

## **2. The media ecosystem of young people: Uses, consumption and perceptions of the media for information, entertainment and sociability**

**Silvia Martínez-Martínez, Jordi Sánchez-Navarro, Daniel Aranda**

### **2.1. Introduction**

The universalization of the Internet has had a major impact on the media ecosystem. Audiences' consumption of media adapts and evolves in parallel to technological developments and the emergence of new devices. These changes range from the emergence of new behaviours to the convergence of media uses (Bernal and Lobera, 2014). The digitisation of the message has contributed to media convergence, defined by Jenkins (2008) as “the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behaviour of media audiences”.

We are witnessing increased ease of access to technology as a result of lower costs and portability (Seni, 2011), the proliferation of channels providing entertainment and communication products (Fernández-Cavia, 2005:30) and the possibility of consumption of content on demand. The opening of public communication to the user (Pastor and Martínez-Martínez, 2013) has also facilitated participation in the production process and made the user a creator of content.

Not only have information channels multiplied, but the social uses of the Internet also affect forms of sociability and inter-relationships (Ito *et al.*, 2009; Valkenburg, Peter, 2011; Cáceres, Ruiz and Brändle, 2009, 2013). In this environment, the power of “weak ties” (Granovetter, 1973) [1] becomes increasingly important, as they also expand the circle of exchange and networking to previously unimaginable magnitudes. So, according to Manovich (2007), these new media contribute to creating the representation of the reality in which users are also participants.

In this context, young people are a singular group due to their ability to appropriate, adaptability and innovativeness in terms of their use of developments in information and communication technology (Livingstone, 2007b, 2008). At the same time, they are also a group that is highly vulnerable and potentially susceptible to risks. This makes them an object of interest for the study of the so-

cial and cultural impact of the Internet, given its key role in various aspects of everyday life (Sánchez-Navarro and Aranda, 2011:33).

## 2.2. Young people and the media ecosystem

The collective imagination uses expressions such as “digital natives” (Prensky, 2001) and the “Einstein generation” (Boschman, 2008) to describe the section of the population born within the information society and which therefore has assimilated the development of ICTs more naturally. Indeed, young people today use the Internet for everything (Aranda, Sánchez-Navarro, Tabernero, 2009; Rubio-Gil, 2009, 2010; Benete, 2010) and despite the ubiquity of television it has lost ground in recent years due to a decline in its consumption, according to figures from Kantar Media (Marta-Lazo, Martínez and Sánchez, 2013). Nevertheless, the relationship between young people and television is a focus of a great deal of research and the opportunity to “rethink this approach” (Sánchez-Navarro, Aranda and Martínez-Martínez, 2014:219) has therefore arisen.

Recent research has broadened the objectives of study to include consumption of other media according to young people's needs or interests. The analysis of how young people and adolescents use the media based on the time they spend consuming them has shown that, although most are moderate users, individuals in this age range are not a homogeneous group and there are “significant differences in Internet usage by age” (Callejo, 2013:2). Although the growing presence of YouTube as the primary means of audiovisual consumption is beginning to become apparent, the importance of television consumption is constant, and, despite the digitisation and multiplatform distribution of content, it is observed among the adolescents the willingness to maintain the consumption habits connected to the television in contrast to the use of other media (Fedele, García-Muñoz and Prado, 2014). In fact, when they analyse the practice known as social television, based on the case study of the Antena 3 Television series *El Barco*, Deltell, Claes and Osteso (2013:356-362) conclude that it is impossible to talk in terms of a *transmedia* audience and argue that “despite being mostly digital native, it does not behave as a creative audience on Twitter,” because it merely distributes content created by institutional profiles. An understanding of these results is completed with the findings of the qualitative study conducted in 2012 by Aranda, Sánchez-Navarro and Roca (2013), which show that television consumption is perceived as an activity associated with the common areas of

the home, determined to an overly large extent by parents' interests, and based on closed programming defined only by the interests of the channel. The opposite is true of opinions on browsing the Internet for the purposes of information or entertainment, which is a less regulated activity that meets their needs and is used in a way that is more closely related to private areas such as the bedroom. This confirms the development of what is known as *bedroom culture* (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001; Livingstone, 2007a), in which young people spend more time in what they consider their own territory, where they can access specific content and manage remote personal relationships.

