Romanian teenagers and the Internet: The Internet in the life of romanian adolescents

Simona Ştefănescu
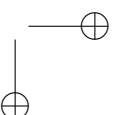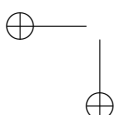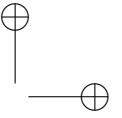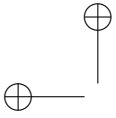*Romanian Adventist Theological Institute, Cernica, Ilfov, Romania*
E-mail: simona.stefanescu@shd-net.com

S INCE the beginning of the '90s, the Internet has revolutionized the communication world in unprecedented ways. No other medium managed to achieve this, and the Internet along with other technologies has opened channels of communication different from all the classic ways of communicating. Its potential of altering traditional communication systems turned into an important subject of research in the field of communication.

The research this article is based upon is included in the wider trend of social-constructivist paradigm, which looks upon people as if they were the ones to build their own realities and social identities, by the means of interacting with others and projecting their cultural expectations, respecting the general rules of social life at the same time. Looking at it from this perspective and trying to explain the agenda of common internet users, regarded from the point of view of their relationship with technological systems, A. Feenberg (1991, 1999) came up with the 'critical theory of technology' according to which these systems are not able to define in an exhaustive way the necessary conditions for the existence of the subjects involved in it. People use to offer their own explanations and they generate their own applications when it comes to technological systems, but most of the times these aspects turn to be far away from their initial goals. According to Feenberg, they are not irrational alterings, the way the dominant ideology might portray them, but rather a pattern of rationalism, deeply rooted in the alternative values and interests set. Based on this idea, the users, the clients and even the 'victims' of technological systems engage in appropriating technology in a creative way, causing its reform and hence making it appear more humanized, even democratical.

Starting from this wider perspective, M. Bakardjieva and R. Smith (2001) introduced the term of 'generative process of technology', in order to characterize the dialectic nature of technology, regarded as a system that not only determines, but is also able to transform, inside the wider ring of technology
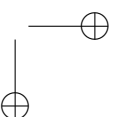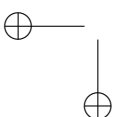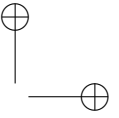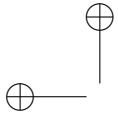
at the disposal of people. This vision allows us to see the Internet -at the same time- as a system that determines what the users can do and cannot do, endorsing an 'already given' design, and as a system able to alter during its usage. The same authors refer to the 'little behaviour genres' emerging as a result of several typical usage situations – ranging from the *loisir* when at home to the usage in an organized system, at work – but each one of these situations represents a result of the social environment, determined by the larger process of social reproduction (Bakardjieva & Smith, 2001, p. 68).

Starting from these premises, the idea that the Internet users are indeed an active force in the 'generative process of technology' might emerge, as a hypothesis, but not in any random or voluntaristic way. The socio-biographical situations in which the subjects find themselves determine specific 'little behaviour genres', where the ways of using technology are also included. If certain conditions are met, such genres are able to induce changes in the technology itself. However, their existence is a factor that brings its contribution towards creating possibilities for the development of the aforementioned technology.

One might argue that the researchers from the communication field found themselves somehow unprepared in front of the impact of the Internet development. Besides the initial difficulties triggered by conceptualization (for instance, there were questions dealing with the classification of the Internet as medium: a mass communication agent, or a way of interpersonal communication?), then there were the difficulties in using it, explaining all the aspects, the theories and the theoretical models existing at that time. Despite the fact that some theories related to communications can be used when studying the Internet's effects and implications, we are in need of new concepts and theoretical models, through which the evolution, the usages and the effects of this new medium could be interpreted. Although some progresses have been made lately, due to several approaches from the communicational, sociological, psychological perspective and so forth, at present the development of technology (of the medium itself), is still ahead of the researches regarding its social impact.

Objectives and Methods

This article presents some of the results of a research [1] whose objectives attempted to identify: a) the extent to which Romanian adolescents have access to the Internet and the characteristics of this access; b) the patterns of using the Internet and the conveyance of a 'portrait' of the Internet uses, of the place of the Internet consumption into the larger media consumption, on one hand, and in the customs of interpersonal communication, on the other hand; c) the effects the Internet has on young people, both on the personal plan, and on the plan of social micro-relationships, not to mention the wider plan of social life; d) the expectations towards the Internet – not only personal, relational and social ones, but also the expectations related to technological evolution.
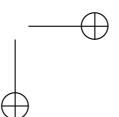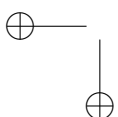
The specific objectives of this paper are identifying: the frequency and the duration of adolescents use of the Internet, as well as determining the most frequent used applications; access to the Internet and the characteristics of it; the significance of the Internet for the Romanian adolescents (what does the Internet mean for them?).
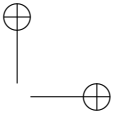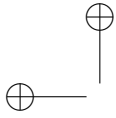
The methods we used were specific both to the qualitative and quantitative research: in-depth interviews and sociological survey. Using the qualitative method, 30 respondents have been interviewed in-depth, chosen according to two main conditions: a) still studying in high-school; b) using the Internet. As both the qualitative and the quantitative researches aimed samples of respondents from Bucharest [2], a third criterion was added: the respondents should live and study in Bucharest. Specific criteria for choosing the respondents consisted of independent variables, such as gender, year of study, profile of the high school [3] . The interviews were conducted between March–June 2007.

