

Appropriation and use of new technologies by Portuguese elderly in a Senior University

Propiedad y uso de nuevas tecnologías por los ancianos portugueses en una Universidad de Mayores

Apropriação e uso de novas tecnologias por idosos portugueses de uma Universidade Sénior

Bruna Giovanna Buesso da Silva
 Mariele Rodrigues Correa
 António M. Fonseca

ABSTRACT: This paper reports a research carried out with Portuguese elderly, intended to investigate the influences and computer learning resonances in their sociability. Interviews were conducted with six elderly participants of a Internet course of the Universidade Sénior Contemporânea, in the city of Porto, Portugal. The survey data point to a questioning of the modern relationships, with special interest to the impact of the internet on the processes of subjectification in the different ages of life.

Keywords: Internet; University of the Third Age; Sociability.

RESUMEN: *Este trabajo reporta una investigación realizada con ancianos portugueses, con el fin de investigar las influencias y resonancias en el aprendizaje por computadora de la sociabilidad de los mismos. Se realizaron entrevistas con seis participantes en el curso de Internet, de la Universidade Sénior Contemporânea, en la ciudad de Oporto, en Portugal. Los datos de la encuesta apuntan a un cuestionamiento de las relaciones actuales, especialmente para prestar atención al impacto de Internet en los procesos subjetivos en las diferentes edades de la vida.*

Palabras clave: *Internet; Universidad de la Tercera Edad; Sociabilidad.*

RESUMO: *O presente texto relata uma pesquisa realizada junto a idosos portugueses, com o objetivo de investigar as influências e ressonâncias do aprendizado de informática na sociabilidade dos mesmos. Foram feitas entrevistas com seis idosos participantes do curso de Internet, da Universidade Sénior Contemporânea, na cidade do Porto, em Portugal. Os dados da pesquisa apontam para uma problematização dos vínculos na atualidade, no sentido de atentar para os impactos da internet nos processos de subjetivação nas diferentes idades da vida.*

Palavras-chave: *Internet; Universidade da Terceira Idade; Sociabilidade.*

Introduction

Increasingly present in the daily lives of people of many different ages, digital technologies, especially information technology and the Internet, contribute to the promotion of virtual meetings, new sociabilities and learning. There are abundant computer courses and programs for the elderly and one must consider that digital inclusion is currently a goal to be reached among older people.

Learning new technologies presents its own challenges and motivations, so our research sought to investigate with the elderly who attend a computer course offered by the Universidade Sénior Contemporânea do Porto (Portugal) the influences of learning and handling of computer information in the sociability of the third age. In this paper, we will discuss the paths and results of the research, taking into account the demographic and psychosocial aspects about the aging of the Portuguese population, as well as issues related to retirement in the scenario of that country and a characterization of the Portuguese University of the Third Age (UTA).

Increased life expectancy in the Portuguese context has caused changes in the demographic profile of the population. Data from the last census show growth of 9% of the population between 20 and 29 years old and 26% of those over 69 years old. In 2001, the first age group represented 51% of the population and now has become 54%. In the case of the second group, in 2001 it accounted for 11%, and the current numbers are 14% of people over 69 years old. Comparing the growth of the aging population with young people, the elderly increased from 16% to 19%, while among young people there was a decrease from 16% to 15% (INE, 2011).

Similar to the Brazilian reality, in Portugal aged population is mostly composed of women, especially among the segment above 85 years old. This condition is caused by similar reasons to Brazilians: men have a lower life expectancy because they are more exposed to occupational risks than women and, moreover, the female population is usually more careful with their own health (Marques, 2009).

Currently, in Portugal, people aged above 65 are considered old, and this is the age of entry to the process of "reformatar-se", equivalent to the process called in Brazil "aposentar-se" (retirement). However, according to Marques (op. cit.), there is no specific age at which people start being referred to as elderly, and there are reports of cases where people over 50 are already included in the age group of the "Third Age".