Following the pioneering work of Boyd (2007) and Ito *et al.* (2009), studying the role of the Internet in the configuration and management of identity and social and interpersonal relationships has also become important. For some time, studies of Internet use among university students have shown that despite “not giving up relations of belonging, they tend to increase temporary, reticular relationships that are limited in scope, which enable experimentation without any consequences” (Cáceres, Ruiz and Brändle, 2009:229). The qualitative analysis by Núñez-Gómez, García-Guardia and Hermida-Ayala (2012) shows that for young people between 14 and 24 years old, social relations mediated by ICTs are “essential”. In the same vein, other studies have found changes in the mode of sociability (Cáceres, Brändle and Ruiz, 2013) and the importance that they acquire for accessing information content in a context of fragmentation of sources and interest in free content (Casero-Ripollés, 2012).

### **2.3. Methodology**

The aim of this chapter is to study young people's understanding of the Internet and its impact on the definition and hierarchy established by the media ecosystem, based on an analysis of their media practices. The study of uses and perceptions and how this contributes to redefining young people's ecology is of particular interest.

The data presented and discussed below were obtained from a survey carried out in Spain in December 2013 as part of an international research project, the World Internet Project (WIP) [2]. This project is the result of an interest in studying the impact of the Internet and its potential to become the most important cultural influence in recent years, even surpassing television.

A universe consisting of the general population over 16 years old, resident in Spanish households with landline telephones, was used for collecting the data, and the resulting sample is proportional to the real distribution of the Spanish population in terms of autonomous regions. The primary and secondary units were selected randomly while the final individual units were chosen according to cross bedding of gender, age and size of the municipality.

The margin of error in the survey was  $\pm 2.45\%$ , for  $P=Q=50\%$  and assuming maximum indeterminacy. A total of 1,600 people participated, although in this chapter we focus on the answers given by the group of the population in the age group between 16 and 24 years old [3].

The questionnaire, agreed upon and partially shared by the network of member countries of the project, consists of more than thirty questions, including those related to socio-demographic aspects. Some of the questions were multivariable and included cases where an open or closed response and one or more responses were possible as well as dichotomous questions and questions applying the Likert scale.

The snapshot of Internet use obtained shows that penetration and access among young people aged between 16 and 24 years old is virtually universal. In addition to the responses obtained in the WIP, and in order to obtain a more accurate perspective, the data have been supplemented with information gathered in the sixteenth survey of Internet users, *Navegantes en la Red* [Net Surfers] (2014), organised by the AIMC, media research association, for which the fieldwork was carried out between October and December 2013 and which was aimed exclusively at users visiting Spanish websites. The file of data collected in this survey with the coding of the answers provided by each of the participants of the study is openly available. This enabled us to select the answers given by the group of interviewees in the age range mentioned above.

In this study, we expect to find the Internet in a prominent position in young people's media ecosystem due to its potential for information and entertainment, and its potential for socialisation. We also expect to observe a perception and differential use by young people of the communicative infrastructure that is available to them, and which they appropriate to meet their needs.

## 2.4. Results

Internet penetration among young people is almost complete, as 99.6% of those surveyed say they use it and 63.7% say they use the Internet on a daily basis. The home is the primary place for going online (96.2%), although doing so while on the move is common among the habits of Spanish young people (76.9%) in comparison to other places such as places of study, libraries, call centres, friends' homes and workplaces. This means that, while the computer is the most commonly used device, 3.6% of the young users surveyed do not use it to connect to the Internet and 91.9% say that they use a mobile telephone to use the Internet. Likewise, among those who use more than one device, the majority (63%) prioritise consumption by means of mobiles rather than a computer or a *tablet* or *e-reader* (Table 1).

