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Buenos Aires University Students in Times of Internet

Abstract: The widespread use of information and communication technologies (ICTs), coupled with global changes have taken place in most social environments. The subject of research are the university students at the School of Philosophy and Literature, and at the School of Social Sciences, both at the University of Buenos Aires. The goal of investigation is to explore the ICT's habits in this population. This article stands at the intersection of the fields of communication and education, specifically associated to the issue of the insertion of ICTs in these students' everyday life. In the review of the state of the art, are taken up some concepts as "degradation culture" (Eco, 1968). The method was qualitative, based on 120 semi-structured in-depth interviews. The initial hyphotesis was that multitasking and intensive use of ICT's have its side effects in "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). The main conclusion of this work is that intensive use of ICTs involves a paradox: on the one hand, greater accessibility, availability and information exchange around the "culture of connectivity" (Van Dijck, 2013), but also a degree of "distraction", "superficiality" and "speed" around the view of "degradation culture" (Eco, 1968), which we called, based on a native category, "academic fast food".

Key words: *youths, ICTs, Internet, university, education*

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Apstrakt: Rasprostranjena upotreba informacionih i komunikacionih tehnologija (IKT), zajedno sa globalnim promjenama, odvijala se u većini društvenih sredina. Predmet istraživanja su studenti sa Fakulteta za filozofiju i književnost i Fakulteta društvenih nauka Univerziteta u Buenos Ajresu. Cilj ovog rada je istražiti navike ove populacije u upotrebi IKT-a. Ovaj članak obuhvata oblasti komunikacije i obrazovanja, posebno povezane sa pitanjem upliva IKT u svakodnevni život studenata. U pregledu stanja tehnike uzimaju se neki pojmovi poput "kultura degradacije" (Eco, 1968). Metod je bio kvalitativan, zasnovan na 120 polu-strukturiranih dubinskih intervjua. Polazna hipoteza je bila da multitasking i intenzivna upotreba IKT imaju neželjene efekte po "digitalne urođenike" (Prenski, 2001). Glavni zaključak ovog rada je da intenzivno korišćenje IKT bazirana na paradoksu: s jedne strane, veći pristup, dostupnost i razmjena informacija bazirana na "kulturi povezanosti" (Van Dijck, 2013), ali i stepen "distrakcije", "površnosti" i "brzine" koji počiva na "kulturnoj degradaciji" (Eco, 1968), koju smo nazvali, na osnovu kategorije urođenika, "akademska brza hrana".

Ključne riječi: *mladi, ICT, internet, univerzitet, obrazovanje*

1. Introduction

Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have become widespread globally affecting everyone's daily social life (Castells, 2009). Also, they have come to be key to contemporary communication, particularly among the young, and they have contributed to generate novel ways to gain access, process and manipulate information (Urresti, 2008). These new practices have been referred to in multiple ways by social sciences. One of the conceptualizations which has generated the most acceptance is "culture of convergence" (Jenkins, 2008) or "culture of connectivity" (Van Dijck, 2013), as cultural concepts and human interaction increasingly tend to converge around ICTs, since the most dynamic sectors of society (services, finance, media and youth groups) are interconnected through digital networks (Castells, 2009). This phenomenon expands until Internet 2.0 is developed, which basically refers to the mass use of "social network sites" (Boyd, Ellison, 2008) and to the emergence of collaborative platforms.

In this context, the initial hyphotesis was that multitasking and intensive use of ICT's have its side effects in "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001). Our research question was how the recent mass uses of ICTs impact on the practices of university students. To this end, we have developed two axes: 1) communication between fellow collage students and between professors and students; 2) the relationship between the collage students and academic information and production, as the execution of summaries, assignments, term tests, papers, articles, theses and dissertations. Lastly, this research article aims to explore the study practices of the students at the School of Philosophy and Literature and the School of Social Sciences, University of Buenos Aires.

2. Methodology

In this qualitative study,we did 120 semi-structured in-depth interviews, between 2012 and 2015with universitystudents. First, we interviewed acquaintances from these faculties. Then, we contacted students in the libraries of these Faculties. We asked for further contacts from those who agreed to be interviewed so that they too participated in the research. Thus, we gradually increased the sample. Our universe comprises students from the Schools of Social Sciences and the School of Philosophy and Literature, University of Buenos Aires, who range between 18 and 29 years of age.