Therefore, age is a factor to be considered when we reflect on the aging process. According to Gomes (2014), this factor can be understood from three perspectives, namely, the chronological, the social and the psychological age. In the author's words:

(...) The chronological age is measured by the functional or vital capacities and the life limit of organic systems. Social age refers to the roles and habits that the individual takes in society. The psychological age refers to the behavioral abilities of the individual to adapt to the environment. This is influenced by biological and social factors and involves skills such as memory, learning, intelligence, abilities, feelings, motivations and emotions (...) (Gomes, 2014, p.19. All citations in this article have been written originally in portuguese).

Age is a vector that stratifies and structures the understanding of old age, along with patterns of behavioral expectations created by society, from the concept and status of old age. This movement of stratification occurs since the nineteenth century, with the emergence of age categories, and is connected to a process of social planning, traditional between Western societies in modernity. Linked to age categories, there appeared habits and spaces targeted to each group, and the crystallization of these divisions occurred in the twentieth century with the institutionalization of transitional occasions such as school and university entrance and retirement, which have created higher uniformity within the age groups (Silva, 2008).

An understanding of old age from a pure etary perspective is one of several ways to reflect on the process of aging and in the literature we find explanations that point to other aspects as well. For Marques (2009), for example, an aging population can be understood from the individual and demographic dimensions. The individual dimension takes into account the average life expectancy, while the demographic point of view considers the increasing number of elderlies in the population, due to low levels of infant mortality and increased life expectancy.

While a complex and diverse phenomenon, the aging process is experienced in three areas: biological, psychological and sociocultural. For some gerontology scholars, aging is initially experienced in the physical aspect, whose signs are not always perceived by people. Between the first physical changes the most reported are the emergence and predominance of white hair and, for women, the arrival of menopause (Cerqueira, 2010). Such physical changes reflect the psychological aspect, because they demand new forms of subjectivity and the construction of new meanings to life, especially when we also take into account the social and cultural aspects of retirement and social expectations regarding place(s) reserved for the elderly.

To Fonseca (2016), the aging process can be understood from three different perspectives: normal aging, pathological aging and successful aging. In the first case, the aging conditions occurs without pathologies, with, however, progressive decrease in capacity and increased risk of dependency on others. Pathological aging is marked by the presence of physical or mental illness that incapacitates the subject and is associated with the need for external care. Finally, successful or active aging, as opposed to the other two modes, is characterized by individuals with good health, both physical and cognitive, who are also socially participatory (Fonseca, 2016).

With that in mind, the experience of a successful aging would involve, among many other considerations, keeping networks of sociability active, especially after the retirement period.

Retirement in the Portuguese scenario

The arrival to retirement is associated with the entrance into the third age and, consequently, this generates relevant changes in people's daily lives, since the time that was filled by a job now becomes free and available to be dedicated to what one wishes to do and achieve.

Work occupies a relevant space in human life and, more specifically, in the process of subjectification. Sometimes the subjects conquer personal identity and acquire social status through the function they have exercised for years. With retirement this reality changes and, along with it, some frustrations related to the loss of routine can be added, like low social interaction and, in some cases, fall in the purchasing power, since pensions are unsatisfactorily adjusted for inflation.

Retirement produces several changes in the life of the subjects. In cases where work plays an extremely important role for individuals, it would be interesting to use, as a way to alleviate possible difficulties, policies such as gradually retirement, which could prevent the abrupt interruption of access to social contacts and other aspects mentioned previously, as presented by Fonseca (2012):

In the same way, researchers from the Center for Retirement Research of the Boston College point out that a gradual transition from the status of worker to retiree is preferable to an abrupt transition (Calvo, Haverstick and Sass, 2007). Gradually withdrawing from work and incorporating the time available into the routine of everyday life helps the person in transition to preserve their identity and goals in life by remaining active and socially involved. These authors present a review of studies that have systematically demonstrated the positive effects of this gradual transition in health, well-being and adaptation to aging. Thus, a smooth transition allows workers to continue to develop activities similar to those they developed in the previous years, ensuring a sense of everyday life while adapting to the aging process. A gradual reform also allows us to highlight opportunities to remain personally and socially active, which have a very strong positive impact on individual health and well-being (Fonseca, 2012, p. 81).