**Table 1: Use of devices among young people who use the Internet (%)**

	Devices used N <sub>1</sub> = 234	Hierarchy of devices* N <sub>2</sub> = 211
Computer	97.4	35.1
Mobile	91.9	63
Tablet or e-reader	33.3	1.9

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the 2013 WIP surveys.

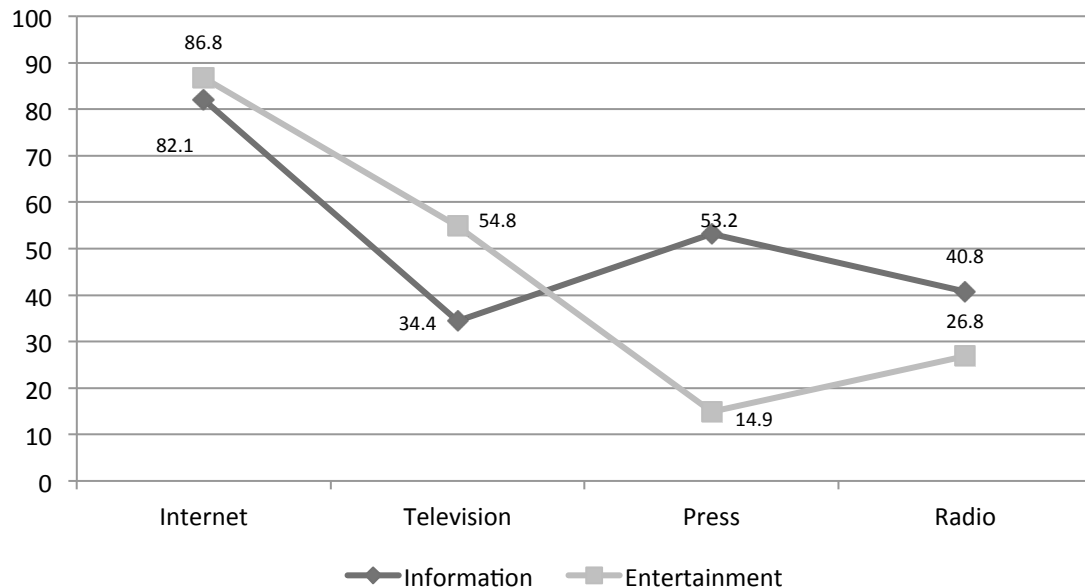
Young people appropriate mobile devices to meet their connectivity needs. In addition, when young users were asked about their activities over the last 30 days on each device (AIMC, 2014), young people primarily used mobile telephones to connect to social networks (82.3%), instant messaging (82.1) and e-mail (80%) while tablets were mainly used for browsing (70.8%) and watching videos (64.7%).

Due to the universality of the Internet among young people, it is part of a media ecosystem in which it plays a key role. In this context, it is especially important to note the importance conferred by young people on each medium either as a source of entertainment or information and to establish a comparison between them based on the assessment offered (Figure 1).

Internet is a primary medium for young people, as it obtains the highest scores as a medium for information and entertainment. The press is in second place as an information source, and television is second for entertainment. The degree of regularity and frequency in performing activities related to entertainment and information on the Internet is consistent with the perception recorded. 56% of

young users therefore read the national or international news every day. As for activities related to leisure, 24.8% watch amusing or entertaining content every day, 37.6% download or listen to music and 26.9% do the same with videos.

**Graph 1: Perception of media as a source of information or entertainment. Percentage of those surveyed who say it is an important or very important source (%)**



Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the 2013 WIP surveys (N=235).

