## BABEŞ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY FACULTY OF SOCIOLOGY AND SOCIAL WORK



# THE IMPLICATIONS OF USING THE COMPUTER AND THE INTERNET UPON THE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUTH

-Abstract of the PhD Thesis-

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# Youth's social development in the context of PC and internet usage – a theoretical analysis: the thematic structure of the thesis

**Key words**: ommunication, online environment, young people, school preparation, professional integration, identity, social integration

In general, changing social context bring about new challenges in the life trajectory of individuals. In the digital age, using the internet and the personal computer (PC) has become for youth a common occupation having strong interferences with the majority of other fields of activity. As young people gain access to the online environment, the most important aspects of their social development acquire new dimensions, requiring in their turn novel and specific methods of approach. From the very onset of associating the concepts pertaining to the field of social development with those concerning the direct consequences produces as an outcome of using these new technological media, I have identified relevant and differential particularities which indicate the important changes brought about in the period of adolescence and youth perceived as an actual stage of life.

The present thesis approaches the problematic of the implications of using the PC and the internet on the social development of youth in a comparative manner, theoretical and empirical in nature. In the theoretical endeavor I have tried to do a sociological analysis by always making connections between the different aspects identified in the international literature regarding PC/internet usage and their effect on the youth's social development. Hence, I have structured the theoretical part of my thesis in three chapters which summarize in three directions the understanding of youth's social development in the context of PC and internet usage.

*The first chapter* delineates a global vision on the role of introducing information and communication technology in the realm of youth's social development. In the initial stage of configuring the theoretical framework, I have advanced a conceptual explanation of the main elements associated with the focus of the thesis: social development, the period of youth, and using new technologies. Grounded upon these inter-connected elements in the conceptual level, I have developed an analytical perspective on the changes brought about by the transition from adolescence to early adulthood in the social development of the young man or woman (understood in terms of the formation and development) in the context of the digital age. The generation of youths who grew up having at their disposal new technological media

represents a generation of technological ascension which fully explores the benefits brought by this technology, but which is also exposed to the risks it entails (Rollot, 2012). In the context in which, the responsibilities increase with the diversification of challenges, today's youth differentiate themselves from previous generations in terms of increased opportunities (access to knowledge, communication, means of leisure, etc.) but also in terms of the risks and responsibilities (dissemination, selection, and patterns of internet usage) ensuing from these opportunities (Dagnaud, 2011; Ellison et al., 2007). All these variations and challenges which determine clearly visible changes in the youths' life trajectory can ground the development of some new hypothetical models of framing the various stages through which individuals progress in their life (life periods could be thus restructured and categorized differently).

The second chapter focuses especially on the theoretical and empirical evidences of the social development of different categories of youth (students, young people finding themselves in difficult situations) against the background of accessing the online environment. The thesis presents side by side classical theories of social development, insisting on the influence of PC and internet usage. The thesis proceeds, firstly, with presenting the entire development cycle followed by an individual, and then it highlights the patterns of interaction and leisure both in an online and in a real environment. Hence, for the youth of the digital age, new technology represents an important dimension of their existence. The social environment and the virtual one interacts one with each other, in the context in which the virtual world serves as a testing ground for exploring the problems of development in the physical world, such as identity, the formation and the development of relationships, school and/or profession preparation (Subrahmanyam & Greenfield, 2005). Online communication, educational and professional software, the variety of relaxation mechanisms existing in the virtual environment determine multiple consequences in the social development of youths. Also within the reach of this theoretical subdivisions, I have approached the topic of disruptive behavior in the online environment, insisting upon the cases of cyberbullying at the international level, on their associated effects, and on the means of preventing/intervention promoted at the global level. As the last theoretical aspect, in the third chapter, I have highlighted the impact of PC usage on the youths who find themselves in difficult situations. Besides adopting a descriptive and categorizing type of approach (within which I have insisted upon identifying the categories of vulnerable youths), I have emphasized the therapeutic role of the internet in the intervention practice concerning vulnerable youths. Moreover, I have evaluated the direct implications of PC/internet usage on the lives of youths who find themselves in difficult situations.

The category of youths who are in situation of risk includes a vast series of problems which seem to change significantly with the passing of time. In the digital age, the risks and inequalities among youths have sharpened and diversified considerably (Brotcorne et al., 2009). The main risks of exclusion that become clear against this background can be found in four central fields: workplace, professional formation and development, access to information and online services, using the new media of communication, participation in cultural and civic life. Offline youths (those who do not have or have limited access to PC/internet) are facing visible difficulties at the level of school, professional, and social integration, because the requirements of the social-professional-educational environment do not take into account that not every young man and woman has proportional access to the new technology.

In the section comprising the empirical research of the thesis, I have structured the contents in four chapters in which I present how I have planned, gathered, analyzed, and interpreted the data – mainly qualitative data regarding the digitalization of the internet and its consequences over the social life of youths. Hence, in *the fourth chapter*, I have made a systematic analysis at the international level and I have drawn the guiding lines for a type of qualitative research based on grounded theory and computerized qualitative analysis. The systematic analysis from this chapter includes, specifically, the correlation and the analysis of the researches done in the qualitative tradition at the national and international levels, in terms of the following criteria: relevance (inter-connectivity between social development and PC/internet usage), actuality (the analysis of the most recent studies), and interdisciplinarity (the analysis of the phenomenon in an interdisciplinary perspective). The increased dynamic of accessing the internet and the PC can be observed as a central tendency at the general level. The implications of the expansion of the electronic media generate at the social level both positive and negative effects (INS, 2013; IRES, 2011, IWS, 2015).

*Chapter five* details the methodological section of the empirical research, drawing some descriptive elements regarding the novelty of qualitative methods of collecting online data (online semi-structured interview, research objectives, research questions, etc.).