All the fears, anxieties and difficulties produced by the arrival of retirement demonstrate how much we are unprepared to reflect and face this moment, to the point that many people postpone this decision, while, in other cases, some continue to work after retirement in order to retire a second time (Fonseca, 2012).

If, in one hand, we have those who avoid retirement, in the other we find people anxious to retire so that they can have free time to enjoy activities aimed at the elderly, whether in social action initiatives or attending courses offered by the *Universidades da Terceira Idade* (Universities of the Third Age), or *Universidades Seniores* (Senior Universities).

The Universities of the Third Age enable the elderly to develop new social roles and stimulate creativity and new learning. In addition, these programs allow individuals to communicate with others and promote new networks of sociabilities (Varela, 2012).

The reasons for which the elderly seek those universities are generally related to the search for social interactions like they use to have in their lives before retirement, as well as developing cognitive and cultural skills, which are ways to deal with loneliness and isolation (Marques, 2009).

The Senior Universities have been an efficient proposal to appease the loneliness of elderly people, since they make it possible, above all, the contact with people from the same generation and also with the younger one.

The reality of the Senior Universities: historical rescue

During the 1970s and the 1980s the relevance of the increase in the life expectancy of the population and the need for new configurations to deal with this change caught the attention of adult educators in Great Britain, who also realized both this populational transformation and also the need to rethink activities aimed at this public. Since then educators began to worry about developing educational and leisure or recreational activities so that seniors could fill their free time (Marques, 2009).

In this context, the first University of the Third Age appears in Europe in 1972 at the University of Toulouse, France, which was open to retired people during the European summer holidays (July to September) as a way of encouraging participation in active groups (Pacheco, 2006).

Years later, closer to the end of the 1970s, a similar project appears in the United Kingdom, at Cambridge and London Universities. These two poles of emergence of the Universities of the Third Age (UTA) gave rise to two configurations of UTAs functioning, namely, the French model and the English model.

The French model operates by offering academic training to the seniors and, therefore, they count on controlling of students' attendance, assessments and the provision of diplomas. The English model works in a more open and self-sufficient way. The initial aim of this university model for senior citizens in the United Kingdom was to promote equal access to education for older people who had not passed through the education system. However, this proposal needed state support and formal universities for the idea to move forward. With the lack of investments, students become teachers and thus a model that is distinct from the French one is created, open to anyone with a relatively low cost and that does not have assessments and diplomas (Marques, 2009).

Even without state support or formal universities, a large part of the UTAs in Europe rely on the partnership of institutions that often provide the physical spaces to carry out the activities, just as in the case of the Universidade Sênior Contemporânea, which works in the vicinity of a Catholic church.

The activities offered by the Universities of the Third Age (UTAs) generally include courses in languages, history, health, photography, computer science, arts, theater, music, dance, physical activities and also guided tours. In the institutions linked to formal universities, we can also find courses on the aging process. These universities emerge with the purpose of meeting the demands of this population, with formal and informal teaching on various knowledge disciplines, not only computer courses but recreational activities as well. Concomitantly, they aim to operate on reducing the social isolation of the elderly, providing a redefinition of images of old age and the elderly and their reintegration into society.

In Portugal, the first UTA appeared in Lisbon, in 1976, named Universidade Internacional da Terceira Idade (International University of the Third Age), under the coordination of Dr. Herberto Miranda, following the English model. The emergence of the first UTA in Portugal gives rise to a new scenario for the experience of active aging. According to Jacob (2012), in the year 2012 there were 189 UTAs enrolled in the Rede de Universidades da Terceira Idade (Network of Third Age Universities or RUTIs in the Portuguese acronym).

The Universidade Sénior Contemporânea do Porto (Senior Contemporary University of Porto), where we developed the research, was founded on May 18, 2005, based on the initiative of the directors, Professors Marta Loureiro dos Santos and Artur Filipe dos Santos, to create a learning space for the elderly willing to acquire new knowledge and improve existent ones.

The directors, who already had experience teaching classes at another senior university, decided to develop the project after many requests from former students, and, progressively, the university grew year by year and today has approximately 300 students and ten volunteer teachers. The age of the students of the University are 65 or older and the group of teachers are between 38 and 46 years old.

