countries as "enemies," as had been the case since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran's hegemonic discourse. Next, he defined the COVID-19 pandemic as the "enemy" that the country should fight. The use of warfare metaphors to portray COVID-19 as the "enemy" was prevalent in the first wave of the pandemic. Finally, Rouhani concluded that the U.S. is the virus (as both are "enemies") and even more dangerous than a virus:

> We are dealing today not only with COVID-19 but with one even more dangerous and damaging than the virus: the U.S. and other superpowers. If the damage they have done to our nation is no greater than the damage done by COVID-19, it is certainly no less. (Cabinet, March 11, 2020)

Thus, he legitimized the hostility toward the U. S. Just as the country should eliminate COVID-19 as a dangerous virus, it should also neutralize the U. S., as they are both harmful viruses. In Rouhani's speeches, the U. S. (as well as other Western countries and even domestic critics) and COVID-19 are one and the same: the "enemy." Therefore, the fight against one justifies the fight against the other.

Rouhani also addressed his local critics with sarcasm, calling them "wise individuals who are trying to catch us in the act by focusing on shortcomings" (Cabinet, February 26, 2020). Since the national stage is a conflict zone and COVID-19 and its "enemies" have joined forces to harm Iran, the critics have no excuse to vent their frustration; yet Rouhani sarcastically challenged them to find a cure for their deep-rooted idiocy, suggesting that they have no justification to do so. Similarly, he suggested sarcastic proverbs such as "prescribing cures for the country" to prop up this argument. He also questioned the validity of compassion as a viable basis for helping oth-

5 In the terminology of Islam, jihad is a war for God.

ers, claiming that this was just a ruse to disguise the critics' true intentions.

As we have already seen with jihad, Rouhani frequently used religious jargon in conjunction with these practices. In this way, he sought to legalize his ideas and arguments by portraying Iran as a religious country. He referred not only to Quranic verses but also to the three common religious terms of *Wajib* (obligatory religious acts), *Mustahab* (recommended yet not obligatory duties), and *Makrooh* (disliked yet not forbidden duties) to give his arguments more religious weight. For example, he argued that continuing economic activities was wajib. He also referred to giving health instructions as *hagh-o-alnas* (people's right). This term indicates that failure to perform an act would be punished by God in the hereafter. In addition, he referred to COVID-19 as God's test. Scholars of Islamic jurisprudence traditionally emphasize being patient in the face of inevitable calamity rather than lamenting one's situation, and placing one's hopes in God, who is the ultimate source of strength and succor. One way Muslim leaders traditionally fulfilled this religious obligation is by using prayer formulas such as "'In shā' Allāh" (If God wills) and "Alḥamdulillāhi" (God be praised). In addition, Muslims should avoid committing sins (*taghva*) as a form of self-purification in order to attain physical and spiritual health. Rouhani employed this term to assert following health instructions and to legitimize the decisions of his government. He stated in a speech, "How should we avoid this virus? The solution is taghva" (Cabinet, April 26, 2020). Just as Islam recommends that we avoid sins in order to strengthen ourselves spiritually, here, we must avoid anything that might infect us, Rouhani implied.

Metaphor is a rhetorical device mainly used in political communication to simplify complicated events and concepts (Edelman, 1971). Here, Rouhani used religious metaphors to translate the unknown and worrying situation of the COVID-19 crisis into a less concerning one. He employed familiar religious terms in order to assure people that the future would be better and the crisis would be over:

> In shā' Allāh, we will again go to our holy places and pray for our GOD. These days are bitter and hard for all of us, but they will be over, and we can again find peace and comfort under the roofs of the merciful Imams. (Cabinet, March 11, 2020)

Furthermore, Iran is known as a religious sociey in which most people obey Islamic rules. Rouhani used religious metaphors to connect health instructions with religious rules in an attempt to persuade people to follow them. As we have seen with taghva, he implied that trying not to be infected by the COVID-19 virus is somehow a religious principle. Thus, all people should comply with them. This finding reveals how politicians in religious societies use religious metaphors to justify their health and even political decisions. Rouhani relied on pre-filled and rich religious concepts to make the empty signifiers in the middle of crisis meaningful in the ways that serve his interests.

Another case could explain this tactic more clearly. Religious figures in Iran, such as Friday prayers, were angry with Rouhani as his government tried to close holy shrines. Holy shrines are the places where many people gather together to pray and visit the tombs of Shiiti's Imams. Since there are many people in closed spaces, holy shrines are places where many people could be infected easily. Therefore, Rouhani aimed to close them. However, this decision was not welcomed among religious figures. They denied this policy, mentioning that Islamic norms are above all, and people would not be infected in these places. For instance, Mohammad Saiedi, the Friday prayer of Qom, a holy city in Iran, said on February 27, 2020:

> We consider this holy shrine a place of healing. This means that people should come here to be healed from spiritual and physical diseases. Therefore, this place should be kept open so that people can come and heal their pain.

On the contrary, Rouhani used their own religious language to fight back against them. Unlike Western politicians, Rouhani could not refer to liberal values such as human rights or even to WHO (World Health Organization) statements to defend his decisions in front of high-profile clergies. Therefore, he used religious metaphors and jargon cleverly. He mentioned an excerpt from prophet Mohammad: “Hygiene is part of faith” (Cabinet, March 23, 2022) which can be roughly translated as “cleanliness is next to godliness.” In addition, we discussed how he poached the meaning of taghva to emphasize that not going to holy shrines not only does not contradict the Islamic norms but is also in line with them. He described visiting shrines as Mustahab, while he asserted that avoiding disease and illness is Wajib. Thus, Rouhani used religious metaphors both to persuade people to follow heath instructions as well as counter religious figures’ critics.

Finally, Rouhani frequently employed auxiliary verbs that indicate a strong will, such as “must” and “have.” He wanted to convey that the government was capable of handling the crisis. He commanded, “People must trust the government. We are all working hard to manage the crisis and provide the people with all the necessary materials. So, our dear people should believe in their government and not listen to others” (NOCC, February 25, 2020). He also highlighted violent encounter in this language, like prisoning journalists. He called on law enforcement agencies and security forces to put a stop to those who propagated rumors and waged war against the economy. Rouhani viewed the stage as a battlefield. He used rhetorical devices as such and combined them with religious and imperative language, as befits wartime. In this regard, he reinforced the COVID-19 discourse as an antagonistic discourse in which the country fights the “enemy,” whether it is the U.S. or COVID-19.

6 Conclusion

We have applied Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse theory to our study of Rouhani’s antagonistic and populist political discourse on COVID-19. Previous research has focused mainly on political speech during socio-political events. However, the COVID-19 outbreak provides us with an unprecedented opportunity to analyze political discourse during a pandemic. Our analysis of the COVID-19 outbreak shows that Rouhani’s discourse is generally antagonistic. We also contributed to the existing literature on the discourse of Iranian presidents. Although much of the research has analyzed the discourse of Iranian presidents in general, our study offers nuanced understanding of Rouhani’s key signifiers, nodal points, and rhetorical practices. This work examined the COVID-19 pandemic and provided a deeper understanding of the Iranian President’s discursive practices.

Based on the structural articulation of the “country,” the “enemy,” and “the state of exception,” the results show that the COVID-19 discourse is similar to the hegemonic discourse in Iran, which is a populist discourse (Holliday, 2016). Populist discourse, as Panizza (2005) asserts, is the creation of an internal boundary to separate two types of groups and enforce a binary relationship between the politically constructed “self’” and the “other.” The existing literature shows how politicians around the globe legitimize their political agenda with populist discourse (De Cleen & Stavrakakis, 2017; Hidalgo-Tenorio & Benítez-Castro, 2021; Laclau, 2007). Populist discourse exists independently of the political context. It is found in both authoritarian and democratic regimes, as Nørgaard Kristensen and Mortensen (2021) argue. The discursive distinction between “us” and “them” that forms the backbone of populist discourse can exist as a mindset in liberal democracies such as the U.S. (Lacatus, 2019). Drawing on Laclau and Mouffe’s insights, this paper contributes to the existing literature by examining former Iranian President Rouhani’s populist discourse during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although this study does not establish a causal relationship, it does show that populist discourse is not dependent on specific events. As Spector (2020) has shown, this study also illustrated that politics remains of great concern even during a pandemic. As a rich theoretical approach to analyzing populist discourse, discourse theory provides us with an appropriate conceptual lens and analytical tool to examine how populist discourse in Iran was shaped and functioned during the pandemic.

At the heart of populist discourse in Iran is hostility toward the U.S. and other Western democracies (Mohd Don & May, 2013; Sheikholeslami, 2000). Traditionally, the U.S. is seen as a bogeyman in Iranian culture, which unifies the country in domestic conflicts (KhosraviNik, 2015). This research confirms that Rouhani's discourse also embraces and solidifies this antagonistic discursive theme. Following the process of constructing an antagonistic discourse that began since the 1979 revolution (Jahanbakhsh, 2003; Shahibzadeh, 2015), Rouhani portrayed the U.S., other Western countries, and even local critics as "enemies" during the pandemic in order to legitimize the state's policies. To make this tactic as effective as possible, Rouhani used war and religious metaphors to rhetorically articulate new signifiers (essentially health-related phenomena such as COVID-19) in an antagonistic political discourse.

War metaphors play an important role in unifying actions and holding society together (Flusberg, Matlock, & Thibodeau, 2018; Gibbs Jr, 2018; Lakoff & Johnson, 1990). The use of war metaphors in political communication about health crises has been documented and analyzed in the context of the epidemics of the early 2000s (Molnár, Takács, & Jakusné Harnos, 2020). War metaphors are based on common historical experiences of a community, and their use reflects cultural peculiarities. Although conceptual in nature, they are perceived as realistic due to the frequent occurrence of wars and even serve as a source area for discourse metaphors describing seemingly unrelated events (Molnár, Takács, & Jakusné Harnos, 2020). This study shows that the use of war language was also a tactic available to Rouhani to control the crisis and impose his politically desired meanings on new signifiers.

Also, this study shows how Rouhani employed religious metaphors during a biological event to legitimize his government decisions and policies. Furthermore, this study contributes to the academic literature on the political use of war metaphors. The analysis of Rouhani's rhetoric shows how the president employed anti-Western and anti-American discursive strategies to construct COVID-19 as both an "enemy" and a weapon of the West. We extracted strategic themes from Rouhani's speech and examined how the state portrayed the U.S., other "enemies," and COVID-19 to feed Iranians' anti-Western sentiments.

This research also contributes to a better understanding of how leaders of authoritarian regimes used the COVID-19 crisis as an opportunity to redefine their relationships with some powerful state organizations, in this case, the IRGC and the IRIB. The nature of the pandemic called for an unprecedented level of collaboration among political, health, social, and military forces to mitigate the severity of the impending crisis (Dada et al., 2021). Thus, the pandemic allowed Rouhani to create a rapprochement with organizations that had once hindered his political career (Mirzaei, Eslami, & Safari, 2017; Rouhani lambasts IRGC's role in the economy, 2017). This is significant when we consider how Rouhani had previously challenged these organizations. It appears that he was trying to align himself with those organizations that would be most beneficial and influential in society while maintaining a reputation that would reflect well on him. This can be seen through his utilization of the key signifier of "unity."

This study also extends the literature to the political realm in authoritarian regimes such as Iran. The results show that Rouhani's COVID-19 discourse distances itself from the hegemonic discourse somehow. Adherence to medical instructions can often be seen as a signifier where the struggle is between competing discourses: the hegemonic discourse and the COVID-19 discourses. Of course, Rouhani's COVID-19 discourse was not strong enough to destabilize the hegemonic discourse and constitute a new hegemon (Holliday, 2016; Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Although high-profile clerics focused on religious orders, Rouhani emphasized the need for health regulations. Thus, the closure of holy sites is of great importance. Rouhani emphasized "the state of exception" to defend his decisions against religious opponents. As Agamben (2005) states, autocratic regimes make "the state of exception" a permanent situation to control society. This phenomenon has been referred to as "the current sensitive conditions" (*Sharayet-e hassas-e konooni*) in the Iranian political context (Jahanbakhsh, 2003; Holliday, 2011). Rouhani resorted to this discursive construction to continue the legacy of defining the situation in Iran as exceptional, which has been common in the jargon of Iranian politicians since the establishment of the revolutionary regime. Nevertheless, he used this rhetorical strategy to oppose senior religious figures, while Iranian politicians traditionally used this tactic to suppress dissidents and critics. Therefore, this study contributes to our knowledge of how pre-existing repressive discursive metaphors can work against radicals during a pandemic.

This study examined how a politician in an authoritarian state developed a discourse about a pandemic. We examined how COVID-19 is used as an empty signifier to reproduce existing meanings and produce new ones. We also closely examined how COVID-19 became a nodal point, what signifiers were used to give it meaning, and how COVID-19 was articulated in a web of meanings. Further research in similar contexts is needed to transfer these findings. This study emphasizes the need for more research on whether other politicians have articulated the same or different discourses. Such a study could improve our understanding of political discourse during a pandemic – the type of thing that might be useful if there was ever another pandemic.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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SComS
Thematic Section

Old media persistence.
Past continuities in the brand-new digital world

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GUEST EDITORIAL

Media persistence: Theories, approaches, categorization

Gabriele Balbi*, USI – Università della Svizzera italiana, Faculty of Communication, Culture and Society, Switzerland
Berber Hagedoorn, University of Groningen, Faculty of Arts, Research Centre for Media and Journalism Studies, The Netherlands
Nazan Haydari, Istanbul Bilgi University, Faculty of Communication, Department of Media, Turkey
Valérie Schafer, University of Luxembourg, Luxembourg Centre for Contemporary and Digital History (C²DH), Luxembourg
Christian Schwarzenegger, University of Bremen, Centre for Media, Communication and Information Research (ZeMKI), Germany
*Corresponding author: gabriele.balbi@usi.ch

1 Introduction

Despite the fact that new media are continually seen as "natural born killers" of old media, old media rarely die and very often persist. In what is alternately called the "age of the Internet," the "digital revolution," the "metaverse," the era of "artificial intelligence," old media such as books, cinema, radio, television, landline telephone, and several others are still in use. Moreover, there is a kind of re-emergence of "the analogue" in various forms and for different incentives, including nostalgia. See for example Polaroid or Lomo in the realm of photography or vinyl and cassette in music.

This Thematic Section is the outcome of an intellectual journey that the five editors undertook first separately and then combined. The occasion for bringing together prior interests and combining theoretical and empirical understandings of the reasons why and the different modes how media persist over time was facilitated by the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) virtual post-conference (co-)organized jointly by three ECREA sections in September 2021: the Communication History section together with the sections of Radio and Sound, as well as Television Studies. It is no coincidence that these three sections are concerned with old media, which seem to decline but apparently also do persist, as those are the sections dealing with the mediated relationship of the old and the new, the past and the present such as the viewing and screening practices of television, transformation of sonic environment from radio toward podcast, and in general old media remediating into new ones. Some selected papers of the conference were then combined with others submitted in response to an open call for papers. All in all, they provide empirical case studies on the meaning and appearances of media persistence in different contexts and sectors and contribute theoretically to our understanding of it. Besides providing an overview of the chapters, this editorial piece also theoretically maps out the field and poses a discussion on the categorization of media persistence.

The first question to be asked is: What does persistence mean? The word "persistence" has an interesting etymology, as it comes from Latin *persistere*, *per+sistere*. In Latin *sistere* (from the verb, *stāre*, "to stand") means "to cause to stand" and "to set something up in standing position." We can see, crudely, how *sistere* twins the base of *stāre*, *st-st-, and we might imagine how this doubled "standing" conjures up something that means: "remains standing" (see Kelly, 2017).

This Thematic Section on persistence draws from the cases of media which *remain standing.* There are media which can be considered "ruins" of the past, are not updated, and can quickly become useless tools. But in this Thematic Section we emphasize another idea: To stand and remain, media have to adapt or, in other words, to change and

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to evolve in changing natures, transforming themselves, and striving in the ecology where they are included.

2 Persistence in media and technology studies

This is not the first time that the concept of persistence has been addressed in media studies. With only a few exceptions, (digital) media scholarship has often focused on the disruptive and revolutionary power of new technologies, seeing them as opposite to analogue media (on this "newness ideology," see Balbi & Magaudda, 2018; as a notable exception see Van der Heijden & Wolf, 2022). Similarly, the still scarce literature on digital media history has often researched digital media in their early stages, focusing on the brilliant ideas of inventors and their ability to change established paradigms. The focus was and is typically on the new and the changes it will bring about. Elements of technologies, practices and functions of media that would not change but persist and be of continued relevance were conceptually and empirically neglected as compared to the new (Driessens, 2023).

Yet, several approaches in media and technology studies in the last decades have proposed a different perspective. Within media studies, we can identify at least two main fields which have dealt with persistence. Firstly, media archaeology has often underlined how past objects and technologies still matter in contemporary culture. Erkki Huhtamo (1997) has focused on the idea of *topoi* to mean topics of media culture that are recurring, cyclical, and always at disposal to be used over time. Parikka, Schneider and Jucan (2019, p. 9) in their book entitled *Remain* claim:

> The remain is not merely secondary but the primary entry to a different temporal regime that is still, oddly enough, persistently here as a thing but also as something more. The emergence of the *re*-main is to be taken as primary even if one would be tempted to think of it as a trace that is not fully present.

Media archaeology, in sum, has focused on the material persistence of media forms.

A second tradition in media studies touching the issue of persistence is the literature devoted to the relationship between old and new media. Again, the focus on new media is much more prevalent than the focus on the old, with the old often being regarded as what the new helps to advance from. Old media are then seen as the embodiment of old obstacles and limitations that can be overcome and made obsolete by the functionalities of the new (Menke & Schwarzenegger, 2019; Scolari, 2013). But several authors have tried to define the persistence of old media in different ways. According to Bolter and Grusin (1999), *remediation* is the process through which old media are embedded and integrated into new ones, and so persisting over time. Charles Acland has used the expression of *residual media*: Quoting Raymond Williams in *Marxism and Literature*, Acland (2007, p. xxi) defines the residual as something that "has been effectively formed in the past, but it is still active in the cultural process, not only and often not at all as an element of the past, but as an effective element of the present." Similarly, residual media are media of the past, but still affecting the present: media whose relevance and activity persists. *Reconfiguration* is how Gabriele Balbi (2015) called the process of old media changing in order to react to new media. Old media, to save from extinction and so to persist, sometimes change *because of* new media: the telegraph changed because of the telephone, radio and cinema changed because of TV, analogue media are changing because of digital ones. Reconfiguration is a strategy of persistence used by old media. The same author has introduced the concept of *co-existence*: this is a "golden rule" of media history, in which new media and old media live together, they do not kill each other. Berber Hagedoorn has used the concept of *rescreening*. The medium of TV has evolved into a constellation of dynamic screen practices affording *rescreening* (Hagedoorn, 2017, 2020) – i. e., the vast access to a (digital) repertoire of previously transmitted TV images in today's multi-mediated landscape – for instance through re-use in programming on TV and streaming media, but also in online networked television archives. Philippe Theophanidis and Ghislain Thibault (2017) have used a concept taken from hard sciences (*media hysteresis*), referring to "phenomena where effects persist when causes have disappeared" (p. 9). The two authors define "'media hysteresis' as the persistence of effects at the cultural level even after the causes have disappeared at the technical level" (p. 9) and, more specifically, "It can be the persistence of media forms, functions, and configurations, or media discourses, imaginaries or otherwise" (p. 12). Finally, Carlos A. Scolari (2023) resorts to biological metaphors and arguments to explain the life cycle of media in the context of media ecologies. He introduces several terms and phases of media life which can be considered close to persistence: defensive resistance, adaptation, convergence, and obsolescence. All these terms indicate that media technologies are part of a struggle to survive, to adapt to new circumstances and environmental impacts in order to prevent getting extinct. To persist, in other terms.

The persistence of the past and its continuous relevance for understanding processes in the now has always been challenging for media and communication studies. In history and media history a focus on what was is the essence of academic practice. However, media and communication research are importantly driven by the ever new, fascinated by and obsessed with change. Against this backdrop the idea of persistence is simultaneously an important reminder and a provocation for the field. Over time, the delay between new media entering the media ecology, and media studies turning to them as a new main area of investigation has grown shorter and is almost nullified (Wilke, 2019). The focus on change is, as Oliver Driessens (2023) has put it, a gene in the DNA of communication studies, that immediately stands out. Here, a problematic circle begins, as Driessens argues: the focus on change, from now on forward, causes an abandonment of historical continuities and persistence of the old, the neglect of what persists amount to exaggerated claims of change. To them who ignore what was there before, everything will appear as new and changing.

To remain standing, i. e., to persist, in the media ecology is to adopt and evolve, to change with changing circumstances. Furthermore, persistence is not opposed to change, but rather change is a constituent for media's ability to persist. At this point, we can recall Simone Natale (2016) who argued that there are no old media, highlighting that the old is always rejuvenating, adapting and changing.

In technology studies, technological persistence is centre stage. David Edgerton (2007), in his seminal book, has argued that old technologies matter for a long time and, often, they matter more when they disappear from the public discourse. He calls this "the shock of the old." It is not only a matter of persistence, then, but especially of *relevance*: Persistent technologies are often more relevant than breakthroughs. And they are more relevant if they get older and older in a version of "Lindy effect" applicable to communication technologies – the so called "Lindy effect" is a theory according to which the future life expectancy of some non-perishable things (like a technology but also ideas) is proportional to their current age, so that every additional period of survival implies a longer remaining life expectancy (Goldman, 1964).

A chapter of Edgerton's (2007) book is entitled "maintenance." *Maintenance* made persistence a key topic of discussion. Maintenance theory has emerged in the last decade, but so far it has been rarely associated to media and communication studies (Balbi & Leggero, 2020). Nevertheless, in order to launch a theory of media persistence, focusing on maintenance is crucial because it means focusing on how old technologies can be kept in function, and so can persist over time (Russell & Vinsel, 2018; Weber & Krebs, 2021). Maintenance is an effort that helps media to persist and to prevent uncontrolled, chaotic change, the withering away or decay of technologies. Again, if we see persistence not as a form of stasis, maintenance can be considered as a way of managing change in order to allow for persistent use and continuity.

Path dependency is another theoretical tradition in technology studies linked to the idea of persistence. The famous case of the

QWERTY keyboard (David, 1986) is one of the best examples to illustrate the persistence of old ideas into new and digital technologies. The QWERTY keyboard was invented in the 19th century and its intermedial persistence across times and cultures is very surprising: from mechanic to electric typewriters, from computers to smartphones. The motto of path dependency is "History Matters!" and, in this case, the persistence of a keyboard is mainly a cultural rather than a technological fact. One could learn to use another keyboard, of course, but to change media habits a strong effort is needed. So, persistence is also a theory of habits that cannot be changed so rapidly and research on user practices has found that some practices are more persistent than the technologies they are performed with. Even when media users own the latest devices that would allow for different modes of use, they might pertain to old and established patterns rather than swiftly adjust (Menke & Schwarzenegger, 2019).

We have reflected on topics including topoi, remains, residual media, media hysteresis, reconfiguration, co-existence, rescreening, but also the need for maintenance and the relevance of path dependency of old media. All these (and probably many other) topics are connected to media persistence, and, in some cases, they can also be considered synonyms. So, what is new in our contribution? With this Guest Editorial and Thematic Section, we aim to advance a new research agenda for historians of digital media and technologies and, more in general, for digital media and digital technology scholars. Instead of focusing on the early histories of digital media, we propose to study the persistence of old media in the digital age and against the backdrop of digital media environments. More specifically, the reasons why old media persist over time, how they are part of new media and shape them, how digital society was and is strongly influenced by old ideas, imaginaries, and preceding visions of the future. Jussi Parikka (2012, p. 34) has proposed that the concept of *remain* can help expand the "media-archaeological agenda." We do think, similarly, that persistence can change the way we approach media studies, and digital media especially. On the one hand, with the concept of media persistence, digital media can be re-imagined: They are not always disruptive technologies that have changed the past completely, but they often have connections with previous media forms. On the other hand, this can be also considered as a new way to understand (digital) media history, since the field does not have to deal with the past anymore, but with the present: Today, digital desktops resemble physical desktops, old telephones are embedded in the logo of WhatsApp, and old infrastructures are used for transporting new digital data. Persistence of the analogue and of early digital media imaginaries in the contemporary digital era is not history, but it is an attempt to better understand present times and how present times are full of old things. Interestingly, some of the persistent technologies and practices that echo in current digital icons surpass the time when they still relate to the actual practice and will become unfamiliar to younger generations of users, who will learn to invoke functions demarked with the icon, but without relating their sense making to the old technological roots the symbolism refers to: For example, we have saved this Guest Editorial clicking several times on an icon resembling a 3.5 floppy disc – a technology which we have used and also reveals our age –, but the same icon is clicked by people who have never user a floppy disc. Hence, persistence emphasizes the material, functional, and symbolic entanglements between old and new, the past, present, and future of media.

Beside a literature review on the topic, the Guest Editorial aims to categorize media persistence, discussing the main reasons why, according to us, media persist over time. This typology can then be discussed or applied both to the case studies in this Thematic Section and hopefully to further case studies in various other contexts.

3 Categorizing media persistence

In this part, we will try to categorize and discuss persistence at four main levels: technology, management, user practices, and metaphors. Of course, other dimensions may be added – in some ways, this is our hope because it means that a reflection on media persistence has started in different fields –, but we decided to focus on the most relevant ones in our research, on the most representative in the Thematic Section, and the ones emerging in the scientific literature.

3.1 The persistence of technology

Technological persistence, as the first category of persistence, deals with the material, physical, and tangible persistence of media, that is evident in media infrastructures. At the macro level, the development of telecommunications networks from the 19th century to the present shows a surprising continuity: The intertwining and structure of the global networks of submarine cables that carry Internet data, for example, are incredibly similar to those of 19th century submarine telegraphy and, in some ways, of wireless telegraphy in the first decades of the twentieth century (see for example Starosielski, 2015). Secondly, as Christian Henrich-Franke (2019) has shown, Internet networks are often based on previous networks, like the telegraph and telephone. Telephone networks in copper have been the backbone of the Internet and, thanks to them, millions of people have accessed the net. Telephone networks are indeed very difficult to be changed completely (for example you must dig up streets and change cables in the houses) and their persistence is quite symbolic of the quasi-irreversible nature of large technical systems, as path dependency and STS studies have shown.

Some technologies will persist longer than we aspire to keep them. Another interesting case has to do with pneumatic tubes. Pneumatic post was one of the most popular new media of the 19th century and several big cities in Europe decided to dig and to place this network of tubes under their roads. It was the fulfilment of an old dream: the instantaneous transportation of goods from one point to another in the city. After some decades, those tubes were abandoned and, for example, today in Rome an Internet operator has bought tubes and filled them with Internet cables. Like the telephone cables, also the persistent tubes changed their usages and pass from transferring goods to support the Internet (Balbi, 2017).

There are persisting media which are simply technologically better than new (and maybe digital) ones. As Lisa Gitelman and Geoffrey Pingree (2003) claim, we tend to consider new and digital technologies simply better than old and analogue ones. This is a teleological, linear, and evolutionary view of the history of communication from the oldest and worst medium to the newest and best one and can be considered a huge mistake when studying technologies. A paper book, as an example, is a technology "invented" centuries ago and which was transformed thanks to the printing press in the 15th century and by new technologies for mass production like the steam power and the linotype in the 19th century. Despite several attempts and forecasting on the disappearance of paper (books, newspapers, but also ephemerals), this technology has not been replaced by its digital form (epubs, ebooks, etc.) but, on the contrary, the publishing and selling of the paper products globally are in its highest numbers ever (Pimlott, 2011). This is a form of "shock of the old" in Edgerton's words: When digital media seem to be the crucial and more relevant technologies today, paper books proliferate. This phenomenon is not only persistence, but also proliferation of the analogue with digital platforms: in the booming of paper books, for example, Amazon or similar digital platforms which allow to buy and distribute books play a relevant role.

Another case of technological persistence is the forms of analogue media which are not used anymore but they are still "preserved" in private or public spaces, such as archives. It is the case of old telegraph or telephone networks which nobody wants to dismantle (because it is too expensive for public companies or the responsible private companies failed, for example). Paolo Bory (2020) has shown how cabinets of high-speed Internet in the 1990s are still visible in several roads of Italian cities, sometimes reused for new generations of Internet cables, sometimes simply abandoned. Then, on a smaller scale, think of how homes are full of unused analogue and digital media: VHS recorders, Walkmans, Discmans, old mobile phones, not working stereos, gramophones, old consoles for computer gaming, old MP3 players, DVDs, CDs, floppy discs, and many other technologies. Why don't we throw away old technologies which do not work or we do not use anymore? Because analogue and digital technologies can also change their "functions" over time. Media are relevant not only when they are in use, but also when they are *not used*. They become decorative objects and modern antiques which are also sold and bought in markets. Media we own and showcase are telltales of our identities, who we are, want to be seen and recognized as or, especially with older media, of who we were in our past. Hence, we also do not throw old media away because we attach to them powerful feelings of memory and nostalgia (Niemeyer, 2014). These feelings attached to objects persist over time and they are a material memory of each person (Menke & Schwarzenegger, 2016) and sometimes even survive the first owner (Bodei, 2015).

3.2 The persistence of management

The second category of persistence can be laid out under the *management persistence*. Politicians, private companies, and technicians regulate, manage, and create new media often in the contemporary (and old) media landscape. There are several examples of this form of persistence. It is surprising how political ideas and principles persist over time. Let's take the famous information superhighways (we will return on the metaphor of highways later) document written by the Clinton administration in 1993 (proper title: *The National Information Infrastructure: Agenda for Action*). It is a document full of persistent ideas on "communication revolutions" and on the impact of new media: Digital networks, like telegraphy and broadcasting in the past, will reduce distances, bring democracy, provide equal access to schools, and benefit people from economic to health perspective (Streeter, 2011). Another example is the World Economic Forum initiative "One Laptop per Child": Driven by technological determinism, the idea behind the project is to bring inexpensive laptops to children living in poor countries and, doing so, to give access to new forms of education and information (Ames, 2019). Giving access to media as giving access to new forms of culture is another persistent political idea: Radio and TV sets, VHS recorders, desktop computers, Internet connections and others were all used to spread culture among the young generations.

There can also be a persistence of business models and business mentalities as in the persistence of players and stakeholders. In the 1970s, the first personal computers were produced and sold by companies making electric keyboards. The management paradigm was the office. Companies like Motorola passed from producing portable radios (the so-called transistors), to beepers and pagers, to mobile telephones. The persistent management paradigm here was the portability. Leading companies producing batteries like Duracell in the United States have started to produce power banks for digital devices. They are indeed in the paradigm of recharging. In terms of distribution, there is the famous example of Netflix coping in the second half of the 2000s the renting model of Blockbuster. Instead of physical shops, Netflix allowed users to rent DVDs through an online platform and then they circulate through normal postal services (Lobato, 2019). This is a form a persistent idea of circulation of physical goods even in the digital age.

It is also interesting to note continuities and persistence in terms of space and place. Then, physical places have seen the birth and development of dozens of media, analogue and digital. At Menlo Park, a small town of just over 30 000 inhabitants located in San Mateo County, California, Thomas Edison established his headquarters for decades experimenting and producing technologies for cinema, sound reproduction, radio, and many other communication sectors. A few decades later, Menlo Park became one of the nerve centers of the Silicon Valley and of the so-called digital revolution: Here, Sun Microsystems developed the Java language in the nineties of the twentieth century and, since 2011, Mark Zuckerberg moved the headquarters of Facebook.

3.3 The persistence of practices and users

The third category deals with users applying similar practices to different media over time. Going back to their paper on media hysteresis, Theophanidis and Thibault (2017, p. 10) claim that users' expectations are "shaped by their experience of previous technology" and they

> are actively seeking to recognize something that is familiar to them […] they might attribute […] past models of knowledge to new media; they might resist the prescribed usages in favour of older practices that they have become accustomed to; or they may cling to obsolete vocabulary to describe new technics. (Theophanidis & Thibault, 2017, p. 12)

This can also be read as a tactic to "temper the acceleration of technological evolution" (Theophanidis & Thibault, 2017, p. 12). Persisting is also tempering. Resorting to the allure of familiar old technologies and practices in the context of new technological frameworks helps us to cope with change (Menke, 2019) and reconnect current action with previous experience and knowledge: In other words, it is a form of persistence of practices. A telling example is the sound of the mechanical shutter in the smartphones: When we take a picture with our smartphone, we can hear the click of the old analogue camera. Why? Because this is the sound of cameras and it is a way to link old practices (taking a picture by clicking a button) to new devices (Henning, 2007).