A succinct analysis of the previous research done on the different categories of people using PC has revealed that adolescents and youths are the subjects who use most frequently the PC, the internet, and online communication media (Shield & Kane, 2011, Regan & Steeves, 2010, IRES, 2011). In this regard, the research sample has been made out of 65 subjects, with ages between 18 and 26 years. Fifty-three were undergraduate (B.A. level) or

graduate students (M.A. students) from Babes-Bolyai University, while twelve were youths who grew up in residential centers from Cluj county. Sampling was conventional, depending upon the consent and the availability of the students in answering the questions they were asked. The goal of the research was to analyze the implications of using the PC in general, and of the internet in particular, on the social development of students and youths who grew up in residential centers. The main objectives were: to highlight the purposes and specificities of using the PC/internet among the investigated youths; analyzing the types and patterns of communication forming online between students; exploring the influences of communicating online on the interaction between youths with their fellows from the social environment; analyzing the formation of youths' social identity as they were using the internet; identifying the connections between the messages posted online on various social networks and their life experiences; exploring how using the PC/internet influences students' school and professional preparation; analyzing the inter-relationship between social context of the life trajectory of youths raised in residential centers and the (non)usage of PC/internet.

Interpreting and analyzing the data with the software of computerized qualitative analysis Atlas.ti7 led to identifying seven categories of content: the purposes and particularities of using a PC, characteristics and influences of virtual communication in contrast to face-to-face communication, the formation and development of identity within social networks, the role of the PC/internet in preparation for school, virtual environment, and the professional preparation of youths; the risks and facilities perceived by the youth in the online environment and patterns of using the PC/internet among the youths who benefited of residential protection. Based on these content categories, in the final section of the thesis I have articulated the theoretical model of the youth's social development in the digital age. This model comprises the inter-relationships between individual particularities, environmental conditions, and their outcomes in the process of social adaptation and integration of the youth. The aforementioned particularities draw in general lines the influences the PC/internet has in the youths' social development. Hence, adequate integration of youth in the social environment (adequate educational/professional development, harmonious relationships) determines an adequate behavior pattern in the online environment, while the problems youths face in the social environment (integration difficulties, communication issues, etc.) are associated with a high risk of disruptive/vulnerable behavior in the online environment (addictive behavior, cyberbullying). The final section of the thesis specifies the limits of the research, indicates future directions of analysis, and closes down with presenting the conclusions and the recommendations developed on the basis of this research.

#### Interpretation and analysis of data: descriptive elements

All content of the data that entered in the qualitative computerized analysis was achieved based on the refinement and special interpretation. The process was segmented into five major categories of content: purposes and particularities of using computer at young students; characteristics and effects of virtual communication related to the "face to face" communication; social networking and identity development; the role of the computer / internet in school efficiency at young students; Internet and the vocational choice / training of young students.

We shall initiate the exposure of the results through a brief analysis of each unit accomplished in parallel through correlation with empirical evidence collected and afterwards we shall explain the concept chart obtained from the refinement of the data through qualitative analysis computer program. The motivation behind the empirical evidence emerged from the data analysis would be performed by using relevant quotations from the interviews and also listing where you can find the index lot of the paragraph in the qualitative analysis computer program Atlas.ti7 followed by the number of assigned hermeneutics unit.

#### Social networks and the development of identity

Social networks are the main resource of allurement for students that is eased by the internet. This chapter will try to explore how the social identity of the young adults emerged from the information they have provided as participants through the interviews and the analysis of their personal social network pages (mainly Facebook). The interference between social identity and virtual identity can be explained with relating it to the goals and motivations of social networks use.

Creating a blog, a facebook account or twitter profile and the activity within these networks enable the need for affirmation and personal expression of the young people. This challenge can be found in the college students' need for popularity. The online environment makes it easier than ever to see the new possibilities of young people' assertion in front of friends and acquaintances:,, it is on fashion, it's tempting and attractive. You can see what others are doing and posting, you can look at the photos and make new friends. Many students became "popular " due to these social networks'' (16.3) The idea of self-image in the online environment is reorganized according to the personal wishes of the student, in order to accede an ideal self and the expectance of others; the nature of the messages posted via social

networks is often real, personal experiences according to lived experiences by the participants in the social environment. Thus through the messages posted in the online environment (the messages are disguisedly in quotes from authors, various songs, or plastic images) the young people externalize their thoughts, feelings or emotions often found in these emotional mechanisms discharge:,, Some friends post things that represent feelings that they go through in those moments, in this way they can express their frustrations, joys or emotions. (489.3,) It mirrors my feelings, though we should not let a social network to influence us in such a manner'' (303.3).

Young people often identify in the social network an anchor, an adjustment mechanism where they have failed to adapt in the social life:,, Sometimes if I want to send a message to a friend and I find it hard to do it, I post on my wall a general message in which I hope, he will see it and interpret it, as an indirect recipient" (325.3). I think that virtual world it is a place of refuge, a place in which you can forget the hardships of society ...'' (137.3). The premise of associating the internet with a mechanism that deals with the problematic situations that the young people are confronting, can lead to an increased time spent online, thereby to addiction of this environment. The analysis of the empirical data revealed that the social identity of the young people is formed and developed based on inherent/extrinsic perception of themselves and promoted as the cornerstone of the behaviour patterns of living. The virtual identity is building/ developing on virtual environment based on the social identity, being a precise view for the young people with a positive self-image, adapted to the social environment in which they live or on the contrary, the view they present to function as a mechanism of readjusting their social identity of the ones who face difficulties in adapting to the social environment (communication difficulties, or barriers in communicating face to face, or youth who have a low self-image, etc.). Within the social networks, the young students found the most attractive learning environment and also a place in which they can develop a virtual identity.

