IDENTITY-RELATED MEDIA CONSUMPTION: BRIDGING THE LITERATURES FROM AUDIENCE RESEARCH, CONSUMER RESEARCH AND MATERIAL CULTURE STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

Although identity has been omnipresent in the typologies of media use defined by various theoretical frameworks within the field of media studies since 1940s until recent years, and simultaneously a consumer research staple for over twenty-five years, the lack of collaboration between audience research and interpretive consumer research discouraged a complex view of media consumption practice. To resolve that problem, we propose an integrative review of identity-related media consumption by building bridges between these two areas of knowledge - audience research and consumer research. The paper additionally employs a material culture perspective to highlight the role of materiality in specific forms of media. To illustrate the usefulness of this literature integration, we focus on the role of media in the identity projects of audience members and we further discuss other potential interpretive relationships between media consumers and media products.

Keywords: identity, media consumption, audience research, consumer research, material culture.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary consumption is a complex practice distancing itself over time from utilitarian perspective and encapsulating a broad range of meanings and levels of interpretation. Postmodernity offered a central position within its repertoire to the idea of identity construction through acts of bricolage and consumption adhered to it. Consumers flexibly build new identities from the resources available to them reconsidering constantly their self-conceptions. The present paper aims to look afresh at the audience members as consumers and at media products as commodities in order to explore the symbolic and material dimensions of media consumption within the broad framework of consumer society. Our first objective in this article is to review the conceptions of identity within audience research, consumer research and material

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culture studies. A second objective of this article is to connect the streams of literature and to thereby provide a more refined structure for the important processes and mechanisms that have emerged from this literature up until the present time. The final objective of this paper is to discuss the usefulness of this interdisciplinary approach to identity-related media consumption in relation to both old and new media.

**Conceptions of identity in audience research**

Over time, media consumption model oscillated between two poles within the field of media studies. At one pole there have been models of media consumption which stress the power of the media and implicitly treat media audiences as passive (e.g. the hypodermic needle theory). At the opposite pole stay the approaches viewing media consumption as an active process in which audience members actively select from a range of media materials and are equally active in their different uses and interpretations of the material which they consume (e.g. uses and gratifications theory). In the past twenty-five years, many voices claim the necessity to progress beyond this oscillation which has structured the field (Katz, 1992; Livingstone, 1993).

The phases of audience research have been systematized by Jensen and Rosengreen (1990) identifying five main traditions that can be summarized as follows: effects; uses and gratifications; literary criticism; cultural studies; and reception analysis. McQuail (1997) defined a somewhat more economical typology of audience research by delineating three major approaches: structural, behavioural and sociocultural. We will further review the literature of identity-related media consumption by employing McQuail’s typology given the fact that it provides us a more comprehensive structure for the present article.

The **structural tradition** can be equated with the audience measurement and it is reflected by the earliest kinds of audience research which were design to obtain the size and reach of radio audience and the reach of print publications by using mainly quantitative methods.

The **behavioural tradition** is dominated by media effects and media use. In the effects studies audience is conceptualized as exposed to influence and impact and is perceived as a passive recipient of media stimuli. In reaction to a model of direct effects, media use research viewed media users/consumers as active and in control of their media experience and not just passive recipients. This line of research focused on the motives for choice of media and media content. ‘Uses and Gratifications‘ is originating in this line of research but it is not considered strictly behavioural given the fact that its main focus is on the social origins of media gratifications. We will further present the history and current status of ‘Uses and Gratifications‘ Theory given its particular relevance to the present topic.

Nearly seven decades ago, in the 1948–49 edition of Communication Research, Bernard Berelson published an analysis under the title ‘What Missing the Newspaper’ Means’ having as a starting point the 1945 New York newspaper delivery strike. Berelson was not the only one researcher interested in the impact of the strike, but he embraced a unique approach - he focused on what people felt when the paper didn't arrive and why. Berelson’s study uses a series of intensive interviews and it identifies some basic reader-gratifications which the newspaper supplies: 1. For information
about and interpretation of public affairs; 2. As a tool for daily living; 3. For respite; 4. For social prestige; 5. For social contact.

This focus of research to discover motives and selection patterns of audiences for mass media initiated by studies similar with the one signed by Bereleson, conducted later in a social-psychological mode, and audience based, crystallized into the Uses and Gratification (U&G) approach (McQuail, 1994). During the 1950s and 1960s, researchers identified and operationalized many social and psychological variables that were presumed to be the precursors of different patterns of consumption of gratifications (Wimmer and Dominick, 1994) and the first formal statement of the uses and gratifications theory came from Katz, Blumer, and Gurevitch (1974).

But in the 1970s U&G faced also a strong tide of criticism from other mass communication scholars. Critics such as Elliott (1974), Swanson (1977), and Lometti, Reeves, and Bybee (1977) stressed that U&G continued to be challenged by four serious conceptual problems: (a) a vague conceptual framework, (b) a lack of precision in major concepts, (c) a confused explanatory apparatus, and (d) a failure to consider audiences’ perceptions of media content. In reply to these criticisms, U&G researchers produced multiple responses by theoretically refining U&G in the past decades and their efforts led to a more nuanced framework.

Seeking to advance U&G theoretically, McQuail (1987, p. 73) offers a typology of common reasons for media use and he identifies four such broad reasons: a) Information; b) Personal Identity; c) Integration and Social Interaction; and d) Entertainment. Likewise, Lull’s (1990) also comes with an alternative typology of media use and he defines two main categories: structural and relational. Lull developed this alternative typology after conducting ethnographic research in the USA on the social uses of TV in family life.

Broadly speaking, U&G research has shown that media frequently are employed to fulfil both mediated and interpersonal needs, so both interpersonal and mediated communication motives are incorporated in studies of media consumption.

Reviewing decades of U&G tradition, Papacharissi (2009) comes until contemporary times and shows that, despite the criticism surrounding U&G, researchers routinely apply the framework to focus contemporary social phenomena and problems like informational and social uses of newer media or social connectivity enabled by newer media. Papacharissi herself researched the uses and gratifications of personal web page authoring (2002a, 2002b) and blogging (2007) to understand how they facilitate social environments and identity expression. A future direction proposed by Papacharissi in order to ensure U&G longevity is the collaboration of U&G with other perspectives which will enable U&G terms to become modernized through a process of mutual integration.

