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Simply Convenient? The Justification of Convenience in the Digital Transformation of Domestic Life

Abstract: Smart home technologies are commonly promoted through promises of convenience, and the value of such convenience is often implicitly accepted in sociological research. This article does not conceptualize convenience as a property of technical systems or as a subjective user experience, but rather offers an analytical perspective on normative processes of production in everyday life. Based on 22 home visits and interviews with users of smart speakers, the article examines how convenience is produced, stabilized, and limited through verbal and practical acts of justification. Drawing on practice theory and the sociology of justification, it shows how users situationally mobilize different orders of worth to frame technological use as meaningful, appropriate, or problematic. The analysis demonstrates that convenience is neither self-evident nor stable, but remains a contingent outcome of ongoing justification work. Thus, the article offers a sociological approach to smart-home technologies that does not presuppose convenience, but systematically examines its normative production.

Keywords: convenience, smart home, smart speakers, practice theory, sociology of justification

Introduction

Ongoing technologization and digitalization are transforming not only the world of work but also the home as a place of retreat and a site of reproduction and regeneration. The contemporary home has thus increasingly become a key arena of digital transformation, where established domestic practices encounter ever more sophisticated technologies and, in doing so, give rise to new forms of everyday life. This development forms part of a longer historical trajectory of technological change in the household. As Cowan (1983), Strasser (1982), and Shove (2003) have shown, household innovations have always been accompanied by rationalization, simplification, and changing expectations of comfort; today's smart homes therefore update an older cultural promise that is deeply embedded in the history of everyday life.

Smart homes represent the most recent stage in this process. Networked devices enable automation, entertainment, and optimization, creating the impression of a seamlessly integrated home in which tasks are delegated, and the resident appears as a conductor coordinating technical devices designed to make life easier. In current STS and digitalization research, smart homes are frequently discussed as sites where questions of datafication, control, and domestic order become concentrated (Lupton 2015; Pink et al. 2016; Maalsen & Sadowski 2019).

In this context, smart speakers are a particularly salient example. As central control devices for smart applications and interaction partners within the technologized home, they have entered countless households worldwide and are reshaping how people interact with their domestic environment. In doing so, they embody the promise of domestic convenience—a seemingly objective benefit associated with time savings, effortlessness, and comfort.

Research on consumption, everyday life, and technology describes convenience as a cultural motive with normative force, linked to the promise of a smooth, efficient, and well-organized everyday life (Shove 2003; Southerton 2003; Trentmann 2016). The present contribution builds on these works and adopts their understanding of convenience as a socially produced phenomenon. At the same time, while convenience is frequently invoked as a benefit of digitalization, it has rarely been examined as a phenomenon that itself requires sociological explanation. Here, the analysis shifts specifically to those situational practices of justification in which convenience in relation to smart speakers is explicitly articulated, grounded, and bounded. Accordingly, this article focuses on the verbal-practical production of convenience through justification work. It examines how residents construct convenience in relation to smart speakers by combining different orders of worth (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006) and how such a construction remains contingent due to its situational irritability. This focus brings to the fore processes that often remain unexamined in classical smart-home studies: the practical and discursive micro-processes through which digital technologies are socially embedded and normatively secured. Rather than accepting convenience as a self-evident benefit of digitalization, this article demonstrates that convenience must be continuously produced in everyday life—also, and crucially, through verbal justification work.

From a macro-sociological perspective, convenience appears as a complex social construction as well as a central selling point of a capitalist industry that translates technological progress into consumer goods. Smart-home devices, and smart speakers in particular, are, in this sense, part of the techno-economic visions that Jasanoff and Kim (2015) described as "sociotechnical imaginaries": collective visions of the future that define what a good, efficient, or modern life should look like. Line Aagaard (2021) has identified the central industrial visions connected with smart-home technologies and shown that convenience plays a key role in them. Studies on digital consumption further demonstrate that smart devices generate new forms of convenience while simultaneously transforming consumption practices (Cochoy et al. 2017).

In contrast, from a micro-sociological perspective and within a praxeological framework, convenience can be understood as the outcome of continuous individual negotiation. The promise of effortlessness must constantly be translated into concrete everyday practices. Smart devices have to be installed, networked, maintained, and meaningfully embedded in existing routines; they require competencies and generate new demands. Convenience therefore emerges only through practical engagement and remains tied to experiences of functioning and failure, frustrations, competence requirements, and problems of connectivity. From this perspective, convenience is not self-evident but fleeting, fragile, and permanently contested. Smart speakers illustrate this particularly clearly: while they promise seamless integration into everyday life, they simultaneously open up fields of con-

flict—for example, in regard to privacy, control, and the reorganization of domestic interactions—which themselves become central arenas of this contestation (Maalsen & Sadowski 2019). Against such a background, the question arises of how users justify and legitimize the convenience produced—or called into question—by smart speakers in everyday life.