Building the identity in the virtual environment is achieved in the presence of self image (exteriorized in messages, photos, interests and relevant goals) in front of their virtual friend circle. Through the possibility of restructuring the virtual identity, the participants are creating a new environment in which they feel appreciated and accepted by other online members. The youth are associating to the idea of virtual identity, a new environment, identified by the members as a virtual world: "It's sad because in the virtual world you can see things that with or without your permission trigger some expectations, and in the moment you displace a person or his virtual situation into social reality, everything collapses. You do

realize that you do not even know that person, neither his problems. You realize that although in the virtual world you allowed discussions, there were even attempts to be familiar with each other, in front of you is a stranger. It is sad because you look at the people around you and you think they are very happy. I wonder if this approach does not increase the predisposition to depression, especially in the case of teenagers. The virtual identity distorts the perception you have of yourself. Before you take as a good thing what you see on the surface, you should consider that what is on the surface do not coincide with the core" (178,3). Setting up virtual reality seems to disassociate in social reality. The virtual space provides the young generation with the possibility of forming a projective dream of an ideal identity in which you bring the acceptance and recognition in the online environment. The following triad *I-real*, *I-virtual* and *I-ideal* emphasizes the opportunity to "evolve" given by the virtual environment to the young adult. We can excerpt from here three phases of the identity construction during the development of technology in our society. In the context in which technology enables new opportunities for minimizing the plausible reason between what we are and what we can be, it is easy to explain why so many teenagers and young people prefer to stay online a long period of time while they are dramatically reducing their activities carried out in the social reality. The online environment, as a resource of knowledge and friend making, becomes a mask of a false reality for young people, which can lead to disturbing consequences, in the social development of the youth, but also in the formation and development of their own identity. In other words, as long as social reality does not collaborate with the online environment in which the young adult is carrying out his activity, the identity formation and development is being built on the basis of two pawns of fundamental different personality.

Two diametrically different environments (the problematic-reality, the ideal virtuality, qualities/weaknesses of social- I, the virtual-I, the ideal-I) bring interference on the self perception and unsteady the formation of a real self image (you do not know who you are). Amid the dichotomy between what am I (in the social environment) and what I want to become (suited for the virtual environment), the young adult often confronts problems regarding appropriate personal perception of others but also his own, but also finding difficulties when accommodating in the real world, these difficulties are materialized into depression, frustration, isolation and unrealistic expectations: "On my facebook page... sometimes I reveal my frustrations in a general way, from which you can reach to a conclusion...(75,3), "The virtual world is always "polished". Nobody wants to be the target of critics on a social network, so people are struggling to show only happy moments from their

lives. Personally, I think it is an act of cowardliness to pretend something that you are not"(214,3). The virtual environment it is seen by the young generation from the perspective of another reality ("virtual world") which can be divergent or convergent with the social reality (with the social reality in which they belong).

If virtual identity constitutes a niche for the development of socio-personal identity of the young people then we can say that the virtual environment constitutes an opportunity of learning and enrichment with life experiences, with positive implications in the harmonious development of their personality. But the data collected in this research shows that few young people are willing to be perceived in the virtual environment just the way they are perceived in the social one: "We use the social networks to create a better self-image of ourselves that we share it with the people we know; to share faster all kinds of thoughts and things that we like at the moment" (0,75,3) ",... to be on trend, to show much more than in reality, it is easier to be in the back than in front stage, sometimes on the social networks takes place a transformation of what you are or what you think you are just by wanting, which is in fact a mood, a need which is necessary to be accomplished because you want others to see what do you think they want to see."(119,3). This fact displays a lot of problems whereby the young people are confronting in the social context of life as a result of the opportunity they found in the online environment and which entailed deformation or even creating uncertainty upon their perception and their role that they should exercise in the social environment. On this basis often are build disruptive behaviour patterns, frequently encountered at teenagers and young people such as: addictive behaviour, delinquency and social mal adaptation.

#### The role of the computer in school preparation of young students.

School preparation is an inherent part of social development of the young students, it represents a prerequisite for a desirable development and a foundation for the professional development of the student. Along with the identification of the positive effects associated with the introduction of interactive media in the vast majority of human activities, the role of computer started to vary. Using the computer (interactive media) within the educational process, it is known to bring a positive effect in the course of time. The way the young people perceive the computer and internet in the school preparation process indicates largely the coordinates of the readjustment of school learning requirements brought by the new technology.

One of the main purposes for which students are using the computer is an educational one. The role of the computer in school preparation is perceived differently by the participants according to their educational level, displaying an important increase as the level of education is higher: "The computer is a *sine qua non* object as the Latin says - without you can not be – in nowadays, especially if you are a student. You must be always in touch with your colleagues, you must be informed or you must find useful information about your exams" (255,1). The positive effects of introducing the electronic means into the learning sphere as they are perceived by the students can be found in: the particularities of class management (professor-student interaction and restructuring the educational process), teaching means and strategies (academic resources electronic/online), improve learning process by increasing the access to documentation and information regarding scientific content, facilitating information regarding the organization of educational approach and school results obtained.

At the level of class management, students recall the importance of computer and internet use in interaction with educational actors (professor- student, student- professor) and the media resources which supports the entire educational process. The online communication between professors and students or simply between the students is perceived by the participants like a growing mechanism providing information regarding educational activities and thus as a resource of improvement in the quality of teaching: "The internet and the computer are helping me a lot. I can watch quite a few studies on projects that I am working on, I can contact professors or my smart colleagues, I can surf for pages, I can order books...."(154,4). The improvement in technology of education in the teaching strategies is seen from the perspective of educational actors as an efficient learning (the access to scholar documents in electronic format reduces the material and time costs: the internet facilitates access to various information in no time): "...the internet is much more practical nowadays in schools. We, the students, are fascinated by the computer because it helps us in finding much more quicker the information we need" (222,4). The use of computerised programs (Office suite or other educational/scholar expert software) are seen by the students as a support resource in their academic preparation, often being academic requirements imposed: "The majority of projects we work on are requiring Microsoft Office suite. Lately I used Microsoft Word and Power Point in doing home works, presentations, so I was saying, the computer is almost compulsory" (107,4). Facilitating the information regarding the organization of teaching staff and the school results obtained is carried out with both virtual interactions between the main educational actors (professors- student, student- professor) and also through new computer software (academic platforms, web pages) which allow students the access to information: finding out the time schedule, information regarding school results, scientific conferences or any other relevant issues regarding students life:"In preparing for school I use the computer for documentation, for reading specialized articles, for reading books, to find out the schedule or other relevant information regarding courses"(141,4).

