

THE USE OF MOBILE PHONES FOR 8 TO 10 YEAR-OLD CHILDREN: A COMPARATIVE STUDY IN LISBON

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Abstract

Among new technologies, mobile phones are the devices that combine communication and locomotion, two important capabilities of human beings. Meant to be a tool to businessman, mobile phones were adopted by the adolescents in high numbers, and now the phenomenon is also reaching children, who desire the mobile phones from a very young age. The way they use mobile phones vary: as a kind of toy, an appliance to make calls and send messages, a radio, or even as a camera. To identify some of the uses children make of the mobile phones a study was conducted in a public primary school in Lisbon, with 12 students from 8 to 11 years old, from the 3rd and 4th grades, respectively, to identify some features, abilities and also the relevance that the mobile phone have in their lives. The results were compared with another national survey: *E-generation*.

Keywords

Mobile Phones; Children; Use; Primary School; ICTs.

Introduction

Since the advent of new media in the nineteenth century, the question of children's media uses have repeatedly resurfaced. However, today they are different in many ways, especially because of the need to respect and listen to children, following the best practices expressed in the UN Convention of Human Rights. Also, in the last decade, the social construction of childhood has been on the centre of discussion and studies: the experience of children and youth, their expectations, independence, knowledge are all being studied and reviewed. (James & Prout, 1997, in Haddon, 2004).

According to Livingstone (2008:1) «The combined developments of globalized communication networks and new media have catapulted children's media culture to the centre of public attention».

When talking about new technologies of information and children's culture, the latter is usually strictly related to market and consumerism. By this perspective, toys and media are managed and marketed as part of the regulation and the commercialization of children's culture, which requires a critical perspective if we are to judge how far children's culture is being transformed into promotional culture, identity is refashioned through consumption and the citizen is transformed into the consumer. This is also true to Buckingham (2007), for whom the kids have become a new target market, which can be confirmed by the offer of sites, TV channels and special programs for them.

On the other hand, the social construction of childhood, the experience of children and youth as well as expectations about their roles, their independence, their knowledge etc. are relative: they change over time and vary cross-culturally. (Haddon & Ling, 2008)

In the history of the relationship media/children it can be pointed out that in the 1960s they used to spend much more time watching TV than at school, for example. Nowadays, children and teens' experiences differ a lot from those of the older generations, especially because children spend much more time with any kind of media than they do on any other activity apart from sleeping. «Childhood is now permeated, even in some respects defined, by the modern media – by television, video, computer games, the internet, mobile phones and popular music and by the enormous range of media-related commodities that make up contemporary consumer culture.» (Buckingham, 2007: 75).

As these new digital media have presented significant developments in the media field, and, although there are involving technological changes, they also reflect changes in the consumer culture. Children are in contact with the new products and technologies shown by the media, and they also desire the new media themselves.

Another feature that should be pointed out when talking about children's media practices and consumer culture is globalization, that, together with the satellite television, the internet and mobile devices have been instrumental in recontextualising children's media practice (Livingstone, 2008). One example is that it's really common for young people and children to know the names of TV programs, cartoons, global brands of food, clothing, toys, games, as well as knowing how to handle new devices, such as the internet, computers and mobile phones.

It's noteworthy that in the last decades and in many parts of the world, children have been early and avid adopters of new media, often challenging normative socio-

cultural practices through the ways in which they use media. On the other hand, parents and educators consider that media permeate and even control children's lives to a degree that was unknown just a generation ago (Livingstone, 2008).

Some generational differences are seen to be produced by technology, rather than as a result of other social, historical or cultural forces (Buckingham, 2000). Unlike their parents, who are portrayed as incompetent "technophobes", children are seen to possess an intuitive, spontaneous relationship with digital technology. It would seem that, for many kids, using new technology is as natural as breathing. It is this technology that is seen as the means of their empowerment. Children have become "active" but only because technology has permitted them to do so.

[Children today] have new powerful tools for inquiry, analysis, self-expression, influence, and play. They have unprecedented mobility. They are shrinking the planet in ways their parents could never imagine. Unlike television which was done to them, they are actors in the digital world.» (Buckingham, 2000: 47).

Technology is also being used in more individualized ways. Children have TV, VCRs or DVD players, sometimes hand-held videogame devices, video games, and a lot of them have personal computers and also mobile phones. This individualization of media directs to a change in family relationship as well as a tendency of encouraging democratization of relationships inside the family (Buckingham, 2007).

This democratization also has influences in children's relations to ICTs. Researchers in a European study of children observed how children's bedrooms have become increasingly 'media-rich'. Children have gained more and more access to various personalized ICTs. In the past, children, especially teenagers, acquired their own record-players and radios, which in later years evolved into music systems. Since then many children have been provided with or acquired their own TVs, VCRs, games, PCs and mobile phones.