This is a descriptive case study, which focuses on how university students use ICT's. A qualitative method was used during the data collection, to obtain in-depth information. The explorative study focused on 120 undergraduate students from Litherature and Social Sciences departments in the University of Buenos Aires. The interviews typically lasted 30-40 minutes and were conducted by the researcher.

The University of Buenos Aires, were we did the interviews, is located in the City of Buenos Aires, Argentina. All of the students participated in the research vol-

untarily. The participants were selected by the purposive sampling method, which is widespread in qualitative research (Patton, 1990). This study group was aged 18 to 29, and consisted of 63 female and 57 male students. We interviewed also ten young professors from these faculties between 28 and 39 years old.

The data were collected by means of semistructured interviews, using a method developed by the researcher. In order to ensure the validity of the data collection tool, three expert reviews and six peer reviews were consulted. According to their feedback, the interview schedule was modified and finalized.

The interviews were transcribed and coded. Then, the transcriptions were analyzed by means of content analysis. Initially, the researcher conducted an analysis of single transcriptions to create a set of categories and subcategories related to the research questions. Themes derived from each participant's responses were shared and discussed among other researchers.

The intentional sample was made with 60 students from Social Sciences and 60 from Philosophy and Literature. The names of the students have been modified for ethical reasons. Even though almost half the sample is male, in this exploratory research no significant discrepancies will be found as concerns use of ICTs according to gender. The subjects in our research are middle-class residents of Buenos Aires City. In line with the National Institute of Statistics and Census (2012), middle-class youths are those who have parents with a secondary level education or higher, hold medium or high qualification jobs and also live in homes with basic public services.

For analysis of the information was used discourse analysis and hermeneutical analysis. Discourse analysis is a strategy of analysis that includes a set of procedures on a text (corpus) previously delimited and on which conceptual applications and tools of interpretation. From the perspective of discourse analysis we reviewed the interviews, which consisted of transcribing each one, design a matrix and qualify the discourse from a series of categories linked to the object of study. For its part, the hermeneutical analysis was based on the construction of meanings. The dialogue between the hermeneutic exercise and the information obtained through the interview allowed us to understand an area of the social reality of these university students.

We revised, compared and analized the 120 in-depth interviews. Afterwards, we selected the more representative fragments of the interviews and we presented examples of the constructed empirical evidence. In this study, semi-structured in-depth interviews were basically used to collect the data. The analysis of the qualitative data was developed by the author. Permission for the use of the collected data were taken from authors in a co-presential way and via e-mail with a consented form.

Since this is a non-probabilistic sample and an explorative study, the results of the study cannot be extrapolated to the whole universe of study. However, we claim that this research is useful in order to observe emerging tendencies in the fields of communication and education, especially in the relationships that college youths establish with ICTs.

3. State of the art

The college students in our sample were raised in digital environments. All of them share the habit of multitasking and the condition of prosumers, as they usually consume and produce contents (Urresti, 2008; Piscitelli, 2009). It is because they share these characteristics that they are refered to as "digital natives" (Prensky, 2001).

The computer has succeeded television as totem, but with the difference that digital natives find in it a different meaning and project onto this device a great number of expectations linked to play, experimenting, learning and sociability, to the point of regarding it as a part of their identity (Albarello, 2011: 38).

Apart from adolescents, the ones who spend the most time on the internet are college youths, who still bear the "aura" (Benjamin, 1973) of learners and who, hence, are extended a "social moratorium" beyond the limits of the "vital moratorium" (Margulis, Urresti, Lewin et al., 1998). This explains the fact that they have more time in their hands to spend on the internet, unlike their same-generation working peers and those belonging to previous generations (Urresti, 2008).

On the internet, adolescents mostly use SNS, particularly Facebook and Twitter. Overall, SNS are multi-purpose platforms where users, by means of computers or smartphones, share information as they build public or semi-public profiles to interact with their groups of contacts and their latent ties (Haythornwaite, 2005; López, Ciuffoli, 2012). Within these sites, the most published contents by young people are texts and personal photographs (Linne, 2014a & 2014b).