Although most participants mentioned especially positive effects of computer use on school education, the content analysis of all empirical data captured is raising some concerns by involving technological resources in teaching (felted more strongly in the learning part). The circulation of electronic information in the educational behaviour, often leads young students choosing online teaching materials. The quality of information from different websites which students are accessing is frequently not scientifically valid, which leads to inefficient learning and assuming a status of building-up inefficient information. Participants that have a rather holistic approach to computer and internet use in their academic life remind the fact that they are getting rid of the traditional educational methods (books, handwriting, etc.) these could have negative effects both in the quality of school education (shallow knowledge) as well as the psycho-social level (diminishing confidence in its own strength and poor social interactions). To impose the solution of academic requirements with computer's help had restructured the learning process of college students and sometimes had determined the students to use it in other purposes for a long time: "I believe that for some students, the computer had a positive impact... but unfortunately for some students the computer influenced them in a negative way because spending large amounts of time in front of the it, playing or just doing stuff, they did not do anything just wasting time or taking a step back in their learning process, because the internet provided them with finite information and they only had to copy and then paste without knowing what was written in those documents, papers" (200,4)

School preparation alongside professional, social integration, maintaining and developing relationships with various actors sets the bases of social development of young people. The interference, which academic life brings to youth development, influences the whole course of the development of a future adult. The improvement in technology of education and the increasing implication of media resources in the process of education can determine the young people to substitute the exacerbated importance of computer and other aspects of day-by-day life. On this line, promoting a technological culture in school or educational institution in which the teenager or young person operates can induce an increase in importance of technological means and in other aspects of life trajectory of the young adult (communication, relations development, etc). In this direction, it is very important that the educational actors responsible with the policies and the educational curriculum to be aware of

the effects of using the internet/computer in designing the educational process. The role of teachers is to support the student into maximizing the positive effects of computer use and to mitigate the disturbances associated with the use of computers in the teaching process.

#### The Internet and the career choice / training at young students

One of the most important challenges for the social development of youth is adapting to the new roles that transition to adulthood undergoes, the choice for career it is one of them. For many young adults, following an academic training (by going to university) prolongs their time in which they have to deal with new challenges of integrating their vocational choice. In this research, we analyze how students perceive the influence of computer and internet in choosing, training their professional development, in terms of a projective way (a student who will look for a job) or a more implicit outlook (a student who is working).

The participants of this research often recall the role of the internet in choosing a career, especially because most participants are in the preparation stage of professional integration. College students identify the support that internet has on career choice by the various information you can find online or through the various career opportunities and job offers: " On the internet you can easily and quickly access websites that provide jobs, and you can choose what do you want to work" (001, 5); "...With a single click you can find accurate details about a job and it is faster than if you would spend time going and asking about the job and the employee would not be able to answer you..." (118.5). Young people have a more easier contact with the labour market due to the internet use, the advantages of using the internet in searching for a job go further in the time management and reduced costs in terms of information, selection and prioritization of available jobs:, You avoid walking to companies with a stack of resumes, so you save time. Further more, the offers are various and numerous, while giving you the possibility to obtain information on the internet or from other customers" (112.4)

The quality of information regarding the job offers must be checked in terms of validity and you must follow if the employer's company is updating professional opportunities: "We are allowed to reach unlimited number of websites or posts, which you can access in order to satisfy your own desires. But beware, the information is not always true, or updated, so that failure could be close at hand in obtaining the information we need" (103.5).

This online environment is a real support throughout the hiring process: information about job offers and the institutions that are employing candidates, the preparation of the candidate to meet the requirements and skills for the job, facilities and development support with CV, direct connection between employer and candidate, opportunity for interviewing online, access to forums that promote training and development of professionals. The computer and the internet are seen as important resources, even compulsory in the workplace because they support the vocational training and the development of young students:,, The computer nowadays is no longer a fad, but a necessity, the computer came bundled with the internet. We can observe more and more people that are communicating through social networks, reading online books or documents, writing e-mails, store documents and pictures that are important to them, working from home or from office with the computer, etc. And I find myself in every situation above mentioned , I need computer service because you have to make reports and to send them to my boss'' (241.1);

In this core of roles that computer has during students lives, we recall the one in which internet function as a financial resource:,, ... I started to use the computer in 1999- 2000 in those days was just a source of entertainment, as I grew older I understood that this device can help you learn new things, but also can bring an additional income, so I started creating web pages to promote certain services'' (321.1).

The access to the online environment for young adults come up with more opportunities for their integration and training. For the majority of jobs that require a university training the computer is compulsory. Although college students recognize the importance of internet facilities throughout the selection process and vocational training. Also the fact they were faced with dangers and abuses in the virtual environment draw the attention of specialists. The information about the abuses and downfalls in the virtual environment on professional or other domains destined to young people should be the premise of prevention programs in educational institutions, employing firms or other organizations that support the socio-professional integration of young people.

# A comparative analysis of the purposes and results of the national and international research

The studies that analyze the features and implications of computer /internet on individual development were broaden with the spread of technology. The concern of scholars for this new field of study is lately relevant in the context of which the computer and the online environment has become an important resource for the individual that spends a lot of time surfing.