The central research question of this article is therefore the following: How do people justify and legitimize convenience in their everyday engagement with smart speakers, and what does this reveal about the digital transformation of domestic life? The study is based on 22 home visits conducted between 2021 and 2024 and combines semi-structured interviews with ethnographic observation. The analysis shows that the interviewees engaged in complex and creative justification work and drew on multiple orders of worth—such as efficiency, autonomy, care, and control—to legitimize their technological decisions and navigate ambivalences in domestic life.

In regard to theory, this contribution advances the sociological understanding of technology appropriation by foregrounding justification as a practice. It demonstrates how narrative practices shape what becomes acceptable, normal, or desirable in everyday life, and highlights the continuous reflexive work required to sustain technological arrangements. It does so in three respects. First, it conceptualizes convenience as a contingent outcome of justification work, rather than as a technological attribute. Second, it connects practice theory with the sociology of justification to analyze how routinized engagement and explicit account-giving intersect. Third, it provides a micro-sociological perspective on smart-home technologies that foregrounds normative embedding rather than technical functionality.

The following section outlines the practice-theory framework of the article (2). The methodological background of the qualitative study is then described (3). A presentation of the findings (4) addresses the combination of orders of worth in the verbal-practical production of convenience (4.1), as well as the situatedness of this construction and feelings of irritation in its regard (4.2). The results are then discussed (5), and a brief conclusion is provided (6).

Theoretical Framework

This section outlines the theoretical approach that guides the empirical analysis. It first introduces a practice-theory foundation, which is then connected to the sociology of justification. This theoretical combination aims to conceptualize speech about everyday life not merely as description but as socially relevant performance. Analytically, it seeks to capture the normative references on which such utterances draw and how they contribute to the legitimation of action.

Practice Theory and Domestic Transformation

The theoretical foundation of this analysis is practice theory, which understands social life as constituted through interconnected practices rather than primarily through individual actions or structural determinants (Schatzki 1996; 2002; Knorr-Cetina et al. 2001; Reckwitz 2002). From this perspective, practices constitute the central unit of analysis

for understanding social reality. Practices are conceived as complex patterns of activity integrating material arrangements, competences, and meanings, and thereby connecting bodily, material, and discursive dimensions.

For Theodore Schatzki, practices consist of a nexus of "doings" (bodily and material activities) and "sayings" (verbal utterances that accompany action and are performed in concrete social contexts) (Schatzki 1996; 2002). These doings and sayings form what Schatzki calls an "organized nexus of actions." A practice thus consists of an interrelation of doing and saying. In developing this perspective, Schatzki draws on Ludwig Wittgenstein, for whom language cannot be understood as a mere system of signs independent of its use. Rather, language is always embedded in concrete forms of life and must be understood as a rule-governed language game that emerges in relation to specific practices (Wittgenstein 1953).

This gives rise to an understanding of language as practice—speaking that is structured by concrete social contexts and, in turn, helps to bring these contexts into being. Accordingly, "sayings" cannot be understood as mere speech acts. Instead, saying is conceptualized as a form of doing (Schatzki 2002: 72). For Schatzki, "sayings" therefore include verbal utterances such as questions, valuations, narratives, or comments, as well as gestures, glances, and similar forms of expression. These do not merely serve communicative purposes but are constitutive of the accomplishment and organization of practices themselves. In this sense, "sayings" are not secondary or reflective additions to action but integral components of what makes a practice a practice. Language is thus not treated as a tool for describing the world but as a medium through which a shared world is practically constituted.

Within practices, "sayings" therefore play a central role: they order actions, mark permissible options, and stabilize shared understandings of what counts as "proper" or "efficient" action (Nicolini 2012). When, for example, a person legitimizes their use of a smart speaker by invoking time savings, this "saying" normatively situates the action. This form of verbal embedding is not merely reflective but constitutes a verbal-practical construction in which meanings are produced situationally.

Smart speakers enter practices as technological elements—for instance, when they help with cooking by providing recipes or when they help organize everyday life through scheduling—and they may support, extend, or reorganize these practices. Their integration, however, always requires practical work. Continuous effort is needed to align technological capacities with established courses of action, spatial arrangements, and social expectations. This work also includes finding a verbal frame for the device, through which its presence and use are legitimized.

From this perspective, convenience does not appear to be an intrinsic property of smart speakers, but rather an emergent quality of configurations of practice. When residents speak about the convenience of their devices, they articulate relations between technological capacities, domestic routines, and personal values—relations that must be continuously maintained through practical engagement. This understanding challenges techno-deterministic accounts that treat convenience as a direct outcome of technological design, as found in early digital-utopian visions (Negroponte 1995), or in industry-oriented imaginaries of networked living environments (Mitchell 1999). Although such promises have since been critically interrogated, they continue to shape imaginations of what smart

technologies are expected to deliver in everyday life (Strengers 2013; Wajcman 2015; Pink et al. 2016). The present text engages with these debates by demonstrating that everyday experiences of convenience cannot be taken for granted but are situationally produced through practical coordination and verbal justification.