In the past few years, media researchers tried to clarify the relevance of U&G approach in a digital society. Quan-Haase (2012) is optimistic about U&G future in relation to social media sites research: ‘U&G approach seems promising in providing a theoretical framework from which to examine what kinds of social media are adopted by what segments of the population, and what gratifications individuals obtain from their use of various social media platforms, sites, and services’. Whiting and Williams (2013) demonstrate the importance of uses and gratifications theory to social media, Phua, Jin and Kim (2017) explores uses and gratifications of social networking sites for bridging and bonding social capital, Shao (2009) explains the appeal of user-generated
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media (UGM) by using U&G perspective, Joo and Sang (2013) embrace U&G approach to explain the motives of diverse activities associated with smartphone use.

While U&G tried to look deeply into the individual for psychological motivations for media use, the media dependency theory was developed to explain the sociological drivers of media use. Media dependency theory (MDT) (Ball-Rokeach and Melvin DeFleur, 1976) provides a perspective according to which people's media consumption is constrained and determined by social forces. More exactly, MDT has at its heart a complex system in which the media, individuals, their interpersonal environment, and the social environment are seen to have dependency relationships with each other. Ball-Rokeach and DeFleur (1976, p. 6) defined dependency as 'a relationship in which the satisfaction of needs or the attainment of goals by one party is contingent upon the resources of another party'. Media system dependency relations are categorized into dimensions of understanding (social and self), orientation (action and interaction), and play (social and solitary). These categories dependency dimensions are considered to be equally essential for the individual welfare, and, thus, to have the potential to lead to equally central dependency relations with the media system.

Rubin and Windahl (1986) undertook an integrative approach and combined the two theories generating the uses and dependency model. They argued that dependency on a medium or a message results when individuals either intentionally seek out information or ritualistically use specific communication media channels or messages.

Deprivation theory has an even longer history in U&G research than dependency theory. As previously mentioned, Berelson (1949) studied the effects of the 1945 strike of eight major New York City daily newspapers on audience behaviour. Since that time, additional studies of media strikes have emerged (Kimball (1959); Bock (1980); Cohen (1981); and Walker (1990)). More recently, after nearly 50 years, Bentley (2001) replicated Berelson's study by conducting a number of in-depth interviews of regular newspaper readers in Oregon in order to answer the same research question – 'why do people 'miss' their paper?'. Berelson's five newspaper attributes seemed to hold in the Oregon study, and, additionally, the notions of 'ritual' and of 'interactive shared use' of the newspaper came to the forefront in this study.

The cultural tradition of audience research views media use as a reflection of a sociocultural context and as a process to giving meaning to cultural products and experiences. This line of research rejected the stimulus – response model of effects and the early studies within cultural tradition were made to show that a message can be decoded in various ways by different cultural or social groups, but also in different way than that intended by the communicator. The decoding research gained a central position within the media cultural studies in the 1980's. Simultaneously, another stream of research within culturalist approach viewed media use as a meaningful aspect of everyday life. Media reception strongly emphasizes the role of the reader in decoding the media texts and views audience hood as a learned and varied form of cultural and social practice or, in other words, emphasizes the study of audiences as 'interpretive communities' (Lindlof, 1988). The critique brought by the culturalist approach to functionalist approach laid in its lack of popular culture. In terms of methodology, the culturalist approach is characterized by the use of qualitative and ethnographic methods. Since the 1980s reception research has studied e.g. media
reception and the formation of gender, sexual, ethnic, racial, political, religious, national, class, age-determined, regional and fan identities and the essence of findings provided by this line of research is best pictured by Kellner (1995, p. 5): 'radio, television, film and other products of media culture provide material out of which we forge our very identities, our sense of selfhood, our notion of what it means to be male or female; our sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of 'us' and 'them'. According to this line of research, media depictions affect the formation of identity and, in the same time, identity is fundamental to the process of meaning-making. A great number of influential studies focused on the media’s ability to produce people’s social identities ‘in terms of both a sense of unity and difference’ (Grossberg et. al, 1998, p. 206). For instance, feminist television studies highlighted the importance of looking at the interaction between text and its consumption focusing primarily on women. Radway (1984) focused on a small group of romance readers in the USA and related their pleasures of reading to women’s subordinate position within patriarchal households - reading romances is a sort of declaration of independence from one position accorded them by the dominant patriarchal discourse. Feminist authors reflected gender identity as a constantly set of positions created through various social and cultural practices. Simultaneously, other authors explored the importance of national and ethnic identity to audience readings or, more broadly, the relationship between the interpretation and reader or viewer’s membership to specific cultural communities. Studies as those conducted by Katz and Liebes (1985), Gillespie (1995) and Jhally and Lewis (1992) reveal how ethnic groups bring their own identities in the meaning-making process of television programmes. The role played by racial identity in message interpretation constitutes the focus of several other studies within culturalist approach (Bobo, 1988; Bobo and Seiter, 1997; Reid, 1997).

Nowadays, the growing migration and human mobility opened up a new line of research exploring media consumption and identity in diasporic context (Lee and Lee (2015); Hung (2013); Alghasi and Aas (2009); Georgiou (2005, 2003) Ogan (2001), D’Haenens, Beentjes and Bink (2000)). The main aim of these studies is to survey some of the material and symbolic aspects of contemporary media consumption.