---

1. The reasearch is named *The social and cultural impact of the Internet on Romanian teenagers, financed by* The National Grant of Research CEEX-ET no. 172/2006-2008.

2. Because of financial reasons.

3. This way, depending on these variabiles and taking into account the general level structure of the category of population, our in-depth interviews' sample consisted in: according to gender, 16 girls and 14 boys; according to year of study, 7 pupils in the 9th grade, 8 in the 10th grade; 7 pupils in the 11th grade; 8 pupils in the 12th grade; according to the profile of the highschool, 7 pupils studying at a highschool with mathematical profile, 8 in humanistic profile highschool, 4 pupils studying at a technical highschool, 4 studying at an art highschool, and 3 in sports highschool.

The sociological survey was fulfilled on a representative sample of teenagers from Bucharest, and the sampling technique was the 'strata' one. The sampling schema was complex, involving a bistadial sampling procedure, combined with proportional strata operations, cluster selection and random simple selection (standing for the last selection type). 'The universe of the research' or the reference population was made up of adolescents living in Bucharest, studying in high school. 'The strata' the sampling was based upon were: a) the form of education (highschool, with three variants: 'day' education, 'evening' education and reduced frequency, respectively vocational/professional schools); b) the year of study (with five subcategories – 9th, 10th, 11th, 12th and 13th) and c) the 'profile' (with eight types/substrata – human sciences, real sciences, informatics, economic, artistic, sports and technology). The highschools where from the respondents have been selected, the classes (parallel classes, such as – A, B, C, D and so on), as well as the pupils who took part in the survey were selected by random allocation. The field survey was carried out in November 2007, in 60 highschools and vocational schools from Bucharest[4], and the volume of the final samples reached 1008 subjects.
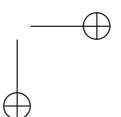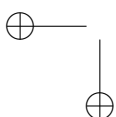
Results

The frequency and the duration of adolescents use of the Internet

The results of both the qualitative and the quantitative research show the fact that adolescents can be considered 'intense Internet consumers'. 29 out of 30 in-depth interviewees use the Internet *daily*, and our sociologic survey showed us that more than three quarters of the teenagers use the Internet daily.

Therefore, 75,8% of the subjects use the Internet daily, and almost 17% do not use it on a daily basis, but at least once a week they use the new medium (8,8% of them get online 4-6 times/week).

The data provided by the in-depth interviews allowed us to find out what is 'hiding' behind these figures. Besides noticing that they use the Internet daily, we were interested to find out what this 'every day' means. The qualitative research revealed the fact that the duration of using the internet varies from one hour to 10 or even 13 hours daily. Some of the in-depth interviewees were

---

4. Out of 102 highschools and vocational/professional schools in Bucharest.

Figure 1: The frequency of Internet use by adolescents (percents) [5]

not able to estimate how much time they spend online: they state that their PC or laptop connected to the Internet is switched on 'all day long', without using it continuously, because there are other activities going on during this time, or they stop using it in order to perform other activities [6]:

6. The cassettes contain quotes from the answers provided by the in-depth interviewees; the graphics show the results of the sociological survey.

Cassette 1
"It's switched on all the time"

Sanziana (11th grade, 18 years old): "[*When do you use the Internet?*] Every day (...) Ever since I come back from school, until I hit the sack. But I do not stay at my desk all the time, sometimes I go out and I leave it switched on, because the Messenger runs all the time. I chat all the time; this is some sort of addiction. If I do not get online for one day or two days, I feel I am going crazy!"

Oana (11th grade, 18 years old): "Using it passively or actively?... Because, practically, the access to the Internet begins with every on-switch of the PC and it is on all the time. Hence, I am online all the time. When it comes to browsing the Internet pages, or communicating via Internet, this means about two-three hours per day, on average".

Lavinia (10th grade, 17 years old): "I own a PC, it's in my room, and the Messenger is on all the time..."