Justification as Social Practice and Orders of Worth

The analysis of how people produce convenience in relation to smart speakers builds not only on a practice-theory foundation but on the sociology of justification, which was developed by Laurent Thévenot and Luc Boltanski (2006) and is here understood as a specific form of "sayings." Thévenot and Boltanski's framework provides analytical tools for examining how people navigate situations that require evaluation and justification by drawing on different orders of worth—coherent normative frameworks and evaluative principles that operate across social contexts.

Boltanski and Thévenot identify several historically central orders of worth that people mobilize when justifying their actions: the domestic order (1), the civic order (2), the market order (3), the industrial order (4), the order of inspiration (5), and the order of fame or recognition (6) (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006). In addition, a "green" order of worth centered on sustainability has emerged more recently (Thévenot 2019b: 89). These orders represent distinct normative domains, each characterized by a specific moral logic. In processes of justification, actors can draw on these orders to establish legitimacy. People navigate between them skillfully and often combine them in situationally adaptive ways, constructing justifications that resonate with relevant discourses and contexts (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006).

It is precisely here that the compatibility with practice-theory perspectives becomes evident. Orders of worth are not understood as mental representations but as situationally enacted practices of valuation and justification. Research in pragmatic sociology has repeatedly emphasized that justifications should be understood as practical competences mobilized in situated action, rather than as stable convictions held by actors (Silber 2003; Thévenot 2007; Lamont 2012). Justification is therefore not a purely verbal rationalization but a practical competence enacted in situ. In this sense, justifying itself becomes a social practice, embedded in doings and sayings, through which normative orders are activated, combined, and appropriated.

In the context of smart speakers, users must often account for multiple and sometimes conflicting orders of worth. The industrial order emphasizes efficiency and productivity; the domestic order refers to intimacy, care, and familial responsibility; the green order foregrounds sustainability; and the order of inspiration may be invoked to resist efficiency claims or to protect activities from optimization. The selection and combination of these orders are accomplished in practice—and it is precisely in this process that convenience appears as a practically produced, non-self-evident phenomenon.

The domestic context offers a particularly instructive analytical focus, as the home comprises spaces in which technological and social arrangements are continuously negotiated and reconfigured. Smart homes and smart speakers can be understood as assemblages of people, technologies, practices, and meanings that achieve temporary stability through on-

going relational work (Maalsen 2020; Kennedy et al. 2020). Technological integration is therefore never purely technical but always socially and culturally shaped.

Actively embedding smart speakers into everyday life thus requires continuous justification work. Residents explain to themselves and to others why these technologies belong in their homes and how they contribute to valued domestic outcomes. Viewed through this lens, it becomes clear that people do not passively consume convenience, but rather actively negotiate, produce, and legitimize it—a central insight for understanding the social dynamics underlying seemingly self-evident everyday technologies. The theoretical contribution of this article therefore lies not in introducing a new order of worth, but in analyzing how convenience emerges relationally from the situated alignment of multiple normative references within ongoing practices. In the analysis, this combination allows routinized and often taken-for-granted practical engagements with technologies to be connected to those moments in which actors are explicitly called upon to account for and justify their practices. Bringing together practice theory and the sociology of justification shows how everyday technological arrangements are both silently enacted and normatively articulated, thereby linking material coordination with the grammars of legitimacy through which convenience becomes acceptable or problematic.

The Analytical Role of Convenience

In this study, convenience is not understood as an order of worth in the sense proposed by Boltanski and Thévenot, but as an analytical category that captures how actions are presented as meaningful, appropriate, or legitimate in everyday life. Convenience is thus not a normative standard in its own right but an outcome of situational justification work.

Concepts of convenience have come to shape domestic life particularly strongly in the digital age. As a sociological object, however, convenience has primarily been addressed fragmentarily and from different analytical angles. While the sociology of consumption has extensively addressed status, identity, and symbolic aspects of consumption (Warde 2005; Campbell 2018), the specific role of convenience—understood as the promise of time savings, effortlessness, and comfort—has so far been explored only selectively. For instance, in *Comfort, Cleanliness and Convenience*, Elizabeth Shove (2003) showed how normative expectations of convenience have developed historically and become inscribed in material infrastructures. For Dale Southerton, convenience reshapes time-space relations by reorganizing everyday rhythms and the temporal coordination of practices: easier access and accelerated availability shift temporal bindings and coordination of action (Southerton 2003). Judy Wajcman demonstrates that digital acceleration dynamics lead to increasing time compression and scarcity, which also affect practices of reproduction and regeneration in the household and place existing temporal rhythms under pressure (Wajcman 2015). As Yolande Strengers shows, under conditions of accelerated and intensified everyday time, convenience becomes an implicit expectation in regard to technological innovations, insofar as they are expected to function without additional effort and to integrate as smoothly as possible into existing everyday practices (Strengers 2013). Convenience thus constitutes a key concept for understanding technologization and digitalization in the household not primarily as technological processes, but as socio-cultural transformations.