The activities of the Universidade Sénior Contemporânea occur in the premises of the Parish of Our Lady of Fátima do Amial, which rents rooms to be used by the University. Classes take place from Monday to Thursday, between 10:00 AM and 7:00 PM. Fridays are free for booking tours and group travel that may extend over the weekend.

Just as leisure activities have their importance, the University is also concerned with academic activities regarding the theme of aging. In 2007, they created the first journal of gerontology of Portugal, the *Revista Transdisciplinar de Gerontologia* (Transdisciplinary Journal of Gerontology), which aims to deal with the different aspects of the third age and counts on the contributions of several areas of knowledge, such as Psychology, Sociology, Medicine, Social Education and others.

Objectives

The general objective of this study was to investigate among the elderly enrolled in the Internet course offered by the Universidad Contemporânea the meanings that they attribute to the use of the computer and new technologies. Thus, we try to understand how the tools offered by the digital medium are used and what contributions they bring to the sociability of the elderly according to their own perception. As specific objectives, we highlight:

- a. General characterization of participants in the "Advanced" IT course in relation to the profile of the elderly, such as average age, gender, marital status, income sources, type of residence, living or not with a family, daily activities, places that he/she attends, activities that he/she develops, use of computers in the domestic environment and use of other technologies, such as digital cameras, mobile phones, ATMs and others.
- b. Mapping the conceptions of the elderly about personal relationships established through new technologies, specifically the Internet and social networks.
- c. Investigation, together with the elderly, about the difficulties found in the process of appropriation of information technology and the contribution of this learning to access other technological tools.
- d. Understanding how this population evaluates personal relationships via the Internet, and perceives the existence of aspects that they consider positive and / or negative in the contact with the virtual world.

Methodology

The research data were collected through interviews with six elderly participants of the Internet course offered by the Universidade Sénior do Porto. The study period lasted from April to June 2016. During these three months, we attended classes in several courses of the Universidade Sénior in order to build a link that allowed the development of study and participant observation.

The interviews had closed and semi-closed questions. The closed questions were elaborated to carry out a general characterization of the profile of the interviewees, considering several aspects, among them: age, sex, type of residence (whether alone or accompanied), frequency of attendance in the computer course of the project, time of use and place where you access the computer and the internet (if at home, in a relative or friend's house or in college), most accessed electronic addresses and others. Regarding the semi-open questions, they were asked about how they evaluate the use of the computer, more specifically the internet and social networks, how they use these tools, whether this access brought benefits/contributions or not, if there was an expansion of social links and in what way, among others.

The data obtained were analyzed using the Content Analysis method, proposed by Bardin (2009). This method is characterized as an investigative technique in order to describe in an objective, systematic and quantitative way the content of the information. This method of analysis is constituted by a set of techniques characterizing the productive conditions of discourse. It also considers the meanings and content of speech, occasionally the form and distribution of these contents, in an attempt to know the elements behind the lines and words (Bardin, 2009).

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and later codified and classified in the analysis categories, based on previously established units of meaning. As general categories of analysis previously established, based on the literature and the objectives of the research, are those referring to the perceptions and evaluations of the experiences of contact with computers, for example, consequences in practical life, reflexes in self-image, changes in the relationships with people from the same age and with young people as well, resonances in feelings of isolation and solitude, impacts on communication, resonance in affective and social bonds, unfolding in the handling of other digital technological artifacts, consequences on motor agility and thinking, reflexes on feelings of security and self-confidence.

The discussion and interpretation of the results were made through comparisons between the categories and with results of other researches raised in the literature and theoretical references situated in the field of gerontology.

This study was made possible through funding from the “Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo” (Foundation for Research Support of the State of São Paulo - FAPESP) and from the “Bolsa Estágio de Pesquisa no Exterior” (Internship Program for Research Abroad - BEPE), destined for researchers already linked to the foundation, with studies being developed in the State of São Paulo. In our case, we developed the research titled “Terceira Idade e Novas Tecnologias: Experiências de idosos na apropriação e uso da internet” (Third Age and New Technologies: Elderly Experiences in the Appropriation and Use of the Internet), still in progress, with the participation of elderly people of the “Universidade Aberta à Terceira Idade” (University Open to the Third Age) of the Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” (Paulista State University - UNESP), Campus of Assis.