Doina (9th grade, 16 years old): "I switch it on in the morning, I leave it like that and when they call... I mean, I do not stay in front of the PC all day long, only when I have something to do or other things like that. I do not use it only for chatting".

As one might easily see after reading the latest two statements, the Internet is equated, many times, with the Messenger or with the activity of 'chatting, communicating'. Anyway, communicating with other people, especially instant communication is the main factor driving towards adolescents using the Internet.

Going back at the amount of time spent online every day, we find the examples offered by teenagers quite relevant – taking into account the fact that they spend all their free time, or almost all of it, online. Even on workdays, when they have classes, some teens spend even 10-13 hours/days, as one can notice in the examples provided by the second cassette, or at least four hours per day, as cassette number three shows:

Cassette 2
"10-13 hours daily"

> *Cosmin (10th grade, 17 years old)*: "13 hours every day, usually; it depends on how much free time I have when I am at home, but on average I would say about 10 hours".
> *Adrian (11th grade, 18 years old)*: "It depends on the time. There are times when I use it 10-12 hours daily... It depends on my training program [7] ".

Cassette 3
"4-5 hour per day, sometimes even more"

> *Maria (12th grade, 19 years old):* "On average, about five hours every day (...) During weekends, even more, and weekly about 40 hours".
> *Mihai (12th grade, 18 years old)*: "About five-six hours per day".
> *Alexandra (11th grade, 17 years old)*: "About five hours every day, maybe six or four, it depends on the day (...) During holidays there are days when I get to stay online from dawn till evening, mmm, I mean, using the PC".
> *Stefan (9th grade, 16 years old)*: "On the average – four-five hours/day, sometimes even more than this. And every week this means a lot, around 35 hours, according to my assessment".
> *Sorina (9th grade, 15 years old)*: "I guess it is around five hours/day. (...) In weekend I get to spend more time online".

Starting from these examples, one might notice the subjects differentiate between using the Internet during workdays, weekends and holidays. This is precisely why the questionnaire we used during our survey had a decomposed item of three periods of time, emphasizing the differences between the adolescents' agenda: workdays (Monday to Friday), weekends and holidays. We underlined this difference due to the fact that our previous qualitative research, as well as most of the studies referring to mass media consume – show that the period of time assigned to the media is not a homogenous one, being correlated to people's daily agenda.

As one might easily notice in this graphic expressing the results of our survey, more than half of the respondents are Internet power users (spending

---

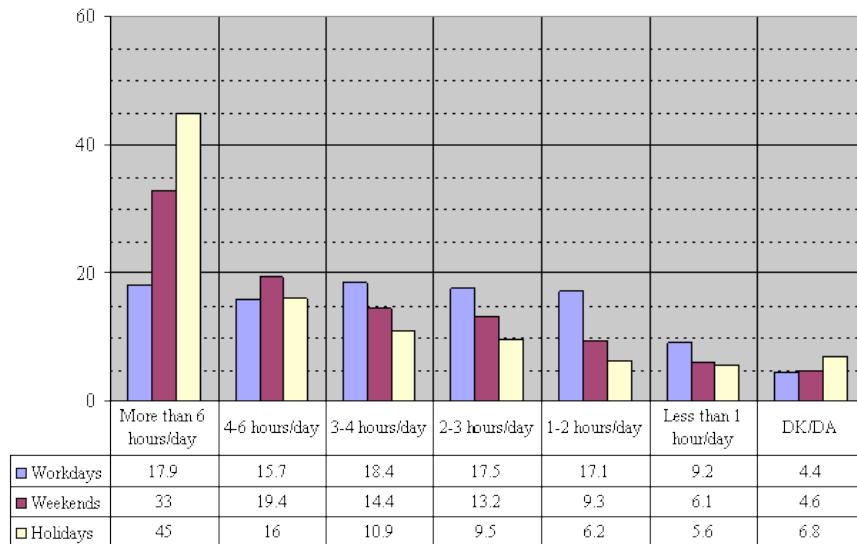7. Adrian studies at a sport highschool.