Rather than treating convenience as a stable cultural norm or as a structural outcome of broader socio-historical dynamics, this article conceptualizes it as the situated outcome of justification practices. Analytically, the focus is not on individual orders of worth, but on the ways in which different normative reference points are related to one another in concrete situations. Convenience emerges where such references are combined in ways that render the use of smart technologies plausible and self-evident. This does not involve the full mobilization of entire normative orders, but rather their selective and context-dependent activation.

These relations are not stable. Because orders of worth are structured according to different normative logics, they may come into tension with one another and must be realigned situationally. By analyzing justification work, the study therefore demonstrates that convenience cannot be presupposed in everyday life but must be continuously produced through practical and verbal means.

Before examining these processes empirically, the following section outlines the methodological approach that underpins the data collection and analysis.

Methodological Approach

This study employs a qualitative research design that combines semi-structured interviews with ethnographic elements in the context of home visits. Such a methodological approach was chosen in order to analyze the justification practices through which smart speakers are legitimized, stabilized, and produced as "convenient" in domestic everyday life. The focus is not on a full reconstruction of situated usage performances, but on examining those verbal-practical processes in which meanings, valuations, and normative classifications are articulated.

The data collection involved 22 home visits conducted between 2021 and 2024 in different households in Germany.[1] Participants were recruited through a combination of snowball sampling and targeted recruitment to ensure a degree of social and demographic diversity, for example, with regard to age, household composition, income, and the intensity of smart speaker use. Both urban and rural contexts were included. All households owned at least one smart speaker device, with ownership durations ranging from six months to five years.

The home visits usually lasted between 90 minutes and two hours. They began with an informal technology tour in which residents showed their smart devices and explained typical forms of use. During these tours, the technical infrastructure—particularly smart devices—was systematically explored, as this also allowed potential usage scenarios for smart speakers to be identified.[2] The methodological approach is informed by a technographic sensitivity (Kien 2008), attending to the situated embedding of technological artefacts in

[1] The data collection was carried out as part of the sociological sub-project of the project 'DIPCY-Disruptions of Networked Privacy,' which was conducted from 2021 to 2025 at the Technical University of Dresden under the direction of Prof. Susann Wagenknecht.

[2] Due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021, the first four interviews of this study were conducted and recorded via video calls. In these cases, the technology walkthrough was limited to participants showing and explaining the relevant devices using their computer camera.

everyday practices. The tour was followed by semi-structured interviews addressing when the technology was acquired, its perceived benefits, its routinized applications, and the interviewees' ambivalences and irritations related to smart speakers (e.g., due to malfunctions or privacy concerns). All the conversations were recorded using an audio recorder. The interviews drew on principles of ethnographic interviewing (Spradley 2016); accordingly, observations were documented during field visits and subsequently elaborated into memory protocols.

The analysis followed an interpretive approach informed by principles of grounded theory (Corbin/Strauss 2008; Charmaz 2014; Bowen 2006). Interview transcripts and field notes were first coded openly and inductively; this was followed by focused coding with particular attention to valuation, justification, and everyday references to relief, efficiency, and convenience. Theory functioned as "sensitizing concepts" (Blumer 1954), providing analytical orientation without restricting empirical openness. Particular attention was paid to moments of ambivalence, uncertainty, or contradictory valuations, as these were instances in which justification work could be observed especially clearly.

A central methodological argument of this study concerns the limited observability of practices. Practices consist of routines, tacit knowledge, situational coordination, and material arrangements, which can all be captured only empirically in partial and fragmentary ways (Nicolini 2012). Empirical access to practices therefore necessarily relies on indirect indicators such as narratives, situated descriptions, and the ways in which actors order and account for their actions.

In this context, interviews are not treated as distorted representations of an underlying "actual" practice but as social practices in their own right (Talja 1999; Silverman 2013). Interview situations are performative contexts in which normative reference points are activated, valuations are made, and actions are legitimized. It is precisely this normatively charged setting that reveals how people navigate between different orders of worth and integrate technological arrangements into domestic life.

For the purposes of this study, the mode of justification was central. The participants did not merely report their use of smart speakers; rather, through their explanations they actively produced what convenience meant to them and why it appeared acceptable or desirable. Their justification practices therefore did not function as retrospective reflections but as constitutive elements in the social production and stabilization of convenience.

The interview guide did not explicitly ask for convenience as a term. Instead, it elicited open narratives about usage, everyday experiences, perceived benefits, and ambivalences or irritations. The fact that convenience nevertheless appears repeatedly is therefore not an effect of suggestive questioning; rather, it indicates that convenience—as a conceptual condensation of the combination of different orders of worth—constitutes a central reference point in the everyday justification of smart speakers. Convenience was thus not presupposed but developed inductively as an analytical category from the material. Given this interpretative design, the findings should be understood as context-sensitive reconstructions rather than statistically representative accounts of smart speaker use. The study does not seek to determine the prevalence of specific justificatory patterns, but to illuminate the mechanisms through which convenience is normatively produced and stabilized within situated practices. While the empirical material reflects diverse domestic

constellations, the analysis remains embedded in a particular national and socio-cultural context. The transferability of the results therefore lies at the level of the conceptual mechanisms identified, which may inform and be specified in further studies conducted in different settings.

