

ICTs and Social Change: Three Examples from Everyday Life

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This paper considers three examples¹ of how our experience of information and communication technologies (ICTs) might be changing and might themselves be influenced by wider social developments. But the broader aim is go beyond considering these areas of life in their own right and ask about the types of contributions that researchers working in this field of ICTs might make. Hence, the three areas have not been chosen as the most important areas of change in our experience of ICTs nor is it claimed that they have the most significant social consequences. Instead they should be seen as case studies to achieve the wider goal of identifying the levels of analysis that social scientists might address

The three examples and related questions are:

1. Time stress. Is our use of ICTs, perhaps especially the mobile phone and other portable technologies, contributing to greater time pressures or stresses in society?
2. People's expanding communications repertoires. What issues and problems arise from the increasing range of communication channels open to us?
3. Parent-children relationships and ICTs. Is it becoming increasingly difficult for parents to monitor their children's use of ICTs?

Do ICTs contribute to creating more time stress?

"The life in Madrid is a madness, we are running everywhere".

"I try to find time in the weekends to be with my family, but I have to pay attention to other obligations, therefore, it is not easy".

Participants in Spanish focus groups, 2001 (EURESCOM P-903 project)

The quotes reflect ways in which people experience time pressures, or stress, which was one common theme that emerged in the research cited above. To put this into context, there is in fact a wider, especially North American, literature on time stress, also expressed as 'time famine', 'the time squeeze' or the 'harried leisure class' (Southerton, 2001). An apparent paradox commented upon in some of this time literature is that while time budget data has demonstrated that those in employment have gained slightly more leisure time (or rather 'non-work time'), many surveys show that people actually feel more time pressure.

One first qualification is that there are national variations in perceptions reflecting perhaps not just different objective circumstances but also different expectations. For example, in surveys asking working people if they felt rushed, 25% said yes in Germany compared to 11% in Spain (Garhammer, 1998b). Even within countries, there is variation. Certainly those involved in what has been called more 'passive' leisure activities (e.g. TV watching) have not necessarily felt 'pressured' nor, surveys suggest, have young workers spending time in pubs, cinemas etc., whose social life involved a large amount of social communication (Garhammer, 1998b).

¹ The three areas are elaborated a little further in Haddon, 2004, but the particular purposes of this line of argument are expressed here in this paper for the first time

A second qualification is that even if sections of the population who experience a crowded timetable might agree that they are, or outsiders might define them as being, 'busy', they need not experience this as 'pressure'. For example, some find it stimulating. In the focus groups conducted across several countries, including Spain, those participants who had both mobile phones and Internet access were more inclined to talk about the huge number of different activities which made them live an active and rather hectic life, including their leisure time. But these people liked to be busy, they did not feel stressed but saw being busy in a very positive way (Klamer et al, 2000). One factor noted across all focus groups in this study was the importance of being in control of one's own activities. Being busy did not automatically lead to feeling under time pressure as long as the people wanted to take part in these activities and felt in control.

With these reservations in mind, do ICTs contribute to time stress or, at the very least, making our lives more hectic? The observation of an Italian participant in the European focus groups described above reflects a view of how ICTs do have this effect.

'New technologies allow you to do more activities but they make you frenetic and stressed.' (Klamer et al, 2000).

To be more specific, it has been argued that the duration and frequency of the activities in which we engage are changing. This leads to people to feel time pressure because they use their time more intensely, perhaps doing several things at once, or because the large number of separate activities leads to a succession of short, frequently changing episodes of activity (Bittman, 1998). Multi-tasking has also been cited as a cause of stress. Or if not actually doing several things at once, then at least 'juggling' activities has also been mentioned in this respect.

We can do all of these things without ICTs. However, do ICTs, or certain, allow us to use time more intensely? If we use ICTs to 'fill in the gaps' in our time this can create more acceleration in our lives and a sense of hurriedness (e.g. Eriksen, 2001). In fact, this line of argument has more specifically been used with the mobile phone, as we fill spare moments with additional communications, dealing with tasks or just communicating more than before. Apart from the communications we make, arguably there is pressure to be more reachable by others (to be discussed below), which can mean more things we have to deal with. In principle this could be extended to portable technologies, whether this means filling in moments work on the laptop, or sending and dealing with emails².

