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## 7. Intermediality in User's Discourses about Digital Television

### Introduction

This paper deals with users' experience of the main digital switch-over of Finnish television in 2007. The users' interpretation of this experience is identified here as the intermedially oriented re-articulation of television. First, the context of digital television in Finland is briefly described. Then, as a framework for the analysis of research data, the digitalisation of television is conceptualized in terms of theories about media change and related to constructions of media forms. The analysis itself is divided into two major parts; one looks at the discussion on digital TV in relation to the 'old' television, and the other at dimensions characterised as 'intermedial use' and 'intermedially oriented relationship' with the medium.

### The digital switch-over of television in Finland

After a period of tests, the digitalisation of distribution and reception of television in Finland started in August 2001. That introduced a

process of transition and transformation which lasted altogether six years. In September 2007, the terrestrial distribution and reception turned fully digital and Finland became the first country in the world to switch off its terrestrial (broadcast) analog transmissions. Parallel to that, cable companies started reducing their analog channel supply. By March 2008, cable distribution and reception had also gone fully digital.

The Finnish model of digitalisation did not follow the normal process of media evolution. Like many states and international organizations, the Finnish government and authorities were active in making decisions which aimed in particular at enforcing the digitalisation of terrestrial television. As such, the process can be characterised as an enforced transition, applying Urrichio's (2004: 30–31) distinction between transition and media evolution.

As an action, the Finnish model of a total digital transition represented the hard form of media policy, especially, with respect to media technology which still was highly incomplete and untested. A lot of defective equipment was available in the market. Over 70 percent of households had some sort of technical problems in digitalisation. State authorities and other decision makers in respect to digitalisation did not listen to consumers' problems. The user research showed that digitalisation as such was seen reasonable, but people were critical to the way the process was implemented. A section of consumers responded by just fully skipping television. As a result of the switch-over, the share of households without a television set grew from five to eight per cent (Finnpanel 2009).

Digital television was considered as a part of the Finnish information society project. It was marketed as an important new dimension of information society. Digital television was characterised as an interactive medium in which television and the Internet go hand-in-hand. Promises were big and expectations high. The new media hype made 'interactivity' a key slogan for digital television which, however, turned out to be a misleading utopia and illusion.

The ground-breaking transition of digitalisation seemed to shrink to a small extension of the old television. First, a number of channels were added to antenna households. Later, the breakthrough of terrestrial-distributed pay television heralded a broader transition; the same applied to the growing popularity of recording set-top boxes and the consequent free selection of viewing time. Finally, user research reported multi-media oriented media consumption which gave birth to new media practices.

### Digital television in the context of media change

When considering television as an object of study, Allen (2004: 12) constructs a strong contrast between the 'state' of television in the 1970s and 80's and the present-day digital television. Television varied considerably from nation to nation, which is why the golden era of analog television is often characterised as national television. Experientially, writes Allen, television was understood to be a private (as opposed to public) and hence domestic medium. Because of scarce programme supply and normally only one receiver per household, family viewing became a norm.

The 'state' of television changed constantly during the course of 1980s and 90s because of rapid and unpredictable technological, institutional and economic change (*ibid.*). Towards 2000 the changes accelerated, and a long list of new dimensions were needed when trying to define television. Allen's list includes multiple and proliferating channels, multiple transmission systems, multiple simultaneous viewing options, remote control devices, multiple television sets in the home, the use of the television set for playing video games, home production of video via camcorders, streaming of video via broadband internet... and the list continues (*op. cit.*: 16).

The above kind of transformation of television which, following Bolter and Grusin (2000: 184–195), could be characterized as

the 'remediation' of television: the change of media form is what the digitalisation of television is all about. The point of this paper is to ask how people transform the medium of television in their intermedially oriented user practices to something new which can be identified as a new media form and practice. This kind of medium theory acts in a loose sense as a framework for this paper. The question is not only about the medium of television as technical equipment, but also as a mediator and as (a collection of) social and cultural practices.