We have mentioned before how in the practices of users, well established habits, routines, and logics may persist even though the technologies in use would allow for other ways of engagement. Users however, when confronted with new media, will not simply start to use new devices as designed by their producers, but will eventually appropriate the use of technologies according to their preferences, needs, and previous habits (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003). How people make use of certain technologies in their lifeworld lies not so much in the technologies themselves but is formed and accustomed in a complex interplay of individual, social, and technological factors, along with infrastructures, availability and costs (Menke & Schwarzenegger, 2019; Naab & Schwarzenegger, 2017). People started for example to search their names in the electronic repository of the Minitel before they did it again on Google when it appeared on the Web and its messaging allowed users to connect, chat, flirt before the dating websites (Schafer & Thierry, 2012). Some practices span the media genealogy.

In the concept of media generations (Bolin, 2016; Hepp, Berg, & Roitsch, 2017) certain practices and uses are related to generational features: People belonging to the same generations are likely to have shared experiences and possibilities that will also impact how they make use of certain technologies including media. In a media generation approach, the younger age and times of growing up and adolescence are seen as formative years, which will later impact how all newer media technologies are used, made sense of, and valued against. The experiences made when people first become familiar with the then prevalent media of their time, will persist in how they make use of later technologies. Bolin (2016) as well as Hepp et al. (2017) alongside others have however criticized what could be considered a generational determinism of media use. It is not the generation that shapes how media are used but it is the likeliness of similar experience that define generations which will play out in how users make sense of media and integrate them in their everyday practices. Old media persist in the ways of how users engage with new media or technologies. Again, we can see the potential of emphasizing persistence over change. Rather than looking for what sets generations apart and how new technologies are carriers of change, persistence allows asking for what remains despite of technological innovation and how shared experiences, needs or similar patterns of use are established across generations. Before, we have named nostalgia one important factor of why old media and technologies persist as relevant for the life worlds of their users. But a lens on persistence also allows to identify motives, reasons, and modes of persisting media use that cannot be explained by nostalgia alone. Finally, while all eyes are typically on change and appropriation of the new, when it comes to media use, the concept of persistence helps to understand that not all and everybody will become a user of new technologies, but some (in fact many) people will just continue to use media as they did before, regardless. It is necessary to keep a focus on what people keep doing, avoid to do and do instead of taking up the latest fashions, and on media resistance (see on this concept Syvertsen, 2017). It also adds some complexity to the studies of reception, adoption, domestication as well as to media studies in general.

3.4 The persistence of metaphors

The fourth and last form of persistence is *metaphoric*. Think of analogue metaphors and how much they are popular in the digital world and prove how there is a form of persistence of imaginary and ideas. Very often, digital media have been imagined as analogue media doing something better: This is an old media metaphor imaginary (Scolari, 2021). If we take, for example, the proposal of the WWW of Tim Berners Lee old media like phone books and libraries are the key inspirational tools to build the new system (Bory, 2018). Another example is the already mentioned superhighway metaphor: This is a transportation metaphor, which became quite popular to indicate high-speed Internet networks. In different countries, this metaphor took different names like autobahn of information or data in Germany or railway networks in Italy, but the analogy between the Internet and transportation of people and goods is a recurring and persistent topic. Jérôme Bourdon (2021, p. 211), in his analysis of "telepresence" notes: "With or without making a comparison with the digital world and connecting the past and present, some media and art historians also used expressions such as 'presence at a distance,' 'social presence,' 'electronic presence,' or simply 'presence' to discuss the power of technologies to 'transport' people to different spaces and to faraway people or creatures, not necessarily including interaction."

A second form of metaphoric persistence has an iconic character. Although landline telephone handsets are decreasing, the icon that distinguishes WhatsApp consists of a white telephone receiver in a green field. Similarly, the Instagram logo is an analogue camera. Most e-mail services on the Web continue to preserve traditional postal icons such as paper envelopes, carbon copy, paperclips for attachment. As mentioned, the universal icon of "save" is a 3.5-inch floppy disk used in the 1980s and early 1990s and which has become synonymous with conservation in the contemporary digital world despite having fallen into disuse. Think about the desktops of our laptops: They are still quite similar to physical offices and desks with bins, folders, documents, and word processing programs. As briefly touched upon above, it is also interesting to note how the youngest users of digital services have perhaps not sent any paper letters during their life, they have never taken a photograph with an analogue machine, they have never made a phone call through a classic receiver or used a 3.5-inch floppy disk. Nevertheless, they are able to recognize all these objects as media and relate them to their current practices: sometimes perhaps without grasping the historical core that persists through the symbol.

There is also a continuity in the way services are called. For example, the liquid or fluid metaphors are quite popular over time: Radio and TV channels became YouTube channels; the tube itself is a persisting container even at metaphorical level; even the network can be considered a persistent way to imagine media infrastructures and comes from fishing (Musso, 2017). There is room for a lot of discussion on the history of media metaphors and especially digital media metaphors: This would clearly show how topics, names, and metaphors persist over time, maybe they can change meaning, but they are still alive.

Of course, there can be several other forms of media persistence, but we decided to focus and to categorize the ones that look more evident. Of course, this is just a first and starting analysis of media persistence and several other categories and forms can be found in further studies on this topic, while the six papers in our special issue also illustrate the shared approaches as well as own definitions and understanding of media persistence by the authors, who challenge and enrich our typology. Under this respect, we hope to launch a new theoretical reflection on media persistence to be expanded later. This section is a first step to explore what old media persistence can add to our understanding of media (change) and which avenues for research it can open in the future.

4 This Thematic Section and media persistence theory

The articles in this Thematic Section cover some of the topics mentioned earlier. They are particularly sensitive to the nostalgic dimension of media persistence. The articles extensively explore the realm of audiovisual media and culture, by discussing VHS, vinyl records, film restoration, and how the platformization and on-demand distribution of films complement each other. Through the articles we contemplate on various relationships built with various media forms such as the practices of VCR collectors and enthusiasts in the context of Greece, the strategies of major media groups like Netflix or Disney+ in addressing the general public or the practices of collectively watching TV at night. One article addresses preservation and restoration efforts, while another one discusses the re-circulation of content through platforms such as social networks. The articles together therefore tackle various issues related to the production, re-circulation, preservation, reception, and participation of the public in media persistence.

The authors embrace complementary aspects of media persistence, including technical, managerial, and economic dimensions, entrenched usages, and forms of nostalgia. To capture this diversity, the authors use complementary approaches, with many leaning toward qualitative studies and emphasizing oral interviews to gather insights into the usage of older media formats. Some articles also employ platform studies and occasionally quantitative methods. All of them emphasize the complementarity of formats and uses, also highlighting the fluidity and some continuities of professional practices, user habits, and transitional phenomena that are far from radical. Keywords such as "reinvention," "resistance," "nostalgia," "memories," "media repertoires," "contamination" (the past strongly influencing the present) are all crucial in unpacking the concept of media persistence.

The first article by Michael Stamm, stands out in this issue, as it is not related to audiovisual content and artifacts, but focuses on the persistence of the book. The author invites explicit consideration of the perpetual reinvention of "the old," while underlining that "the printed book was not only perpetually present but also continually innovative, and manufacturers consistently have sought means of more sustainable manufacturing" (p. 318). Stamm highlights the constant evolution of the medium through examples of three books made from sustainable materials: David Brower's *Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run* (1995), printed on paper made from kenaf, a sustainable alternative to wood-based paper; William McDonough and Michael Braungart's *Cradle to Cradle* (2002), printed "on a synthetic polymer that could be endlessly remade into other products" (p. 311); and HarperCollins's *Green Bible* (2008) printed on recycled paper and that used soy-based ink. Stamm suggests that the printed book was not only perpetually present but also continually innovative. And so, media persistence is not only a conservative act, a form of resilience, but more often can be a form of innovation and change.

Finding novelty in persistent practices is also at the core of the article by Zachary Karpinellison, who explores the restoration of celluloid film as not merely relegating old media but creating a renewal and coexistence between analogue and digital versions. The article challenges the relegation of celluloid film as old media and argues that distinguishing between digital and analogue *film-versions* gives rise to "a new kind of mediatised coexistence" (p. 321). The audacious proposal of not distinguishing between copies and originals and emphasizing the coexistence of both analogue and digital versions provides a stimulating framework, as is his proposal suggesting that "[i]n a way, it could be argued that the details drawn out by the restoration process, did not exist prior to the advent of digital technologies" (p. 328).

The reintroduction of past media content, mediated by audiovisual centers through social networks, to reach new audiences is also fascinating and finds resonance beyond the detailed case study provided by Juan Francisco Gutiérrez Lozano and Antonio Cuartero. In their article the authors analyze how Spanish public television archives use social networks, particularly through the production of memes, to connect with young people. While the Spanish strategy is rooted in a local context (MemorANDA relies on the repetition of regional topics, and flamenco or copla – a more popular variant of the former), the article raises key questions about the mediation and contextualization of persistent TV content in the frame of digital sharing and circulation. One more time, here, media persistence is a form of change, of innovation, of recontextualization: What persist is constantly re-used in different media environments.

In terms of cultural practices, beyond the content itself, the article by Ursula-Helen Kassaveti highlights the importance of considering the intertwining of past content and its formats and devices. Her exploration of Greek VHS cultures, especially VHS collectors, delves into fan cultures and the question of nostalgia.[1] In particular, we find the expression of forms of nostalgia, resistance, and tangibility to which the author adds an interesting reflection on the fact that VCRs (Video Cassette Recorders) are situated (in space, context, uses, etc.).

Examining the space of practices as well as their temporalities, as Jutta Röser and Jo Marie Dominiak do in their article related to collective TV night practices, is stimulating. Another intriguing perspective is indeed presented in the latter by the authors who discuss collective TV night practices as well as vinyl uses, and explore nuances in the persistence and reinvention of media practices. The inclusion of second screens in TV viewing is an important point which they stress. However, what the authors emphasize is that persistence is not merely something that happens, but that requires effort and action. Also, what makes persistent practices relevant is that they become the expression of particular meanings and mediate relations, between users sharing the experience, but also between the persistent media and new complimentary practices and available services.

Similarly, the final contribution explores hybrid practices and continuity in the presence of platforms and media chronology in film and TV production, offering nuanced reflections on the shifts and continuities between the pre-Netflix and post-Netflix eras. Authors Éric George, Justine Dorval, and Édouard Germain underline a "certain 'contamination' of old practices originating from the organization of industrial channels ('filières') and forms in the mutations currently presented by these new intermediation services" (p. 369). By analyzing Netflix, Amazon (Prime Video Service), Disney+, and Apple TV+ they highlight forms of continuity in three fields: presence of platforms downstream but also upstream, the respect or not of media chronology in the case of film production, and the media coverage of TV series.

Collectively, the six articles in this Thematic Section offer a fruitful reflection on the dynamics and notion of media persistence. The authors of these research articles bridge the gap between "old" and "new," analogue and digital, past and present, and together they present a sensitive understanding of the ambiguities of novelty and persistence, while rejuvenating the understanding of media dynamics.

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What we can learn from books in the digital age

Michael Stamm, Michigan State University, Department of History, United States
stamm@msu.edu

Abstract

Though books are often considered "old media" in the digital age, their production in this period in fact has been continually reimagined and redefined through new technologies of printing, especially paper and ink manufacturing. This paper explores how three specific recent printed books demonstrate this point in both form and content: David Brower's *Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run* (1995), William McDonough and Michael Braungart's *Cradle to Cradle* (2002), and the 2008 HarperCollins *Green Bible.* Brower's book was printed on paper made from kenaf, a sustainable alternative to wood-based paper. *Cradle to Cradle* was printed on a synthetic polymer that could be endlessly remade into other products. *The Green Bible* was printed on recycled paper and used soy-based ink, and all verses with environmental content were printed in green. In each case, in form these printed books were meant to model innovative industrial information production while also through their content to motivate enhanced environmental consciousness.

Keywords

paper, ink, materiality, print, sustainability, recycling, media revolution

1 Introduction

Among media historians, printed books are considered revolutionary new media, but for the most part that revolution is understood to have been a development of the early modern period (Pettegree, 2010). Scholars differ in their assessments of the character and pace of the cultural changes promoted by a new form of mechanically printed knowledge, but there is general agreement that what we now understand as a media revolution happened in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries as a new kind of book began circulating widely across Europe (Eisenstein, 2002; Johns, 2002). Having started a media revolution, however, books in many historical accounts then remain mostly static forms until rendered "old media" in the twentieth century by the various "new media" that emerged. The communications scholar Neil Postman (1985/2006, p. 8) went so far as to describe this as the "decline of the Age of Typography and the ascendency of the Age of Television." This is a misconception that the historian Paul Duguid (1996, p. 65) calls a misguided "notion of *supersession* – the idea that each new technological type vanquishes or subsumes its predecessors." In fact, print evolved and persisted alongside the development of cinema, radio, television, and it continues to do so in the age of the Internet.

Two of the primary reasons for this widely misunderstood element of media history are the practices of making hard turning points out of the diffusion of new technologies and the tendency to overlook important evolutionary developments in specific media. By focusing so much attention on the ruptures *between* successive media, scholars have been inattentive to innovations *within* forms of media. In the case of print media, this means that scholars have ignored a range of technical and commercial advances in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Some of these involved the development of new ways to add images to books, magazines, and newspapers, which enhanced the visual appeal of printed materials (Brown, 2002; Harris, 1990). Other less-heralded innovations have been similarly important, for example the development of the softcover paperback book, which aided significantly in the diffusion of serious literature in the mid-twentieth century (Menand, 2022, pp. 354–363). As this essay will show, other important advance-

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ments in printing and papermaking technologies, in particular the development and evolution of industrial printing and the adoption of wood as the raw material for papermaking in place of recycled cotton rags, enabled major changes in the circulation and content of books and newspapers (McGaw, 1987). In the expansion of its production and circulation networks, the "old medium" of print in fact was defined by constant innovation, and this continues into the digital age.

One way to see the ongoing transformation of the printed book is to consider how publishers have used it as a vehicle to model sustainable industrial mass production in an age in which concerns about the environment have become prominent. Among scholars focusing on the materiality of media, there is increasing awareness of the ways that media production can harm the environment, including deforestation and chemical waste production in paper manufacturing, mineral extraction and processing in smartphone manufacturing, and heavy energy usage by data centers (Hogan, 2015; Kaminska & Ruiz, 2021; Maxwell & Miller, 2012; Merchant, 2017; Stamm, 2018). The use of printed books to promote sustainability and alternative thinking about industrial manufacturing remains a vital project in the contemporary world. For radio listeners, television viewers, and Internet users, the quest to be informed, entertained, and connected has placed increasing demands on the natural resources necessary to produce media objects. Projects aiming to create a sustainable industrial print culture provide important lessons to those who are continuing attempts to solve this problem in the digital age. Considering efforts led by those in the print sector to refashion and make sustainable the manufacturing of books, magazines, and newspapers offers ways of rethinking and possibly refashioning the industrial supply chains producing the media devices and content that are giving the digital age its name.

This essay analyzes three specific recent printed books about the environment that provide lessons in what "old media" can teach digital age readers about materiality and sustainability in both their form and content: David Brower's *Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run* (1995), William McDonough and Michael Braungart's *Cradle to Cradle* (2002), and the 2008 HarperCollins *Green Bible*. Sierra Club President Brower's book was printed on paper made from kenaf, a similar crop to hemp that could be produced in a more sustainable and less polluting manner than wood-based paper. *Cradle to Cradle* was printed on a synthetic polymer paper that could be endlessly remade into other products. *The Green Bible* was printed on recycled paper and used soy-based ink, both important late twentieth-century innovations, and all verses with environmental content were printed in green. Over a quarter century spanning major developments in digital media, the "old" medium of the book persisted and evolved. Books were not superseded by newer media but were continually reshaped by technological innovations. Authors and printers imagined and developed new ways to manufacture books, in the process modeling new forms of industrial mass production that could be used in and beyond the media industries. In each case discussed in this essay, these printed books were meant to have content that stimulated thinking about the environment while showing how as objects they could model a more sustainable form of industrial information production.

2 Sustainability and print media

In the 1960s and 1970s, one of the most important developments in United States politics was the emergence of the environmental movement. Increased popular usage of the term "environment" reflected a growing understanding that human actions affected the natural world even when people were not physically in "natural" settings. Modern life in cities and suburbs, particularly when oriented around mass consumption, had consequences that rippled across the planet through various natural systems (Caradonna, 2014, pp. 89–95).

Print media have played a paradoxical role in the rise of environmentalism. Some of the most important motivators of the environmental movement were books, including major monographs like Aldo Leopold's *A Sand County Almanac* (1949) and Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), both of which have sold more than two million copies since their initial publications (Aldo Leopold Foundation, 2022; Griswold, 2012, p. SM38). The mass consumption of these influential environmentalist books was part of a dramatic increase in the circulation of printed materials in the second half of the twentieth century. Between 1950 and 1995, U.S. newsprint consumption increased from 5 937 000 to 11 261 000 tons (Stamm, 2018, p. 267), the number of periodical titles published from 6 960 to 11 179, and the number of book titles published from 11 022 to 57 353 (Carter et al., 2006, Tables Dg275–286 and Dg225–252). The production of all that paper had environmental consequences, as Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller (2012, p. 46) note: "Two important properties of paper-mill technology deepened the printed word's relationship to the Earth's ecosystems, causing effects that are familiar to modern readers: water pollution and deforestation." Some of the effects include the release of noxious odors into the air and carcinogenic substances like dioxin into local waterways. Knowledge production affected the natural landscapes surrounding industrial paper production.

Some of those seeking a way out of this paradox that learning about the environment could harm the environment were inspired by the Club of Rome's 1972 report *The Limits to Growth*, another widely circulated and influential monographic motivator of environmentalism. The book, which has been translated into thirty languages and sold more than thirty million copies (Nørgård, Peet, & Ragnarsdóttir, 2010), offered a vision of a bleak future if society stayed on its current path of "resource depletion" (Meadows, Meadows, Randers, & Behrens, 1972, p. 29). This perception of limitations influenced many people in the media industries. Gar Smith, the editor of the radical magazine *Earth Island Journal*, adopted this language in 1990 in claiming that "[a]t some point in the not-too-distant future, there will be limits to publishing. How many newspapers, magazines, comic books, books of poetry, fiction or nonfiction can be sustainably produced in a given year?" For Smith (1990, p. 33), the central problem with print culture was that "civilization is as fundamentally addicted to woodpulp as industry is held hostage to oil."

In many respects, publishing projects like the ones discussed below reflected this new understanding of the limits of natural resources and the environmental damage done by industrially produced media. They took place not only against the backdrop of the emergence of the environmental movement but also in relation to a developing discourse around what became known as "sustainability." As was the case with the idea of the "environment," the concept of "sustainability" reflected an old term taking on a new meaning in the late twentieth century. As historian Jeremy Caradonna notes, the concept was used in the early modern period in relation to forestry, but in the 1970s and 1980s the term came to denote prescriptive actions aiming to mitigate environmental degradation and climate change and to create a more equitably functioning capitalism (Caradonna, 2014, pp. 5–8). Over the subsequent half century, print media have been vital means of circulating information about sustainability, and many in that sector used their production to model sustainable industrial production. These are the lessons of the three innovative books discussed below. By developing new sources of raw materials for paper and ink, and in promoting paper recycling programs, book and periodical publishers aimed through content and form to promote the idea that sustainability was a desirable and viable practice that was portable to other media industries.

3 New materials for old media

As the production of books, magazines, and newspapers continued to increase after World War II, chemists and manufacturers sought alternative sources of raw materials to lessen the amount of forest resources being utilized in papermaking. In the late twentieth century, one of the most important emerging sources for making paper on a mass scale was kenaf, an "annual, nonwood fiber plant native to east-central Africa" (Kugler, 1988, p. 2). In the field, kenaf grows to a height of four to six meters and resembles both okra and cotton plants, and it can be grown in same regions as the latter crop (Wood, 1988, p. 17). In 1960, after considering over five hundred other annual plants as possible raw materials for paper, the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) deemed kenaf the "most promising nonwood fiber plant" (Kugler, 1988, p. 3). Scientists estimated that the costs of making paper from it could be a quarter lower and that the manufacturing would generate less pollution than with wood. Kenaf also offered the benefit of being more practically renewable, as it matured in under three months, a far shorter growing period than decades-long process for pulpwood trees (Wood, 1987).

Experiments with kenaf continued throughout the 1970s, and in 1986 the USDA and the private firm Kenaf International formed the Kenaf Demonstration Project (KDF) as a "public-private partnership with the principal objective of gaining acceptance of kenaf as a fiber source for the manufacture of newsprint" (Kugler, 1987, pp. 2–5). By 1987, KDF thought that its kenaf process had developed sufficiently to merit a public demonstration, and on July 13 the *Bakersfield Californian* used this paper to print that day's main and sports sections. In a front-page story, the *Californian* told readers that the paper that they were holding "never saw a forest" (Stevenson, 1987, p. A1). In California's Central Valley, or one over from its emerging Silicon, one of the forefronts of media production was a new method of paper manufacturing.

Even on the cusp of the digital age, many environmentalists believed, extending this Bakersfield project to more publications would have major environmental benefits. The most prominent national demonstration of the possibilities of kenaf came in 1995, when HarperCollins published David Brower's *Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run* on paper made from it. Brower was the first executive director of the Sierra Club, and his book was part autobiography and part manifesto, and in tone it was consistent with Brower's strident public persona (McPhee, 1971). Brower had grand aspirations to fix environmental problems in the developed world that he believed were long in the making and that had reached a crisis point. "In the years since the Industrial Revolution," Brower (1995, p. 2) argued "we humans have been partying pretty hard. We've ransacked most of the Earth for resources." This had happened across industries, Brower argued, including media. "No tree is safe," he warned. "The information society demands more, not less, paper for printers, copiers, and fax machines … Democracy means more newsprint, and higher literacy calls for more books" (Brower, 1995, p. 62).

However, Brower noted, experiments with kenaf meant that "We are on the verge of a forest revolution. It is not necessary to make paper from trees" (Brower, 1995, p. 62). His own book, Brower claimed, was evidence that this could be done. "The words you are reading right now have not been printed on paper pulped from any tree. I write upon flowers, as it were" (Brower, 1995, p. 66). Through buying and reading books printed on kenaf paper, Bower told his readers, they were "helping build the demand that will encourage others to meet it. And there is further reward in your knowing that the unpulped trees can keep a lot of forest beautiful in perpetuity" (Brower, 1995, p. 76). Reading this way, Brower concluded, promoted environmentalism and sustainability. "I like to read. I like forests on the sides of my mountains" (Brower, 1995, pp. 68–69). For David Brower, the lesson of the form and content of *Let the Mountains Talk, Let the Rivers Run* was that print media could be readily made and distributed from a renewable resource offering a clearly viable alternative to prevailing methods employing wood-based papermaking. Though Brower's book retained the medium's old form, he also pointed to a new configuration of the commodity chains involved in producing it.

4 Recycling and upcycling

Alongside the continued search for new raw materials, some paper manufacturers began viewing the recycling of wood-based paper as a realistic way to print more sustainably. If wood was to remain the base of paper's commodity chain, a starting point toward more sustainable production was developing mechanisms to shift away from the single use and disposal of the manufactured item.

Paper manufacturers in the United States benefited from the widespread development of recycling programs around the country starting in the 1950s and 1960s (Quimby, 1975). By the 1970s, paper and paperboard had become the largest component of American municipal solid waste. Between 1983 and 1991, half of the states in the U.S. passed laws either requiring or promoting recycling, and the number of American municipalities with "active collection programs" quadruped from 1000 to 4000, with paper products a "major focus" of them, as a U.S. Forest Service report noted (Ince, 1996, p. 2). By 2014, some 87 percent of Americans had either curbside pickup or relatively accessible drop off locations to recycle paper, and recycled paper comprised 38 percent of the material for the manufacture of new paper (Bajpai, 2014, pp. 2, 6). In aiming to make the production of print media more sustainable, however, recycling was not a panacea, as even the best policies and technologies had limitations. As a practical matter, as historian Finn Arne Jørgensen notes, paper "cannot be endlessly recycled" (Jørgensen, 2019, p. 43). The quality of the fiber deteriorates with each successive recycling, and current technologies allow for five to seven cycles, within each of which some new fiber must be added to bolster the weakened source material (Bajpai, 2014, p. 17). Even though it had benefits, some sustainability advocates believed, recycling remained an imperfect solution because it left existing commodity chains intact. There might be, some argued, a better way to make books.

One of the most important demonstrations of this came in 2002, when designer William McDonough and chemist Michael Braungart published *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*, a book arguing that all industries needed to fundamentally rethink their supply chains away from "cradle-to-grave" design and instead look to nature's "cradle-to-cradle" system of material flows while embracing a new paradigm in which "waste does not exist" (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, pp. 102–104). McDonough and Braungart called their approach "upcycling" rather than "recycling," and they promoted a vision for the industrial production of all goods that would be completely sustainable.

Like David Brower, McDonough and Braungart intended their book to offer lessons in what readers could learn in both form and content from print. *Cradle to Cradle* opened with the statement that "This book is not a tree" (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p. 5), and the authors went on to show how their book was an example of their philosophies of sustainability in action. *Cradle to Cradle* was "printed on a synthetic 'paper'" (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p. 5) made using new materials and processes. "Unlike the paper with which we are familiar, it does not use any wood pulp or cotton fiber but is made from plastic resins and inorganic fillers," McDonough and Braungart remarked, and they offered *Cradle to Cradle* as a "prototype for the book as a 'technical nutrient,' that is, as a product that can be broken down and circulated infinitely in industrial cycles – made and remade as 'paper' or other products" (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p. 5). The use of new and non-wood sources for paper in *Cradle to Cradle* "expresses our intention to evolve away from the use of wood fibers for paper as we seek more effective solutions" to mass production, and they added that their book "represents one step toward a radically different approach to designing and producing the objects we use and enjoy, an emerging movement we see as the next industrial revolution" (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, pp. 5–6). As a material object, *Cradle to Cradle* was an attempt to show how, even in the digital age, the printed book might offer an example of a reconceptualized industrial capitalism.

McDonough and Braungart argued that their book was a step toward the book of the future, and they claimed that successive developments could make its production completely sustainable. With imminently available production changes in the mass production of books, that was what the reader could soon be holding in her hands, a printed object made from a new kind of synthetic paper that did not "require cutting down trees or leaching chlorine into waterways" (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p. 70). The remainder of the book would be similarly designed for upcycling, as the inks and glues in the binding could be cleaned readily and the cover made from the same material as the pages. By virtue of its design, the authors concluded, the "entire book can be reclaimed by the publishing industry" (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p. 71).

Cradle to Cradle, McDonough and Braungart later noted, "signaled our intention to design for a human industry without waste, and it forwarded a strategy of hope" (McDonough & Braungart, 2013, p. 19). Their book offered a demonstration of how the industrial production of printed knowledge could be done with modest environmental effects, even on a mass scale. Books could propagate knowledge not only in their content but in their material upcycling. In this reimagined new materialization of an old medium, "[b]ooks become books become books over and over again, each incarnation a sparkling new vehicle for fresh images and ideas. Form follows not just function but the evolution of the medium itself, in the endlessly propagating spirit of the printed word" (McDonough & Braungart, 2002, p. 71).

5 Read your vegetables

The mass circulation of printed information had environmental consequences not only from the manufacture of paper but also from the manufacture of ink, which for much of the twentieth century was "derived from petrochemicals" and often contained "toxic heavy metals" such as cadmium and lead (Assmann, 1992, p. 21). As was the case with commodity chains for paper, some inventors and firms sought ways of redesigning them using less polluting and more sustainable methods, and in both cases what seemed like viable solutions led back to farms. For paper, kenaf offered tremendous promise, and for ink soy did the same in creating a vehicle that replaced petroleum products.

In the U.S., the increase of soybean production in the twentieth century was meteoric. From "near zero" in 1900 to 1629 acres under cultivation in 1909, by 2000 there were some 70 million acres planted with soybeans (Roth, 2018, p. 1). Some cultivation was for human food, but a great deal was also for chemical byproducts, one of the most important of which was ink, which offered two primary environmental benefits. First, in contrast to petroleum-based inks, soy relied upon renewable resources. And second, soy ink usage generated far less pollution, as it did not release volatile organic compounds during the printing process (Munger, 2008). In the 1970s, as Americans experienced spikes in petroleum prices and supply because of actions by OPEC, soy ink also became desirable for economic reasons. The Newspaper Association of America (NAA) directed its technical staff to develop an alternative to petroleum-based ink, and Larry Diedrich, the President of the American Soybean Association, noted that the NAA's move was "not in response to environmental concerns" but stemmed from "their concern during the petroleum shortages back in the 1970's that they needed to have some sort of alternative" (US House, 1995, p. 25). While Americans in their cars were waiting anxiously in long lines at gas stations hoping to fill up their tanks, U.S. publishers were responding to the crisis by trying to find a way to make ink with a more readily available domestic source. In 1987, the *Cedar Rapids Gazette* conducted test printings using soy ink and was pleased with the results (US House, 1995, p. 29). This was a catalyst for other newspapers around the country, and numerous publications began making the switch to soy inks. These included the *Boston Globe*, *Los Angeles Times*, *Detroit Free Press*, *USA Today,* and the *Christian Science Monitor*. As the manager of the *Monitor*'s Arizona printing plant noted, soy ink was the "wave of the future [...] It is a cleaner ink, easier to control. It's good for us and for the farmers" (Siems, 1992, p. 13). By the early 1990s, soy ink had clearly taken hold among American newspaper publishers, for both environmental and economic reasons.

The shift toward soy ink also had the benefit of making paper recycling more convenient. For most of the twentieth century, one of the biggest practical challenges to using recycled paper involved removing the ink. Re-pulping the paper was relatively easy, but making it look new was not, and when the ink was removed, it contained significant amounts of "barium, copper and heavy metals" that made the process costly and hazardous (Carrere & Lohmann, 1996, p. 26). By the mid-1990s, researchers had found that "soy ink is easier to remove from paper pulp before recycling. This paper does not have to be bleached as much, resulting in a cleaner paper at a lesser cost" (US House, 1995, p. 26). Soy ink proved itself to be a vital part of more sustainable printing, and supplies had gone up and prices down. With wood remaining the dominant source for newsprint production, and with more publishers and paper manufacturers looking to recycled pulp as a sustainable and economical source for papermaking, soy ink offered the additional advantage of making that process more cost effective.

6 The good book

These histories of innovative paper and ink manufacturing were recently brought together in the printing of a Bible showing the ways that books have not only persisted but have remained avatars of innovative industrial production. As virtually all histories of the book note, the first major work printed using a mechanical press was Johannes Gutenberg's fifteenth century Bible. Gutenberg's Bible had tremendous cultural significance, and in a commercial sense it demonstrated that mechanical printing could produce knowledge on an unprecedented scale (Pettegree, 2010). In 2008, HarperCollins, David Brower's publisher, brought book history full circle in issuing what it called *The Green Bible*. The book's pages were made from recycled paper and the ink printed on them was soy-based. The cover was made entirely from linen and cotton that was "produced in a green friendly environment" in which "all air is purified before exhausting into the atmosphere and all water is purified and recycled" (*The Green Bible*, 2008, p. I–2). *The Green Bible* took a cue from the so-called "red-letter editions" of the Bible that have the words directly spoken by Jesus printed in red rather than black ink by offering a "green-letter edition" in which each of the more than one thousand verses that the editors believed "speak directly to how we should think and act as we confront the environmental crisis facing our planet" (*The Green Bible*, 2008, p. I–15) was printed in green.

The Green Bible was bold in both form and content and aimed to remind readers that book production could motivate thinking about the environment and sustainability. In its content – the green soy-based text printed on recycled paper – the book also encouraged readers to interpret some verses with fresh eyes, and to, as Archbishop Desmond Tutu noted in his foreword, become more "responsible stewards preserving our vulnerable, fragile planet home" (*The Green Bible*, 2008, p. I–13). *The Green Bible*, in other words, encouraged readers to consider both heaven and earth.

In the book of Genesis, rendered in *The Green Bible*'s green text, nature provided information about the world, though initially in the form of eating rather than reading material. When God places Adam in the Garden of Eden, he offers him the freedom to "eat of every tree" except for the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" (*The Green Bible*, 2008, Genesis 2:16–17, p. 2). Adam disobeys this prohibition, and afterward with Eve is sent out into the world to "till the ground from which he was taken" (*The Green Bible*, 2008, Genesis 3:23, p. 3). In that world as in the Garden of Eden, the descendants of Adam and Eve follow God's dictum to "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it" (*The Green Bible*, 2008, Genesis 1:28, p. 1). This ethic has created the modern system of print media. Trees are still the sources of much of our knowledge of good and evil. The subjugation and instrumentalization of nature, in media industries and most others, has created some of the most pressing environmental problems in the world today. And yet, in media, as *The Green Bible* aims to show, there are alternatives. Trees are not the only material basis of knowledge and, even when they are, they can be better and more sustainably used. As Job prayed, "For there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again, and that its shoots will not cease" (*The Green Bible*, 2008, Job 14:7, p. 488). This lesson has persisted through its widespread circulation in print, and in this sense, books have remained central to media innovations from Gutenberg to *The Green Bible*. The original mechanical book of the fifteenth century models the sustainable book of the twenty-first century.

