

# Inside the 'black-box'

children rights in the digital age



Conceição Costa  
José Rogado  
Carla Sousa  
Sara Henriques

# Children Rights in the Digital Age

- The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
  - Children have rights and their views and voices are to be considered
  - It has been impacting governments, civil society and the private sector and ICT driven companies on the internet should not be exception!
- According to Livingstone, Carr and Byrne (2015)
  - “Internet governance bodies have a ‘everyone’-based approach to online ‘users’ that does not meet, respect or protect the rights of the children in a digital era (...)
  - The main problem is to find a balance between a protectionist approach and a responsible and mindful one that also understands children’s right to access information, media and culture, the right to privacy and active participation in social and cultural forums.”

# Media literacy matters for children rights

- In a ICT driven economy
  - To children fully exert their rights to participate, to have privacy and freedom of expression (among others) they may understand the technological underlying processes of digital environments
  - Media literacy is not a stand-alone competence but is mutually defined in relation to the interpretability or legibility of the technologies with which people engage (Livingstone et al. 2013, 217)
  - All stakeholders in charge of children education should act in order to minimize risks while not losing the opportunities of digital environments

## The study

- An exploratory study as part of Gamilerning research project
- Aim
  - To understand how knowledge about security technological processes improves children’s capability of managing their digital identities and online presence
  - To understand the value of *pedagogies of play*
- Hypothesis
  - Young citizens literate on managing their digital identities will be able to navigate, communicate, play and learn online more safely, achieving a more responsible connected presence and protecting their privacy.
- Using a constructionist approach and action research methodology

## Method

- Sample

- 13 young people aged between 14 and 18 years old (Average=15,85)
- 5 girls and 8 boys, 2 of them are refugees
- Students of the 3<sup>rd</sup> cycle of Basic Education (**vocational**) with an average of 8.31 years of completed formal Education
- Residents in disadvantaged areas
- Low levels of literacy in several domains
- Doing a media education programme at our University as supervised internship (Prática simulada – in Portuguese)
- All of them have smartphone and use social networks
  - Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat and WhatsApp

## Materials and Procedures

- 1<sup>st</sup> step
  - The basic concepts related to *e-presence* were elicited by viewing a video about digital footprints (Jaro, 2014)
  - Focus group, to gather data on their attitudes on *e-presence*, focusing on data management and protection rights
- 2<sup>nd</sup> step
  - Viewing the video “The secret alphabet” to learn how to encrypt and decrypt messages using the Caesar Cipher: a mono alphabetic transposition cipher used since the antiquity



## Materials and Procedures

### • 3<sup>rd</sup> step

–Youth played the “Secret Alphabet” game with the help of a cipher wheel

- The rules of play were introduced
- 3 teams, the messengers (2 teams) and the Intruders
- Allowing competition and collaboration

–Simulating a real life scenario on the internet

–Playful activity and Participant observation

### • 4<sup>rd</sup> step

–Six participants were selected randomly to individual semi-structured interviews