Results and discussion

Six elderly people enrolled in the Internet course of the “Universidade Aberta à Terceira Idade” were interviewed, being three men and three women. Classes for this course take place on Thursdays, lasting one and a half hour. All have attended the Senior University for at least three years and have taken the computer course for more than two years. Regarding the profile of the participants, the age ranges from 66 to 73 years, and of the six, four are married and live with their respective spouses and two are single, one of which resides with the father and another lives alone. All are retired, but two still exercise paid employment. The study participants were engaged in the following professions: Law Practice, Banking, Nursing and Real Estate Sales.

All have a computer with internet access in their homes. When asked about the use of other instruments and appliances in their home environment, the elderly cited the following items in descending order: television, refrigerator, washing machine, video, dishwasher, computer, microwave, stove, smartphone, toaster and clothes iron. Overall, respondents say they do not find it difficult to use these tools. However, of the devices most frequently used outside the home environment, the elderly chose the cell phone or smartphone and tablet. One of the interviewees said she used an older model of cell phone to make calls because she has not yet fully accustomed herself to the smartphone.

The first contact of the elderly interviewed with the computer occurred in the workspace, as well as with the Internet. Initially, according to reports, everyone knew and handled these tools strictly in the workplace. Over time, they took the custom of using the computer inside their houses. Only one of the elderly interviewed started using the computer for personal use after entering the university's Internet course, when they bought a notebook for the purpose of attending classes to learn how to handle the computer and browse the internet.

About the first contacts with the computer, one of the interviewees said she had felt a marked difficulty in handling the machine, according to her testimony:

“Oh, it was very complicated, for me it was, I still worked using computers, and therefore, I thought this was a monstrosity, so to say, an absurdity for me and I even wrote in some surveys, 'The computer for me is a Seven-headed beast', because it was very complicated, really.” (I-1).

Difficulties in the use of the computer and the Internet are common among older people, as we have seen in some studies carried out in the Portuguese scenario. Gomes (2014) carried out a study with 25 elderly people from a Portuguese University with the objective of understanding the motivational reasons of the elderly for the search for computer courses for the third age and later analyzed the contributions of this learning to the well-being of the same. According to the research, their main difficulties in the contact with the new technologies are memorization (44%), learning (28%), softwares (12%) and lack of bases (16%). According to Garcia (2001), the difficulties of the elderly in the handling of new technologies are related to resistance fear and of learning to use these tools, because they believe that they will use the computer in the wrong way or will cause some damage to the machine. To the author, a strategy to heal this feeling in the elderly is to guide and encourage learning while respecting the time of appropriation of the knowledge of the elderly in the handling of the computer.

Santana & Leeson (2013) argue that younger people generally use electronic devices more easily than the older people, who are not comfortable with handling the technological tools and disbelieve that they have the skills necessary to learn how to use these devices.

Young people belong to a generation born in a highly technological environment, being thus accustomed to live with the most diverse devices full of commands and buttons, especially in the digital format, unlike today's the older generation, who were born in another time and grew in contact with a world the analogic and of valves, technologies that require much more manual effort (Kachar, 2003).

Even with some initial difficulties in the handling of new technologies, we noticed that the elderly have a good disposition for new learning, aiming especially to be able to increase the communication with other people:

“(...)even Facebook, I am still not used to it but I'll try to use Skype more to talk, for example, to Brazil, I can use Skype to talk, but I still don't want very much to use it, but I'll see if I can get used to it because it will be useful to me, even because the calls are free, aren't they?! And now with Smartphones it is even easier, that's it, I'll see if I can use this more.” (I-6).

The speech of this participant leads us to reflect on the reasons that motivate the elderly to look for computer courses, revealing behind every motivation the will and disposition to learn.