7 Conclusion

Projects like *The Green Bible* suggest a way of rethinking the notion of print as "old media," which has been a common trope for nearly a century now. Back to the early days of radio broadcasting in the 1920s, futurists have been incorrectly forecasting the demise of print. There is a mistaken tendency to assume that the newest medium of the day is the only medium of the day, but over the past century the so-called "new media" instead have added to public discourse and created new forms and channels for it, while print has thrived. Print is "old" in the sense of having been around longer than many other forms of media in widespread contemporary usage, but it is not "old" in terms of being near the end of its lifecycle. Some have taken to calling print "legacy media," but we might more accurately call it "persistent media." As the books in this essay show, print remains subject to constant and active innovation, and it continues to adapt and evolve.

One of the striking things about this evolution is that the object at hand remains the printed book. Recent decades have seen numerous attempts to create electronic books that might render paper obsolete. "A change is upon us," the essayist Sven Birkerts wrote in 1994, and "nothing could be clearer. The printed word is part of a vestigial order that we are moving away from – by choice and by societal compulsion." As the "printed sheet is heading for obsolescence … The screen is where the information and entertainment wars will be fought" (Birkerts, 1994/2006, pp. 118, 120). These predictions of electronic hegemony as yet have failed to come to pass, an observation made with a mixture of resignation and scorn by scholars of media and technology taking longer views of those histories (Striphas, 2009; Vinsel & Russell, 2020).

If we examine the technologies and things that we use most in our daily lives, historian David Edgerton shows, we find that many of them are based on innovations that are decades and perhaps even centuries old, and the book is exemplary of this. Indeed, the opening lines of Edgerton's introduction to the second edition of his book made this point. Upon the publication of the first edition in 2006, he noted, many thought that books "were on the way out" (Edgerton, 2007/2019, p. vii). And yet, he remarked in 2019, "even in a world of supposedly ever-accelerating, disruptive change, in which creative destruction makes the world anew, here the book still is" (Edgerton, 2007/2019, p. vii). As this essay has shown, the printed book was not only perpetually present but also continually innovative, and manufacturers consistently have sought means of more sustainable manufacturing. Book futurism has not just been about the transition to e-readers or digital text, as many have had it, and there have been important innovations among publishers and materials scientists aiming to improve the printed book.

In some respects, they have been responding to understandings of the environmental impacts of their own industry, which as Richard Maxwell and Toby Miller show, have remained significant. As they note, total energy usage by the U.S. papermaking industry in 2006 was exceeded only by firms in petroleum production. Maxwell and Miller estimate that the average printed book in the United States weighing half a kilogram generates an average carbon dioxide emission of four kilograms, and in 2006, book production generated aggregate emissions comparable to "between two and seven million cars, depending on which account you trust" (Maxwell & Miller, 2012, pp. 50–51). While some attempts to create alternative forms of book production have proven successful and durable on a mass scale, most importantly soy ink, others like kenaf paper remain available but not widely adopted, mostly because of the costs involved in remaking the extensive and capital-intensive network of paper mills utilizing wood as the raw material. Still, the utility of alternative materials like kenaf and synthetic polymers have been proven as concepts. The alternatives are there and, as the examples in this essay show, practical.

In important areas of the media industries, the quest for sustainability modeled in the form and content of books about the environment has had significant success. One can see this in the conduct of Apple, the world's most valuable corporation and a dominant presence in the digital economy. On its website, Apple prominently promotes its efforts to do more sustainable manufacturing, and in many respects its core philosophy mirrors what progressive book publishers have been doing for decades in trying to reconceive and reconfigure their industrial production. As Apple notes, it "sells hundreds of millions of products each year. Each product represents an opportunity to reduce our carbon footprint – small changes can yield enormous results" (Apple Computer, 2022, p. 16). In its 2022 *Environmental Progress Report*, the company touts its commitments to such actions as using only renewable energy, becoming carbon neutral, reducing water usage, and utilizing as much recycled material as possible in the production of its devices and packaging. "Natural resources make our work possible," Apple remarks, "and we take responsibility for how we source, use, and recycle the materials we rely on to create our products" (Apple Computer, 2022, p. 34).

There is no indication in Apple's *Environmental Progress Report* that the company was motivated directly by the specific examples of the books discussed in this essay. However, the company's outlook and practices are clearly and profoundly shaped by concerns raised by participants in the environmental movement since World War II, and many of those ideas circulated in printed books. The examples traced here show how some books have attempted to provide lessons for media corporations not only in their content but in their form. As concerns about sustainability and the environment continue to circulate widely in society, and as scholars increasingly explore the environmental consequences of media production, books like these offer models for responsible industrial production. In form and content, we still have much to learn from books.

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Conflict of interest

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Digital restoration and the invention of analogue: The National Film and Sound Archive of Australia and *Wake in Fright*

Zachary Karpinellison, Australian National University, Interdisciplinary Cross-Cultural Research stream
Zachary.Karpinellison@anu.edu.au

Abstract
Prior to the advent of digital film technology, analogue film was not analogue, it was simply film. The introduction of digital, thus also marks the introduction of the analogue version. The idea of old media persisting – is dependent on celluloid film being transformed into "analogue" and being classed as an old form of media. In this paper, using the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia and *Wake in Fright* as case studies, I introduce the concept of the *film-version*. Moreover, my paper challenges the relegation of celluloid film as old media, and instead argues that the creation of a distinction between digital and analogue *versions* gives rise to a new kind of mediatised coexistence. I argue that rather than forming a hierarchy, the analogue and digital form a parallel and dialogical relationship allowing both the new restored version, and the older celluloid version to not only persist, but evolve into the present.

Keywords
versions, film, digital, restoration, analogue, old media, dialogical relationship

1 Introduction

Prior to the advent of digital film technology, analogue film was not analogue, it was simply film. The introduction of digital, thus also marks the introduction of the analogue version. The idea of old media persisting – is dependent on celluloid film being transformed into "analogue" and being classed as an old form of media. However, photochemical processes for moving images are little more than a century old and so to describe them as *old* media (especially in comparison to the written word or painting) is to accept digitisation's cannibalisation of analogue's cultural and technological dominance. My paper challenges the relegation of celluloid film as old media, and instead argues that the creation of a distinction between digital and analogue *versions* gives rise to a new kind of mediatised coexistence. The singular descriptor, "film," becomes insufficient in this cultural moment – limited as it is to describing cellulose sheets layered with chemical emulsions, or as a synonym for movies or motion pictures. Instead, I argue for the term *film-versions* which can function as an umbrella categorisation capturing both analogue and digital versions as legitimate and separate, yet connected instances – or versions – of a given film. The digital film-version requires a degree of distortion, change and enhancement of its analogue cousin, in service of producing and creating something that is distinguishable and different. In other words, the digital and the analogue film-version are more than just technically distinct, the two versions are separate pieces of art.

Digital and analogue are, of course, not the only version types or styles that exist within the broader umbrella of the *film-version*. As I have written in other publications like my piece in the Journal of Mise-en-scene (Karpinellison, 2019), the practice of *versioning* is one that has a deep history in the global film industry. The existence and proliferation of many versions of films that are grouped under a single legal title or identity has significant ramifications for media and film studies, and it is my hope that this paper draws further attention to the complex ways *versions* impact our understanding of film and cinema cultures. However, while it is true that other version types exist (such as at the

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chemical level, director's cuts, changes made for international releases, different standards of definition and fidelity within the category of digital), for the purposes of this paper, I have simplified the distinction between analogue and digital as two major versions, because of the association of oldness and newness with each term respectively.

Thus, I argue that digital restoration *versions* a given film, such that where an original may have previously existed, there are now two different original versions of the same film. These differences can include, but are not limited to, changes to aesthetics, content, dialogue, and even cast. To illustrate this claim, I will draw on my ongoing research into the National Film and Sound Archive of Australia (NFSA) as well as a case study from their flagship *NFSA Restores* program: Ted Kotcheff's 1971 film *Wake in Fright.* I argue that the restoration of this film exemplifies the generative and creative aspect of restoration practices. *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) represents a compelling case study because not only does it showcase the extent to which restorer transform the film, but also because the account of how the film came to be saved from destruction and obscurity, is intertwined with the technical narrative of its restoration. I will demonstrate that the film's rediscovery led to a kind of archaeological fixation with the analogue version, prompting filmmakers and restorers to attempt to excavate latent detail and information.

This paper will be in three parts. First, I will continue my consideration of the contradictory and multifaceted aspects of restoration practice, and how these practices are influenced by broad and overarching culture of nostalgia (section 2). Secondly, I will turn my analysis to my specific case studies of the NFSA and the film *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) (sections 3 and 4). Finally, I will consider access to the film as a dimension of its capacity for persistence: To what extent does it matter if multiple versions exist and persist, if only one can be seen (section 5)?

2 Restoration – Returning the past to the future

Scholarship on film restoration attests to the practice as a site of fraught and complex debate. Crucial to this debate is an assessment of what it means to restore a film. There is no simple answer to this question. Firstly, consider that embedded within an understanding of *restoration* as a concept, is an expectation of returning a film to some prior state. This concept is not difficult to grasp and functions as a prerequisite for understanding the basic tenet of film restoration. However, where the term becomes more complex is in identifying whether that prior state ever actually existed, or whether or not the previous moment to which a film is being returned is in fact an idealised version of its history, or even an approximation. It is my contention that the process of digital restoration creates the conditions by which a celluloid film can become an historicized cultural artefact and thus a piece of old media.

In order to critique the technical and archival applications and definitions of restoration as a practice, it is necessary to understand the motivations for restoration. One of the key concepts that pervades restoration practices is nostalgia. Svetlana Boym's book *The Future of Nostalgia* (2001) poses the idea of the link between restoration and nostalgia (what she calls "restorative nostalgia") by unpacking the nostalgic construction of a particular image of the past. For Boym , this process is highly selective, and not necessarily grounded in historical realities. Instead it invokes many assumptions and "invented traditions" of the past. She writes:

> Restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps… Nostalgia is an ache of temporal distance and displacement. Restorative nostalgia takes care of both of these symptoms. Distance is compensated by intimate experience and the availability of a desired object. Displacement is cured by a return home, preferably a collective one. (Boym, 2001, pp. 41–42)

Here Boym, referring broadly to nostalgia as a cultural mode – articulates the seduction and promise of restoration: the ability to revive and contemporise memory and history. I argue that film restoration operates, according to this same fixation and mission. Film restoration, particularly the digital restoration of analogue film, claims to reconstruct an artefact of the past as it was intended but also as it is mediatised for a modern audience. The restored film needs to not only be recognisable as the same film as can be found in the analogue version, but must match the social and historical memory of that film. At the same time there is a notable institutional and scholarly ambivalence towards defining and locating the practice of restoration.

The International Federation of Film Archives (FIAF) has several resources and glossaries that attempt to locate the ethical, institutional, and technical definitions of terms like restoration, access, and preservation. However, in each of their definitions of restoration, a degree of flexibility is present. For example, in the FIAF Technical Commission Preservation Best Practice document, the definition of "Restoration" reads:

> Restoration is a complex term which can mean the faithful duplication of an original element using techniques to remove or disguise damage and deterioration, or it can mean the recreation of an original cinematographic work from surviving elements which may be incomplete or from different versions [...] Restoration will inevitably involve subjective decisions, both on technical matters and on the question of content [...] (FIAF, 2009, p. 2)

This definition betrays an unwillingness to constrain the meaning of restoration. Even the first sentence contains a strange paradox. The concept of a "faithful duplication" and "to remove or disguise damage" seems fundamentally at odds. It raises further questions such as: What if the vast majority of audiences had seen the film with damage? Is the removal of this damage still an act of *restoration?* The open-endedness of this definition is particularly apparent when compared with the same document's clear sentence on the meaning of *conservation* and *preservation:*

> Conservation means the safeguarding and protection of original materials from damage, decay and loss.
>
> Preservation means the duplication, copying, or migration of analogue and digital film to a new support or format, typically in cases where the life expectancy of the original elements is limited or unpredictable. (FIAF, 2009, pp. 1–3)

These are definitive principles that a new archivist can observe when conserving and preserving film objects. However, even documents that collect guiding principles like these, cannot offer concrete statements on the nature of *restoration*. Instead, we are left with the impression and assertion that restoration, whatever it may be, is distinct from other archival practices like preservation and conservation. Preservation and conservation are simply practices that involve the extension of the life of a film, as well as the protection of that film from further, avoidable damage.

Another definition of film restoration comes from the National Film Preservation's *Film Preservation Guide.* Their understanding of *restoration* is as follows:

> Restoration goes beyond the physical copying of the surviving original materials and attempts to reconstruct a specific version of a film. Ideally this involves comparing all known surviving source materials, piecing together footage from these disparate sources into the order suggested by production records and exhibition history, and in some cases, enhancing image and sound to compensate for past damage. Film restoration, unlike art or paper restoration, always involves duplicating the original artifact. (National Film Preservation, 2004, p. 4)

Again, in this definition there is a tension between the act of retrieval and recovery of the perceived original object, and the necessary degree of intervention or even construction required to produce the *restored* object. Further, words like "enhance" and "compensate" serve to bring additional weights to the concepts and philosophies at play in the practice of restoration. Duplication and copying are in this definition foundations for the restoration project. Rather than attempting to duplicate the unattainable object of the past, the duplication is arranged, and assembled using relevant resources and understandings.

It could be further argued that practices like preservation are folded into the practice of restoring a film. Indeed, this is the position of the NFSA who, in their statement on the *NFSA Restor*es program (the flagship restoration program at the archive) write: "NFSA Restores is an exciting program to digitise, restore and preserve, at the highest archival standards, classic and cult Australian films so they can be seen on the big screen in today's digital cinemas" (NFSA Restores Committee, 2016).

By capturing multiple disciplines of archival practice, the NFSA has permitted a degree of freedom and intervention by archivists and restorers in service of the goal of *restoration*.

While preservation and conservation do have more stable definitions, *digitisation* does complicate that stability. In Michael Friend's "Film/Digital/Film" he writes:

> What we call <<preservation>> in the film archives is … a misnomer. There is no such thing as preservation. The motion picture is one of the most ephemeral objects yet created in the cultural sphere with a life span shorter than almost any previous medium. (Friend, 1995, p. 36)

As Friend notes, true *preservation* of a film (either by methods of digital or photochemical preservation or restoration) requires an uncoupling from the analogue medium its crucial fleeting quality. To sustain the film into the present means, in some way or another, destroying the decay which is so unique and specific to celluloid. Friend writes: "If by film preservation we mean the perpetual retention of all of the information in the original negative, we must confront the fact that there is currently no true preservation" (Friend, 1995, p. 38). In the intervening 28 years since Friend wrote this piece for the *Journal of Film Preservation*, however, some interesting technological developments have emerged that challenge this wholesale perspective: that *preservation* is a futile goal. With new technologies such as the state-of-the-art Scanity WetGate machine, it is possible to take extremely high-resolution photographs of each frame of an original negative, without damaging the film – capturing a new level of latent information in the negative.

However, a new problem – or rather a new aspect of preservation – has emerged. It is now possible to retrieve *more* information from the negative than was previously detectable. In other words, the preservation process would not add new information but rather make visible information that was already there, just unseen. This opens entirely new ethical and artistic questions – ones that I will address and illustrate with my case study shortly, but it is clear that film preservation and restoration are not straightforward conceptually or physically.

Director of the *Österreichisches Filmmuseum*, Alexander Horwath, contributes to further uncertainty to the word *restoration*. Horwath (2017) provides an abbreviated history of the term's flexible meaning, while also arguing that an inextricable component of the meaning attributed to restoration is the complicated dynamic between the film industry and state archive. He writes.

> As victims of flattery (once viewed as "pirates", film archives are now being courted by the industry to join the game as "partners"), we, in turn, often flatter the industry by offering ourselves as service-providers with a special cultural cachet. (Horwath, 2017, p. 32)

Here, the reciprocal invocation of *flattery* is a valuable reminder that archives engaged in restoration, often do so without the assistance of funding from distributors or studios. That is to say, there is an inherent flattery in choosing to *restore* a particular film, in effect celebrating and embellishing the achievement of the filmmakers and industry who produced the film. Furthermore, this simultaneous acknowledgement of archival cachet and industrial oversight also reminds us that the filmmaker looms, like a spectre, over the practice of restoration both intellectually and sometimes in person. The NFSA's restoration of *Starstruck* (1982) is one such example where the film's director Gillian Armstrong (1982 / 2015) was closely involved in the process. It is this creative figure or these figures of the past to whom a restoration is notionally obliged. This is important to recognise because it again enhances and complicates the position of an older piece of film. With the filmmaker directly or indirectly involved in the restoration process, the unrestored version functions as an object which captures historical ideas and sensibilities, which, in turn, can converse with the updated sensibilities and taste of a filmmaker whose career has continued after the film's initial release.

Marie Frappat (2016) provides another useful appraisal of film *restoration*. She notes that the term "restoration" is rarely used before the 1980s, and when it does finally emerge as a practice it goes beyond the simple repairing of a damaged film stocks:

> But the solution, beyond these specific repairs, often referred to as "restorations" in the grey literature of laboratories and archives, seems to be the "reworking" of the film… More generally, in speaking of the need for "re-working" we are here referring to all films that are on formats that are rapidly becoming obsolete and have to be transferred to be viewed in a new historical and technological context. (Frappat, 2016, pp. 43–44)

Here, and throughout Frappat's argument, there is a clear resistance to defining restoration as any one specific film related activity. Instead, Frappat goes on to find other terms which could, under the right circumstances, be viewed as synonymous – "reconstituting" and "re-working" just to name a few (Frappat, 2016, pp. 44–45). She frames the exercise of restoration as fraught, but crucially distinct from repair and preservation. To *restore* a film, whether by use of photochemical or digital processes means, in one way or another, to intervene in that film in order to make something new that still communicates its history. This argument is perhaps best clarified by German film historian and preservation scholar Enno Patalas (1998, p. 38):

> The restoration of a film should always be an open process, leaving time and space for further "versions" that will not necessarily make the earlier ones obsolete. Each print is a kind of "original" and each performance is unique. So each restoration is an interpretation, a translation, an explanation, a performance.

Patalas frames the exercise of restoration not only as an extension of the life of a film, but also as an evolution. To restore a film is to allow the old media to persist, but it is also to create something new.

But it does more than that. The heralding of digital film technologies also serves, I argue, to define the meaning and limits of celluloid film newly recast as the analogue version. Thus, these old films do not only persist, they become a canvas from which new versions can emerge to live alongside the old print. My argument builds on Patalas' to show that here, not only is each restoration an "interpretation, a translation" but, in the creation of a restoration, the original analogue print itself becomes an interpretation and a translation of the film. Together these two versions present different yet legitimate and original instances of the same film.

While those involved in restoration (archivists and restorers) might view their roles as solely practical and technical, they are, regardless of intent, fundamentally creative and generative. If we accept that these practitioners are themselves creative actors, they can be understood in terms of adjacent theoretical frameworks such as John T. Caldwell's mode of production framework. Caldwell argues all workers in a production culture are capable of self-theorising their labour and the product of that labour. To this end, I will argue that archivists and restorers are engaged in this process of self-theorisation (Caldwell, 2008, pp. 19–22).

I now turn to my case study of the NFSA and *Wake in Fright* to demonstrate how the digital restoration of this iconic Australian film created two distinct versions. The first is a newly-old celluloid print which can be viewed as an object of history, entangled with questions of its material age and claim to originality. The second, is the new digital version of the film, which, now divorced of the technological parameters of photochemical development, invites intervention and creativity in producing a final product that is distinct from its analogue cousin.

3 The National Film and Sound Archive and *Wake in Fright*

The NFSA was founded in 1984, after the National Archive of Australia and National Library of Australia had amassed too much film and sound material to be managed as a portfolio of either of those institutions. The NFSA has thus become the premiere repository, accessioning body and exhibitor of the last century of Australian film. They are a state funded organisation, although being a Commonwealth corporate entity they are also able to solicit donations from the public and industry partners. In the years since the institution's inception, they have suffered multiple funding and staffing cuts, but their collection continues to grow. It is worth acknowledging therefore, as a precis on any discussion of the NFSA as an institution that maintaining a collection of more than two million items on a shoestring budget is an enormous task, one that necessitates a degree of compromise and sacrifice.

This background is important to understanding the perceived role and function of their ongoing flagship *NFSA Restores* program which is responsible for the digitisation and restoration of important Australian films. More than simply a routine operation of the archive. This is an outreach program actively aimed at sharing iconic Australian films with a new audience. It is in this context that the resurfacing of an original negative of *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) becomes so impactful.

4 Wake in Fright

In 2009 the NFSA's restoration of Ted Kotcheff's *Wake in Fright* (1971 / 2009) joined Michelangelo Antonioni's *L'Avventurra* (1960) as the only films ever to be screened twice at Cannes. The film follows John Grant played by English actor Gary Bond, a middle-class schoolteacher working in rural New South Wales. Grant decides to travel back home to Sydney for his school holidays but is waylaid in a small town called Bundayabba. While spending the night in this town affectionately referred to as The Yabba, Grant is seduced into a perilous game of two-up at the local pub. Before long Grant has lost all his money and is plunged into a kind of drunken purgatory. Without the financial means to leave, Grant is stuck in The Yabba, and forced to endure its violent characters, and terrifying drinking culture. By the time the credits roll Grant has been subjected to all manner of tortures, and even been co-opted into the violence. *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) resists being part of any specific genre and instead manages to straddle the woes of a social realist film and the disturbing tone of a horror movie.

The restoration of the film was awarded the prestigious title of Cannes Classic following the championing of the film by Cannes Classic board member Martin Scorsese. The NFSA's process of getting to this restoration, however, was extremely complex.

While relying on an entirely Australian crew, the film was funded and distributed by several international bodies. Group W, a division of Westinghouse formed the UK and U.S. arm of the production, while NLT was the Australian production company involved. *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) counted as one of just three films ever financed and produced by Group W, a company that ultimately fell apart after the film was released. This shutdown led to the original negative of the film – that is, the object from which other prints could be made – ending up in the hands of creditors who did not view themselves as having caretaker responsibilities and did not have any other stake in preserving the film. However, NLT Productions, a company that did maintain a modest existence after the film was released, continually lobbied the filmmakers to assist in the production of a DVD or VHS release of *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009). This prompted these filmmakers to mount a search to find the negative and make the film available once more.

Finally, in 2004, all 273 cans of original negative and soundtrack were eventually found by the film's editor Tony Buckley. The cans were being kept in a Pittsburgh film archive and were, upon discovery, sitting in a dustbin marked for destruction. These negatives comprised an intelligible and watchable original instance of the film. This original, finally retrieved, was then immediately delivered to Canberra to begin restoration.

In brief, *Wake in Fright*'s (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) apparent saviour from incineration imbues the exercise in restoration not only with a quality of urgency and desperation, but with one of excavation. It is this archaeological impulse that I wish to pursue in the subsequent sections of this paper, as I argue, that the *unearthing* of this film contributes to key aspects of the digital restoration process.

In May 2022 I was invited to visit the archive and view both versions of this film back-to-back which provided me with an unprecedented comparative experience, usually reserved for those involved in the creation of a restored or preserved version of the film. During this screening I noted significant differences between the two versions that I will expand on here. Firstly, I noted that in an oral history the archive conducted with the film's director Ted Kotcheff, he specifically drew attention to *Wake in Fright's* colour scheme (Ted Kotcheff & Paul Harris, personal communication, June 17, 2009). In fact, Kotcheff speaks at length about the importance of earth tones in the film. For him the film's colour should only present as reds, oranges, yellows, browns and so on. This is clearly demonstrated when viewing the digital restoration which is heavy with warm earth tones, only occasionally offset by a desaturated green tint that washes over the screen during exterior sequences and is deployed to depict the unnatural intensity of the heat.

The 35mm print's colour, on the other hand, is a bit more varied. While earth tones are similarly highlighted, there are more blues and dark greens giving the interiors a colder more sterile feeling when compared with the restoration.

It appears that the colours that Kotcheff celebrates in his oral history, have received a significant amplification in the restored version. Kotcheff claims that he insisted on "no blues" throughout production, but the blue, coldness of the colour scheme in the analogue print suggests a flawed memory, and a degree of tweaking, that brings the restored version not just into line with Kotcheff's description, but perhaps restores the film as per Kotcheff's memory, and nostalgia (Hartley, 2007). The analogue print's colours offer a compelling departure from Kotcheff's statements, presenting a version of the film that can overshadow the creative control of its director. In this way, old media persists.

At the same time the archaeological impulse brought to the process of restoring the films meant that fulfilling the filmmaker's original vision intensified. Consider the following quote from my interview with the film's editor Anthony Buckley

> We were astonished when we saw the bar-room scenes with Chips Rafferty, and Gary Bond the clarity and the depth in the shots! We could read things on the walls that we'd never seen before. It was a blessing in disguise. It was an incredible period of nearly losing the film altogether and then seeing more than was even there. (Karpinellison & Buckley, personal communication, May 17, 2022)

Buckley's admiration for the detail and information drawn from the image through the digital restoration demonstrates that his conceptualisation of restoration is one that sees it using all available technologies to modernise older films. However, this reasoned inference as to Buckley's theorisation of restoration practice does not serve to locate the NFSA's restoration practices in any specific methodological or theoretical mode. Instead, I argue that as per Caldwell's argument that those in a mode of production are competent and agile self-theorisers, the expertise earned by Buckley's time spent working in the film industry imbues him with an authority to create an implicit theory of restoration that is compatible with the NFSA's internal practices. Similarly, while in further instance in this article it is possible to attempt to align restoration practices with theories of restoration like Giovanna Fossati's "film as original" and "state-of-the-art" (Fossati, 2009, pp. 120–125), the purpose of my research is instead to recognise the ultimate legitimacy of the language deployed by those working in the archive to theorise their own version of restoration that sits adjacent to a more academic conception of the practice.

This experience of seeing new detail was consistent with my viewing experience of watching the two film-versions back-to-back.

In particular in interior sequences in the film, such as those set in pubs, restaurants, and hotels, new details emerged. Posters, books, and art that were blanketed in pitch black shadow in the 35mm print, were made legible and visible in the restored copy. Whereas in the analogue print it is possible to make out the record that hung on the wall of John Grant's apartment only as a dark and murky rectangle – in the digital restoration it is easy to see that it is a record and that it is in fact Abbey Road by The Beatles. While a small detail, in this digital version the record contributes to the characterisation of the film's protagonist, reminding us of his metropolitan British origins, which are poorly suited to the harsh masculinity needed in the Australian outback. It is also a reasonable assumption that the choice to decorate this room, as part of the film's set design imagined communicating this detail to viewers. However, when comparing this sequence to the same one in the analogue print, a different tone is evoked. Instead, the dark room where certain details are too shadowy to make out foreshadows the relentless, violent, and morally corrupted activity of the plot following this scene.

Importantly these two versions do not form a hierarchy of original and copy. Instead, they function as legitimate and parallel instances of the film. The old version persists into the present by capturing a different tonality and colour to the digital version. The digital version delivers on its promise of restoration, by not only amending the colour and exposure to match the perceived vision of the filmmakers, but by exposing latent information and detail that no audience to the film had seen previously. In a way, it could be argued that the details drawn out by the restoration process, did not exist prior to the advent of digital technologies. My interview with the lead restorer on the film, Anthos Simon, confirms this sensibility. He told me that the role of an archivist-restorer was not just to return the film to an original state, but in fact to continue the ethos of those filmmakers and technicians involved with the original production, in line with what was possible now. He said:

> In the old days, of film grading, all cinematography was shot – the negatives, the labs processed them, and then there was what's called an RGB pass – a red, green and blue pass. And you could generally change density and colour. What you couldn't change was what was called dynamic grading, which is colour within the frame. If someone says to you, "I love everything, but just this one thing here, can you change this to blue?" you couldn't do that in those days. Whereas now you can! And that was the difference, we were able to do some dynamic grading within some of those scenes to bring out the dartboard that they could never see because it was you know… the exposure was so dark.
>
> Well, some archivists are like: "No, you shouldn't do that, because that's not what the cinematographer could have done at the time." And I said, well, then that's a technicality. Because cinematographers that sat next to us, for the last 20 years, always wanted that scene adjusted." For us, we made the decision to go that extra mile. (Karpinellison & Simon, personal communication, June 1, 2022)

This quote is an excerpt from a longer interview[1] and demonstrates the extent to which both digital intervention in an analogue print is controversial, but also creative. It exposes an artistic impulse, which, in this instance, is enhanced through digital technology. While these kinds of interventions have been possible using older photochemical techniques, it is evident that Simon's decision to make these changes is, at least in part, motivated by the flexibility and scope of the technology at his disposal. Moreover, this decision to brighten the film through dynamic grading, again, demonstrates the way that a digital restoration bears distinctions that transform both the analogue print and the new restoration into singular, legitimate versions of the film that exist in parallel to one another. The brightening of these sequences, and the language used by Buckley and Simon transforms the analogue print's darkness into a choice against this detail, allowing the photochemical processes' aesthetic to persist –

1 Note both interviews with Tony Buckley and Anthos Simon are part of a broader interview project that surveys staff at the NFSA and relevant filmmakers. This research has ethics approval. The ethics code is: 2022/028.

with deep blacks creating a different tonality for the film.

Further, in my viewing I also noted that this approach, as demonstrated by the above quote from Simon, was selective. While the bar-room sequences were generally brighter, a close-up of the two-up tipper (a wooden paddle used to flip coins for a gambling game), which frames a single hand holding the wooden paddle against a black background, was almost indistinguishable across the two versions of the film. Here, common traits like these also develop a new meaning, wherein certain artistic and aesthetic decisions from an old medium like an analogue film, have managed to persist into the aesthetic palette of digital films. The restoration of a film is thus a process of conscious decision making, choosing what can and cannot be brought from the past into the present, and moreover, what needs to change to reflect contemporary and historical sensibilities and tastes.

Finally, I noted that *Wake in Fright*'s (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) production being transnational in nature, has also influenced the content of the two different versions of the film. While the restored version of the print has sought out and repaired original audio from the Australian and UK release of the film, the surviving 35mm print takes its audio from the American version of the film. This results in a few very slight differences in dialogue between the two films. One of these involves a sequence in which a woman refers derogatorily to a pregnant dog as a "slag" in the UK and Australian version, while calling her a "slut" in the American version. This subtle moment of cultural translation of gendered insult further demonstrates the agenda of a digital restoration in presenting the film as an original Australian audience would have seen it, despite the fact that the surviving print was of the American version. Here, I argue that again the archaeological impulse and the old media distinction expand, as this analogue version is not only an historical artefact, it also becomes a geographical object, which offers insights into different comprehensions of different audiences of the past.

Thus, *Wake in Fright* (Kotcheff, 1971 / 2009) and the National Film and Sound Archive's restoration of this film present as a profoundly creative exercise – offering not only a new version of the film, but giving further depth, meaning, and understanding to the older, analogue version as well.

5 Conclusion: Access

It is clear then that the analogue celluloid print has only recently become an old medium. Its status as an analogue artefact is entirely constructed by the advent of digital film technologies against which it is redefined. However, this creation of an old and analogue category, ushers in a new media environment in which both film-versions, digital and analogue, can operate independently and in conversation. It is my contention, therefore, that digital does not explicitly pose a threat to analogue instead, and to the contrary, providing it with the theoretical and conceptual foundations to not only exist but also to persist. Understanding celluloid film as a partner or even counter to digital film, both of which exist as legitimate film-versions, allows us as scholars and audiences to gain deeper and fuller insights into the value of archival work as well as cultural life of a film text. By exploring the transformation from obscurity to rediscovery to a dual analogue and digital life of *Wake in Fright* I am able to chart the cultural resonance of the film over time.