But if we pause a moment, what other explanations of increased stress are offered in the time literature. Some explanations of stress make reference to objective changes in society. While claims that we work longer are empirically not true, other changes in our time structures provide more plausible explanations for this sense of being harried. One of these is the weakening of socio-temporal structures as more work takes place at different times, as we can shop at different times, etc. While this

² Of course, one would have to be careful and ask how people 'filled in the gaps' in their time in the past, before these technologies, such as reading books or newspaper. But then were these activities less demanding?

provides more individual flexibility on the one hand, it can also increase (time) problems associated with co-ordinating with our social networks (Southerton, 2001).

Then there are a range of explanations referring to people's changing time strategies, themselves based on new expectations. For example, one account referred to the amount of things people now tried to achieve. In a German study, three-quarters of those surveyed said that they experienced time pressure precisely because they were trying to do too much in their leisure time (Garhammer, 1998b). One could ask if ICTs could sometimes ease some of this pressure by saving time, but even if this is the case the overall trend may simply be to fill up the time saved, as one monitors of the of the Spanish focus groups summed up the responses of the group *'There were people who were not consciousness of time gain using these technologies. A lot of times, time saved using technologies is automatically assigned to other things, so it does not lead to reduced time stress.'*

Finally, one last explanation of time stress referred to the speeding up of life as people did things more quickly in order to fit everything in. Hence, leisure activities become less 'leisurely' (Roberts (1976), discussed in Southerton, 2001). The overall point from these last few explanations is that these developments do not necessarily involve ICTs. This was also indicated in the initial quotes: running around Madrid or meeting social obligations that take one away from one's family need not imply the technologies are creating the problem.

What general lesson is to be learned from this example? It would be very easy for a researcher looking at ICTs to suggest how they might be contributing to social change. In this case of time stress, it is plausible that ICTs contribute in the way outlined above. We only have anecdotal evidence and it might be a difficult area to research. For instance, traditional time budgets might not pick up the short communications described above. Since this change is at best gradual, it may not be picked up in national studies which are normally only funded for a few years. But it is worth monitoring. On the other hand, any research looking critically at this area would also have to compare the influence of ICTs with other changes taking place in society. In this particular case, these other levels of explanation of time pressure may ultimately account for more than ICTs

The problems of managing a growing communications repertoire

The second case study may involve stress, the stress of communications overload, but it is really more about the growing complexities and uncertainties that occur as our communications options or 'repertoire' (Haddon, 2005) increases. Furthermore, much of this is based on multiple observations from qualitative studies – in the UK. This mounting evidence appears at least as forceful as the 'ICTs and time stress' arguments above, though it remains to be seen how much it applies to Spain.

Our starting point is research in the early to mid-1990s looking at how we manage ICTs and communications more generally. This is important because while there is considerable research on patterns of communication or the nature of communications this is less on how we manage them and, in particular, on the interactions between people in households, and sometimes tensions, that shape those patterns.

British qualitative research from the early 90s looking at the domestication of ICTs in general considered how people managed their relationship to the fixed telephone line. In other words, rather than focusing just on the number and the nature of the calls that people make, these studies explored the types of communications or situations that counted as ‘problems’ for them, and charted the type of strategies that people developed for dealing with these. This sometimes included efforts to control communications, both outgoing and incoming (Haddon, 1994).

One of the chief reasons for wanting to control outgoing calls was, as might be expected, the cost of calls. However, there were other problems, such as when some household members blocked the phone line with their own calls at a time when others in the home want to make or receive calls of their own. Years later, using the ‘dial-up’ Internet on the single phone line could raise similar issues. The main problem from incoming calls was that they could sometimes be disruptive, if they were received during ‘quality’ family time together, dinner time, relaxing time after work, or times when people were otherwise busy, e.g. getting children for school, preparing meals.

These problems, tensions or issues led to various interactions with other household members, e.g. negotiating rules and understandings with about making calls, perhaps trying to persuade others to ration calls. They could also lead to discussions with wider family, friends and colleagues, trying to persuade them to call at some times rather than others. And they could lead to other strategies. In the case of outgoing calls this might involve getting children to pay for some of their calls. In the case of incoming calls it could entail blocking incoming calls at certain times (e.g. unplugging the phone line, turning down the sound of the ringer), not answering the ringing phone or getting other people to answer the phone (to say, often pretend, that they were not available).

