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## Introduction

In the second decade of the new millennium, digital media have become a natural part of our everyday lives. This is especially true for young people who have grown up in the era of the “mediatization of childhood” (Livingstone, 2014). They use smart phones, tablets, laptops and their various applications in a sophisticated manner, often in a more complex way than most adults do (Smahel et al., 2020, p. 8). Digital media allow them to seek information, to communicate, to express themselves, to play, to be creative, and – of course – to learn. In the process, various forms of digital youth cultures are established in an interplay with social, political, cultural, and societal contexts. Actually, this has to be seen as a long-term process, since ever new media offer specific forms of communication, provoke new practices and demand new competencies, as it is discussed in the theory of mediatization (Krotz, 2007). At this stage, many aspects concerning education become essential.

First, digital media themselves are learning objects. They represent new spaces for action (e.g. TikTok for creating and sharing videos), provoke new practices (like Instagram challenges), and provide chances as well as challenges. Media or digital literacy is an essential prerequisite for coping in a digitally immersed society, not exclusively for children and youth. As David Buckingham (2019, p. 3) puts it, media literacy is more than a set of skills, it also includes the central aspect of critical thinking: “The idea of media literacy is that we are actively involved in how we perceive, discuss, or consider the media we consume and the media we use in our lives.” (ibid.) Part of this critical thinking is the awareness that media are interwoven with economy. The changing media environment has opened up new marketing strategies for addressing young people and consequently new types for the commodification of youth. In times of “deep mediatization” (Hepp, Breiter & Hasebrink, 2018), social actions are shaped by or embedded in processes of algorithmic calculations and datafication, where digital traces are transformed into monetary value. In addition to these economic aspects, issues like online privacy protection and (self-)responsible media use come into play. Developing a sovereignty for acting in the digitally immersed media environment is crucial for participating in contemporary society and a vital aspect of the recent era of algorithmic media literacy.

Secondly, digital media are tools for education. Today, young people use social media platforms attached to their smartphones not only for fun, but also for keeping track of their obligations in relation to school. They search for additional information, they read, learn and study online, write assignments, create documents and posters, make videos etc. Against the background of “convergence culture” (Jenkins, 2008), we are therefore faced with the blurring of education and entertainment. On the one hand, (social) media like YouTube tutorials, social networks and several online chat applications provide occasions for non-formal learning experiences. On the other hand, labelled as “gamification” (Reiners & Wood, 2015), entertainment programs like computer games are provided, which support formal learning processes as well.

The Covid-19 pandemic has recently marked a caesura affecting nearly all areas of life and all segments of the population. Following the lockdown of educational institutions, the pandemic also shed light on the diversified roles of digital media in education, bringing the school environment directly into family relations, changing the existing home settings, internal family rules and physical spaces as well. With such radical and unexpected novelties, several new questions have been raised, such as how learning can be realized without personal meetings in class and how the youth can react, experience and cope with distance learning. Many new dilemmas have occurred, like the fact that, due to different circumstances, economic opportunities and technological skills, not all students were able to participate in such distance-learning settings on an equal basis. Some were technologically not well equipped, others lacked the expected technological skills, while some were without proper help to be able to work and study from home.

Although the papers published in this special issue were written before the time of the Covid-19 pandemic, they still underline the importance of discussing education against the background of societal and technological changes. Altogether, four papers are included in this special issue:

In the first contribution "*Education within Digital Culture: Shifting the Paradigms of Prospective Knowledge by Mediatization*", Gudrun Marci-Boehncke and Matthias Rath focus on the changing paradigms of education under the conditions of mediatization and digitalization. Given that education can be defined as a communicative system, serving the acquisition of new and future-relevant knowledge in lifelong appropriation processes, the authors argue against a language of educational institutions that excludes those who are not able to serve this language register. Referring to Rawls and Nussbaum and taking into account current mediatization processes, the authors discuss this selection mechanism as both ideologically outdated and practically reducible. Hence, they refer to current models of professionalization of teachers and international competence frameworks for digital media education.

The second paper entitled "*All's Simple (Club)? Education and Learning in the Digital World*" by Ilona Cwielong and Jana Metz, is narrowly focused on explanatory videos and tutorials spread via YouTube and other channels, that have become an integral part of young peoples' everyday life. As the authors point out, such potentials of digital media to learn outside of school should be regarded as widely established learning tools. By taking three perspectives – a socio-cultural perspective, an application and action-oriented perspective and a technological-medial perspective – into account, the study shows the interdisciplinary aspects of such issues, combining the necessity of cooperation between media and communication studies, didactics and also media pedagogy. In addition, a critical approach is needed, as such video platforms are becoming serious business players, which also commodify the educational market, in which schools and students are not just consumers, but where they are easily transformed into goods themselves.

The paper entitled “*Digital Sovereignty of Adolescents*” by Jane Müller, Mareike Thumel, Katrin Potzel, and Rudolf Kammerl, “develops a first systematization of the concept *Digital Sovereignty*. The authors define this as “the abilities and opportunities a person possesses to realize his or her own plans and decisions in dealing with or depending on digital media in a competent, self-determined and secure manner and against the background of individual, technical, legal and social conditions”. With the help of an exploratory study among a sample of 106 eighth-graders of different school types, the authors convincingly show “that most adolescents have only a vague notion about their own data traces”. The paper actually argues that deep reflections on digital media are so rare among the youth that only few possess strategies to move competently, self-determinedly and safely through a “deeply mediatized world”. These so-called *Whizzes* had – in contrast to their classmates – not only higher technical affinity, but a “much broader view on individual, technical, legal and social conditions as well”.

Isabell Koinig closes the issue with a theoretical contribution on the varying degrees of importance concerning the online privacy of adolescents. Based on a review of relevant articles, she discusses phenomena like the “new privacy paradox”. Due to the essential role of social networks for adolescents, information disclosure is seen as unavoidable, even if young people are concerned about their private data. The author argues for a “teen-centric approach” to privacy and an appropriate education about data protection options to enable young users of social media to adequately protect their privacy.

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