DIGITAL PLAY AND THE INTERNET AS LUDIC ECOSYSTEMS:
THE HIERARCHY OF MEDIA FOR ENTERTAINMENT AND EMERGENT LITERACIES

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In the body of research and proposals for action in media education, young people's relationship with television has been the center of attention due to the ubiquity and influence of this medium in everyday life. We believe that such an approach should be reconsidered, as recent research (which has investigated not only the active media consumption by young citizens but also the hierarchy of media they establish in relation to their several interests) has revealed that, although the time they dedicate to watching television is greater than that dedicated to the Internet, the youth regard watching television as a habit "of the past," whereas the personal computer is the device that fits their leisure needs and audiovisual consumption. In this sense, the data show that young people perceive television consumption as an activity related to common spaces within the household, supplied in a way that does not match their interests. Moreover, they perceive the media and content consumption through the Internet as a "freer" activity; that is, an activity less regulated by parents and better adapted to their social, cultural, and psychological needs (Aranda, Roca, & Sánchez-Navarro, 2013).

In these circumstances, the question "What do they use the Internet for?" becomes irrelevant: the youth use the Internet for everything, as reported by several authors in the case of Spain (Aranda, Sánchez-Navarro, & Tabernero, 2009; Bernete, 2010; Rubio-Gil, 2009, 2010) and as we have again confirmed within the framework of an international research project, the World Internet Project (WIP)[1], from which some data and conclusions are shown and discussed on the following pages. The results of the WIP and other research projects give us clues toward an in-depth understanding of the Internet as a fundamental medium for the leisure of young people, who also establish a clear hierarchy of media for entertainment. In addition, we have observed that this form of entertainment is clearly related to the users' self-expression and that, at the same time, this self-expression is related to a ludic orientation of the use of the Internet. At this entertainment crossroads of self-expression and ludic orientation, a characteristic use of the media by the youth emerges. This use is the seed of a new model of media consumption that requires, therefore, a refocusing of certain aspects that are taken for granted in the field of media education.

Media for entertainment

The data collected in the WIP show that, among all the uses of the Internet, one seems to be especially relevant. Comparing the answers gathered in different waves, it can be observed that the percentage of youth who perceive the Internet as a suitable space for entertainment has increased slightly, to 86.8% in 2013 from 85.6% in 2011. This trend is confirmed when users between the ages of 16 and 24 are asked about their perception of the Internet as a medium for amusement and enjoyment.

Figure 1: Perception on the Internet in terms of amusement and enjoyment among young users interviewed in 2013 (%).
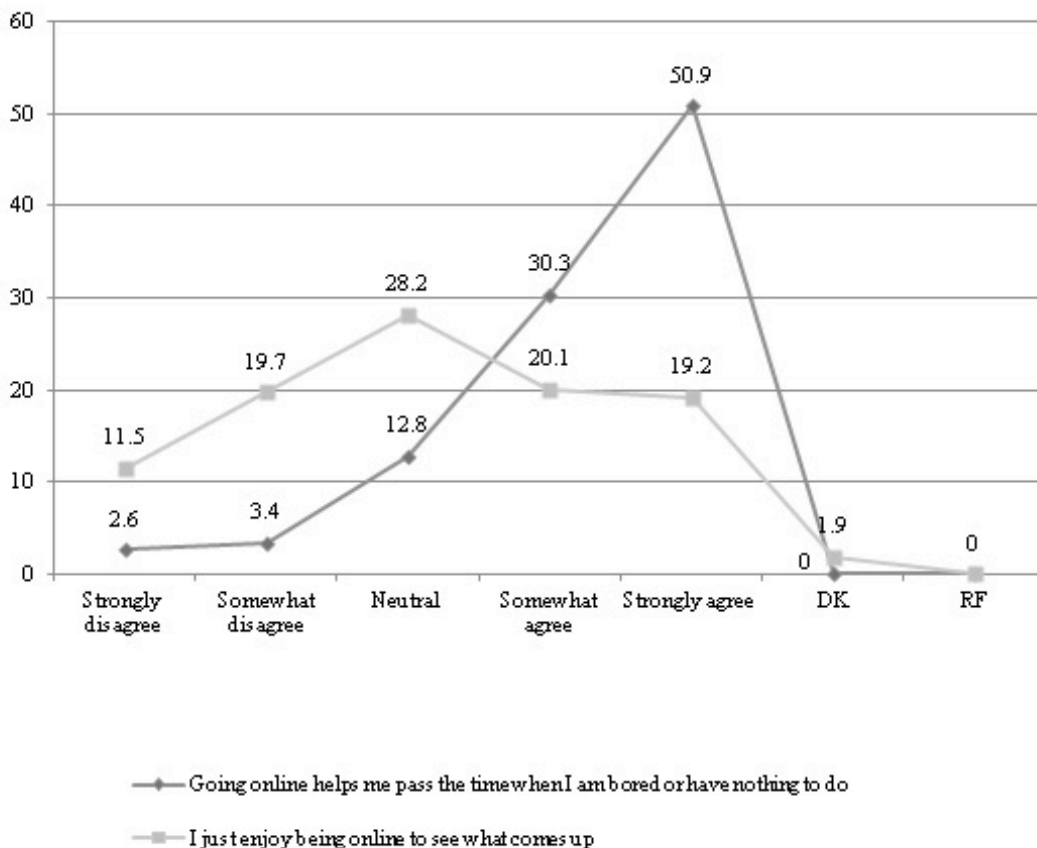
Source: WIP 2013, data from Spain (T= 234).

