

YOUNG PEOPLE AND THEIR SIGNIFICANT ADULTS IN ITALY. THE CONSTITUTION OF YOUTH GENERATIONS THROUGH THE USE OF THE INTERNET

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Abstract: *This paper presents the results of research carried out in Italian schools in relation to the world of adults and young people. It principally focuses on generational relationships through the use of new digital technologies. The research design, the analytical techniques used as well as the models constructed will be described from the perspective of the general relevance of technology for society, discussed on the basis of the theoretical writings of Mead, Mannheim and Castells. Secondary data will be used to describe the Internet population with reference to the variables of not only sex, age, education and geographical area but also generational. Subsequently, the quantitative and qualitative results of the effects of the Internet on generational relationships will be presented. In detail, how young people and adults use the Web within the relationships between parents-children and teachers-students. Finally, the results of the multi-dimensional analysis are summarized. In this perspective, by using the Mannheim concept of generation, it is possible to state that digital technology has instituted the current generation of young people, on the basis of the process that occurs when there are cultural experiences that characterize a cohort in relation to the previous one.*

Key words: *Internet, generation, socialization, technology.*

1. Theoretical references: the construction of generation

Margaret Mead in her essay *Generations in Conflict: A Study of the Generation Gap* (Mead, 1970), claims that there are three types of culture in the evolution of human society: a 'post-figurative' culture characterized by children who learn from their seniors; a 'co-figurative' culture in which children and adults learn from their

peers, and a 'pre-figurative' culture, our contemporary one, in which the relationship of socialization is inverted and, for the most part, adults learn from their children. For the American anthropologist, the crisis of our contemporary society is a cultural issue that manifests itself in the detachment and isolation in which generations live, also caused by the electronic revolution: '[we have] entered into a present in which no

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one was prepared for from an understanding of the past, from an interpretation of the experience that was drawing closer or by a forecast of the future. All of us who grew up before the Second World War are pioneers, immigrants in time from their own familiar worlds that they left behind to live in a new era in which conditions are quite different from those they previously experienced. Intellectually, we are still connected to the past, to that world that existed during our childhood and adolescence. Born and having grown up before the electronic revolution, many among us still do not understand what it represents... The younger generations... are similar to the first generation born in a new host country. They are at home in this era. Artificial satellites are the norm in their skies... those that use electronic calculators do not anthropomorphise them, because they are aware that they have been programmed by human beings' (ibidem, pp. 112-3).

In the Network Society (Castells, 2002; Iorio, 2005), it is worth noting a radical break-off between the two generational groups that live in mutual contact but are isolated. Young people and adults face each other with awareness that nobody will, in considerable measure, live an experience already lived by the other. For the first time, no adult will be able to live the empathic experience that allows them to understand the young people they are faced with. No one will be able to act as a parent or teacher of a certain time, who can recall their youth in order to understand the experience of their own children or students. This is probably what many adults insist on doing, even though they are fully aware of the inadequacy of their own tools.

Digital technology, therefore, transforms a cohort into a generation. In fact, according to Mannheim, generations are

the product of cultural and historical influences that cause a discontinuity in the biography of individuals, the effect of a rapid social-historical transformation: "it is not the fact of having been born chronologically at the same time, of having become young people, adults and old at the same time, that constitutes one's location in the social space, but only the chance that derives from it to take part in the same events, life content, etc., and even more, to do that starting from the same 'stratified conscience'" (Mannheim, 1974, pp.346-7).

Mannheim again indicates the concept of the 'generational nexus,' the condition for the configuration of a generation. This occurs when a historical discontinuity produces a fracture, limited in time and not permanent, in the transmission of the traditional cultural patrimony of adults to their children. The transformation has an impact on all the members of a society, but is particularly incisive on the values of young people, especially those included in the age bracket of our group who find themselves in a period of transition in which the bonds with the significant adults in their lives become weaker and without any others substituting them. These are the conditions that cause a restructuring of the cognitive maps of individuals, of their self-images and what they think of their world. (Cavalli et al., 2008, p. 332).

