Digital media consumption and its environmental impact

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1. Aim of the study

The aim is to evaluate the environmental impact of digital media use by young people in Switzerland.

- Which aspects of digital media use are environmentally relevant?
- Which environmental benefits arise from digital media use?
- Which recommendations can be given to young people?

Recommendations from this study were used to promote environmentally-friendly behaviour among young people with a communication campaign.
1. Aim of the study

From an LCA-perspective, the following questions are interesting:

• **Which activities** do young people pursue?
  
  - watching videos, e-mailing, chatting, browsing, gaming,
  
  - using social media, listening to music, phoning or watching TV

• **Which devices** do young people use?
  
  - Mobile phones, tablets, laptops, desktops, televisions

• What is the **environmental impact** of their behavior?

• **Which aspects** of their behaviour are relevant?

• **Which recommendations** can be given based on this analysis?
1. Project team: Three ZHAW research groups

**Life Cycle Assessment**
Regula Keller, Matthias Stucki, René Itten

**Sustainability Communication and Environmental Education**
Linda Miesler, Urs Müller, Verena Berger

**School of Applied Psychology, Section Media Psychology**
Lilian Suter, Gregor Waller
2. Goal and Scope

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2. Data sources: Survey on use

- Online questionnaire completed by **800 young people** (12 – 24 years) in 2017, both in school classes and individually.
- Data were adapted to represent the average Swiss young person taking into account:
  - age, **sex**, education level and **urbanity** (suburban areas vs. rural areas)
2. Data sources: Use and ownership

- From survey:
  - Duration of different activities
  - Internet connection (WLAN / mobile network)
  - Lifespan of mobile phone (2 years)*

- Other sources: recent Swiss studies
  - Lifespan of other devices (Thiébaud, 2017)
  - Data on ownership of devices (JAMES, 2016)
  - → 99% possess mobile, 30% possess TV

* Swiss average for the mobile phone is 3.3 years (Thiébaud, 2017)
2. Data sources: Hardware

- **Hardware: End devices**
  - **Router, desktop, screen:** ecoinvent data v. 3.5 from 2018
  - **Mobile phone, tablet, laptop, television:** Data from Green Media Calculator
  - **Mobile phone, tablet, laptop, and router was adapted:** Chinese electricity mix added to correspond to GWP* results published by Apple
  - **Resources** in inventory data corrected: 1kg of Indium has an actual input of 1kg of Indium. Dissipative use assumed, since Indium cannot be industrially retrieved.
2. Data sources: Data transfer

- Data transfer
  - Energy use and hardware considered
  - Data based on **Green Media Calculator** (Hischier et al., 2015b; Hischier et al., 2013a)
  - Hardware for data transfer is based on **router** from ecoinvent, adapted: Also Chinese electricity mix added to correspond to GWP* results published by Apple

* GWP = **Global Warming Potential**
2. Impact assessment methods

• Ecological scarcity method

2013, v.1.06

(Frischknecht et al., 2013)

• Results calculated with

SimaPro, Version 9.0.3.32

(PRé Consultants, 2019)
3. Modelling Approach
3. General structure of modelling

Hardware: End Device

- Idling (electricity demand modem in stand-by and device)
- Usage of devices (data, direct electricity demand)

Usage (incl. data transfer)

- Using background functions (e.g. GPS)

Environmental impact of digital media use
3. Modelling of devices and usage

• Which devices were analyzed?
  • Focus on **common** devices with multiple functions
  • Mobile phone, tablet, laptop, desktop and television
  • No other devices taken into account

• Which aspects of usage were analyzed?
  • Direct **electricity** demand devices
  • **Data** (WLAN or mobile network; data transfer; data centres)
  • **Duration** of activities
4. Inventory data
4. Duration of activities

→ **Mobile phone** is used most; mainly used for **chatting**

→ **Watching videos** accounts for a lot of use on all devices

*Source: Suter, L., & Waller, G. (2017b).*
4. End devices: Lifetime and ownership

Life time end devices
(Source: Mobile phone from the study «JAMES» from Waller et al., 2016. Others from Thiébaud et al., 2016)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Mobile phone</th>
<th>Tablet</th>
<th>Laptop</th>
<th>Desktop</th>
<th>Television</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Service life time in years</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