The uses and activities of younger users are clearly coherent with this perception. Based on the data, 63.7% of the youth connect to the Internet on a daily basis, and 48.7% do

so to visit social networking sites or video websites; 24.8% look for jokes, cartoons, or other humorous content every day, whereas 36.3% do so every week. Other common activities among young people are downloading or listening to music (37.6% daily, 35% weekly) and watching videos (26.9% daily, 41% weekly). The results in 2013 show that, although 40% of the youth reported that they never connect to the Internet to play games, 60% of them play with variable frequency, which represents an increase from 2011.

Therefore, the Internet is clearly a basic tool for entertainment among the youth, as several previous studies have shown (Sánchez-Navarro & Aranda, 2011, 2013). In fact, this usage for entertainment is so integrated into daily life that one could say that Internet-based entertainment is no longer an area of interest for academic research because it belongs to the field of market studies. That is, because the Internet has become the basic infrastructure of entertainment for the youth, we have reached a point at which it no longer makes sense to continue studying something because it is simply there. However, from our point of view, whether we like it or not, the Internet is part of a complex ecosystem of media that is not getting easier but quite the opposite. Therefore, any project of media education must pay attention to the position the Internet holds in the landscape of contemporary media as far as the everyday life of young people is concerned. In this sense, it is interesting and necessary to compare the perceptions and uses of the Internet with those of other media.

Table 1: Assessment of media as sources of entertainment: a comparative study on the perceptions of users interviewed in 2011 and 2013 (%).

		2013						2011					
		Not important at all (1)	Not Important (2)	Neutral	Important	Very important (5)	DK	Not important at all (1)	Not Important (2)	Neutral	Important	Very important (5)	DK
Media for entertainment	**Internet**	1.3	1.3	10.7	31.2	55.6	0	2.3	2	10	33.1	52.5	0
	Television	6.4	15.7	23	28	26.8	0	6.4	13.4	17.4	38.5	24.4	0
	Newspapers	21.7	24.7	38.7	12.3	2.6	0	15.1	30.1	33.1	15.7	6	0
	Radio	19.1	20	33.6	17.4	9.4	0	16.7	23.7	21.1	24.7	13.4	0.3

Source: WIP, data from Spain in 2011 (T=299) and 2013 (T=234).

This media hierarchy dominated by the Internet was confirmed in our research in 2012. Using a qualitative approach,[2] we gathered data through eight focus groups organized in at four centers of secondary education. The interviewees stated that, even in cases when the time they spent watching television was greater than the time they dedicated to the Internet, television was not perceived as the main source of entertainment. Regardless of the time spent, the Internet is the preferential medium. The data gathered in the focus group show that, as mentioned, television consumption is perceived, as previously mentioned, as a more restrictive activity, located in common areas of the household (such as the living room, dining room, and or kitchen), and offered in ways that do not fit the real interests of the young. On the contrary, going online for entertainment is a "freer" activity, ; that is to say, less regulated by adults (parents) and better fitted to their real needs. The fact that Internet consumption takes place in private spaces within the household (mainly in the bedroom) probably contributes to this perception by the youth.