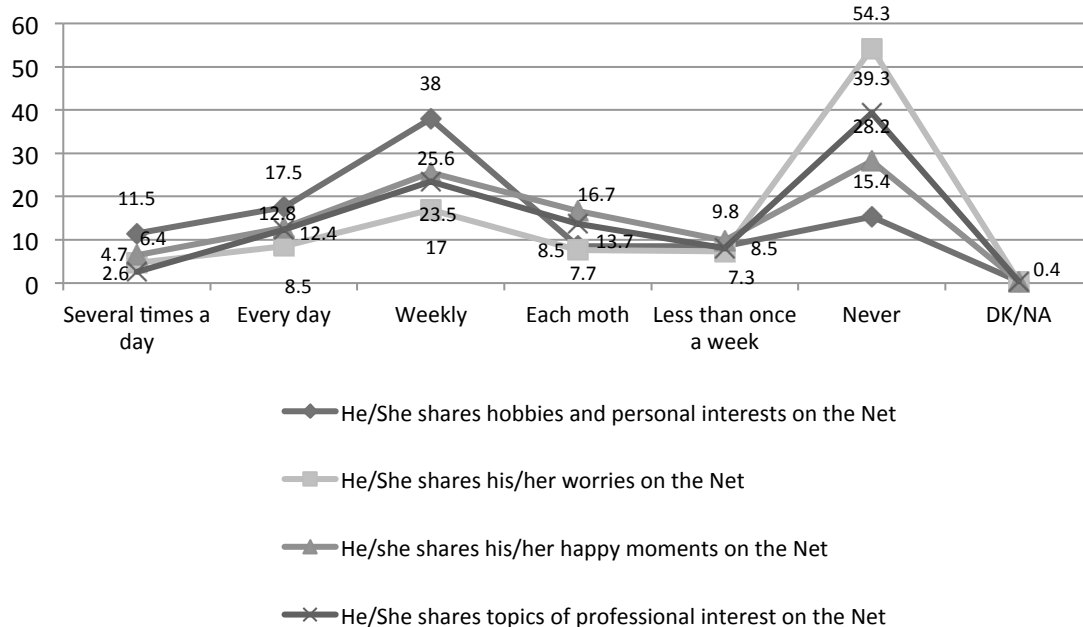
In terms of consumption, as noted above, the medium most affected by competition from the Internet is television. According to the results of the AIMC survey, the majority of young users spend between 2 and 4 hours every day (29.7%) or between 4 and 8 hours every day (30.4%) on the Internet, in terms of total time on any connected device. This figure contrasts with recent measurements of television audiences, in which young people aged 13-24 are the population segment that consumes the least television, with an average of 134 minutes per day (Barlovento Comunicación, 2015). In fact, when young people are specifically asked what are other activities that they have reduced due to their consumption of the Internet, 61.7% of the respondents stated that the activity that they have reduced to the greatest extent is “watching TV” (AIMC, 2014). These figures show a situation in which the Internet has replaced television as the main medium among young people, regardless of the time spent consuming other media.

Besides being the main source of information and entertainment, the Internet offers young people new forms of sociability. The importance of social networks can be empirically observed in the widespread nature of its use, as, according

to responses to the WIP survey, 50% of young users post messages or comments on them daily. As for the use of social networks and the relationship between sociability and the consumption of information, the AIMC data (2014) show that among young people who use social networks, 67.6% follow a media outlet and 41% follow a journalist. Among the activities carried out in the last 30 days, 54.3% say they have shared news items from the media on social networks; 67.1% say they have received them; and 43.6% say they have commented on them. Despite this connection to the media, what is known as social television still has low penetration rates, as 48.2% of young people who use the Internet while watching television say they have never read or commented on the programme they are watching.

By means of social networks, the Internet offers young people a relational and communication infrastructure and, indeed, young people often share messages and content that are linked to and which form their self-expression. The progression is clear: what they share most are their hobbies or personal interests, followed by things that make them happy, subjects of professional interest and, finally, their concerns.

**Graph 2: Frequency with which young users share concerns and interests on the Internet (%)**



Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the 2013 WIP surveys (N=234).

If we consider the frequency with which young people never share messages or content, it is even more apparent that young people are cautious especially

when sharing their concerns with others. This is in contrast to the limited negative experiences they have had *online*, and specifically those linked to intrusion of privacy, as 87.2% admit that nobody has violated their privacy online and 8.1% of those who have been affected state that it was a minor problem.

The perception of the Internet as a source of problems is also limited. The difficulty involved in deleting personal information from the Internet and consequently enforcing the right to be forgotten is perceived as a fact by 63.7% of young people, although only 48.3% say they agree or strongly agree with the statement that “people can find personal information about me online”. Working with the Internet can be frustrating for only 9% (Table 2).