Regarding the reasons that led the elderly to seek the Internet course, the main aspects reported are the intention to update themselves and the possibility of social contact. For example, for one of the interviewees, updating existing knowledge and mastering new technologies more quickly is a secondary motive, for he claims he could take the course at a conventional computer school. On the other hand, he ponders that there would not be as many opportunities to interact with other people.

The search for socializing is a fact that has attracted our attention, considering that more than half of the participants are married and live with the spouses. This demonstrates the interest of the population in this study to create other bonds beyond marriage and to expand the network of contacts, while also revealing the importance of social contact among the elderly to reduce the feeling of loneliness.

Rodrigues (2012), in an empirical study similar to ours, could perceive that the elderly of some Senior Universities of the city of Lisbon tend to seek involvement with the UTAs in order to expand their network of contacts, besides the interest in acquiring knowledge; generally, the ties woven in the middle of the University expand beyond the physical limits of the UTA.

When asked about activities routinely carried out through the computer and the internet, respondents said that they use these tools for different purposes, such as surveys of travel, restaurants, text translations, Facebook browsing, reading and writing of emails, banking transactions and even genealogic research.

Although all participants have an account on the social network Facebook, they claim that they do not use social networks very often. Only one respondent uses WhatsApp, while one of the elderlies is unaware of what this smartphone application is and how it works. Another participant has an account in the Twitter and Instagram networks, but hardly accesses them, due to lack of interest. Respondents say they use the internet and social networks to communicate with friends and relatives, but mostly with family members who are physically distant, in other countries or even on another continent.

When asked if they felt changes in their lives after using the computer and the internet to become more frequent in their routines, some claim to notice differences in their lives:

“Yes, I notice, because I spend more time around the computer.” (I-2).

“Yes, although we need to get physically together, because I think this method of communication has greatly dehumanized society, even the young. Young people today impress me, nephews, I already have one at home that is here to work on an internship, and the use of cell phones is impressive, I think it dehumanizes, I prefer direct contact, but I feel this difference, I always prefer personal interactions, for example, I still don’t accept very well if someone wishes me a happy birthday and don’t call me, or don’t meet me, congratulations, happy birthday, like this, but what I see that mostly it’s not so, people do prefer it, it’s faster, and many times riskier because they use the mobile while driving, and get involved in accidents, that’s why I never had it, but I see that it is riskier to youth, to use this kind of communication, and then they become very introverted, almost as if after that they do not know how to live anymore.” (I-3).

The response of the participant I-3 stands out for presenting the point of view of one generation over another, which builds a critique of the cyber habits of young people, as well as Sousa Junior (2015), who reflects on virtual life in contemporary times based on the findings of Zigmunt Bauman. Social life has become increasingly subordinated to network websites, and face-to-face contact has changed to screen-to-screen contact, because virtual contact is available almost everywhere on computers, smartphones and tablets.

And this situation applies mainly to young people and adults, in the words of the author: "we clearly see the dependence of young people on accessing the internet, something that is practically indispensable for those who want to have fun, play games, talk, or something else. But not anymore in a presencial way, like decades ago, but rather for the pleasure of being online." (Sousa Junior, 2015, p. 64).

Other reports of interviewees, on the other hand, point out that they do not notice a difference in their daily lives with the use of the computer and the internet:

"No, no, it's the same thing, it changed a bit because I was, I was working until ten years, nine, ten years ago, and I had more contacts, because I was a nurse, I worked with a lot of people, with whom I had contact, I was never alone; when I went home, I got lonelier, now I go to the university, it already makes up for a lot, so the internet is the complement." (I-4).

"Maybe there are some differences, but I did not notice because I have my normal life, on the other hand, I did not abdicate of things to be in Internet, to use the internet, nor on the other hand, I did not abdicate, but also not, personally I am not to see more things if there was no internet." (I-5).

The two interviewees affirm that for them the internet and the state of "being connected" represents an addition in their social life and not a rule that dominates them, as in the words of Nicolaci-da-Costa (2005, p. 54) about virtual and real relationships: "(...) virtual relationships are a complement to the "real" ones and not a substitute for them".

