

# Supplemental Material

## Selecting, avoiding, disconnecting: A focus group study of people’s strategies for dealing with information abundance in the contexts of news, entertainment, and personal communication

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<b>SM1 Screening survey</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>SM2 Sample description</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>SM3 Interview guide</b> .....	<b>5</b>
<b>SM4 Codebook</b> .....	<b>7</b>
<b>References</b> .....	<b>9</b>

## SM1 Screening survey

Participants for our study were recruited using various strategies to reach people of different backgrounds, including: the distribution of leaflets in cities via students, friends, and family; social media posts in various Facebook and LinkedIn groups; direct emails to various organizations of the Swiss community (e.g., church communities, military, choirs, sports associations). In our communication we claimed that the study aims to explore the role that media play in Swiss peoples' lives without mentioning information abundance. Flyers, emails, and social media posts directed participants to a website about the study (see figure 1), which explained the procedure of participant and included a link to a screening survey.

The pre-survey asked potential participants for:

- (a) demographic information: their age, gender, citizenship, canton, occupation,
- (b) media use: frequency of internet use, smartphone use, tablet use, TV use, radio use, print news use, other media use, and digital confidence
- (c) contact information: email and/or phone number.

108 individuals participated in the screening survey. We used this data to select individuals for our study and ensure diversity, mainly focusing on age, gender, and education. Frequency of media use or digital confidence were neither an inclusion or exclusion criterion for the study. We excluded individuals with a background in communication science and those without Swiss citizenship.

After we selected and invited participants to a focus group interview, we informed them in detail about our study, adhering to APA ethical standards:

- Prior to the interview, they received a fact sheet per email, including information about the participants' right to interrupt study participation at any time, the voluntariness of the study, confidentiality, and data protection.
- Before the interview started, participants all signed an informed consent form.
- During the interview, we asked the participants again if they agreed to be video recorded before the start of the Zoom recording.
- After the interviews, participants received a debrief via email.

Figure 1. Recruitment Website Screenshot (05/05/2022)



## Medien im Alltag

### Herzlich Willkommen!

Wir danken Ihnen sehr für Ihr Interesse an unserer Studie "Medien im Alltag". Wir möchten besser verstehen, wie Schweizerinnen und Schweizer die heute verfügbaren Kommunikations- und Informationsmedien im Alltag nutzen und erleben. **Unsere Studie besteht aus einer kurzen Online-Umfrage und einer virtuellen Gruppendiskussion (ca. 1 Stunde).**

### Wie kann ich teilnehmen?

**Schritt 1:** Nehmen Sie noch heute an einer **kurzen Online-Umfrage** teil, damit wir Sie besser kennenlernen können. Wir möchten beispielsweise wissen, wie alt Sie sind, welchen Bildungsabschluss Sie haben und wie oft Sie täglich das Internet nutzen. Diese Informationen benötigen wir, um Sie für die in Schritt 2 beschriebenen Gruppengespräche einzuteilen.

➤ Über diesen Link kommen Sie direkt zur Umfrage. Es dauert nicht länger als 5 Minuten und Sie können unsere Fragen am Smartphone, Tablet oder PC beantworten.

**Schritt 2:** Basierend auf den Ergebnissen der kurzen Online-Umfrage, werden wir Sie zu einem **Gruppengespräch im April** (vor und nach Ostern) mit bis zu sieben anderen Personen einladen. Die Gespräche finden online (auf Zoom) statt und dauern circa eine Stunde. **Ihre Teilnahme an einem Gruppengespräch vergüten wir mit CHF 30.**

Wir werden Sie Anfang April 2022 kontaktieren und Ihnen mögliche Termine für ein Gruppengespräch vorschlagen. Wir werden Ihnen dann auch weitere Informationen zum Ablauf des Gesprächs geben (z.B. technische Hinweise zu Zoom und zur Vergütung). Selbstverständlich werden alle gesetzlichen Bestimmungen des Datenschutzes eingehalten.