Domestication research is another strand of research with a particular relevance when reviewing identity-related media consumption literature. This strand of audience research integrated material aspects of media technologies with people’s sense-making about them. A prevalent theme explored initially by feminist authors within media studies was the concern of the domestic context of reception or so called ‘domestication’ (Hobson, 1980 – looking at the role and meaning of television in the lives of housewives; Bausinger, 1984 – media consumption in the home as a collective process; Morley, 1986- how viewing was managed in the household; Lull, 1988- how families watched television; Moores, 1988- memories of early radio). In the 1980’s the literature on consumption (Douglas and Isherwood, 1980; Bordieu, 1986; Miller, 1987; McCracken, 1990) had also an influence on media research initiating a new tradition which looked at the symbolic nature of goods. Roger Silverstone and his collaborators bororough these ideas and integrate them into a framework of thinking about how we experience media technologies. The concept of domestication consolidated its position within media studies especially by being employed in a collection of some of the first empirical studies of information and communications technologies (ICTs) coordinated by Silverstone, Hirsch and Morley (1992). In short, these studies reflected the process
of domesticating ICTs by bringing them into the home. Silverstone tried to refine the ideas about domestication until the late 1990s in order to keep pace with the literature on social shaping of technology. In the 2000s, Norwegian researchers contributed to the further development of the concept of domestication proposing the extension of the domestication framework outside the home given the fact that ICTs became portable. Their focused moved from the household level to a wider one considering the ‘domestication in society’ (Sorensen, 2005- domestication of the car in Norway). The main methodologies used by domestication research have been qualitative.

Closely connected to the concept of domestication is the theme of public and private character of media use. McQuail (1997) envisioned that the development of the media will open new opportunities for private audiencehood taking into account the type of medium, the content, and the frame of mind of the audience member. Twenty years later, McQuail’s prediction regarding the private turn in the character of media use seems to come entirely true. McQuail (1997, p. 91) crystallizes succinctly the essence of the private audiencehood as follows: ‘the private type of audience experience is constructed according to personal mood and circumstance and does not involve any reference to society or even to other people. When not purely introspective, it is likely to be concern with self-comparison and matching with a media model, role or personality in a search for an acceptable identity for public self-presentation.’

Thompson (1995) is the media theorist who comes quite close to consumer research approach in his conception of identity related media consumption. Similarly, to interpretive consumer researchers, Thompson views the process of self-formation as reflexive and open-ended and individuals as using various resources - including mediated symbolic material- to construct a coherent identity. He also underlines the fact that the active character of the self does not imply that the self is socially unconditioned. In his view, the process of self-formation becomes increasingly dependent on access to mediated forms of communication and, implicitly, ‘the development of the media accentuates and enriches the reflexive organization of the self.’ (Thompson, 1995, p. 213)

The current expansion of new media redirects media researchers’ attention to identity-related media consumption in digital world. Zemmels (2012) considers that long standing theoretical perspectives regarding identity can still provide an important lens for examining users in the new media environments and more specifically for the formation and maintenance of personal and group identities and how that relates to their analog world subject positions. Nevertheless, in Zimmels’ view, it is not clear what the future of this strand of research holds: ‘it remains to be seen whether new conceptualization and theoretical frameworks can build on, or must displace, traditional theorizing about the construction of Self and Other’ (2012, p. 6).

Couldry and Hepp (2017) underline the fact that the change in how social knowledge is produced in the twenty-first century’s second decade has generated a different role for the self. In their view, in this new world where selves are required to manage themselves online, the self faces new types of risk and opportunity. When talking about opportunities, Couldry and Hepp state: ‘The opportunities are the new possibilities as organizing our life as selves through media technologies, through digital devices that help the self-cope better with the multiple expectations of contemporary
life and new possibilities for self-representation, of which the ‘selfie’ is only one recent example’. (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 146) The two authors consider that in the new media era the self is not more understood as substance but as process and there are new resources available to the self for sustaining its integrity as ‘a reflexive project for action’. They further identify three distinct types of resources: resources for self-narration, resources for self-representation, and resources for self-maintenance. Moreover, in an age of deep mediatization, the self’s recorded performance becomes its own data and this transformation leads to so called ‘self-quantification’. Couldry and Hepp (2017) also highlight the fact that these transformations come with a price: ‘While apparently enhancing the freedom of the self, they build into the fabric of the self an infrastructural dependency: a process of institutionalization and materialization that, because of the asymmetrical power-relations at work in the media domain involved, introduces a dimension of unfreedom that today’s selves must confront.’ (Couldry and Hepp, 2017, p. 166)

Based on the discussion above, we can state that identity has been omnipresent in the typologies of media use or media consumer goals defined by various theoretical frameworks/models and scholars within the field of media studies since 1940s until recent years, with its both dimensions - personal and social. This substantially supports our interest in looking of media as a resource for identity construction and signalling. We will further try to highlight the similarities between audience research and consumer research when analysing identity-related consumption. Surprisingly these areas of knowledge didn't find ways to effectively fuse yet.

**Conceptions of identity in consumer research**

Consumer researchers consider that there are myriad ways in which identity and consumption intersect in our contemporary consumer society or, furthermore, that consumption behaviour is fused with our self-identity – shaping it, changing it and often challenging it. The main assumption in consumer research work is that consumers are what they consume, and conversely that consumers consume what they are. As Belk states, ‘this may be the most basic and powerful fact of consumer behaviour’ (Belk, 1988, p. 160).

A few relevant theories have been developed in the recent years in this field to investigate the intricacies of symbolic consumption and identity-related consumption is one of their pillars. **Consumer Culture Theory** (Arnould and Thompson, 2005) is one of the major frameworks of analysis having a great influence in the field which organizes and in the same time unifies the body of theory. The framework proposed by Arnould and Thompson in their synthesizing essay **Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research** published in the Journal of Consumer Research in 2005 has widely diffused through consumer research field. The authors mapped the literature within ‘new consumer research’ in four clusters of theoretical interest (1) consumer identity projects; (2) marketplace cultures; (3) the socio-historic patterning of consumption; and (4) mass-mediated marketplace ideologies and consumers’ interpretative strategies. According to Arnould & Thompson (2005: 4), Consumer Culture Theory ‘has illuminated the symbolic, embodied, and experiential aspects of acquisition behaviours’.

More specifically, consumer research studies demonstrated how consumers are identity seekers and makers (Markus and Nurius, 1986), how a fundamental motive
make them enlarge their personal identities beyond their immediate selves (Aron et al. 1991; Aron et al. 1992; Belk, 1988), how symbolically meaningful products enable them to construct identities for their multiple selves (Aaker, 1999; Belk, 1988; Levy, 1959; Schouten, 1991) or how they utilize consumption to amplify their identities beyond their corporeal selves (Ahuvia, 2005; Belk, 1988; Schau and Gilly, 2003; Reimann and Aron, 2009).