A subsequent 5-country European quantitative study³ conducted in 1996 aimed to explore the scale of such problems as well as the degree to which different types of strategy were used (Haddon, 1998; 2004). To give a flavour of its findings, here is a summary of the data for the 5-countries combined, with the Spanish data in brackets. In households with multiple members, 24% (26% in Spain) of the interviewees received complaints about the cost of the calls they made, but that figure is perhaps understandable over double that for 14-17 year olds (42% for Spanish children). As regards strategies to control outgoing calls, 64% (69%) used cheaper tariffs, 64% (57%) rationed their own use, and 42% (48%) tried to limit the calls of other household members. The scale of the strategies indicates the extent to which telecoms costs were an issue, shaping telecoms usage. Meanwhile, the attempts specifically to limit others and the complaints figure provides some sense of the interaction going on in households and the potential tensions that existed.

As regards incoming calls, a substantial minority, 37% (37%) found these to be disruptive at least some of the time. When we look at the different control strategies used, 22% (14%) blocked phone calls at least some of the time, 22% (14%) had sometimes not answered the ringing phone, 29% (16%) had arranged for someone else in the household to answer it and 32% (30%) had persuaded outsiders to redirect

³ France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK

calls to other times. While all of these strategies tended to be used occasionally rather than often, clearly disruptive calls are an issue for many people - which they try to do something about, although the Spanish figures are lower than for many of their European counterparts.

That was a decade ago. The more contemporary question is what happens when we now have many more communications options? The mobile phone and Internet would be the obvious major examples. But then we must remember that there are on-going innovations and developments in relation to these technologies, such as the rise of texting after the mobile had already started to become a mass market, and changing tariff structures for both mobile and fixed lines.

First it is important for the general argument being made here to look at the continuities. People are still managing outgoing communications and cost is clearly still an issue with mobile phones at least, as demonstrated in a recent UK study (Haddon and Vincent, 2004). In some households the negotiations have been such that parents have arranged for children to pay for their own pre-paid cards for their mobile was one way of avoiding arguments about the cost of the calls they made (Ling and Helmersen, 2000, in a Norwegian study; for the UK data on this, see Haddon, 2002). The 2004 UK study cited above showed how children's use was rationed, how there were still complaints about spending too much money on the mobile. Incoming communications, on mobile as much as fixed, can still be perceived as being disruptiveness, and there are new strategies for controlling this, such as sending messages to the voice mail, making excuses (there was no signal, the battery ran out) or simply not replying to emails straight away. In other words, the details change, but there are still issues, still negotiations, still strategies for managing communications

The next question is: what is new? For one thing, some of these negotiations are in addition to older ones about the fixed phone, as in the discussions of who children are allowed to speak with online. Or they involve negotiations that cover a range of communications channels, such as discussions about when to use the fixed phone vs. the mobile (if there are 'free minutes' left on the latter, for example). In other words, there are either additional areas of life to manage or the negotiations have become more complex.

Furthermore the economic calculations are themselves more complicated (including ones relating to the fixed line). As in many other countries, the UK tariff options have proliferated since the 1990s, with a host of mobile phone and even fixed-line tariff packages offering flat-rate tariffs, either for certain times or all the time. Some households in the UK study above had moved to flat-rate fixed line calls. This meant that the question of rationing was no longer so relevant, if there were no extra costs incurred in making additional calls. However, there were still efforts to persuade children, for example, to use the fixed line in the first place rather than other channels such as the mobile phone, since that could incur further costs per call. Or if the tariff was such that flat-rate applied to the fixed line or mobile after a certain time, then children (and adults) were sometimes persuaded to move their calls to those times when communications were regarded as being effectively 'free'.

Moreover, some of the discussion about how best to keep down telecommunications costs arose not only when particular calls were made or, more often, when the bill

arrived but also when negotiating about which operator and tariff arrangement to have in the first place or deciding whether to change these. You now have people making calculations that ask how many of their social networks are on a particular package since that might mean cheaper calls if they join it as well. To summarise, the problem of telecommunications costs is not only still present, but the details of its management and the nature of the search for solutions has arguably become far more complex in many households.

Moving into another area, we have decisions about which channels to use to reach people (Haddon, 2005). Is the person to be contacted likely to be near their fixed phone? Would a call to his or her mobile be most likely to succeed or would it be disruptive? Would a text message be more appropriate, or an email? Or for the particular task in hand it would be better to talk. Again we find more considerations, that take into account the nature of the communication, the relationships with the person being called, knowledge of their circumstances at a particular moment, etc. (Haddon, 2005). The other side of the coin is how do I make decisions about which channels can be reachable by (as indicated by the speed at which I reply to text messages or emails, or whether my mobile is switched off). Moreover, these decisions take place in a situation where arguably, there is more pressure to be available as captured in the question 'Why do you have a mobile phone if you don't switch it on?'