However, there is a major caveat to this argument. That is, that at this time, I believe that I am the only person to have seen the two different versions back-to-back, with the exception of technicians and curators at the archive. While celluloid and analogue prints remain difficult and expensive to access as opposed to the much more readily available digital editions of these films, a hierarchy is ultimately formed. This hierarchy is based, however, on access rather than actual old media cannibalisation. However, even in the media environment of this access hierarchy, again, a distinction is drawn by way of the presentation of digital's ubiquitous and easily accessible status. In other words, the constructed rarity of the celluloid print creates a niche environment wherein it becomes desirable to see both the celluloid and digital versions of a given film, wherever possible. This is evidenced by the persistence of independent and repertory cinemas in programming and screening 35mm original films around the world. As long as this process continues, scholarship and audiences will be able to pursue a comparative understanding of the value of these two film mediums. The ongoing relationship between digital and analogue, new and old media, thus invites both of these versions of film to persist and evolve into the present.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Television archives, social networks and the young audiences: The example of Internet memes as a way to revitalise public broadcasters' engagement

Juan Francisco Gutiérrez Lozano and Antonio Cuartero*, University of Malaga, Faculty of Communication Sciences, Department of Journalism, Spain

*Corresponding author: cuartero@uma.es

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to explore the efforts that Spanish public television archives are making to bring their audiovisual content closer to young people via social networks. Specifically, this text focuses on analysing the public television archives of the Spanish national television company RTVE and of the Andalusian regional public television agency (RTVA), known as Archivo RTVE and MemorANDA, respectively. The methodology used is based on both qualitative and quantitative tools, consisting of content analysis and in-depth interviews. The results obtained show that both platforms manage to reach young people, but indirectly through viral videos or Internet memes. The RTVE archive is the most successful among young people because it has a more extensive collection and more resources as well as a policy that is more clearly geared towards the dissemination of its audiovisual heritage. The most negative aspect identified in this study was the repetition of regional clichés, especially in the case of MemorANDA.

Keywords

television archives, social networks, young audience, Internet memes, public service, Spain

1 Introduction

The nostalgia the public often feels for certain television broadcasts has been used as a tool by traditional television channels to attract the attention of their audiences. The use of TV archives in different formats to cater for this nostalgia for material from the past, however, is particularly successful among elderly audiences, who, years later, remember those original broadcasts that are being made available via different platforms and formats (Gutiérrez Lozano, 2013). But do they also attract younger audiences, that is, those who did not originally watch those television contents? Following Hegel's famous phrase, which Marx later modified, it could be said that, in relation to television archives, history always repeats itself twice: once as drama or tragedy, and the second time as farce or comedy. Perhaps something similar happens with television fragments from the past. Thanks to Internet memes and the virality they currently enjoy on social networks, these television contents from TV archives get a second life, full of adaptations and new uses that modify their original meaning and generate new modes of appropriation.

Traditional television broadcasts in Spain maintain a high following among the adult population, but younger viewers are increasingly moving away from linear consumption as it does not satisfy their demands, or at least not in the same way as new proposals such as YouTube or Twitch seem to do. In this context, in any case it is striking how some programmes or fragments of the broadcasts of traditional channels have a great repercussion on YouTube, Twitter or Instagram thanks to different kinds of memes spread by younger viewers or users, who in most cases are unaware of the origin of these images and do not have any knowledge about the facts or the people who appear in them.

In the case of public broadcasters and traditional channels seeking to adapt to new viewing cultures, the impact of parallel or multiple reception, and especially that of vi-

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ewing television content while commenting on it and sharing it on social networks in a connected way, is a creative and adaptive challenge (Bruun, 2020; Lotz, 2017). In relation to this trend, this research aims to explore the strategies being used by two Spanish public corporations, Radio y Televisión de Andalucía (RTVA) and Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE) to bring their archival content closer to young people by making use of social networks.

The Andalusian public regional channel, Canal Sur Televisión (created in 1989 by RTVA), has chosen YouTube and Twitter as the main digital windows for its audiovisual content in social networks. The portal that reflects these efforts is "MemorANDA", launched in 2013 with a blog format to disseminate images "that should be remembered or are part of the sentimental memory of viewers" (MemorANDA, n.d.). Televisión Española (TVE), which would later go on to become Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE), was launched in 1956 and is the largest Spanish national public channel. Since 2008, RTVE has made its archives available via its web portal and on social networks such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and YouTube through "Archivo RTVE". Currently, both public broadcasting companies are also seeking to attract the attention of young audiences through their two respective free VOD platforms: RTVE Play and CanalSurMás.

2 Theoretical frameworks: New forms of TV consumption

According to the report "The Networked Society", young Spaniards live immersed in today's digital landscape. In 2021, the Internet penetration among the 16–24 age group was 99.2 %, a value bordering on universal access. Young Spaniards are also spending less and less time watching television (Red.es, 2021). This trend has been observed for some years now, with increasingly lower figures, and contrasts with the older population (Barlovento Comunicación, 2020).

This trend consisting of young peoples' preference for social networks and the increase in consumption via smartphones has led to a great deal of academic research being devoted to analysing the relationship between young people and the Internet. The literature addressing this matter in Spain is very extensive (Pertegal Vega, Oliva Delgado, & Rodríguez Meirinhos, 2019). Internationally, other interesting contributions are those made by Craig Watkins (2009) when the phenomenon was incipient, or the changes that social networks brought about regarding mass media (Stefanone, Lackaff, & Rosen, 2010). The process of media convergence has given rise to new patterns of audiovisual consumption. The progressive abandonment of linear television by young people and the strong competition from OTTs force traditional television channels to search for new market strategies (Cunningham, Craig, & Silver, 2016; Guerrero Pérez, 2018; Guerrero Pérez, González Oñate, & Camussetti, 2018; Lobato, 2019; Neira, Clares-Gavilán & Sánchez-Navarro, 2021; Vonderau, 2016).

The case that concerns us, that is, the relationship between television archives and social networks in Spain, has not received much attention from researchers. Nevertheless, there are some interesting contributions on the role of public audiovisual services and the different strategies to strengthen audience engagement and participation in Europe (Kolokytha, Korbiel, Rozgonyi, & Sarikakis, 2019; Vanhaeght, 2019). As regards Spain, Anton and Gaullar (2013) analysed the presence of the audiovisual archives of Spanish regional television companies and highlighted the good position of Canal Sur at that time. Previously, López de Solís and Martín López (2011) investigated the possibilities offered by the Internet for audiovisual archives to incorporate part of their collections on the web, for both commercial and educational purposes. This situation has meant that documentalists working in television archives have had to acquire a new role and new skills; for example, they have achieved competences in "analytics to measure the time-shifted audience a long time after a series has stopped being broadcast" (Rodríguez Mateos & Hernández Pérez, 2015, p. 117). In other words, some of the documentalists working in television archives have begun to acquire community manager skills so as to be able to manage the audiovisual contents of the TV archives.

One of the tools most commonly used by community managers of audiovisual archive platforms to attract young audiences and achieve greater engagement are Internet memes (which from here on we will refer to as just "memes"). The term *meme* has its origins in the book *The Selfish Gene* by zoologist Richard Dawkins, published in 1976, where he defined a meme as the agent responsible for cultural transmission within the human being and considered it to be "the minimum unit of information that can be transmitted" (Alarcón, 2017, p. 123). Nowadays, the concept of meme more commonly refers to a variety of types of contents that, with different origins, circulate through social networks and are capable of evolving as each user uses them and gives them a different meaning (Shifman, 2012). Thus, the key to the success of this social media content is its ability to transform as it is distributed (Ask & Abidin, 2018; Milner, 2016).

Digital forums such as 4chan or Reddit were the first to make room for this type of content. What has been called the "memefication" of content began to take shape in these forums. But memes have been defined as one of the predominant means of communication for Generation Z to translate and bring any type of content closer to their reality (Zeng & Abidin, 2021). Social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, and, more recently, TikTok (Zulli & Zulli, 2022) have been the ideal propagation vehicle to virilise this type of archival content. The global incidence of the meme phenomenon, extended to all areas of communication, has led to research on its political implications (Chagas, Freire, Rios, & Magalhães, 2019; Howley, 2016), cultural links (Islas, 2020), identity relations (Ismangil, 2019; Milner, 2012), and even the possible incidence of memes in hate speech (Kiela et al., 2020).

The creation of memes is grounded on the anonymous and at the same time collective dynamics of the participatory culture of Internet, where the boundaries between production and reception are completely blurred (Jenkins, 2006; Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2015). This means that most users do not know the origin of the images or videos they use, to such an extent that there are even spaces on the web devoted to finding out the origin of memes (such as "Know your meme"). Not surprisingly, some authors attribute the rise of memes to a kind of "catharsis" through which young people try to adapt to a socioeconomic context that they cannot accept (Girard, 2006). In this way, the meme has become the predominant discourse through which youth construct and imagine their own generational consciousness around social issues of interest to them (Zeng & Abidin, 2021). Many of the memes that draw on television archives, which are very successful among younger audiences, are received in a decontextualised way by those who use them. This is a challenge and a double-edged sword for public service broadcasters.

3 Objectives and methodology

The digitisation of TV archives has provided a new way of sharing and making television heritage visible. Analysing the presence of these archives on social networks is an interesting way of finding out what strategies these archives use to connect with young audiences, as well as the uses that those audiences make of this content (Newman et al., 2021, p. 10).

The main objective of this research is to analyse the strategies used by the television archives of two Spanish public channels, the Archivo de Radiotelevisión Española (RTVE) and that of Canal Sur Televisión – which belongs to Radio y Televisión de Andalucía (RTVA) and is called MemorANDA, to bring their audiovisual content closer to young people through the use of social networks. RTVE and RTVA archives were chosen because they are two of the public TV broadcasters that reach the highest number of people in Spain. RTVE has the largest television archive in Spain, while RTVA, created in 1989, is aimed at the most populated autonomous community in the country.

To achieve these objectives, the following research questions will be addressed:

- RQ1: What are the differences between RTVE and RTVA in terms of the way they define their strategies on social networks?
- RQ2: Do these portals try to attract young people's attention with politically, socially

or culturally relevant archival content, or do they focus on infotainment or national / regional identity topics, more suitable for viralisation through memes?

The methodology we have implemented combines both a qualitative and quantitative approach using the methodological tools of content analysis and in-depth interviews. Firstly, a content analysis of the social networks of MemorANDA and Archivo RTVE was performed. The networks analysed were the Twitter and YouTube profiles of MemorANDA, and the Twitter, Facebook and Instagram profiles of Archivo RTVE. The period studied covered two months (from 1 May 2019 to 30 June 2019). The analysis sheet created for this phase of the research consists of different sections including date of publication, original date of the archival material, name of the programme, television format, function played by the message that is broadcast, content of the message, subject matter, and social interactions ("likes", shares or comments). The second part of the methodology used in-depth interviews as a qualitative tool. Specifically, after the first approach to the analysis described above, we interviewed the people responsible for managing the social networks of the archives analysed: María Ángeles Martín, head of the Archive and Documentation Department of Canal Sur and community manager of MemorANDA, and Víctor Peña, community manager of Archivos RTVE.

4 Results

In this section we present the main results of the research in which the different strategies used by both television archives to try to attract the attention of young people are evidenced. Some of these strategies have been extremely effective, while others present obstacles in gaining loyalty among youth audiences.

4.1 The strategies of RTVE and RTVA's television archives in social networks

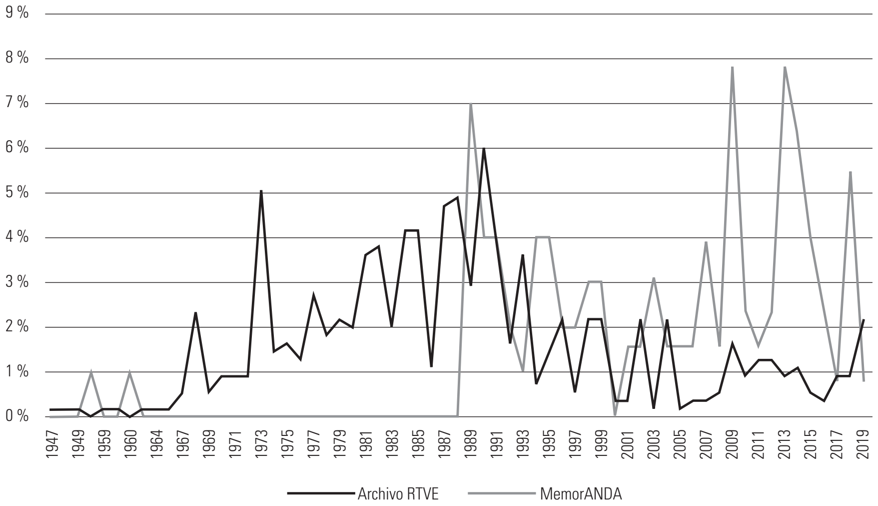
The analysis has shown the use of certain strategies by the archives of both public broadcasting corporations under study. The most diversified is Archivo RTVE, which is present on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram, but did not join YouTube until June 2019. On the other hand, the project to disseminate the RTVA archive, MemorANDA, opted from the outset for a combined presence on Twitter and Google's video platform YouTube.

As regards the staff responsible for managing these networks, RTVE, as the main Spanish public broadcasting company, has the most resources at its disposal. Specifically, the team in charge of the Archivo RTVE profiles is made up of three people. This means that Archivo RTVE is far more active on social networks, they have a greater number of different profiles and post far more information than MemorANDA, which has only one person in charge of managing its social networks.

The analysis carried out also shows how national public television is committed to a strategy of making the content of its archive more visible on social media, which it achieves by presenting a series of programmes or series during the week that are uploaded in full to its website. From these, videos of a few minutes duration are subsequently extracted and posted. These posts have their corresponding link to the full audiovisual document available on the website. In contrast to the RTVA MemorANDA portal, in which the use of a list of selected anniversaries is the central axis to recall historic events or characters, in Archivo RTVE there is a clear strategy of publishing television contents that are more varied and are updated on a daily basis.

The interaction or engagement they carry out on all their social network accounts is perhaps one of the most outstanding aspects of the planning of Archivo RTVE. The study of their network accounts allows us to conclude that posts that open with a question or invitation addressed to the audience with the clear objective of obtaining feedback and interaction with them are the most common. One feature that stands out immediately is the casual, close and direct discourse, which is an essential aspect to attract the attention of younger viewers, as opposed to the more impersonal and static content that has been identified in MemorANDA.

Figure 1: Original date on which Archivos RTVE's and MemorANDA's archival contents on Twitter were broadcast



Source: Author's own.

In this latter case, its central strategy is based on a list of selected anniversaries, and all its narrative discourse on social networks is developed around it. This means that the strategy followed by the Andalusian public television archive is much better adapted to Twitter than to other social networks, given that the tags, or hashtags, are a perfect way of reminding their audience of notable past events and anniversaries. Part of the strategy MemorANDA follows is due to the lack of human resources with which it works, with only one person responsible for it. As explained by its coordinator, María Ángeles Martín, "MemorANDA is not a project that has people assigned to it. It was born from within the department, I am the head of department and I coordinate MemorANDA and well… I basically do it whenever I can find some spare time. What we do is a bit opportunistic" (M. A. Martín, personal communication, 16 June 2019).

4.2 How engagement increases through nostalgic, stereotyped and viral archival contents

One of the key aspects of the strategy followed in the two cases analysed in order to approach the youngest viewers (or social media users) is to show TV footage that arouses their nostalgia, despite the fact that in many cases the material was perhaps not originally broadcast during the childhood of the members of this population group, although it has been repeatedly released on their on-air channels.

The original date on which the television contents included in the profiles of the social network Twitter were broadcast is affected by the birth of the two channels: RTVE, in 1956, and RTVA, in 1989. In the first, the material that is shared the most belongs to the period from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s. After these dates, the rate of posts referring to this period drops considerably, so that the television content from the childhood of the youngest viewers, or at least the programmes or series that they may know about, are the ones that Archivo RTVE shares the least. The highest peak of posts refers to 1990, followed by 1973 (see Figure 1).

The trend of the MemorANDA archive is slightly different. Two peaks can be detected, one in 1989 and the other in 2009 and 2013. The case of 1989 coincides with the year the channel was launched, which also celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2019, so a lot of content is retrieved from this time. In short, for both archives, the 1980s represent a rich audiovisual heritage to be shown on Twitter.

The programmes most shared on social networks are entertainment formats, followed by news programmes; both archives devote almost half of their content to entertainment programmes. The only differences are found in the case of fiction, which for Archivo RTVE is a central part of its commitment but this is not true for MemorANDA.

In the latter case, the study reveals the repetition of regional and national clichés in the most posted television contents. In RTVA, among the sub-themes analysed, the enormous presence of flamenco stands out above the rest. Ninety-two per cent of all the tweets about music posted by MemorANDA refer to this musical genre. This is to some extent worrying because of the reiteration of regional clichés or stereotypes in the new digital social media. The presence of flamenco in Archivo RTVE, for example, appears more balanced (it represents 8% of the tweets posted with a musical theme) and responds much better to the national reality of Spain in relation to this kind of music. The reinforcement of this sort of content in social networks is striking because it perpetuates the same television strategies that this regional channel has been practising for years, which have been criticised by researchers of the Andalusian channel (Gutiérrez Lozano, 2010).

The incorporation of an image and especially a video in each post significantly improves its chances of reaching a larger audience (Carrasco Polaino, Villar Cirujano, & Martín Cárdaba, 2019, p. 10) and in this case we can see how Archivo RTVE, by using images and video in all its social media posts, achieves a much greater impact than MemorANDA. MemorANDA, on the other hand, does not include videos in its tweets, and the person responsible for the archive explains the reasons for this: "Videos embedded in social networks do not count in the number of views on YouTube, and this aspect is paramount" (M. A. Martín, personal communication, 16 June 2019).

When analysing the interactions that the posts on social networks receive from the audience (comments, likes, retweets or views), Archivo RTVE is the platform with a greater and more powerful engagement in social networks, which is logical given that it is a national television channel and that in the analysis we have carried out it is compared with a regional channel that, in theory, is bound to have less coverage. Hence, it has been found that including videos in the tweets of Archivo RTVE boosts their impact. The average number of views of its audiovisual documents is 10000. Two of the main examples of this could be found in the videos entitled "El momento feminista de Rocío Jurado" [Rocío Jurado's feminist moment] and "El casting secreto de Verano Azul" [The secret audition for *Verano Azul*]. The latter is about one of the most famous series about teenagers in the history of RTVE premiered in 1981 but constantly rebroadcast over the years. The first one responds to a certain extent to the current concerns of young people, where feminism is of paramount importance. In it, Rocío Jurado (1946–2006), a Spanish copla singer from Andalusia, responds in 1995 to a sexist question (specifically, the presenter asked her about her bra size). This tweet has gone viral on social networks due to the significance of the artist's answer. Although it has "only" reached 231000 views, the impact of this video has been huge, and it has gone viral on social networks. This type of audiovisual content retrieved by the archives is possibly one of the best examples of how to attract the attention of young people by showing the struggle that women have maintained in order to reach some degree of equality and shows how those women who achieved greater success were continually harassed by questions such as those shown in the video.

In MemorANDA, the posts with the most interactions are a list of selected anniversaries. The head of the archive herself, María Ángeles Martín, expressed her doubts about the low impact of the archive on Twitter. Possibly the scarce interaction with the user and the insufficient use of images and videos are the causes underlying the low impact of MemorANDA and the very limited innovation it carries out.

Despite this, MemorANDA does manage to reach this segment of the population through certain YouTube videos that go viral. The strategy followed by the archive of the Andalusian broadcasting company of highlighting small fragments of programmes achieves its objective and the number of views and the rate at which some of its audiovisual documents on Google's platform go viral is tremendously high. Among the most viewed videos in this period of analysis, we find once again the repetition of regional topics, and flamenco or copla (a more popular variant of the former) rank in a predominant position.

But among MemorANDA's videos there are two that have gone viral, one of them in the form of an international meme. It is the video: "El ataque de risa de El Risitas al hablar del fin del mundo" [El Risitas' laughing fit when talking about the end of the world], with two million views. The other is a very harsh testimony given during a Canal Sur programme in 1997 by a woman who was victim of abuse. Some days later that woman was murdered by her abuser, in this case, her ex-husband. Her name was Ana Orantes. The video of that television intervention that was uploaded to the networks, "Ana Orantes relata los malos tratos sufridos durante 40 años" [Ana Orantes talks about the abuse she suffered for 40 years], also went viral with 3.3 million views. What is it about these fragments of television programmes that attracts the attention of younger viewers?

Among the two videos that have stood out, "El ataque de risa de El Risitas al hablar del fin del mundo" is perhaps the strangest case, as this Andalusian character has gone viral even beyond the borders of Spain, turning him into a meme with an international scope. Juan Joya, nicknamed El Risitas, was a character who first appeared in June 2007 in the programme "Los ratones coloraos" (2002–2005 and 2007–2010) for his peculiar way of laughing. The success of the character was such that he became part of the television memory of Canal Sur, and from there he went on to gain popularity throughout Spain. Young people have included El Risitas in the world of memes, his nickname has been translated as the "Spanish Laughing Guy", and there are a multitude of montages on the Internet of this and other videos that demonstrate the impact this character has had on the network. The videos featuring this character have become an international viral meme that has been a tremendous success in countries such as France and Finland (Aragón, 2019) as well as in the United States (Peinado, 2017; Parkinson, 2015). However, once again, a regional cliché, that of the Andalusian as a funny, humorous character, becomes the most successful video among young people of those taken from the Andalusian corporation's archive. This reiteration of regional and national clichés is not surprising because of the ability of these stereotypes to persist over time and to reproduce themselves even beyond their national borders.

Another of the most relevant audiovisual archival documents, as mentioned above, is the case of Ana Orantes. This woman explained in a talk show on Canal Sur, in 1997, the abuse she had suffered for 40 years at the hands of her partner, from whom she was recently divorced. Thirteen days after telling her story, she was burnt alive by her ex-husband. The importance of Ana Orantes today is essential to understand the fight against male violence in Spain, as she changed society's perception of violence against women and it connects very well with a young audience that is very concerned about feminist issues.

Why have these specific YouTube videos by RTVA and RTVE gone viral? The root of the success of the television appearances of El Risitas, Ana Orantes or Rocío Jurado can be explained by the fact that they meet the main characteristics that make a video go viral: They are usually short in duration, they are content taken from television broadcasts, they contain humorous or violent elements, they appeal to the most basic emotions, and they usually also include the presence of famous people and have an obvious emotional tone (Dafonte Gómez, 2014, p. 204–205). It could be stated that there is a close relationship between videos that go viral and current debates in society. As has been explained, in these television archives young people can find a way, whether through memes or not, to give meaning and an explanation to their current reality and to the issues of interest that concern them. In this way, and even if it is through unplanned or unforeseen ways, the archives of these public television channels can be revived in the digital context due to the new uses given to them by their younger audiences.

5 Conclusions

Both Archivo RTVE and MemorANDA manage to reach young people, especially through the fact that some of their posts go viral. Possibly the most successful strategy in this respect is the one followed by Archivo RTVE, with the backing of a greater availability of human resources dedicated to the management of archival content on the networks. The constant interaction with the public through its posts by means of questions and invitations improves its engagement with the audience. As a result, the national public broadcasting corporation has managed, through its archive channels, to make several of its posts go viral during the period analysed. The aforementioned videos entitled "El momento feminista de Rocío Jurado" [Rocío Jurado's feminist moment] and "El casting secreto de Verano Azul" [The secret audition for *Verano Azul*] stand out in this respect.

MemorANDA makes a huge effort to keep its Twitter and YouTube profiles afloat, which is noteworthy considering its limited human resources. In the period analysed, only one person oversaw content management. However, the strategy followed by the Andalusian public broadcasting company's archive in its constant use of lists of selected anniversaries means that its messages are disjointed and lack a clear direction. The almost non-existent interaction with its audience (such as the disabling of comments on YouTube) seems to lead to the absence of any impact on young people. Despite this, and due to the success of some of its videos on YouTube (which have well over a million views), some of the fragments it shares do manage to reach young people because they go viral or are converted into memes. Therefore, although their strategy is perhaps not the most appropriate for bringing audiovisual content to the younger generations, on some occasions they do manage to include part of their content in the collective imagination of young people. However, it can be observed that the name of the company that originally broadcast these videos is lost in the process of going viral.

Content with political or social relevance is almost non-existent in the most viral posts, although cultural content does occupy a slightly prominent position. The repetition of regional clichés is detected, especially in the case of MemorANDA. Canal Sur has a rich audiovisual heritage that perfectly reflects the heterogeneity of Andalusian and Spanish society, but it seems that the broadcasting company insists on its social networks constantly repeating the clichés for which Andalusians are renowned.

In any case, in the complex world of the survival of traditional television with the new multiscreen consumption, the presence of television archives in social networks must be very careful, especially in the profiles of public television channels. In addition to being able to foster greater engagement with youth audiences, the content they transfer must be carefully selected and accompanied by contextualisation policies that do not pervert the origin of these TV archives. Although memes can be a very useful weapon for the resurrection of some of this content, it should always be borne in mind that such public services should aim to expand knowledge of the past among audiences, and not just become a tool for entertainment.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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"We consume to forget; we collect to believe": Resistance, nostalgia, and VHS technologies in 21st century Greek video cultures

Ursula-Helen Kassaveti, Hellenic Open University, School of Social Sciences/+MATEK Project, Thessaloniki International Film Festival, Greece
ursulacassavetes@gmail.com

Abstract
Almost 50 years after the VCR's (Video Cassette Recorder) worldwide penetration in the international entertainment market, this paper will explore VCR-use-related and VCR-viewing-related activities, and the cultural practices of the Greek video cultures, particularly videotape collectors, in the 21st century. Rooted in various disciplines, the article aims to illuminate the persistent nature of VHS collectors' previous entertainment routines. From owning a VCR device and maintaining their videotape collections to enriching them with new acquisitions from video libraries and online buys, Greek videotape aficionados' practices show continuities and discontinuities from the past. Furthermore, it will explore how these practices have influenced their perception of current uses and gratifications of VHS technologies, revealing a perspective rooted in (tech) nostalgia. Moreover, the article will argue that the enduring presence and resilience of VHS technologies can be regarded as a testament to collective memory, a resistance to the digitalization of entertainment, and a longing for simpler ways of life, particularly in the aftermath of the 2007–2008 financial recession and the rise of new technologies.

Keywords
VCR, VHS, VHS collectors, nostalgia, analog media, VCR-related activities, direct-to-video films

1 Introduction

The aftermath of the 2007–2008 financial crisis generated a wave of nostalgia (Boym, 2001; Guffey, 2006), prompting a reimagining and reassessment of what may have been considered "dead media" (Parikka, 2012, pp. 3, 5). Although Japanese electronics company Funai ceased the production of VCR (Video Cassette Recorder) appliances in 2016 (Sun & Yan, 2016), VHS technologies, such as VHS devices, camcorders, and cassette tapes, continue to consistently reappear in our daily technical, cultural, and aesthetic discussions. This persistence can primarily be observed in online video sharing and social media platforms. For instance, users worldwide share their digitized home VHS tapes on YouTube, driven by a clear desire to reminisce about the past. Moreover, music channels like EELF push the boundaries of *vidding* (Turk, 2010, pp. 88–89) by featuring electronic music releases alongside home and amateur videos. VHS technologies, including camcorders and cassettes, see a revival for technical, stylistic, and artifact value. Examples include filmmaker Harmony Korine, who used analog camcorders for *Trash Humpers* (2009), even selling limited VHS cassettes with the film, or the horror anthology *V/H/S* (since 2012) that showcases "found footage" technique with VHS cameras.

This tension of "technostalgia" (van der Heijden, 2015, pp. 104–108) is abundantly evident in our contemporary media culture, as the interplay of materiality, aesthetics, and the past reveal novel cultural practices. There is a growing fascination with older, primarily analog, media technologies and their associated practices, often described as expressions of nostalgia, vintage appeal, or "retromania" (Reynolds, 2011; van der Heijden, 2015, p. 103). As the prevalence of technostalgia, the act of recalling past media technologies in present memory practices (van der Heijden, 2015, p. 104), continues to rise, "cultures of mediatization" (Hepp, 2013, p. 4) and fan cultures begin to form around

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specific dead or obsolete media. One of them is video culture (Willett, 2009).

This article aims to explore the enduring significance of VHS technologies (hardware and software) in contemporary domestic entertainment. Focusing on Greek VHS cassette collectors, who remain dedicated users nearly five decades after video players became prevalent, the study delves into usage patterns, viewing habits, and the role these cultures play in collective cultural memory. By investigating the continuities and changes in entertainment routines, the research highlights how these cultures resist digitalization and intangibility, rooted in a perspective of (tech)nostalgia.

2 Video and its audiences: Challenges and complexities in Greece and beyond

From AMPEX's early experimentation with magnetic tape, to different formats and the VCR's great popularity from the late 1970s onwards, reveals how video would come to transform domestic entertainment. So far, the existing academic literature on VHS technologies focuses on video, and it explores the medium's predominant technological use through a cluster of social, cultural, and historical processes (Armes, 1988; Dobrow, 1990; Levy, 1989; Marlow & Secunda, 1991; Newman, 2014) that comes from both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective. In the first instance, a backward glance over the VCR's worldwide penetration figures in the 1980s (Ganley & Ganley, 1987; Tydeman & Kelm, 1986) shows the medium's prevalence in home environments and the significance of domestic viewing routines. Also, it helps us conceptualizing aspects of consumption and spectatorship (Benson-Allott, 2013; Cubitt, 1991; Gray, 1992). In the second instance, VCR as a tangible medium has become a dialectic within the frame of media archaeology (Zielinski, 1985), or it encourages considerations of new cultural connotations based on its software (VHS) and its distribution via video libraries (Greenberg, 2008; Herbert, 2014).

During its prime, scholars also directed their attention to various audiences and how the VHS technologies influenced family dynamics (Morgan, Alexander, Shanahan, & Harris, 1990) or altered their television viewing habits, e.g., Krugman & Gopal's (1991) engagement findings. Uses and gratification theory gauged VHS satisfaction, like the Israeli study by Cohen, Levy, and Golden (1988) on home entertainment. Besides, Lin's work (1992) identified three critical VCR functions: entertainment, displacement, and social goals. In the meantime, VCRs broadened choices (van den Bulck, 1999), with VHS as family time (Winn, 2009).

Research on VHS technologies in Greece has been notably limited (Kassaveti, 2014, 2016). Greek media scholars overlooked VHS technologies and its opportunistic, non-professional local video production with low-budget aesthetics during the 1980s. This led to a restricted interest in contemporary VHS usage and cultural practices or Greek direct-to-video films in original VHS format. Whatever the case may be, the history of VHS technologies in Greece reveals an intriguing and overlooked aspect that sheds light on the social and cultural implications of their use within a local context. Notably, between 1982 and 1987, there was a remarkable 900 % increase in VHS devices sales within the Greek market (Kassaveti, 2014, p. 182). This surge can be attributed to the profound sociopolitical changes occurring in Greek society in the 1980s (Kassaveti, 2014). The ascent of the quasi-socialist PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) government, driven by a populist agenda, encouraged working and middle-class consumers to focus on the ownership of durable goods, such as television and VHS appliances (Kassaveti, 2014, pp. 184–187). Owning a VHS equipment became a symbol of social mobility and prosperity, and it was intricately connected to the emerging petit bourgeois aspirations for identification with the upper classes and smoother integration into society.

Yet, the growth of VHS technologies in Greece brings forth complexities. State television's political ties (Papathanassopoulos, 2010) and the 1980s media landscape with two unpopular channels led to a rise of direct-to-video film circuit as an alternative voice. VHS technologies' decline matched deregulation and private TV stations' arrival, offering varied entertainment. This shift led video libraries to close or adjust for the DVD era in the early 2000s.

The advent of the high-speed Internet in Greece in 2004 (Mallas, 2017) facilitated the growing prominence of illegal downloading services, but also allowed for renewed access to "lost" direct-to-video films of the 1980s. With the emergence of social media platforms, video films from the 1980s gained even more visibility and collecting older VHS tapes gradually started to take root. People of various backgrounds started to share their collections or knowledge of various 1980s movies and uploaded them on social networking sites, but also used them to trade video cassettes and organize public screenings. Additionally, the Gagarin Film Festival for Cult Cinema, launched by the late filmmaker Nicholas Triantafyllides, continuously showcased Greek direct-to-video films from 2002 until a few years ago. The times of the Great Recession (2007–2008) apparently influenced Greece, and the 1980s culture came to the spotlight as a nostalgic trend (Zestanakis, 2016).

3 Research design, methodology, and ethics

While quantitative and qualitative research on Greek television and its audiences play a crucial role in understanding the different facets of Greek society and media culture (Papathanassopoulos, 2000; Vamvakas & Gazi, 2017; Vamvakas & Paschalidis, 2018), "obsolete" media, such as the VHS technologies, are under-researched. Moreover, the available sources from the 1980s pertaining to VHS spectatorship and audience are somewhat limited and contradictory. Official statistical information on this topic is scarce, and when it does appear in the Greek (professional) press, it tends to be somewhat ambiguous or lacking in specificity.

Notwithstanding these complications, the uses and gratifications theory (Katz, Gurevitch, & Haas, 1973; McQuail, Blumler, & Brown, 1972) provides a useful starting point and the conceptual background of this article. Overall, the theory aims to comprehend the reasons, motives, and purposes behind the audience's everyday media use. With this approach, valuable insights have been gained into how mass audiences embrace different media platforms (from television and video to print resources to the Internet) (Ruggiero, 2000, p. 24). Discussing the effects media have on individuals, the uses and gratifications theory explores their motivations and psychological needs that surround a particular medium and its use.