The following section draws on selected empirical material to show, first, how people creatively combine orders of worth (4.1) in order to construct convenience as a legitimation of smart speaker use, and second, how this construction can lead to irritation, or fail (4.2).

Results

Convenience at the Intersection of Different Orders of Worth

This analytical step shows that convenience should not be understood as a presupposed property of smart technologies. Rather, alongside concrete modes of use and the associated material arrangements, it is also produced through verbal-practical justification work. Smart speakers do not reveal their convenience solely through technical functionalities but only where these functionalities are embedded in everyday routines, put to use, and framed as meaningful or appropriate. Accordingly, the analytical focus of the section is on users' justificatory practices. This does not imply that convenience is produced exclusively through language. Rather, the analysis focuses on situations where technological arrangements require explanation, and it becomes visible how concrete uses, spatial-material set-ups, and normative expectations are verbally related in order to stabilize convenience as a legitimate quality of everyday life. The very need to mobilize multiple normative references side by side indicates that, in the cases examined here, no single order of worth is sufficient on its own to legitimize convenience in a lasting way.

A particularly classic form of producing convenience appears where efficiency and time savings are foregrounded. In a video interview, one interviewee describes how smart home functions contribute to the compression of everyday routines:[3]

> The day still has its 24 hours, but the whole range of tasks you have keeps getting denser anyway. There are always more things you have to get done, and especially with things like that—yeah, maybe we're talking about a task of, I don't know, a minute a day, pulling something up and down, maybe a minute—but even if I can automate all of that and I'm sitting at the breakfast table in the morning and just say: Alexa, raise my blinds […] then yeah, that's time I've simply saved (transcript of video interview 1).

In this passage, convenience is initially legitimized through the industrial order of worth: automation appears as a means of reducing effort and using scarce time resources more efficiently. The saved time, though, is not presented as a mere by-product but is endowed with its own normative value. "Time for oneself" is implicitly linked to notions of autonomy and self-care. Efficiency thus functions as an enabling condition for other value references rather than as a stand-alone criterion.

An everyday extension of this logic could be observed in another home visit, during which an interviewee described how the use of smart devices gradually became established:

[3] The interviews were conducted in German. All excerpts presented here were translated into English by the author, with attention to preserving contextual meaning.

It's actually quite pleasant when I walk in here and can already tell the TV to turn on, so I don't always have to look for the remote control, and that's how it gradually expanded. And then with the thermostats I thought it made the most sense, because—I don't know how it is for you—in the evening you turn the heating on in the living room and then forget to turn it off. You leave…and I can just tell my heating: at around 11 p.m., please turn down to 12 degrees. Exactly. And it's just a relief in terms of work in many places (transcript of home visit 20).

Here, convenience is explicitly produced through the notion of relief from work. With the phrase "I don't know how it is for you," intersubjective plausibility is generated: the use is presented as a generally understandable response to common everyday situations. This argument is supplemented by a reflexive consideration of possible energy savings, which is, however, explicitly relativized:

And I'm also hoping for some electricity savings, but I haven't really been able to find—not even online in studies—whether it actually leads to savings (ibid.).

What is analytically decisive here is not the demonstration of objective effects, but the plausibility of relief. This is further supported by a series of small-scale uses:

I don't have to constantly use light switches. At the same time, I have a music speaker where I can tell it what kind of music I want to listen to without having to pick up my phone. These are little things—setting a timer or an alarm via the device is super easy, super quick, which I'd otherwise have to do on my phone or something. (…) I put the pizza in the oven and say: set a timer for 15 minutes, and then I can sit down here and relax, or the alarm in the morning, the classic one. (…) And then I have a few silly things (…) like: when I tell her to make the lighting sexy, then the lights turn red and music starts playing—things like that, little things, just… (ibid.)

In this passage, different usage scenarios are placed side by side, jointly contributing to the legitimation of the smart speaker. Some of these examples remain within the industrial order of worth, insofar as they aim at reducing coordination efforts. At the same time, however, uses are mentioned that elude this logic. By referring to lighting and music moods, another value reference is mobilized that can be associated with the order of inspiration—not as creative self-realization, but as an everyday mode of playful self-expression and affective atmosphere. Here, the analysis shows that the legitimacy of use emerges from the co-existence of these value references rather than from their unification.

A qualitatively different form of producing convenience emerges in the context of domestic care. In a household with small children, the use of smart speakers is legitimized through their function in everyday family life:

It depends, yeah, because we also have a child, and sometimes it's just like this: when he's crying, you can, for example, say, play some song that he likes, and then he really does calm down sometimes […] or we sometimes use this drop-in function […] hey, please come to the bathroom quickly… (transcript of home visit 7).

