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**CONCEPTUALIZING AND
ILLUSTRATING THE DIGITAL
LIFESTYLE OF YOUTH**

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Conceptualizing and illustrating the digital lifestyle of youth

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Abstract

This research looks at the psychosocial content and nature of the concept of the digital lifestyle when applied to pre-teens and teenagers. The concept of lifestyle is analyzed to assess whether the digital technological context is an acceptable framework to characterize the daily life of pre-teens and teenagers. Five dimensions of the digital lifestyle concept were useful to structure more than 200 technologically aware young consumers who discussed the meaning and usage of several digital devices.

1. Introduction

Adolescents are usually keen to adopt new technologies, especially those relatively accessible and valued by their peer group. Although, this statement is intuitively imbued with common sense, it does, however, require some deeper inquiry to assess to what extent there is lifestyle which may be labeled as digital within the teen and pre-teen sub-culture? And if it exists, what is the sociological and psychological meaning of being digital in these age groups?

We start this article by discussing concepts such as culture/sub-culture and lifestyle. Further, the methodological aspects guiding the empirical part of this research are depicted and the results are discussed.

2. Conceptual background

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- Apart from the author three other psychologists moderated the Focus Group: Márcia Gonçalves, Célia Medeiros and Catarina Saenz Camilo.

Very often the term lifestyle appears associated to youth culture and specifically with sub-culture theories. In order to clarify the nature of lifestyle notion we start looking at the conceptual and structural relations between these two concepts.

2.1 Youth sub-culture

Culture captures the shared meaning within a specific society encompassing a common representation of the world and the way participants within that culture affectively react, think/believe and consistently behave (Sturdivant, 1973; Sherry, 1986). Apart from the values, norms, and rules held by most people in society, the cultural process includes symbols and rituals (McCracken, 1988). The symbols are particularly useful to communicate the real or the desired cultural meanings (Durgee and Stuart, 1987; Solomon, 1983). The rituals allow persons/consumers to create, affirm, evoke, or revise certain cultural meanings during their life cycle, whether under a ceremonial format or not (McCracken, 1988). A sub-culture gathers many common traits of the upper-level cultural hierarchical degree but also nurtures some specific and unique cultural meaning only significant among those members belonging to that faction (Peter and Olson, 2005). That is, a sub-culture is a sub-set or a social group both distinct and separate from the related (dominant) culture (Blackman, 2005). Age can be a criteria used to draw up the boundaries of the sub-culture (Walsh, 1985), but insufficient to exclusively define it. Sub-culture can be regarded by two different perspectives:

- Youth versus adult society, or dominant culture against youth world (sub-culture). Although, it is a social product or a reflection of what is happening in society, it represents the way youth experiences are expressed and how they deal with their existential problems. They reject the conventional norms, even provoking the established authority just to pinpoint their independence (Garratt, 2004). In the adults' perspective a youth sub-culture is somewhat subversive, deviant and intellectually impenetrable (Becker, 1973).
- Visibility = Street + Style. Only by interacting on the streets and becoming highly visible (eventually choking), youths express a shared style: (1) music preferences and the corresponding idols who personify freedom and a sort of collective consciousness (Garrett, 2004); (2) fashion deals as a value-

expressive channel of their imaginary or real reference groups but is always active in influencing the teenagers' self-concept and self-identity (Hebdige, 2002); (3) body-shaping (and/or modification), beyond the leisure domain, sport is aestheticized regardless of portraying an assertion of popular consumer culture thus a globalization and commodification of their lives (Hengst, 2005), it is generally recognized as a popular practice in which to interact and integrate.

The view taken above epitomizes one among many conceptualizations. Blackman (2004) summarized historically roots of sub-culture concept and the subsequent streams of sociological paradigms:

- (1) The Chicago School, following a structural-functionalism approach and ethnographic methods, mapped the diverse urban communities social relations ascribing sub-cultures as the deviant group generally devoted to marginal and criminal activities.
- (2) Sharing a similar outcome, aiming to explain individuals/groups social inadequacy, the British Theories of Sub-culture evolved from positivism and theories of (child/adolescent) development to psychoanalytical interpretation.
- (3) Cultural Studies assumed the Marxist legacy to criticize the capitalist society praising the ability of sub-culture to creatively resist the established cultural status-quo to generate inter-class conflict and social emancipation.
- (4) Post-modern theory.

