Finding the best of both worlds? Understanding cases of “going analog” by Chinese adults in a personal archiving context

1. Background

- Existing work on personal archiving: focuses more on developing and introducing best practices and tools for digitization and long-term preservation
- Less research on nuanced thoughts behind individual choices of personal archiving media in everyday lived experiences (esp. outside of “Western” cultures)
- This study: examines cases of “going analog” by Chinese adults in a personal archiving context

2. Research questions

What are the thoughts and experiences of Chinese individuals in certain cases of personal archiving where they:
- prefer analog versions of materials over digital versions?
- intentionally create necessary analog counterparts of digital versions?

3. Method

- Data: Drawn from larger project studying the sharing of personal memories and personal archives in Chinese families -- semi-structured interviews with 32 Chinese adult participants
- Analysis: qualitative coding using a general inductive approach (Thomas 2006), coded all content related to “choosing analog” for themes via open coding

4. Preliminary Findings

Emergent themes in three shades of “going analog”:

- Resisting digitization
  - Avoiding enhanced visual representations
  - “I feel like when I take digital photos of [my drawings]... I magnify them, add filters... Then it’s like, oh, they’re so ugly, goodbye - so I delete them.” -- (Wei, age 20)

- Preferring original creation in analog, not digital
  - Sustaining motor memory (for Chinese writing)
  - “I would continue to write with pen and paper [for my diary]: Because if I don’t, I’ll forget how to write [Chinese] characters. Opportunities to use a pen are already rare nowadays.” -- (Yingri, age 38)

- Needing to create analog versions of digital files
  - “Forcing” selection
  - Adding “truly” personal imprints
  - Facilitating more embodied engagement (esp. when sharing)
  - Accommodating elders

Going analog:
- May be shaped by ideas about representations of self, uniqueness, add-on value
- May vary by type of materials (text, visual) and envisioned use situations (self-oriented, other-driven, interaction-based)
- May have connections with cultural elements

Practical implications: personal archiving support may consider a process of “analog to digital to analog”, help individuals find the best of both analog and digital worlds

5. Further work

- This study: Refine and contextualize themes, potentially follow up with participants to gather more targeted data
- Future studies: More focused investigations on cases of resisting digitization
  - Comparative studies to further explore potential cultural differences in choices of personal archiving media

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