Apart of Belk’s popular concept of ‘extended self’, there is an abundance of self-conceptualizations within consumer research – ‘malleable self’ (Aaker, 1999; Schouten, 1991), ‘situational self’ (Hogg and Savolainen, 1998; Schenk and Holman, 1980), ‘fragmented self’ (Firat and Venkatesh, 1995), ‘narrative identities’ (Fournier, 1998; Thompson, 1997; Ahuvia, 2005), ‘role identities’ (Arnett et al., 2003; Kleine et al., 1993; Laverie et al., 2003) and so forth.

Relatively recently, dialogical self-theory (DST) (Bahl and Milne, 2010) added even more substance to the discussion of consumer identities. DST introduces the study of dialogical relationships between I - positions in consumer research, which enables consumer researchers to study identity conflicts in consumers and the role of possessions and specific brands in creating a coherent sense of self.

Social identity theory (SIT) has also been used in consumer research generating valuable insights. The principle of ‘accentuation’ from Social Identity Theory (Hogg and Abrams, 1998; Tajfel, 1981) has been used to understand the process of interpretation which consumers use to classify themselves (and by association, endorse or reject products) in relation to in-groups and out-groups.

By using SIT, Kleine et al. (1993) and Sirgy (1982) demonstrated how people consume products to enact identities consistent with their ideal self-images. In line with this idea, the possible selves theory has also been adopted offering an all-encompassing perspective on the self-concept (past, present and future selves) for consumer research. According to Marcus and Nurius (1986, p. 954), ‘possible selves represent individuals’ ideas of what they might become, what they would like to become, and what they are afraid of becoming, and thus provide a conceptual link between cognition and motivation.’ Self-congruity theory (Sirgy, 1982) became useful in identifying congruency relationships between product imagery and possible selves. Similarly, Fournier (1994) underlined the idea that consumers’ relationships with products may be based on meanings that are central to the individual’s self-concept.

Wright, Claiborne and Sirgy (1992) even developed an integrated model of the effects of product symbolism on consumer self-concept by using the perspective of self-congruity theory. The integrated model, based on Sirgy's (1986) self-congruity theory, specifies predictors and determinants of recognition and/or learning of product symbolism, identifies the mediating process in which consumers use product symbolism to define themselves in the context of a specific situation, and posits that outcomes across a constellation of products, across situations, and over time influence the formation and change of the extended self.

There are also critics who consider that the studies connecting identity and consumption lack a comprehensive theoretical foundation and the interpretive researchers interested in this topic had been using varied and sometimes divergent conceptualizations of the self and identity and disparate theoretical frameworks.
resulting more or less in a fractured theoretical base (Cohen, 1989; Vignoles et al., 2006).

In order to remediate this issue, Thompson and Loveland (2015) proposed a new theory - *Identity Investment Theory (IIT)* - providing a single conceptualization of the self and identity. IIT employs five theoretical propositions through which the authors try to account how identity and consumer behaviour reciprocally influence one another. According to Thompson and Loveland (2015, p. 237), ‘IIT differs from prior theories [...] by focusing on how individuals actively choose through consumption to enact and maintain valued identities.’ IIT is a dynamic theory that has the potential to explain variations in identity consumption between individuals and across time.

Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) conceptualize a new form of consumption – *liquid consumption* - that helps unpack contemporary consumption phenomena emerging in the current context of liquid modernity where social structures, and resulting consumer identities, are liquidifying. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) consider that liquid consumption is needed to explain behaviour within digital contexts, in access-based consumption, and in conditions of global mobility. According to Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017), liquid consumption is ‘a style of consumption characterized by a lack of singularization, ephemerality, the dominance of the use-value, and dematerialization’. The authors also discuss the implications of liquid consumption for various domains including materialism, identity, quantification of the self, etc. Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) consider that digital technologies afford a new mobile and flexible sociality which recognizes identity as performance and the self as a networked self. And this notion of networked self provides a starting point for unpacking the nature of identity in liquidity. Moreover, Bardhi, Eckardt and Arnould (2012) introduce and develop the notion of liquid relationship to possessions by investigating consumers’ relationship to possessions in the condition of contemporary global nomadism. According to the authors, this alternative relationship to possessions is characterized by detachment and flexibility. They also identify three characteristics of a liquid relationship to possessions: temporary situational value, use value and immateriality. ‘We identify global nomadism, characterized by nomadic mobility (serial relocation and frequent mobility) and deterritorization as a lifestyle in which an alternative, liquid relationship to possessions emerges. Under such condition, consumers tend to form situational attachments to objects, appreciate objects primarily for their instrumental use-value, and value immaterial or “light” possessions as well as consumption practices’ (Bardhi, Eckardt and Arnould, 2012, p. 20).

This approach clearly challenges the existing conceptualization of consumer behaviour, including the centrality of possessions and the dominance of ownership and the nature of relationship to objects.

In the past twenty years, consumer researchers have been interested to specifically look into media consumption through the lens of CCT. Hirschman and Thompson (1997) explored consumer’s relationships to nonadvertising forms of mass media and they identified three key interpretive relationships between consumers and mass media vehicles. Halkoaho (2012) focused on consumers’ relationships with their favorite TV programs while Sihvonen (2015) explored media consumption and the identity projects of the young.

Relatively recently, *Journal of Consumer Research* published a collection of articles on self-identity and consumer behaviour (White, Argo and Sengupta (2012); Townsend
and Sood (2012); Ward and Broniarczyk (2011); Chan, Berger and Van Boven (2012); Kettle and Häubl (2011); Mercurio and Forehand (2011)) with five of these six articles focusing on specific relationships between self-identity-related goals and consumer behaviour, exploring needs such as affiliation and distinctiveness, self-verification, and self-affirmation. The sixth paper explores the effect of identity activation on memory.

Looking into recent research we can state that it takes a more granular approach, breaking down the relationship between identity concerns and consumption to look at the effects of specific self-related goals and of different aspects of self-identity on consumer behaviour.