Uricchio (2004: 30–31) points out that some moments of media change are more revealing than others. He lists as examples the 'birth' of media forms, when technological possibility finds systematic deployment as media practice, and the dramatic re-purposing of media systems like radio's shift from an individuated two-way communication system to a broadcast system. The most relevant of his examples for the analysis of digitalisation of television is the intermedial redefinition of media which concerns digital technology's implications for the sound and/or image media of music, photography, film and television.

What was above, with reference to Allen, described as the change of television's media form, can now be defined as intermedial redefinition of the medium of television. Uricchio makes also an important conclusion concerning what he calls 'discursive evidence regarding perceived media capacities, anticipated use patterns, and intermedial relations' (op. cit.: 31). His point is that certain moments of media change are rich in discursive evidence challenging the 'take-for-grantedness' that under normal circumstances tends to blind us to the possibilities inherent in a particular medium and the processes by which social practice gradually privileges one vision of the medium over others. That is exactly the point why the kind of user interviews collected in the context of the digital switch-over of television are useful material in considering television's changing character as a medium.

## Research methodology and results

The research data to be analysed and discussed in this paper was collected shortly prior to and following the digital switch-over of terrestrial television in Finland in September 2007. The data consist of interviews in 30 different families (including a total of 70 family members) in six communities, and with four mentor groups assisting people with digitalisation problems. The data can be characterised as a reception study with a focus on consumers' intermedially oriented media use and media relationship. Question topics included the ways in which people experienced the switch-over and how they constructed inter-medial relationships in their discourse. The approach was qualitative in nature. In this paper, the following three dimensions of the research are considered: digital television in relation to the 'old' television, television in the context of intermedial user practice, and television in the context of intermedially oriented medium relationship.

The intermedial user practice is the point of view which opens up the link to what was above termed the 'intermedial redefinition' of television. This is also a link to the focus of the major project on intermediality, the background of the present book, within which this study was originally conducted. In the context of the major study, this study was entitled '*Intermedial Re-articulations of Television in the Digital Switch-Over*'.

A useful approach for the understanding of re-articulations is offered by Moscovici's notion of social representations, which refer to joint, everyday understandings of objects among a community of people: issues raised concern a system of values, ideas and practices. According to Moscovici, thinking is not only an internal activity of the human brain, but also, or rather, communal communicative action. He speaks of a 'thinking society' in which its members play an active and intelligent role (Moscovici 1984).

The basic function of a social representation is to make a new, alien and unknown thing or object familiar and close to people. This comprises two central processes: 'anchoring' and 'objectification' (op

cit: 3–39). In anchoring, an unknown item is connected to (as part of) the old way of understanding by linking it through familiar concepts and categories with known contexts. With objectification, sensory experiences and sensory as well as symbolic interpretations are linked with an originally alien and abstract concepts and through that the item made into an object of concrete thinking. Moscovici points out that representations are not only verbal (or, more widely, depictions using words and images [at least], and by more literal-realist or metaphorical-symbolic means) but are materialised in social practices and rituals. Anchoring and objectification, as defined by Moscovici, are useful tools for analysis for this study when considering the intermedial re-definition of television in people's media practices.

### Problems feed fear of technology

Analysis of the research showed that the way interviewees described digital television in relation to old television was dependent on their age, or place in the life-cycle and, in particular, on the periods of television that they had experienced. Ellis (2000) characterises the historical periods of television as three eras, named 'scarcity', 'availability' and 'the era of plenty'. How much of this history the interviewees had lived through clearly affected their interpretations of the present. The older generations were suspicious of the reform, while the younger ones had more positive expectations. Another division was related to whether people lived in antenna or cable households. The former experienced the change as more significant.

The change of standards in the distribution and reception of television forced users to deliberate not only about digitalisation but also about the relationship between the new television and the old analog television. For many older people and for those who can be identified as 'late adopters' – the two groups coincided to a significant degree, it was older people who tended to hold out against digital later and vice

versa – digital technology appeared problematic, mysterious, unnecessary. They were anguished by the continuous technological change, and their answers reflected a distancing: ‘I should not bother myself with this.’ Like a 70-year old lady from the town of Nokia, they said that they were ‘not keen on new things’, there was ‘no need for such fine things’, and it was ‘good enough when things work like now.’