In the past ten years we have witnessed a debate between the traditionalist approach of sub-culture, developed and sustained by the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) at Birmingham, U.K, and the so-called Post-sub-culturalists. The former supports a coherent sub-unity of society focused on common norms, values and beliefs portraying a fixed and stable unit in terms of time and space identity homogeneity. Their concept of sub-culture remains relevant only when it is seen in contrast with the dominant culture. Thus, Shildrick and MacDonald (2006) stress the enduring role of social (class) divisions in shaping youth cultural identities, practices, leisure activities and above all inequalities of power.

The Post-modern theories gave rise to Post-sub-cultural theories. This movement simply contests the sub-culture divide as a specific and stable entity, but proposes it rather as a fleeting, free-floating, fragmented, more fluid and transient cultural formation, celebrating style, fashion and media avoiding affiliations in a political gesture of resistance (Muggleton, 2000). The Teen sub-culture phenomenon, if it exists, far from being an homogeneous unit, comprises many categories of groups, without necessarily involving the adoption of all-encompassing norms and values, but is more a leisure-time activity or social gathering on special occasions such as music festivals (Martin, 2004). Sub-cultural identities are complex, diachronic in nature, not mutually exclusive with other sub-culture, though externally stable they exhibit high levels of internal variation (Wood, 2003). Under this theory, the priority lies in individual choice to explore personal emancipation and self-fulfillment by engaging (creatively) in consumerism practices, hence collectively experiencing stylistic appearances, drug use or bodily representations (Blackman, 2005; Bennett, 2005). However, individuals select and internalize differently those communalities of cultural commoditization redefining their meaning according to each biographical idiosyncrasy. Thus nothing stops them to accommodate several sub-cultural identities (Bennett, 1999; Wood, 2003).

The Post sub-cultural theorists propose other constructs to replace the old-fashioned sub-cultural concept:

- Neo-tribes are small-scale social configurations positioned outside from the notion of class; a sort of coming together of protests, festivals and movements of diverse causes, reflecting the speed and passion of the urban unstable context. Those aims of ephemeral groups are to satisfy their individual needs rather than pursue community goals (Maffesali, 1996).
- Lifestyle binds several antecedents, age, gender, race, family upbringing, cultural affinities, activities, which aggregately better represent it. Miles (2000) stressed that stability and sense of coherence provides the concept in framing youth identities: “Young people no longer depend on sub-cultural affirmation for the construction of their identities (if indeed they ever did) but construct lifestyles that are as adaptable and as flexible as the world around them... young people use their lifestyles, which on the surface appear to be

fragmented or ‘post-modern’, as a highly rational and modernist way of stabilizing their everyday lives”(p.159)

- Apart from this ideological debate, two empirical studies relocate the adequacy of the two paradigms: Sub-culturalists and Post-sub-culturalists. Within the context of Hip-Hop and prison, stylistic expression of African-American youth in New Orleans high school, the sub-cultural framework still makes sense. As Baxter and Marina (2008) describe, regardless of reordering and re-contextualization of some normative signs into different meaning, the fashion-dress, music and language are essentially confrontational instruments against the demands for conformity of the dominant institutional authority/culture. On the other side, Greener and Holland (2006) attempt to take the best of both worlds. They reject the simplistic theoretical dichotomy, since each theoretical approach offers insights to understand the virtual *psytrance* global sub-culture. Rather, neither perspective, separately, is able to capture the complexity of that phenomenon.

The Internet generated a new arena for interaction between people beyond conventional face-to-face interaction constraints. Although the Internet offers the opportunity to globally share ideas as well as new levels of freedom from peer and familial commitments, Bennett (2004) posits that “rather than viewing the Internet as a cultural context, it is perhaps better conceptualized as a cultural resource appropriated within pre-existing cultural context” (p.164).

The Internet, specifically chat rooms and instant messaging, are natural arenas for the development of meta-communicative language – acronyms, similes and a mix of native language with English letters/words, such as, w, k and y _ and conventions or styles inspired in Hip-Hop and techno. These codes are constructed and reconstructed limiting the span of adoption to specific age groups: language in preceding age groups is childish and beyond are fossils, and consequently excluded (Tingstad, 2003). Teenagers and children create their own language – netspeak – which is formally somewhat distinct from the conventional, since it incorporates slang, abbreviations, leetspeak, emoticons and other online jargons (Rosen, 2007). The discussion of whether or not these codes are also “culture” is beyond the scope of this paper. Apparently this meta-communicative

language embodies feelings and thoughts, thus meanings and values, that are better represented and only make sense under that virtual environment.