Entertainment, self-expression, and playfulness

Entertainment, understood as a *set of contents*, is not the only factor that makes the Internet the preferred medium for young people. The InternetIt also offers the youththem a space for self-expression, which fits very well with their needs. There is already an abundant body of literature, derived mainly from the pioneering studies of Danah Boyd (2007) and Mizuko Ito (2009), on how the Internet and, especially, social networking sites offer young people a space to work productively toward managing their identity and status, and raising their awareness of social rules. As the work of a University of Amsterdam research group led by Patti Valkenburg pointed out very precisely pointed out, the correct psychosocial development of adolescents depends largely on the development of their identity, intimacy, and sexuality (Valkenburg and Peter, 2011). Teenagers have to develop a strong self-knowledge and must be sure about of who they are and what they want to become. It is also important that they develop a certain sense of intimacy, as well as achieve the skills necessary to form, maintain, and even conclude relationships with others that who are meaningful to them. To attain the correct development of these psychosocial aspects, teenagers need to develop two important skills: (1) how to presenting oneself to others (self-presentation) and (2) how to sharesharing intimate aspects with others (self-disclosure). The boys and girls with whom we have spoken in our research projects played down the potential risks associated with privacy management in social networks and other services of the Internet, because as their giving a bit of intimacy reverts to the achievement of greater knowledge and opportunities for sociability, as stated in Rheingold's studies about on social network capital. Users generate and manage a cultural capital that is based on

and reverts to: 1) the flow of information, opportunities, and choices; 2) the ability to influence; 3) the certification of social credentials; and 4) the reinforcement of identity and the recognition of who we are and what we like.

As previously mentioned, entertainment, self-expression, sociability, and play appear to be clearly entwined in the cultural consumption and activities of young people on the Internet; this has also been confirmed in several researches research projects in which young people implicitly or explicitly mentioned implicitly or explicitly the ludic approach to the use of the Internet in everyday life (Aranda, Sánchez-Navarro, & Tabernero, 2009; Sánchez-Navaro & Aranda, 2010, 2012; Aranda, Roca, & Sánchez-Navarro, 2013). Thus, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, we argue that the characteristic use of the Internet by the youth constitutes the origin of a new model of relationship with the media and requires an extension of the focus of media education. Hence, we think hold that *ludoliteracy* should be added unequivocally to the set of *media literacies*.

Emergent literacies: Ludoliteracy

It should be pointed out that the concept of ludoliteracy refers not only to video games, or to what is explicitly understood as a game, but also to that the current tendency of the digital society toward playfulness, in the form of either ubiquitous games on mobile devices or an the increasing gamification of art, marketing, or and social media. Ludoliteracy is a form of knowledge that implies understanding digital gaming as a semiotic system (Gee, 2004), as a different medium that generates its own meanings and pleasures, and requires its own analytic and creative skills. It has to do not only with functional abilities related to the act of playing, but also with analytic and reflexive capacities and skills, and with creative abilities oriented toward the production of meanings in playful contexts.

Insisting on the idea that ludoliteracy is related not only to video games, it must be pointed out that its origin can be found, precisely, in the confirmation that digital games are a characteristic medium of our contemporary culture. From the data obtained in the WIP 2013, we observed that 81% of the surveyed youth reported playing or having played video games on consoles, computers, mobile devices, or even social networking sites, and 41% admitted that they play often. These numbers are consistent with their perception of video games: 53% of the surveyed youth believed that playing video games was not a waste of time. Outside these data, the literature shows that, through the use of digital games, individuals improve their the abilities and skills they need needed in the digital society (Jenkins, 2008; Aranda & Sánchez-Navarro, 2009, 2010), obtain pleasure and fun (Huizinga, 1994; Sherry, 2004), participate in

creative ways through fan communities (Wirman, 2009), socialize with peers while generating interchange networks (Jansz & Marten, 2005; Zagal, 2010), or learn both curricular and extracurricular contents and skills (Gee, 2004; Lacasa, 2011; Whitton, 2009).