Besides this democratization at home, there has also been a change related to arguments about children's greater absence from unsupervised public spaces (Livingstone, 2002). It has been argued that many social activities that in the past took place in public are increasingly taking place in the home. Children also experience this, having their friends around to interact within their homes, in their own rooms. This absence from public spaces and this interaction at home has been called «bedroom culture». (Livingstone, 2002).

Mobile phones

Conceived to be a tool to allow business people to interact, mobile telephony has become a phenomenon among teens and young people. As GSM short messages were initially thought to be an effective solution for busy businessman, the telephone was also planned to be a good device to deliver news to public squares, but they were rarely used for the purposes they were conceived.

The real successes of these devices often start by user innovations – the users start to use the product or the service in a different way than the designers originally planned. Young people and children are innovators. One current example is the selling of ringtones. «A couple of years ago, nobody would have believed that selling ringing tones and icons for mobile phones could be a serious business» (Kaasinen, 2001: 1).

According to the proceedings of the Experts` Meeting in Tokyo (2003: 5) some attractions of mobiles for children can be pointed out:

- Mobiles are personal and private. Children do not need to ask for permission from their parents to use it. The personal nature of the device means that it is not like the PC in terms of possibilities of parental involvement and supervision.
- Image and fashion, once there is a perceived need to have the latest phone and even embarrassment to have an old one.
- Constant communication, wherever the child is, at any time, he/she is able to get in contact with anyone.
- Price – this influence how people use their phones, for example, if texting is cheaper, so they will use it rather than making calls.
- The services offered, as SMS, games and ring tones.

These attractions to children vary from country to country, so it's really difficult to prioritize any of them. Also, there are other characteristics of mobile phones that must be pointed out: first, they are really mobile, always with consumers, ready for use; second, it is personal, once it allows the user to have personal contact and to look at content in a very private way.

Okabe and Ito (2005: 1) call the mobile a pedestrian device, something that can be held in one hand while walking, biking, or engaging in other activities. Mobile phones

are also anonymous, especially because the greatest part of them in many countries are pre-paid, thus, networks do not know who their users are.

They also help with the bills since they have a spend limiting due to the pre-paid phone cards.

They are also media interactive: they can interact with TV and Internet sites which make them an important tool to be used while consuming things.

Another really important feature is that the mobile phone is a communication channel that helps people to make contacts and maintain relationships and it makes possible real time communication and thereby a direct conversation between the communication partners.

The mobile phone does not decrease the number of face-to-face contacts – on the contrary it increases and promotes them. People typically use the mobile phone for calling up a person whom they would like to meet or whom they are on the way to meet. (Kopomaa, 2000)

According to Höflich (2006: 2) «the mobile phone enables nearness in spite of distance, possibly even more than any other medium to date. It does seem to be absolutely *the* medium for relationships of all the electronic media. Especially where close relationships are concerned, the mobile phone is a medium for relationships from beginning to end – from the first point of contact with the exchange of telephone numbers and the sending of the first text message, through to breaking up by mobile phone and especially by text».

The mobile provides a sense of omnipresence, either the telephone or the user and this constant reachability creates many problems since people want to be able to reach others all the time, but not necessarily the other way round.

The freedom provided by the mobile phone means that people are always available, even when moving, which means they are maximizing their contact potential. The more people have a mobile phone, the more complete this reachability becomes. (Kopomaa, 2000)

On the other hand, this feeling of always being in touch creates security, because «you may be alone, but you do not feel lonely. This may lead to dependence where one can no longer bear to be alone» (Höflich, 2006: 3).

Leopoldina Fortunati and Anna Maria Manganelli (2002: 16) present another concept: “virtual brotherhood/sisterhood”, which the key word is “loneliness”. In their

point of view young people feel deeply alone, in a home where, sometimes, they have no “like” or “equal” to share feelings, hopes, etc. and where the parents, because of new occupational demands, are fundamentally absent most of the day.

Mobiles and fashion

For some authors, mobile devices will become in a near future as jewellery – they will be wearable and will clearly indicate the social standing of the user. In fact, the mobile phone is already used by young people as a way of status and also to show pertaining to a group, a way of showing the identity.

Fortunati (2005) explains this motivation for fashion as something sometimes magical, aesthetic and that has to do with identity, perceiving the mobile phone as a totem or talisman. Nowadays young people and children also have the mobile as talisman, an electronic friend, a companion, a connection with the world.

According to a study conducted with children and adolescent, Fortunati (2005: 38) presents that for this group of people functionality is not a relevant element of the mobile phone, and the aesthetics is considered relevant by children and more by adolescents. «Thus we can see that in order of relevance, style has already overtaken functionality and “handiness” as a criterion of purchase for the mobile phone».

The Italian author also identified in her research that mobile phones were seen as fashion objects that allowed a certain degree of individualization, such as using different ring tones, cover, logos and children are even more taken to individualization, once they also use some inscriptions and stickers.