Accessing the online environment through available technological resources (computer, phone, pad, etc.) it is for youth, today, one of the main activities through which they practice their daily tasks in social, educational or professional. The literature in this area that have assessed the influence of the Internet on social development have revealed conflicting results. We identified two trends in literature that try to explain the central role of computer/internet in the social development of young people. The first idea spread in theoretical and empirical studies on the consequences of computer use underlines the benefits brought by these digital means upon the entire process of individual and social development (Coakes & Willis, 2002; Louage, 2006; Khanchali, Zidat, 2011; Balakrishnan, 2010; Purcell Buchanan & Friedrich, 2013; Sponcil & Gitimu, 2011; Becker & Becker, 2008). Altogether, these studies capture important issues (which we shall discussed later) of the computer and internet, we can see clearly the support of the new technological devices in the integration and social development, educational or professional of the youth. The second direction in which we can study the impact of the computer / internet use in the social development of young people it is opposite from what we discussed so far. There are various studies that contain the negative effects of the online environment over the entire course of the development of individuals, especially among teenagers and young people (Huitt, Dawson, 2011; Allison et al., 2006; Gentile, 2009; Griffiths, Davies, Chappell, 2004; Hauge & Gentile, 2007; Supaket et al., 2009; Zamani et al., 2007). The negative effects of the computer / internet use are associated with a dysfunctional behaviour related on the time spent at these interactive media. The negative effects of accessing the online environment are related to a long time spent in the virtual environment or to a disruptive behaviour experimented online (addiction, abuse, bullying / harassment, etc). We can see the association of the type of effect induced by the computer is related to a functional/dysfunctional extrinsic indicator. In other terms, the positive effects of accessing the internet are related with a moderate use, while the disadvantages of the social development of young people are felt by those who will spend an increased time or will adopt a disruptive behaviour in the interactive media.

The analysis and the interpretation of data of this research has identified a third direction of approaching the computer's implications upon the social development of young people, this approach does not exclude relevant theories like the two above discussed, but rather add up by identifying and correlating other intrinsically indicators that influence individuals. As we have discussed, it is known theoretically and empirically demonstrated that the Internet and computer has provided advantages and disadvantages to the whole process of social and individual development. The scholar studies analyzed above have focused on grasping only external issues related to the virtual environment (the time spent, the behavioural pattern). This study captured the extrinsic particularities experimented by the individual online, but also the intrinsic particularities of the individual that have an important role in shaping the pattern of implications of using internet /computer on social development. If by extrinsic pattern we understand behaviour pattern directly related to the online environment, the intrinsic pattern it stands for the individual behaviour and the impact upon the social environment. For this purpose, a better integration of young people in the social environment (proper communication, healthy relationships, academic/ professional development, etc) entails a suitable behaviour pattern in the online environment, while the issues that they are facing in the social environment (the difficulty of integration, communication problems, etc.) are associated with an increased risk of online disruptive/vulnerable behaviour (addictive behaviour, cyber-bullying). We can bring evidence, about the reliability of this theoretical statement, by referencing it to studies that showed that teenagers/young people from disadvantaged families (who are supposedly more vulnerable in social integration) have a higher risk of experiencing the negative effects of using the computer/internet by adopting an addictive or a victim behaviour in online environment (Yen et al., 2007, Radacina, 2013; Davis et al., 2013). The theoretical conclusion is based on the data of this research. In the following, we shall analyze the premises that stand on this study by comparing our results with the results of other national/international studies that aim of finding key aspects of social development of young people.

One of the most important aspects of social development is social identity. It seemed that the social networks are increasingly accessed by teenagers, the way in which they are developing their social identity within these networks is an area of interest for scholars (Boyd & Ellison, 2007; Sponcil & Gitimu, 2013 Tufekci, 2008; Sheldon, 2008; Quan-Hasse & Young, 2010; Pempek et al., 2009; Urist et al., 2009; Jiang, Bazarov, & Hancock, 2011; Allen

et al., 2010, Anderson et al, 2010; His & Larose, 2008). The virtual identity is based on social identity, it is a truthful projection for the young adults with a positive self-image, or a readjusting mechanism for the ones with difficulties in adapting to the social environment (communication difficulties, barriers in communication face to face, low self-image, etc.). There are other studies that had highlighted the importance of social networks in building the identity and social development of young adults, these studies support the results of this research (Gosling et al. 2007). Through personal profile the young adults provide information about them, this extrospection is a way of expressing identity and the way how young adults want to be perceived by others (Pempek et al., 2009). Another study showed that the ideal self projection in the virtual environment helps improve online self-esteem but also improve it in social reality (Urist et al., 2009).

As a segment of social development the academic preparation is an important step in the development of the young adult. The computer/internet use throughout the educational process is a necessity and a real support for both students and teachers. (Coakes & Willis, 2002; Jones et al., 2008; Allen & Seman, 2005; Lenhart et al., 2010).

The main functions of using the internet /computer in the educational process are found both in the skills that students acquire and the level of teaching (Balakrishnan, 2010; Charp, 2000; George et al. 2006). The findings of the current study are consistent with other research in the field. Studies have shown the main functions of the computer/internet use in preparing for school (for teenagers and students): it is an exhaustive resource of information, they can communicate without barriers, it can provide interactive online learning, online research done by electronic means, newsfeed, enhancing interest in education, it promotes a holistic education, it provides various teaching and learning methods (Lenhart et al., 2010; Khanchali & Zidat, 2011).

Altogether with the benefits associated with using the internet/computer in the educational process we have identified a number of negative factors that can create real barriers in training school students. The use of new technologies in the academic writing process creates ambiguity between the formation and the development of different writing styles (formal and informal) so that students are unsure whether using formal or informal writing (we can recall difficulties in writing official or scientific works) (Purcell, Buchanan & Friedrich, 2013). Another problem faced by students due to the use of digital resources in writing scientific works is plagiarism or avoiding the rules of writing standard works but also problems with spelling and/or grammar (ibid.). Likewise these aspects confirmed by international research, the current study identified that the disposal of traditional teaching

(books, handwriting, etc.) can have negative effects both in the quality of school education (superficial knowledge) and psychological social level (low self-confidence and little social interactions). Recording the academic requirements with computer reorganized the learning process of students and sometimes led to the use of computer for other purposes for a long period.