Lastly, new communications options can also give rise to new problems, new situations to be managed. The recent UK study above of a day-in-the-life of families and their communication choices started to show some of the new frustrations, or irritations emerging as telecoms options have grown. For example, it was increasingly common for callers try one channel, such as the fixed line, and then another one when the first fails or is occupied. However, sometimes this could happen too quickly. Or else, as the interviewee below indicates, it was precisely because this person was engaged in one call that she did not want to be contacted through another channel.

'One thing I don't like is when my husband tries the house phone and it's engaged. So he knows I'm on the phone! And (yet) he'll ring the mobile. By the time I get to it it's stopped. He often does that. It's really annoying.' (Haddon and Vincent, 2004).

Appropriate behaviour in these cases had not yet been worked out. Meanwhile the sheer increase in communications that sometimes followed from having more channels could be overwhelming

'Sometimes it infringes on you privacy. I mean you want to be left alone and unless you switch the thing off...For example, my husband (calls and asks) "Where are you, what are you doing". (And I think) "Oh, leave me alone, don't drive me mad". (Haddon and Vincent, 2004).

Then there have been various issues related to texting on the mobile phone, this time with problems arising sometimes in relation to peers in social networks. One such issue is when it is or is not appropriate to manage communication by text at all as opposed to some other channel or face-to-face (e.g. when ending a relationship with a boy- or girlfriend). Another problem to be managed was dealing with expectations about how quickly to return the gift of a text message (Taylor and Harper, 2001) – although this could also apply to expectations regarding replying to phone messages

or emails. And returning to intra-family relations, and another example from the British study, one teenager caused great anxiety at home and immediate phone calls back from his parents, when he sent a text back from a holiday abroad just mentioning that there had been some 'problem'. This illustrates the more general issue of when it is appropriate to send a text about what topic, and the consequences of doing so.

Similar questions have also been raised about the appropriateness of some emails, not so much spam but from and to known social networks. This had led some to comment on how this medium is still relatively immature, when it can lead to 'unnecessary' emails (almost like spam – when one can be overwhelmed), emails that find their way to the wrong people, or emails that create misunderstandings (Haddon, 2006). Once again, people have started to develop strategies for dealing with all of these potential or actual problems, although some still remain frustrated.

The more general lesson to be learnt from this case study is that it is important not just to see the social changes but to appreciate that there are continuities from the past, even if they have received less attention than some other areas in terms of research. There were always issues around managing communications, even when we only had the fixed line, and some of these, such as those relating to telecommunication costs, continue in new guises. However, as this section makes clear it is not just the details that have changed but the number and scale of things to be managed and uncertainties about rules of communication as our options have proliferated⁴.

Changes in parents' ability to monitor children's use of ICTs

In this third section we will start by considering a number of changes that have affected the ability of parents to monitor and regulate the use of ICTs by their children. But the ultimate aim is to stand back from these immediate trends to consider the much wider context of parent-children relationships.

The arrival of the mobile phone has somewhat complicated parental surveillance of children. On the one hand, it offers more monitoring potential of a certain kind. Parents can phone to check up on their children when the latter are out of the home. In this sense, the mobile has been referred to as a 'digital leash' (Ling, 1997) although teenagers sometimes allow such parental surveillance simply in order to gain possession of a mobile phone (Green, 2001). Sometimes teenagers even accept parental arguments about safety as being legitimate (Green, 2001). Yet, at other times they resisted such monitoring (e.g. by diverting the calls sent to them by the parents directly to the mobile phone's voice mail - Ling and Yttri, 2002).

A second development is that in the case of some ICTs, such as use of the Internet, the children are sometimes more competent than their parents, which again makes parental monitoring difficult. Moreover, even if the parents are competent online, a

⁴ This is arguably an ongoing process, as newer options continue to appear. For example, we have research on how people work out how to communicate sending pictures or when this is worthwhile (Batterbee and Kurvinen, 2005; Scifo, 2005). If mobile videotelephony is taken up on a large scale, we would have new questions about when to use this channel. In the online world, we have questions about how people communicated using blogs such as the *Cyworld* case in Korea or *Facebook* in the West..

UK survey showed that parents still did not understand which ICTs the children were using (e.g. Instant Messaging). In general, there was a lack of awareness of children's experiences online (Livingstone and Bober 2004).