Here, convenience is not justified through efficiency or performance enhancement, but through references to care, responsibility, and the organization of intimate domestic situations. The legitimacy of use arises from its embedding in a domestic order of worth, in which relief appears as a morally appropriate form of supporting everyday family life.

In some cases, convenience is finally embedded in a broader societal context. In one household, for instance, the use of a smart heating thermostat is reflected against the backdrop of the energy crisis and the war in Ukraine. Smart speakers are also valuated as part of a shared frame of reference for smart household technologies:

That's why I find these things quite practical, because I also know that I don't really have that awareness […] and now, especially with the Ukraine crisis and the whole energy issue, I'm quite curious whether that might actually make a difference […] it's just such a relief […] and then actually not having to think about so many things anymore. (…) it's the same with Alexa and shopping lists or something, that you don't have to write things down everywhere and save paper (laughs) (transcript of home visit 8).

In this passage, several orders of worth are interwoven: sustainability, civic responsibility, market-based scarcity, and everyday relief. Convenience is constructed—initially in a general reference to smart devices and then, albeit in a slightly ironic tone, explicitly in relation to smart speakers—not as mere comfort but as legitimate support for responsible action.

The above examples demonstrate that convenience is not a given but is rather produced through situational justification work. Convenience emerges from the combination of different orders of worth, whose interplay allows smart speakers to be stabilized as legitimate elements of everyday domestic life. The following analytical section turns to the moments these constructions begin to cause irritation and reach their limits.

Irritations and Situational Negotiations of Convenience

While the preceding section demonstrated how convenience is produced through the situational linking of different orders of worth, the focus now shifts to those situations in which these linkages give rise to irritations, become fragile, or fail altogether. In such moments, justificatory orders can no longer be smoothly combined (Schmitz 2023), or they lose their plausibility in practical enactment—for example, when promises of efficiency are not fulfilled. Which order is drawn upon for justification in each situation is always a situational achievement: actors recognize which justificatory strategy appears plausible in a particular context and adjust their argumentation accordingly (Boltanski & Thévenot 2006). It is precisely where such adjustments falter or fail that the fragility of convenience becomes analytically visible. The following examples illustrate different forms connected with such feelings of irritation: normative revaluations of previously plausible justifications, practical failures of promises of efficiency, and deliberate normative boundary-drawing.

A first form of irritation becomes visible when gains in efficiency lose their positive valence in the course of reflection and collide with other value orientations. In one interview, the use of a smart speaker is initially described as a way of bundling multiple information requests in the morning, while showering:

Listening to the news in the bathroom in the morning. When I get up, I say "hey, start my day," and then I have—well, I configured that in the app. Then it tells me what appointments I have in my calendar, what the weather will be today, and it plays the news via the app that I set beforehand. […] Now the density of information is even higher, because you configure exactly what you want to hear, or it's more focused (transcript of home visit 7).

In the interview, this use is legitimized through reference to efficiency and the temporal compression of everyday routines. In an informal follow-up conversation after the interview, however, an element of irritation has entered the valuation. In retrospect, the interviewee reflects that this morning routine could also be read as a loss: the few minutes in the morning that had previously not been functionally organized now

appeared as the only unplanned periods of the day. The efficient structuring thus becomes ambivalent—it no longer stands solely for relief, but collides with a value orientation that emphasizes openness, leisure, and non-scheduling. The analysis suggests that this irritation did not emerge independently of the conversational context. Rather, it arose in the interview situation itself, when a previously taken-for-granted everyday valuation was renegotiated under an explicitly reflective, sociologically-framed perspective. This example demonstrates that the interviewees' justifications were not independent of the situational context but remained bound to their respective normative framing.

A second form of irritation concerns cases in which efficiency is generally accepted as a normative orientation, but its promises are not realized in practical enactment. In several home visits, it becomes apparent that convenience is not tied solely to individual functions but equally to upstream processes of setting up, configuring, and maintaining technical systems. In one interview, for example, the growing organizational effort associated with an increasing number of networked devices is described in detail:

> These are just things where I currently need—it feels like—a new app for every lamp, for every thermostat, because Alexa itself hardly produces any of its own stuff and all of that is done by so many subsidiaries. And that means I now have one app for the thermostat and another app for the lamps, and for the lamps I have yet another app because of the brand—and I only found that out afterwards, that those bulbs don't exist and so on. And all of that is a bit exhausting (transcript of home visit 20).

Here, the industrial order of efficiency collides with experiences of complexity and additional work. The promised relief is undermined by organizational effort; convenience loses its plausibility because it is experienced not as simplification but as a new burden in everyday life. A similar pattern emerges in another home visit, where potentially attractive functions are acknowledged in principle, but their implementation is described as disproportionately complicated:

> These are things where I thought, well, you could try it and see whether it brings something, but with commands like that—well, voice commands and spoken outputs and geographic position—it makes less sense. That probably makes sense on an Alexa Show device, but I don't feel like programming that, because then you have to use paid maps and all of that setup stuff, and it's just all too complicated for me (transcript of home visit 4).