The desire for identity is closely related to the desire of the “personalization” of the mobile. Young people find choosing the various personalized forms as regards casings and their colours, icons, call sounds, decoration, shape and size completely inseparable from their desires for identity. «The ultimate aim is to identify the phone with their body, make it an extension to the body, the ear, the voice, the touch. The phone thus turns into a machine that becomes part of the self.» (Lorente, 2002: 17).

The mobile telephone already has the potential to be our personal calendar, personal music player, call history, message centre, to-do list, and photographic album and in the future it can conceivably even have the function of their pocket book and their identity card.

Parents, children and ICTs

While being rapidly adopted by teens, pre-teens adopted the device by the end of the 1990s, what created new debates and doubts for parents, as the appropriated age to give their children mobiles. 10- to 12-year-old children owning a mobile phone is no longer seen as an unusual phenomenon that requires an explanation. (Oksman & Rautiainen, 2002).

«Yet children are not simply passive in this whole process. Part of the changing experience of childhood is that children are always growing up with new ICTs.» (Haddon, 2004: 33)

According to Haddon and Ling (2008: 138) technology is being used by parents and children as a way to manage the child's growing independence. Parents can use the mobile as a control device, checking up children's activities and on the other hand, they can also «use it to push their children on the road towards independence». For this reason, many parents first purchased the mobile phone as a way to ensure children's safety as they move into a broader society.

This straight line between children and mothers is also named "the umbilical cord", as parents may be more or less active in using the mobile telephone as a control device, checking up on their children's activities remotely, although some of them can use the mobile to encourage children becoming more independent (Haddon and Ling, 2008).

The mobile phone has in other senses further increased children's capability to organize their social life beyond the surveillance of parents (Ling and Helmersen, 2000). While from the viewpoint of the parent, this decreases their ability to monitor children's communications, from the viewpoint of the child it increases their own privacy.

Children also resist such parent control and surveillance. For example, when distance from their parents is important, teens' deploy strategies through which they limit parents' access. When the child uses some excuses like "my battery was dead" or "I didn't hear it ring" in fact he/she is establishing a separate identity from the parent.

There has been a move from children having autonomy and responsibility to being more protected, making less decisions and experiencing more restrictions in their daily activities according to Vestby (Haddon, 2004). On the other hand, Livingstone (1997) reports that children are experiencing more domestic democracy and the individualization of childhood – but also increased regulation and risk management of children by adults. (Haddon, 2004).

Being good parents

With the advent of the mobile and the new technologies being adopted by teens and children, adults feel themselves constrained to have an adult behaviour, which means, making decisions as “good parents” would make.

To Lemish and Cohen (in Haddon, 2004), in the case of childhood, we can also see people being active in the very process of constructing parenthood. In one Israeli study reported by the researchers, people constructed the «appropriate adult behaviour» through their complaints about children’s use of the mobile. Thus, they were at the same time indicating how ‘good parents’ should control their children’s use of their mobiles.

And of course, if children have new technologies, new ways of communicating and spending time, as well as parents have new “parenting decisions and actions”, for sure there will be more new pressures on parents, affecting the way they deal with ICTs. One of these new pressures is that parents should spend really quality time with children.

Besides, parents may consider their duty to raise their children to become ‘mobile citizens’. Mastering the use of the mobile phone and other ICTs is believed to prevent social exclusion and to guarantee future status as a full-fledged member of the information society. (Oksman and Rautiainen, 2003)

«Since the early 1980s many parents have felt the expectation that they should acquire microcomputers so that their children should not be ‘left behind’ (Haddon & Skinner, 1991; Skinner, 1994). In the 90s, parents experienced a similar sense of guilt that led them to provide their children with Internet access.» (Haddon, 2004: 35).

And it’s also possible to add to this list of new pressures buying a mobile phone to kids for safety meanings, once children’s mobility is complex nowadays. They spend time not just home, but also at school, in their friends’ house, in post school activities, depending on the country, in sports, dance, music or languages classes.

In Haddon’s (2004) point of view, as children spend more time outside home and even school, mobile phone sales have benefited from concerns about these times when children are out, influencing parents to provide them with mobile phones.

In the daily lives of families, the mobile phone constitutes a ‘safety line’ between the child and the parents. Parent-child mobile communication is not very significant in quantity; it is the opportunity for contact that is valued. Parents emphasized the safety aspect in the use and purchase of the phone. Guar-

teeing the child's safety was considered the most important reason for acquiring a mobile phone for the child. (Oksman & Rautiainen, 2002: 28)

Also in the author's opinion, new family situations such as divorce, stepfamilies and single parenthood demand the coordination of everyday life. The mobile phone is used to make it easier the balancing of work and family: connection to the child remains intact even when parents are away from the home.