2.2 Lifestyle concept

Lifestyle is not a new a concept. In spite of its long “tradition” usage in social sciences and widespread applications covering domains from medicine (Coreil, 1985) to marketing (Kotler, et al., 2005) it still requires more intellectual investment to define and operationalize (Rossel, 2007). The theoretical underpinnings of the term go back to the origins of the sociology. Veblen (1899) assumed a conflict between the Marxist notion of the precursor of lifestyle, named pattern of life , and his own approach of “styles” of life. The former theorization was purely economic and materialistic dependent on the division of labor, which yielded a system of production contributing to social and wealth disparities (Marx, 1887). Whereas Veblen, without excluding income and occupational position aspects, introduced a symbolic element on the interpretation of style of life patterns: the individuals’ motivations to validate and exhibit their status. These two previous studies influenced Weber (1922), who was the first to coin the term ‘lifestyle’. He embodied it as a structural feature in his social strata conceptualization, which also comprised hereditary charisma and hierocratic authority. The legacy of those authors still persist in the sociological debate concerning whether or not lifestyle can be considered an alternative to the classical concept of social class. The former terminology could be seen as a subjective dimension of social inequality or at least as a complement (DiMaggio, 1987; Pakulski and Waters, 1996).

In the psychology field, Adler (1929) placed a central role in the notion of a person as a purposive actor in life. The person’s lifestyle reflects and creates the unity and uniqueness of an individual’s behavior, which is subjectively, determined more by his/her psychological background than by the environment and society. Although, the psychologists emphasized the internal disposition, such as emotion and cognition, the observational arena of the lifestyle guideline is expressed on the social interaction. This aspect represents the convergent approach of the sociological and psychological traditional vantage point. Aiming to synthesize several components associated with the lifestyle concept, Feldman and Thielbar (1972) proposed the following characteristics:

(1) it is a group phenomenon encompassing a similar profile in terms of demographic and psychographic variables; (2) it pervades many aspects of life portraying a consistent behavioral pattern; (3) it implies a central life interest shaping the individuals' family, work, leisure and buying decisions; (4) it is specific and measurable by selected sociological relevant variables. Furthermore, contributions from medicine and healthcare pinpoint the notion of "habit" as a direct consequence of the person's life style, and is coherently connected with the time dimension which underlies stability in pursuing that behavior (Coreil et al., 1985).

More recently, the opinion of the German language sociologists, voiced by Rossel (2007, p.3), proposed the following definition: "Lifestyles are a pattern of actions within fields of behavior which can be aestheticized". In contrast with more instrumental relations with the objects, aestheticizing daily life means to focus on experiences that are pleasant for the senses, as well as immediate sensory with regards to enjoyment consumption and leisure time.

Adopting the pragmatic perspective of marketing, Lazer (1964) showed the operational benefits of an aggregate behavioral pattern based on several relevant variables covering many different disciplines. Under this perspective, lifestyle "refers to a pattern of consumption reflecting a person's choices to how he or she spends time and money" (Solomon, 2004, p.198). It is equally useful to learn what consumers buy, as well as to know who they are, how and under what conditions they decide and consume the products and/or services, and finally why they perform that behavior or make those decisions.

The lifestyle segmentation allows a categorization of consumers into specific motivational groups. Activity, Interest and Opinion, AIO, was one of the most popular motivational research methods (Wells and Tigert, 1971). Using this approach we can learn what actions consumers accomplish and how they use their time – Activity. Simultaneously, we also may understand their emotional attachments and preferences – Interests. Finally, the justifications and attributions are obtained through a battery of possible statements aimed to capture the opinions. The AIO was particularly popular in identifying lifestyle profiles, which helped to differentiate between users and non-users, but also to discriminate the heavy users of a given product (Berkman and Gilson, 1974).

The Values and Lifestyles Systems became a well-known proprietary method offering segmentation typologies (Riche, 1989). Although too general to be practical under micro-marketing context, their categorizations of consumers, rooted in values, help marketers to avoid mistakes when advertising in different cultural settings.