**Table 2: Perception of the Internet in terms of fun, instrumental efficiency, as a source of problems and as a social enabler. Percentage of interviewees expressing agreement or strong agreement (%)**

Factor	Statement	Acceptance
Escapism/fun	Browsing the Internet helps me escape the things I'd rather not do	33.8
	Browsing the Internet helps me pass the time when I'm bored or have nothing to do	81.2
	When I'm online I'm don't feel lonely	12
	I have a good time online seeing what happens	39.3
Instrumental efficiency	The Internet is an efficient tool for finding information	85
	The Internet makes life easier	65.4
	The Internet helps me save time	66.7
Source of problems	It is difficult to delete personal information on the Internet	63.7
	Working with the Internet is frustrating	9
	There is a lot of immoral material online	58.5
	Working/dealing with e-mail takes up a lot of time/effort	6.4
Social enabler	People can find personal information about me online	48.3
	Being online allows me to be in touch with people	82.9
	For me it's easier to meet people online than in person	20.1

Source: Compiled by the authors based on data from the 2013 WIP surveys (N=234).

The assessment of instrumental efficiency shows a large percentage of acceptance. In fact, it is a useful tool for finding information for 85% of the young users surveyed. There is a high degree of consensus on the potential offered by the Internet for contacting people (82.9%). Despite these figures, only 20.1% say it is easier to meet people online than in person and 12% say that they do



not feel lonely when they are online. In any event, Internet appears to be a factor or means of distraction to pass the time when they are bored or have nothing to do (81.2%).

## 2.5. Conclusions

The importance of the Internet for young people lies in and is explained not so much by the amount of time spent on its consumption, but instead how the Internet is used and what it is used for. In this respect, the Internet is the preferred medium of Spanish young people not only as a source of information and entertainment but also because of the opportunities for sociability it offers. The media ecosystem is determined by a clear hierarchy in which the television ranks second for entertainment and the press does so for information. This highlights the need to refine the traditional focus of many studies on youth and communication, which focus their attention on young people's relationship with television. Despite the ubiquity and influence of television in everyday life, young people believe that watching television is a habit "of the past" and that the computer is a device that is much more suited to their audiovisual entertainment and consumption needs. The data show that young people consider television consumption to be an activity linked to common spaces in the home with a range of content, variety and schedules that are determined by interests that differ from theirs. Moreover, they perceive media consumption and content via the Internet as a "freer" activity, i.e. one that is less strictly regulated by parents and more suited to their social, cultural and psychological needs. In addition, young people appropriate the communication infrastructure that is available to them. Among those who use multiple devices intensively, the mobile is therefore the most frequently used medium, as it meets young people's needs for connection and communication, as can be seen in the primary uses they make of it.

Internet also provides a response to young people's psychosocial needs thanks to its opportunities for sociability. Social networks provide young people with a relational infrastructure that enables them to expand their network of contacts. Young people use them to share messages and content that are linked to and which form their self-expression. The tendency to use the media for entertainment – in this case the Internet – is clearly linked to users' self-expression, and that self-expression is in turn linked to use of the Internet that is focused on entertainment. This convergence of entertainment, self-expression and entertainment leads to a characteristic use of media by young people, which is the seed

for a new model and therefore requires a refocusing of certain aspects that have been taken for granted in media education.

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## Notes

[1] The strength of the tie established is defined by Granovetter (1973, p. 1361) as follows: “the strength of a tie is a (probably linear) combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy (mutual confiding), and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.”

[2] The World Internet Project (WIP) is an international project carried out collaboratively by over thirty teams of researchers, which studies the social, political and economic impact of the Internet and other new technologies.

[3] There is no unanimity when defining the age range used to discuss youth (Naval, Sádaba, 2005, p. 9). In this study, we use the United Nations definition (which places the upper limit of youth at 24 years of age) and the minimum age for participation in statistical surveys such as the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) Survey on Household Information and Communication Technology Equipment and Use.