Third, there appears to have been a number of interrelated shifts in the experience of many children, in parts of the West at least, that are relevant for understanding children's relationship to ICTs. One change is related to arguments about children's greater absence from unsupervised public spaces (Büchner, 1990; Livingstone, 2002). It has been argued that many social activities that in the past took place in public are increasingly taking place in the home. The home is itself becoming more public, more open to outsiders (Wellman, 1999). Children also experience this, having their friends around to interact with in their homes, in their own rooms (Livingstone, 2002). This socialising in the home has been identified in a European study of children as 'Bedroom Culture'. Observing that this is a European and North American phenomenon, partly depending on wealth, this research showed the high proportion of European children, especially teenagers, who had their own room (e.g. 82% of 15-16 year-olds). Indeed, the majority of 15-16 year-olds in a UK study claimed to spend at least half their waking life in their rooms (Livingstone and Bovill, 2001). In contrast Asian researchers have said that for a variety of reasons, including the nature of housing, bedroom culture not established in countries such as Japan (Ito, 2005) or China (Lim, 2005). It remains to be seen how much it exists in Spain, of Southern Europe more generally

A number of factors shape this experience besides general affluence, some more country-specific than others. For example, in Britain the influence of the lack of leisure alternatives for children and youth outside the home has been commented upon (Bovill and Livingstone, 2001). In addition, the last decade or two has also seen the process, again perhaps true in some countries or areas than in others, whereby there has been a growing concern for children's safety in public spaces. The UK study of children and ICTs described how parents felt under pressure to keep their children indoors (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999; Livingstone 2002). Reflecting these concerns, we now have a situation where the vast majority of children in Britain are now driven to school.

These are the background developments against which we can appreciate children's relations to ICTs. If we return to the bedroom culture, the researchers in the European study of children observed how children's bedrooms have become increasingly 'media-rich'. However, monitoring by parents has once more become problematic. The children were now often at home and so monitoring where they are is easier. But was more difficult to monitor children's use of ICTs in their bedrooms rather than in a communal space in the home.

Now let us contextualise these developments in order to see them in a slightly different light. The last decade has seen a growing literature on the social construction of childhood. The key point is that the experiences of children and youth as well as expectations of their roles, their independence, their knowledge etc., are relative (e.g. see James and Prout, 1997). This literature has emphasised how that social construction changes over time. Sometimes change is gradual, taking place over hundreds of years, such as movement away from regarding children as simply

small versions of adults (Ariès, 1973). The emergence at the end of the nineteenth century of the concept of adolescence as a stage between childhood and adulthood would be another example of such shifts in perception (Gillis, 1981).

Because such changes are relatively gradual it appears that successive generations have similar experiences. But there are also the more short- to medium-term changes. For example, in Britain the 1980s saw a lengthening of the period during which young people are financially dependent upon the family. This was because of the longer time spent in both education and training due to the pressures to acquire qualifications and from youth unemployment.

It is worth noting that in these discussions of social construction the exact details of how childhood and youth are changing are themselves debated. For instance, one view is that there has been a move from children having autonomy and responsibility to being more protected, making less decisions and experiencing making more restrictions in their daily activities (Vestby, 1994). Another view is that we see more autonomy being experienced by children, more domestic democracy and the individualization of childhood - but also increased regulation and risk management of children by adults (Livingstone, 1997 - referring to Giddens' analysis). These two characterizations cover some similar points, but they are not identical.

There has been less study of the related notion of social construction of parenthood, although it has been referred to by some in the literature on media (Vestby, 1994). In parallel with the above discussion of the social construction of childhood, to talk of parenthood as a social construct means that the experiences and especially expectations of parents are relative. Once again, the literature notes that they can change somewhat over time. This includes their expectations of what counts as being a 'good parent', the expectations parents feel they should have of their children and how they should approach the parental role. For example, one corollary of the above arguments about childhood is the claim that there is now an ideology of parenthood implying that parents should have a more detailed involvement in their children's lives, including an increasing expectation that they should protect their children from the flow of impressions and experiences (Vestby, 1994).

These subtle differences in our understandings of childhood and parenthood provide a wider context in which to appreciate parents' and children's contemporary behaviour. Within this framework what is of particular interest is not only change over time but also cultural differences in expectations of children's consumption of ICTs, developments in their experiences of these technologies, and expectations about what role parents should play in this process.