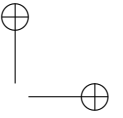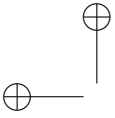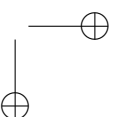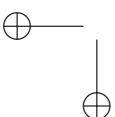|	More than 6 hours/day	4-6 hours/day	3-4 hours/day	2-3 hours/day	1-2 hours/day	Less than 1 hour/day	DK/DA
Workdays	17.9	15.7	18.4	17.5	17.1	9.2	4.4
Weekends	33	19.4	14.4	13.2	9.3	6.1	4.6
Holidays	45	16	10.9	9.5	6.2	5.6	6.8

Figure 2: Duration of the Internet usage according to adolescents' agenda (users' percents)

more than three hours per day on the Internet), even on workdays, when they have to go to school the next day. Thus, the cumulative percents expressing the subjects who use the new medium for six hours/day, four-six hours/day and three-four hours/day reaches 52% during workdays. The percent gets even higher when it comes to using the Internet on weekends and holidays: 66,8% of the respondents use the Internet for more than three hours every day during the weekend, and the percent gets grow to 71,9% during holidays. This growth shows us that adolescents feel constrained by the school program. One should also take into account the 'intensive internet consumption' during holidays: almost half of the teenagers (45%) spend more than six hours per day online when they are during holidays. Furthermore, this percent also is significant during weekends (33%), and on workdays, when 17,9% of the teenagers use the Internet for more than six hours per day, although they have to go to school the next day.

Internet access

All the in-depth interviewees subsequently answered that they get online from home: "home" is the main location from where the Internet is being used, even the only place, most of the times. In some cases, the subjects presented other locations too, such as school, Internet Cafes, friends. The school is mentioned only a couple of times as location for the Internet usage, and when they get online from that location they do not do it in educational purposes (they do not use it in order to learn something new or help the educative process developing during school program). On the contrary, using the Internet from school appears to be an illicit action, taking place during the breaks or after the informatics classes are over, so the educative process had already reached its end. Usually, they use it to check the mail boxes and the messages sent to them from different web sites:

Cassette 4
"At school, only during break time"

Oana (11th grade, 18 years old): "At school, only during break time, provided that the teachers allow us. [*From the classroom?*] No, at the lab, during the 10 minutes long break, they allow us to get online and do whatever we want. [*And would you rather use those ten minutes to get online?*] No. Honestly speaking, 10 minutes it's not enough times for what we are interested to do online. Anyways, there's not much to do in 10 minutes".

On the other hand, when they are at 'home', all the interviewees use the Internet, some of them do it *only* from home. The respondents use the Internet all by themselves; using it with someone else is an exception, not something happening frequently. The exceptions happen when friends are visiting, when getting online together is a habit for checking the Messenger or the messages on the sites they have subscribed to. 'The norm' is accessing the Internet when alone, and most of the respondents (24 out of 30, in the case of in-depth interviews) from ones room. Sometimes the teens' room turns into an exclusively private place, as Oana states:

Cassette 5
"I prefer to get online when I am alone, from my own private space"

Oana (11th grade, 18 years old): "I get online using the PC in my room, this is my private personal space and no one interferes with it (...) I have my own room, my TV set, my PC, my phone, my bed, my books – everything in there belongs to me. And I usually connect to the Internet from my room, it's my own private space, where I am alone. So there is no one beside me, unless, let us say, I might invite someone to visit and we see some websites".

The survey confirmed the results we got during our in depth-interviews, as 87% of the respondents confirmed that they get online from their homes:
The high percentage (87%), shows us the fact that there is a high degree of connectivity to the Internet (at least in the families of teenagers), despite
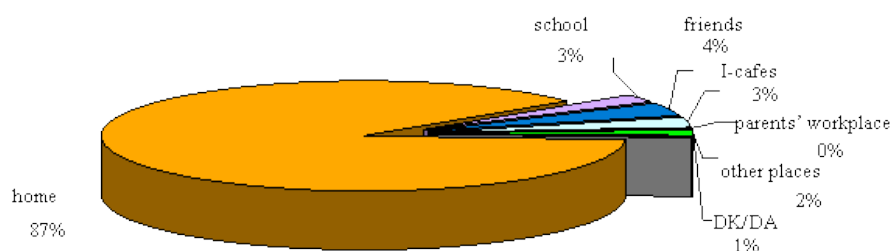
Figure 3: Locations to Internet access by the adolescents

the fact that about four years ago, in 2004, a national survey [8] showed that the percent of the degree of connectivity to the Internet was of only 6% (11% in urban areas and 1% in rural ones), in the households where there was at least one child aged between 6-18 years.

The major differences between the data achieved by the two surveys can be explained by appealing to two elements: the difference between the reference population (our survey was focused on respondents living in Bucharest, while the one that took place in 2004 was at national Romanian level, and the statistic data show us that Bucharest is leading the ranking referring to Internet connections), and the second element refers to the three year interval between the two researches, which turned out to be a good time for altering the peoples' conceptions in what the Internet connectivity is concerned. Furthermore, as we envision adolescents, we have to take into account the greater pression they put on their parents, so that they can get an Internet connection at their place (usually cable). But pressure aside (one could resist to it), the parents willingness to provide their children with an Internet connection can be explained by the image of 'encyclopaedia of all encyclopaedias' that the Internet has achieved. As our research has revealed the ambivalent character of the Internet (medium of information and communication, at the same time)

8. Reasearch conducted by MMT (Metro Media Transilvania) and Gallup for CNA (Consiliul Naţional al Audiovizualului).
http://www.cna.ro/cercetari/sondaje/rapfinrom.pdf, last accession 15 March 2009.