Reviewing the state of the art, we have found antagonist positions. Eco (1968) was one of the first who posit this dichotomy: on the one hand, the "apocalyptic ones", who associate technical advances with the "degradation of culture" (Eco, 1968); and on the other hand, the "integrated ones", enthusiasts of technological change imposed by scientific progress in association with companies and public bodies. Albarello (2011) redefines these two positions with the terms "technophiles" and "technophobes", and adds a third, the neutral position, according to which technology is neither good nor bad, but depends on how it is used. In this line, Landow (1995: 211) has claimed that "technology always confers power on someone; it gives power to those who possess it, to those who use it and to those who have access to it". Although ICTs have become widespread worldwide, they still generate a certain resistance among those who think of them as beneficial and those who think they may have deleterious effects. this dichotomy is considered to be productive in order to enrich the discussion.

Multitasking, which refers to the practice of doing many tasks simultaneously (for example, chatting and studying), to some means the positive dismantling of binary mental tools inherited from nineteenth-century culture (Baricco, 2008) whereas to others it entails distraction and a decrease in productivity in the school and work systems (Healy, 1998). Thus, while Berardi (2007) points out the risk of

homogenization and alienation of the bodies, researchers such as Landow (1995) and Shirky (2010) highlight the unprecedented freedom and the potential development of collective intelligence enabled by hypertextual communication and information genres. Supporters of the Internet wield the arguments both the freedom and variety to choose consumptions, and the possibilities of empowerment of the citizens and the various minorities.

On the other hand, Internet naysayers mention the false egalitarianism, claiming that the internet is controlled by the same corporations as the other mass media. Also, they stress the addiction produced by video games, pornography and social networks (Carr, 2008), compounded by the ease with which child pornography and the contents of terrorist networks may be disseminated, as may harassing through virtual bullying and the publication of intimate aspects of someone's life without their consent (Livingstone, 2008). In this way, the internet may turn into a space for liberation as well as domination (Lago Martínez, 2012). Though the web was at first designed as a free communication technology, at present it is not a space of total freedom, but neither is it one of exclusive State or corporate control, but basically the medium by means of which most people express themselves and get informed (Castells, 2009).

As most professors and students have their own computers or smartphones in the classrooms, the debate about the consequences on school learning are at a peak, and expert narratives multiply from this traditional dichotomy. Those who emphasize the positive effects of ICTs indicate that each generation is more digital than the one that came before (Negroponte, 1995), that more texts are read than before and that there are more texts available for reading (Baricco, 2008; Piscitelli, 2009). They also value the advent of ICTs in the classroom and weigh the potentialities of non-linear self-directed, interactive, simultaneous learning open to the senses (Negroponte, 1995; Reinghold, 1996; Cassany, Ayala, 2008). Contrarily, others lay emphasis on the obstacles and the new problems such a phenomenon poses (Berardi, 2007; Levis, 2009; Palazzo, 2010). Among other matters, they warn that people do not read any more, that the internet diminishes the quality of reading and writing, and that it makes us more superficial (Sibilia, 2008). As to college students, these authors suggest that hypertextual reading by these students detracts from their capacity to remember data while the distraction generated by multitasking negatively affects their academicperformance.

To sum up, in context of distraction as a new paradigm of knowledge and the hypertextual mode as a less linear way of thinking (Kerckhove, 2001), the various studies reviewed normally track and underline negative or positive aspects in connection with the uses of ICTs. We maintain that our contribution consists in working based on this paradox: as with other technologies, the value and usefulness of these "tools" depends on the uses and appropriations made. Moreover, there being a great number of research studies analyzing the genesis and architecture of digital devices, this work consider it is a specific contribution to work from the perspective of college students and from their direct experience with these technologies.

