“I do it my way”: Idioms of practice and digital media ideologies of adolescents and older adults

# Details

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## Sample

Eight focus groups conducted 4 in Rome and 4 in Barcelona.In each city, two focus groups involved adolescents (38 participants, aged 16–19) and two involved older adults (26 participants, aged 65–85).

# Abstract

This article analyzes the idioms of practice and media ideologies of adolescents and older adults regarding mobile digital media usage, and how they are negotiated within and between age cohorts. We formed aged-based focus groups in Rome and Barcelona (four groups of 16- to 19-year-olds and four of 65- to 85-year-olds). The comparison provides new insights on older individuals’ communication practices, often overshadowed by the focus on youth. Participants of both age groups explained they do media in their own way, which is perceived as “the right” (or legitimate) way. Strategies and hierarchies differ with age, according to meanings and rankings attributed to media choices in a communicative environment of affordances, or polymedia. The results suggest that differentiated generation-based idioms of practice and media ideologies are in operation in each cohort while, in both cases, refer to adaptative and goal-oriented communications.

# Outcome

"The results suggest that media ideologies and idioms of practice are at work as participants
adhere to the idea that they do media in their own, legitimate way. However, the way
of doing media is different in adolescents when compared with older adults. Participants
describe a media hierarchy (RQ1), a set of preferences in using available digital platforms
that relates to the perceived salience each age group ascribes to different digital platforms.
Both in Rome and Barcelona, older adults’ choice of one platform over another becomes
the message itself and ends up being part of the relationship—because such a decision has
moral consequences (Madianou and Miller, 2013). According to it, the closest, most personal mediated communication is a phone call, followed by personalized messages,
including group/standard ones; a strategy that also applies when urgent communication
comes into play. In contrast, teenage participants prefer message-based communication,
probably due to their limited tradition of voice-based mediated communication as, in general,
they associate voice calls to urgent matters.
The media hierarchy takes into account the available media as both age groups adapt
their choice to the ever-changing mediascape over time. Both consider the different platforms
fluidly, but also adapt to the circumstances of the communication and the recipient
involved in the process. The circumstances are mainly shaped by the communication
goal—such as birthday greetings and urgent requests. To accommodate communication
partners, the dimensions taken into account are the (perceived) characteristics, skills, and
digital practices of that person, as well as the relationship with them.
[...] We found differences in discourses on social media based on diverse life experiences
and expectations (Taipale et al., 2017), which emphasize the idea that digital platforms
constitute “generational contexts.” Older participants showed higher reflexivity while
teenagers were less explicit when describing their everyday digital practices or the norms
they follow. Adolescents do not state any differences between social (online/offline) practices, while older adults mark the boundaries when they implicitly describe and analyze
how they do social media—in most cases showing a preference for voice-based
communication." (Fernandez-Adrevol et al., 2020, pp. 12-14).