– is responsible for this opening towards the Internet: the parents appreciate its informative features, while the teens value its communicational characteristics).

The most used applications/programs of the Internet

The item referring to the most used applications/programs of the Internet was assessed using a hierarchic scale [9], and these are the results:
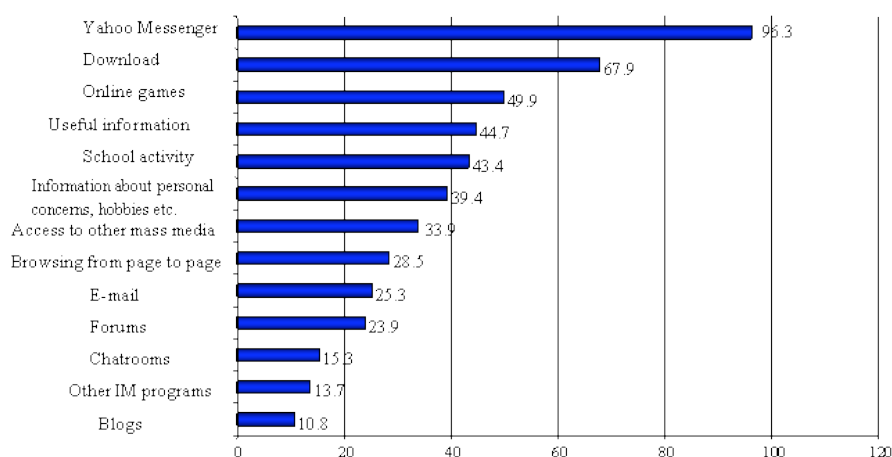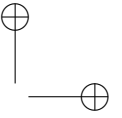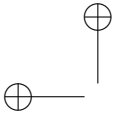

Figure 4: The most frequent used applications of the Internet by adolescents

This graphic strengthens an already established hierarchy, conveyed by the in-depth interviews: for adolescents, the Internet means communication, entertainment and access to information. In order to communicate, the leading program, ahead of other IM programs, is Yahoo Messenger. 96,3% of the respondents designated it the main program that justifies the usage on the Internet. Yahoo Messenger means communication, this is its very essence, and it does not deal only with instant communication, in real time (and here we include written communication, voice to voice calls from one PC to another,

9. We asked them to provide an answer out of 13 variants, 5 answers according to their opinions; we got 4891 answers; the figure presents percents per interviewees – on each line.

and visual communication via webcam). They also communicate the features of their personality, preoccupations and frames of mind, through the means of avatars and displayed messages, their constancy versus frequent change and so on.
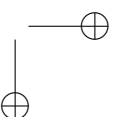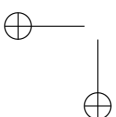
The next two applications popular among teens are the "download" and the "network games" – both of them can be included in the field of 'entertainment', as the Internet users have labelled it, while the next three items of the hierarchy give meaning to the 'information' field: useful information, pieces of information for the school activities, various other types of information (related to interests, personal preoccupations, hobbies and so forth). The other applications mentioned in the graphic subscribe both to communication (such as the e-mail, chats, IMs, forums, blogs) and to information (access to other mass media types, browsing from one page to another) – but the latest ones might as well be associated to entertainment.

The significance of the Internet for the adolescents

In order to find out what the Internet means for the Bucharest teenagers we asked them, during the sociological survey, to characterize this new medium of communication using maximum five words. The results are being shown in the next graphic [10]:

As one might easily notice, *communication* is the first word mentioned by 61,5% of the subjects. Anyway, as our research has shown so far, adolescents think that the Internet facilitates the communication between people and it changes it, at the same time, and the interviewees consider that it becomes 'improved' this way. The previously shown hierarchy (see figure 4) is confirmed for another time, because the next places are also being secured by entertainment activities (the '*fun*' title is mentioned by 60,6% of the subjects, and 49,4% of the respondents indicated the word '*entertainment*', that secured

---

10. The item was measured by asking the question: ‚What's the word that characterizes the Internet in the best way, in your view?'. The respondents have been provided with a list of 23 words, and they were asked to choose maximum five answers out of them, according to their opinion. So it was a close-ended question, with multiple answers, with a nominale scale. As a result of the research we obtained 4624 answers, and the percents from the graphic are being calculated per respondents – on each line.