Costs

One of the biggest problems parents had and still have with teens and pre-teens are the telephone bills. In the beginning, it was the landline phone bills, now with mobiles, parents give pre-paid cards mobiles in order to control the bill in the end of the month.

Nowadays, it's still common to find conflicts over the costs of children's mobile communications. On the one hand, negotiations about the mobile phone bill may be used by the parent to give children objective lessons in independent economic responsibility, for example as a way to give the child a better understand of money and consumption (Ling, 2004: 112).

In another study conducted by Jane Vincent (2004: 14), it was concluded that the mobile phones were used more by the older children and on average slightly more by the girls than the boys. This means that «the age, gender and maturity of the respondents appeared to have a significant impact on the amount they used the phone».

Paying the bill and the amount it is spent is a significant factor in parental control and in the developing independence and maturity of the children.

Some children are aware of costs and, though they have the option of looking for things on the net or even chatting and downloading through the mobile, they resist it because it was perceived as risky and expensive. What they know of it or have experienced has not been beneficial.

In the study conducted by Vincent (2004: 15) the author came to the following conclusion:

Children and pre teens like to have and to use their mobile phones and if they cannot afford to make calls or send text they can certainly receive them. They

can also use them for games, to take pictures and videos and to play with all the other ad hoc functions such as the radio and infrared that they discover their phone can do. They are not about to give up mobile phones.

National data

According to a report from ANACOM (National Authority of Communication), in the end of September of 2004 there were 9,636 millions of mobile users in Portugal.

At the end of the 1st quarter of 2008 there were more than 13 million, which was also a 10.3 per cent increase compared to the same time of the previous year (12.398 million subscribers).

The rate of year-on-year growth recorded this quarter is the highest of recent years.

Also, in the first four months of this year, 1.76 billion calls were made by subscribers and more than 5.4 million of SMS were sent.

E-Generation

The E-Generation was a survey conducted along Portugal that interviewed children and young people about media, as internet, television and mobile phones to find out the uses they make of it.

It was coordinated by Gustavo Cardoso and had the support of other two researchers: Rita Espanha and Tiago Lapa. It was published in 2007 by CIES/ISCTE – Centro de Investigação e Estudos em Sociologia, Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa.

The Project was based in a data collecting realized through a face-to-face survey applied to a representative sample of population, with ages from 8 to 18 years old. Children and young people were from several regions of Portugal

The objective was obtaining representative data of Portuguese population about the use of media, as well as understanding the specific behaviour of these young media consumers.

In this paper, the focus is the use of mobile phones by the 8 to 12 year-old-children, which means 39% of the respondents.

Children from primary school in Lisbon

A questionnaire was applied to 14 students, from 8 to 12 years old, of a public primary school in a working class neighbourhood of Lisbon. Children and pre-teens were asked to answer it in class, without talking to friends while doing it.

When kids were told about the questionnaire, the first thing asked by them was if they would have to use the mobile phones to answer the questions.

Education of parents

According to the scholar level of parents and the responsible for kids, one grandfather and one mother (mother of two students) answered having finished 1º ciclo, that means the first four years of school; one mother finished 3º ciclo, that is equivalent to the ninth grade, five mothers answered having concluded high school, and just one parent reported having concluded college.

TABLE 1. LEVEL OF PARENT'S EDUCATION

LEVEL	PARENTS
1º ciclo (First four years)	2
3º ciclo (9 th grade)	1
High school	5
College	1

Seven of the responsible for children answered earning one minimum wage a month, two other families earn from two to three minimum wages and five didn't answer the question.

TABLE 2. FAMILIES' MONTHLY WAGE

FAMILIES	WAGE
7	1 minimum wage monthly
2	From 2 to 3 minimum wages monthly
5	No answer

Six boys and six girls had mobile phones and all of them worked with pre-paid cards. Just two girls didn't have mobile phones, what sums up 14 inquirers, but only the twelve that correspond to mobile phone owners will be dealt with in this study.

The comparison: Children from E-Generation x children from primary school in Lisbon

In E-Generation, 45,9% of children from 8 to 12 years old claimed having a mobile, a number that is below the incidence of mobiles of the group of primary school that was around 85%. The tendency is that, year after year, the number of children having mobiles increases.

TABLE 3. CHILDREN WHICH OWN A MOBILE

E-GENERATION		PRIMARY SCHOOL	
Children	45,9%	Children	85%

Also, in E-Generation, the pre-paid phone cards are chosen by 96% of children and young people. Just 2,6 % had post-paid mobile phones. In the primary school, all the students had pre-paid cards.

The greatest part of the interviewed young people, 89,6% answered having just one mobile phone working at that moment, while 8,8% said having two and 1,6% mentioned having 3 devices. In the class of the primary school: 58% said having one mobile, 8% having two, and 33% having three or more devices.