2. The methodology and research design

The research is part of a larger national survey carried out using analytical, qualitative and quantitative techniques. It was carried out in cities in both the North and South of Italy: Bari, Bergamo, Milan, Salerno and Turin. In the first phase, the qualitative research involved 38 students between the age of 14 - 18, and their respective one parent and one teacher, for a

total of 114 interviews. The sampling was organized by selecting the students on the basis of gender (the students interviewed were females and males), school attended (lyceums, technical and professional institutes) and city. The technique used followed the rule of a structured interview. The order in which to ask the questions, as well as the way to formulate them, was left up to the judgement of the interviewer who, during the conversation, could explain its meaning, answer requests for clarification, and more in-depth understanding, etc. The 'stimulus' was the same for everyone, even if there was total freedom in expressing the responses, due to the all questions being open-ended. The qualitative analysis of the documents was carried out with a hermeneutic approach as well as using Atlas-Ti software.

In the second phase, the quantitative analysis consisted of the administration of an anonymous questionnaire made up of prevalently closed-ended questions to a representative sample of 1,294 students from 60 classes in high schools distributed in a proportional manner throughout the five cities. The data were analysed according to three levels. The first level involved a univariate and bivariate analysis. The construction of a synthetic index made it possible to analyse the associations between Internet use with other variable indexes such as: propensity towards deviance [1], openness to others [2], significance of the peer network [3], significance of the family of origin network [4] and scholastic achievement [5]. The second level consisted of submitting some categorical variables to multiple correspondences analysis [6] (MCA) in order to explore, describe and synthesize the information in question, reducing it to a smaller number of latent constructs [7]. The third phase consisted of a hierarchical type of cluster analysis, in order to classify the young people who

were interviewed on the basis of their different ways of using the Internet. This analysis produced three significant clusters. The choice of the divisions therefore resulted in the creation of the three groups and was optimized through the supportive alignment of a non-hierarchical classification and a repeated division, in order to improve the solutions obtained through the adoption of criteria-objectives [8].

Finally, a cluster analysis was carried out with a method that included the variables in relation to the education level of the father, city of residence; type of secondary school (lyceum/ technical/ professional).

3. How and why: use of the Web among students

Digital technology is an integral part of the daily lives of young people (Tapscott, 1998; Prensky, 2001). Internet offers an environment that allows everyone to cultivate daily passions, sports, relationships or entertainment. It is a socialization instrument, used to maintain relationships with friends as well as make new ones. It can be used to be kept update with information as well as study better for school tests.

In our model group, 87.6% surfs the Web and only 12.4% have never used it. There are no differences between males and females. The most popular sites are about music, which reach a percentage of 81.4%, followed by access to others containing information (60.1%) and news (55.6%). The least visited sites are those dealing with virtual encounters, visited by 23.2%.

Nevertheless, upon analysing the data of the "assiduous" surfers, i.e., who uses the Web for more than two hours a day, there is a different order of preferences. In first place, there are the virtual contact sites (49.4%). The most chosen modality is

“other” (39.9%). There is no specific information about this category, but it is probably related to a varied group of sites, not cited in the question.

Students were asked if they used the Web for their scholastic choices. 18.1% of the total has used the Web for this reason. It also emerges that they are mature, generally being aware, attentive and responsible when using the Internet. In fact, 43.9% went online to find the teaching curriculum of the school they had chosen, while 17.8% did so to compare the different institutions and 16.1% to compare the different educational tracks available. Only 9% used the Web to look at photos of their new school. It seems, therefore, that the Internet is used to acquire information about their personal life.

Combining the response modalities of ‘sometimes’ and ‘often’ shows that the use of search engines, communication tools, as well as the exchange of music files, films and programmes is over 80%. “The use for study purposes, to do research, but also for entertainment as well as to communicate with others.... I feel passion and freedom. Passion because I feel capable when using the Internet, freedom because I feel like I can do what I want, of course within legal limits... one time I had a test the following day and I could not study the subject in detail and, thanks to the Internet, I found what I needed” (F., L., I., S.) [9].

Apparently, there do not seem to be any significant differences between the South and North of Italy. In fact, in the first context, the percentage of connections is equal to 86.7%, in the latter 88.2%. However, looking at the disaggregated data of the time spent on the Internet, there is a percentage of “assiduous” youth in the South equal to 43.8%, while in the North, it is only 27.7%. Thus, those in the South are not less inclined than their peers in the North to access the virtual world, but

rather demonstrate a greater intensity in the use of technology.