**Material culture and identity**

Unquestionably, Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) formulated by Arnould and Thompson (2005) has widely diffused within the field and has instilled a great appreciation. CCT framework continues to open interdisciplinary discussions and to constantly strengthen its legitimacy. But there are also voices suggesting the necessity of extensions and adjustments to CCT. For instance, Marcoux (2005) outlines the need for an extension of CCT in the general domain of the relationship between possessions and identity. He, specifically, suggests that is necessary to develop a theory of ‘possessions’ in consumer research. Marcoux invites CCT researchers to value the materiality of objects by borrowing insights from contemporary material culture studies. Very few CCT researchers have examined and problematized the properties (the sensuality, the presence, etc.) of objects, and how these objects work; namely what they do, in addition to what they mean. The material culture group from University College London that Marcoux was referring to examine the material components of social life. Their view of materiality is radically different from the psychological vision of materialism that almost invariably links materialism to a lack: of social skills, emotional strength, intellectual depth, etc.

Daniel Miller pioneered the group at UCL and worked on how a material culture perspective can be relevant to the study of consumption. If previously many approaches to consumption took an anti-material culture stance seeing materiality as a threat to society, environment and spiritual and moral values, Miller offers an opposite approach. According to Miller (2006, p. 347), ‘material culture studies work through the specificity of material objects in order ultimately to create a more profound understanding of the specificity of a humanity inseparable from its materiality.’

The rethinking of materiality favoured by this new work in the material culture field became influential in the areas of architecture and design (Attfield, 2000; Clarke, 1999, 2001; Miller, 2001; Chevalier, 1998; Marcoux, 2001; Garvey, 2001; etc.), in clothing studies (Benerjee and Miller, 2003; Clarke and Miller, 2002; Dalby, 2001; Freeman, 2000; Woodward, 2005), car consumption studies (Young, 2001; Verrips and Meyer, 2001) and so forth.

Similarly, Miller’s work opened a new perspective in the study of media consumption, by directing attention to the role of materiality in specific forms of media and its impact on the creation of sociality: consumption of radio in the home (Tacchi, 1998), on the cassette (Manuel, 1993), on ambient television (McCarthy, 2001). Horst and Miller (2006) came with an ethnographically grounded study on the everyday use of mobile phones initiating the so-called anthropology of mobile communication. Using
the frameworks of cultural sociology, combined with insights from material culture studies and cultural approaches to consumption, Bartmanski and Woodward (2015) investigated the surprising trend of returning to ‘tangible music’ with a focus on vinyl. The authors see vinyl as being an attention-riveting medium that can help distinguish a ‘true music lover’ from the ordinary consumers who are using the standard purchasing practice of downloading whole albums from Internet. Recently, Miller himself conducted a global anthropological research project on the uses and consequences of social media and self-presentation is one of the main explored areas in ‘Why we post’ study. Miller et al. (2016) found out that while it is a common observation that people may want to create ‘idealised’ versions of themselves through the images they post, these all relate to particular social and historical contexts. In particular it seems that both the terms ‘aspiration’ and ‘idealised selves’ mean quite different things across the field sites.

In the same time, object-relations theory originating from psychoanalytic theory is considered by various authors in the field a fruitful area for new research innovations within material culture studies. The emphasis in object-relations theory is on fixing upon objects that satisfy key relationship needs. People choose certain objects from within their environment to develop, manage and mediate their sense of self, others and the external environment. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) interviewed over 300 people from 82 different families within the Chicago City area for their influential study that set out to empirically account for the transactions between people and objects within homes. Their research approach is underpinned by a belief that objects are symbols that can tell researchers who people are, who they have been, and who they wish to become. Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) learned that the home contains a symbolic ecology that represents both continuity and change in the life course and thus gives permanence to our elusive selves. Laura Kampfner (1995) researched the treasured possessions of adolescents and she learned that treasured objects mirror age- and gender-related aspects of the adolescent self, and simultaneously contribute to the development of self-identity. In her research into object meanings, Marsha L. Richins (1994a) distinguishes between the public and private meanings of possessions, while noting the interpretation of such categories. The data show that a person’s material values can be communicated through socially constructed stereotypes about possessions and about the relationships between possessions and their owners. In addition, study findings suggest that low-materialism consumers have an orientation that emphasizes both the interpersonal-symbolic value and the hedonic potential of possessions; the orientation toward possessions of those high in materialism seems to emphasize more utilitarian as well as appearance and status concerns. Richins (1994b) finds that less materialistic people value objects likely to be used privately, or visible within the home only, whereas more materialistic people value objects that are worn, or used, in public spaces. Jacobs and Malpas (2013) seek to extend the field of housing studies by exploring the relational effects of the home and come with two key arguments: the objects have effects that are independent of our awareness of them, and the formation of self is constituted in relation to the material world rather than through a separated interiority. Betts (2015) explores in his thesis the impact of material objects on people’s identity at work.

In the current context of transnational migration, the academic literature has witnessed the emergence of a new trend – the so-called the ‘material turn’ in
migration studies focusing on ‘mundane’ everyday practices of mobile individuals. Scholars have started to pay attention to the material aspect of migration (Burrell 2008; Temple 2010; Abranches 2013; Savaş 2014) trying more specifically to look at how migration takes place through the medium of materiality (food, clothes, architecture, public transportation, languages, family albums, letters, medicine, dancing, sound, smell, the Internet, built environment, etc.)

Goffman (1959) used the concept of performance to explain the enactment of social roles according to the logic of status management. More recent developments in performance theory (Alexander, 2004a, 2004b; Butler, 1997[1988]; Geertz, 1973; Schechner, 1993; Turner, 1982) seek to understand the performative character of identity by drawing upon theoretical resources of symbolic action, ritual and social drama to show how social action is contingent upon history and collective sentiments, but must be brought into existence by continuous performative acts which actualise and reproduce the identities of social actors (Butler, 1997[1988], p. 409). Embracing this perspective, various authors in the field look at the consumption as being driven by the need to establish cultural identities and affiliations, then, conceptualising it as a type of ‘consumption performance’ where actors harness symbolic codes, narratives and objects to achieve certain ends. Alexander (2004b, p. 532) is referring to the range of ‘mundane material things’ that allow and empower people to act socially. This consists of objects that serve to represent things to others, frequently through iconic means. These material things are a crucial part of any social performance because they assist social actors to ‘dramatize and make vivid the invisible motives and moral they are trying to represent’ (2004b, p. 532). Erving Goffman referred to such things as ‘expressive equipment’. Alexander makes the point that an individual’s social performance can be received as ‘fused’ (successful), ‘de-fused’ (failed and incomplete) and ‘re-fused’ (re-made as successful), depending on a range of factors such as an individual’s command of the situation and its requirements. Ultimately, the goal of any social actor is to harness the symbolic things and objects at hand in order to successfully convey their meaning to others. Material things become part of most social performance.