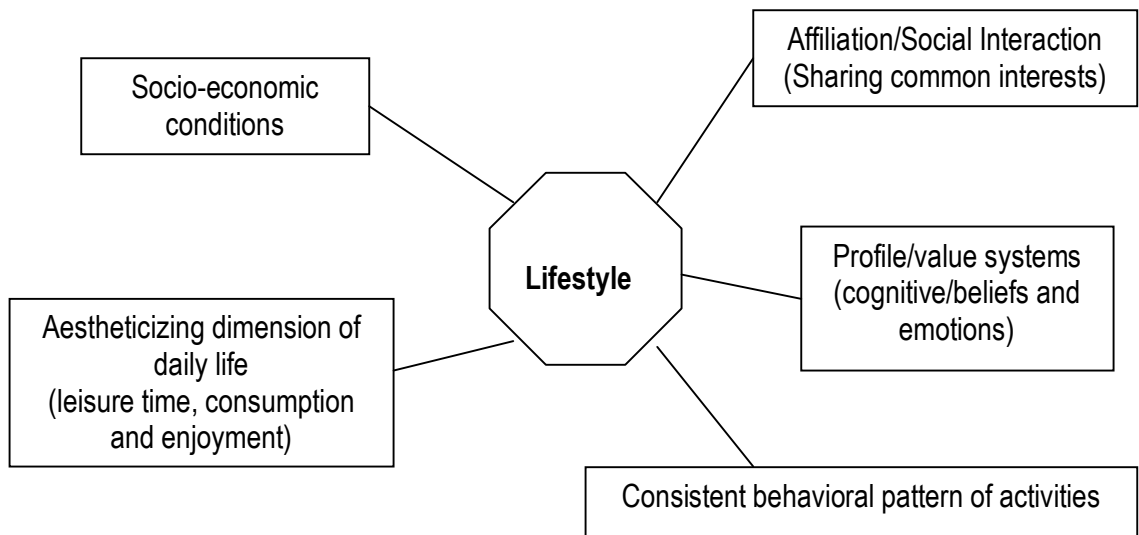
Apart from those unspecific and broader typologies mentioned above, the conjoint application of demographics – describing who – and psychographic variables – describing why – provides a more realistic scenario, especially if they are designed to be a product-specific profile (Plummer, 1974; Boote, 1975; Rice, 1988). The predictive power of “lifestyle” variables depend on the definition of appropriate psychographic constructs in order to match the specific characteristics of the product/service as well as the context/situation (Heath, 1995; Lastovicka et al., 1987). Whang and Chang (2004) developed the typology of Massive Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game participants. The nine lifestyle factors gave rise to three clusters of players: single oriented players, community oriented players and off-real world players. The differences among them still persist in off-line world when criteria such as activities, style of community participation and method of self-expression are used to make comparisons. However, in the latter segment of players, their online character tended to deepen some specific traits.

Sociological tradition underlying lifestyle has pinpointed the social nature of that concept expressed in the intra-group sharing of common interests. Cooley (1998) characterized two principal types of groups: primary and secondary. The former is composed of persons who know one another well, seek one another’s company, and are emotionally closed. Their members have a “we” feeling and enjoy being together (Shepard, 2007). Whereas, the secondary group is instrumental, impersonal and goal oriented (Cooley, 1998). Both types of groups require some degree of social interaction. That process of mutual influence (Turner, 2002) may be expressed through five possible modalities: cooperation, conformity, social exchange, coercion and conflict (Nisbet, 1970). The first three social interaction basic modes are more typical under the primary group scenario than the remaining two. According to Tajfel (1978, p.63), social identity is “that part of an individual’s self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to the membership”. Personal identity is partially merged with shared

social/group identity leading to a self-categorization rooted more on the social attributes of the group than on the personal attributes of the member (Hogg and Abrams, 1988; Turner, 1991).

The schema depicted in Figure 1 summarizes the main dimensions.

Figure 1 – Lifestyle dimensions



3. Methodology

The target populations were the pre-teens enrolled in form 6 (6 schooling years) and teenagers with 10 schooling years. Four schools located in Porto, Portugal, agreed to collaborate and they were responsible for recruiting the students. The student selection criterion was that they should have some experience as regular users of Instant Messaging. This device was a proxy measure of the degree of their “digital” involvement since it requires a computer, Internet access as well as a network of peers to interact with.

207 students volunteered to participate:

- Pre-teens: 11,4± 0,5 years old (58% with 11 years old and 41% with 12 years old) and 58% males;
- Teens: 15,5± 0,5 years old (51% with 15 years old and 47% with 16 years old) and 55% males;

The research objective required the application of both qualitative and quantitative modes of collecting data. In fact, we planned to run a focus group and in the same session a survey based on a semi-structured and structured questionnaire.