Concerning the advantages and disadvantages of using the computer and the internet compared to letters and the telephone to communicate, all of the participants admitted that the letter is no longer used and today it has become more expensive than the internet, but, for one of the Interviewee, the internet does not allow us to keep memorable things, unlike letters, that can be stored for a long period of time and revisited as often as we wish.

The observation of this man refers us to another common phenomenon of the technological world: the transformation of physical things into impalpable files. The books are scanned and converted into a PDF file, the songs are MP3 files and the JPG takes the place of photos, all of them data configured and formatted to be stored on computers, tablets, mobile phones and also on the network, today called the "cloud". Such a reflection seems to us common among people of a generation of readers of physical books, of radio listeners and buyers of the vinyl disc, tape cassette and CD, at a time in which photographs were revealed from the negatives of photographic rolls.

Nevertheless, one of the interviewees makes more favorable considerations about the use of the Internet as a means of communication:

"Oh, I see nothing but advantages, you see, because with letters it is very annoying, to have to write the letter, and then buy the stamp, send by mail, etc, no, now the internet, email, sending is instantaneous, much more comfortable." (I-4).

The phone, compared to the internet, is still preferable for two participants, who claim to be more personal and more direct:

"Between phone and internet? I prefer telephone, so if there is a situation that the person needs to solve at the moment, the person uses the phone and not the internet." (I-1).

About the facilities of using the internet, one of the interviewees reported:

"There are advantages, in my case, that are the easiest way, first of all the question of communication with my son that is far away, and then dealing with of some things that we had to go to a public agency, but now on the internet we can do the same thing, even on the trips, we did in the old days, recently I went with my daughter, she's never visited it, and with my wife, we went to Barcelona, and we used the cell phone to buy tickets to the museums, it was much faster, more comfortable, so, in this aspect, it has a lot of advantages, because, before, we used to get there; for example, I went on a trip, in Florence, Italy, I went to a museum, we wanted to visit several places, we ended up going to just two museums, because we had to wait in

huge queues to get the tickets, it was paid, and the internet made it easy, you come, you get it, but at that time we didn't use it yet.” (I-5).

When questioned whether they believe that computers and the Internet help or disrupt social relationships, all the elderly said that they help, but some have made the counterpoint that they can also disrupt or cause discomfort, like being insulted on the internet, suffer bullying or provoke a physical distance between people.

“On one hand yes, but on the other hand I find counterproductive the abusive use of hours that many young people and even those not so young spend on the internet. (...) There isn't anymore that presence that used to exist in the past, people go all in their own world, listen to music, to anything, and sometimes even think like this, "we are really in a world where people are actually present but are absent at the same time, because they are not there”, they are not there, they are not there in the bus, they are somewhere else, that is what I think is strange, I think it's strange because I think the internet is not just the internet, because some people say that people are dependent on the internet and this is also a disease, that's what I think. But I think that, too, why not, people have to connect with those who are next, too, it is not sitting side by side without being there, they're not there, they're absent, they're in their own world, they're watching what they want, I do not know, I do not know if I did explain.” (I-6).

In the excerpt, from the interview number 6, we see the concern of the elderly with young people and adults about the unbridled use of new technologies that sometimes take over most of the life span of these age groups, who are much more dedicated to virtual relationships in the detriment of real ones, and immersed in cyberspace. As Sousa Junior (2015) warns, there are people who, when browsing the internet, "dive" into the network and spend nights and dawns immersed in this environment, becoming addicted and dependent on life in the virtual space.

Based on an empirical study, Leitão and Nicolaci-da-Costa (2005) warned of an increase in the number of clinical cases involving abusive use of the Internet and indicated that some young people and adults feel safe to represent characters in virtual space and build loving relationships, just as one of the interviewees expresses such an aspect in his speech:

“It can, can, can help, but it also has its pernicious side, so we know that even in relationships that sometimes come from the internet, things are a bit crooked, therefore, but there is a way for this situation, it's one thing to talk in person and even then we are deceived, talking through the computer, through the cell phone, a social network, you cannot see, and besides not seeing, there is something very important, that a person in front of a computer is something impersonal, and a person is able to say things that personally, maybe because of cowardice, so those people who have, who do this already in bad faith, maybe in person wouldn't say it, and in front of the computer write or say it, because since it is impersonal you can say everything, therefore, it has advantages, it has many advantages, but also you have to be quite careful, as in almost all other situations, you have to be quite careful in what, always confirm everything that technology gives us.” (I-5).