4. Results

4.1. Frequency

Interviewed candidates spend an average of 7 hours daily online. The most frequent users affirm to spending "over 12 hours a day", "all day", "all the time", "all the time I am at home or close to a computer" or "from the time I get up till I go to bed". Whereas the average for Social Sciences students is 8 hours daily, those of Philosophy and Literature average 6 hours. Partly, this difference may be due to larger course loads, the greater number of mandatory final exams and the lesser use of ICTs in the Philosophy and Literature subjects as compared to those of Social Sciences, which require greater study of the new communication and statistics media.

Although some report connecting to the internet less than one hour per day, most state they are online nearly seven hours per day. The most active users are normally bloggers who came to be participants in social networks (such as Twitter and Facebook). They tend to be readers of digital format news and to consume various audiovisual contents. These users generally have a greater level of prosumption in their mediated everyday life, since they stay longer online and, therefore, tend to generate contents of their own at some point, even if it is in their personal Facebook profile. Also, immersed as they are in "bedroom culture" (Livingstone, 2008), the computer normally regulates their routines and schedules. This "bedroom culture" is an apt example of what we understand by digital environments: "media ecology" (Horst, Herr-Stephenson, Robinson, 2010) formed around the youths, which more often than not consists of a desktop or laptop computer, an mp3 player, a smartphone and, sometimes, a tablet. College students in our sample normally live in homes which are media rich, with various technological objects available to them.

The average television time viewed by the interviewees is one hour. In many cases, they reply that they do not own a television set, never watch or simply substituted the internet for television. So it happened with the films that they used to rent, the newspapers they used to purchase or the books they used to buy in book stores: there is a trend to consume online and at no cost the cultural objects or texts for which they used to pay. Nevertheless, rather than analyze whether television has been displaced by the internet or whether books and notes in a paper format have, what matters is exploring how a new means of communication – and information – complements the existing ones (Morduchowicz, 2008), and how people live together in this media diversity.

I use the internet 8 or 9 hours a day. I'm online that long, but my hours surfing the net are less. One, two or three hours a day I read the papers, use social networks, watch videos, reply to emails, etc. I call being on Facebook or listening to music on the internet being online, as I work with other applications not on the internet. (Macarena, 26 y/o)

I think it's not even one hour of television a day. But to have a more serious statistic I must be in the three hour a day slot. I've been living without it for many days, and it looks like I got used to its not being on, now that I have one. Basically, because I replaced it with the PC and the internet. (Julieta, 24 y/o)

Most of the interviewees make frequent use of the internet, especially in connection with communication and information through SNS. The main arguments that they offer to justify that frequency are the following: 1) they find it "entertaining"; 2) by means of this technology, they integrate communication with their peers, professors, family, teachers and, in some cases, employers. 3) they deem it important to havecontinuous access to various kinds of information to stay up to date; 4) they claim that being online improves their chances of getting a job, a partner and new contacts; 5) they are at ease with the medium, find it practical to consolidate the relationships with their fellow students and friends; 6) they think it is the best medium to widen their "cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1985), i.e to gain useful knowledge, obtain university degrees and improve their foreign language level; and 7) they widen their "social capital" online (Bourdieu, 1985) by consolidating and extending their contact base.

4.2. Main practices and sites used

The youths in the sample coincide with those in other research studies (Cassany and Ayala, 2008) in that they cannot imagine life without ICTs. They also claim that ICTs markedly modified their college experience. Unlike adolescents –who belong to a post-email generation– and low-income youths –who do not normally use email (Linne, 2014b)–, when it comes to college students this is the most cited medium for academic communication, together with Facebook. Although SNSs and instant messaging services have replaced email as the main digital communication medium, to college students it continues to be a fundamental tool: professors use it to facilitate communication as a direct channel between teachers and students, and also as a strategy to generate a horizontal communication peer network (be them among professors or students). Some students check their in-trays several times a day, in very many cases up to dozens of times a day. Others report they have abandoned their email accounts, as they now communicate with their teachers and fellow students via Facebook. In all cases, students generally have high expectations relating to the integration of these technologies at college, which tend to go unsatisfied.