The Web seems to be used even more than the computer. In fact, the access terminal is often a mobile phone, or “multimedia I-pod,” offering different media (Morcellini, 2005).

“Internet? It’s important and you use it to find a bit of everything: music, if you want to find an apartment, whatever it may be. My parents went to Greece this summer – because one of my aunts lives in Greece... we are in Italy and she is in Greece – while I was in Germany, and so my aunt downloaded all the pictures of Cologne. When we saw each other again, back home, I wanted to show my mother my photos, to say to her: ‘Look I was there.’ My mother took the things that had been downloaded from the Internet: ‘Oh, but I know it, this is the central station, this is the church.’ ‘Alright, you’ve already seen everything’; they already knew everything” (F., L., S., N.).

Young people use the Web according to the logic of learning by doing, that is, they learn by using and transforming the digital tool, outside of its normal context, in direct connection with the tool and with whoever uses it. At the same time, they become creators of it, proposing new solutions in order to respond better to their interests. Its diffusion, therefore, goes ahead according to a “viral” logic, a contagious one, with the best solutions being adopted and substituted only when a better one is found.

“I learned together with my cousins and friends... if I need help with it, I ask them” (M., L., I., S.).

“I learned alone; when I needed some information, I asked the first person that came my way... or better still, I asked on the Internet” (F., L., S., N.).

Whether they are from the North or South, enrolled in a lyceum or technical school, religious, nonbelievers or

agnostics, Italian or foreigners, from a rich or poor family, introverted or out-going, their parents educated or not, young people use the Web to respond to their desires, needs, or to carry out their duties. Music, friendships, family relationships, professional goals, studies, research, all find their reference point on the Internet, to acquire information that better respond to the expectations of their daily lives. Their lifestyle is a hybrid of material and immaterial, of real and virtual worlds, of places and spaces. In conclusion, they become a fluid point of the Web, an example of “culture of virtual reality”. In this context, however, “significant adults” progressively lose their power, their prestige, becoming less and less the reference point for the on-line life of youths.

4. The relationship between parents and children

“... and if you are ignorant like me, how do you educate your child how to use it... they have learned it on their own... they instinctively know these things... so perhaps they should be the ones to educate us” (F., D., I., S.) [10].

Digital technology has marked the nature of new generations. For young people, the environment will be never like that of their adults. It is worth noting the diversity in the fruition of music among new generations, of their relationship to sexuality, the family, the learning process, food, work, of the ease and comfort that characterize daily life as they go from television to the computer, to the Web, the car, airplane, other accessories; the heating and conditioning of the environment we live our lives, as well as the infinite gadgets that for adults represented a novelty and a conquest, giving the idea that in some way life is made easier and less tiring. For our adolescents and young

people, all of this represents nothing new or special. That which is “real” is a fact for adults to conquer and understand with effort, while for new generations it is a free space, modelled and rendered always greater by new technologies. Martinotti recalls: “My generation grew up doing many things with their hands and feet.... The generation of my students grew up instead with their hands on buttons... just click and something happens” (Martinotti, 2002, p. XVII). The patrimony of adult experiences is therefore not useful for our “new heroes”.

Up until now, growth has occurred through the progressive discovery of “the secrets of life”: each age has had its own experience. Adults were like the guardians of the night, delegated to deciding to gradually reveal, in ways deemed appropriate, what could pass through and what had to remain “outside the door” of knowledge, that is, which experience was perhaps premature for the psyche of the adolescent. Traditionally, childhood was a period of life cut off from the real world. Children were surrounded and protected by adults, hiding several aspects of life because they were not yet seen as emotionally ready to face them. This is now no longer possible: everyone, even children, knows how to get to know everything right away, at least potentially. This is the denouncement made by Neil Postman: the annulment of childhood, the transformation of children into “small adults,” not yet grown up, but already deprived of their season (Postman, 1982).

Results show that 72% spend more than one hour in a virtual environment and over a third go over two hours. It is a matter of self-monitored hours, conducted in the absolute absence of significant adults: 84.2% of Internet users surfs alone. The competent presence, with the educational functions of parents, is equal to 0.8%; that is, only 10 young people interviewed

stated that they access the Internet with their father and mother present. For 11.5%, the Web is the place they use with their friends, while only 3.4% are online with their brothers and sisters.