All the elderly interviewed stated that they had a good relationship with young people, despite the fact that contact was not frequent and that it occurred more to the family level, with grandchildren and other young people in the parental environment. At the Universidade Sénior Contemporânea, the teachers are in the age group corresponding to 38 to 46 years old, and thus the Portuguese elderly have few opportunities to establish intergenerational relationships. With regard to the coexistence with people of the same age, everyone admits that the conviviality is satisfactory and the University is characterized as an environment that encourages contact with other people and maintenance of social life.

Conclusion

The elderly people interviewed in this study bring very pertinent views and meanings to the use of the internet and social networks by the aged, especially if we consider the forms of sociability between them.

Portuguese seniors are looking for the services of the University especially to socialize with peers of the same age and other people who do not belong to the family environment. Thus, what actually interferes in the sociability of the Portuguese elderly is the social interactions at a physical level in the spaces of the University or in the moments destined to leisure, in cultural afternoons and tours. Virtual contact exists, although not preponderantly, for this population that is worried about the loss of physical contact due to the direct influence of the new technologies in their daily life, as one participant points out:

“(...) but television today allows people to rewind the program, make a backwards movement to the program, and it allows them to go get it again, you don't need to see it at the time, although we all always like to know things at the moment but you can dine or have lunch without watching television, and then watch the news back, those are things that while the personal encounter passes and is no longer repeatable, the news can be watched later.” (I-5).

We can consider that new technologies do not play a decisive role in the lives of these seniors because everyone is used to dealing with the computer from the work phase of their lives, that is, it is not a novelty able to hold attention for a long period of time. They are in stark contrast with the participants of the research we are developing in Brazil, some of whom had the first contact with computers or internet in the computer classes, a condition that can be attributed by economic factors. The population of a Senior University in a Brazilian small city tends to have lower purchasing power and less professional and academic training when compared to a large city in Europe.

The fact that the use of new technologies does not have a direct impact on the lives of senior internet users interferes also with their virtual habits, that are more interested in developing researches, writing and online banking, and not so much in the use of social networks.

We may suppose that, because the elderly subjects of this research have used the computer for so long in their working life, they may want to enjoy other sociabilities that are not necessarily mediated by the current media. In this sense, the appropriation and the use of technology are supportive of the togetherness with the other, which is built in the search of a clearer and palpable way in the meetings among the elderly in the Senior University of which they are part. As a result, we were able to glimpse, with the research subjects, other possibilities of sociability based on an attempt to balance the virtual world and the more immediate presential reality.

We believe that this study contributed to the possibility of visualizing the different perspectives of one generation over the other (the elderly about the young) regarding the social bonds we create today and the conflicts: the virtual and the real, what does it mean to be with the other, what is valued when we talk about cyber habits. We consider it important that these considerations can be exchanged and debated between generations, so that new learning and new senses can be built in the meetings of the elderly and the young, whether in the virtual or face-to-face environment.

Finally, we understand that research has expanded beyond the mere thinking about the appropriation and use of the computer and the internet. The research data contributed to problematize the links we weave, making us reflect on the resonances of social life, virtual or real, in the processes of subjectivation; thus, we understand that the study can bring contributions to Psychology and related areas.

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Recebido em 05/09/2016

Aceito em 30/12/2016

Bruna Giovanna Buesso da Silva - Undergraduate student of Psychology at Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” (UNESP), campus of Assis.

E-mail: brunabuesso@yahoo.com.br

Mariele Rodrigues Correa – Assistant Professor at Departamento de Psicologia Social e Educacional of the Universidade Estadual Paulista “Júlio de Mesquita Filho” (UNESP), campus of Assis.

E-mail: mariele@assis.unesp.br

António M. Fonseca - Associated Professor at Universidade Católica do Porto (Portugal).

E-mail: afonseca@porto.ucp.pt