In one course that looked like they'd propose email as the means to communicate, they did not do so, arguing that they were flooded with messages and they couldn't cope. When the second class came along, we the students formed an email group to swap the writings that we had to submit (and so we did). I think that the other two parallel courses did the same. (Ariel, 25 y/o)

With respect to mobile telephones, they claim that they provide greater convenience to arrange encounters and take advantage of interstitial time. For instance, as they travel to college by public transport or stand in line for some academic for-

mality, they play *Candy Crush* or update their FB statuses (where they are, how they are) on their Twitter or Facebook Timeline. Students stress the increased degree of communication they enjoy through Whatsapp, G-talk or some social network chat feature, especially Facebook. All of these services are free of charge, other than the fixed monthly fee paid to the IP or telephone company providing access.

In the case of Philosophy and Literature students, among the most frequented web pages is the web forum created by the very students, which features daily updates and has become a useful site to exchange information on the various college programs. In addition, forums of both faculties were created in sites like Facebook and Yahoo. Through these web pages, valuable information is exchanged, such as course information, books, articles, monographs and exams. And there exist other web pages visited by college students on a daily basis.

In order to do in-depth study or explore topics they know nothing about, Google is the most popular search engine. Second to Google, the best ranked web pages are Wikipedia; Google Scholar –the Google search engine specializing in college searches–and You Tube, the biggest online video portal globally, where uploading and viewing pedagogic videos on a wide variety of topics is more and more frequent.

In SNSs students display their sociability and also exchange academic information. Facebook and Twitter are the most visited. A great number of students are users of both, though some choose to focus on one social network and eschew the other. Even if Facebook is the most widely used by the college students in our sample, Twitter enjoys a special preference among many of the college students we interviewed. Linked in, which ranks third among the interviewees, is a social network with growing acceptance specializing in the working, professional world. Lastly, Academia.edu is a recent social network focusing exclusively on the academic world which has recently started to be used by college students.

Regarding information and news portals, the most popular are Clarin.com, Ole. com.ar and Lanacion.com.ar (national newspapers web sites). The Web, which daily expands its limits –as it incorporates data and users–, generates constant dependence to informative updating in many students.

4.3. Advantages of Internet-based Study

The interviewees underline as positive aspects the greater access to e-book libraries, online encyclopedias, summaries and articles. They also value being able to enroll for courses and seminars online, inquire about exam dates, have access to bibliography from the college web page (or in the online campus of the different courses), do bibliography searches without having to travel and, above all, have access to material of other local and foreign universities, have a more dynamic dialogue with researchers from other countries and keep track of what is being investigated in other parts. This mediated environment generated around computers and smartphones is the hub of the complex relationship and the crossover of media (Baricco, 2008; Urresti, 2008).

The fantasy is that the internet is a more interesting and entertaining present, where anything happens, and which the future is clearly. But also that it is a place of vital resolutions, as the feeling that is becoming widespread is that more and more things in life happen in the internet. All knowledge and learning today is permeated by the internet. (Florencia, 23 y/o)

The internet and multimedia are already part of the furniture in the bedroom. The internet is there when one gets up and turns in, where it seems to have always been: "I don't know any other way of studying which doesn't include the internet, it's not exclusive as a source, but it's always there" (Melisa, 25 y/o).

All that is good may be bad too: greater access, which may come at the price of contamination of the information, and a lesser reliance on one's own work, but access to information is all-important, especially where gratuitousness is the rule, which is in most cases. (Sandra, 27 y/o)

Many of the students claim that they cannot compare the changes in studying brought about by the mass use of ICTs, since they were already internet users when they came to college: "When I came to university, it was already wired to the internet, so I didn't witness any gradual progress that allowed me to perceive, or not perceive, changes" (Facundo, 26 y/o); "I was into the internet when I came to college" (Santiago, 31 y/o); "When I started my studies, the internet was already a widespread phenomenon" (Lucia, 24 y/o); "I couldn't see the changes because the internet was already there when I signed up… in fact, I signed up online" (Julieta, 28 y/o).

Only some students recall one point of particular importance in the relationship between the internet, and their study habits and access to knowledge, or between the changes in the modalities of courses and course enrolment, as from the development of the web.

