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## **RESEARCHING THE AMBIVALENT ROLE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN ENABLING EDUCATIONAL PARTICIPATION OF YOUNG REFUGEES**

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In 2015 an unprecedented number of young refugees came to Germany. Since their arrival, coping with the experience of forced migration and finding a place in a new country proves to be essential for their everyday life. Against this background, the question emerges, what role digital media do play in terms of benefits and risks when it comes to overcoming barriers in participation and education. So far, the relevance of digital media (and associated practices) for young refugees in formal (school), non-formal (youth welfare) and informal (leisure) educational contexts is scarcely investigated. Thus, the a) contradictory dynamics that are connected with digital media, b) different meanings of digital media in young people's lives in general and c) the dimension of vulnerability of this special target group, are researched in an ethnographical approach.

Digital media, such as smartphones, apps and learning tools, can be valuable in different spheres of (everyday) life and are discussed controversially regarding their potential for education (Erstad, 2012). Research on the issue of educational and digital inequality points to the relevance of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1987) in the context of digital media use (Angus, 2007; Iske et al., 2008; Lareau, 2011; Paus-Hasebrink et al., 2019). An interplay of educational disadvantages at the subject level as well as institutional structures at the context level is therefore assumed. Against this background, digital opportunities can be accompanied by risks of social and digital exclusion, potentially undermining educational participation and supporting social reproduction (Sefton-Green/Livingstone, 2020). Across all continents, there is an insufficient evidence base with regard to policy and practice of digital media in educational contexts (Livingstone et al., 2017).

With reference to marginalized groups, such as young refugees and the potential of digital media, studies have shown the everyday relevance of digital media for refugees as an essential tool (Chamarkeh, 2013; Alam/Imran, 2015). While refugees face a range of restrictions in social participation in the receiving countries, e.g. regarding education, health care and access to labor and housing market (Kutscher, 2017), the question comes up, in what way digital media have a function for coping processes in this context. So far, first indications exist regarding the supportive role of mobile media for certain learning and appropriation processes (Gillespie et al., 2016; Kutscher/Kress, 2019) as well as for self-empowerment (Witteborn, 2015; Trujillo, 2018). At the same time, digital spaces are not detached from power and inequality relationships: Resources and general conditions (e.g. socioeconomic status) decisively shape the use of digital media (in general: DiMaggio/Hargittai, 2001; Buckingham, 2007; Livingstone/Haddon, 2009; Paus-Hasebrink et al., 2019; in respect to refugees: Kutscher/Kress, 2018) and existing disadvantages persist respectively are being reproduced in digital spaces (see Ermel/Stüwe, 2019, 10). Marginalized groups also face greater risks concerning issues of privacy and surveillance (Gangadharan, 2017). In Europe, the evaluation of mobile phone data of refugees for identity verification is already in widespread use (Metcalf/Dencik, 2019). In residential institutions, digital media can have conflicting meanings of support and control (Kutscher/Kress, 2015).

The joint research project of University of Cologne and Leuphana University Lüneburg, funded by the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, examines the question of the importance of digital media in the everyday life of young refugees for their educational participation using an ethnographic approach. Against the background of subjectively unequal conditions and the structural reproduction of digital inequalities as a challenge for digital educational contexts and activities, the research aims at identifying enabling and restricting conditions for participation of refugee youth in different educational arrangements. To avoid a “methodological localism” (Nieswand, 2008, 78), the young people are being followed into their different everyday contexts in a multi-sited ethnography (Falzon, 2009), starting in the institutional settings of child and youth welfare institutions and schools. In a transorganisational perspective (Schröer, 2013) the practices of young refugees as well as of pedagogical staff and other actors in the different structures are reconstructed following a praxeological approach (Schatzki, 1996). The focus is on where and in what way – embedded in arranged pedagogical (in school, in tutoring, in youth welfare contexts) as well as informal practices (e.g. in the family, with peers, etc.) – educational and self-organized appropriation processes take place and digital media become relevant in overcoming or producing barriers to participation. Education is understood as a (partially medially moderated) transformative process (Bildung), which goes hand in hand with a change of world and self-relationships and with the acquisition of orientation knowledge for coping with unknown situations (Jörissen/Marotzki, 2009) The methodological and methodical approach in the ethnography of the project identifies and analyzes both explicit and pedagogically planned as well as implicit and spontaneous practices with and in the context of digital media including participant observations in the sense of “follow-the-actor” in the respective everyday contexts of the young refugees, field discussions and interviews with different actors as well as artifact analyzes (Lueger/Froschauer, 2018) of the relevant digital media. Over 20 adolescents aged 12-24 years are participating during three ethnographic field phases. The data are interpreted according to the grounded

theory methodology (Strauss/Corbin, 1996). Ethical questions of forced migration research (Kleist, 2015), such as participation in the research process and sensitivity for dealing with the limits of privacy, represent, in addition to the "dual imperative" of the application-oriented benefit of the research process for the participants (Unger, 2018), continuous reflective references for the research team in methodological and methodological terms.

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