As a next step in the journey of the youth's life, the choice for professional education and training is an important part of social development. The internet facilitates information today more than ever, training for vocational or employment (Chao, Oslo, 2007; Davis, 2009; Becker & Becker, 2008). The internet facilitates finding/choosing a profession it provides data information about employers' expectations and other aspects. In this setting, it outlines a better connectivity between the employer and the potential employee. The employer has the option to submit the requirements of the job before a wide range of potential customers. Despite this, the current study and other international studies have shown that most youth prefer information and support provided directly (face to face) rather than through technological means (Becker & Becker, 2008). Although the internet offers many opportunities, training for vocational, research in this area shows that the employment of young adults has lower rates than in the last decade (Davis, 2009). This is due to the extension of learning background (at least university level), the continuity of parental support and the access to online information about various jobs (Chao, Oslo, 2007).

Besides the benefits that the internet provides in training and professional development, there are international research which indicates negative effects associated with skills at the workplace of young adults who are using the Internet very much. We shall discuss in parallel the negative effects of the internet in the process of choosing/preparing and developing a professional training highlighted both in the current study and in other international studies. The impact of internet addiction generates negative effects in the individual particularities and efficiency at work, young adults using the Internet in an inappropriate way recorded weaker performance at work (Davis, 2009). Many employers have recognized that unlimited Internet use reduces the potential for employment rather than to increase productivity (Davis, 2009). A particular issue identified in this research is the fact that young adults feel threatened in accessing web pages of employers via internet. Cyber abuse is perceived and described by the young students from the perspective of mistaken information about jobs or professional blackmail from which some institutions attract customers alluring them with false jobs or unrealistic job opportunities.

Youth grown up in residential centres represent a category of the youth found in difficulty confronting problems of integration determined by the risks and inequalities brought by the digital era. Thereby, the main aspects met in studies about utilizing new technologies by youth who have been/are institutionalised aim in particular, inequalities that can appear based on shortage of calculator and internet access, on the other hand, aim in particular the risks they can confront in online medium (Brotcorne et al., 2009-Helsper & Reisdorf, 2009).

Digital inequalities with the young people who have been qualified for special protection of residential type smack in the fund of disadvantages given by the socio-economic background of the medium they lived. These inequalities have been installed in the access shortage to adequate technical equipment – the presence of a computer for a large number of children, lack of internet connection, difficulties given by incomplete knowledge in informatics. There have been identified significant associations between the low educational level of individuals, low incomes and lack of standard access/usage of new technology tools of communication and information (Helsper, 2011). The upbringing of an individual in a medium which did not value the use of technological resources (as in the case of institutionalised youth) can determine low interest for computer and internet usage or can be associated with the settlement of a technologic discomfort that is smack in the incomplete fund knowledge in the field of information and communication technology (Reisdorf, Axelsson & Söderholm, 2012).

Another reference point of analysis in the usage of internet/computer among children and youth grown up in residential centres sets up the exploring of risks and the identification of mechanisms reducing negative effects provided by virtual medium. Adolescents and young people who belong to a disadvantaged family background can face with high risks regarding electronic abuses. In this sense internationally exist series preventing programs of risks and inequalities occurred in digital era that address diverse categories of vulnerable children and young people. Programs are implemented at institutional level (as example in residential centres) as at online medium within the framework of specialised websites that provides information and support in the matter of forming and developing an adequate behaviour in cyber environment. In promotion guides and practices of safe usage of the internet the accent is on the caretakers and social workers from residential centres with the purpose of preventing some inadequate behaviours that might disturb the wellbeing of children or young people. In case of caretakers the informing, preventing, supervising and recognition of cybernetic abuse cases by the social workers are successful assumptions in intervention addressed to children/youth grown up in residential mediums (Farmer & Johnson, 2012).

As for the analyses of usage features of internet and computer at youth grown up in residential centres the research has been performed on a group of 12 respondents who grew up in different residential centres form Cluj County and/or in neighbour counties. In this sense the used method of research was the qualitative semi-structured type interview. The respondents were aged between 24 and 32, having different educational, occupational and marital status. On educational standing most of them have graduated arts and crafts schools, and regarding marital status the majority of respondents were unmarried. The indicators referring to professional standing, capture the fact that most of the respondents work as labourers within factories with different specialisations. Far from willing to create a profile of the institutionalised young person, these descriptive indicators were used only to form an overview image concerning the respondents' features taken into account in the research sequence. Also we could identify the fact that even though there are young people grown-up in residential centres for a short period, most of them grew up in numerous centres throughout their lives. This section of the research sought to follow the social route defined by the mentioned indicators in correlation with implications determined by the (not) use of computer and internet on their life course until present.

The methodological approach to this part of the research is subscribed in methodological guidelines used for the extensive part of the research which analyses the implications of computer and internet usage over social development of youth: interrelations analysis between social contexts of life route of young people grown up in residential centres and (not) use of computer/internet. However, the collection type was differential, the research method and interpretation of data's are the same (use of emerging theory and data processing through qualitative analysis computerised program Atlas.ti7). Within this corpuscle of the research we have tried to answer to the question formulated initially regarding the analysis of interrelations between life route social contexts of youth grown up in residential centres and (not) use of computer/internet.

After data processing in qualitative analysis computerised program Atlas.ti7 have resulted for this segment of the research two fundamental categories of content: computer/internet usage patterns and difficulties versus contributing factors of computer/internet usage at youth beneficiated in residential type protection system. We present every resulted category in turn, proving the main ideas revealed through empiric evidences provided by respondents and making permanent reference to general setting of the research in a comparative view.