–Data analysis using discourse analysis techniques

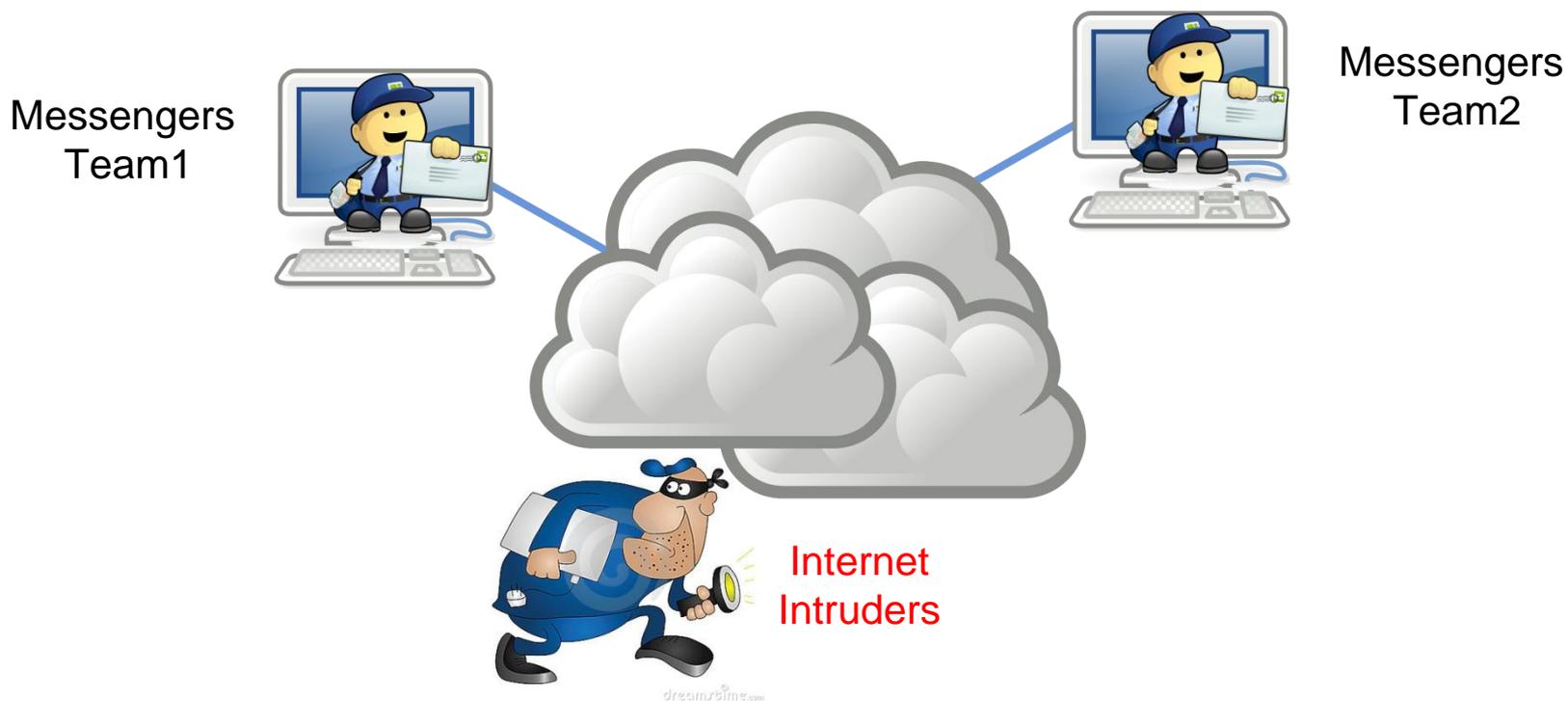
## The Cipher Wheel



# The Cipher Wheel: how it works



# The Game - to mimic a real life scenario



# Results: Digital Footprint Focus Group

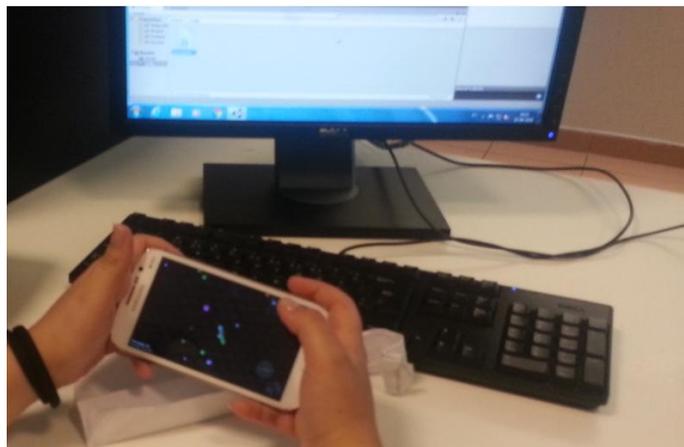
- Three types of attitudes/perceptions among youth
  - They are unaware of digital footprint and online tracks, before they watched the video
    - One boy made evident his discomfort about text exchanges while playing online :  
*“I can’t repeat here what we usually say...”*
  - The perceptions of digital identity management
    - Youth discussed who is in charge of managing our data and this responsibility was assigned to big internet companies, what elicited a concern about who is the owner of these companies, and what is their interest in our data:  
*“I think whoever controls our data... is Google, I just don’t know who owns Google.”*  
*“I think they are rich. Just I do not know why! All that we have installed is free and they could only make money if they oblige us to pay.”*
    - Someone suggested advertisements and the entire group agreed that our data have financial value