This attitude reflects outsider experience and distancing. Older people and late adopters<sup>1</sup> were most often negative to the digital switch-over. They articulated the switch-over in terms of enforcement and too quick a speed of development. Even the need for a change questioned (Kangaspunta 2008: 7–8). For these people, the old was simply better. Their fatalism and fear of technology was expressed in the attitude, ‘Whatever’s done, everything will change’. Fears of learning and mastering the new technology intensified the problems of adoption. The mentor groups consulted for the research stated that they often met older people with this kind of technology fear.

In a study concerning the British digital switch-over, the most problematic consumer group was identified as the ‘reluctant 50 per cent’. This group consisted of older people, late adopters and the reluctant (Mackay 2007: 33, 43–45) Also in Finland, late adopters have been characterised by different attributes, such as with the notion of ‘*hidastelijat*’ (hangers-back) in a report by the Ministry of Communication (Lvm 2002).

In our research, a 76-year old lady and a late adopter from the community of Pälkäne, reported experiencing digital television as difficult because ‘the set was allowed to make tricks’. Her relationship with the television equipment became insecure and the whole reform became, as she put it, ‘worsening’. The reason behind this was that there was no control over the retail sale of set-top boxes in Finland and, as a consequence, there were a lot of unsuitable devices on the market – and this state of affairs continued through almost the whole transition process. The loose policies and practices of actors in the digital television market and failure to intervene or regulate on the part of the authorities ensured that consumers suffered. Problems appeared

in 71 percent of households, altogether. Nevertheless, and somewhat surprisingly perhaps in the light of these implementation difficulties, research conducted by the Office of Communication found that users rated digitalisation positively (Viestintävirasto 2/2007).

The evidence gathered by our research also showed that late adopters in particular protested by skipping television viewing altogether, at least for a while. Another (no doubt intersecting) group of consumers was identified as those who (illegally) stopped paying the television license fee (again, at least for a while). The share of people who completely opted out and did not watch or even (necessarily) own a television was reported to have grown from 5 per cent in 2002 to 8 per cent in 2008 (Finnpanel 2009).

To summarise the views of respondents in this study, the technical problems of digital television strongly characterized their dissatisfaction, and this independently of the categorizations made of interviewees. Some respondents considered the digital switch-over as part of a major process of convergence. One 60-year old lady was critical of the enforced buying of ‘these digital miracle devices’ and compared it with the electricity company that delivered an automatic electricity meter free of charge to her house – a comparison representing what can be characterised as ‘inter-technological’ argumentation.

### **The promise of interactivity unrealised**

In the beginning, digital television was marketed in Finland as a multimedia centre for the home – an interactive, converged medium, delivering Internet services through television. The new media hype raised ‘interactivity’ as the key word for digital television (Kangaspunta 2006) – just as, it may be noted, ‘interactive’ has become a buzzword generally, including outside the media world.<sup>2</sup>

Many adult interviewees saw only minor results in the digital reform that finally transpired as compared to expectations, a feeling

that seemed to be generalised irrelevant of adopter category. Innovators and early adopters were more interested in the reform and enthusiastic about the new kind of interactive television, but they were doomed to disappointment. An example is the 45-year old father in the Pälkäne community who had had strong expectations of digitalisation but felt that these were realised by the Internet, not television. His family generally had a positive attitude towards technical innovations, and demonstrated what might be termed a pragmatic relationship to media; new technologies made life easier and they tended to adopt them early on. They owned several television sets including the so-called 'second-round' set-top boxes, one of which could record. The man thought that a major reform was on its way that would concern most of all the intermedially oriented user practices of television and the Internet (or computers).

Digital television was mis-marketed, said many interviewees. A 30-year old woman from the town of Porvoo thought that the interactivity argument was misleading, because one could not send information back directly, meaning an inbuilt return channel. Many informants had been keenly waiting for added interactive services, but to no avail. The marketed digital vision included three phases; enhanced television, interactive television, and television as a gate-way to the Internet. In Finland, marketing concentrated on the two latter phases, which were also what captured the attention of the mass media. The third-phase, digital television, represented a vision of a new kind of media combination, a hybrid in nature. The hype over these digital visions lasted a few years, public and consumer enthusiasm falling flat with the delay of functioning mhp-boxes and lack of a functioning return channel. Digitalisation of television remained at the first phase, enhanced television (Kangaspunta 2006).