Methodologically, and in addition to the uses and gratifications theory quantitative frame, I have employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. The participants in this study are individuals who more or less actively collect VHS tapes. There is existing literature on collecting as a pastime, which can be perceived as a psychological mechanism (McIntosh & Schmeichel 2004; Muensterberger, 1994) for building self-identity or as a cultural practice to preserve the past (Belk, 1995). Still, this article will not primarily concentrate on collecting habits nor will it seek to explore the motives behind collections. Instead, the focus will be on how collectors utilize VHS technologies, as VHS collecting entails specific devices and involves distinct routines. It is highly probable that a VHS collector would nowadays be the primary user of VHS tapes, given that these tapes require a specific device to be played and viewed. In that context, it may be argued that contemporary Greek video cultures predominantly consist of video collectors.

Using snowball sampling (Gray, 1992, p. 35; Shatzer & Lindlof, 1989), I located participants for the questionnaire, including collectors I knew personally or recruited via social media, particularly my Facebook page on Greek VHS direct-to-video films.[1] Some were acquaintances, while others connected through online interactions or screenings. The survey featured a structured online questionnaire on VCR-related activities, VCR viewing-related audience activities, and the interplay of nostalgia and old media in the modern media landscape. Throughout the article, I have maintained the acronym VCR (Video Cassette Recorder), as all activities are heavily interrelated with the appliance.

1 https://www.facebook.com/greekvhsbook/ (accessed 1/8/2023).

The questionnaire was sent to the collectors via e-mail and was open from December 2021 to February 2022. My first intention was to engage in an ethnographic perspective with in-depth interviews and film / video elicitation methods (Banks, 2005, p. 99). The ethnographic tradition in media scholarship, from its origins at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Grimshaw, Hobson, & Willis, 1981; Hobson, 1982) to today, provides a diverse approach to understanding media's role in culture (Jordan, 1990). Still, due to ethical considerations and the post-COVID-19 restraints, such an approach could not be employed. Eventually, all data were collected by informed consent, and personal information was disclosed. The interviews have been conducted in Greek and the author translated all parts presented in the following into English.

The final sample consists of seven Greek males born in the greater metropolitan area of Athens, Attica:

- Panagiotis (b. 1971), Fanis (b. 1980), and Kostas (b. 1979) hold university degrees.
- Nontas (b. 1975) comes from a technical background.
- Christos (b. 1974) graduated from a public institute of vocational training.
- Bakis (b. 1975) and Leon (b. 1983) have completed their formal compulsory education.

While space limits discussion of gender bias in video use and collecting, it is noteworthy that VHS activities, particularly collecting "trash films" (as Greek direct-to-video films are often considered), often appeal more to males (Menninghaus, 2016). Previous research (Gunter & Wober, 1989) suggests male dominance in VHS-related activities. In this study, no female collectors of Greek direct-to-video (apart from the author) or foreign films on VHS were identified in Athens or other Greek areas. The participants are VHS device owners with diverse collections, embracing "para-cinema" (Sconce, 1995, p. 372), which includes different and diverse film subgenres within the realm of "cult film," such as horror films, soft pornography, splatter flicks, to name a few.

The paper's first results section (section 4) explores VHS technology ownership, including VCR usage, domestic screening, recording, replaying, and video library building. The second results section (section 5) delves into collectors' viewing activities, cultural practices, and uses and gratifications. Finally, the Conclusion section examines Greek direct-to-video films as a form of vernacular software, highlighting how participants engage as "textual poachers" (Jenkins, 2013, p. 69), and reinterpret VHS material within collective cultural memory. This approach provides both gratification and a window into an older prosperous past, invoking nostalgia. To this end, the concept of "ethnographicness" (Heider, 1990, pp. 5–6) and the shift toward technostalgia are also pivotal.

4 VCR-use related activities

This section will focus on the possession of VHS technologies, specifically VCRs, the current frequency of playing, watching at home, recording and playing back activities, as well as the process of maintaining a video library. Previous scholarly works (Lin, 1990; Gunter & Wober, 1989; Rubin & Rubin, 1989) have emphasized the significance of activities associated with VCR use. Despite employing a quantitative framework, these studies provide valuable insights into the fundamental applications of VHS technologies. Further, they pinpoint entertaining, and social aspects of their use.

Nontas owned the same VCRs for 30 years; Fanis owns four of them. Bakis reports that

> in the 1980s, I owned a VCR player made by Hitachi; at the end of the 1990s, I bought a Sanyo, which I still own. Today, apart from the Sanyo, I own a Sony and a Funai – 1990s models –, an old Telefunken VCR from the 1980s that has been a recent gift, and an LG VHS/DVD recorder combo player.

Besides, Leon used to own a "family VCR" until 2001. His recent VCR player was bought in 2003 from a "sailor's widow." It appears that Panasonic holds significant appeal as a brand, as five individuals possess products from this specific electronics company.

All of the collectors' first VCRs were bought by their fathers, and they have been purchasing new devices over the years. Leon and Nontas have changed one and four VHS devices respectively, Christos has changed five, while Fanis has changed in toto 25 video players. Still, five of the collectors have never done any maintenance of their VHS equipment.

Far more interesting is where this VHS device is located. Typically, these appliances are situated in the living room, beneath the television set. Four of the collectors have retained their original placement. Nontas argues that such a decision is justified, as it operates as "a recollection of its primary use." However, a VHS device is situated in Christos's home office, as "VCR connects only to CRT (Cathode-Ray Tube) monitor." In terms of frequency, four of the collectors use their VHS equipment once a week, one uses it three times a week, one sets the power only every 15 days to see if the device works, one uses it rarely, and one never.

Bakis, Leon, Fanis, Kostas, and Christos perceive their collecting practices as a "work-in-progress," while Nontas and Panagiotis seem to have completed theirs. The amount of collected VHS cassettes range from 30 (Christos) to 5 000 (Fanis). Leon owns 300 VHS tapes, while Nontas once had 800 VHS tapes in his collection, but now only has 30 remaining, which only "serve as a memory" of his previous collection. Two collectors (Panagiotis and Bakis) have been collecting VHS since the 1990s, and two (Leon and Kostas) began their collection in the early 2000s. Christos started his collection in his early 30s. The rest have been collecting VHS cassettes since the 1980s.

VHS collectors acquire films on tape through diverse sources: VHS tape exchange, old Greek video libraries, online markets, and other collectors. Nontas, Kostas, Leon, and Fanis collect from fellow enthusiasts or warehouses. Bakis frequents video library clearances, flea markets (Monastiraki), and online platforms. Panagiotis and Christos exchange and purchase from video libraries. While some communication exists among collectors, buying VHS cassettes appears to be a predominantly solitary activity, even though there used to be more interaction, particularly in visiting video libraries. However, most of the collectors stress how video library owners and collectors overvalue tapes for sale. Leon agrees that "some people speculate; it is normal due to the rarity and demand for some VHS. After all, it is not a sport for small pockets." Christos expands this argument: "After all this 'hipster' hype, prices went up. Now, the prices are so ridiculously high with retromania that it is not worth even bothering." He concludes, "we gathered what we could, and that is all."

VHS collectors seem to take care of their VHS cassette collections: Nontas has "special shelves on a piece of furniture in the living room or the storage room." Bakis has transformed the childhood bedroom into a storage room "with shelves full of VHS tapes." Panagiotis has placed "shelves everywhere," Kostas uses his parents' storage room and his old baby bedroom to store his tapes. Christos had an old-school shelf for his VHS tapes; his main concern for them was their "vertical" (otherwise they get demagnetized) position.

Apart from collecting VHS as a part of an entertainment routine, collectors indicate different reasons for doing so. Though Nontas has stopped buying cassettes, his remaining tapes have a sole destination: "I want to see the same films repeatedly and for completist reasons (as he owns full videographies of selected directors)." Bakis collects only films that "were not released in any other format." He argues that "if some films have already been released in Greece on DVD or Blu-ray, I would prefer buying the latter, as – let us face it – they have a better audiovisual quality compared to VHS."

Panagiotis experiences "frustration" from watching VHS tapes, because he prefers HD formats, and Fanis collects films for completist reasons and research. In contrast to the views already expressed above, Leon and Kostas stick to VHS cassettes' obsolescence. Leon's point is clear: "could it be a passing fancy or romanticism, but I tend to salvage obsolete forms of technology that are precious to me." Kostas' argument focuses on technology: "a VHS could be held as a magic spell. You put it into the VHS equipment, and the portal opens. Then, the past is in front of you."

In the present context, ownership of VHS devices and software has shed its previous connotations of conspicuous consumption and social escalation. It now reflects collectors' aesthetic preferences and personal needs. These collectors, often continuing a generational tradition, maintain or acquire VHS devices, preserve and enhance their collections. Despite modern trends like hipsterism and retromania, online markets have simplified VHS cassette acquisition. VHS collectors, not necessarily tech-savvy, digitize tapes while valuing the tangible aspect. VHS devices remain vital for playing these collections, even as formats like Blu-ray offer superior quality. This contrast forms the basis for the following section, exploring VHS collectors' viewing patterns.

5 Viewing-related audience activities

This section delves into the viewing-related activities of collectors, the cultural practices that revolve around this pastime, and the motives behind them. Initially, VHS technologies were primarily associated with communal viewings among friends and family, i.e., "family togetherness" (Gunter & Wober, 1989, p. 55). However, as the medium became obsolete and alternatives like DVD, Blu-ray, and online streaming emerged, most collectors transitioned to watching VHS tapes in solitude, either due to the changing landscape or the abundance of entertainment options. Nontas argues that "it is better to watch VHS with a company," but he cannot find enough time. Christos also has limited time at his disposal; however, "nobody else wants to follow him" in his VHS tape viewing.

Bakis likes "company to comment upon" the VHS content, while Panagiotis defines himself as a "misanthropist," and he avoids any companionship. Still, Leon remembers one particular time when he and his wife were "eating snacks, drinking soda, and watching VHS cassettes together." Solitary VHS tape viewing contrasts with recollections of events revolving around direct-to-video films. Bakis recollects a public VHS tape screening of two video films, *O Skylas* (directed by Dimitris Vogiatzis, 1986) and *O Alitis kai o Batsos* (directed by Giorgos Mylonas, 1989). It took place in 2004 in "Texas," a heavy metal club in Athens, and "one viewer would throw a punchline, and generally it would be so messy and fun." Christos finds it challenging to watch VHS tapes with friends; nevertheless, he remembers about "3–4 successful public VHS screenings that we organized." Nontas co-organized and attended one of them; it was the cult video film *To Computer tou Thanatou* (directed by Michalis Lefakis jr., 1987). Actor Akis Florentis, the film's main protagonist, attended the event, and "was excited that so many people loved the films he starred in." Unfortunately, Florentis died a few months later.

While collectors use their VHS equipment to watch various films, the 1980s Greek direct-to-video films seem to interest them more. As mentioned earlier, these VHS tapes have only lately begun to be considered a part of the Greek (audio)visual culture. Except for Panagiotis (who prefers comedies), all collectors highly regard them and watch them occasionally. Christos favors the latter, along with adventure films. His most beloved films are *Peinanteous* (directed by Giorgos Skalenakis, 1987) and *Klassiki Periptosi Vlavis* (directed by Takis Vougiouklakis, 1987). The other collectors prefer most VHS-film genres, such as high-school comedies and dramas about drug addiction. Leon finds youth deviant video films really "exciting." He argues that Dimitris Tzelas, a filmmaker whose VHS ventures adopted a social critique on drug addiction, is "a very notable video film director." Both, Nontas and Bakis, appreciate the works of Tzelas likewise. Nontas argues that Tzelas' *O Straggalistis tis Syngrou* (1990) is "very original and daring." Bakis likes Tzelas' video drama *Oi Batsoi Poulane tin Iroini* (1989) because he adores "Gatos" (The Cat), the video film's main character. Moreover, he enjoys the work of other filmmakers, such as "Nikos Foskolos, Kostas Karagiannis" or "Andreas Katsimitsoulias" who happened to work for the mainstream film market since the 1960s. Fanis's most beloved filmmaker is Takis Vougiouklakis, and his video films *Harise mou to Gounaki sou* (1986) and *Anarchikes Kalogries* (1986).

In analyzing the motives behind such tastes, all the collectors argue that they like Greek direct-to-video films, as the latter offer testimony of the 1980s, when everything was “simpler,” as Nontas puts it. For him, this spirit of “non-political-correctness” was essential, as “nowadays everything is so commercial and a limited circle of individuals directs all films.” It encapsulates a “hit-and-miss attitude,” as Christos explains, and “this attitude had been prevalent in the Greek direct-to-video circuit and the Greek society as well.”

Bakis indicates specific reasons for watching direct-to-video films. He wants to see “locations, places, and neighborhoods from the past, clothing, and hairstyles of the 1980s decade,” how people entertained themselves – something that “no longer exists in our lives.” Kostas adds, “Greek video films exemplify how low-budget production values work, and they show places and people you will not expect to watch on tape.” For all of them, Greek direct-to-video films provide a more or less accurate portrait of the 1980s in Greece. Kostas thinks that “whenever I push the ‘play’ button, I can see an alternative ethnography of the 1980s unfold in front of me.” His motto is “we consume to forget; we collect to believe.”

Leon comments on the video representation that it “is quite faithful and could be considered a period document for scholars.” Nontas argues that “it reflects, to a satisfactory degree, what was going on at the time.” Christos further adds that “they present such a relaxed routine that we can no longer even recall. I also think landmarking is quite interesting.” On the other hand, Fanis believes that this representation “is not always plausible” but “cultural elements can be located instrumentally.” He adds that “they are of cultural, social and folkloric interest.”

Using the VCR and watching Greek direct-to-video films triggers nostalgia. Leon remembers his “pre-teen self-fondly, the old pre-Internet society,” and Kostas recollects a

> society that was not afraid of anything: the crisis, the pandemic, the loss. However, most importantly, a society that is not afraid of the technological complexity of today, especially when you forget all your passcodes on the web! How embarrassing!

For Nontas, these films “foreshadow a beautiful era, now long lost.” Leon’s final argument summarizes this nostalgia: “They are documents of an era I long for.”

But what are the collectors’ views of the original VHS viewing of video films in contrast to their digitized version, which is often uploaded on the Internet? Nontas does not feel that watching video films from their source is superior, and he acknowledges it as a “psychological difference that certainly exists.” For Leon watching a video film from a VHS cassette reveals “a warmer format and it has a process, a special ritual; digital is very easily accessible, cold and, therefore, cheap.” Christos comments on how VHS technologies orchestrates a particular ambiance: “the blur, the analog noise, the mechanical murmur, the hazy sound set up an atmosphere.” Bakis has another argument: “Because I own several (videotapes) in physical format, and I prefer to watch them that way because they have a better picture. On YouTube and streaming services, the picture quality is poor.”

VHS collectors’ viewing habits reveal the antiquated perception of using VHS devices and tapes, even within families. Public screenings fall short, maintaining video watching as a solitary endeavor. Collectors favor comedy and drama genres, especially direct-to-video films that address delinquency, police dramas, and 1980s Greek issues. Beyond their dramatic content, they value VHS films for their ethnographic essence, as they capture historical and cultural nuances. These films serve as a gateway to lost Greek heritage, nurturing collective cultural memory. While sparking memories of youth, they also mirror analog interactions, socialization, and past entertainment. These films encapsulate prosperity, interwoven with 1980s cultural insights; they reshape and enhance the VHS collectors’ personal experience, contributing to cultural memory (Fickers, 2009, p. 124). Collectors perceive themselves as individuals who once experienced the 1980s through various entertainment and cultural routines, and connected to a specific sociotemporal collective. VHS technologies, both hardware and software, expand memory boundaries, aligning with Assmann’s notion that media shape memory’s evolution

(Assmann, 2011, p. 137), and they infuse the collectors' historical instances into an idealized semi-factual, semi-fictional narrative. This process transforms factual history into remembered history, effectively crafting myth within cultural memory.

6 Conclusion

Twenty-first-century Greek video cultures, i.e., this small group of VHS cassette collectors, exhibit interesting levels of activity, creativity, and critical involvement as consumers of popular culture, signifying their role as pioneers in shaping a novel bond with older media. Older uses and gratifications of VHS technologies, that encompass entertainment, displacement, and intra-family communication, have evolved in the digital era. In an age of diverse media, VHS could be considered a form of "de-massification" (Williams, Rice, & Rogers, 1988, pp. 12–13), and collectors seem to derive gratification from the medium's content. Either considered old fashioned, obsolete, or dead, VHS technologies persist in being part of their entertainment routines. Face-to-face intra-communication for renting and viewing has waned, and the VHS appliance intentionally supplants other, potentially higher-quality media options. Greek video collectors employ VHS technologies to fulfill psychological needs, and they view them as carriers of collective memory and symbols of simpler social structures. Amid skepticism toward the digital realm, they perceive themselves within the broader analog context, using VHS to uncover cultural evidence of a bygone ideal society.

An important dimension observed from the collectors is that VHS technologies seem to be central to their lives. Greek VHS collectors engage in memory practices that evoke nostalgia through VHS technologies and watching Greek direct-to-video films. For most of them, the latter serve as vivid ethnographies of the 1980s, and a reminder of what Assmann has pinpointed: "That which continues to be a living memory today, may be only transmitted via media tomorrow" (Assman, 2011, p. 36). Bakis concludes that "viewing these films can help you recall the days we lived. And now, it has all gone." In that sense, technostalgia emerges as a new form of memory practice, not simply longing for the past, but bridging analog and digital realms, archival and performative aspects (van der Heijden, 2015, p. 104). This process reevaluates the past and reframes the present, mediating between different practices, perceptions, and viewpoints (Pinch & Reinecke, 2009, p. 166), constructing a temporal "bridge" between various experiences and contexts.

The abovementioned tension is clearly illustrated in the collectors' attitude toward contemporary digital culture, as they perceive VCR-use-related activities and view related activities as "non-revolutionary" in the digital realm. For Panagiotis and Kostas, VHS equipment was revolutionary for its time only. Nontas insists on his memories: "for some of us, it is an example that they can make do with what is available, and they are against this hyper-digitization of our lives." With their analog allure, VHS technologies are charged with the ability to teleport one to another decade. It is no surprise that all collectors are prone to use traditional media, such as cassette players, arcade video games, walkmans, CDs, and turntable players. Christos has carried out this experiment: "I recently recorded the first two episodes of *Stranger Things* on VHS (cassettes), while having previously watched them on Netflix, and they seemed a lot scarier…"

This study has raised important questions about 21st-century VHS technologies and cultures, yet there are untapped avenues for exploration. A transnational approach could reveal variations in national viewing habits and gratifications. Investigating how cultures around dead media shape bonds and fandom perceptions offers another intriguing angle. Additionally, delving into areas like pornography consumption on VHS or gendered analyses could shed light on contemporary perceptions of analog entertainment and its appeal as a nostalgic refuge.

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Media consumption between dynamics and persistence: The meaning of persistent media practices in a mediatized everyday life

Jutta Röser and Jo Marie Dominiak*
University of Münster, Department of Communication, Germany
*Corresponding author: j.dominiak@uni-muenster.de

Abstract
Qualitative reception studies have shown that new media neither radically change people's media repertoires, nor do they replace the old. Established media practices remain relevant, and users actively persist on old media (technologies). To show why and how this persistence is embedded by its users, the paper at hand addresses old media persistence from a user's and appropriation perspective. Thus, following the mediatization approach, we enfold the concept of the interplay of dynamics and persistence and transfer its theoretical ideas to two studies that deal with (1) the persistence of the TV in everyday media repertoires and (2) the persisting usage of vinyl records in the face of digital streaming services in everyday life. Our aim is to illuminate why and how users, on the one hand, persist on established media practices, but on the other hand, simultaneously combine them meaningfully with new media (practices) within their respective everyday lives.

Keywords
dynamics and persistence, mediatization, coexistence, media appropriation, second screening, television, music media

1 Introduction

In the face of high innovation densities, the emergence of new media technologies and advancing digitization, the focus of scientific discourse often tends to fall on the new (digital) media (Menke & Schwarzenegger, 2019, p. 658; see also Kinnebrock, Schwarzenegger, & Birkner, 2015, p. 13). Yet many older, established media (technologies) are far from extinct. On the contrary, media such as linear television, the telephone, or e-mail have been able to maintain their place in people's everyday lives to this day. Against this backdrop, this paper approaches old media persistence from a user's and appropriation perspective. It discusses the questions why and how people persist on using established media, what background is relevant in the context of everyday life, and how users negotiate persistence in association with new and dynamic media practices. We want to show why new media do not change the media repertoire in the form of radical upheavals and how established and new media develop together as processual transformations negotiated by their users (Röser, Müller, Niemand & Roth, 2019). Afterall, we know seemingly outdated media are still firmly merged into everyday life and, contrary to some public discourse, continue to occupy an important part of everyday practices (Müller & Röser, 2017a; see also Balbi, 2015).

Following the mediatization approach (Krotz, 2007, 2014a; see also Couldry & Hepp, 2017) and arguing from a user's and appropriation perspective, we unfold the concept of *the interplay of dynamics and persistence* (Röser, Müller, Niemand, & Roth, 2017, 2019). The concept theoretically and systematically captures how mediatization is both intensified in dynamic elements and shaped by persistent elements. In this way, we want to open new perspectives on dealing with old media persistence in different mediatized spheres of life. This paper therefore draws on two studies to illustrate the theoretical concept.

In the following, first the theoretical framework is developed, which refers both to the mediatization approach and the inter-

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play of dynamics and persistence in media consumption, supplemented by references to media nostalgia research and the media repertoire concept. Following on from that, the first case study addresses the users' persistence on collective television nights in the domestic couple context. The second case study illustrates how old media persistence is implemented and negotiated in a music media context. Finally, the conclusion discusses to what extent looking at media consumption through the lens of the interplay of dynamics and persistence can open new perspectives in dealing with old media persistence.

2 Theoretical framework: Mediatization between dynamics and persistence

The theoretical framework ties in with the mediatization approach and expands it to include the concept of media consumption between dynamics and persistence. According to Krotz (2007, 2014a), mediatization can be understood as the increasing penetration of all social spheres with media-related communication. The approach theorizes the connection between the change of media and media communication on the one hand and the change of society, everyday life, relationships, and culture on the other (Hepp & Krotz, 2014a, p. 3; see also Krotz, 2017a, 2017b). This change is not primarily triggered by (new) media, as technology determinist approaches suggest. Instead, the change emerges from the media-related actions of people, whose changed forms of communication and interaction in specific social worlds thus come under scrutiny (Krotz, 2014b, pp. 71–76). New media technologies enable a change in communication, but it is the users who shape it according to their everyday life and their own needs. New media technologies and offerings have to be appropriated and find their place in everyday life in order to change communication. For empirical studies, this means focusing on people's communicative actions and media appropriation.

In this context, the mediatization perspective concentrates its focus especially on dynamics and changes in media-related communication: "Mediatization is a category to describe a process of change" (Hepp & Krotz, 2014a, p. 3). This is because it specifically aims to analyze the "waves of mediatization" (Couldry & Hepp, 2017, p. 38) in the context of a comprehensive digital infrastructure (Krotz, 2017a, p. 16). In this sense, studies have been conducted investigating how specific social worlds are increasingly mediatized and at the same time socio-culturally changed by communicative practices with digital media (see e.g., the studies in Hepp & Krotz, 2014b). The German Priority Program "Mediatized Worlds" was also designed in this line of thinking (Hepp & Krotz, 2014a, pp. 9–10). While, on the one hand, the projects elaborated profound changes in communication in different spheres, on the other hand, they found that established media remain significant and are not eliminated. Additionally, processes of change do not occur as universal as many media and academic discourses suggest (Krotz, 2014c, p. 27). Subsequently, elements of persistence were also included and illuminated in particular in two qualitative reception studies on mediatized communitization and the mediatized home (Hepp & Röser, 2014). Specifically, the project on the "Mediatized Home in Transition" found in the context of a long-term panel study that overall, a coexistence of diverse "old" and "new" media and media practices was evident in households. Against this background, the researchers adopted a perspective on change that not only thinks of it as a dynamic process of transformation, but also takes persistent elements into account. As a result, the theoretical concept of the interplay of dynamics and persistence in mediatization was developed (Röser et al., 2019, pp. 30–32; Röser et al., 2017). This concept, as this paper will show, is suitable for developing a deeper understanding of old media persistence.

The researchers of the study on the "Mediatized Home in Transition" took people's media practices as their reference point. By dynamics, they mean continuous, sometimes also sudden changes in media usage, through which the mediatization of the domestic (or other) spheres intensifies. By persistence, in contrast, they understand the continuation of established media practices, for example by keeping the old (analog) media in play

(Röser et al., 2017, pp. 140–141). According to this, persistent media usage arises when "people do not change their communicative behavior in subareas or change it only slightly, even though corresponding media technology and content potentials would allow this" (Röser et al., 2017, p. 142).[1] In other words, the potential of new media is not fully exploited, or not exploited at all, and established media practices are retained (mostly in specific subareas, not universally, see Krotz, 2014c). The researchers assumed the requirements of everyday life to be the underlying reason for this: If certain media practices continue to make sense for people in their everyday lives, they see no reason to abandon them. If one follows the researchers' reasoning, then this could mean, for example, that people may insist on linear radio because it remains practical as a kitchen radio at breakfast or as a car radio on the road; at the same time, however, dynamics could emerge because podcasts are newly integrated into the media repertoire and regularly listened to for falling asleep.

Persistence is not to be confused with non-mediatization or de-mediatization (Grenz & Pfadenhauer, 2017). For persistence also means a mediatized practice, only with older media. Thus, it is not about less media usage, but about acting with media in an established, "persisting" way (Röser et al., 2019, p. 142). Persistence does not need being about analog media alone, either. Rather, an "established media practice" can also be based on digital media applications. For example, private communication via e-mail could now be classified as persistence, as currently messenger and social media communication offer more diverse options. Therefore, persistent and dynamic media practices cannot simply be equated with "analogue old" and "digital new" media.

The question of what actually gives media their character as "old" or "new" has recently been theoretically addressed in particular by studies in the context of media nostalgia and retromedia (Magaudda & Minitti, 2019; Menke, 2017; Menke & Schwarzenegger, 2019). These argue against a dichotomous opposition because "'oldness' and 'newness' should not be considered as two separate stages in media lives, but two relational terms that are (repeatedly) attributed to media as part of a continuous process of reconfiguration of situated practices and discourses" (Magaudda & Minitti, 2019, p. 676). In this process, mutual influence takes place. "New media are tied to their predecessors on multiple levels [...] and old media are reformed as they are challenged by the new" (Menke & Schwarzenegger, 2019, p. 659; see also Balbi, 2015) Therefore, characterizations of media as old or new are relational constructions that are in a constant process of negotiation and change historically. Thus, in our argumentation persistence means established media practices with "old" (and sometimes "new") media.

Another innovative aspect of these studies on media nostalgia or retromedia lies in their focus on media users (unlike to more media-centered studies, see for example Balbi, 2015). For example, Menke and Schwarzenegger (2019, p. 678) examined how media users "construct notions of old and new in making sense of media." Thus, they are interested in the discursive assignment and definition of oldness and newness of media by the users. In contrast, Magaudda & Minitti (2019), like us, focus on practices in everyday life. With their concept of "retromedia-in-practice," which draws on practice theory, they use a variety of case studies to explore how older media no longer belong to the past but "emerge as innovative outcomes of a creative reconfiguration of actual practices" (Magaudda & Minitti, 2019, p. 689). Thus, with the focus on users' practices, there are parallels to the concept at hand of dynamics and persistence. However, we are not concerned here with older media that are newly incorporated into the (digital) media repertoire as retromedia. Rather, we examine the other way around, why established media practices are retained and combined with new practices.

We can state that the classification of dynamic and persistent media practices (as well as the classification as an old or new medium) is historically relational. Furthermore, both elements have an interdependent connection and coexist in everyday life. In this

1 All original German quotations from literature and interviews were translated into English by the authors.

respect, persistence does by no means mean stagnation (Hepp & Röser 2014; see also Kinnebrock, Schwarzenegger, & Birkner, 2015, p. 13). There are processes of negotiation and transformation between the poles of dynamic and persistent media practices. And because older media also change on a deeper level (such as television through digital program multiplication or the record through added QR codes) and new application potentials are added through various additional devices, "such persistent practices are also simultaneously connected with media change" (Hepp & Röser, 2014, p. 179). In particular, established and new media practices can be combined to form new kinds of media use patterns, as will be shown in more detail in the case studies.

It is therefore crucial to focus on people's "media repertoires" (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012) instead of single media. With media repertoires, the relationship between different media is brought to the forefront of the analyses, and all media that are regularly used by an individual are captured as a complex network. Thus, established as well as new media and media practices can be considered as part of a "meaningfully structured composition of media" (Hasebrink & Domeyer, 2012, p. 759). This is due to the fact that dynamic and persistent media practices interact with each other in everyday life, they have "points of contact and are in an interrelation with each other that influences the media repertoire" (Röser et al., 2017, p. 151).

Persistent media practices are therefore not understood by the researchers of the study "The Mediatized Home" as opposites, but as part of change. According to this concept, media use always includes elements of dynamics and of persistence as well as of their interplay (Röser et al., 2017, p. 143). These elements together constitute change, which is why such processes are gradual rather than radical and often also unevenly discontinuous.

It is the requirements and meaningfulness of everyday life that, on the one hand, cause people to persist on established media practices or, on the other hand, suggest a dynamic appropriation of new applications (Röser et al., 2017, pp. 157–158). The meaningful organization of their everyday life is the directive maxim of people's actions, into which media use is inserted. Therefore, rules, routines, and institutionalizations of everyday life are maintained insofar as they make sense and "work" from a subjective point of view. If this meaningfulness changes, media action can also be suddenly and profoundly altered, which can also be associated with intensification of mediatization (Röser et al., 2019, pp. 151–154; see also Niemand, 2020; with reference to television, see also Gauntlett & Hill, 1999, pp. 79–109). If, on the other hand, everyday life is more stable, media repertoires and media practices are changed only gradually and in parts. This explains why, from the user perspective, mediatization usually does not manifest itself in the form of "revolutionary upheavals" through digital media, but rather as a gradual transformation of mediatized everyday life, in which persistent media practices play an essential role (Röser et al., 2017, pp. 157–158).

We are convinced and would like to illustrate this by case studies that the concept of media consumption between dynamics and persistence can be applied to different spheres and opens up the possibility of bringing old media persistence into the analytical focus.

3 Case Study I: Persistence of collective TV nights

One medium that has asserted itself in the media repertoire and thus refers to persistence in media use is linear television. When linear television is referred to in the following, it implies the more classic, scheduled television broadcast, often also referred to as appointment-based TV. Streaming of audiovisual content has gained in importance in recent years and linear television has therefore lost share. Nevertheless, people in Germany, especially the over-30s, still spend a considerable amount of their watch time on program television.[2] "The Mediatized Home in Transition" project has investigated the

2 Sixty-nine percent of the usage time of audiovisual content (a total of 222 minutes) in Germany in 2021 was accounted for by the current TV program, but among the 14–29 years old this fell from 46 % (2018) to only 22 % (2021) (Kupferschmitt & Müller, 2021, p. 375).

Table 1: Sample of the study "The Mediatized Home in Transition" (Couple households) with Internet

Age (2008 at project start)	Education Normal[a] pseudonymes, occupation male (age) / occupation female (age)	Further[b] pseudonymes, occupation male (age) / occupation female (age)	N
Younger	› Maier, electrician (33) / nurse (25) › Markuse, worker (33) / nurse (33) › Brandt, hairdresser (26) / hairdresser (29) › Schunk, refuse worker (37) / housewife, kitchen helper part-time (33)	› Sarholz, sport therapist (41) / PR consultant (32) › Trautwein, musician und service employee (41) / teacher (35) › Olsen, clerk (33) / copywriter (29) › Bunk, medical doctor (29) / advertising consultant (29)	8
Middle	› Meckel, administrative officer (50) / administrative officer (48) › Bindsei, refuse worker (38) / clerk (42) › Weinert, self-employed carpenter (44) / school secretary part-time (43) › Mück, administrative clerk (43) / housewife (55) › Wulf, postman (38) / educator (38)	› Flick, self-employed coach (42) / physiotherapist (40) › Schneider, teacher (39) / clerk (37) › Brinkmann, teacher and vice-principal (49) / manager in family education (48) › Mahlmann, senior executive (48) / pharmaceutical representative and project manager (46)	9
Older	› Steffen, software developer (56) / accountant (57) › Sommer, taxi employer (63) / accountant part-time (61) › Ziegler, municipal official for data processing (59) / housewife (58) › Frey, insurance salesman in in partial retirement (60) / accountant (57)	› Wiegand, lawyer (63) / housewife and service employee (61) › Nagel, teacher (53) / clerk (51) › Bauer, retired banker (63) / retired teacher (62) › Frings, IT-employer in partial retirement (62) / teacher part-time (58)	8
N	13	12	25

a Secondary general school or intermediate secondary school.
b High school graduation or vocational diploma.