In the current transformation, adults have lost their educational function in relation to the new generations. Adults, in great part, do not know this world, do not live in it, and for this reason they are scared by it. There is a growing desire in them to either control or censure it through prohibiting the use of the computer and Internet in their home. They become a sort of “police” but feel frustrated. They are fully aware that repression can be ineffective and they often turn it around. However, they believe they have fulfilled their duty to “tame the beast,” and their consciences seem to be appeased. In reality, deep down, they feel a sense of inadequacy.

The “controlling” parent tries to monitor, but...: “I control the use of the Internet, but I don’t know up to what point I can do it. If not now, he will later learn to hide what he is doing, if he wants to do things behind my back” (F., L., I., S.).

The most worried parent becomes a “censurer”: “I do not control, but I prohibit him from using the Internet. At home, in this moment we have no Internet connection... I know that at times he goes to the Internet Café or to a friend’s house and he uses it. I only hope that those parents have been attentive and put up some screening device. But this is part of the game” (M., L., I., S.).

Some parents even maintain that it is not the task of the family to intrude in the sites, the experiences and identities built by adolescents on the Web. In addition to the “policing” parent (i.e., the type that monitors and censures), there is also the “absent” type. This attitude in certain cases is due to the inexistence of cognitive tools to think to involve themselves in this

relationship, as an immigrant mother stated:

“My son uses the Internet but I don’t know where he learned to, maybe at some friends’ house... and I cannot monitor his use of it; in any case, it’s not the family’s task to control it” (M., D., I., S.).

A third type is the parent who is “aware,” who understands the Internet world. He/she is aware of its different uses and the meaning it has for his/her children. They are parents who typically have the following characteristics: either a high education or are under 45 years of age, or they have a job that involves a computer and use of the Internet. All the same, this type of parent still feels fear.

One stated: “I cannot monitor how he uses it, but he is at friends’ house that I trust him... there is not 100% control. In fact, they even made some purchases, but all summed up, I’m not worried about my daughters, they are old enough... We do not have Internet at all because we don’t know how it works... to control what one can and cannot do, we preferred not to have it. An educational course would be called for, even though it’s always the teenager who ultimately chooses and often their curiosity gets the better of them ...” (F., D., I., S.).

Another difference between “significant adults” and young people is seen in analysing the two processes. The first, how adults (a few) learn to use the Internet, from which emerges that learning happens in formal contexts –they have normally taken courses, therefore the logic of socialization is of the *using by learning* type.

“I am very ignorant, due to circumstances, I use the computer like a typewriter and I rarely search for anything on the Internet, but I am really indifferent to it, like cave people; certainly I use Internet for specific actions, such as buying airline tickets, but I really do not

like it at all. I prefer to read a book.... I learned it in the hospital, I had to learn on my own, the x-rays were no longer arriving on film but by computer.... If I need help, I ask Giacomo or my other son, my husband or whoever knows more than me” (F., L., I., N.).

Children are their reference point in case of difficulty, not only technical but also on ways to use the Web. Processes of “reverse socialization” are thus activated, just like the children of the first generation of immigrants who introduce their parents to the “new world” by acting as “bridges” between the old and new reality they face.

“Yes, I use it. I learned from my daughter; she is better at it” (M.,E.,S.,N.). We found two variables that differentiate within the world of adults: age and level of education. The lower the age under 40, the greater the level of education, the more probable is their familiarity with the Web. The adults with these characteristics know the logic of the Web, its tools and its possibilities. They are more aware of the need to follow their children, to act as models that they can imitate, to be mirrors for them in order to foster a responsible and free use of it. The young people interviewed use the Web according to the logic of learning *by doing*, i.e., they learn while using and at once changing the digital tool, outside of their formal context (Mongelli, 2009), in direct rapport with the tool. At the same time, they become creators of it, proposing new solutions that respond better to their interests. Its diffusion, therefore, goes ahead according to a “viral” logic, a contagious one. Best solutions are adopted and substituted only when a better one is found.