In the middle of the digital switch-over, expectations of interactivity were still strong. A 34-year old man from Porvoo thought that the fate of interactivity might be like that of 3G mobile services. The Wap technology remained something of a bubble because of missing services and contents, although the technology was working. In

contrast, ready tailored interactive services for digital television were developed, but the technology and television operators were not ready to make use of them.

For a couple from Nokia, aged 26 and 29 years, interactivity seemed to be lost, although they thought that sending SMS messages to the *Big Brother* programme represented decently working interactivity. They would not use interactive services based on a direct return channel in the digital television, because they already had a broad-band connection at home. Having Internet services in digital television was a foolish idea, they thought. Even teletext services were only occasionally used by them.

A 34-year old man from Porvoo with work experience in television had given up on interactivity, because he saw it as 'huuhaa', a strong, disparaging expletive (something like 'rubbish' in English). Who would like to hang around teletext pages, when the Internet was available? The next feedback technology for him would be a set combining an ADSL box (giving Internet and television feeds) and a computer with a big screen and keypad. He had a friend who had constructed just such a combination for himself.

### Video tape destroyed

According to Allen's (2004) list (above), the new millennium brought with it new characteristics for television like a quantitative and qualitative proliferation of channels, availability of international channels, and, especially, the dimension of theme and group-targeted channels. In addition, the new television enabled prolonged viewing, supplied on-demand and pay-TV services and offered new options for recording and archiving. Also, television viewing outside the home, in public spaces, increased. The dominant feature in Allen's view was a 'constant, rapid, and unpredictable technological, institutional, and economic change' (op. cit.: 16).

Allen (*ibid.*) asserted that (in the USA) video tape recorders had been surpassed by DVD only in 2001. The main commercial development of DVD came in the late 1990s and was much quicker than in the case of VCR. In five years between 1997 and 2002, more than 30 million households in the United States purchased DVD player. When this was complemented by a computer-like recording capacity in digital television, the VCR/VHS ended. In addition to recording, the digital set-top box enables prolonged viewing even in boxes without a recording capacity.<sup>3</sup>

VCR/VHS had a major impact on television viewing upon its arrival in Finnish homes (Kortti 2007). The rapid displacement of video tapes by recording set-top boxes, computers and DVDs surprised many people, and several interviewees regretted the change. A video tape archive or a small video library had appeared in many homes. Tapes were actively used for both recording and viewing. A young couple in Nokia estimated that they had in their cupboard more than one hundred cassettes; they also had a list of videos on their computer. The (29-year old) man thought that (pre-recorded, television company produced) videos could be completely skipped once one could search and watch the series in the net or DVD. They were waiting for more highly developed recording set-top boxes.

Although interviewees hardly had any knowledge of digitalization in other countries, many wondered about the curiosities of Finnish media policy in the digital switch-over. A father (44 years) of three from Porvoo was irritated by the solution of one set-top box per television, which became expensive and bothersome for a larger family. He preferred the solution of one set-top box per household (i.e. linking several TV sets), and thought that it should be technically possible: 'If man goes to the moon, why shouldn't such a set-top box be possible?' He pointed out that manufacturers of home appliances had an interest in speedy returns.

## Enthusiasm for prolonged viewing

According to Hirsch (2004), there are both established and new forms in the domestication of consumption of technologies. Domestication normally encourages people to apply both strategies. In respect of the digitalisation of television, therefore, it is important to evaluate the extent to which this changed old practices and how much it brought in new ones.

The Finnish data introduced here shows that the use of universal channels changes slowly. At the time of the interviews of this research (in summer 2007), the older age groups typically followed four main channels, but the younger ones watched also more target oriented channels like *Subtv* and *Voice*. According to the Finnpanel (2009) data, the share of the older and established TV channels run by the public service broadcaster YLE and its main commercial competitors (MTV Media and Nelonen Media) ran to 90 percent of all television viewing. On average, Finnish people watched five channels per day and nine channels per week. In 2001, before digitalisation, the average was five channels a week.