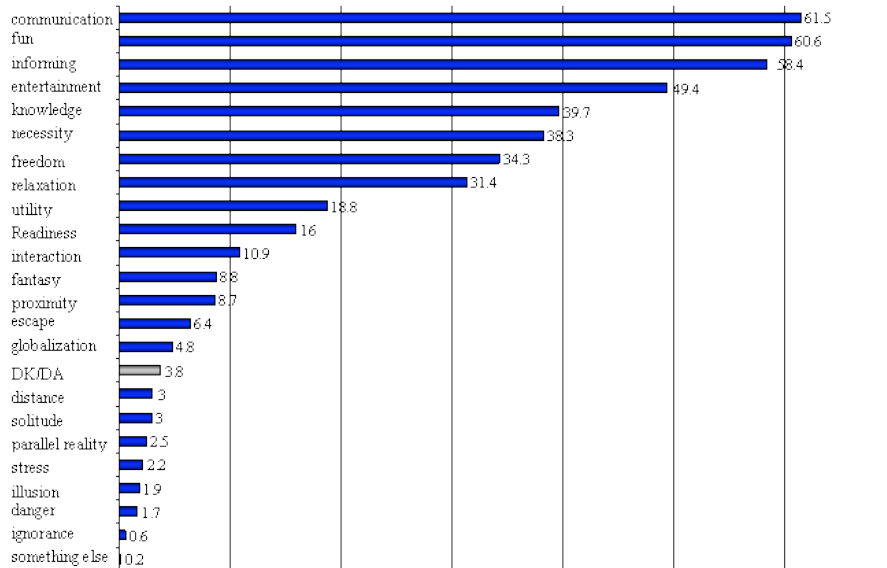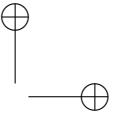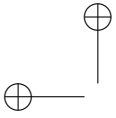| Term	Value
communication	61.5
fun	60.6
informing	58.4
entertainment	49.4
knowledge	39.7
necessity	38.3
freedom	34.3
relaxation	31.4
utility	18.8
Readiness	16
interaction	10.9
fantasy	8.8
proximity	8.7
escape	6.4
globalization	4.8
DK/DA	3.8
distance	3
solitude	3
parallel reality	2.5
stress	2.2
illusion	1.9
danger	1.7
ignorance	0.6
something else	0.2

Figure 5: Terms that characterizes the best the Internet

the forth place in the hierarchy) and *informing* (term chosen by 58,4% of the interviewees).

The next four words from the hierarchy, chosen by close percents of the respondents do not represent features or 'objective', concrete definitions of the Internet, but symbolical definitions. For 39,7% of the respondents, the Internet mean the *knowledge*. This word can be associated both to 'informing' (finding out new things and memorizing them) but also to 'communicating' (getting to meet new people). 38,3% of the respondents associated the word *necessity* with the Internet, so they regard the Internet as being an integrated and indispensable part of life. Another symbolical significance associated to the Internet, revealed also before by the qualitative research, is the *freedom* – 34,3% of the respondents considered that it defines the Internet in the best way. Finally, the fourth word of this set – *relaxation* – was mentioned by 31,4% of the subjects, and this significance can be associated both to communication and to entertainment.
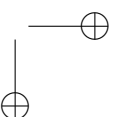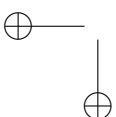
Other features chosen by teenagers in order to characterize the Internet: *utility, readiness, interaction,* can be regarded as positive aspects of the new medium. The same applies to the characteristics mentioned further, in a set of four words, or at least the first three terms, because globalization is an ambivalent concept, being regarded, at least by some of the analysts, as a negative phenomenon that characterizes the nowadays world: *fantasy, proximity, escape, and globalization.*

Finally, what appears to be significant in our research is the fact that the terms that stand as negative characteristics/aspects that can be associated (and many specialists, but especially non-specialists in socio-human sciences associate them in virulent critics) of the Internet, are in fact a dwindling minority when it comes to the words adolescents associate to the Internet. Many people criticizing the Internet assert that it generates and/or facilitates the distance between people. Only 3% of our subjects chose the *distance* as a word that might characterize the Internet. The critics also mention that the Internet encourages and determines the lack of interaction among people, the *solitude*, but only 3% of our respondents see things this way. Many people talk about the reality created by the virtual world itself, by the Internet, as a 'parallel reality' that damages people's lives. Only 2,5% of the respondents chose the sintagm *parallel reality* in order to define the internet. So do the ones that criticize this technology, they see it as if it were another world, another reality, an *illusion* able to waste people's lives. Only 1,9% of the respondents chose this term. Small percents (under 2,2%) referred to other terms, such as *stress*, *danger,* and *ignorance* – this shows us that adolescents think that the Internet is mostly a positive medium, being associated with positive words, such as communication, entertainment, informing (it facilitates and improves them), and also with utility, relaxation, fantasy, freedom, necessity, knowledge and interaction.