In second year of college, I first heard of Wikipedia from a friend when nobody knew about it. Knowing the site let me reach contents that I wouldn't have known otherwise. (Alejandro, 26 y/o)

I don't have one point of contact without the internet, but little by little I noticed a greater use of email in the courses I was doing, creating accounts or groups in many courses, and having a communication that was part of the course configuration: sending pieces of writing, receiving corrections, sharing them with students. (Ariel, 25 y/o)

The internet makes available contents to students that would otherwise be inaccessible. Additionally, it allows them to communicate with people from remote locations and to exchange contents with peers, teachers and non-teaching staff in a more dynamic and convenient than with the previous in-person practices.

4.4. Risks of Internet-based Study

Many interviewees indicate their difficulty in disconnecting from the internet and the fact that various types of accessibility and technological equipment may be something dangerous in itself, as they could increase inequality between those with greater access and those without: "it raises the technological gap between

digital natives and the digital illiterate" (Glenda, 27 y/o); "while its use becomes widespread, we depend on the internet, which may increase inequality with those without easy access" (Julian, 29 y/o).

On the other hand, numerous students draw attention to the unreliability of the sources and the difficulty to check on them, the overabundance of information, recurring viewing of pornography, laziness to attend the library and do teamwork, the sedentary stimulated by having access to so many sources a click away, the temptation of plagiarism and the loss of habit of reading paper books.

When you study from the internet, you have the feeling that everything is at hand, you believe everything is easier than it is, the availability of wonderful works on the same topic one has to write about, all add up to the constant temptation of plagiarism. (Carolina, 25 y/o)

The internet influences what one reads too much, stumps criticism and leaves less space for free thought and creativity. I stopped going to libraries, now I do academic fast food. (Mariano, 27 y/o)

This native category of academic "fast food" is particularly apt for our analysis. At the end of our last series of interviews, we asked students whether they agreed with this expression to describe a part of academic work based on the intensive use of ICTs. All participants agreed with the proposed category; consequently, we decided to employ it to describe a certain imaginary present in this study population in a more economical way. Most students state that they normally study and produce text more quickly but with less quality due to constant micro pauses and the tremendous amount of information available online.

Students also maintain that intensive use of the internet goes against their creativity. This repeated complaint about the "superficiality" and extreme speed with which they tend to write their monographs, assignments and summaries can also be called a consequence of this "academicfast food". Students report that they get distracted more with the internet, that they find it hard to concentrate and that the new habit of reading in a digital format is both economical and convenient, yet it generates a superficial comprehension of texts, the tendency to read shorter texts and to skip parts of those texts.

To me, reading from the computer does not generate the same effect as from paper. I can't read from the screen, and downloading books from the internet makes it less probable, mostly for economic reasons, that one prints them. (Laura, 21 y/o)

I think that 70% of the time spent online is sort of walking in circles. It is neither producing contents nor reading articles or books or stories or poems, nor seeing films nor doing research on anything. Truth is the advantages are not so great; I don't know if a world with the internet is better than a world without it. (Antonella, 24 y/o)

Internet-based study has changed in many ways. It distracts me more, and I study with the books and notes, but with the computer by my side, pausing to check news updates and check email. (Camila, 23 y/o)

A great part of the students complains that the convenience and ease to gain access to different sources gives them the feeling of having "covered half the distance"

and that, because of that, it makes them produce more superficial texts: "it's easy to feel you're studying when you goggled the subject" (Francisco, 29 y/o). There is also a marked tendency not to question the information sources validated by Google, like Wikipedia and the busiest portals in the web. Over half the interviewees agree that –even when they save time thanks to copying and pasting, to the digitalization of contents and to the automatization of searches and procedures– it takes them longer to discriminate which sources are useful amidst such abundance of data.