Source: Röser et al. (2019, p. 46).

background for this persistence of television (Röser et al., 2019). Using selected findings from this study, our first case study aims to discuss two main questions: (1) How and why do users persist on established practices with linear television, and (2) to what extent does the presence of digital media in the home influence and change television practices?

The study was conducted as a long-term panel study with heterosexual couples. They were interviewed together four times between 2008 and 2016, focusing on qualitative interviews in the couples' homes. The sample consisted of 25 households (Table 1) with couples who used the Internet at home and represented the broad middle class (Röser et al., 2019, pp. 44–48).[3]

The interview guide covered a wide range of topics (including acquisition processes of the domestic Internet, spatial arrangements with the Internet, and domestic occupational work with the Internet; Röser et al., 2019, pp. 44, 48–54). The evaluation was based on media ethnographic household portraits in a total of six thematic areas. The findings selected here result from the topic area "The Internet in the media repertoire: coexistence of old and new media" and the associated evaluation (Röser et al., 2019, pp. 119–149).

In the following, selected results of the study are presented and situated along the aspects *Collective TV nights as persisting practice* and *TV nights between continuity and change.*

3.1 Collective TV nights as persisting practice

The focus of the overall study was on the appropriation and domestication of the Internet and the consequences for couples' everyday life, communication, and media repertoires.

3 The sample was quota-based according to age (3 age groups between 25 and 63 years in 2008) as well as school education (2 groups) (Table 1). To select households, 135 households were previously recruited via a written questionnaire using a snowball system and multipliers.

At the beginning, the focus was primarily on dynamic changes brought about by the new online medium in the home. However, it quickly became clear that the arrival of the Internet did not radically change the media repertoires in the home. Rather, many established media practices were retained and merely supplemented by the Internet. This was especially the case for television.

The distinctive significance of television in the couples' domestic media repertoire was evident across the board and at all survey points in the panel study. This was also observed in strongly online-oriented households and also with younger Internet-savvy couples, especially if they had children. The analysis showed that this continuity was primarily caused by the collective domestic TV night, because it continued to be part of the daily routine in the vast majority of households. All couples surveyed in 2016 reported watching television together, including more than two-thirds on at least three to four nights a week (Röser et al., 2019, p. 142).

In order to analyze the background in more detail, this phenomenon was treated thoroughly in the interviews of the third wave (2013) (for the following incl. interview quotes see: Müller & Röser, 2017b). This revealed that it is the couples' effort to create community with the television night:

> For us, it's simply a piece of time we have together every day – well, not every day, but several times a week. Everybody has things of their own, not only in the professional, but also in the hobby area, and then it's something like a meeting place where you get together. (Mr. Brinkmann, teacher)

Here, watching television on the collective device in the living room fulfills a temporal function of synchronization (Neverla, 2007, p. 48): It heralds a phase of situational community in otherwise fragmented (mediatized) everyday life. The prominently placed new large-screen televisions in the living rooms, which caught the eye of the researchers during their visits from 2011, appeared in this context as a kind of anchor of their community and thus as a counter-narrative to the fragmentations.

Why is the television night particularly suitable for the creation of couple togetherness? The researchers identified three reasons for this: First, the TV night allows couples to *combine companionship and relaxation*:

> You just kind of do it together. And you don't have to do anything. You don't have to talk, you don't have to argue, you don't have to do anything, and you can just let yourself be entertained and if it's also exciting, it's really nice. (Ms. Weinert, school secretary)

Here, the function of television as a lean back-medium for the recreation from work, household, and family as effortless media consumption is addressed. This de-stressing function of television can be realized in particular with linear television, because it requires only limited number of activities to select from a given program, which makes it easier for couples to agree on. Therefore, classic linear television was prevalent among the couples, even though other modes of use, such as streaming or DVD, were partially used.

Second, the couples emphasized that the setting together in front of the TV provides a framework for having (casual) *conversations with each other*. They discussed "what had happened during the day" (Ms. Maier, nurse). The television as a situational framework for couples to talk to each other and exchange ideas is often emphasized positively. It is above all a matter of everyday topics and only to a lesser extent on the television program. Thirdly, the television situation is particularly suitable for this kind of togetherness because the way in which television is received can be adapted in a *highly flexible* way. The degree of attention can be varied from e.g., spellbound watching of a thriller, to casual reception of a series, to the application as background noise. The partners can switch between different modes of reception, depending on the needs of the situation at hand.

Thus, couples persist on certain television-related practices because they are subjectively meaningful in the context of the couple's community and domestic cohabitation in everyday life. However, this by no means implies that the digital mediatization of the home has stopped at the TV night.

3.2 TV nights between continuity and change

The researchers found a significant change in the collective TV night: Second screens were gradually integrated into the situation. While in 2008 the simultaneous use of the Internet while watching TV via second screens was still an exception, at the end of the study period in 2016, three quarters of households used online content while watching TV (Röser et al., 2019, p. 144).

This development was largely enabled by the in-home mobilization of Internet use via smartphones and tablets, which began to take effect in the sample from 2011 onward. This led to an intensification of mediatization in the home, as potentially every room was now penetrated by occasional Internet use, including the living room (Peil & Röser, 2014). With this development, the effortless combination of TV and Internet became viable, and couples began to integrate second screen use into their TV night.

Second screens have thus been established in media repertoires within a few years and have brought certain dynamics to collective TV nights. A major reason for the acceptance of second screen use has proven to be its potential for the users to remain in community and still pursue their own communicative interests at times (Müller & Röser, 2017b; Röser et al., 2019, pp. 142–146). The mobile second screen makes it possible to go separate ways symbolically, but at the same time to maintain the situational togetherness that is important to couples: "You're still together somehow. And if you want to talk about something or have a question, you can do that directly and I think that's good" (Mr. Sarholz, sport therapist).

Even in situations when the partner's preferred TV program does not match the own interests, people use second screening to regulate individual content preferences: "I only do it [use second screen] when a movie really doesn't interest me. Then I twiddle with my smartphone or text with friends" (Mr. Bindseil, refuse worker).[4]

The mobile second screen allows couples to stay seated alongside each other and maintain the spatial proximity that was often more important to them than the media reception itself.[5] D'heer and Courtois (2016, p. 11) also found this combination of, on the one hand, "privatization and individualization of media use within the living room" and, on the other hand, "opportunities for interpersonal contact." It stands to reason that children and adolescents in the family context also use second screens in this way.

Overall, it is evident that the television setting fulfills important social functions in the context of the couple relationship and that the partners therefore persisted on this established practice. At the same time, new online-related media practices in the form of second screen use were integrated into the TV night and created dynamic elements. Second screening allows an even better balancing of the couples' collective and individual thematic interests, without giving up the situational company in front of the TV, which is very important to the couples.

Thus, for the findings of the study presented here, the context of the couple as a community proves to be crucial in order to understand the persistence on the collective TV night.[6] It must be asked whether the practices analyzed in the cited study have retained their relevance since 2016 until today. Here, based on the usage data for 30+ couples, it can be presumed that streaming is increasingly used when attentive and involved shared appropriation is intended. However, for more casual television reception accompanied by conversation, live linear television is likely to retain some relevance.

4 In contrast, the motive to exchange information with others about the television program via smartphone was not relevant. Although the researchers found this in isolated cases among those living alone who were interviewed further after the couple had separated. They did not find it among the couples, since they talked to each other about the program, if they needed to (Müller & Röser, 2017b).

5 Another reason for the use of second screens was found among mothers of young children who compensated for the fact that they had no time for online activities during the day by using television and the Internet in parallel (Müller & Röser, 2017b, p. 152).

6 In contrast, television and second screen use is likely to be different for those living alone and would need to be studied systematically further.

There seem to be stronger changes among young couples. This is because among under-30s in Germany, streaming dominates compared to linear television (see footnote 2). Nevertheless, elements of persistence can probably be found here as well. In a teaching research project on streaming in everyday life among young people, it was shown that young couples stream more frequently than they use linear television (dynamics), but in doing so create a situation that is similar to the television situation of their parents in terms of time, space, and community: Thus, in a study on binge watching that emerged from that particular seminar context, Hollekamp (2019, pp. 11–12) summarizes that "social motives and the desire for togetherness and companionship play an important role" and quotes a 24-year-old social worker: "That's kind of nice, watching a series together, switching off, cuddling while doing it, not having to think about anything, maybe sometimes not having to talk if you've had a busy day [...]. Just being together and resting together." The young couples arrange to meet at a certain time in the evening in the living room in front of the screen, and they too are (like the older couples) essentially concerned with synchronizing encounters, experiencing community, having space for relaxation, conversation, and closeness (persistence).

Against this background, it can be assumed that compared to 2016 (the end of the cited study), classic linear television and more flexible streaming services increasingly coexist with equal importance or streaming will even dominate in the future. But at the same time there is persistence in terms of time, space, and community in the organization of collaborative reception situations with screen media.

4 Case Study II: Vinyl listening as persisting media practice

Music media are in a constant state of change. Rapid developments in digital infrastructures and new media technologies can be seen in the last decade, especially regarding the spread of streaming services (Anastasiadis, 2019; Hracs, Seman, & Virani, 2016; Lepa & Seifert, 2016). The impact of mediatization can thus also be seen in the music media sector. And yet the vinyl record as older, seemingly outdated music media is still around and is furthermore experiencing an astonishing revival in recent years. People continue to use the medium, persisting on established media practices and keeping the established medium constant within their everyday lives (Magaudda, 2011; Palm, 2019). This raises the questions: What drives users of vinyl today to continue using it? And why, in the face of digital music media and infrastructures, do they insist on the seemingly outdated medium?

Following on from this, the second case study deals with the persisting use of vinyl records in the face of digital streaming services. Against this background the study will be presented regarding two main questions: (1) Why and how do users persist on established media practices with the vinyl record, and (2) to what extent does the parallel use of digital services play a role in the context?

The explorative interview study was developed and conducted in the course of a master's thesis at the University of Münster (Dominiak & Röser, 2022). With the help of a preliminary questionnaire, which primarily asked about interest in music and socio-demographic data, the interview partners were first recruited from the researcher's distant circle of acquaintances and then by means of the snowball method. In January 2020, a total of six interviews were conducted with men and women, who belong to one younger (19–25 years) and one older age group (53–62 years). All interviewees regularly used vinyl records and digital streaming services at the same time in their everyday lives with particular interest and expertise (Table 2).

Table 2: Sample at a glance

#	Pseudonym	Age	Sex
1	Bob	62	male
2	Tina	56	female
3	Elvis	53	male
4	Freddie	25	male
5	Janis	22	female
6	Michael	19	male

The interview guide primarily considered dimensions such as the *use of individual media in everyday life*, *social contexts of media use*, and the *relationship of music media and related practices in everyday life*. First, the interviews were considered case-analytically and then analyzed comparatively, along the aforementioned dimensions (Dominiak & Röser, 2022).

In the following, the results of the study are presented and situated along the aspects *Vinyl listening as old media persistence* and *Interplay of vinyl and music streaming*. It remains important to note at this point that in this sample the vinyl record is considered an established music medium in the media repertoire. Media nostalgic tendencies or retro-media, such as those taken up by Magaudda and Minitti (2019), play a rather subordinate role in this context, since vinyl has been used uninterruptedly by most interview partners since childhood. In our argument, the use of vinyl records represents an ongoing and established media practice in people's everyday lives.

4.1 Vinyl listening as old media persistence

Following our theoretical understanding, listening to vinyl records can be identified as a persistent element in music listening practices. Five of the six interviewees stated that they had been using vinyl records since early childhood. Only Freddie is an exception, as he had only discovered vinyl for himself a few years ago. All of the interviewees also own a record player and show a certain euphoria, passion and also expertise for the analog media. The persistence on the established medium can be outlined and explained along three main aspects. First, vinyl offers a certain *continuity within people's life cycle*. Most interviewees have been using the vinyl record since childhood, show a certain pride in it, and state that the medium has even been able to defy digital competition:

> […] even in the time when the CD had bigger market shares than the vinyl, I probably listened to CDs in parallel, but I never stopped with vinyl records. In fact, ever since I was a little kid, I started with fairy tale records and never stopped. (Bob, 62)

The medium poses as a common thread in the lives of the interviewees that is implemented and integrated in terms of content and technology. Although content preferences and practices may adapt to certain life situations over the years and change accordingly, listening to vinyl records has remained a constant until today. This is particularly reflected in Janis' interview. Although her life situation changed when she moved out of her parents' house, the record player and its regular use brought routine and continuity into her life.

The second main aspect ties in with this and positions the persistence of the vinyl as *a form of deceleration and recreation*. Listening to vinyl is often connoted with the words "retreat" and "resting place." To this end, Bob and Tina set up extra rooms for the reception of the medium. Moreover, the reception of analog music is considered a conscious practice that demands interaction and engagement. For all interviewees, conscious engagement with content and technologies is an integral part of their decelerating media practices, such as studying record covers or cleaning vinyl albums while listening to the music:

> There's something calming about that. That's for sure. The emotional part is that I can see what's happening. And if I can see something, your brain can logically comprehend it. And I also have to do something. I have to put the needle carefully and I see it go through this groove. (Elvis, 53)

The emotional charge and connection to the established media becomes clear in all interviews and is the third aspect that shows in which ways users persist on the vinyl record. The vinyl record is consciously and reflectively established as an *expression of emotional culture of remembrance*. This means that the medium is afflicted with past memories and is also used to actively revive these memories musically, to create a "nice feeling" (Janis, 22). Janis also says she uses the record to remember times from her childhood vividly. She uses the vinyl record to establish a connection to the past in a certain way and utilizes it to approach memories musically. Elvis appreciates the special campfire atmosphere that resonates with the vinyl record in the present time. Rather, he charges his current experiential space emotionally.

The use of the established medium is therefore often described as an emotional counterpart to digital music and is deeply rooted in the everyday life by the users. The media is still present within their repertoires because the vinyl record offers emotional and technological advantages digital music lacks, where the direct and haptic interaction with the record player and the vinyl itself plays a central role as well:

> I can't describe it… it's just something completely different to listen to a vinyl record. It's more like driving an old car or… I can't describe it at all. With a manual car and an automatic. I just think it's something completely different. It still has something to do with mechanics. (Tina, 56)

This quote signals that there is a link, a kind of connection between the established and the new and emphasizes the importance of considering both music media in the context of old media persistence. Following on from this, the next section will discuss the establishment of new media practices that evolve from combining established and new music media practices.

4.2 Interplay of vinyl and music streaming

According to our theoretical understanding of dynamics and persistence, the sample revealed dynamic elements particularly with regard to the use and appropriation of digital streaming services in combination with vinyl records.

Five of the six respondents indicated Spotify as their preferred platform to stream music. Only Freddie uses Amazon Music to stream music. It is evident that all respondents use streaming services very regularly, mostly casually, and have therefore closely connected them with everyday practices, so that the mediatization of their everyday lives is beginning to intensify.

In contrast to the decelerating function of the vinyl record, streaming services are implemented by users as *functional and flexible everyday companions*. In contrast to the conscious use of the vinyl record, the advantages of digitalized music reception are apparent on different technological, spatial, temporal, and content-related levels. The digital platforms rather take on an accompanying role in everyday life. For example, household chores are accompanied by digital music or spare time is bridged. Respondents frequently stated that they integrate the service as a secondary medium and use digital music rather practically and casually: "Streaming […] I put it on when I listen to music on the side. It's more like background music for me" (Elvis, 53).

New modes of use emerge that integrate music even more profound into everyday life, especially on a temporal and spatial level: for example, the creation of situational playlists whose content is tailored to certain collective or individual activities in everyday life (such as playlists particularly suitable for sports, playlists for getting together with friends, or mood-regulating playlists for listening alone). Also, the flexible technological expansion through portable Bluetooth boxes, making music highly versatile and adaptable to various location-independent everyday situations, shows how the dynamic media usage differs from but also complements the persisting usage of the vinyl record.

Despite the new music media being implemented by the users, the established ones are not losing their relevance. On the contrary, the vinyl record can consolidate its place in everyday life and is embedded even more deeply through a conjunction with digital services.

Hence new media practices emerge. In the form of a "digital pre-check," the users combine dynamic and persistent elements of their media activity with each other by using the streaming service as a kind of "validation tool" for analog music. Songs and albums are digitally checked for quality and value before they become part of the physical vinyl record collection. The combined merging of the two media shows that, in addition to the constant integration of new music media, the established one proves to still be valid within the everyday lives of the users. Thus, five of the six interviewees directly connect digital and analog usage habits in this context and subsequently construct new everyday practices.

Thus, it became apparent that the users actively create a coexistence of the media for their everyday life and continuously intensify their music consumption by doing so. In many cases, the interviewees place the record and digital streaming services in a complementary relationship to each other:

> […] the advantages that the record brings with it, the streaming service doesn't have […] and it's sort of like a mirror. Because it's exactly the other. And that's why they complement each other perfectly. […] So because everything that the record can do, the streaming service can't do, and everything that the streaming service can do, the record can't do. (Michael, 19)

Contrary to media conservatism or backwardness, users produce and implement new media practices that embrace both established and new media. That means, that despite their use of vinyl, respondents are not at all backward-looking, but are also still open to new technologies. Embedded in everyday structures of meaning, users make use of the potentials of both music media. Thus, neither the vinyl record nor the new streaming services stand in isolation. As the theoretical framework already suggested, it is the combination of established and new media and the associated new media practices that emerge, which at this point describe the distinctive relationship of both music media in everyday life.

This is also strengthened by the fact that spatial as well as technological boundaries are partially blurred by the users and a gradual convergence of media on a spatial-technological level can be observed. Elvis, for example, has placed both music media centrally in his living room. He designed his music system so that it is connected to the record player and as well as being able to access Spotify via Bluetooth. Both music media are placed with spatial proximity and are used routinely. Bob expresses similar intentions regarding the spatial combination of both media. Although Bob spatially separated the two music media in the early stages of coexistence, over the course of their use, he aspires to open up his music room to digital music as well. Thus, he plans to dissolve his originally strict spatial and technological separation of the two music media: "Where I'm thinking about it now, though, is whether I'll integrate another streaming device like this into this stereo system down here. So that you can also listen here […]" (Bob, 62).[7]

In summary, the users negotiate the music media and their relationship within the media repertoire closely linked to their individual everyday contexts and thus creating coexistence. The persistence of established media practices with the vinyl record can therefore be located as a counterbalance within the processes of mediatization and digitization, which users negotiate within their everyday lives as well. Instead of speaking of the rejection of new or the dismissal of the established media, this rather refers to the user's reflected and critical dialogue with media change within their respective lifeworld.

5 Conclusion

The aim of this paper was to open up a profound and innovative perspective on the topic of old media persistence with the help of the theoretical concept of dynamics and persistence in media practices, and to illustrate this in specific terms on the basis of two case studies.

Our findings revealed that the persistence of established media results from the everyday context of the users. Older media continue to be used in coexistence to newer (digital) media when they can prove their usefulness in people's everyday lives. Thus, the persistence of established media practices always results both from the benefits and value attributed to them by users and from their complex relationship to the other, mostly digital, new media in the media repertoire. This has been demonstrated by the use of the vinyl as a counterbalance and decelerating element in relation to streaming services, and has also become clear by the established linear television nights for social synchronization and sentiment of community as coun-

7 A slightly different mode of use becomes evident in Freddie's interview. Contrary to the rest of the sample, he first used the streaming service before he then started to integrate vinyl into his everyday life. Accordingly, Freddie corresponds more to the context of media nostalgia and retromedia (Magaudda & Minitti, 2019; Menke, 2017; Menke & Schwarzenegger, 2019).

terpart to the (mediatized) fragmentation of the everyday life.

Both studies were also able to emphasize that understanding old media persistence always requires a broader view of the entire media repertoire and that both established and new media must be included in the analyses. Old media persistence cannot be adequately captured by thinking of old and new as binaries (Magaudda & Minitti, 2019). Neither the use of new digital means of communication nor the persistence of old media can be considered in isolation in a mediatized everyday life. The combining of established and new media practices, which is negotiated by users, continues to produce new media practices that drive mediatization forward: whether it is the digital pre-check of music with the help of the streaming service or second-screening as an accompanying practice during television nights. Additional movement is emerging because the "old" media (technologies) are changing on a deeper level after all (Balbi, 2015). The seemingly old record player, bought new, has integrated digital access, the classic television program is only a push of a button away from the streaming offer on the digital screen. This, in turn, promotes the emergence of new hybrid media practices in which old and new elements will probably become progressively less distinguishable in the future.

Against this background, one advantage of our approach of focusing on users and their established persistent or their new dynamic media practices becomes apparent: In the end, it is not the age of a media technology or its analog / digital technique that determines its classification in this concept. Instead, the focus is on the continuity and change of media practices of the users – with "old" and "new" media.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Thinking about platforming with more traditional mediatization: Lessons from audiovisual analysis

Éric George*, Université du Québec à Montréal, École des médias, Canada
Justine Dorval, Université du Québec à Montréal, Faculté de communication, Canada
Édouard Germain, Université du Québec à Montréal, Faculté de communication, Canada
*Corresponding author: george.eric@uqam.ca

Abstract
Since the mid-1990s, film and television industries are more and more confronted with the appearance of new intermediation services which have created platforms. In a project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), we try to analyze the place and role that these new services are taking in the audiovisual sector. Our corpus is composed of the platforms of four companies that have developed activities on a vast international scale, Netflix (with its service of the same name), Amazon (Prime Video service), Disney (Disney+) and Apple (Apple TV+). Based on our corpus, it seems to us that some changes have been the result of firms' activities, but that it is not as linear as it may appear at first sight. Transformations are at work but there is also some "Old Media Persistence." Thus, we find a certain "contamination" of old practices originating from the organization of industrial channels and forms in the mutations currently presented by these new intermediation services.

Keywords
digitalization, cultural industries, audiovisual, firms, platforms, change, capitalism

1 Introduction

Since the mid-1990s, in a context characterized by the digitalization of the processes of creation, production, distribution, and reception of audiovisual products, the liberalization of legislation and regulations, the financialization and the globalization of economies as well as the rise of new cultural practices, film and television industries are more and more confronted with the appearance of new intermediation services. Often set up by communication industries (telecommunications, informatics, and the Internet), these digital platforms offer new forms of intermediation (web-based offer, absence of advertising, premium service, low-cost subscription, etc.) that compete with those of "traditional" distributors, their aim consisting in most cases of facilitating or renewing access to pre-existing products in a more or less selective and prescriptive manner (Mœglin, 2005). These new services often rely on financial capacities that are much greater than those of local cultural industries to obtain exclusive broadcasting rights (Benhamou & Farchy, 2014; Latournerie, 2001). They have little or no tax burden to pay and no specific regulatory framework to follow, whereas traditional distributors contribute to the financing of television production and must take into account the requirements of national laws, like the 1991 Broadcasting Act in Canada (Claus, 2017).

In a project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) we try to analyze the place and role that new services of Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) are taking in the audiovisual – film and television – sector. At the Canadian scale, we both study four national platforms (ICITtou.tv, Crave, Club Illico, and GEM) and four international platforms, Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, and Apple TV+. These last ones are constituting our corpus in this paper.

The focus will be put on the theme of this Thematic Section "Old Media Persistence."

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We will begin by introducing some theoretical and methodological elements. Next, we will continue by exploring to what extent these new intermediaries call into question the traditional functioning of the film and television industries, by looking at the implications upstream and downstream of these industries, by questioning whether or not the traditional media chronology for feature films is respected, and by studying whether new viewing practices for television series are developing or not.

2 Theoretical and methodological elements

Number of experts consider platforms as matchmakers (Evans & Schmalensee, 2016) or put the emphasis on the idea of "platform-mediated networks" (McIntyre & Srinivasan, 2017), which interface among different sides. This can mean various kinds of institutional actors (or complementors), as well as end-users (i.e., consumers), thereby constituting multisided markets. While multisided markets are not new, over the last two decades they became much more prevalent with the advent of digital technologies affording networking and with the creation of platforms. Benkler (2006) theorized on the existence of a "networked information economy," which could contribute to major changes in the dominance of the industrial mode of information production. This idea of a time of disruption in the cultural industries was also promoted by Henry Jenkins and his concept of convergence. In the mid-2000, Jenkins anticipated a convergence of media that would lead to a blurring of the boundaries between the historical branches of the cultural industries, with this inevitable merger giving rise to a sort of meta-branch: transmedia (Jenkins, 2008). Many other social actors have also developed comments favorizing major changes. Among them, Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, has often publicly opposed traditional intermediaries while underlining the great opposition between the old analogue age and the new digital one. In this digital age, anyone could create something, find an audience and allow the market to determine the appropriate economic form according to Bezos (Rimaud, 2019, p. 73).

Our own approach tends to go in the sense of the political economic perspective that shows the dominance of a small number of international actors, often symbolized by the acronym GAFAM (Fuchs, 2017; Van Dijck, 2013). Under the digital age, cultural industries do not seem more and more dissolved in a global democratization of the expression of creativity. On the contrary, several researchers have documented ownership concentration in Canada and other countries' industries and conclude that this process of concentration stays typical of current capitalism (e.g., Winseck & Jin, 2011). More, if there is any convergence, this one tends to link together communication industries (from telecommunications, informatics, and the Internet) and cultural industries (cinema, television, music, radio, and so on) on a global scale – and not only at a national level – but with various kind of relationships depending of traditional activities of main firms and relations of power between transnational and local platforms (Bouquillion, 2008; Winseck & Jin, 2011).

Platforms constitute a new mode of mediatization which aims to ensure the central place of an organization, most often a private company, in the cultural sector within which it deploys its activities. This concept also refers to the articulation of activities of various operators – including consumers mobilized in the sector – as well as to diverse modes of valorization. More specifically, this paper concerns the audiovisual sector, which includes cinema and television (Ménard, 2004). On the one hand, it remains relevant to distinguish them in certain respects: quasi-generalized theatrical release of cinema films, lower cost for television programs, participation in often distinct festivals, unique creation for cinema productions versus serial creation for those made for television). But on the other hand, since the development of television, they have been more and more linked together.

Our research is based on a documentary fund including sources of various origins, annual reports of companies, articles of journalists, and academic texts. A contrastive analysis (George, 2018) between Netflix, Amazon, Disney, and Apple tries to put the emphasis on elements that seem relevant in order to understand how they fit into the traditional sectors of cinema and television in a certain continuity and, on the other hand, how their activities can perhaps contribute to changes, or even lead to disruptive situations that call into question the ways in which the two sectors operate : presence of platforms downstream but also upstream (part 3), the respect or not of media chronology in the case of film production (part 4), the media coverage of TV series (part 5).

3 An increasingly systematic presence downstream but also upstream

A parallel analysis of the activities of Netflix, Amazon, Disney, and Apple indicates firstly that these ones present a certain number of specificities depending on the history of each firm. Netflix is a company whose main activity has always been the distribution of audiovisual products, initially on DVD and then online. Subscription Video on Demand (SVOD) is therefore the historical core of its activities. For Amazon, on the other hand, the Prime Video service is just one among many e-commerce activities of the firm. Disney constitutes a giant of the cultural industries, and not only of the audiovisual sector. Consequently, SVOD may be considered as an extension of its activities within the cultural industries. From this point of view, even if Disney differs from Netflix, there are certain common elements here and indeed a certain convergence. We will come back to this. Finally, Apple is another different case, as the company comes from communication industries and in particular from computer industries. As for Amazon, its platform is not the core of its activities but a supplement whose importance in the medium term is not yet known. While the stories are quite different, we will also see that there may be some convergence in terms of activities.

Revenues of Netflix depend on its subscriptions with two requirements: firstly, the necessity to always increase the number of subscribers and secondly to ensure the highest possible retention. For this reason, having an attractive catalog of a considerable size is crucial. While Netflix's management had originally focused on downstream distribution, it made a change in 2013 with the production of a now iconic series, *House of Cards* (Netflix, 2019, p. 9). Subsequently, the company invested considerably in productions distributed under the "Netflix Originals" label. It has thus focused on creating a catalog with a very wide range of texts, mainly films and television series. In fact, the catalog includes four types of productions:

1) the (co)production of original creations. The company has put emphasis on its role as producer since *House of Cards* was made available on the platform. However, it is important to emphasize here her role of co-producer. Production is always done by companies specialized in this activity at the heart of the audiovisual sector (Barthes, 2018, p. 3). In terms of (co)production, the Netflix model is therefore not very innovative.
2) the purchase of series and films in return for exclusive distribution over the widest possible territories (Barthes, 2018, p. 7). Netflix also attributes the label "Netflix Originals" to these programs, but if there is any exclusivity, it is about distribution. This is also a fairly classic way of doing things in the film and television industry.
3) the acquisition of proven programs and the development of sequels. Once again, the company uses the term "Netflix Originals" in connection with these productions. The originality here lies in the fact that the company buys the rights by securing the exclusive right to (co)produce the sequel of content that has already been produced and broadcast in the past. This is an attempt to solve the problem of uncertainty regarding the profitability of audiovisual creations (Bouquillion, 2008; Ménard, 2004; Miège, 2017). A well-known example is *Casa de Papel*, a Spanish series whose broadcasting rights for the first two seasons were acquired by Netflix before the company bought all the rights and ordered the production of the following seasons (Barthes, 2018, p. 8). We could also cite the well-known examples of *Black Mirror* or *Arrested Development*.

4) Finally, to enrich its catalog, the company practices the purchase of old content, like all its competitors. Thus, the Los Gatos firm bought the broadcasting rights to *Seinfeld* for a sum close to US$ 500 million (Poirier, 2019). And this is just one example of the battle between platforms to build up a catalog of historical productions.

Finally, due to its extremely wide range of content, Netflix can be considered both a mass medium and a niche medium. Indeed, the platform offers a catalog that refers both to a "generalist" target, the widest possible audience, and to a "niche" target in order to take advantage of the Long-Tail phenomenon (Bourreau, Maillard, & Moreau, 2015, p. 180). Popular series but also horror films or impact documentaries, the offer is finally very diversified, although the vast majority of it corresponds above all to dramas or comedies. This multiplicity of genres on Netflix therefore allows it to also target "micro-audiences" (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016, p. 128).

Netflix has also developed (co)production of audiovisual products because it has no longer access to some contents since several companies like Disney have decided to create their own platforms (Desjardins, 2018, p. 5). Conversely, Netflix's choice to support co-production has appeared over the years as a threat to its competitors (Bélanger & Lafontaine-Beaumier, 2015, p. 71). As Lucien Perticoz (2019) clearly points out, this has resulted in a cross movement between activities of the two companies: developing upstream in the audiovisual sector with its own (co)production for Netflix and investing downstream in the sector by creating a platform in the case of Disney.

For Disney, this is not a new choice. Historically, Disney is one of the world's leading groups in the cultural industries sector. In the early 2000s, it was one of the first firms that tried to launch websites in order to distribute their productions as a priority. But these activities largely failed for several reasons (Bouquillion, 2008). The market for online distribution did not yet include enough potential customers, people connected to the network were still a minority in almost all markets in capitalist countries, networks were still too small to ensure the distribution of high-quality video signals and the Internet still appeared to be a largely open network. Consequently, in the 2000s, it was more relevant for production companies such as Disney to distribute their creations widely through various media, including a number of Disney-branded television channels, which also points to the idea that the firm's presence downstream in the industry is not new.

Development of the two other platforms, Amazon Prime Video and Apple TV+, also involves production upstream, whereas creation of the two interfaces has obviously been primarily downstream, through the control of relations with consumers. Both Amazon and Apple have realized the importance of controlling activities from upstream to downstream by building up catalogs of rights based on production and co-production, or even exclusive purchases, and by supervising audience practices by designing interfaces that allow them to offer modes of access to content.

As we have seen before, Jeff Bezos, Amazon's founder, has taken position against norms concerning cultural industries. Even if his company has played a role in the transformation of the literary publishing sector, this seems to be less important in the audiovisual sector. For example, in 2011, Amazon bought the European company Lovefilm and transformed it into Amazon Studios in order to produce original creations. However, unlike Netflix, which leaves the production work to specialized companies, Amazon Prime Video produces or co-produces itself (Barthes, 2018, p. 3). Although investing large sums in the production of films and series for its platform, Amazon had not yet reached the investment of its main rival in 2020, making it less aggressive in its production strategy. It was also much less indebted than Netflix, thanks to the fact that revenues from its other activities allowed it to amortize its investments in original content (Levy, 2018). Until recently, Amazon remained above all a historical distributor, a position that can be seen from the study of the entire catalog of the Prime Video service, which is made up mainly of acquisitions and not original productions. However, the situation is now changing.