Pantzar and Shove (2006: 13) point out that objects and practices of consumption are not only born and developed but also fade and die. The research on consumption has mainly concentrated on the birth of practices and innovations, and problems of dissolution and 'fossilisation' have stayed outside the mainstream. People create new practices, become used to them, but also abandon them.

There is a big cultural gap between the generations in media consumption and competence. Media use is in the middle of a major transition, of which the practice of prolonged viewing, which makes it possible to pause viewing and continue later, is a good example. The research evidence on this practice is still scarce, but there is already data on the impact of the recording capacity of set-top boxes. The Finnpanel (2009) survey entitles the result 'Recording set-top boxes increase television user comfort'.

The main share of television viewing continued to consist of live programming, with news, current affairs and sport as main examples. According to Finnpanel's evaluation, in the case of some programmes, watching recorded material had already increased total viewing time by 30 to 50 per cent. The most popular recorded materials were foreign and domestic series. Typically the recorded programmes were viewed within 24 hours of the original transmission. The practice was most popular among the 25–44 age group and in families with children.

In our research data, there were few direct references to the above kind of changes in viewing practices. But the visions and expectations expressed demonstrated that one could forecast a change in a similar direction. The most common vision was to connect television and computer. Many families interviewed had considered the idea of watching television through computer, and, indeed, expected to do so. Many hoped for the option of an on-demand subscription to programmes, particularly through the Internet. The connection of television and the Internet would also enable the creation and use of personal programme archives.

### Towards intermedia use

The references to 'intermedia' or 'polymedia' use with a number of attributes were common in our research data. In a family from Porvoo, for example, a 34-year old man and 30-year old woman, representing late adopters, used to check the TV pages of newspapers and the web page of *Big Brother*. Both said that they had stayed with *Big Brother* despite skipping watching the programme itself. They also read about the key events in this reality show in a free circulation newspaper, *Metro*, the popular afternoon papers and weekend section *NYT* of the biggest newspaper, *Helsingin Sanomat*. The woman pointed out that it was important to know about *Big Brother* for making friends and following things generally. The web page information about almost

all programmes was enough, she thought, to keep one up-to-date and able to join in coffee-table chats, even if one skipped actually watching the programmes themselves.

Using the Internet for watching television was common among the interviewees, but only one reported having tried digital streaming of television channels by inserting a TV card into a PC. Following television through the Internet offered clear bonuses, like background information about programmes. The couple from Porvoo was an interesting case of intermedial use; they followed television but did not own a television set prior to the switch-over. When contacted later in February 2008, they reported having purchased a TV set.

It seems that television is an important factor in motivating people toward intermedial use. In this sense, the data reflects televisualisation, a factor, which Herkman (2005: 264–269) connects with television's impact on newspapers, in particular, the popular papers which in Finland are identified as afternoon papers. Televisualisation and audiovisualisation of the Internet are also apparent; including web versions of the newspapers. Some newspapers characterize their web pages as 'web television', but others avoid reference to television, although the content might consist of only moving images, videos or video portals (Mäenpää and Männistö 2009: 101–102). Most newspapers describe the audiovisual supply of their web pages as 'net TV' or simply 'videos'.

In our research data, the discourse on intermedial use was frequent. Television channels have brought and created services for the Internet that have accelerated the use of television services through the Internet. The consequent new user practices reflect that television as equipment has lost some of its previous importance. An interesting programme and related content is followed independent of source and technology.

The web pages of *Pikku Kakkonen* (*The Little Two*), one of the most traditional public service children's programmes on TV2, were known to many young families. One such, for example, was a three-member family from Nokia that lived in a terrace house but dreamed

of a villa. Their interest in house construction programmes and associated web pages had turned almost into a hobby, reminiscent of the cross-media interest orientation of the Porvoo family without a television (above).

The 29-year old woman in the family said that she visited the web page of the television programme *Sillä silmällä* (*Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*) just for a quick look. The man (30) explained about the web pages of the house construction programmes, like *Remontti Reiska*.<sup>4</sup> He had also found a good construction programme (*Paikat kuntoon*)<sup>5</sup> on the web page of the local TV station TV-Tampere. In *Remontti Reiska* a house is built and viewers can vote on, for example, the selection of roof material. The couple also used the web pages of food and cooking programmes when looking for recipes.