There's so much information that it's unfathomable many times, and you lose focus. Besides, thanks to the internet I get distracted more, use Wikipedia more and my notes, less. (Sebastian, 25 y/o)

Search for information has been automated to such an extent that it has diminished the level of complexity used to formulate questions as triggers for the search. And if the information that one expects to find isn't available online or is incomplete, one tends to simplify the complexity of the search or to get discouraged: "if it isn't on the internet, it isn't reliable enough". Or, to quote the saying: *IfWikipedia says it, it must be so*. This contributes exponentially to the dependence on this robotized, unintelectualized search. Insight and intellectual processes pertaining to study volatilize and alienate themselves from thought. Students don't use their brains in working out the answers. They copy and paste the information as need be. The logical process has gone softer, the way the solution to a problem is thought out or an idea is articulated is different. (Samanta, 29 y/o)

The professors we asked, post-graduate students over thirty years old, are the most critical of these transformations. Among the disadvantages, they warn that "comprehension does not increase one bit, as it fosters plagiarism and savage paraphrasing" (Sergio, 35 y/o); "the temptation to cut and paste goes up" (Ana, 32 y/o); "it allows students to cheat" (Marina, 31 y/o). They also state that the diversity of stimuli robs students of energy and time to analyze the topics and the information provided by the Professors. The majority agree that with the internet the capacity for reflection has been compromised.

Too much stimulus takes time from reflecting on the information obtained. It leads you to think that having information is explaining. And that is not so. It is NOT enough to say "this is so", but "this is so because...". (Martin, 37 y/o)

The internet substantially modifies the search method and the way you relate concepts. The link lets you relate topics easily, but it also limits that relationship. Online availability speeds everything up and you search fast because you have something else that may be more useful. In that passage, what may be lost is a certain capacity for reflection, or at least for reflection as we understood it up until not so long ago. (Pablo, 31 y/o)

Although the risks of using the internet for studying, as we have seen, are many and varied, the majority perceives it as a requirement to go through university life, not just to have an email and Facebook account, but to own a computer with an internet connection.

5. Discussion and conclusions

We have exhibited abundant empirical evidence of how ICTs have significantly modified the study practices of college students. Most students use the internet intensively. Because with all interviewees and with a significant part of the state of the art (Baricco, 2008; Kerckhove, 2001; Klichowski, 2015, Shirky, 2010, among others), multitasking and prosumption are two marked practices, we can call the students in our sample "digital natives".

We discovered that having access to a computer with an internet connection is becoming more and more frequent and necessary in order to do a university degree. Hence, the internal need to be part of a network overlaps the external imperative of being connected. As both professors and students report, frequent use of the internet favors access and visiting various sources of information, renders communication among peers more dynamic and facilitates the writing of academic assignments and the intercommunication between students and teachers. In this sense,both students and teachers consolidate their social capital and, specially, their cultural capital with the use of ICT's.

The majority of the students interviewed declare that the internet is their principal source of entertainment and information. In addition, they consider that their email and SNS accounts are fundamental tools to exchange academic, social, and work communications and information. On the other hand, we note the disadvantages that both college students and professors find in the academic use of ICTs: mainly, the low reliability of the sources used, the constant risk of plagiarism and the superficiality both of study methods and student productions.

These new modalities of study mediated by ICTs are reflected in the high number of hours in which the sample college students stay connected. It is based on the widespread nature of their self-criticism towards their own academic production that we find the "academic fast food" native category productive: this phrase summarizes a tendency and a contradictory feeling shared among college students. To them, ICTs have become key tools, but they also foster the development of a fragmentary attention and distract with their constant offer of contents, stimuli and applications. In this sense, forward investigations must keep exploring the potential or real negative influences of multitasking in our brains (Loh, Kanai, 2014).

As seen, Eco's traditional distinction (1968) between the "apocalyptic and the integrated" remains productive in its reformulations in order to reflect upon this paradox of risks and advantages in connection with ICTs. All of these phenomena, rather than entail a crisis of the educational system, are an opportunity and a challenge to renovate the practices, since students have been through profound cultural and cognitive transformations that have not been fully contemplated by academic institutions. In context of distraction as a new paradigm of knowledge (a less linear way of thinking), this paper sustains the thesis about hypertextual way of thinking in the young generations from Kerckhove (2001), Prensky (2001) and Baricco

(2008), among others.

Even though "academic fast food" seems to be not testable, future research should delve deeper into these youths' technologized practices to ascertain whether what we call distraction may be a new paradigm of knowledge, more fragmentary and hypertextual, and less linear than the one that came before.

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PhD Joaquin Linne
Buenos Aires University Students in Times of Internet | Media and Communication
Mediji i komunikacije

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