In 2021, Amazon bought the Hollywood major Metro Goldwyn Mayer (MGM) for US$ 8.45 billion, while a short time earlier, a purchase of the same Hollywood studio by Apple for an estimated US$ 6 billion had failed. This is the first audiovisual platform to acquire a major historical player in the audiovisual industry on an international scale (Forbes, 2021). With this acquisition, Amazon acquired the broadcasting rights of 4000 feature films (including *Basic Instinct, The Pink Panther, The Wizard of Oz, The Silence of the Lambs, Raging Bull, Rocky, Terminator, The Hobbit*, and all the James Bond films) and 17 000 television programs (such as *The Handmaid's Tale* or *Stargate*). This change of strategy was also symbolized in 2022 by a major investment in a new major series, *The Lord of the Rings. The Rings of power*. US$ 250 million was invested to obtain the rights of the franchise, while a budget of US$ 460 million was reserved for production. These amounts are huge but remember that in 2021, the company's turnover was US$ 470 billion. Activities in the audiovisual sector are only one component among many others of the e-commerce giant.

In his comparative study of the relationship between Amazon and Netflix and traditional American television, Michael L. Wayne (2018, p. 726) noted that Amazon developed a much more harmonious relationship with the traditional television industry than Netflix, the expression used in English being "symbiotic relationship." For the latter, this was explained by the fact that Amazon sees its video platform as a mere phishing tool for its Prime service (Wayne, 2018, p. 726). Moreover, this tendency to cooperate with the audiovisual industry is reinforced with the fact that Amazon has not sought to disrupt the hierarchy of theatrical film releases unlike Netflix. Moreover, the company has frequently partnered with independent filmmakers (Olsen, 2018, p. 2) since the launch of its platform.

Finally, what about Apple, which comes from a completely different universe, that of the communication industries? Firstly, as soon as the platform was launched, its management decided to offer several months of free subscriptions on the condition of buying an Apple product, computer, tablet, phone or other. Revenues from Apple TV+ are therefore considered as complements to the others. From this point of view, cultural productions are only one part of the company's possible sources of revenue and profit, more or less marginal.

Secondly, the platform quickly distinguished itself by a catalog that was more refined than that of its competitors and generally considered to be of good quality (Self, 2022). Distinction is therefore once again the order of the day, as was the case in its history when it launched its IT products, including computers, phones and tablets, with the company going so far as to create a universe of its own. In 2020, Apple TV+ had a limited catalog of 8 films and 27 series, all of which the company identified as "Apple Originals." That said, like Netflix, the company did not produce any of the content in its catalog. Nevertheless, in mid-2020, the Apple brand seemed to partially change its orientation by developing a policy of purchasing rights to programs without having exclusive rights to broadcast them. For example, it announced that it had acquired exclusive international rights to 96 episodes of Jim Henson's series *Fraggle Rock*. However, focusing on co-producing of a small number of programs has not been a bad strategy. To do this, the company has enlisted the help of cultural industries stars Oprah Winfrey (and her *Book Club*), Jennifer Aniston, Reese Witherspoon and Steve Carell (producers and lead actors of *The Morning Show*), Spike Jonze (director of *Beastie Boys Story*), and Steven Spielberg (executive producer of the revival of the anthology series *Fantastic Stories*).

Moreover, standing out seems to have already succeeded in ensuring the success of the platform. In 2021, Self Financial's ranking of the best programs distributed on platforms in the U.S., using IMDb scores, concluded that Apple's was ahead of Netflix, HBO Max, Prime Video, Disney+, and Hulu (Self, 2022). Clearly, Apple is targeting a more specific audience than many of its competitors, starting with Netflix (Power & London, 2020).

As we have seen before, the four firms have realized the importance of controlling activities from upstream to downstream by building up catalogs of rights based on production and co-production, or even exclusive purchases, and by supervising audience practices by designing interfaces that allow them to offer modes of access to content and control them.

4 Whether or not media chronology is respected in the case of film production

In order to go further into the relationships between these "new" intermediation services and old and new practices in the audiovisual sector, it is also interesting to look at the media chronology. Historically, depending on the country, either thanks to a law and regulations (in the case of France), or thanks to self-regulation by the main players in the sector (in the case of Canada), any film production was first broadcast in theaters before being offered on other media (VHS video cassettes and then DVDs, pay-per-view television, specialized television and often, at the end of the day, general television). The order and timing were precise and differed from country to country, depending on the relations of power between the various players in the two audiovisual cinema and television sectors.

As the first platform to start producing original content for online viewing, Netflix has challenged this traditional chronology. It has historically positioned itself against the obligatory passage of a film in a theater (Olsen, 2018), preferring to take advantage of the exclusivity of distribution on the platform, in order to attract more subscriptions (Olsen, 2018). With the creation and rise of this player, audiovisual products are no longer linked simultaneously to a single screen, but to a multiplicity of viewing practices on different terminals (computer, tablet, multifunctional phone, and even television). The company has even been known to offer its feature film co-productions on its platform rather than in theaters (Olsen, 2018). This choice caused quite a problem at the 2019 Cannes Film Festival (Bernard, 2019). More recently, Netflix has softened its stance by making exceptions for some of its (co)creations, including *Roma* (Lussier, 2019). This film, which won three Oscars, for Best Director, Best Foreign Language Film, and Best Cinematography, received a theatrical release, albeit a very limited one (Lussier, 2019).

On the contrary, Amazon's management has generally chosen to respect the first window of distribution for the cinema, i.e., the cinema screening in theaters. It prides itself on adopting a "case-by-case" approach, depending on the films it distributes: Thus, while it has taken advantage of the craze surrounding certain films in festivals such as *The Wife* (Björn Runge) or *The Old Man and the Gun* (David Lowery) by making them available directly on Prime Video, the film *Cold War* (Pawel Pawlikowski) benefited from a theatrical presence before being put online on the platform (Lesniak, 2019). It appears once again that Amazon generally seeks to integrate its activities within the film industry without challenging it, at least in this respect. The same applies to Disney+ and Apple TV+. In this regard, the Cupertino firm has confirmed that films shown exclusively on its platform would be in theaters so that they would be eligible for the various awards (Gramuglia, 2019). In July 2020, Apple TV+ even became the first online viewing platform to win a Daytime Emmy Award less than a year after its release for its productions *Ghostwriter* and *Peanuts in Space: Secret of Apollo 10* (Apple Inc., 2020). In doing so, it is behaving more like traditional broadcasters of film productions than Netflix, which has instead tried to change the rules of the game in this area.

5 Change or no change in the media coverage of TV series

And what about the online availability of television series, which are now emblematic of television as a medium? Once again, Netflix has tried to change the uses of serial creations by favorizing the trend of binge-watching – watching several episodes at the same moment – with the "continue watching" box at the end of each episode (Mota Drumond, 2016, p. 73). This practice encourages the consumption of content on such a platform by creating a virtuous circle in its favor as Jenner puts it: "[S]upposedly 'binge-able' texts also legitimise the viewing practice, and thus the medium: if viewers stand to earn valued cultural capital, it is socially acceptable to binge, rather than watch several hours of scheduled television" (as cited in Wayne, 2018, p. 730). The trend thus feeds the platform, which in turn feeds the trend.

However, this practice is not completely new either. Traditional television channels could already broadcast several episodes of a series in a row. However, they were still limited to a programming schedule whose time slots could be commandeered in advance by other content produced for the channel. In addition, it was possible to practice burst listening by purchasing the DVD box set of the season of a series to watch the episodes one after the other. But it was necessary to wait until the end of the programming of these seasons on television to obtain the DVD box set of the complete season. Therefore, while streaming is not completely new, Netflix has allowed it to take on a new dimension. This form of mediatization of serial audiovisual content refers to what its management at the Los Gatos firm calls "winning moments of truth," the moments of free time that consumers give to watching content on its platform (Netflix, 2019, p. 1–2). This new mode of burst viewing is a trend to watch as it is not just a downstream change in the industry. It is also likely to influence scriptwriters in the way they write creations, as is the fact that platforms do not cut series with commercial breaks unlike traditional TV channels, especially private ones. The result is a tendency "to side-step recaps, cliff-hangers, and similar narrative devices intended to keep viewers glued between commercial breaks and from one week to the next" (Hallinan & Striphas, 2016, p. 129).

Nevertheless, this type of practice used by Netflix has not necessarily been followed by the other major players (Jenner, 2018). For example, Apple's management has decided to release one episode per week for some of its series, notably its flagship series *The Morning Show*, *For All Mankind* and *See* (Dumas, 2020). It chose to make the first three episodes of each of these series available at the launch of the platform. The remaining episodes were then released individually each week. This strategy aimed to hook the audience during the first week of the free trial and then force them to renew their subscription in order to find out the outcome of these series. The trend is the same for Disney, which is hardly surprising given that the company is a historical player in the cultural industries. Thus, an emblematic series of this platform, *The Mandalorian*, was made available at the rate of one episode per week, a rather traditional strategy, mainly aimed at boosting subscription retention (Dumas, 2018). This decision to maintain the traditional model is not only related to the choices of a few companies. Indeed, it is possible to wonder whether it does not hide a loss of speed – quite rapid from a historical point of view – of the practice of binge-watching. With the free trial periods, some people took advantage of them to devour the last season of their favorite show and then unsubscribe from the service (Dumas, 2018). In this area, Disney+ no longer offers free trial periods in some countries such as the U. S. and France since the beginning of June 2020 (Gartenberg, 2020). It is also possible to see more and more series releasing their new seasons in two stages (case of *Lupin* and *Stranger Things* on Netflix). Is there no longer a single model?

6 Conclusion

It appears that historical professions of the companies to which we have devoted this research play a notable role in the ways in which their platforms contribute to insert themselves into the audiovisual sector and mediate their content. On the one hand, as Perticoz (2019) writes, these firms intend to control the entire sector, i.e., to be fully involved in an industrial logic of functioning in a sector, by implementing a classic strategy of vertical integration from upstream to downstream. Nevertheless, they are developing various modalities according to their historical activities and their modes of valorization. For many years, Netflix has always been perceived as the leading, innovative company in the sector. In fact, Perticoz (2019, p. 338) writes that even well-established companies in the audiovisual sector has to adapt to the new ways of doing things created by Netflix, whose successful model has until now dictated the strategic positioning of its competitors.

We could then think that the traditional model of broadcasting television content was going to be replaced by that of webcasting, which is specific to online distribution platforms (Le Champion, 2019, p. 39). Reed Hastings, chairman of Netflix, has always said that he no longer believed in the traditional television model, where viewers would be "dependent on channels that offer programs at fixed times, visible on a television set." In contrast, Netflix would offer the "television of the future" (Lauer, 2014). The company describes itself in terms of the opposite characteristics of television: "Members can watch as much as they want, anytime, anywhere, on any internet-connected screen. Members can play, pause and resume watching, all without commercials or commitments" (Netflix, 2019, p. 1). However, in some countries like France, Netflix is now available on a broadcasting model, the viewer being forced to watch selected programs, rather than choosing one and starting to watch it at the most convenient time for him (Campion, 2021). In Canada and U.S., Netflix signed in 2022 a priority distribution deal for one of its main movies with the largest theater owners in North America (Radio-Canada, 2022). The company's management does not systematically practice "permanent revolution" anymore. Changes are not as linear as it may appear at first sight. Transformations are at work and there is a certain "contamination" of old practices originating from the organization of traditional cinema and television in these new intermediation services.

In these transformations, what is the possible function of the COVID-19 pandemic that has led to several lockdowns in 2020 and 2021 in most countries in the world? Based on research made during the first year, Vlassis (2021) concludes that global online platforms (Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, Disney+, Apple TV+, or HBO Max) have strengthened their position, which generated an unprecedented change in the production, dissemination, and consumption of audiovisual content. Logically, Netflix benefited from this situation to increase its number of subscribers in 2020 and 2021. At the end of 2019, the platform included 167 million subscribers worldwide while two years later the number had increased to 221 million (Bazoge, 2022).

But the long-term effects of the pandemic on the development of the industry remain unclear according to the Federation of European Screen Directors (2020) while the Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions concludes to the rise of the platform as the dominant infrastructural and economic model in the industry. The pandemic context could even favorize concentration dynamics in the audiovisual market due to the action of global streaming platforms (Intergovernmental Committee for the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, 2021). In fact, we could hope that COVID-19 situation is only conjunctural while changes are more structural. Beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, growth of platforms is more and more present in a world increasingly marked by digitalization (George, 2020a, 2020b). But data need to be analyzed with caution and on a long-term scale. In the first half of 2022, the emphasis was made on the decline of subscribers (1.2 million) for Netflix but there was a further increase in the second half of the same year (Bazoge, 2022). The two years of COVID-19 pandemic have also been characterized by an increase of viewing traditional television (Ségur, 2020). In the struggle between "old" and "new" media Lotz (2021, p. 145) estimates that linear television will prioritize "ephemeral" programs for simultaneous viewing, to be able to compete with the offer of streaming platforms. However, this kind of program is also now available on digital platforms, starting of course with DAZN, specialized in the broadcasting of sports events (Lupien & George, in press).

In this paper, emphasis was placed both on changes and continuities to challenge the idea of a break between a possible pre-Netflix era and a possible post-Netflix era. In order to do this, several dimensions were emphasized while others were discarded. For instance, if the growing production for audiovisual content was underlined, focus was not on consequences of the emergence of new professional practices and new professions (Baldacchino, 2019). We did not study conditions of work, for instance, the case of professionals who need to work more and more, often 15 hours a day with constant pressure to speed up work and little time for breaks (Bloom, 2021).

Nor was there any emphasis on the role of subscribers in ongoing continuities and changes, such as the consequences of their uses of platforms on firms' decisions. If some exclusive popular titles can generate subscriptions, loyalty to the services can be mainly explained by the size of catalogs and the functionalities of devices (organization and presentation of the catalog, possibility of downloading, availability of subtitles, perceived qualities of recommendations, etc.). Ellis (2000) develops the concept of "choice fatigue" which tends to favorize the domination of the market by a small number of international platforms, such as Netflix, Amazon Prime Video, and Disney+ (Dessinges & Perticoz, 2019). "The old media persistence" manifests itself not only in the choices made by platform managers but also in cultural practices developed by users, for instance when they re-create at home traditional conditions of viewing television even with digital platforms (Combes & Glevarec, 2021).

In conclusion, all studies, including ours, have several limits. Those analyzing audiovisual transformations most often choose to work separately on modalities of production, analysis of audiovisual content, or reception, which limits the global ability to capture how all these activities fit on a continuum or contribute to major changes (Mittell, 2015). But ours seems to be useful by trying to take into account long term analysis (George & Sénécal, 2017) in order to work on the theme of this Thematic Section.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Science-related populism: Conceptualization, empirical investigation, and implications for science communication (Dissertation Summary)

Niels G. Mede, University of Zurich, Department of Communication and Media Research IKMZ, Switzerland
n.mede@ikmz.uzh.ch

Niels G. Mede was awarded the SACM Dissertation Award 2023, which honors the best PhD thesis in communication and media sciences completed at a Swiss university or by a Swiss researcher. SComS is proud to publish a summary of Niels G. Mede's (University of Zurich) winning PhD thesis entitled *Science-Related Populism: Conceptualization, Empirical Investigation and Implications for Science Communication.*

Abstract
Populist criticism has become a significant challenge for science and science communication. Such criticism maintains that allegedly corrupt academic elites and their expertise are inferior to allegedly virtuous "ordinary people" and their common sense. It suggests that the people, rather than elites, should have authority over how "true knowledge" is produced and communicated. This dissertation provides a conceptual and empirical analysis of populist science criticism against the backdrop of science communication scholarship and practice. It develops a theoretical framework for populist demands toward science, conceptualizing them as *science-related populism*. It also introduces a novel measure to investigate science-related populism in surveys – the *SciPop Scale* – and provides empirical evidence on populist science criticism in Switzerland and beyond. Moreover, the dissertation discusses implications of science-related populism for public discourse about science as well as science communication practice and proposes ways to respond to it.

Keywords
science communication, populism, public opinion, theory, scale development, survey

1 Introduction and research questions

Populist movements have gained influence in many countries (Berman, 2021). They typically criticize political elites – but also *academic* elites: For example, populist key figures like Donald Trump suggested that the "natural instinct" and "common sense" of "ordinary people" are superior to allegedly useless scientific knowledge (Morin, 2018). In a similar vein, British politician Michael Gove claimed that "the people [...] have had enough of experts" (Mance, 2016). Claims like these contain key characteristics of political populism, such as anti-elitist ideas and positive conceptions of the common people (Mudde, 2017). However, they are more than a mere concomitant of political populism: They do not (only) criticize a political power elite, but a societal knowledge elite. Moreover, they do not (only) refer to the political will of the people, but to alternative truth claims. They can thus be understood as a distinct form of populism: as *science-related populism*.

Science-related populism may not only appear in the *communication* of public figures. Surveys indicate that single facets of science-related populism can also manifest as an *attitude* among the population (e.g., Motta, 2018). This raised concerns among scholars, journalists, and political decision-makers: They suggested that populist resentment against science can have negative consequences for societies' resilience against crises like the COVID-19 pandemic; for individual well-being, due to populist vaccine hesitancy; and for the natural environment, due to populist climate change denial (e.g., Kennedy, 2019; Krämer & Klingler, 2020). But despite these problematic implications, science-

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related populism had not been systematically studied. My cumulative dissertation (Mede, 2022) approaches this caveat in five peer- or editor-reviewed articles and a synopsis. They pursue the following research questions:

> RQ1: How can we conceptualize science-related populism?
> RQ2: How can we measure people's support for science-related populism, i. e., science-related populist attitudes?
> RQ3: How prevalent are science-related populist attitudes and similar phenomena during and beyond crises like the COVID-19 pandemic, and what are correlates?
> RQ4: What are implications of science-related populism for science communication?

Article I addresses RQ1: It introduces a conceptual model of science-related populism (Mede & Schäfer, 2020b). The article maintains that science-related populism can manifest as a set of attitudes among its supporters. However, there had not been a social-scientific instrument to measure these attitudes. Article II fills this gap, as it develops, tests, and validates the SciPop Scale, an eight-item scale to measure science-related populist attitudes in survey studies (Mede, Schäfer, & Füchslin, 2021). Article III applies this scale in a panel study in Switzerland, demonstrating a significant decline in science-related populist attitudes during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mede & Schäfer, 2022). Science-related populism involves elements of other types of populism (e. g., support for populist parties) and science criticism (e. g., distrust). Article IV explores these elements, examining the relationship between public perceptions of the "replication crisis," distrust toward science, and populist voting (Mede, Schäfer, Ziegler, & Weißkopf, 2021).

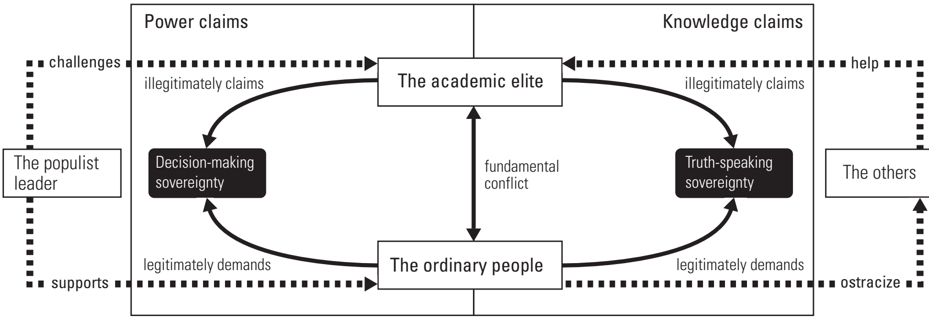
Science-related populism has important implications for science communication, as it suggests certain norms for how science should be discussed in society. However, scholarship of normative demands in science communication has typically only considered democratically defensible perspectives and largely ignored populist worldviews as normative reference points – a caveat Article V aims to compensate (Mede & Schäfer, 2020a). The synopsis offers a comprehensive discussion of Articles I–V: I extend their conceptual arguments, scrutinize their methods and results, analyze implications for science communication, and explain how my dissertation contributes to (science) communication scholarship and may inform responses to science-related populism.

2 Theoretical framework: Introducing a conceptual model of science-related populism (RQ1)

My dissertation develops a novel conceptual framework for populist demands toward science. It conceptualizes these demands as "science-related populism," integrating three strands of scholarship: first, scholarship of political populism, which theorized perceptions of a fundamental conflict of societal elites versus "ordinary people" (Mudde, 2017). Second, scholarship of the "participatory turn," which has identified an increasing demand for public participation in different realms of society, including science, and thus resonates with populist ideals of civic participation (Bherer, Dufour, & Montambeault, 2016). Third, scholarship of alternative epistemologies, which has analyzed how experiential, commonsensical, and emotional truth claims challenge dominant truth claims in society (Saurette & Gunster, 2011).

Based on key arguments and findings from these literatures, Article I proposes a theoretical model of science-related populism. It conceptualizes science-related populism as a set of ideas that suggest an irresolvable antagonism between allegedly virtuous *ordinary people* and allegedly immoral *academic elites*. Science-related populism maintains that this antagonism is because academic elites withhold two kinds of sovereignty from ordinary people: First, science-related *decision-making sovereignty,* i. e., the power to decide on research goals and methods, for example. Second, *truth-speaking sovereignty*, i. e., the power to determine what is deemed "true knowledge." Science-related populism contends that academic elites raise illegitimate claims for both these sovereignties, as they allegedly use unreliable methods, are

Figure 1: Extended model of science-related populism



Source: Mede (2022, p. 19) based on Mede and Schäfer (2020b).

ideologically biased, and ignore the needs of common people. Legitimate decision-making and truth-speaking sovereigns are rather the ordinary people, because their common will and common sense are seen as the only valid principles for determining what is regarded as "true."

The synopsis extends the conceptual analysis of science-related populism substantially: First, I respond to critiques suggesting that the concept may be indistinct from similar concepts and too versatile to be a useful analytical framework (Krämer, 2021). I maintain that science-related populism has indeed parallels to other anti-establishment sentiments – but it involves a clearly defined set of theoretical assumptions and has important differences to them, which makes it a precise and distinctive social-scientific concept (Gerring, 1999). In contrast to political populism, for example, it does not primarily target political elites and political power claims, but challenges the legitimacy of decision-making and truth-speaking claims of scientists beyond policy-making processes. Science-related populism is also different from distrust toward science, because it does not only criticize scientistic approaches to the production of knowledge, but also promotes alternatives to them, i. e., popular sovereignty over the definition of "true knowledge." Empirical studies recently provided evidence for these differences: They showed that individual support for science-related populism is different from support for political populism (Eberl, Huber, Mede, & Greussing, 2023) and has only weak correlations with (dis)trust in science (Mede, Schäfer, Metag, & Klinger, 2022).

Second, I identify four factors that can explain why science-related populism has been less visible, successful, and pervasive for certain scientific issues – and more so for others, such as climate change and COVID-19. These factors include the public salience of an issue (Dennison, 2020), the influence of charismatic science-related populist leaders (Kriesi, 2014), attachment of science-related populism to conservatism, libertarianism, and other "host ideologies" that may aid its public appeal (Mudde, 2017), and the availability of science-related populist claims in traditional or online media.

Third, I discuss how individual perceptions of an epistemological people-elite conflict – which is central to science-related populism – may escalate to the societal level, exacerbating "societal cleavages" (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967), polarization against counterpositions like technocracy, and ostracization of alleged "helpers" of academic elites, such as journalists of mainstream media or pro-science movements like Fridays For Future (e. g., Bergmann & Ossewaarde, 2020).

I integrate these considerations in an extended model of science-related populism, which involves the four core building blocks "academic elite," "ordinary people," "decision-making sovereignty," and "truth-speaking sovereignty," as well as two additional components: the *science-related populist leader*, who may trigger and nurture populist demands toward science among the public, and *the others*, who are blamed by science-related populists for allegedly upholding the illegitimate epistemic authority of academic elites (see Figure 1).

Article I calls for empirical research on science-related populism, distinguishing between *supply*-side populism (e. g., public communication) and *demand*-side populism (e. g., individual attitudes). Article II responds to this call by introducing an empirical measure for the demand-side of science-related populism, i. e., for *science-related populist attitudes*.

3 Method: Measuring science-related populist attitudes in surveys (RQ2)

Extant research has examined attitudes which are similar but also different to science-related populist attitudes, such as conspiracy beliefs or anti-intellectualism. Yet there had been no instrument to measure these attitudes in surveys. Article II develops and validates such an instrument: the *SciPop Scale* (Mede, Schäfer, & Füchslin, 2021).

In a first step, we devised 17 survey items based on prior research and a pretest with a student sample. They addressed four dimensions that correspond with the four core components of science-related populism (see Figure 1). These dimensions are:

1) Positive conceptions of ordinary people, which suggest that "ordinary people" are virtuous and trust common sense (indicated by agreement with items like "What unites the ordinary people is that they trust their common sense in everyday life.").
2) Negative conceptions of academic elites, which suggest that scientists are immoral and produce useless knowledge (indicated by agreement with items like "Scientists are only after their own advantage.").
3) Demands for decision-making sovereignty, which claim that "ordinary people" should decide on science's goals and methods (indicated by agreement with items like "People like me should be involved in decisions about the topics scientists research.").
4) Demands for truth-speaking sovereignty, which claim that "ordinary people," rather than academic elites, should determine what is considered "true knowledge" (indicated by agreement with items like "We should rely more on common sense and less on scientific studies.").

We then conducted two survey studies: In study 1, we submitted German versions of all 17 items to a representative online survey that was carried out in March 2019 in Switzerland. A series of exploratory factor analyses suggested eight items to form a stable and plausible four-factor solution: the SciPop Scale. In study 2, we tested the performance of the SciPop Scale in three languages (German, French, Italian) using data from a telephone survey conducted in June / July 2019 with a nationally representative sample of the Swiss population. Results of a confirmatory factor analysis supported the eight-item / four-factor structure we found in study 1. Multigroup confirmatory factor analysis suggested that the SciPop Scale performed well in all three languages. However, Item Response Theory models indicated that the measurement precision of single items differs across languages and may be slightly compromised by socially desirable response behavior of the survey participants. Further analyses indicated high external validity of the SciPop Scale, showing significant correlations of the scale and constructs that are presumably (inversely) related to science-related populism, such as trust in science.

The synopsis further engages with the strengths and potential weaknesses of the SciPop Scale: First, I point out eight major advantages, e. g., cross-lingual invariance, convergent validity, high measurement precision across different intensities, and a strong concept-measurement link (Lundberg, Johnson, & Stewart, 2021). Second, I identify eight limitations of the SciPop Scale and propose solutions to them. These limitations include language-specific connotations, semantic ambiguities, unknown discriminant validity, and minor social desirability bias, for example. They should be assessed with cross-national measurement invariance analyses and could be compensated with culturally and linguistically sensitive translation procedures, for example (Beaton, Bombardier, Guillemin, & Ferraz, 2000). Third, I discuss five challenges of empirical studies using the Sci-

Pop Scale, such as non-response, context-dependency, and covariate selection.

4 Main findings: Populist criticism of science in Switzerland and Germany (RQ3)

Article III applies the SciPop Scale in a panel survey in Switzerland to test the temporal stability of science-related populist attitudes (Mede & Schäfer, 2022). It investigates if the COVID-19 pandemic has decreased public support for science-related populism. On the one hand, this is plausible: After the pandemic unfolded, publics in many countries showed higher support for foundational societal institutions including science (Sibley et al., 2020), which can be described as a science-related "rally 'round the flag' effect" (Baker & Oneal, 2001, p. 661). On the other hand, media headlines suggested that populist resentment against science had surged during the pandemic (Brooks, 2020). Article III tested this using individual-level panel data from two population surveys that included the SciPop Scale and were conducted in Switzerland before (2019) and during (2020) the pandemic.

Results showed that respondents had significantly less support for science-related populism after the pandemic hit Switzerland. This indicates that science-related rally effects may alleviate public resentment against science. We also found that the decline of science-related populist attitudes was more pronounced for people who had been particularly prone to science-related populism before the pandemic, which suggests that the pandemic contributed to a convergence of pro- and anti-science milieus rather than polarized or fragmented the population.

Article III provides important evidence on a shift toward pro-science views during the COVID-19 pandemic. From a normative perspective, this shift may be worthwhile, because effective approaches to cope with crises like the pandemic (e.g., vaccination) and its accompaniments (e.g., circulation of disinformation) require low levels of (populist) anti-science resentments among the public. Nevertheless, even small levels of such resentments can be detrimental to the status of scientific expertise in society, because they may extend to other realms: For example, they can be associated with support for populist parties, which often fuel resentment against science (Krämer & Klingler, 2020).

Article IV examines the link between populist party support and distrust toward science more closely. It focuses on Germans' perception of the "replication crisis," i.e., the inability of many studies to yield equal results in follow-up studies applying the same or similar methods. Using a secondary analysis of the German "Science Barometer" survey 2018, we found that the "replication crisis" may evoke or reinforce negative attitudes toward science among supporters of the German populist right-wing party AfD. They tended to see the "replication crisis" as a reason to distrust science even if they had not heard about it before the survey. This suggests that the "replication crisis" accommodates populists' existing reservations against science by providing them with a useful narrative of an untrustworthy science.

5 Implications of science-related populism for science communication (RQ4)

All five articles and the synopsis emphasize that science-related populism has important implications for how individuals and societies communicate about science: For example, it can manifest in the rhetoric of politicians, circulate in news or social media, and lead people to perceive media coverage about science as less trustworthy (see also Blassnig, 2021). Article V interrogates the relationship of science communication and science-related populism (Mede & Schäfer, 2020a). It analyzes the normative claims of three established science communication models – the Public Understanding of Science model (PUS), the Public Engagement with Science and Technology model (PEST), and the Science Communication as Political Communication model (SCPC) – and compares them with the normative claims of science-related populism. The three models differ in what they consider "good" science communication – and they conflict substantially with the claims of science-related populism, which suggest that "good" science communication should articulate common sense arguments and criticisms of academic elites, rather than accurate scientific facts and positive portrayals of science, for example. We conclude that a variety of normative reference points is not problematic per se, as they can inspire insightful analyses from different angles. But reference points that challenge established science communication approaches – such as science-related populism – can be seen as problematic, as they undermine the capacity of science communicators to provide society with the "best scientific input available" (Scheufele, 2014, p. 13590).

The synopsis scrutinizes implications of science-related populism for science communication further. It explains how science-related populism may (re)configure individual communication and societal discourse about science, for example, by manifesting in social media discussions about science, shaping science-related communication behavior, or fueling a "public disconnection" from science – i. e., a "constellation in which segments of the public feel alienated from scientific institutions due to a lack of connectedness to societal discourse around science-related topics" (Mede, Schäfer, & Metag, 2023, p. 16).

Moreover, I discuss appropriate responses of scholars and communication practitioners to science-related populism. This discussion first approaches the question if they have an obligation to prevent science-related populism. Some pundits would dispute this, assuming that prevention efforts may backfire or will be "a waste of resources on those who will never change their minds" (Gil, 2020, p. 126). Others, however, argue that scientists and science communicators do have a responsibility to prevent science-related populism, as they have subscribed to the scientific epistemology, which obligates them to defend the norms of science against contrarian norms (Grodzicka & Harambam, 2021). This raises questions of how prevention can be achieved and which prevention measures are ethically defensible.

I focus on these questions in the concluding chapters of my dissertation: Potential responses to science-related populism include, for example, increasing public understanding of how science is done (to prevent populist perceptions that scientists fake results "behind closed doors"), fostering dialogue and engagement with science-related populists via their opinion leaders (to alleviate populist perceptions that scientists are a distant elite), and reflecting whether scientists may give publics legitimate reasons to be criticized (to anticipate populist backlash for politicized science debates). These responses should involve ethical considerations: For example, top-down interventions to increase public understanding of science could be conceived as "socially engineering" public opinion (Freiling, Krause, & Scheufele, 2023, p. 229). After all, not only complete endorsement but also complete rejection of science-related populism may be undesirable, as certain aspects of populism can serve as healthy correctives within democracy (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012).

6 Conclusion

Scholars and pundits worried that the legitimacy of scientific expertise is at stake in many countries worldwide: Some claimed that "truth" is increasingly being determined by emotions, personal opinions, common sense, folk wisdom, and individual experiences. This may have triggered a "reconfiguration of scientific authority" (Oliveira, Evangelista, Alves, & Quinan, 2021, p. 165). Populist demands toward science are an essential component within such a reconfiguration. Yet, scholarship had not analyzed these demands. My dissertation compensates this gap: It provides a theoretical model that conceptualizes them as science-related populism, introduces a reliable instrument to measure it, presents empirical findings, and offers a detailed discussion about implications for science communication. Accordingly, it has introduced a useful and instructive framework for conceptual and empirical scholarship within and beyond communication research, may hopefully stimulate further research, inform appropriate responses to science-related populism – and help to "better understand the social and media environments" of a "post-truth, post-trust, post-expert world" (Cormick, 2019, p. 161).

