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***“Bridging Uncertainty”. Mobile Communication
in the Context of Social Networks, Developmental Conditions
and Media Arrangements during Adolescence***

This paper focuses on the changes of peer relationships among adolescents emerging through different forms of mediated communication. This notion will be examined by exploring communication patterns within peer groups.

Peer groups are the frame of action in which adolescents form and experience new types of relationships that are characterized by a relatively high stability with regard to personal compositions and interaction patterns as well as expectations and modes of action. In these communication processes, media play an important role to express an individual identity with reference to friends, to exchange views and experiences within the peer group, and to form a communicative net of social relationships. As an indispensable, personal and multifunctional medium, the mobile phone takes a central position in these media arrangements and answers the purpose to perpetuate and organize peer relationships.

With regard to new forms of communication and interaction that are mirrored in the structures and dynamics of these relationships, this paper aims to answer three questions: What is the nature of communication in peer groups that are negotiated through media, especially through the mobile phone? How do different forms and patterns of communication established by mobile phone use materialize in peer relationships? What are the consequences for the process of socialisation in peer relationships among adolescents?

The empirical results are based on qualitative interviews with German adolescents. The findings show that there are certain patterns of communication applied to all members of the peer group while other patterns surface in specific peer constellations or appear as highly specific for a single individual. The use of the mobile phone by adolescents is embedded in the use of other media, especially the internet and the television, but also the landline phone and face-to-face communication. Different types of communication are established with the mobile phone to create, organize and change peer relationships: mediated interpersonal and interactive communication as well as receptive communication and different types of symbolical expressions realized with the mobile phone. Referring to these mediated interactions and with the mobile phone as a central

communication tool, the answer of important questions in adolescence are given into the hands of adolescents. As a consequence, theoretical implications have to be discussed as well as practical questions, for instance the need for new aspects for legal protection of minors and media education.

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