Claxton and Murray (1994) introduce the concept of object-subject interchangeability proposing a symbolic interactionist model of materialism through which they highlight the important role of material objects in individual self-definition. The concept of interchangeability refers to a psycho-social mechanism that permits individuals to selectively substitute the influences of objects and subjects (other people) for each other as necessary to construct, adapt, and maintain self-definition. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, defining self through symbolic interaction with objects is a natural and pervasive part of socialization. McCarthy (1984) asserts that human identities reside in objects more than in individuals. One reason this may be true is that objects help orient individuals by "making visible and stable the categories of culture" (Douglas and Isherwood, 1979). In the interchangeability model, the degree of contribution by objects and subjects to the creation and rejuvenation of self-definition is never static. In response to certain environmental demands, greater reliance may be placed on objects to help in the adaptation of one's self-definition. In other circumstances, relatively greater reliance is placed on subjects for the preservation and evolution of the sense of self. Further, objects and subjects do not
simply make "non-human" and "human" contributions, respectively, to self-definition. Although the model represents a social/material duality, each may contain part of the other, and serve in the other's role at certain times. Such is the case when people are used as objects (objectification), and when objects are viewed as possessing human qualities (anthropomorphism). In other words, the lines of contribution between object and subject to self-definition may sometimes blur.

James Côté (1996, p. 424) proposes that late-modern society requires individuals to cultivate and apply forms of 'identity capital', which he takes to refer to the 'wherewithal individuals use when ... they attempt to negotiate the tricky passages created by the obstacles of late-modern society'. Côté's (1996) 'identity capital' thesis suggests that in late-modern culture individuals have the potential to develop situated, contextual modes of self-presentation that are reflexive and self-monitoring, allowing ease of forms of 'cultural mobility' through time and space. Identity capital constitutes investments people build in themselves, which assist them in making their way in a variety of personal and professional arenas they aspire belonging to. This variant of capital includes things like: development of social and technical skills, enhanced behavioural repertoires, and associations within networks. One could add that the possession of particular object tokens that afford desired identities could be included as part of the 'tangible resources' for identity capital Côté refers to (1996, p. 426). Such material tokens – the right 'look', clothes, jewellery, motor vehicle, and so on – all become passports into desired social, cultural and institutional spheres.

Essentially, all this line of research argues in various ways that consumers form enduring and strong attachments to possessions because of their centrality to identity projects.

It is relatively recently, though, that the concept of liquid consumption, as opposed to solid consumption, is challenging the domains of materialism and identity. Moreover, Bardhi, Eckardt and Arnould (2012) introduce and develop the notion of liquid relationship to possessions by investigating consumers’ relationship to possessions in the condition of contemporary global nomadism. According to the authors, this alternative relationship to possessions is characterized by detachment and flexibility. They also identify three characteristics of a liquid relationship to possessions: temporary situational value, use value and immateriality.

**Bridging the literatures on identity-related media consumption**

We further propose a theoretical discussion connecting identity formation and media consumption aiming to bridge the existing chasm between the three disciplines - audience research, consumer research and material culture studies. More specifically, we try to illustrate the potential usefulness of this literature integration and extension in analysing the media consumption practice.

Much of uses and gratifications research tries to quantify media use by fulfillment of four needs: diversion, personal relationships, personal identity and surveillance. Personal identity refers to the way in which media play a part in defining us. Issues of taste come into play here – how our choices reflect our preferences for information, pleasure and so on but also, in turn, reinforce our sense of who we are. In Berelson's five-point typology, identity can be located in tools for daily living category, social prestige category and social contact category. Denis McQuail introduces (McQuail, 1987, p. 73) personal identity as one of the common reasons for media use in his
typology and details its facets as follows: finding reinforcement for personal values, finding models of behaviour, identifying with valued other (in the media), gaining insight into one's self. The alternative typology of media use proposed by Lull (1990) is also relevant to our discussion especially through its relational use category which suggests that we use media as a currency of intercommunication, as an aid for companionship. We relate to each other by relating our media experiences.

The theme of identity gains even more importance in the field today with some current research illustrating even the plausibility of changing the scope of uses and gratifications research from an ‘exaggerated emphasis on using mass media to meet social deficits, to the function it fulfils,’ as Blumler (1985, p. 41) suggested to aiding people in promoting social identities (Finn, 1997).

Similarly, Consumer Culture Theory positions consumer identity projects as its first cluster of theoretical interest which concerns the co-constitutive, co-productive ways in which consumers, working with marketer-generated materials, forge a coherent if diversified and often fragmented sense of self (Belk 1988).

While U&G tried to look deeply into the individual for psychological motivations for media use, the media dependency theory was developed to explain the sociological drivers of media use. In other words, the media dependency perspective views people's media consumption as constrained and determined by social forces. A decade after its development, Ball-Rokeach (1985) advances media dependency theory by explaining structural dependency relations and the social environment at the macro-, meso-, and micro-level and, starting from this stratification, she focuses on micro-level analysis generating individual-media system dependencies. Rokeach defines the three major dimensions of human motivation that underlie individuals’ media behaviour—understanding, orientation and play, each of which has two subtypes: social and self. Rokeach (1985) explains that the typology reflects the more general assumption that individuals’ motives for media exposure concern both self-maintenance and self-growth.

Consumer culture theorists have also turned their attention to the relationship between consumers’ identity projects and the structuring influence of the marketplace, arguing that the market produces certain kinds of consumer positions that consumers can choose to inhabit. While individuals can and do pursue personally edifying goals through these consumer positions, they are enacting and personalizing cultural scripts that align their identities with the structural imperatives of a consumer-driven global economy.