These 207 students were divided into 13 + 13 groups with an average size of 8 participants per focus group. As most of the sessions occurred simultaneously, four researchers led the focus groups. All researchers had psychological background education and were trained to manage focus group protocol. The data collection took place from 1st June to 22nd June 2007.

Quantitative study: Aiming to measure behavior

The survey questionnaire covered demographics (age and gender) and digital technology user profile of mobile phone, ipod, MP3/4, Playstation/XBox, PSP/Gameboy, PC, digital camera and Internet messenger.

Qualitative study: Focus group

A commonly accepted focus group definition is a group discussion moderated to explore a specific set of questions. It is a nondirective and nonstructured technique of collecting data (Krueger, 1994; Bristol and Fern, 1996). In this technique the focus is shifted from the individual to the group and the attention is shifted from researching pre-specified models and assumptions to respondents' perspectives. The interaction between participants is enhanced and expressions of people's experiences, feelings, opinions, wishes, views and concerns are encouraged. This method allows a "to see reality from a client's point of view" response (Krueger, 1994,p.9). Thus, it is possible to assess how people regard, interpret and judge an idea, product/service, brand or event.

The procedure and the context in which the Focus Group is implemented prevent or minimise research belief interference, as well as individual self-conditioning. The participants end up influencing each other's comments and explanations are probed. In the process, new ideas come up and are discussed. The permissive environment invites participants to open up and divulge their emotions, as well as a stream of unthinkable inter-connections (Bristol and Fern, 1996; Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999).

Fern (1982) cited Calder (1977), who delineated three focus group approaches: the exploratory, the clinical and the phenomenological. This research adopts the first, the exploratory. This approach tries to uncover the consumers' knowledge and definitions, enlightening possible hypotheses that lead to research questions (Bristol, 1999).

The complexity of the topics and the diversity of the target groups dictate the number of groups to use. Common sense suggests that less than three groups are worthless. This rule of thumb assures us that if one group performs below the required quality and quantity of information, it leaves at least two other groups to explore (Kuzel, 1992). Krueger (1994) advises group sizes ranging from 6 to 12. However he also stipulates that in many situations, the ideal number stands at five or six.

Homogeneity is one criterion to consider when in selection of participants. It was assumed that the condition to obtain people who share the same experience lies in some common demographic characteristics, like age, education level and gender (Farquhar and Das, 1999). Again, this is not a universal principle. Sometimes bringing together people who are too similar generates boring, resigned and unimaginative discussions. Therefore, some degree of heterogeneity under the moderator's control is useful in some circumstances. Another element to decide is whether to include only strangers or pre-existing groups (Chiu and Knight, 1999). Here again, the age of participants and the topic under study guide the options to take.

The recruitment of participants, the question guide and other materials to present in the focus group session, the location and where to house the session, moderator profile, incentives, recording, content analysis procedure, editing and finally reporting also represent major aspects of a focus group design. Krueger (1994) summarised five categories of questions: opening, introductory, transition, key and ending. This outline aimed to gradually approach and focus participants' attention and discussion on the key issue that drives the study. "Prior knowledge or ability to pick up or interpret the language, terminology, gestures and cultural meaning of the particular groups with whom one is working is also crucial" (Kitzinger and Barbour, 1999,p.5). This statement synthesises the moderator's expected skills. The moderator ought to be a facilitator of the group discussion. The right choice emerges from a balance between a low profile moderator, who subtly and discreetly leads the conversation, listens attentively and with

sensitivity, and assertive control over an ongoing session in order to prevent anarchy and confusion. The latter also represents a positive moderator response (Wilkinson, 1999).

The focus group guide included two main topics/scenarios:

Topics/scenarios under discussion	Rationale
1 - Some Dutch schools forbid the use of mobile phones inside the school. These devices should be kept turned off all the time. Would you accept this measure in your school?	Rather provocative, these scenarios aimed to prompt youths to express how committed they were to mobile phones, their specific role and meaning.
2 - What is Messenger for? Are your parents aware of the content of your exchanges?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - We intended to induce youths to let us know to what extent digital technologies are important in their lives? - Aspects of parent – adolescent relations. - Content of the message production.

4. Results

4.1 Digital devices usage profiles

This quantitative data depicts a behavioral profile and an overview of their digital technological background experience.

Figure 2 – Mobile phone

Pre-teen Group

Mobile phone

- Mobile ownership: 93,3%
- 69% of participants started to use it before the year 2006;
- 72,3% of the participants got it thanks to their initiative;
- 36,5% have used already more than 3 mobile phones;
- 78% of participants' mobile phone device have camera;
- On average they send 84,2 SMS/week
- On average mobile phone 's contact list size is 87,2;
- But the active list (short list) has only 12,2 contacts.