The quantitative surveys show that 65.7% of the people interviewed stated that they learned the ways and secrets of Web on their own. The second learning modality is the informal one, through one’s peer group (for 11% of those interviewed),

that is, with their schoolmates (1.1%) or the help of friends (10.1%). If the 10.3% who turns to their parents for advice or when in difficulty while surfing, then 4.9% avail themselves of formal means of learning.

5. The teachers outside the team: who will explain to our youth a world unknown to us?

The teachers have interiorized a prescribed role that fosters the transmission of skills and knowledge to their students, but they also feel a sense of frustration between their expected roles and reality. They cannot control the home environment of their students, they feel they should educate them on how to use new technologies, but they see that they know less. Their own role is questioned, and their own methods are presented as obsolete. Their previous monopoly of the content is put in crisis, which makes them look increasingly uncertain.

Today, there are many reference points on the Web for new generations; so many that they have lost their meaning and credibility. Formative teaching is substituted by “guiding” and “helping”. The role of the teacher, at one time the absolute reference point and model, disappears and is substituted by the often exclusive relationship with electronic instruments that duplicate their presence.

According to this experience, there are teachers who are “giving up,” who perceive their inadequacy and live it with resignation, almost with shame. Others instead rebel from being trapped by the change of context and assume a “censuring” strategy, justifying and invoking the regulation of its access, because the activity of the medium is negative due to it being a vehicle of content without worth, value and culture. People do not know how to dissociate

content from form, object from the subject of knowledge, or content from the text. In the final analysis, at least in principle, also the form of the book is a technological media tool. However, there are also “integrated” teachers in the new world, who generally tend to be younger.

Teachers perceive themselves as inadequate because they recognize the fundamental importance of the Internet and often assume an attitude of “giving up”:

“If I need advice, I turn to my students who know more than me... probably I am not aware of all the advantages and disadvantages connected with the Internet. Surely the possibility of gathering material, information in any moment, also for those who do research and study, is of great help... certainly...I feel a bit of a victim of my old schooling that keeps me bound to the book version” (M., L., S.) [11].

The image of the Web among teachers is very contradictory. On one hand, they perceive the risk of isolation that contrasts with what they maintain young people do, namely, chat, update their diaries, meet people, socialize through games and do research. On the other, with respect to the contents, another contradiction of opinion emerges which have its roots in the book-centric culture: if the Web is perceived as an inexhaustible resource of information and material, at the same time, it is also perceived as a deterrent to the development of critical thinking. Beginning from analysing the data related to the propensity to take on deviant attitudes (tab.3), we find that they do not uphold the expectations of adults, and in particular, of the teachers interviewed. In fact, 89% of digital users have a propensity to ‘high’ transgression, against 86.3% of those with a ‘low’ propensity. This indicates that no association exists between the two variables (the median being 87.7%) and that the search for places where acting against of the laws of civil society does not

show to be correlated to the use of the Web.

Another aspect is the preoccupation that the use of the Web would provoke social isolation and produce young Internet users immersed in an imaginary reality with its own certainties and truths, a tribal world with symbols and identifying taboos. This is, in fact, how some teachers expressed themselves in the interview.

Crossing the data about Internet use with the index of frequency of ‘alterity’ (frequencing others), in order to empirically verify the image of the isolation caused by the Web, the theoretical hypothesis used in the adult interviews does not find any empirical support.

The results show that 83.3% have a ‘low frequentation of their friends’ on the Internet, while the percentage becomes 86.7% for the ‘middle’ level and reaches 91.4% for ‘high’ intensity and frequency with their own peers (Tab.3). This means that, in contrast to the expectations of the adults interviewed, the significance of the peer network grows in a manner directly proportional to Internet use.

In addition, the measure of openness or closure towards religious or ethnic diversity is slightly connected to the use of the Web: the frequencing of other religions or ethnic origins is equal to 87.6%, while the frequencers of people of ethnic groups and other faiths is equal to 86.8% (tab.3). Therefore, the results show that closure towards other faiths and/or ethnicities does not constitute a major factor in discriminating between users and non-users of the Internet.