Discussions

Our research reveals the fact that adolescents are Internet power users. For many of them, staying online turned into the only way of spending their free time. There are high percents of teenagers using the Internet daily, and their
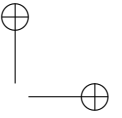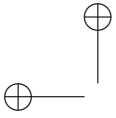
consuming grows during weekends and holidays – and this shows that they are being conditioned by their agenda/school program.

In many cases, 'the Internet is on all day long', even on weekdays (though the pupils have to go to school the next day), and despite the fact that they do not use it continuously. For some subjects of our research, the Internet seems to offer a kind of psychological safety: they are being 'connected' all the time and want to stay connected, even when they are not in front of the PC; this shows their desire of staying connected to the virtual world. When they break from it and then come back, after the interrupted connection, they want to stay in touch with everything that happened during their absence.

One might ask oneself, at this point: what makes the Internet so important in teenagers' lives? What does the Internet offer them, what makes them wish to stay online all the time and spend so many hours online on a daily basis? We can find some answers when interpreting the results of our research regarding what does the Internet mean to teenagers, what is the significance they offer to this new medium.

There might be the argue that the Internet offers youngsters many things they want. First of all, it gives them the possibility of communicating – free of charge – with their friends or with other teenagers. It is already an axiom, the fact that communication is fundamental for people. In particular, for the group of population that makes up our target – adolescents – communication is a way of living. The Internet offers adolescents this possibility of communicating, not only verbal communication (with multiple possibilities included – written and oral communication), but also non-verbal (the *web-cam*s make the communication through mimics and facial expressions possible). Communicating via Messenger gives the teenagers the possibility of offering others information about their personality, their interests (general or on the spot ones), their tastes and so forth. Communicating via websites such as Hi5, for instance, is complex: some sort of miniature radiography of the personality of the owner of the page. Such a page offers others details on its owner: whether it is an introvert or an extrovert, whether he/she has many friends or not, if it is a popular person or not, not to mention the details connected to the favourite books, music, the teenagers' category where one belongs (for instance, rockers are a category that does not mix up with housers or hip-hoppers and so forth).
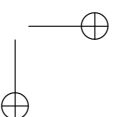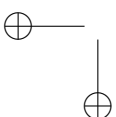
Communicating over Internet means not only keeping in touch with the friends and the people one knows in 'real life', but also communicating with

'virtual friends'. Most of the adolescents prefer relationships and friendships that exist in real life that is way most of the time 'the virtual friends' turn into real friends. However, many teenagers bestowed the power of 'knowing' upon the Internet – and they were also referring to meeting new people: Internet facilitates it. We were talking about the possibilities of telling others about ones tastes, interests, personal preoccupations – they are extremely diverse, multiple, and teens have the chance to meet other teenagers like them. Taking into consideration this point of view, communication over Internet means more than communicating via phone (and replacing it, because the Internet provides free calls, they only have to pay for the monthly subscription): the telephone does not offer the possibility of meeting other people, at least not on a wider scale, and on the Internet one is not limited to the verbal communication.

Many times, the Internet is being regarded as the equivalent of communicating – for instance, when being asked about the Internet, the teenagers' answers involved (Yahoo) Messenger. This application is used active (sometimes is equated with the proper use of the Internet) and intensive (as many adolescents told us, they sometimes have over six online conversations simultaneously). This fact entitled us to say that the Internet, indeed, concur to communication facilitating (in adolescents' terms), but also to changing it. Communication over the Internet is a 'transformed' communication.
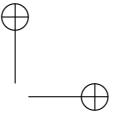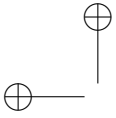
Besides communicating via Internet, adolescents use it in order to inform themselves and for entertainment. Practically, the possibilities for entertainment offered by the Internet have no limit, and most of them are not available in any other mass media genre. For instance, the network games offer teens the possibility of competing against each other, testing their abilities and intelligence (when it comes to strategy games) or their knowledge, memory, logical thinking or intuition (general knowledge games). On the other hand, the Internet is a gate of access towards music and movies, two of the major preoccupations of adolescents. The TV and radio stations also broadcast such shows, but on the Internet one might find whatever one wants, and it can be downloaded, not only seen. The TV and the radio impose a limit – the one of seeing some things that has already been rotated and set in a program – but the Internet offers the 'freedom'. People can choose the movie they want to see or the music they want to hear, and teens appreciate this freedom. Information is also easier to assimilate from the Internet. By the means of the Internet, adolescents get to know information that might be useful for school,

for their future job, for their general knowledge, information regarding their own interests, news and so on. Besides, they have the freedom of choosing the pieces of information they are interested in, without feeling constrained by a program or a certain horary, such as news broadcasts shown on TV.