Every ludoliteracy proposal must be fully framed within the principles of media literacy and media education in a global context. According to the UNESCO indications (2008), the objective of media literacy is to help filter the media and the messages transmitted by them because these have an influence on the personal decisions of citizens. This point of view establishes that different processes and techniques (media education proposals) allow and help students, education professionals, and citizens in general to develop critical capacities and knowledge about the media.

Any definition of ludoliteracy needs to include the two dimensions of media education: education with the media and education in the media. Therefore, we need to pay attention to digital play as a didactic tool and as an object of study. Following classic authors (Masterman, 1993), we can distinguish between education with digital gaming and education in digital gaming. The first approach comprehends the use of digital play as an educative support, as a pedagogical help aid at the service of contents and educative programs (Jacquinot, 1996). Such a didactic use of digital games (Aguaded, 1999) would be aimed at enriching and diversifying contents, making them more attractive and closer to the reality of the students, by using a medium that motivates and fascinates them. Serious games or educative games have been and continue to be a very fruitful field, led by theoretical bodies and educative initiatives, such as the digital game-based learning (Prensky, 2007), edutainment (Egenfeldt, 2005), or the so-called *serious games*. The educative use of digital play would be related to contents, competences, abilities, and skills present in actual educative curricula, such as problem-solving, teamwork, or values like effort and self-improvement (Lacasa, 2011; Aranda & Sánchez-Navarro, 2011; Wirman 2009). The use of commercial video games, casual games for tablets or smartphones, and, more recently, different dynamics of gamification have a prominent role in this kind these kinds of proposals. However, as previously mentioned, ludoliteracy is the understanding of digital play not only as a didactic tool but also as an object of study *per se*. According to Poulsen and Gatzidis (2010), understanding digital play is not only valuable *per se* as a pedagogical proposal but is also a prerequisite for those interested in its educative use. Thus, ludoliteracy would also be aimed at reflecting the technological, cultural, sociological, and economic context of digital games as well as media. From this point of view, one of the main goals of ludoliteracy would be to provide children, teenagers, and adults with knowledge toward obtaining a certain level of control over the media they use, in this

case, digital games. In a nutshell, according to Roberto Aparici's arguments regarding media in general, if citizens are offered appropriate analysis guidelines and a reflexive, critical, and pedagogical (we would add creative) proposal, they will have the tools necessary to make autonomous decisions about the messages (products and discourses) they receive from media (Aparici, 1997).

Based on the work of James Gee (2004), José Zagal (2010, p. 24), defines ludoliteracy as (1) the ability to play, (2) the ability to understand meanings in relation to games, and (3) the ability to create games. These three aspects are common in most ludoliteracy proposals (Buckingham & Burn, 2007; Poulsen & Gatzidis, 2010; Caperton, 2010; Squire, 2005, 2008), all of them based on the following dimensions of skills: (1) functional skills (playing the game or reading),); (2) analytic or reflexive skills, ; and (3) productive ability (writing). Zagal focused his proposal on the second dimension, arguing that the analytical and reflexive skills are aimed at improving the ability to explain, discuss, frame, and interpret games in the cultural context, as a cultural artefact, in relation to other games, by comparing games and genres, and within their technological contexts.

Beyond where the emphasis is putplaced, it seems clear that the academic community agrees that a good literacy plan must take into account reading competence, analysis, production, and pleasure. However, according to Squire (2005), a good literacy policy—media literacy in our case—is an attitude, not a destination. Thus, media literacy in digital gaming—ludoliteracy—must be a continuous process of inquiry, research, and self-reflection.

Notes

1 The World Internet Project (WIP), an international and collaborative project involving more than 30 research teams, analyzes the social, political, and economic impacts of the Internet and other new technologies. The data presented in this chapter were obtained from two fieldworks, conducted in June 2011 and December 2013. The universe of study in both fieldworks was formed by the general population aged 16 and above living in Spanish households with fixed telephone lines. The resulting samples in both fieldworks were proportional per autonomous community to the real distribution of the Spanish population, with margins of error of ±2.13% (2011) and ±2.45% (2013) for P=Q=50% and assuming maximum uncertainty.

2 Research conducted in the framework of the Digital Convergence and Youth: The New Spaces of Audiovisual Consumption project under a grant from the Catalan Audiovisual Council.

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