End devices per young person
(Source: Study «JAMES» from Waller et al.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>unit</th>
<th>Mobile phone</th>
<th>Tablet</th>
<th>Laptop</th>
<th>Desktop</th>
<th>Television</th>
<th>source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Proportion with their own device</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>(Waller et al., 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proportion with device in household</td>
<td>%</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>(Waller et al., 2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devices per person (personal &amp; share of household devices)</td>
<td>[p]</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>calculated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Results
4. Usage of digital devices per day (eco-points) calculated with user data from survey

- **Devices** have highest impact (personal & shared in household): 78% of total impact
- Follow-up project «Lifesaving» aims at extending the lifespan of hardware
- Television has a high share of use (27%): data provision in data centres (23%), direct electricity demand (3%), data transfer (< 0.1%)
- Television is most relevant in terms of impact (> 50% from total)
4. Usage of digital devices per day (eco-points per day)
calculated with user data from survey

→ Relevant impact categories are: Mineral resources, climate change, air & water pollution

→ Indium is responsible for 65% of the impact in the category mineral resource use (of which TV: 50%)
## 4. Assumptions for daily substitution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Substituted product</th>
<th>amount</th>
<th>unit</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Book</td>
<td>0.011</td>
<td>Pieces per day</td>
<td>Replaced by audiobooks and digital books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newspaper</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>Pieces per day</td>
<td>5 newspapers per week minus digitally read newspaper = 1.8 per week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camera</td>
<td>2.2 * 10^{-4}</td>
<td>Pieces per day</td>
<td>50% don’t have a camera; 75% because of mobile phone. lifetime: 5.3 years</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. Savings due to substitution (eco-points)

- Highest savings due to no need for a camera with multifunctional mobile phones
- Relevant savings for newspaper and books
4. Savings due to recycling mobile phone (eco-points)

- Assumption: All metals can be recycled and replace primary production
- Metal content of mobile phones based on Manhart et al. (2016)
- Max of 22% of environmental impact of the production of a mobile phone can be reduced if metals of a mobile phone can be fully recuperated.
5. Conclusions
5. Conclusions

Devices – improvement options

• Fewer devices = fewer impacts
• **Smaller devices** have lower environmental impact
• **Sharing** devices instead of buying new ones
• **Maximise lifetime**, reduce number of devices

Usage – improvement options

• Electricity demand is lower for smaller / portable devices
• Data transfer is not relevant;
• **Data provision** is only relevant for data-intensive use like high resolution TV.

**Multifunctionality** can reduce environmental impacts
5. Use of insights for communication campaign

Communication campaign was developed by the research group sustainability communication and environmental education in collaboration with myblueplanet.

Aim: Motivate young people to use their mobile phone longer, because

→ Hardware and its lifetime are crucial
→ 99% of all young people own a mobile phone

ugPhone

If you want to know more, visit www.ugphone.ch.
Questions?

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Bibliography

### Appendix: Duration of activities as table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration of usage in min/day</th>
<th>Mobile phone</th>
<th>Tablet</th>
<th>Laptop</th>
<th>Desktop</th>
<th>Television</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Video</td>
<td>24.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E-Mail</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chat</td>
<td>60.3</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet browsing</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gaming</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>36.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music</td>
<td>23.3</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Calls</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Television</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>63.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>184.9</strong></td>
<td><strong>24.1</strong></td>
<td><strong>56.4</strong></td>
<td><strong>47.3</strong></td>
<td><strong>63.4</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix: Access network via mobile data per megabyte data transfer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dataset</th>
<th>Amount and unit</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Output</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access Network, UMTS, 2010</td>
<td>1 MB</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Input</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Electricity, medium voltage {CH}</td>
<td>0.293 Wh / MB</td>
<td>(Schien, et al., 2013)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Appendix: Access network via home wlan router per megabyte data transfer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dataset</th>
<th>Amount and unit</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Output</strong></td>
<td>Access Network, home WLAN, 1 d basis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Input</strong></td>
<td>Electricity, low voltage {CH}</td>
<td>61.9 Wh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>market for</td>
<td>0.816 Wh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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