TABLE 4. NUMBER OF MOBILES WORKING AT THE MOMENT

E-GENERATION		PRIMARY SCHOOL	
MOBILES	%	MOBILES	%
1	89,6	1	58
2	8,8	2	8
3 or more	1,6	3 or more	33

More than 60% of the students had gotten their mobiles when they were 8 or 9 years old. Compared with the results of the E-Generation Survey, children from the public school of Lisbon got their mobiles around 2 years earlier. This may suggest that

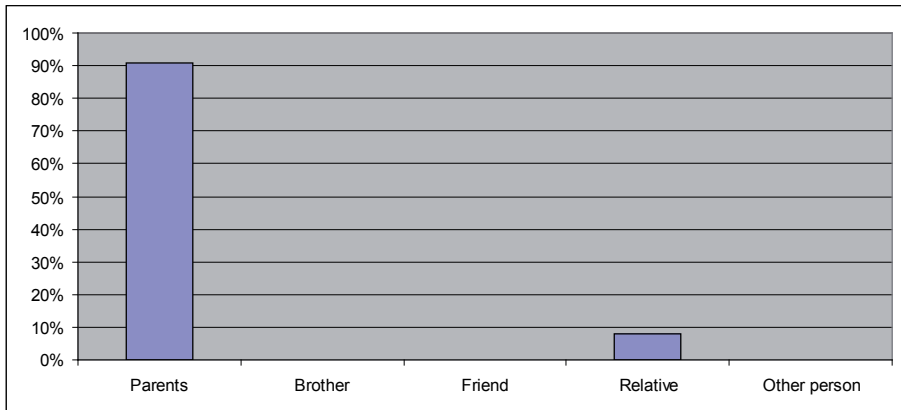
year after year children have access to new media technologies earlier and also that, the lower the income of the family, the more new media technologies at home.

From the twelve kids with mobiles, 91% got them from the parents, and just 9% mentioned having got from a relative. In E-Generation, 73% of the children answered that got their mobiles from parents, 15% from other relatives, and 10% answered “Other people”.

TABLE 5. ADULT WHO GAVE THE FIRST MOBILE TO THE CHILD

E-GENERATION		PRIMARY SCHOOL	
WHO	%	WHO	%
Parents	73	Parents	91
Relatives	15	Relatives	9
Other people	10	Other people	-

FIGURE 1: PRIMARY SCHOOL: ADULT WHO GAVE THE FIRST MOBILE TO THE CHILD



Also, 83% of them mentioned that the parents pay the costs of the pre-paid cards and almost 17% students didn't answer the item, while in E-Generation, 70% said that parents pay the costs, 10% assumed paying them by their own and 17% didn't answer.

TABLE 6. WHO PAYS THE COSTS OF THE CHILD'S MOBILE

E-GENERATION		PRIMARY SCHOOL	
WHO	%	WHO	%
Parents	70	Parents	83
Me	15	Me	-
No answer	10	No answer	17

The mobile phones are present in almost all home of the interviewed people, with 8,4% having mentioned having just one mobile at home, 20% having two; 29.7% having three and 21.6% having more devices. In the primary school student's house, 8% answered having two mobiles at home; 33% having three, and 50% having four or more devices.

TABLE 7. NUMBER OF MOBILE PHONES AT HOME

E-GENERATION		PRIMARY SCHOOL	
NUMBER OF MOBILES	%	NUMBER OF MOBILES	%
1	8.4	1	-
2	20	2	8
3	29.7	3	33
4	21.6	4	50

The questionnaire also indicates that children really know about models and brands. 83,3% of them knew the brand and model of their mobile phones.

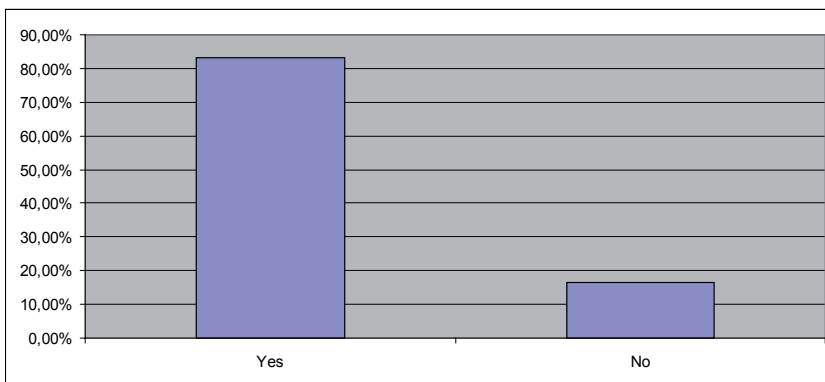


FIGURE 2: PRIMARY SCHOOL: CHILDREN WHO KNOW THE BRAND AND MODEL OF THEIR MOBILE

Yet, 64% said that have chosen the device. Afterwards, they were asked what was taken into consideration while choosing the mobile. The greatest part of the respondents said that the mobiles were chosen because of the price, the beauty and the brand. Some also mentioned the importance of the ring tones.