Situation in life influences viewing. In interviewed families with children, the youngest watched *Pikku Kakkonen* (*The Little Two*) and somewhat older *The Simpsons*, with adults. Digital television brought more channels and target group channels in particular. The web pages of many channels and programmes offer archives and links. In this way, the Internet extends channels and programmes to cross-media and, consequently, digitalisation increases intermedial use.

The middle-aged parents of a family in Pälkäne did not read print newspapers, but occasionally followed net versions of newspapers. Television was their dominant medium and it was on continuously. The woman watched all the soaps. They actively visited the web pages of television channels and programmes. Their use of the Internet at home was changed in part because of the increased Internet use of their teenage children (14 and 17-year old sons). Both parents had a college education and used a computer and the Internet at work.

Consumers are inventive and creative. They employ devices for several uses and make combinations of them to suit their own purposes. An example is a retired woman from Helsinki who not only was keen to use her computer to chat with friends through Skype connection, but was also able to link her computer to the television in order to screen photos of a joint event for her hobby community.

The above example not only demonstrates intermedial use but also the new role of women in the domestication of media technology. For instance, the 30-year old woman from Porvoo felt ready to skip the television set and purchase instead a digital stick for her computer. She took care of all the media equipment in the home and was considering setting up a separate media room where they would be able to watch programmes with a video projector. The idea reflected criticism towards the viewing routines of her family; television was on all night regardless of whether anyone was watching it or not. Her media use was divided according to content. When searching for daily news she turned to the net version of *Helsingin Sanomat* and to YLE's web page, but for more background she looked in the print newspaper.

### Cross-over, side-by-side and parallel to each other

Established media practices represent often people's media rituals which they inherit in their childhood environment. Typically, in Finland at least, it is only when starting their own families that people may change their consumption habits. However, even inside the family setting children and young people often have clearly different media practices from their parents (Noppari et al. 2008: 30–37, 39–53, 152–154, 165–166, Inkinen 2005: 12). The new media practices are typically cross-media oriented, the older ones more media specific.

Herkman says that the media reality of Finnish children and young people changed in the 1990s both for content and technology. Regarding content, the main change concerned the role of television and film, while in the case of technology, the change was characterised by the breakthrough of three media technologies: console and computer games, the Internet and mobile phones. These new technologies now constitute the media environment of children and young people, side-by-side with (traditional) television and other media. (Herkman 2001: 60–61.)

The media use of children and young people illuminates new literacies and practices which their parents do not necessarily recognise in their own experience. Several media operate in parallel to each other, and usage of this kind of simultaneous (poly-media) facility is widespread among children and young people. When using a computer, one may listen to music from another source; when watching television one may at the same time read magazines (Noppari et al. 2008, 40). Lankshear and Knobel describe this kind of activity as 'multitasking' – although 'multimediatasking' might be better – to mean a 'poly-media' and 'poly-sense' activity based on glancing and absent-minded consumption (Lankshear and Knobel 2007: 14–15, Noppari et al. 2008: 40).

Among the interviewees, especially the younger ones, many reported using media in a cross-over and side-by-side style, including simultaneously. The under 20s reported playing music from the Internet or radio while doing their homework and other activities. Television was often on in the background. A 17-year old from Pälkäne used digital television as radio, switched it on in the morning and listened to YLE's youth channel YleX as a background for morning activities.

A retired 60-year old man from Nokia was a real TV freak, for whom television also acted as a 'cross-medium'. His outlook, despite his age, was exceptionally intermedia oriented. His media day opened by switching on the television upon waking up; during morning activities, one television set was on, normally YLE's TV1, like a radio for many others to which the man might listen simultaneously. He was the only interviewee to mention digital radio, to which he also had listened. After morning activities, the man read a local newspaper and thereafter checked teletext services. He went through all TV1's 300 teletext pages and then switched to MTV3, Nelonen and Subtv, representing commercial competitors of the public service YLE.