A concrete illustration of changing expectations can be found in a study commenting on Norwegian debates about the minimum age that children should be to have access to a mobile phone (Ling and Helmersen, 2000). After the mobile had spread widely amongst the teenage population, the new phenomenon in the late 1990s was mobile acquisition by pre-teens. This created some unease, as shown in interviews with parents about the age at which it was appropriate to have a mobile. In fact, even some contemporary teenagers commented that nowadays children were receiving mobile

phones when they were ‘too young’, given that these youth had only acquired a mobile themselves when they were first in their teens. The point to take from this is that the adoption of mobiles by young children made people reflect upon what was appropriate for children of this age, and what stance parents should take on this issue. It provoked some reflection on this particular facet of childhood and parenthood. As the age at which children use the Internet also falls we might anticipate some equivalent reflections on this matter as well.

Earlier it was noted how the writers on the social construction of childhood and parenthood placed an emphasis on change over time. If one has an interest in cross-cultural comparisons one would also want to ask how expectations of children and parents might vary (even if slightly) across cultures, in the spirit of anthropology. In which case, to what extent in the different cultures (and countries) within Europe are there variations in adults’ understanding of how children will make sense of media images or content, as well as in their views about what children have to be protected from or can be exposed to? In fact, this is part of the research agenda of the current EU Kids Online project⁵, as it attempts to make sense of the fact that in different countries there appear to be different levels of concern about Internet ‘risks’, different types of media visibility of such issues, different levels of Government initiatives addressed to parents, etc. These would all be examples of processes through which our understanding of children (in this case, the risks they face) and of parents (what they should be doing about this) are being socially constructed.

So let us finish by returning to the trend described at the start of this section whereby there are reasons why it has become more difficult for parents to monitor their children’s use of ICTs. Let us take two extreme stereotypical examples to make a point. If as parents you live in a period and a culture where the risks to children are heavily emphasised, where the responsibility of parents to protect (or control) their children’s experience is emphasised and where the ability of children to cope with the world (at a certain age point) is questioned, then any decline in the ability of parents to monitor their children is an issue. If at the other extreme, parents living at a particular time and in a particular culture where they do not encounter such a heavy emphasis on risks, where they feel less responsibility to intervene in every aspects of their children’s life because (at a certain age point) they feel that the child can cope or that they need to develop independence, then the loss of some ability to monitor children is less of an issue. It might even lead to a perception that children are becoming more independent at an earlier age and that is welcomed.

Of course, the real world is not necessarily full of such stereotypes but the general point remains that how we evaluate any changes in parents’ ability to monitor their children’s ICTs experiences might vary even within Europe (and over time) because of variations in the expectations of parents and children. And the even more general point to derive from this section is that one role of the researcher in this field is not only to observe any potential social changes in relating to ICTs but also to provide a framework for interpreting and evaluating them.

⁵ The EU Kids Online project (<http://eukidsonline.net>), in which the author is involved is funded by the EC’s Safer Internet Plus Programme. It is charting and reviewing European empirical studies of children and the Internet as well as trying to explain the patterns of research.

Conclusions

This paper has considered three areas, often touching on the daily interactions, routines and minutiae of everyday life. In the case of time stress, it outlined the logics of why ICTs should cause this stress. That section argued why this was an interesting area that deserved further monitoring, even if that is by no means easy. But the section also showed the need to always make qualifications and, more importantly, the need to put any influence of ICTs into a wider perspective. There are many non-technological factors that may be more significant in this area than the influence of technologies. If you are a social scientist looking at ICTs, it is easy to overlook this and emphasise the importance of the technologies you are studying.

In the case study of how we manage our growing communications options one key lesson is to provide some 'historical' context, even if only going back a few years. When we see new practices, how much continuity is there from the past? In this particular area, what type of issues, negotiations and strategies were there in relation to the fixed line over a decade ago, such that we may to some extent be doing the same things now, but in different guises. This then provides a starting point for identifying what counts as 'new' developments. In this particular case, it was argued that the level of complexity (and sheer number) of decisions about communications had increased and we find many examples where rules, norms and quite simply ways on managing the communications repertoire are still in flux.

Lastly we had the case of parents' ability to monitor (and by implication regulate or least advise upon) their children's use of ICTs. There are several reasons to believe that there is a change here, although the question of how much the 'bedroom culture' argument applies to Spain may be better left in the hands of Spanish scholars. The social construction of childhood and parenthood framework provided as a wider context for thinking not only about changing parent-children relationships over time but also variation across cultures – and countries. The general point being made here is that this provides a basis for evaluating any trend that may be taking place and understanding why people's everyday responses to such changes take the form that they do.

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