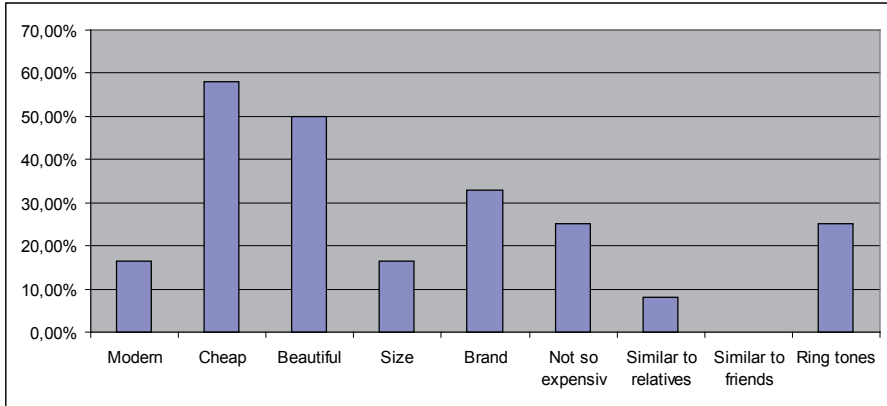


FIGURE 3: PRIMARY SCHOOL: FEATURES CONSIDERED WHEN CHOOSING THE MOBILE

When asked about the uses they make of the mobile phones, 75% answered receiving calls, 66% receiving and making calls, 75% sending SMS as well as playing and 33% mentioned making other uses of it.

This difference of numbers in receiving and making and receiving calls must be related to children not having money in their mobiles to call. So, they receive calls and prefer to send messages.

Another use of the mobile that is considerable is playing, that means, a lot of children have their mobiles as a game or kind of amusement. Children do not use the Internet through the mobile, especially because of the cost, and as they can't spend a lot of money they choose not to surf on the web or chat.

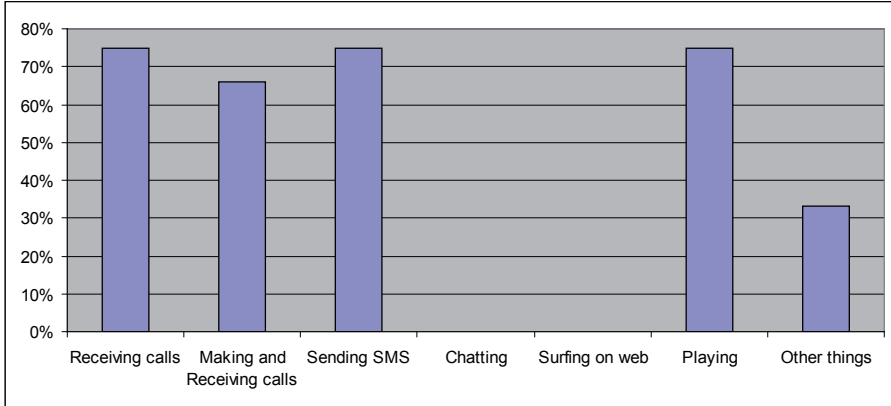


FIGURE 4: PRIMARY SCHOOL: USES OF THE MOBILE BY CHILDREN

When asked with whom do children talk to on the mobile, 83% answered talking to mother, 58% said talking to father, 75% to relatives, 66% to friends and 33% to boyfriends or girlfriends. This shows that children use the mobile communication to keep in contact especially with family and friends. From the age of 8 to 12 years old the family comes first in the amount of calls and messages. The patterns of data are really similar from the ones of the national Survey.

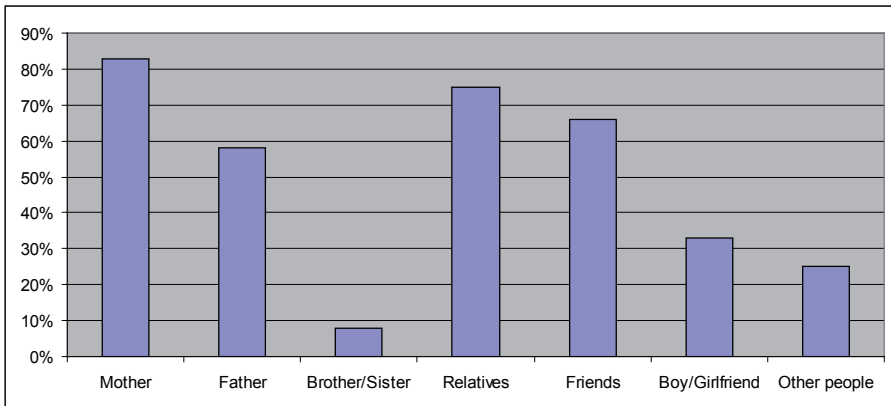


FIGURE 5: PRIMARY SCHOOL: TO WHOM CHILDREN TALK TO

Children talk especially to mothers. In general, they are the ones responsible for bringing and picking up children from school and also to coordinate the organization of everyday life.