As we previously mentioned, deprivation theory has also a long tradition in audience research. Reviewing the studies focused on media deprivation (especially conducted during media strikes), Ruggeiro (2000) concludes that the perceived deprivations of audience members are related both to media variables like exposure, involvement, and motives, and non-media variables such as socio-concept of orientation and activities with friends and parents. One of the prominent studies conducted by Windahl et al. (1986) found that individuals in more socially oriented environments tended to feel more deprived than those in conceptually oriented settings.

Similarly, marketing and consumer research use nowadays brand/product deprivation testing to better understand the role the products and services play in
respondent’s lives. Ritson, Elliott and Edwards (2004) conducted a brand deprivation study and their interpretive analysis indicated five main types of reason for unusually strong brand loyalties: habit, unique sensory stimuli, inter-generational influence, emotional security and fit with personal identity. Even non-display brands were shown to be important to personal identity.

The cultural (reception) tradition of audience research perceives identities as being produced, consumed and regulated within culture- creating meanings through symbolic systems of representation about the identity positions which audience members might adopt.

Furthermore, in his book *The Media and the Modernity*, Thompson (1995) dedicates a chapter to self and experience in a mediated world and comes closer enough to CCT perspective. According to this account, the self is viewed neither as the product as of an external symbolic system, nor as a fixed entity which the individual can immediately and directly grasp; rather, the self is a symbolic project that the individual actively constructs. Thompson (1995, p. 212) states that ‘by opening up the self to new forms of non-local knowledge and other kind of mediated symbolic material, the development of the media both enriches and accentuates the reflexive organization of the self.’ Couldry and Hepp (2017) employ a similar perspective when analysing the identity formation in relation to new media use. This perspective can be easily related to CCT, specifically with its first stream of research – identity projects.

By comparing the role identity plays in consumption within audience research and consumer research, we can conclude that the two disciplines hold quite similar perspectives, but they followed parallel routes without to dare to make forays into the other’s territory. Building from the conceptions of consumption as an identity formation activity within these research areas, we can derive two basic principles:

1. Identity comprises both personal and social dimensions;
2. Identity formation is a process of ‘being and becoming’ that develops dynamically during a lifetime.

Russell Belk’s interdisciplinary essay on possessions and how they ‘extend self’ published in 1988 is a key work in the field of consumer behaviour, but audience research didn’t valued it much. Summarising, Belk (1988) concludes on the basis of his review that the following are perceived by people as important components of self, in ranked order of importance: body; internal processes; ideas and experiences; persons, places and things we feel attached to. Belk’s concept could enrich the analysis when trying to identify interpretive relations between consumers and media. Interestingly, Belk (2013) advances his conception of ‘extended self’ in digital world and examines the major changes that are taking place due to digital phenomenon – dematerialization, reembodiment, sharing, distributed memory are just a few. In the same time, many media scholars consider that the evolving media environment calls for new conceptualizations and approaches for studies focusing on the relationship between identity and the media and we consider that Belk’s digital self can be hugely valuable in this direction. Additionally, Belk’s concepts of collecting and sharing could substantiate the analysis of media consumption practices (including both old and new media).

The concept of liquid consumption recently introduced by Bardhi and Eckhardt (2017) in the field of consumer research and considered necessary to explain behaviour within digital contexts can equally help media researchers to extend their
Self-congruity describes the alignment between the consumer self-concept and brand personality, experienced by consumers during the formation of a consumer-brand relationship. Congruence between brand personality and self-image is considered as the semblance between the symbolic attributes of the brand and the self-image of the consumer (Sirgy, 1982).

Sirgy (1982) suggests that brand personality can be vital in allowing consumers to express their self-concept and can offer reassurance when personalities align. Consumers are motivated to own and surround themselves with such brands (Fournier 1998). The importance of congruence between brand personality and consumer self-image is heightened when products allow the consumer to stress a symbolic meaning (Aaker, 1997). To date, the application of self-congruency theory to media products is very limited.

As we turn our attention to material culture studies, we can notice that this discipline also defines myriad ways in which inanimate objects as symbols of material culture are linked to the development of identity which can be valuable to audience research field. As we previously mentioned, Miller’s work opened a new perspective in the study of media consumption focusing on to the role of materiality in specific forms of media and its impact on the creation of sociality. This line of research has a great potential and we hope media researchers will further employ this perspective strengthening the collaboration with material culture studies. Few other theories from material culture studies could be equally valuable for media researchers.

Woodward (2007) introduces object-relations and psychoanalytic theory to illustrate some of the important psychodynamic relations between people and objects and more generally what can objects do for our social and personal identity. Woodward suggests that the application of this tradition of psychoanalytic theory to the study of material culture could be especially useful in consumption studies. The emphasis in object-relations theory is on fixing upon objects that satisfy key relationship needs. People choose certain objects from within their environment to develop, manage and mediate their sense of self, others and the external environment. For Woodward, the relative paucity of investigation into the interaction between emotion, self and consumption in social research is surprising and encourages that the polysemic nature of people–object relations to be more deeply investigated.

Objects are considered to have also a performative capacity. Alexander (2004b) goes on to develop a model of the elements of cultural performance. The model includes a variety of things that compose a social performance, such as: a body of collective representations to which social actors orient their actions (goals, morals, beliefs); actors and audiences; mise-en-scène (the elements of the scene within which people act); social power (some performances are understood as natural and appropriate, others as inherently challenging and iconoclastic). A final element of Alexander’s model of social performance is especially relevant for discussions of material culture: the means of symbolic production. By this, Alexander is referring to the range of ‘mundane material things’ (2004b, p. 532) that allow and empower people to act socially. This consists of objects that serve to represent things to others, frequently through iconic means. Extending this view more broadly to questions of
consumption, we can conceive consumption as a performative accomplishment, where social actors draw upon narratives, codes and symbols to continuously enact their identity and give meaning to material possessions.

Claxton and Murray (1994) developed object-subject interchangeability model which can be perceived as a symbolic interactionist model of materialism. Claxton and Murray's model explains that the establishment and maintenance of a viable sense of self results, in part, from symbolic interaction with subjects and objects. Where functional human relationships are lacking, people may turn to the symbolism of objects for portions of self-definition.