### Studienleitung

## SM2 Sample description

The final sample consisted of 40 individuals, who participated in the focus group discussions on Zoom.

We divided participants into two age groups (Table 2): Four of our groups were aged 20-40 years (18 participants), another four groups were aged 50-79 years (22 participants). Participants are almost equally distributed in terms of gender (19 women, 21 men). More than half of the participants hold a university degree which is more than the proportion of people with tertiary education in Switzerland<sup>1</sup>. Individuals came from 13 out of 21 German-speaking Swiss cantons; people from rural areas were underrepresented.

37 participants reported in the screening survey that they use the internet at least 6 to 10 times a day; two participants reported they used it 4 to 6 times a day; one participant used the internet only about 4 to 6 days a week.

Participants in the younger age groups (aged 20-40 years) felt much more confident about using digital media than the older age groups (aged 48-79 years).

*Table 2. Sample description*

Age group	Partici- pants	Female	Age		Higher ed.	Internet use		Digital confidence	
			M	SD		M	SD	M	SD
„Young“ (20-40)	18	49	27.9	5.45	61	1.3	0.46	4.8	0.81
„Old“ (48-79)	22	49	60.9	9.16	50	1.9	0.94	3.6	1.00
Overall	40	49	46.0	18.28	55	1.6	0.81	4.2	1.08

Notes. Internet use was measured on a 8-point frequency scale: 1 always / more than 10 times a day – 8 less than once a week. Digital confidence was measured on a 5-point scale: 1 not at all – 5 very much

<sup>1</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2019\\_CN\\_CHE.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/education/education-at-a-glance/EAG2019_CN_CHE.pdf)

## SM3 Interview guide

We developed a semi-structured interview guide based on our research questions and previous research (Kaiser, 2014). It consisted of four thematic blocks (Part I-IV) and ten open-ended questions (Q1-10) (see table 1) and was designed open and flexible to allow new themes to emerge.

For the present study, we specifically analyzed the responses to Q7 and Q8 in the third thematic block (Part III), which asked for the strategies people use to navigate the abundance. However, participants mentioned strategies also throughout the interview.

In order to ascertain whether participants perceived abundance at all, in the first thematic block (Part I), we asked them to reflect on the changes they perceived in the media landscape over the past years (Q2). Abundance was mentioned as one of the most important changes in all focus groups, which allowed us to transition to the second thematic block (Part II) and continue with questions about their experience of abundance in different media contexts. After discussing both negative and positive aspects related to abundance, we moved to the third thematic block (Part III) and asked about the strategies they use to deal with the abundance in different media contexts. We concluded the interview in the fourth thematic block (Part IV) by asking all participants for a concluding statement on their assessment of abundance.

*Table 1. Interview guide*

<b>Introduction to the study</b>  [Welcome and background on the study]
<b>Part I: Description of the media environment</b> (10 minutes)  <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Q1: Could you illustrate what media you use in your everyday life? For example, today, what media did you use today and for what purpose?</li><li>- Q2: Thinking beyond your personal media use, and reflecting about the information or media environment that surrounds us on a daily basis: what has changed compared to the past? By "in the past" I mean, for example, in the last 10 (for older people: the last 10 to 20) years?</li></ul>
<b>Part II: Experience of abundance</b> (20 minutes)  Some of you have already touched on an aspect that is of particular interest to us. And that is the amount or volume of information [in the contexts mentioned by participants: news, entertainment, personal communication] that surrounds us every day.  <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- Q3: How do you perceive this volume? Are there rather too many offers [in the contexts mentioned: news, entertainment, personal communication] today or are there too few offers?</li><li>- Q4: Do you find anything good about the fact that there are so many offers [in the contexts mentioned by participants: news, entertainment, personal communication] available to us today?</li></ul>

- Q5: Do you find anything problematic about the fact that there are so many offers [in the contexts mentioned by participants: news, entertainment, personal communication] surrounding us today?