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#### Computer and internet usage patterns among youth grown up in residential centres

For young people grown up in residential centres the access to computer/internet was restricted. Respondents have confronted lack of access determined either by the insufficient electronic equipment, either their inexistence in the centres they lived in:

"...at school, we had computer, later we had one in the centre in one room, where all of the children gathered and we could stay for 2 hours, we did not know the password to the computer and we couldn't stay more, because we wanted" (R1,009)

"...we did not have access to computer in the centre..." (R3, 093)

" In the centre where I lived we did not have computer and I could not work on it. When I moved with my friend, he helped me to learn on it. He helps me very much, always encouraging me..." (R10, 443)

,, From the age of 11 I used computer, every child was allowed to stay a while in front of it." (R12, 538)

Based on the lack of computer/internet access or reduced utilization opportunities of these new means in residential centres, two behavioural patterns have been developed by the respondents so they can facilitate access to electronic medium. For children from centres the opening of internet cafes and internet rooms represented a way to spend time, to familiarize with electronic equipment and to develop electronic skills. In case of children who had restricted access and existed only one computer or a few computers in the room they spent daily activities, to facilitate access, there were cases when children expressed violent behaviour. This fact highlights that children who have faced inequalities occurred in digital era tend to facilitate themselves the access through disruptive behaviours likewise, violence. On the base of inequalities faced by children grown up in residential centres we can also explain the existence of dysfunctional behavioural patterns. It is noticeable that the lack of computer/internet access can determine rivalry that can generate instauration of violent behaviours:

"At 9 years old, I went to club and played games, losing my nights. I went with friends, and stayed much. I was a child, dreaming to have a car, to have weapons, to run a business. Because I was playing games helped me, now I handle better the computer. After I grew up I bought laptop..." (R1, 009).

"Around 14 years old, I stood for the first time in front of a computer in an internet room. When internet rooms opened, every child were there. We did not have at the centre…" (R8, 326).

"When I was little, I liked games very much. All of us were fighting for computer. I was beating with the children just to get to stay at the computer. We had a bigger room where we had one computer. We were just a few children in group, on modules. I did not allow anyone to computer, I was playing the game Mario. I really enjoyed it, we concentrated heavily. I also felt I was moving with the little man onwards..." (R2, 033).

The incomplete informatics knowledge of youth grown up in residential centres is considered as a sparking factor of frustrations and fears that can inhibit even more the desire of further training in informatics:

"I've started now for the first time with internet. On the computer I was staying in the centre when they made us to draw, told us the components of the computer. It's the first time when I work on computer at the company, printing labels, scanning. I saw from others, I checked after others, and I memorised, and now I know everything. For the first time I was afraid, but now since I learnt it is fine. I was afraid not to make a mistake, not to allow viruses on it. I have a lot more to learn on computer, to make files, a lot, but this way I learnt something..." (R11, 47)

An important characteristic of computer/internet usage at young people coming from residential centres is associated to usage motivation as consequence of facilitating what these offer (it is identified somewhat similarity with usage patterns and motivations of students). Internet perception as a coping mechanism is performed through identifying different opportunities of these electronic means (informing, relaxing, model identifying, problem solving). Very interesting fact, unlike young students who mention the support they get based on computer usage, young people who grew up in residential centres emphasises the importance of computer and online resources in overcoming problems and adaptation to social medium. Another factor of computer/internet usage associated with a coping mechanism is considered the facilitator element of ideals/dreams projection. Besides, respondents who had restricted access to computer in childhood can present tendency of extensive use which is installing on the herd effect background: "We have learnt to stay a lot on facebook, we are all day on it. It is trendy. I feel good when I see I am helped, I come home, open up my laptop, forget troubles, very soon I'm back on my feet" (R10, 448).

In terms of risks and facility factors of internet usage with youth beneficiated special residential type protection it is noticeable similarity elements with hazards mentioned at young students. The difference consists in naïve attitude regarding to harmfulness of youth found in difficulty given by the unawareness of risks.

In order to elaborate the theoretical model of explicitness in social development of young adult in the context of digital generation we used the qualitative analysis soft Atlas.ti7. The model operates with 4 core concepts of social development: extrinsic indicators of the medium, individual intrinsic indicators, adaptation/integration difficulties and adequate social integration/development. Besides the concepts of social development, the elaborated theoretic model has three concepts having in view the electronic medium: digital risks/inequalities, dysfunctional behavioural pattern in online medium and desirable usage of computer/internet.

In the context of digital generation of young adult the social development theoretic model captures the interrelations between individual particularities, environment conditions and resultants of these in adaptation process and social integration of young adult who broadly directs the influences that computer/internet will have in social development. As it was mentioned in analysis and correlation part of national and international studies, an adequate integration of youth in social medium (adequate academic/professional training, balanced relationships) determines an adequate behavioural pattern in online medium, while the problems lived by youth in social medium (integration difficulties, communication problems etc.) are associated with a high risk of disruptive/vulnerable behaviour in online medium (addictive conduct, cyber-bullying type behaviour). Thereby, facilitating an adequate social development in real plan will promote implicitly computer/internet usage in purpose of desirable social development of youth.

Approaching the issue of boundaries in the conducted research there are also mentioned new directions proposed for actual research. First identified boundary is in the exhaustiveness of the topic which had direct implications throughout the data analysis and interpretation process. Social development domain of youth correlated to the issue of computer/internet usage constitutes vast elements of research and analysis. As we have noticed, social development includes a series of different aspects that are indeed correlated, but must analyse particularly (forming and developing of relationships, academic, professional training etc.). Also, studying aspects related to computer and internet usage constitutes a large topic in actual research, due to multiple facilities offered by these means and which rapidly develops. Regarding to specific particularities (likewise social networks, use of educational soft, etc.) in terms of different person categories (children, teenagers, youth etc.) represent important factors of knowledge.

Another identified boundary is given by qualitative research pattern found at the sampling level and research method (convenience sampling, online interview and mentioned boundaries) but also at the level of data analysis and interpretation (issue of generalisation and conclusion extension for other person categories in studied population).

We have identified the necessity of proposing new directions in research that reveal the following:

- performing researches to have in view specific aspects of social development in correlation with internet usage for well-defined categories;
- conducting research that analysis effects of implanting intervention and prevention programmes in purpose of promoting a desirable behaviour in online medium.

Last part of the thesis draws out final conclusions and few recommendations resulted on the base of systematic scientific literature analysis and conducted empiric research.