# Results: Digital Footprint Focus Group

- Three types of attitudes/perceptions among youth
  - The attitudes regarding the online life vs. offline life dichotomy
    - Youth defined *online life* as a different part of the “real world”, offering us a set of risks and opportunities
      - The perception of opportunities is linked to all resources it can offer us, and how they can help us in our daily lives
      - While the perception of risks is mainly bounded to the beliefs of social contact loss
        - “*When we are on the Internet we interact differently, we have much more help to do what we need, while in real life we have to understand everything by ourselves.*”
        - “*Internet spoils people’s social contact. We can be all together, but we end up being always distant (using the mobile phones)*”

## Results: Encryption Learning Activity

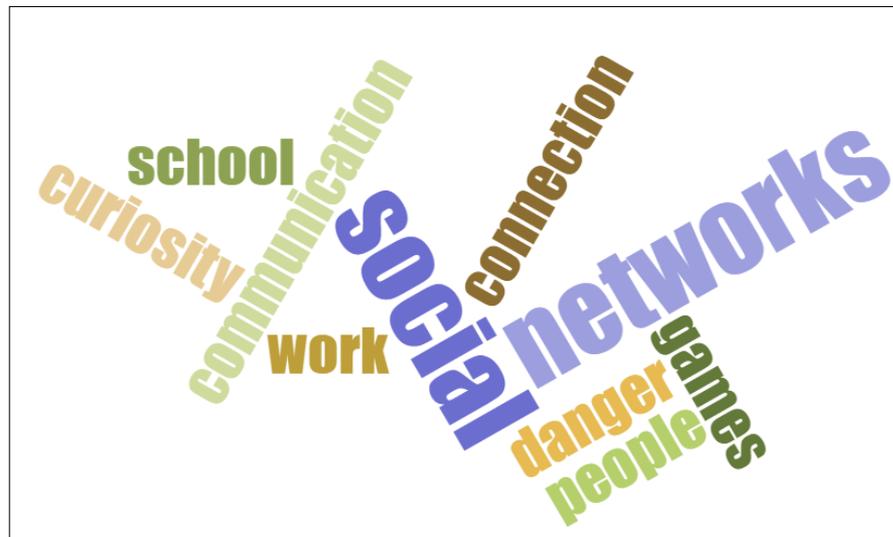
- Participant observation made evidence of a superior engagement, when compared to “software training”



# Results: Encryption Learning Activity

- Interviews

- 6 questions related to youth perceptions about managing their online identities, online security and children rights



World Cloud of youth perceptions about internet

# Results: Encryption Learning Activity

## • Interviews

– When questioned about Human/children rights:

- Most of the youth could only remember of 1 or 2
- All together they talk about privacy, education, protection, equality, home conditions, and also, with the notion of all the society being responsible for children

– Youth's attitudes regarding the relation between human rights and internet

- Freedom of expression and privacy were the most referred, although, this was a contention topic:

*“On the internet I have the right to do everything.”*

- Some youth tend to reinforce the internet's role in the dissemination of social injustices, as an attempt to sensitize people to help solve them.

# Results: Encryption Learning Activity

## • Interviews

–How they manage the privacy of their online accounts

- Youth mainly refer to accept the privacy definitions of each online game or social network

– When asked if they know what Institutions could help them on digital security and protection - *“No idea”*- was the answer

–When asked about what they have learned from the encryption activity

*“I learned that we can make games that motivate us ... we can talk using code in a fun way”*

*“I have learn how to code/decode messages...it could help me in the future”*

*“The Caesar Cipher is related with security, only those with the secret know. We need to know how to think...and it can be a game also...so we will remember more of it”*

## Conclusion

- These particular youth in our sample **are part of those with high rates of failure at school**
  - Youth knowledge of their own rights is very superficial and a few think that on the internet they have more rights
  - They don't know that their online behaviors are traced but they have learned their data has monetary value
  - The encryption/decryption activity was an effective way of learning
    - not only basic concepts of security, but increased engagement was observed and in their blogs they created simple 'games' applying the Caesar cipher, which became the theme for games of their own choice
- Academia should work side-by-side with formal Education with 'hands-on' approaches that could create a bottom-up process of change in the way we teach and create knowledge
- Academia influence on policies is very important, but a move should be done to reach teachers and students in an adequate time span

## Conclusion

- Youth slightly opened the Black Box 😊



- Questions?

Maybe later on?...

Thank you!

[conceicao.costa@ulusofona.pt](mailto:conceicao.costa@ulusofona.pt)