All these neighbouring theories and frameworks of analysis have significant potential to better explore how identity is constructed through media engagement. Traditional theoretical approaches to media research of ‘mass media culture’ do not seem to adequately describe the current condition. New frameworks or hybrid frameworks of analysis may be needed to address the emerging logic of new media, one in which media users in large part define themselves through their choices of media channels and content, but also where media engagement has become situated in a ‘participatory media culture’. Additionally, these theories may help media researchers to deepen the analysis of old media consumption practice in this new media environment in order to better understand the premise of their persistence on the market. They might also provide an important lens for examining the formation and maintenance of personal and group identities in virtual world and how that relates to their analog world subject positions.

Undoubtedly, media researchers struggle to keep pace with and make sense of this rapidly changing media landscape and the questions it raises for the quality of personal life and of society. In this new and increasingly complex media environment, we need conceptual frameworks that can help guide research analysis in new media spaces and define the conceptual structures and boundaries in which to situate analysis. According to Ruggiero (2000), U&G can become ‘a highly serviceable theory for the 21st century’ only if media researchers are able to situate a ‘modernized’ U&G theory within the new media ecology, in an evolving psychological, sociological, and cultural context. In the same time, some media scholars try to adjust media dependency theory to change and its theoretical application in social media resulted in what it is called new media dependency (NMD), while others challenge that MSD does not fit well with social media studies.

The process of mutual integration with neighbouring perspectives might be a valid solution and we believe that identity-related media consumption is only an example from a broad range of themes that currently invites to an interdisciplinary approach in order to obtain a comprehensive explanation.

We can assume that our proposal for literature integration offers the researchers the opportunity to better analyse the expressive capacity of media that affords individuals the opportunity to articulate aspects of self through material engagements, in an attempt to communicate something about – and indeed to – themselves. The chosen media might signify sub-cultural affinity, occupation, wealth, participation in a leisure activity, or an aspect of one's social status – all aspects of social identity. On the other hand, some specific media could also carry personal, cultural and emotional meanings, related to subjective identity – they can facilitate interpersonal interaction, and help a person to act upon him or herself. The selected media can assist in forming
or negating interpersonal and group attachments, mediating the formation of self-identity and esteem, and integrating and differentiating social groups, classes or tribes.

We will further offer an overview of the emerging trends/themes within the three fields which aims to provide a foundation for literature bridging in future projects.

Table 1. Foundation for literature bridging in future projects

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Audience research</th>
<th>Consumer research</th>
<th>Material culture studies</th>
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<tr>
<td>-The concept of audience is considered in many ways outdated and audience researchers are now rethinking the meaning of ‘audience’ itself.</td>
<td>-Cultures and consumption patterns are fragmented and simultaneously interconnected.</td>
<td>-Material culture studies are an increasingly interdisciplinary field (there is a material turn in housing studies, migration studies/diasporic studies, etc.)</td>
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<td>-There are new possibilities for audience definition and new types of audience emerging. Instead of an audience as the attentive mass or group we can for instance increasingly speak of a taste culture or a lifestyle to describe patterns of choice.</td>
<td>-A predominant theme in consumer research field is consumer identity projects (consumers use possessions and brands to create their self-identities and communicate these selves to others and to themselves).</td>
<td>-Materiality and identity is a central line of research within material culture studies.</td>
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<td>-Patterns of media use will simply be part of varied and changing lifestyles.</td>
<td>-Early research on identity-related consumption tended to focus on broad conceptual issues; recent research takes a more granular approach.</td>
<td>-In addition to the established strand which views objects to reveal processes of symbolic communication and identity formation another strand is emerging which considers that things and humans are inseparably interwoven in mutually constitutive relationships.</td>
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<td>-Audiences can nowadays be defined as people, publics, viewers, users, participants, producers.</td>
<td>-The idea of commercial goods as ‘extended self’ (Belk, 1988) moves in online world (Belk, 2013).</td>
<td>-There is an emerging research trend focusing on the appropriation of the new media technologies in everyday life.</td>
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<td>-Terms such as ‘produsers’ or ‘prosumers’ have been devised to refer to the new type of user.</td>
<td>-Liquid consumption (needed to explain behaviour within digital contexts, in access-based consumption, and in conditions of global mobility).</td>
<td>-Virtual spaces have material culture (digital materiality).</td>
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<td>-Identity, focusing on reflexive concepts of the self and the role of the media in identity work is a prominent line of research within contemporary audience research.</td>
<td>-Liquid relations to possessions (in the context of global nomadism).</td>
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<td>-Media consumption and identity in diasporic context attracts special interest.</td>
<td>-Virtual consumption (virtual goods as elements of identity).</td>
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<td>-Identities are increasingly performed and managed online (networked self)</td>
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<td>-Collective virtues of old media audiences are replaced by cultural mobility and freedom from social ties of the electronic highway.</td>
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<td>-The character of media use becomes increasingly private.</td>
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CONCLUDING REMARKS

The purpose of this paper was to propose an enlarged framework of analysis for identity-related media consumption by bridging the literatures from audience research, consumer research and material culture studies.

The first step was to present the conceptions of identity within the three fields in order to map the common ground. We found that identity has been omnipresent in the typologies of media use or the media consumer goals defined by various theoretical frameworks/models and scholars within the field of media studies since 1940s until recent years, with its both dimensions - personal and social. The theme of identity has also been central within consumer research with consumption perceived as an identity formation activity. Material culture studies focused on the interplay of materiality/physicality of objects/commodities and the consumers’ identity construction as well.

The second step was to connect the streams of literature in order to expand further the framework of analysis and to make it more suitable for the increasing changing media environment. Undoubtedly, the three disciplines have neighboring perspectives with great potential for collaboration, which once integrated can sophisticate further the consumption practice analysis and consequently to enrich the explanation.

Additionally, we discussed the usefulness of this interdisciplinary approach to identity-related media consumption in relation to both old and new media. Moreover, we pointed where the concepts or theoretical models from consumer research and material culture studies are potentially applicable in audience research in general.

Future audience research may seek to further employ and develop the neighboring perspectives originated in consumer research and material culture studies, as proposed in our paper, when intending to conceptualize media audience hood as lived experience. This means attending to the media’s multiple significances in varied contexts of reception. We believe that our example regarding identity-related media consumption is not limiting, but illustrative.
REFERENCES


