

PAPER

Title of the paper

Young people, culture and new technologies

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Keywords

Youth, new cultural habits, digital leisure, cultural consumption ways, social networks, value changes

Text

Our study is a qualitative research, based on several focus groups, which analyse the young new cultural habits and experiences. The use of new technologies and the sense, meaning and value they give to cultural experiences are the two main topics. The main conclusions are:

On current concepts and values

Are we talking about culture or digital leisure?

The presence of recreational and entertainment practices is high and also practices related to games: on line games, card games, computer games, bets... Prensky was already ahead in his famous article affirming that "what motivates them are instantaneous and frequent gratifications and rewards. They prefer games rather than serious work."

This is not a new phenomenon but rather an innate dimension in man, an essential function to human condition as J. Huizinga pointed out with his concept *Homo Ludens*. It is a free, pleasant, useless and unrepeatable activity related to relaxing and enjoying, a compensatory activity which differs from daily activities and is closely related to enjoyment. In short, satisfaction, freedom and uselessness would be some of the aspects to define this concept.

Regarding the recreational dimension, new leisure forms have appeared which have not yet been considered by studies and surveys promoted strictly within the cultural field. In fact, considering video games as part of the cultural industry only began in 2009, it might be due to the fact that it has become a strong and prosperous product. Moreover this practice is also very rooted within the young population.

One of the highlights of videogames is interactivity. In the XXI Century certain use guidelines and differences marked by digital interactive leisure are also influencing other cultural contents. As Sigheru Miyamoto, the "father" of videogames, points out, "the technological advances of the last 40 years have offered us more and more interactive elements every time. We have introduced

these advances into our life habits. Interaction will control the future of leisure products from now on”.

Voracity and fleetingness, keys of the new consumption way. Cultural consumption is no more than another field of compulsive consumption promoted by the uses and capacities of a technology, which boosts this desire of “here, now and everything”, even more. The vast capacity of access offered by the net generates a consumption of voracity and fleetingness. Technologies of information and communication have multiplied possibilities like media, contents, information and connection superabundance. A whole infinite spectrum opens up “by just a click”.

This has modified and intensified the differences between virtual consumption and live consumption. We could say that within this research we have found “digital omnivores” and “selective presential gourmets”. There is a general indiscriminate consumption within the web. Thus the capacity for searching, selecting and filtrating contents of interest is becoming more and more important. Parallel to this, there is an increasing need for having intense live experiences as a counterpoint, as a compensatory way of living that digital frenzy. The consumption of live culture is much more selective, due to the fact that it costs money. This aspect can easily be avoided through secondary channels within the web, as different groups of youngsters have communicated us. It could also be considered that those live shows and events head towards becoming quickly obsolete as well after looking for the greatest impact. However, these reflections exceed the aim of this study.

Fleetingness is also another characteristic of contemporary culture. Bauman says that our routines are being substituted so quickly that they do not have time to become habits. Consequently values like permanence or durability, intimately linked to the concept of the work of art and culture, loose their sense. Bauman quoted Willem de Kooning when he said that “content is an inkling” a fugacious vision, a passing by look. In fact maybe the only permanent thing might be that fleetingness.

The idea of fugacity can be observed in the new forms of creating and appropriating those contents generated by the digital era. Stories and ways of narrating are changing, also the way of capturing and seizing the real. Love for fiction television series, which according to some critics are the laboratory of the best current cinema, are generating new forms of narration characterized by fragmentation and ellipsis. We also observe the same phenomenon within music; the concept of album is loosing its value face to the single, the song. And it is specially the younger generations who adopt these new ways of consumption quickly. Among their greatest interests are television series, collections of thousands of songs in their mp4 or Ipods, etc. Reading is for the moment placed at a “predigital” position, this will possibly change as the number of digital readers increases.

Cultural industry is adapting its contents and formats to new values and characteristics. These should be taken into account in education and cultural policies for the youth.

Social Networks: the new agora. The role and extension of social networks have to be highlighted within this research. It is the young ones and mainly girls who use them most frequently. This is a very interesting phenomenon mainly used by the young ones and not so young ones, according to the extension data of Facebook. Again, the scale of the social network is having an impact on concepts like friendship, where the opinion of a friend's friend can influence one's mood; it opens an interesting debate on privacy and the exhibiting nature implied in showing and sharing our life through a collection of photographs and comments on our most memorable times. The progressive sophistication of technology is choosing what we like for us according to our movements within the web and it will even map our lives in the future.

Understanding the dynamics and mechanisms of these networks is another key for the policies aimed at youngsters nowadays. Thus, policies on the cultural field and aimed at the new generations must adapt to these important social, technological and consumption changes produced within the last decades and which are specially affecting the young people.

Considerations on gratuity and price. One of the most controversial practices generated nowadays is the piracy of cultural contents within the web. Piracy is greater among youngsters because it is them who most frequently connect and consume musical and audiovisual contents. According to some analysts, the cultural industry is not answering fast enough to this revolution.

In the focus groups, gratuity of digital contents has been the topic that has provoked greatest unanimity. It is something we take for granted, at least regarding the alternatives of prices and accessibility existing nowadays. We must not forget the "limited" purchasing power of young people. If we look for the new subscription and buying forms, this perception might possibly change. The disposition to payment changes however when it comes to live shows or materials about popular artists. These two ideas compensate the indiscriminate consumption of contents within the web.

On methodologies of study of cultural habits and practices

Adapting methodology to conceptual and value changes. The first reflection is linked to the mutations occurred within the concepts of space and time: instant, speed, immediacy, ubiquity and simultaneity are concepts which outstand as virtues of the new technologies of information and communication and have an impact on the new forms of cultural consumption.

On one hand, the dissolution of opposite pairs like public-private, inside-outside, virtual-real, material-immaterial, require new forms of approaching the study of the habits and cultural practices.

Regarding the tools of analysis, the qualitative aspect must be stressed with the aim of obtaining information which explains behaviours and not only measures.

The dominant logic of the statistic study of cultural consumptions is descriptive, however it is incompatible when it comes to generating policies of transforming nature because defining and giving priority to actions necessarily needs a previous evaluation on the practices and consumption habits of the younger ones.

On the other hand, it seems reasonable to think that what happens within the web must be measured from the web. The question lies in the confidentiality and respect for privacy this might imply.

The traditional explanatory variables determine consumption. A confirmation of the initial hypothesis of this study which affirms that preferences on consumption of cultural products keep being determined by variables which are traditionally considered as explanatory (age, gender, study level, vital situation).

Regarding the influence of technology, the great strokes are maintained; it is used according to possibilities, capacities and preferences of each person, and conditioned by the abovementioned variables. Internet magnifies, enlarges and multiplies, it acts as a magnifying mirror of reality; it is a matter of scale. Predominant cultural practices within the web are related to listening to music and reading digital press; it is not the substitution of old cultural practices by new ones, it is rather a modification on the way that cultural consumption is made. This is an advantage for minority contents and democratization of access.

In short, the significant aspect for cultural and young policies must deepen in the new forms of consumption generated, amongst other factors, by the digital environment. Since the network offers an online extension of their offline life, characterized by sociability, consumption and learning.

Key questions for the next future

1. Which analysis tools have to be used to capture the cultural practices of the young ones?
2. Technology and youngsters' cultural consumption: are the new traditional variables explanatory?
3. From emotion and play: the work on values from the youth policies.
4. The need to research the representation of the notion of culture among the youngsters.