Social development of youth who live in different life backgrounds has to correlate permanently with environmental factors. The new era of information and communication technology continues to translate in a galloping pace the possibilities, facilities and risks that installs as a consequence of electronic means usage. It is obvious that social development of youth has to be studied parallel with socio-cultural background in which exists. The present research captured some essential elements of social development of youth from digital generation

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## **Conclusions:**

Theoretical conclusions	Practical conclusions
• Fast spread of digital means leads to	Virtual space offers more and more
important changes in individuals' life	exploring methods for social science
route.	researchers of the reality through the
• As nationally and internationally,	internet, so that new methodological
youth represent the part of	approaches seems to build a real culture of
population that uses computer and	virtual research studies.
internet on increasingly high scales.	• The increasing of internet usage as social
• The usage of computer/internet	medium where people form and keep social
might represent one of the reasons	relations has diversified the number of
for adolescence has been extended in	websites for research through "virtual type"
digital era.	database collection.
• More diverse challenges appear, the	• Implementation of personal development
more responsibilities will grow,	programmes, of psych-socio-professional
youth distinguish from previous	consultants, project organisations and
generations in their increased	activities that develop pro social behaviour
opportunities (access to knowledge,	at youth by the institutions they belong
communication, means to spend	ought to be a priority, which obviously
leisure time, etc.) but also in risks	would lead to beneficial results as
and responsibilities (dissemination,	personally (self-esteem growth, psycho-
informational and internet usage	social abilities improvement, etc.) as macro-
patterns selection) that arise from	socially (social integration, academic
these facilities.	performance also at work place, increasing
• Social medium and virtual space	living standards, social solidarity etc.).
interferes mutually, in the sense that	Adequate use of communication through
online world serves as an exploration	internet that supports social development of
field for developing issues in	young adult involves respect of certain
physical world, likewise identity,	parameters: safe online communication,
forming and developing	reporting more favourable ratio of virtual
relationships, scholar or professional	communication towards to face-to-face type
training.	communication, sent/received message
• The issue of disruptive behaviour in	characters in virtual medium and analysis of
online medium is relevant if we look	relation type formed through online
at the incidence of cyber bullying	communication.
cases internationally and the effects	• Safety in online communication refers to
associates to these disruptive	risk prevention associated to virtual medium
behavioural patterns.	and awareness of young people about the
• Computer and internet represent a	identity of the persons they communicate
space for youth that determines more	with.
and more controversial valences in	• More favourable report of virtual
social development sphere,	communication towards face to face type
especially results from dichotomy	communication implies a controlled time
factors (benefits and risks) that arise	management.
from these. Implementing national	• In order to capitalize positive effects and
and international programs that	minimize the problematic aspects associated
promote an adequate cybernetic	to social networks usage it is important, that
behaviour represents an important	teenagers, young people and even children
factor in conducting a desirable	to benefit in prevention programmes and

social development at youth.

- Classical theories over social development (initiated by Erikson, Vygotsky, Bowlby and Bandura) approached parallel with influences of computer and internet usage reveal new particularities that installs in youth lives in digital era.
- Extensive use of computer/internet represents a new vulnerability situation met among children and youth can be explicit in the light of traditional sociological theories addressed to understanding social problems.
- Anomy theory, social disorganisation theory and social learning theory can be used to prove a possible sociological explanation in the existence of a new dependency form, likewise computer or internet addiction.
- Information and communication technology can facilitate autonomy of some young people, but in same time it can contribute to exclusion of disadvantaged youth groups by creating digital inequalities.
- On long term, the lack of computer/internet use or restricted access to new technological means, determines inequalities given in scholar, professional training sphere, that have direct effect over social development of young people.
- However the spread of digital means is evident and in galloping pace, more and more statistic dates and studies (some of them presented in this writing) show that we assist an unequal spread, that determined multiple risks and brings in attention a new type of inequality (digital inequalities).

nurture forming an adequate cybernetic behaviour.

- Research development in cybernetic type behaviour can lay the groundwork to some specific theories that will explain the adequate or disruptive behavioural conducts in terms of access and usage of new electronic means.
- The presence of inequalities in digital era and the increasing harmful incidents associated to use of internet among vulnerable youth should be considered as a point of interest nationally and for actual research.
- Increasing identification methods for facilities and reducing risks of inadequate computer/internet usage among adolescents and young people is a challenge for researchers in domain. Implementing prevention programmes in cybernetic abuse and internet addiction becomes support for young people through facilitating social integration.
- Youth information about abuses and traps of virtual medium as in professional domain so in other areas of concern should constitute in training assumption the prevention programs on educational institutional level, at employing companies or other organisations that support socio-professional integration of young people.

### **Recommendations:**

- To create a cybernetic educational culture for every youth category (within institutions where they run their activities: schools, universities, NGOs, work places)
- To create a national research platform to facilitate the interaction between researchers and different categories of electronic medium users;
- To conduct researches which would have in view specific aspects of social development in correlation with internet usage for well-defined categories;
- Research conducts to analyse effects of implementing the intervention and prevention programs in purpose of promoting some desirable behaviours in online medium.
- Introduction of subjects in school/university curriculum that follow to promote risk prevention in online medium;
- To form a special institution that makes available a free phone number where cybernetic abuses can be reported (according to European countries model);
- To open organisations and institutions where youth can benefit of information, support, assistance and intervention to prevent risks and digital inequalities;
- To facilitate electronic means especially for vulnerable young adults (young adults coming for impoverished families, young people grown up in residential centres, young people with disabilities);
- Informing and forming "unconnected youth" about training and developing digital competences.
- Developing and distributing guides and informational materials, supports and practical resources to promote a safe internet surfing;
- To organise training programmes on forming desirable behaviour in online medium within schools/universities/residential centres/special institutions;
- The presence of a special resource (telephonic/online/institutional) to enable youth (vulnerable youth) the report cases of digital abuse and to offer consult and support for electronically harassed victims;
- Promoting and developing online resources that support vulnerable youth (online information on special websites for youth with disabilities, young people grown up in residential centres, etc.).

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