During the day-time the man often watched videos, but in the evening 'started the real thing'. His viewing rituals were exceptional: in the evening at least three television sets were on, and at most five. He watched mainly one of the sets, but glanced at the others also. For

a while would he put on a DVD or a video. 'Such a mixed cocktail it is.' What did he watch? His diet was of a full menu style; news, current affairs, documentaries, series, entertainment, sport, whatever.

The man articulated the significance of television in terms of intermedial and hybrid characterisation. 'That one package gives me news, music, radio programmes, morning paper (teletext) and the programmes of the day.' He consulted the web pages of television channels when a new programme was to be introduced. The man's media use practices combined in a personal way the old established rituals and newly developed practices (cf. Hirsch 2004). The man had an enormous archive of CDs and VHS tapes: video tapes were still in active use. His list of future purchases included a recording set-top box. In addition, he had a big folder of descriptions about new Nokia mobile phones, which helped him to keep track of developments in the mobile world.

### About the construction of medium relationship

The background for people's medium relationship lies in their life history and, as with life itself, continuously changes and transforms. The interviews reported here showed that people's relationship to media was challenged by the launch of a new medium for the market. The same person and family might turn out to be an early adopter of one medium but a late adopter of another. The consumption culture of each generation frames their medium relationship. Our data points out that the articulation of a medium relationship varied not only by age but also by life situation. The clearest peak of television viewing appeared with the birth of the first child in a family, when the child acted as a mediator and gave a rhythm for viewing. Another peak was brought on by retirement, when the viewing became ritualised and gave a rhythm to everyday life.

Historically, the eras characterised by the long history of newspapers, radio and television each resulted in a certain level of dominant identification with a specific medium. Media-related rituals and fan relationships were formed. Consumers identified themselves as newspaper people, radio freaks and fans of television, consciously and unconsciously. The medium relationship was clear.

With new media and digitalisation, however, the variety of media proliferated and the identification changed character. It is not, any more, about identification with a particular medium but rather with certain programmes, content, services, and activities. The users follow their favourite content across different media, and the medium itself remains a pure mediator. This corresponds to what the Danish media scholar Klaus Bruhn Jensen argues about the increased importance of modalities like genres in the context of networked media and communications (Jensen 2010: 85–87).

The above transformation applies in particular to children, young people and young adults (people below 35). They follow their favourite genres and objects of interest and search for information across several media, according to varying situations and needs. Their media use is cross-media oriented and intermedial. The establishment of a new medium relationship requires continuous use. The younger generations use the Internet continuously, albeit sometimes irregularly. The signs of their changing medium relationships are clear and numerous.

The adults of the three-member family in Nokia, living in an antenna household, considered their media use and medium relationship as follows. They still followed the news through newspapers, but checked daily the net versions of afternoon papers. They thought the information in the net was quick but superficial, as often in television news. The family owned a basic DVD player, a set-top box and a PC which was due to be renewed. The wife had a communicator which offered an access to the Internet, a source mainly for checking bus time-tables.

A special feature of the argumentation among younger generations was spatiality, particularly in relation to the Internet. They visited services like *You Tube*, *IRC Gallery*, *Habbo Hotel*, identified as spaces, including chat rooms and hobby groups. Their media relationship was characterised by communication, messaging, playing games and action in the social media. Among the older adults, the relationship with new media technology depended most clearly on whether they used a computer in their work or not. For young people, the most apparent factors were their relationships with parents, school and friends and the income level of the family. In school, the young people learnt basic knowledge and practice about computers, but playing games, net surfing and similar activities opened up in the circle of friends. In our research data, all interviewed young people had that opportunity.

A typical intermedia user seemed to be acquainted and felt safe with the new media technology. Discursively the relationship was relaxed, despite the technical problems of the digital switch-over and particularly in cases of self-critical understatement, typical to many female interviewees. The use and competence defined the relationship with media technology. If computer competences were low, the relationship with technology was distant. On the other hand, intermedial use increased competence and resulted in a stronger relationship with the new media; which again reduced the resistance to and/or difficulty of adopting ever more new media and technologies.

The intermedially oriented medium relationship increased the potentials of media users for the information society. It narrowed the digital gap in which some late adopters and the old people remained because of the enforced digital switch-over. The 'consumer-citizens' of the information society are supposed to be able to use the developed information technology.