Here again, the analysis shows that the justification of convenience does not fail due to a fundamental rejection of technology, but because efficiency, effort, and expected benefit cannot be brought into a convincing relationship. The justificatory work stalls because practical experience does not support the normative claim of relief.

Another form of irritation concerns the worry that automation might undermine cognitive capacities. In one home visit, it was argued that while technological support may offer situational relief, an excessive delegation of everyday thinking processes appears problematic:

> Our gray cells want to be challenged a bit as well […] if everything is served up to us like that […] doesn't a lot of brain power get lost? (transcript of home visit 2).

Here, convenience is not fundamentally rejected, but normatively limited. The order of efficiency comes into tension with value orientations such as self-responsibility and autonomy. The analysis indicates that convenience remains acceptable as long as it is

understood as support but loses its legitimacy where it is interpreted as a replacement for one's own cognitive effort.

The failure of producing convenience becomes particularly visible in cases where smart speakers are abandoned entirely. In one home visit, the memory protocol records that the devices were initially purchased out of technological curiosity (memory protocol, home visit 12). After installation, however, disillusionment quickly set in, as no clear everyday benefit crystallized. At the same time, sensitivity to potential privacy risks increased. What is analytically decisive here is not that a single order of worth—such as privacy—simply overrides all others, but rather that in this case it proves impossible to link privacy concerns, promises of efficiency, and expected added value in such a way that continued use appears meaningful. The justificatory work breaks down; convenience can no longer be plausibly produced.

The normative limitation of the convenience logic becomes most explicit where efficiency claims are deliberately suspended. One interviewee said that while smart speakers are accepted for structuring everyday life, they are not accepted for organizing activities experienced as meaningful or self-contained:

> I see [smart speakers] as a technology that should support me in my life […] But plants… in the end, Alexa should help me facilitate my daily tasks and structure them. But I don't want to have my hobby structured; I want to live it out […] I do it for the joy of it (transcript of home visit 8).

Here, convenience has not led to irritation but is actively limited. Certain practices gain their value precisely from not being optimized. This example illustrates what can be described as deliberate normative boundary-drawing: convenience is not only fragile, but selective—it is desirable only where it can be made compatible with other orders of worth.

In summary, this section has shown that convenience is not a stable condition but is continuously negotiated in a situational manner. The emergence of users' feelings of irritation indicate that the legitimacy of convenience is always contingent: it can be relativized or entirely withdrawn through normative reevaluations, practical failure, claims to autonomy, or privacy concerns. Thus, from the analytical perspective selected here, convenience does not appear as a property of technology but as the result of situational justification work, whose plausibility can be called into question at any time—whether through tensions between different orders of worth or through the practical failure of promised relief.

The analysis of users' feelings of irritation makes clear that the production of convenience depends not only on the successful linking of different orders of worth but equally on their situational robustness in practical enactment. It is precisely where justifications become fragile or fail that the conditions in which convenience can be stabilized in everyday life—and where its limits lie—become visible. The following section turns to the question of how these empirical findings can be theoretically situated and what contribution they make to a sociological understanding of digitalized domestic life.

Discussion

The analysis has shown that convenience in the context of smart speakers can be understood neither as an intrinsic property of the technology nor as a purely subjective user experience.

Rather, convenience is actively produced, stabilized, and limited through verbal practices. Central to this process is that these modes of production become visible primarily in verbal-practical enactments. These include justifications, valuations, and boundary-drawing through which users relate technological use to domestic routines, moral expectations, and personal value orientations. Focusing on "sayings" thus allows the analysis to identify the normative processes through which smart speakers are experienced as convenient and meaningful, or problematic.

Convenience at the Intersection of Different Orders of Worth showed that convenience is typically not legitimized by reference to efficiency alone. Instead, it emerges through the combination of different orders of worth. Efficiency gains plausibility only when linked to other normative reference points, such as care in the context of family arrangements, sustainability in times of energy crises, or autonomy in the sense of temporal relief. These linkages are situational and flexible: users mobilize different orders, adapt their argumentation to the conversational context, and thereby verbally produce specific forms of convenience as condensed meaning.

Irritations and Situational Negotiations of Convenience then showed that these constructions remain structurally fragile. Irritations arise where orders of worth come into tension, can no longer be convincingly combined, or fail to deliver in practice. Efficiency may appear as relief at one moment and as a loss of leisure or autonomy at another. Automation reaches its limits when it is perceived as cognitive disempowerment or when technical complexity undermines the promised benefits. In some cases, the production of convenience fails entirely—for example, when expected added value, practical effort, and privacy concerns cannot be brought into a plausible relationship. These findings demonstrate that convenience is not a stable condition but a contingent outcome of situational negotiation.