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Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Steckbrief «DOCA – Database of Variables for Content Analysis». Zur Relevanz, Zielstellung, Inhalt und Partizipationsmöglichkeiten der Datenbank für Operationalisierungen der standardisierten Inhaltsanalyse

Fact Sheet "DOCA – Database of Variables for Content Analysis". On the relevance, objective, content and participation possibilities of the database of variables for standardized content analysis

Franziska Oehmer-Pedrazzi*, University of Applied Sciences Graubünden, Institute for Multimedia Production, Switzerland
Sabrina H. Kessler, University of Zurich, Department of Communication and Media Research IKMZ, Switzerland
Edda Humprecht, University of Jena, Institute of Communication Science IfKW, Germany
Katharina Sommer, Zurich University of Applied Sciences ZHAW, Switzerland
Laia Castro, University of Barcelona, Department of Political Science, Spain
*Corresponding author: franziska.oehmer@fhgr.ch

Zusammenfassung
Die Open Access Database of Variables for Content Analysis *DOCA* sammelt, systematisiert und evaluiert Operationalisierungen für die standardisierte manuelle und automatisierte Inhaltsanalyse in der Kommunikationswissenschaft. DOCA soll Forschenden das Finden von geeigneten und etablierten bzw. getesteten Operationalisierungen (sowie den gesamten Codebüchern) für die standardisierte Inhaltsanalyse erleichtern. Für die kommunikationswissenschaftliche Forschung soll dies mit einer besseren Vergleichbarkeit inhaltsanalytischer Studien und Projekte sowie einer erhöhten Bedeutungszuschreibung der Transparenz von Operationalisierungen und Qualitätsindikatoren einhergehen. Mit dem vorliegenden Steckbrief sind zwei zentrale Zielsetzungen verbunden: Erstens soll über DOCA und deren Einsatzgebiete informiert werden und so auch der Bekanntheitsgrad dieser Forschungsinfrastruktur gesteigert werden. Zweitens soll dieser Artikel aus der Perspektive der Herausgeberinnen den Prozess und die damit verbundenen Herausforderungen für die Konzeption, Realisation und Aufrechterhaltung einer Forschungsinfrastruktur darlegen.

Abstract
The Open Access Database of Variables for Content Analysis (DOCA) collects, systematizes, and evaluates operationalizations for standardized manual and automatic content analysis in the field of communication science. DOCA aims to facilitate researchers in finding suitable and established or tested operationalizations (as well as complete codebooks) for standardized content analysis. For communication science research, this is expected to result in increased comparability of content analytic studies and projects, as well as greater emphasis on the transparency of operationalizations and quality indicators. The present fact sheet is associated with two central objectives: firstly, to provide information about DOCA and its applications, thereby increasing awareness of this research infrastructure. Secondly, from the personal perspective of the editors, this article aims to outline the process and associated challenges involved in the conception, realization, and maintenance of a research database.

Schlüsselwörter
Inhaltsanalyse, Datenbank, Operationalisierung, Variablen, Konstrukte, Reliabilität

Keywords
content analysis, database, operationalization, variables, constructs, reliability

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1 Einleitung und Zielstellungen

Die systematische Analyse von Medieninhalten ist zentral für die gesamte Kommunikationswissenschaft – ganz egal, ob Fragen nach gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen, Produktionsbedingungen, journalistischen Entscheidungen oder funktionalen und dysfunktionalen Wirkungen von Medienwirkungen im Fokus der Forschung stehen. Die Frage danach, wie Medieninhalte systematisch abgebildet und analysiert werden können, ist daher von grosser Bedeutung. Auffällig ist jedoch, dass bei der Entwicklung und Operationalisierung von inhaltlichen Kategorien selten Bezug auf schon bestehende und getestete Variablen und Konstrukte genommen wird. Gründe dafür liegen a) in der Unübersichtlichkeit der Variablen, b) der (häufig aus Platzgründen) unzureichenden Beschreibung der Variablen in den Publikationen sowie c) der Unzugänglichkeit der Codebücher. Hier setzt *DOCA – Database of Variables for Content Analysis* (https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca) an: Ziel der Datenbank ist es, Wissen über die Erhebungsinstrumente und Anwendungsfelder der standardisierten Inhaltsanalyse und damit über eine der zentralen Methoden kommunikationswissenschaftlicher Forschung und Lehre für Wissenschaftler:innen und Studierende zu sammeln, zu systematisieren, zu reflektieren und im Sinne von *Open Method* und *Open Access* frei zugänglich zu machen.

Mit dem vorliegenden Steckbrief sind zwei zentrale Zielsetzungen verbunden: *Erstens* soll über DOCA und deren Einsatzgebiete informiert werden und so auch der Bekanntheitsgrad dieser Forschungsinfrastruktur gesteigert werden. *Zweitens* soll dieser Artikel aus der Perspektive der DOCA-Herausgeberinnen den Prozess und die damit verbundenen Herausforderungen für die Konzeption, Realisation und Aufrechterhaltung einer Forschungsinfrastruktur darlegen. Der Beitrag ist wie folgt gegliedert: Zunächst werden die zentralen Ziele, inhaltliche und strukturelle Merkmale sowie Möglichkeiten der Partizipation und Qualitätssicherung der Datenbank skizziert. Zudem werden der Entstehungsprozess und die Finanzierung transparent gemacht. Der Beitrag schliesst mit einem persönlichen Fazit der Herausgeberinnen.

2 Charakteristika von DOCA – Database of Variables for Content Analysis

DOCA wurde von fünf (ehemaligen) Postdoktorandinnen des Instituts für Kommunikationswissenschaft und Medienforschung (IKMZ) der Universität Zürich – den Autorinnen des vorliegenden Beitrags – auf Eigeninitiative konzipiert und umgesetzt. Die Motivation besteht dabei in dem Wunsch, den Prozess für inhaltsanalytische Forschung zu vereinfachen, transparenter und offen zu gestalten und damit zur Qualitätssicherung im Fach beizutragen.

2.1 Zielstellung von DOCA

DOCA bündelt und systematisiert Open Access Operationalisierungen für die standardisierte manuelle und automatisierte Inhaltsanalyse in der Kommunikationswissenschaft. Sie soll Variablen schnell auffindbar und für alle unabhängig von einer Institutionszugehörigkeit zugänglich machen.

Mit DOCA sind folgende zentrale Zielsetzungen verbunden: Auf individueller Ebene soll die Datenbank Forschenden verschiedener Qualifikations- und Erfahrungsniveaus das Finden von geeigneten und etablierten bzw. getesteten Operationalisierungen (inkl. der dazugehörigen Codebücher) für standardisierte Inhaltsanalysen erleichtern. Zudem bietet DOCA auch eine erste, niederschwellige Publikationsmöglichkeit für v. a. junge Wissenschaftler:innen. Sämtliche Beiträge sind aus diesem Grund auch mit einer Digital Object Identifier (DOI)-Nummer versehen. Für die kommunikationswissenschaftliche Forschung soll DOCA die Vergleichbarkeit inhaltsanalytischer Studien und Projekte und die Transparenz von Operationalisierungen und Qualitätsindikatoren steigern. Transparenz und Vergleichbarkeit gewinnen so, auch im Sinne der Open-Science-Bewegung, an Bedeutung.

2.2 Inhalt, Struktur und technische Umsetzung von DOCA

In *DOCA* können Variablen und Konstrukte zu verschiedenen Forschungs- und Lehrgebieten der Kommunikationswissenschaft recherchiert werden. Aktuell (Stand: 05.09.2023) lassen sich 100 Beiträge für Variablen und Konstrukte ab-

Tabelle 1: Veröffentlichte Beiträge in DOCA nach Themenbereichen [sections]

Themenbereich [section]	Anzahl Beiträge
Grundlagenthemen [Basics & Procedures]	3
Journalismus [News / Journalism]	47
fiktionale Inhalte [Fiction / Entertainment]	18
Strategische Kommunikation [(Professional) Communicators & Organisational / Strategic Communication]	13
nutzer:innengenerierte Inhalte bzw. Laienkommunikation [User-Generated Media Content]	15
Variablen spezifisch für die automatisierte Inhaltsanalyse [Variables for Automated Content Analysis]	4

Anmerkung: Die Reihenfolge der angegebenen Themenbereiche spiegelt die Struktur auf DOCA wider.

rufen. Unterschieden wird dabei zwischen Variablen inhaltsanalytischer Forschung zu a) Journalismus [News/Journalism] b) fiktionalen Inhalten [Fiction/Entertainment], c) strategischer Kommunikation [(Professional) Communicators & Organisational / Strategic Communication], sowie d) nutzer:innengenerierte Inhalte bzw. Laienkommunikation [User-Generated Media Content]. Zudem können Variablen zu Grundlagenthemen [Basics & Procedures] und Variablen spezifisch für die automatisierte Inhaltsanalyse [Variables for Automated Content Analysis] recherchiert werden. Die Anzahl veröffentlichter Beiträge nach Themenbereich kann Tabelle 1 entnommen werden.

Die Datenbankeinträge folgen dabei in der Regel einer spezifischen Struktur: Zunächst wird die Variable kurz beschrieben und charakterisiert. Dann werden der zentrale Anwendungsbereich, häufig genutzte Theorieperspektiven sowie Methodenkombinationen beim Einsatz der Variablen dargelegt. Kern des Datenbankeintrags ist die Beschreibung der Operationalisierung(en). Hierzu werden die Definitionen der Variablen und die jeweiligen Ausprägungen, wie sie in einer oder in mehreren Studie(n) genutzt und getestet wurden, dargelegt. Zur Kontextualisierung wird dabei jeweils auch die Forschungsfrage sowie der Analysegegenstand und -zeitraum der jeweiligen Studie aufgeführt. Die Auswahl der Operationalisierung sollte dabei von folgenden Kriterien geleitet sein: Qualität der Messung (bspw. durch Angabe hoher Reliabilitätswerte), Relevanz, Aktualität sowie Zugänglichkeit von Codebüchern (eine ausführliche Beschreibung der Kriterien ist auch im Einleitungsbeitrag des begleitenden Handbuchs einsehbar: Kessler, Sommer, Humprecht, & Oehmer-Pedrazzi, 2022). Sofern vorhanden, wird auf der Datenbank auch das zugehörige Codebuch zur Verfügung gestellt. Die Datenbank wird von einem Open Access Handbuch zur standardisierten Inhaltsanalyse begleitet, in dem die Variablen und Konstrukte für eine erste Auswahl an Forschungsthemen -und gebieten vorgestellt werden (Oehmer-Pedrazzi, Kessler, Humprecht, Sommer, & Castro, 2022).

DOCA wird durch *HOPE Hauptbibliothek Open Publishing Environment* gehostet. Dabei handelt es sich um eine Plattform zur Veröffentlichung von Open Access-Zeitschriften, die von der Universität Zürich zur Verfügung gestellt wird. Die Plattform stützt sich auf die Open-Source-Software Open Journal Systems (OJS), die eine Verwaltung und Veröffentlichung von wissenschaftlichen Zeitschriften ermöglicht. Obwohl DOCA als Datenbank keinen Zeitschriftencharakter aufweist, d.h. keine in einem bestimmten Rhythmus und in zeitlicher Abfolge publizierten Beiträge enthält, fiel der Entscheid auf diese Plattform, um von der für Forschende der Universität Zürich kostenfreien, professionell gehosteten Infrastruktur sowie der damit verbundenen Reputation profitieren zu können. Einschränkungen ergaben sich dadurch jedoch in Bezug auf die Gestaltungsmöglichkeiten und die Navigation der Seiten.

2.3 Möglichkeiten zur Partizipation und Mechanismen der Qualitätssicherung

Ein Grossteil der aktuell 100 Einträge in der Datenbank wurde von den Autor:innen des Begleithandbuchs (Oehmer-Pedrazzi et al., 2022) verfasst. Dabei handelt es sich jedoch nur um einen ersten Grundstock relevanter Operationalisierungen. Ziel ist es, die Datenbank kontinuierlich um weitere Variablen auch aus anderen, bisher nicht berücksichtigten Forschungsgebieten zu ergänzen und schon bestehende Variablenbeschreibungen durch weitere, neue Einträge zu aktualisieren. Auf der Webseite der Datenbank ist daher ein kontinuierlicher Call for Authors veröffentlicht (https://www.hope.uzh.ch/doca/call). Sämtliche Beitragsvorschläge werden von mindestens zwei der fünf Herausgeberinnen, die ein breites Themen-. und Forschungsspektrum in der Kommunikationswissenschaft abdecken, begutachtet. Kriterien hierfür sind neben der Relevanz und Eignung des Beitrags für die Datenbank, die Verständlichkeit der Darstellung sowie die Plausibilität und Nachvollziehbarkeit der ausgewählten Operationalisierungen.

Im November 2022 wurde eine erste Evaluation der Datenbank in Form einer Online-Befragung durchgeführt (Oehmer-Pedrazzi, Kessler, Humprecht, Sommer, & Castro, 2023). Abgefragt wurden u. a. der Nutzen und Verbesserungsmöglichkeiten von DOCA, Anwendungsgebiete, Bewertung von Inhalten und Struktur der Datenbank sowie deren Nutzer:innenfreundlichkeit. Als Reaktion auf die Ergebnisse ($N=33$) gab es im Mai/Juni 2023 eine Designüberarbeitung der Webseite, welche zu einer besseren Nutzer:innenfreundlichkeit beiträgt. Ziel ist es, die Evaluation mindestens alle fünf Jahre zu wiederholen.

3 Persönliches Fazit der Herausgeberinnen

Im Fokus des vorliegenden Beitrags stehen Informationen über die Zielstellung und Funktionsweise von DOCA. Abschliessend möchten wir jedoch kurz aus persönlicher und daher in der Wir-Form formulierten Perspektive schildern, welche Erfahrungen wir beim Aufbau von DOCA gemacht haben, in der Hoffnung, dass dies bei der Konzeption und Umsetzung weiterer Forschungsinfrastrukturen von Nutzen sein kann. Wir gehen daher insbesondere auf die Herausforderungen und die möglichen Lösungsszenarien ein. Der gesamte Prozess von der Idee bis zum Launch der Datenbank nahm einen Zeitraum von fast vier Jahren in Anspruch. Für die Realisierung von DOCA sind neben unserem persönlichen Wissen und Engagement vor allem finanzielle und zeitliche Ressourcen notwendig. Finanziert werden muss zum einen die Plattform der Datenbank, das Design der einzelnen Beiträge und vor allem eine studentische Redaktionsassistenz. Wir konnten hierfür erfolgreich Drittmittel akquirieren (u. a. Fellowship Freies Wissen, Graduate Campus der Universität Zürich und Schweizerischer Nationalfonds [SNF])[1] und dankenswerterweise auf die Ressourcen des Instituts für Kommunikationswissenschaft und Medienforschung IKMZ der Universität Zürich zurückgreifen. Wir sind uns dabei bewusst, dass Letzteres in dieser Form nicht an allen Instituten möglich ist. Zu diskutieren wäre daher, welche Rolle die Fachgesellschaften – auch in finanzieller Form – spielen können, um Initiativen, von denen das gesamte Fach profitieren kann, zur langfristigen Realisierung zu verhelfen. Unsere zeitlichen Ressourcen haben wir nicht nur in die Konzeption der Datenbank, die Struktur der Beiträge und die Rekrutierung sowie den Austausch mit den Autor:innen gelegt. Um die finanziellen Ressourcen sicherzustellen, haben wir auch viel Zeit in die Recherche von Förderinstitutionen sowie das Verfassen von zahlreichen Anträgen gesteckt. Ferner haben wir uns um eine Erhöhung des Bekanntheitsgrades der Datenbank in zahlreichen Gesprächen mit Kolleg:innen und auch durch die Veranstaltung eines online Launch-Events der Datenbank am 11. März 2022 bemüht. Diese Zeit fehlt für das Verfassen von Publikationen in wissenschaftlichen Zeitschriften oder für Drittmittelanträge und damit für in Berufungsverfahren und Bewerbungen als relevant erachtete Aktivitäten. Wir alle waren zu Beginn der Arbeit an DOCA Postdoktorandinnen mit befristeten Stellen und erbrachten neben unserer wissenschaftlichen Tätigkeit Betreuungsleistungen. Zu wünschen ist, dass ein solches Engagement

1 Der Schweizerische Nationalfonds hat die Open Access Publikation des Begleithandbuchs, das 2022 im Springer Verlag erschienen ist, finanziell unterstützt. Die hierfür notwendige aufwendige Begutachtung sämtlicher Beiträge des Buches leistete Melanie Magin, Professorin in Media Sociology am Department of Sociology and Political Science der Norwegian University of Science and Technology in Trondheim.

im Sinne des Open Science und Open Method-Gedanken stärkere Beachtung findet.

Danksagung

Die technische Infrastruktur für die Variablendatenbank wird uns von HOPE Hauptbibliothek Open Publishing Environment der Universität Zürich zur Verfügung gestellt. Die studentischen Redaktionsassistentinnen Mirjam Baumann und Miriam S. Cano Pardo konnten aus Fördergeldern des Fellowprogramms «Freies Wissen», das von Wikimedia Deutschland, dem Stifterverband und der VolkswagenStiftung getragen wird, sowie durch die Unterstützung des IKMZ – Instituts für Kommunikationswissenschaft und Medienforschung der Universität Zürich finanziert werden. Der Autor:innenworkshop wurde durch die Unterstützung des Graduate Campus der Universität Zürich ermöglicht.

Interessenskonflikte

Die Autorinnen erklären, dass kein Interessenkonflikt besteht.

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BOOK REVIEW

Emily Hund. The influencer industry: The quest for authenticity on social media. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023, pp. 218. ISBN 978-0-691-23102-0

Nils S. Borchers, University of Tübingen, Institute of Media Studies, Germany
nils.borchers@uni-tuebingen.de

The Influencer Industry: The Quest for Authenticity on Social Media, written by American media researcher Emily Hund, takes the reader on a scouting expedition into the U.S. influencer industry. Hund is a well-established author in social media influencer research, where her works on gender dynamics in the influencer industry have been particularly notable (e.g., Duffy & Hund, 2015, 2019). These works look at social media influence from a creative industry's angle, and *The Influencer Industry* also stands in this lineage. Although the title does not make it clear, the book offers, first and foremost, a chronological history of the influencer industry in the United States. Beginning with the advent of political bloggers in the late 1990s, each chapter focuses on a specific period and the overarching developmental milestones Hund identifies as constituting the period. This way, Hund provides a much-needed historical perspective on the influencer industry. However, the book wants to be more than that – and it definitely is – in that it also reflects on how the influencer industry impacts contemporary forms of sociation. In particular, Hund explores how the industry has become a leading force in defining how we perceive authenticity as a central value of today's (Western) cultures. As Hund explains in the Introduction, "Authenticity is not just a social construction but an industrial one, continually tussled over by a sophisticated and complicated profit-making enterprise whose decisions about what expressions of reality are valuable help determine what types of content and tools for communication and self-expression are available to the world's billions of social media users" (p. 7).

Chapter 1, "Groundwork," provides, on the one hand, the conceptual foundation for the following chapters, including Hund's definition of influencers as "people who earn income as independent workers providing 'authentically' curated content to carefully cultivated online audiences" (p. 29). On the other hand, this chapter also explores the beginnings of the influencer industry. Instructively, Hund identifies technological, cultural, economic, and industrial factors that led to the industry's emergence and thus offers a rare explanation of the rise of influencers from a macro perspective. A crucial factor for Hund, which she returns to throughout her book, is the economic crisis of 2008 and the Great Recession of the late 2000s, which forced (aspiring) media professionals to explore career paths in social media rather than in media houses. Here, Hund shares her story of being a frustrated intern at a New York fashion magazine who saw her dreams of making a career in the legacy media world dashed.

Chapter 2, "Setting the Terms for a Transactional Industry," covers the late 2000s. Hund puts the spotlight on the monetization of influence, which allows influencers to develop professional careers by embracing advertising money as a revenue source. This step changed influencers' take on authenticity, too. While influencers, according to Hund, wanted to be authentic, marketers were satisfied when influencer audiences perceived the produced content as authentic. This led to dissociating authenticity (which should be pursued) from accuracy (which could be neglected), which became a recipe for the functional approach to authenticity, for which the influencer industry is often criticized today.

In chapter 3, "Making Influence Efficient," Hund turns to the marketer side and explains how they professionalized their engagement with influencers in the early 2010s.

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A large part of the chapter is devoted to campaign management processes (e.g., selecting and pricing influencers). Here, I feel that incorporating the rich literature in strategic communication research on these issues would have benefitted the book.

Chapter 4, “Revealing and Repositioning the Machinations of Influence,” identifies the late 2010s as the “era of increasing distrust” (p. 115) in the influencer industry as well as in social media in general. Hund draws the reader’s attention to three “events” she identifies as particularly incisive: the more rigid monitoring of advertising disclosures in sponsored influencer posts by the Federal Trade Commission, the infamous influencer-endorsed Fyre Festival, and the massive purchase of fake followers to inflate reach. The three events challenged the actors in the industry to rethink their routines and procedures. They motivated some noteworthy modifications in the industry’s DNA, which should “serve as a public repudiation of fakery and endorsement of disclosure” (p. 126). Particularly, marketers began to team up with nano, micro, child, and virtual influencers, who promised to deliver more (perceived) authentic content, establish long-term relationships with influencers to improve influencer selection, and use big data-driven evaluation methods to reduce fake follower fraud. Meanwhile, influencers started “sharing more ‘realness’” (p. 124) in an attempt to regain authenticity and they started building platform-independent infrastructures for their business to reduce dependency on the few big platform providers.

In chapter 5, “The Industry Becomes Boundaryless,” set in the early 2020s, Hund discusses the expansion of the influencer field. A first expansion movement concerns influencers’ engagement with topics that go beyond the endorsement of consumer goods. Hund interprets this expansion as an identity crisis, which many influencers were experiencing. Not wanting to further advance materialistic lifestyles, influencers turned to social and political causes. However, Hund also provides a critical reading of this development when highlighting influencers’ role in spreading conspiracy theories during the COVID-19 pandemic (while implicitly complaining that gatekeeping mechanisms to filter out such content before it is published through social media do not exist). Another expansion movement involves marketers reaching out to ordinary social media users, that is users who do not enjoy a microcelebrity status, to obtain authenticity.

In the concluding chapter 6, “The Cost of Being Real,” Hund diagnoses that the influencer industry runs on an incentive system that is “profoundly borked” (p. 157). She devotes the subchapters to distinct actor groups and their failures, namely social media platforms (wield too much power!), influencers (fail to organize professionally!), marketers (merely seek efficiency!), and social media users (become too immersed with social media!). This overview does an excellent job of bringing together some of the main insights from the previous chapters, even though it paints a quite disillusioning picture of the industry. However, this evaluation does not come as a surprise, because rather than singing the praises of a creative industry that has gained economic and cultural impact at a breathtaking pace, Hund has kept a critical distance from her object of study throughout the book.

Encouragingly, Hund also presents remedies. These remedies uphold the chronological order of the book by pointing into the future – a future that could be brighter if only these remedies were pursued. In her closing appeal, Hund reminds us of the empowerment promise that the influencer industry makes: “The development of the industry enabled people to earn income, explore interests and facets of their identities that they might not have otherwise been able to, learn skills in creative production, and push for a more diverse representation across industries” (p. 171). A short note on the remedies: Some of the remedies sound compelling to me, such as putting more effort into building representations that express the collective interests of influencers. In some other cases, however, I felt that, to my liking, the remedies remained somewhat too abstract.

Regarding platform regulation, for example, I would have appreciated the argument being embedded in the rich literature on this topic, explicating what exactly it is that should be done from an influencer industry perspective (which is, to my knowledge, a perspective that is not yet visible in the current regulation debates). Regarding social media users, I feel somewhat unsatisfied with the general plea that they should "cultivate, as best as they can, a mindset of distance and utility" (p. 168). I think that a more thorough elaboration of the remedies could have enhanced the book's impact.

In conclusion, *The Influencer Industry* succeeds in tracing the development of this new creative industry in a vivid and knowledgeable way. The book offers the first comprehensive history of the industry, thus closing a yawning gap in research on influencers in particular and the creative industries in general. True, this is the history of the influencer industry in the United States, and Hund rightly points out in the appendix that this history is not globally generalizable. However, even though the influencer industry is much less internationalized than, for instance, the film, music, or gaming industries, I think readers outside the U.S. would benefit from this book. First, from my Western European perspective, the basic lines of the industry's development appear to correspond to the development in other countries, even if certain development periods may be dated slightly differently. Second, the book offers a compelling analysis of the current U.S. influencer industry, which is certainly valid also for the industry in many other (Western) countries. I especially enjoyed the analytical passages that popped out of the flow of historical descriptions throughout the chapters, in which Hund explains the influencer industry's role in today's culture. Having said this, I also feel that not everybody will benefit equally from reading the book. Readers who are already familiar with the works on authenticity in contemporary digital culture (e.g., Heřmanová, Skey, & Thurnell-Read, 2022) and readers who already have a good understanding of the dynamics that govern the influencer industry (e.g., Duffy, 2017) might find that the book delivers new insights, yet possibly not at a punch rate that is high enough to justify taking the time to read the entire book. Readers, however, who are looking for a historical account of the influencer industry and those interested in an in-depth look at how the influencer industry works will find much to learn in this book.

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BOOK REVIEW

Joanna Nowotny & Julian Reidy. Memes – Formen und Folgen eines Internetphänomens. Bielefeld: transcript, 2022, pp. 261. ISBN 978-3-8376-6124-8

Michael Johann, University of Augsburg, Department of Media, Knowledge, and Communication, Germany
michael.johann@uni-a.de

Memes – Formen und Folgen eines Internetphänomens [Memes – Forms and Consequences of an Internet Phenomenon] is a monograph in the German language authored by Joanna Nowotny and Julian Reidy. In the introduction, five main chapters, and a conclusion, the authors tackle a relatively young, but booming phenomenon of digital culture and communication: Internet memes. The book provides valuable insights and perspectives on the ever-evolving dynamics of memes and meme culture, and it successfully provides a well-executed counterpoint to often overly romanticized meme literature by shedding light on the "darker" aspects of meme communication. While many previous publications tend to idealize memes, this book takes a courageous step in examining the potential negative implications and consequences associated with their spread. By focusing on the less explored, sometimes problematic, and even controversial aspects of meme culture, the book presents a comprehensive view of the impact of memes.

In the introduction, three central features of digital communication environments serve as a starting point for the further examination of memes and their cultural rather than technological significance: referentiality, communality, and algorithmicity (p. 9). Based on these logics of digital spaces, memes are defined, following the approach by Díaz (2013), as replicating units of information that spread "horizontally as a virus" (p. 10). At this point, the book disassociates itself from pioneering literature, particularly evident when it comes to creating a definitory fundament. Notably, the seminal work by Limor Shifman (2014) is purposefully overlooked (p. 15), which is surprising given its significance in the field. Although it is true that some of its aspects might be outdated due to the evolving nature of memes, Shifman's book still provides valuable insights into the nature and characteristics of Internet memes and has strongly inspired a whole decade of meme research. Its partial omission (e.g., the authors do, after all, return later to Shifman's reflections on the relationship between memes and politics) leaves a critical gap in the holistic understanding of this cultural phenomenon. For instance, and most prominently, this is evident when it comes to the important differentiation between memes (as imitation) and virals (as replication).

In the second chapter, the authors delve into a fundamental characteristic of digital culture, exemplified in memes: referentiality. By employing detailed and telling case studies that focus on memes negotiating group identities and creating ingroup and outgroup constellations (e.g., Incels, Alt-Right) and the postmodern aesthetics of memes, the chapter provides a clearer understanding of memetic reference structures. It explores memes as referential aesthetic artifacts, tracing their presence across diverse fringe web platforms (e.g., 4chan, Tumblr). This chapter assumes paramount importance as it examines not only specific digital platforms and their functionalities, which will reappear throughout the book, but also delves into the fundamental – and often neglected – criterion of referentiality which nurtures a core feature of memes: ambiguity.

The third chapter focuses on humor as an important characteristic of memes. Drawing on classical theories of humor, memes are explored as humorous, sometimes even dadaistic formations that create communities and draw boundaries through laughter. The

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chapter skillfully traces processes of community-building, primarily through the lens of memes that emerged during the COVID-19 pandemic. It particularly highlights the self-referential nature of memetic humor using meta-memes (p. 64), showcasing how humor within memes often reflects on the very nature of meme culture itself. Additionally, the chapter illustrates various forms of humor found in memes, and examines memes that address gender roles and identities, probing the question of whether memes can reproduce or subvert power structures. Despite various harmful pitfalls of memetic humor, a central positive aspect of humor remains somewhat underexplored: its role as a coping mechanism. While the chapter effectively tackles the social and cultural implications of meme humor, it might not fully delve into the significant function of humor as a coping strategy in the face of adversity, such as the pandemic. Recognizing humor as a powerful tool for managing stress and navigating challenging situations would further enrich the discussion and offer a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of memetic humor in times of crises.

In the fourth chapter, the authors delve deeper into a complex and widely studied subfield: the so-called “political meme,” which has gained significant momentum in recent years, appealing to various ideological practices. Memes have the potential to wield political impact, as cultural practices are inherently intertwined with ideology. A particular focus in the chapter is placed on the stylistic element of irony and the instrumentalization of irony within the realm of politics. In this way, the chapter provides a refreshing perspective, challenging the often-romanticized view of political participation via memes. Drawing on numerous vivid examples, the authors navigate through the complex terrain of political meme culture, shedding light on its nuanced dynamics. Towards the end of the chapter, a typology of political memes is also presented, which, while intriguing, would benefit from empirical validation. Nevertheless, this typology serves as a starting point for future research, offering valuable insights into the diverse landscape of political meme discourse.

In the fifth and sixth chapters, the authors take a closer look at how memes make their way into the mainstream. In doing so, the chapter is dedicated to the delicate balance between subculture and mainstream, navigating the fine line between niche and canonization. This exploration shines a light on how memes traverse these boundaries, also addressing questions of hegemony. The chapters offer insights into the evolution and impact of memes as they straddle the realms of cultural subcultures and broader mainstream appeal. This observation serves as a crucial pivot point, allowing the authors to examine and question the implications of memetic diffusion beyond digital culture. The focus is here on the processes of normalization and even canonization of memes. Both chapters explicitly broaden the perspective to include memetic artistic configurations that extend beyond the digital realm, emphasizing that the culture of digitality goes beyond the Internet sphere and profoundly influences everyday artistic practices.

Overall, the authors present in this book a comprehensive exploration of memes as cultural artifacts, backed by a wealth of examples and case studies. The book is a compelling recommendation due to its timeliness, vividness, and exploration of “dark” aspects of meme culture. However, while it presents valuable insights, it tends to overshadow many positive aspects, which slightly impacts its overall balance. As a result, it might not fully meet the readers’ expectations, looking for a more balanced view of the potential of memetic communication. In addition, the book’s selection of sources omits several studies and works that lie at the core of academic research on memes from the point of view of various disciplines. As a result, some significant contributions to the field remain unaddressed or marginalized, potentially limiting the depth and comprehensiveness of the authors’ reflections on memes. Nevertheless, *Memes – Formen und Folgen eines Internetphänomens* is a significant addition to the body of knowledge on memes. It remains a worthwhile and thought-provoking read for all those who want to delve deeper into meme culture.

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Aims and Scope

By virtue of the prevailing multilingualism of both the Editorial Team and the Editorial Board, SComS provides a unique forum for exchange among media and communication scientists in English, German, French, and Italian. As SComS is based in Switzerland at the German-, French-, and Italian-speaking intersections of the world, the journal's mission is to showcase the developments in communication sciences in these language areas. The platinum open access journal proposes a multidisciplinary approach to communication sciences that is quite unique. SComS is becoming a home to different traditions, disciplines, contexts, and methodologies, all dealing with communication in its different facets.

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Manuscripts should be a maximum of 9000 words in length (including the abstract and all references, tables, figures, appendices and references). However, exceptions to this maximum, where duly reasoned and demonstrated, are possible. Moreover, authors can submit supplementary material that will be published as online appendix.

The first page should include an abstract (between 150 and 200 words) and selected keywords (e.g., social media, spiral of silence). Please remove all author names and institutional information from manuscripts, so as to enable blind peer review. All submitted manuscripts must be prepared in accordance with APA 6th (the 6th edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association). For more details check our submission guidelines, available online: https://www.hope.uzh.ch/scoms/about/submissions.

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