Teenage Group

Mobile phone

- Mobile ownership: 100%
- 70% of participants started to use it before the year 2002;
- 72,8% of the participants got it thanks to their initiative;
- 77% have used already more than 3 mobile phones;
- 87,4% of participants' mobile phone device have camera;
- On average they send 235,6 SMS/week
- On average mobile phone 's contact list size is 125;
- But the active list (short list) has only 23,3 contacts.

Table 1 - Nine digital devices usage profiles

	Pre-teen		Teenager	
	Ownership	Since 2003 and 2006	Ownership	Since 2003 and 2006
iPod	61%	7,5% - 77,5%	58,3%	5% - 53,3%
Playstation	80%	49,4% - 10,8%	70%	62,5% - 7%
PSP	64,4%	27% - 73%	31,1%	6,3% - 65,7%
MP3/4	74%	8,5% - 54,9%	61,2%	30,5% - 54,9%
XBox	6,9%	57,1% - 28,6%	12,6%	38,5% - 23,1%
Gameboy	23,1%	70,1% - 5,5%	67%	92,5% - 1,5%
PC	72,8%	28,4% - 27%	85,4%	55,7% - 17,1%
Digital Camera	60,6%	14,8% - 47,5%	81,4%	14,8% - 47,5%
Internet	80%	57,3% - 10,8%	99%	78,4% - 6,2%

Among the 23,1% of pre-teens owning a Gameboy, 70,1% already had it in 2003.

Table 2 - Messenger usage profile

	Pre-teen	Teenager
Ownership status	87,5%	99%
Since 2005 and 2006	26,1% - 29,3%	61,6% - 5%
% connected more than one hour/day	53,3%	50%
Average time spent using it	From 8,4h (Saturday) to 4,3h on Tuesday	From 7,2h (Friday) to 6,3h on Saturday
Average contact list size	95	192
Short contact list size	15,4	17,9

The fact of not having Messenger or even Internet access at home does not hinder pre-teens or teenagers to use it in their friends or relatives homes or even in school.

The average number of contacts used more frequently by the pre-teen and the teenager is quite similar: 15 and 18 respectively. Nevertheless, the proportion of the

closest ties among teens is smaller, 9,3%, than in the pre-teen group, 16,2%.Figure 3 -
Pre-teen preferred web-sites

Male group

Ranking	site	%
1	youtube.com	15,9%
2	google.com	10,2%
3	miniclip.com	8,5%
4	hi5.com	7,3%
5	jogos10.com	7,3%
6	google.pt	4,9%
7	hotmail.com	3,7%
8	minijuegos.com	2,4%
9	wikipedia.com	2,4%
10	wwe.com	2,4%
11	nsm.com	2,0%
12	metacafe.com	1,6%
13	neopets.com	1,6%
14	tribalwars.net	1,6%
15	yahoo.com	1,6%
16	fcporto.pt	1,2%
17	fotolog.com	1,2%
18	gamepsot.com	1,2%
19	ojogo.pt	1,2%
20	thecrims.com	1,2%

Female group

Ranking	site	%
1	youtube.com	15,6%
2	google.com	10,6%
3	hi5.com	10,6%
4	miniclip.com	9,5%
5	hotmail.com	6,5%
6	google.pt	6,0%
7	jogos10.com	5,0%
8	disney.com	3,5%
9	ojogos.com	3,0%
10	minijuegos.pt	2,5%
11	stardoll.com	2,5%
12	micorjogos.com	1,5%
13	nsm.com	1,5%
14	streaming.clips	1,5%
15	wwe.com	1,5%
16	ciadefm.pt	1,0%
17	lusomundo.pt	1,0%
18	mtv.pt	1,0%
19	muvids.com	1,0%
20	neopets.com	1,0%

Figure 4 - Teen preferred web-sites

Male group

Ranking	site	%
1	hi5.com	14,2%
2	yahoo.com.br	11,7%
3	google.com	9,6%
4	hotmail.com	9,2%
5	ojogo.pt	7,5%
6	miniclip.com	4,6%
7	abola.pt	3,8%
8	google.pt	3,8%
9	record.pt	2,9%
10	maisfutebol.id.pt	2,5%
11	travian.com	2,5%
12	baixak.com.br	1,3%
13	clip.pt	1,3%
14	fcporto.pt	1,3%
15	gmail.com	1,3%
16	premierleague.com	1,3%
17	soccermanager.com	1,3%
18	uefa.com	1,3%
19	vagalume.br	1,3%
20	wwe.com	1,3%