From the point of view of children's information technology competences, the media environment of the interviewed families was rather rich and multi-faceted. Children generally had good competences and their role in the family turned up-side down compared to the family viewing, where the father mastered the remote control and

dominated knowledge of technology. As our data illuminates, today the dominant role may go to the woman in the family or even more probably to the younger generation.

## Conclusion

The research data presented here shows that overall, the interviewees saw digitalisation in a positive light, but at the same time the way the switch-over was implemented in Finland, with many unsolved technological problems, was strongly criticised. The unrealised promises and expectations of interactivity were a disappointment. The way interviewees articulated the relationship between the old television and the new digital television was dependent on whether they lived within the terrestrial antenna system or in a cable household. The former had, in general, a more positive view of digitalisation.

Children, young people and the younger adults articulated digitalisation in the most positive terms. Employing Moscovici's categories, one can say that they objectified digital television with references to several new media. The 60s typically preferred the old system; it was considered reliable and better. As to the categorisation of adopters, the late adopters were most suspicious of the reform. The argumentation of the older generations reflected a fear of technology and change. They emphasised the reliability and other good aspects of the old technology. The younger ones were more proactive in their relationship with technology. They wanted often to tailor digital TV and other media to their own needs. Also their media environment was more developed and multi-faceted than in the case of older generations.

Media use is changing remarkably through digitalisation. The repertoire of media use expands continuously towards a more intermedially oriented use. Our data show that the use of digital television is still based on established conventions, but that intermedial use and orientation increases parallel to that. There are big differences in the

media practices of different generations. Older people act according to the old conventions, while the young change their practices continuously. The latter ones follow television programmes through several media, side-by-side. The televisualisation of afternoon papers makes it easy to follow the events and characters of TV shows through newspapers. The use of the web pages of channels and programmes also becomes more common. In addition to age, the life situation of the interviewed families strongly framed their media practices.

The circulation of media content is increasingly participatory of nature (Jenkins 2006, 3). Rather than talking about media producers and consumers as occupying separate roles, writes Jenkins, we might now see them as participants who interact with each other according to a new set of rules that none of us fully understands. The new participatory media culture contrasts with older notions of passive media spectatorship (*ibid.*). This kind of participatory culture was clearly visible in the research data. The younger generations objectified digital television by linking it with attributes, images and visual as well as symbolic interpretations of the new media conventions and practices. This kind of articulation was central in their intermedial orientation. Media were used in a crossover fashion, side-by-side, simultaneously, and with a continuous comparison of uses and content.

Digital television was articulated as an 'intermedial hybrid'. The use of and talk about digital television reflected its hybrid nature in several ways; it was used for viewing and listening, as a teletext service and also as game equipment and for screening DVDs. The hybrid dimensions characterised the intermedially oriented user relationship. Television was followed not only through a television set but also through PC and the Internet, and intertextually on radio and on the web pages of newspapers. The time shift dimension of television viewing is increasing with the use of recordings, prolonged viewing and video-on-demand services as well as through DVDs. The ritualistic use of television based on the daily rhythm of the programme flow is breaking down.

Intermedial use demonstrated a relaxed medium and technology relationship. The so-called 'Diderot effect', of good competences in one technology making it easier to master another, was reflected in the articulation of the interviewees. The constitution of cross-media oriented media relationships and the consequently relaxed relationship with technology increased the users' information society competence. In so far as people managed to deal with the challenges of the new technology, they remained connected, as it were, on the safe side of the digital gap which threatens to widen because of the growing speed of changes.

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## Endnotes

1. The category 'late adopter' is taken from Rogers' model concerning the diffusion of innovations (Rogers 2003: 155–157, 282–286).
2. Activities for the public to engage with at museums, for example, are regularly termed 'interactive' – indicating the transposition of digital culture to the framing role of a medial discourse of society.
3. Today, TV Everywhere, a new form of Digital Video Recording is spreading based on ideas of cloud computing. It enables distant viewing of centrally stored personal video recordings through an Internet connection.
4. The name can be translated to '*Renovation Reiska*' – the notion of Reiska characterises a male who is skilled to fix things.
5. The name could be translated to '*How to Fix Your Places*'.