Students from Lisbon primary school:

- Talk less on the mobile (75% mentioned talking on the mobile as something not so frequently);
- Send and receive more SMS than the ones from the national research;
- Play more mobile games;
- Listen to radio and use the alarm clock more than the ones of E-Generation.

Among the actions children can perform or the “gadgets” mobiles have, the most important one in the children’s opinion is the possibility of sending messages.

The ring tone comes in second place, and was chosen by 50% of inquirers, but the possibility of listening to music, taking pictures, recording videos, and even the Bluetooth are considered important to them.

The Bluetooth was registered by 41% of children, what means that they like to send things from their mobiles to other people, and as they do not use the Internet, the Bluetooth is a great option.

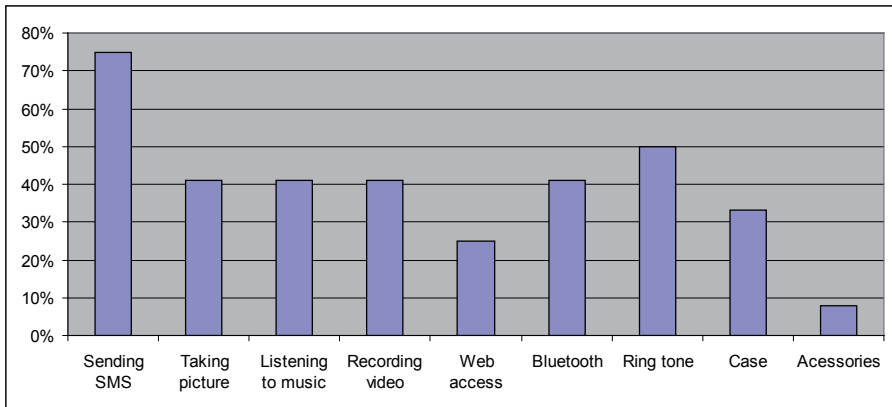


FIGURE 6: PRIMARY SCHOOL: MOST IMPORTANT FEATURE/GADGET IN THE MOBILE

Related to having cameras on the mobiles, almost 60% of the inquirers reported having it and around 40% not having. Even without camera in their mobiles, the big-

gest part of them answered taking 5 pictures or more weekly, what can be done by the parents' mobile. This number is similar to the national one.

Also, children said that like to take pictures of friends, family and of beautiful things.

The number of children with simpler or older mobiles is still relevant.

TABLE 8. NUMBER OF MOBILES WITH CAMERA

E-GENERATION	PRIMARY SCHOOL
59.5%	60%

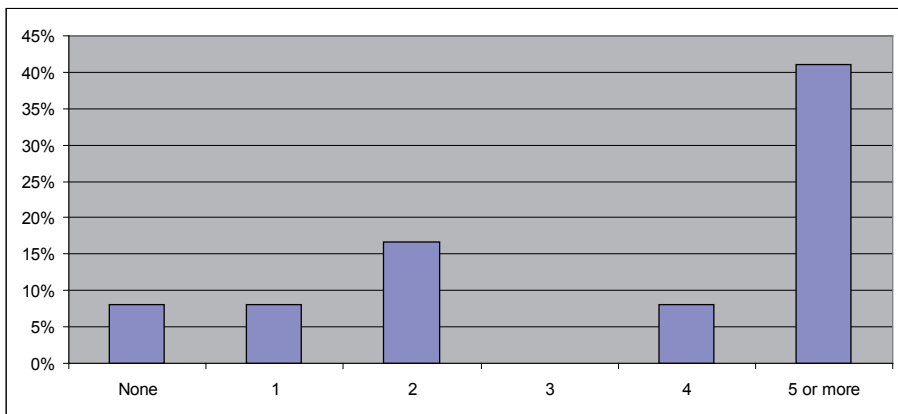


FIGURE 7: PRIMARY SCHOOL: AMOUNT OF PICTURES TAKEN PER WEEK

When talking about personalization of the mobiles, more than 90% of children from primary school affirmed personalizing the device with pictures, ring tones, cases, stickers and key rings. In E-Generation, 58,7% said doing it against 38, 9% that do not do it.

TABLE 9. PERSONALIZATION OF MOBILE

E-GENERATION	PRIMARY SCHOOL
58.7%	90%

Sending SMS is also really common even in this age, with children sending more than 4 SMS per day. The most part are sent for parents and friends. The same is true in E-Generation, which presents an average of 4.6% of SMS sent daily.