Female group

Ranking	site	%
1	hi5.com	19,5%
2	youtube.com	18,1%
3	google.com	14,0%
4	hotmail.com	11,6%
5	google.pt	5,1%
6	fotolog.com	2,3%
7	mtv.com	2,3%
8	acessoaoensinosup	1,9%
9	miniclip.com	1,9%
10	vagalume.com	1,9%
11	gmail.com	1,4%
12	nsm.com	0,9%
13	musicoverly.com	0,9%
14	mysace.com	0,9%
15	sapo.pt	0,9%
16	amazon.com	0,5%
17	anrp.pt	0,5%
18	cayolla.org	0,5%
19	ciaras.com	0,5%
20	clip.pt	0,5%

4.2 Adolescents' meaning of digital technologies

Scenario: forbidding mobile phone use in school

Adolescents position their concerns under a fairness/unjust context. Their beliefs and judgments of fairness evolve from a more primitive approach to a more elaborated construction (Oppenheimer, 2006). Several mobile phone utilities are presented and confessed. Not all absolutely legal. Hence, evident the mobile phone role as a sort of survival kit!

Pre-teens

They were against the mobile phone usage interdiction. They claim it hinders communication with their parents, which would annoy above all their parents, in principal!

- *I've seen students receiving and sending messages during the examination.*
- *Teachers should be more attentive whenever we cheat, the mobile phone is just a means.*
- *-Its fun and free.*
- *We can send a fire alarm, or call 112 just in case.*
- *Sometimes we lie, "where are you?" (asks Mummy's sms) "I am attending the Math's' lesson." (I replied). Actually I was in the playground.... still she remained relaxed thinking that everything was under control.*
- *It is very convenient, especially when I leave school and my parents call me to join them.*
- *It is a sort of picking-up recall.*
- *I agree that it is not polite to keep the mobile phone switched on while we are attending lessons.*

Teenagers

- *I agree, mostly whenever there are misbehaviors.*
- *In general we avoid using it in the classroom... we try.*
- *Students have to be aware of the limits, abuses and should concentrate on learning.*
- *At least while you are at the classroom, its nonsense to divert others from paying attention.*

- *Its rude and poor behavior to use it in the classroom.*
- *However, even during the classes it is useful to plan our meetings later on.*
- *If the lessons are boring... why not to play a game... discretely, of course.*
- *[That measure] would represent an infringement and abuse of our democratic rights to communicate.*
- *Its outrageous, I simply can't live without it!*

Messenger – What is it for? How do I use it?

The private nature of Instant Messaging justified the adolescents' effort to keep out their parents' presence or influence. Self-disclosure, question-asking, communication and emotional sharing of adolescent sexual onset calls for privacy (Tidwell and Walther, 2002; Johnson and Tyler, 2007; Kan et al., 2008). The diversity of exchange themes are huge, as long as their social network.

Pre-teens

- *Teasing, mockery, chat, gossip.*
- *Dating, expressing our feelings, dreams.*
- *Discussing "hot" topics.*
- *Announcing something interesting.*
- *Just being there, I rather feel accompanied.*
- *(Girl) We talk about boys, yes, mainly boys, what they were wearing, who could be the winner of handsome guy contest, how can I grab an utterly attractive boy, private topics.*
- *(Between boy and girls) We talk about who is dating with who, or who is in love with who.*
- *Seeking and expressing intimacy issues.*
- *We also talk about fashion, shopping.*
- *It can help, if we are in trouble to understand our homework. We exchange ideas and help each other.*
- *Sharing pictures, websites addresses, games, discussing football.*
- *Telling and listening to jokes.*
- *My parents are unaware of many aspects of my life .*

- *In contrast, my parents know what I visit , I want them to trust me.*
- *You need privacy. Nobody should mess about. That's why we are alone in our room and whenever someone comes in I close the window.*