There is the risk expressed by other adults interviewed that the Internet creates the habit of being superficial. It does not encourage reading, intellectual curiosity, with it urging people to play games and be frivolous, and perhaps creating young people who are less intelligent:

“Internet has its worth and use but if it becomes – as it is for some teens – the few games in which they get immersed for hours, then it’s a problem, a big problem: there is the automatic grammatical corrector and you find that they are always more ignorant... for the rest, it is an incredible simplification of things.” (F., P., N.)

These worries are not confirmed in our empirical data, but indicate an association between the best school grades and their frequency on the Web, so much that among the subjects who have a ‘high’ school performance, the percentage of

Internet users is 90%, while a lower one (equal to 85.6%) for those with a ‘low’ school performance (Table 1). Reading by adults who see the Internet as an evasion that kills the use of books and commitment in school does not appear to be realistic.

There is a direct connection between the indexes of importance of the family and access to the Internet: a ‘high’ level of significance of family is 90.5% of Internet users, while ‘medium’ is 87.5% and ‘low’ 85.3%. This means that there is a connection between the propensity to use the Internet and significant family relationships.

Table 1
Internet penetration rates by indexes of propensity towards deviance, frequenting others, significance of peer networks, school performance and significance of family

Internet	Propensity to deviance			Frequent. others		Signific. peer networks		
	Low	Med.	High	No	Yes	Low	Med.	High
Yes 87.6	86.3	89.1	89.0	86.8	87.6	83.3	86.7	91.4
No 12.4	13.7	10.9	11.0	13.2	12.4	16.7	13.3	8.6
Tot. 100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table 2
The crossing between Internet use and indexes of propensity towards deviance, frequenting others, significance of peer networks, school performance and significance of family

Internet	Scholastic Performance			Significance of family		
	Low	Med.	High	Low	Med.	High
Yes 87.6	85.6	87.5	90.0	85.3	87.5	90.5
No 12.4	14.4	12.5	10.0	14.7	12.5	9.5
Tot. 100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Own data.

There is a marked difference between the young people and the adult teachers in relation to the modality of learning on the Web. It has already been noted that the process for adult-parents is of the *using by learning* type, with their use being the effect of a learning that occurred in a formal context and there is a type of reproductive use and not a creative one with new uses, as for young people.

“I took part in an organized course and then I taught myself” (F., L., S.).

Not everyone is awkward towards the new reality. There are teachers who are taken with it and are “integrated” into new technologies. In fact, the teachers are clearly differentiated by their age. Those under 40 are also part of the Internet world and have managed to better combine their traditional education with a new creative practice of the Web. In fact, the generation

in their thirties usually becomes familiar with Internet during their university years and, living as students and youths the novelty of the new technologies.

“To have a computer and the chance to use it already as children, and to be educated in its use is fundamental – to have limits with respect to its use. Internet is like life: you have to know how to enjoy it, know where you are heading, and the places where you should not go” (M., P., N.).

In the North as in the South, whether they teach in professional schools or lyceums, whether they are teachers of classical, technical or scientific subjects, whether they are male or female, teachers feel the frustration of having to prepare their students for a world that they do not understand.

It seems that the threshold for this debate is the dam that forms a watershed between the two worlds, also among the teachers, namely, between the ones who are “aware” of the opportunities and the risks and the ones who “censure,” and walk with fear and ignorance in the world of virtual reality.

6. The targets of Internet use: the results of the multidimensional analysis

In order to offer a complete analysis of the homogeneity and discontinuity of the modalities of using the Internet by young people in relationship to their social context of reference, the results that emerged from the standardized questionnaire have been elaborated first through a multiple correspondences analysis and then through a cluster analysis.

In an attempt to summarize the results which emerged from the MCA, three significant factors that together sum up the

data collected about the Internet used by the students interviewed can be made. The first factor can be interpreted in relation to the use/non-use of the Internet and therefore refers to such a dichotomy. In particular, a more in-depth analysis shows that the area of the non-use of the Web is characterized by the presence of subjects from foreign countries, with scarce material resources. All the same, these students take hold of the educational experience, recognizing it as a channel for social mobility.