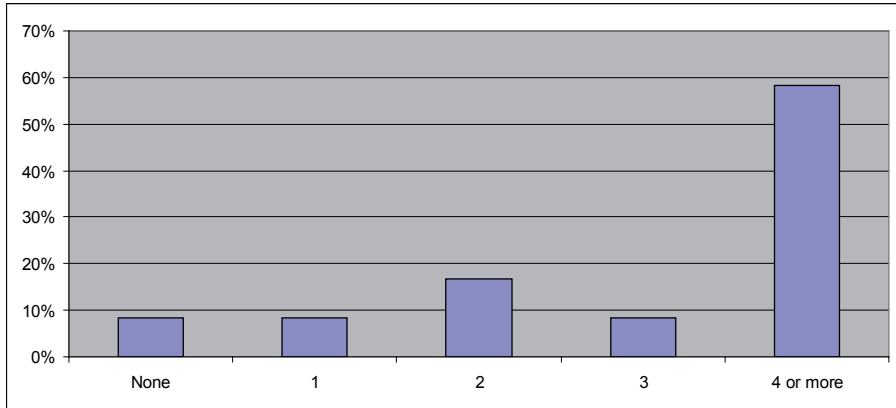


FIGURE 8: PRIMARY SCHOOL: AMOUNT OF SMS SENT PER DAY

Conclusion

The collected data shows an intensive penetration of mobile phones among young people and also children.

The average age for having a mobile, or even better, for receiving a mobile from parents or relatives is around 11 years old but this number must be decreasing, once the mobile is present in children's lives since much earlier. This could be verified by the age of getting the mobiles of the kids of the Primary School.

In a great number of households there is a relevant number of mobile phones and, as shown in the survey with the students of Lisbon, many kids have more than one device.

Another noteworthy feature is the number of students with landline phones at home. As the costs of landline phones are really expensive for some poor working class families, one option is the mobile phone that offers the possibility of controlling the expenditure with the pre-paid cards and especially controlling the bills of kids and young people.

Also, it's not necessary to have credit in the mobile to receive calls. Thus, without spending money the child can be reachable for parents and friends. Yet in this context of costs, it can be seen how much children are financial dependent of their parents to charge the mobile.

Children also like and do send and receive a lot of SMS from family and friends, and unlike some of the fear “technophobes” have that these new technologies of communication could allow or even stimulate the contact with strangers, we can see that it’s been the opposite. Children, as well as young people, use the mobile to keep in touch with people they already know. The mobile phone presents this aspect of promoting relationships between friends, boyfriend and girlfriend, relatives, family.

Parents give their children mobiles. Many of them do it as a way to make the coordination of everyday tasks easier, especially for mothers who work out of home. The mobile offers a possibility of changing plans and being in contact with the kid. The same is true for the child: if there is any problem, it’s possible to keep in touch with family. Other parents justify the child’s mobile as a matter of safety.

To children, on the other hand, besides being a device that makes the contact with friends possible, the mobile can reinforce the identity of the child, showing his/her preferences by the personalization of the device. Children change the ring tone, the screen saver, pictures and also put on some stickers or key rings they like.

Yet, it has to be remembered that the mobile for some children is seen as a companion, a way to avoid undesired people, to spend free time in a pleasant way, as sending SMS, playing , surfing on the web, taking pictures, listening to music or radio, and so on.

Due to the uses of the mobiles, children use more the device to play than young people, and also send more SMS. One possible explanation for these procedures is the cost of the calls as well as the credit that they (kids from Primary School) do not have.

It is also relevant to point out that, although the income of some families was around minimum wage, kids had one or more mobile phones and the same could be noticed in the household. The income of the family is inversely proportional to the number of mobile phones and media at home. Poor income families usually present media rich homes (Livingstone, 2002).

Another observation is that the educational level of parents also contribute to the owning of a mobile for kids. One of the parents of the students, a mother of two boys studying in the same classroom, that had only finished Primary School (1º ciclo) and with a one-minimum-wage-income, had more than 4 mobile phones at home, and each of her children said they had, respectively, 3 and 2 mobile phones each.

Also, kids are following some similar steps of teens: they also use the mobile when in bed to send messages to friends/dates. They also like to play before sleeping.

Some of them are always with the mobiles, in class, taking pictures, recording friends and teachers. Others simply forget they have it.

Many of the kids answered choosing the mobile because of the price: no matter the quality, no matter if it is second-handed, what counts is having one.

Thus, the mobile is not used as a way of showing some status; perhaps the number of mobiles would remind us of some kind of status, once they are really proud about the numbers of mobile they have.

Although this is data of just one group of children of a school in a working class neighbourhood, another study comparing children of the same age, class but with different level of instruction of the parents as well as the social level could be really worthy.

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