From a practice-theory perspective, it is crucial that these negotiations can be observed primarily in users' "sayings." The study does not reconstruct convenience through a comprehensive ethnography of material arrangements or bodily routines, but through those verbal-practical enactments in which use is explicitly articulated, valuated, and legitimized. This follows a central assumption of practice theory: for Schatzki, "sayings" are not secondary reflections on practice, but constitutive elements of practices themselves. Through them, normative orders are actualized, actions are valuated, and possibilities for further action are generated (Schatzki 2002; Nicolini 2012).

Interview situations thus function as condensed contexts in which these normative orientations become visible. When users explain why certain functions are experienced as relief, others are rejected, or use remains limited, they translate technological capacities into socially intelligible orders of meaning. In these "sayings," convenience is not merely described but practically produced. Focusing on verbal justification work therefore allows the analysis to grasp the normative dimension of convenience without claiming to capture practice in its entirety, including all material and bodily aspects.

The findings can also be read as a contribution to the sociology of justification. Boltanski and Thévenot have shown that actors have access to a repertoire of different orders of worth that they can mobilize situationally. The present study confirms this assumption, but shifts the focus in two respects. First, it shows that justification work

is not only relevant in explicit conflict situations but also in the routine handling of new technologies. Here, justifications function as a continuous mechanism of integration through which smart speakers are embedded in existing domestic orders.

Second, the analysis demonstrates that these justifications are not arbitrarily combinable. In several empirical cases, orders of worth come into tension or can no longer be convincingly linked. These moments of breakdown are analytically productive because they show that convenience cannot simply be asserted but remains bound to normative, situational, and socially shaped relations of fit.

Existing studies on smart homes and digital households have repeatedly shown that users explain, relativize, or normalize their technology use—for example, in relation to surveillance and privacy concerns or in the context of energy-related regulation (Strengers 2013; Pink et al. 2016; Maalsen & Sadowski 2019). These works demonstrate that digital technologies are not seamlessly integrated into domestic life but are subject to ongoing negotiation.

The present study builds on these findings but differs in its analytical focus. Rather than treating justifications as accompanying explanations or individual rationalizations, it conceptualizes them as an independent social practice through which convenience is produced, limited, or abandoned in everyday life. By combining practice theory with the sociology of justification, the analysis demonstrates how normative orders are mobilized, combined, restricted, or rejected in everyday contexts. Privacy concerns, for instance, appear in the empirical material less as dominant reasons for rejection than as latent tensions that are situationally relativized or subordinated to other value orientations. This is a significant finding: it shows how convenience, as a normative reference point, contributes to rendering potential conflicts—such as those surrounding privacy—manageable in everyday practice.

The contribution of this study therefore does not lie in establishing convenience as an all-encompassing explanatory concept for digital domesticity. Rather, it sharpens convenience as an analytical perspective that directs attention to justification work. Convenience appears here as the effect of continuous verbal-practical coordination: it emerges where technological functions are successfully linked to existing orders of worth, and it disintegrates where such linkages fail or come into tension.

By introducing justification as a central level of observation, the study identifies a mechanism that has so far received only limited attention in smart-home research: the everyday production of plausibility and legitimacy in dealing with smart technologies. The digital transformation of domestic life thus appears less as a linear process of technological penetration and more as an ongoing negotiation of normative fit. In this process, convenience functions as a central, but inherently unstable, reference point through which technological innovations are rendered plausible in everyday life—or fail to be so.

Conclusion

In this article I have shown that convenience in the context of smart speakers cannot be understood as a self-evident property of technological artefacts. Instead, convenience

was analyzed as the outcome of situational justification work through which users link, delimit, or reject technological functions by drawing on different normative reference points. Convenience thus appears not as a given motive for use, but as a socially produced quality whose plausibility must be continuously negotiated in everyday life.

The central analytical contribution of the study lies in sharpening convenience as a distinct sociological perspective. While smart-home technologies are often examined in terms of their technical potential or individual user preferences, this article directs attention to the normative work required to integrate such technologies into everyday life as "convenient," "meaningful," or "appropriate." Convenience does not function here as an overarching value, but as a mediating reference category through which different orders of worth can be situationally related to one another.

The empirical analysis has shown that the production of convenience is neither stable nor free of contradiction. Justifications can be affected by feelings of irritation, encounter practical limits, or be deliberately suspended. These moments are particularly revealing, as they demonstrate that convenience cannot be taken for granted but remains bound to normative relations of fit. Convenience is therefore not a durable property of technologies but a contingent achievement of social coordination.

Methodologically, the article highlights the analytical value of interviews as situations of justification. By prompting users to explain their actions, interviews make visible those normative orientations that also guide action beyond moments of explicit reflection. Focusing on "sayings" thus allows a central, often difficult-to-access aspect of social practice to be empirically examined (without claiming to capture practice in its entirety).

Beyond the specific case of smart speakers, this study suggests that convenience should not be treated as self-evident, but rather, systematically problematized. Convenience constitutes a core promise of digital household technologies. For this reason, it is worth examining the social production of convenience, with its limits and normative preconditions, more closely. From this perspective, the digital transformation of domestic life appears less like the implementation of technological promises and more like ongoing work on their social plausibility.

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