**Part III: Navigating abundance (20 minutes)**

- Q6: I would now like to ask everyone to recall a specific situation in your everyday life in which the amount of offers particularly disturbed you? How did you feel in this situation?
- Q7: If you consider the amount of offers [in the contexts mentioned: news, entertainment, personal communication] as overloading or negative, how do you deal with it?
- Q8: Do you use any particular strategies or solutions to deal (well) with the information supply [in the contexts mentioned by participants: news, entertainment, personal communication]?

**Part IV: Assessing abundance (7 minutes)**

We are now nearing the end of our discussion.

- Q9: In conclusion, how would you rate the availability of information and entertainment? Under which conditions or in which areas is it rather good or rather bad?
- Q10: Last but not least, I would like to hear from everyone what they take away from today's discussion for their personal media use in everyday life.

Closing

- Does anyone else have anything that wasn't addressed in the conversation but might be of interest now?

[Thank you]

# SM4 Codebook

## Structure of the codebook

A structured approach to qualitative content analysis was used (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2019) to identify and organize patterns of meaning, combining deductive and inductive categories. Existing concepts from the literature were used to identify and organize the data into key categories. This involved, for example, the three contexts (news, entertainment, personal communication), the three levels (content, source, device), or overload. New themes led to the inductive development of categories, which were organized through the strategy of subsumption under existing categories (Schreier, 2012). For example, positive or ambivalent experiences and assessments of abundance were inductively developed as well as many of the more nuanced descriptions of changes in the media environment.

The codebook is available on: <https://osf.io/fkrqp/>

The following provides an overview of the structure of the codebook.

### (1) Descriptions of changes of media environment

- Abundance (e.g., plenty of information)
- Content characteristics (e.g., trash, fake news)
- Connectedness (e.g., permanent online)
- Variety (e.g., viewpoints)
- Accessibility (e.g., high choice)
- Digitalization (e.g., on-demand)
- Public discourse (e.g., incivility)
- Speed (e.g., fast)

### (2) Experience of abundance

- Contexts in which abundance is experienced
  - o News
  - o Entertainment
  - o Personal communication
  - o Other (work, advertising, etc.)
- Levels at which abundance is experienced
  - o Content abundance
  - o Source abundance
  - o Device abundance
- Individual-level consequences of abundance experience
  - o Negative: overload (e.g., emotional drain, stress, or decreased well-being)
  - o Positive: appreciation (e.g., high choice, helpful, or increased well-being)
  - o Ambivalent/indifferent: positive and negative or no consequences

### (3) Strategies to navigate abundance

- Strategies to manage information flow
  - o Select (e.g., filter, prioritize, process)
- Strategies to reject or withdraw from information flow
  - o Avoid (e.g., refuse, bypass)
  - o Disconnect (e.g. discontinue, quit, delete)
- Self-reported lack of strategies or need for strategies
- Individual-level consequences of strategy use

- Helpful
- Not helpful (e.g., fear of missing out)

(4) Concluding assessment of abundance

- Negative (“too much”)
- Ambivalent (“double edged sword”) or indifferent (“does not affect me”)
- Positive (“right amount”)
- Negative (“too few”)

**Intercoder reliability**

All transcripts were double-coded, but we did not attempt to determine the reliability of the coding framework with inter-rater reliability scores because coding was understood to be a reflexive process (Schreier, 2012). Given that reflexivity of the researchers is central to qualitative research, we took notes after each focus group interview and continuously questioned the values and ideologies of us as the researchers, and discussed these related to the results’ interpretation.



## References

Rädiker, S., & Kuckartz, U. (2019). *Analyse qualitativer Daten mit MAXQDA. Text, Audio und Video* [Analyzing qualitative data with MAXQDA: Text, audio, and video]. Springer VS. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-22095-2>

Schreier, M. (2012). *Qualitative Content Analysis in Practice*. Sage.