The second factor is related to the casual use of the Internet, versus a knowledgeable or instrumental use of it to reach general values and goals. In this case, the characterizing factors relate to the recreational use of the Web which is not used to establish relationships, to study or express social and ethical values. They are young people with scarce cultural and social resources available. Disoriented and exposed to violence, they are generally young people who believe in the value of cleverness and see in the Web a social space, a forum in which they can rebuild their subjectivity, and a relational visibility that legitimates institutional paths they cannot take. They are not happy at school, they do not like studying and they would like to drop out of school in order to go to work.

Finally, the third factor represents the dichotomy between a competent and a non-competent use of the Internet and refers to those with a high degree of commitment. They are the adolescents who use the Internet in a boundless measure, aiming to fulfilling life projects that are independently developed, but within legitimate institutional paths such as school, university, the family and civic groups. They come from families with a high level of cultural capital.

On the basis of these first results, it has been possible to outline the general profile of the students on their way of using the digital technology in relationship to their characterization. For example, of their school experience, their social and cultural capital, their anchorage to the social structure.

The results of the cluster analysis [12] therefore indicate that there are three groups which articulate the relationship between the Internet and adolescents: the first two are characterized by the use of the Web, but according to different logics and configurations, the third is typified by its non-use of the Web.

The first cluster gathers the 'adolescents online,' young people who make continuous use of the Web, at home or school. They are "techno-committed". This group has a prevalent female presence, students attending the lyceum, who have a high level of social and cultural resources available. These young Internet users make up 50% of the group interviewed and come from families with parents with medium to high levels of education and who are prevalently professionals. They show a capacity to use technological resources that is strongly self-directed, which allows them to follow life-paths that are rich and meaningful. They are adolescents who have very good school performances in the present, but also a past with a successful school ranking, and who see themselves as aiming to increase their knowledge at university level. These adolescents have strong bonds with their parents (above all their mothers) and teachers, who are they consider to be reliable. They live important group and volunteer experiences, they love reading books and newspapers, and recognize the giving of themselves and gratuity as the value of their existence. In addition, their experience with Web is

mainly a solitary one, even though they have parents who know what the Internet is and use it.

A second group of young people, who regularly use Web, is characterized by the presence of males attending professional and technical institutes. Their school experience is characterized by boredom. They have little trust in their teachers, they do not recognize their authority, nor identify with it as a role that they wish to achieve. School is a bother to them, for the most part imposed, and their grades are low. Their career path is a course with obstacles, which they hope to leave as soon as possible. They are young people who are alienated. They do not read newspapers, they do not like any type of reading, nor listening to music. Their relational world is rather impoverished. They do not frequent associations or groups, and even their relationship with their mothers is unstable. They are youths with scarce cultural and social resources coming from extended families and the lower class. Their parents do not have an education beyond the mandatory school level and hold manual jobs. Their life is all about the Internet, experiences lived in loneliness, without mothers or fathers, nor a significant adult who can act as a guide for them. The value they believe in is cleverness. They have no plans for their lives, but as adults they would like to become successful and their inclination to deviance is high.

The third group is characterized by the non-use of digital instruments. They are the "techno-absent". Internet is an experience known to about 12% of the adolescents interviewed. In a large part, they are students who attend professional institutes and do not have Italian citizenship. Their life is characterized by scarce material resources. Their parents are

blue collar workers or work in agriculture and their level of education is low. All the same, these students take hold of the educational experience, recognizing it as a channel for social mobility. They struggle through school, but they recognize their teachers as a point of reference upon whom they can count and as examples to follow. Their free time is characterized by the mere listening to pop music and rock. They have no groups of friends, belong to no associations, and have never been to the theatre or to play sports.

7. Conclusions

One of the most significant results of the research relates to the generations of young people characterized by their use of the digital technologies. In a Mannheim sense, this is precisely the characteristic of a new generation. It is expressed in the awareness, in both youths and adults, that there is a “new world,” made of practices, social relationships, roles, values, meanings, significance and experiences, therefore of institutions, known and practiced by the first, but not by the latter. This is the cultural experience that defines today’s young people.