The Internet has turned into an integrated part in adolescents' life, in their quotidian 'rituals' and as one of our interviewees has said 'we cannot imagine life without the Internet'. We should emphasize the fact that many teenagers do not see any harm or anything wrong in what the Internet is concerned. One possible explication states that they grew at the same time with the Internet: for them it is not a new medium, it is just part of their daily life and routine and they associate it only with positive words. Many adults went into over-drive when classifying the Internet as a dangerous medium, because there are no restrictions and no censorship, a space where freedom is not well under-stood, a factor leading to stress and to waste time, a way of distancing the people, a space in which human interactions are lost, in which the ignorance is promoted and the desire of human beings to learn is destroyed. Our research proves the fact that most of the teenagers do not associate any of these negative aspects with the Internet. On the contrary, they associate it with the utility and relaxation, with fantasy and with freedom – as a fundamental human value, exclusively positive. For adolescents, the Internet is a space favouring knowl-edge, as opposed to ignorance, a space where one can relax, instead of getting stressed, and the reality provided by the Internet has turned into more than an intrinsic part of their life, so no one can classify it as being 'parallel' or illusionary.
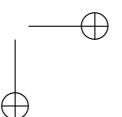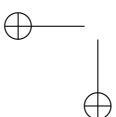
The Internet has turned into a routine for teenagers, it became an 'ordi-nary' routine, as opposed to 'the extraordinary'. Many teenagers became a kind of 'specialists' when it comes to routinely usage of the Internet, and this means many times focusing on the communication with friends, first of all. As I already stated before, communication via the Internet is a sort of 'trans-formed communication'. Thus, this particular 'specialization' itself turned into the paradox of using the Internet and dealing with its effects: the more young people focus on 'communicating' and get to spend more time chatting with friends (generally using IM programs), the lonelier they become – and they would rather use the internet all by themselves, from the privacy of their own room. In this case, one might ask this question: where does the truth stand? Does the Internet facilitate communication and social relationships (as
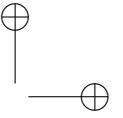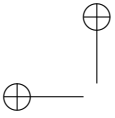
many teenagers reckon) or, on the contrary, it acts like a barrier in their way, by encouraging solitary life, in front of the PC or – depending on how one views things – behind the screen of a monitor? This problem, like many others, might represent a challenging research subject for all socio-human sciences.

Bibliography

BAKARDJIEVA, M. & SMITH, R. The Internet in Everyday Life, *New Media & Society*, Sage Publications, vol. 3 (1), 67-83, 2001.

BARAN, S.J. & DAVIS, D.K. *Mass Communication Theory. Foundations, Ferment, and Future*. Belmont: Wadsworth, 2000.

BAYM, N. K. & ZHANG, Y. B. & LIN, M. C. *Social Interactions across Media. Interpersonal Communication on the Internet, Telephone and Face-to-Face*, New Media & Society, Sage Publications, vol. 6 (3), 299-318, 2004.

CAPLAN, S.E. *Preferences for Online Social Interaction. A Theory of Problematic Internet Use and Psychosocial Well-Being*, Communication Research, vol. 30, no. 6, December, 625-648, 2003.

DEVITO, J. *Human Communication*. New York, Cambridge, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Washington, London, Mexico City: Harper & Row, 1988.

FEENBERG, A. *The Critical Theory of Technology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991.

FEENBERG, A. *Questioning Technology*. London: Routledge, 1999.

KIM, S. T. & WEAVER, D. "Communication Research about Internet: a Thematic Meta-analysis", New Media & Society, Sage Publications, vol. 4(4), 518-539, 2002.

MORRIS, M. & OGAN, C. *The Internet as Mass Medium*, Journal of Communication, 46 (1), 39-50, 1996.

SHADE, L. R. & PORTER, N. & SANCHEZ W. «You can see anything on the Internet, you can do anything on the Internet!»: Young Canadians Talk about the Internet, Canadian Journal of Communication, Vol. 30, 503-526, 2005.

THOMPSON, J. B. *The Media and Modernity: A Social Theory of the Media*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995.

VALKENBURG, P. M. & SCHOUTEN, A. P. & PETER, J. *Adolescents' Identity Experiments on the Internet*, New Media & Society, Sage Publications, vol. 7 (3), 383-402, 2005.

WIMMER, R. D. & DOMINICK, J. R. *Mass Media Research: An Introduction*. 6th Edition, Belmont: Wadsworth, 2000.