Teenagers

- *Our parents have to respect our privacy. We do not meddle in their life either. Spying on us would be out of question.*
- *If we are allowed control, we then become more trustworthy, become responsible guys , and then our parents will start to respect our “breathing space”.*
- *If mummy breaks in I immediately minimize the screen.*
- *They feel that they control everything, but they just know what I want to them to know!*
- *There are parents that simply do not care – they are unable to follow these technologies or/and they trust us.*
- *Parents fear we are at risk from intruders, fake friends, drug dealers, but since we follow the rules we agree to respect, they relax.*
- *Once we get our own mobile, the rest (other devices and online services) is logically consequential.*
- *When you want to spread a gossip, a nasty one, concerning someone who has turned you down, nobody can stop you.*
- *There (on the messenger) we explore subjects that we do not dare to talk about face-to-face.*
- *Even when we share the PC we can always delete the logs (historical files) or the browsed site addresses to obstruct someone to trace back our habits.*
- *We are introduced. He is cute and gives his email address. At night I start to interact ... who knows, if we meet again...*
- *We hardly delete a contact in the messenger list. So, it helps to keep in touch with long distance friends. Even when we leave for another continent we keep close by “feeding” our friendship.*
- *When I am alone at home, the messenger allows me to feel accompanied.*

- *I miss the messenger, its weird.. After dinner I have to be there again otherwise something is missing in my life. Am I obsessed? May be I am addicted to it or a sort of creepy thing is happen to me.*
- *Sometimes it is a waste of time. We have nothing to say but still we keep talking. We are just amused to be there.*

5. Conclusions

Apparently there is a digital culture at least since the sixties (Gere, 2002). “It would be more accurate to suggest that digital technology is a product of digital culture, rather than vice-versa. Digital refers not just to the effects and possibilities of a particular technology. It defines and encompasses the ways of thinking and doing that are embodied within that technology, and which make its development possible” (Gere, 2002, p.13).

The digital sub-culture arises whenever adolescents attribute a relevant meaning to the nature and the function of mobile phone and messenger. For them these technologies mean freedom and privacy. They are the building blocks and structure under which adolescents socially interact in a quicker and almost permanent way, without requiring the physical presence of the receiver. Digital means speed, availability without time or space restrictions and above all it means control. To have control over whom, when and where to communicate.

It was also illustrative how Internet – messenger and email –, off/online games, and mobile phone can materialize and reconstruct so efficiently the web of relationships called social network. The size of the contact list in both communicational devices demonstrates this. The Attachment theory and the Social Identity theory provide an insightful framework to understand the following digital features:

- Meeting – to be with/among others;
- Exchange and sharing – music, photos, feelings, intimacy;
- Cooperating - helping each other;
- Collecting and searching – experiences and data;
- Socializing and learning – influence others to explore our world (culture).

Being digital contrasts primarily with being analogical (Negroponte, 1995; Prensky, 2004). Consequently, can we assume the adolescents' lifestyle as "Digital"?

1. Even though the entertainment dimension of the majority of the digital devices depend more on the user than on the device (except for the games), all of them are potentially designed to amuse. Therefore, as Rossel (2007) argues, the sensory orientation and enjoyment during their handling clearly expresses the aestheticizing life pattern.
2. There is evidence of consistent behavioral pattern turned into habit, since the adolescents keep using those instruments not only regularly but also intensively. The number of SMS sent per day, the extensive contact list and the number of hours connected online confirm such behavioral involvement.
3. The emotional attachment was also supported once the free access to mobile phone inside school was hypothetically threatened. Those reactions resemble an obsession and sort of dependent reaction toward that simple communicational tool.
4. At least three of the Top4 preferred websites were the Internet social network provider hi5.com and the webmail services free of charge. Those sites supply and are supplied by other digital devices such as MP3/4, iPod and digital camera.
5. Apparently, teenagers are not the automatic successor of the pre-teens and the pre-teens will not evolve into what are now the teenagers. The pre-teens are at least equally digitally sophisticated and expert as their older mates except for the content and nature of their online motivations and interests. If pre-teens can afford a digital life they show a similar intensity and involvement with those devices.

The fact of the sample falls in a "population", which is a sub-set of the universe of students belonging predominantly to an affluent fraction of society, affects its representativeness to all society. The participants' selection criteria of using messenger restrained the possibilities of including those who do not use regularly or at all, but still perform a digital life thanks to the other devices. Therefore, this sample represented mostly the sub-set of the heavy users of almost all digital technologies. Although, a powerful networking mediator, the messenger only registers those who are online regularly. The social networking capacity of the adolescents may comprise other factors

and environments than those allowed by that digital context. It would be interesting to collect data of the overall cliques and clusters regardless of contact mode. These results would provide an overview of the relative importance of digital technologies, vis-à-vis the analogue processes of social interaction, within that age sub-culture.

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