The “over 40s” belong to one of the last generations who had the privilege of facing the first challenges of life while having a relatively solid tradition as a reference point. The cultural patrimony of their own parents. This link, made of memories, rules and customs, was faced by each subject, to then come to accept it, put it into context, or rather introduces new things into it, which in each person’s life the historical circumstances and one’s own “inner conversion” (Archer, 2003) appear necessary. For millenniums, this constant transmission of knowledge, techniques, collective ethos, ways of life and their

progressive adaptations, was the typical process of continuity of the passage from one generation to the next. Modernity has already characterized itself for its certain degree of counter-traditionalism towards the other era, highlighted by Weber and all the classical sociologists. However, the principal element of our time refers that changes and crisis have become not only a condition of “normality” of modern human beings, but have also grown in intensity.

Today, the “handing on” of the past to the future, in the same way that history is passed on to us, is no longer possible. Between the testimony of what has already been lived and the preparation for the near future, the technological and virtual transformations of life have determined an impoverishment of the communicative and pedagogic power of which the “adults” naturally availed themselves to lead their children and grandchildren towards an adolescence of awareness, the precursor of a responsible adult age. Technology is also the factor that has broken that generational bond between adults and youths, which is also a second indicator of the birth of generations.

In addition, the process of “appropriation” and “initiation” of new realities and their meaning, founded on a new technological context, seems to follow the logic of a “reverse socialization”. When adults have to learn how the world of “virtual reality” works (Castells, op. cit., pp. 430-7), they turn to young people, recognized by them as the best teachers of the secrets of the “new world.” In brief, school and family, teachers, mothers and fathers entrust themselves in large part to adolescents, their children or students, in order to access the digital resources that pervade our daily reality. Nevertheless, when the attempt to penetrate the new world of the Web is absent, young people

have to try to find the meaning of their reality on their own. This entails the risk that the different generations will unexpectedly become alienated from each other. The fact that we must begin from this means that the Internet is not only a medium of communication or new technology. In fact, it has become a cultural environment of our very production and distribution, the typical element of today's society that finds expression in generational relationships.

Notes

1. Indexes composed of the questions: To travel on public transport without paying, point 1; To take something without paying, point 4; To get in a fight with other youths, point 2; to break a bench, point 3; To drink too much, point 2; To pick on someone weaker than you, point 3; To write graffiti on walls, point 2; To use bad language, point 1.
2. Indexes composed of the questions: 1 "You are friends with people of other faiths"; 2 "You are friends with foreigners."
3. Indexes composed of the questions: 1 "Who helped you to choose your high school?" 2 "How important is what your friends think of you?" 2 "How much do you trust your friends?" 3 "Who would you turn to if you had a problem with"
4. Indexes composed of the questions: 1 "Who helped you to choose your high school?" 2 "How important is the opinion that your Mother, Father, brothers/ sisters have of you?" 3 "How much do you trust your mother/ father/ brothers/ sisters?" 4 "Who would you turn to with a problem?"
5. Indexes composed of the questions: 1 "What grades did you receive in Middle School?" 2 "Did you ever have to repeat an academic year?" 3 "In the previous school year, did you have any incompletes in any subjects?"
6. The active variables referring to the following macro areas were exposed to MCA: internet connection at home; use of the internet by parents; use of the internet by the youth with their parents; education level of the parents; students' frequentation of persons from other ethnicities or different faiths; type of support in choosing websites; school achievement of students. In addition, as illustrative or supplementary variables, were the age of the students, their residence and religion (also of the parents).
7. The MCA made it possible to set out three more significant factors that explained about 44% of the inertia.
8. To this end, a grouping technique around mobile centres was adopted, by using the coordinates of centroids of different groups. The interactions that followed thus gave place to an optimization of the divisions through the transfer of a few cases from one group to another, on the basis of the identification of the barycentres and the minimization of the distances.
9. The characteristics of the young people interviewed indicated in parenthesis are gender (M=Male/F=Female), school (L=Lyceum/P=Professional), nationality (I=Italian/S=Foreigner), region (N=North/S=South).
10. The characters of the parents interviewed indicate gender (M=Male, F=Female), level of education (E=Elementary/L=Lyceum/D=Degree/M=Masters), nationality (I=Italian, S=Foreigner) and region (N=North, S=South).
11. The teachers of the youths interviewed are classified by gender (M, F), the school in which they teach (L., P.) and the region (N., S.).

12. We first began to save the factorial coordinates obtained from the MCA on the first three factors and then the cluster analysis was done on these cases.

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