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## ON AND OFF: DIGITAL PRACTICES OF CONNECTING AND DISCONNECTING ACROSS THE LIFE COURSE

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In a time of ubiquitous and permanent access to the internet made available to more and more people, emergent research has focused on audiences' practices to disconnect from the internet (Kaun *et al.*, 2014), to go offline and to remove their presence and visibility from online spaces (Light & Cassidy, 2014). Connectivity being a central element of 'social media logic' (Van Dijck & Poell, 2013), disconnecting has been analysed particularly in relation to social networking sites (SNS), in the context of accounting for audience's relationship with the technological functioning of those digital platforms (Burgess *et al.*, 2016). From criticism on digital media to acts of refusal such as closing accounts on SNS or abstention from use have been understood "as a performative mode of resistance" (Portwood-Stacer, 2012: 1041; Woodstock, 2014; Syvertsen, 2017).

On the other hand, discussion on the rights of the users, especially the youngest ones, has highlighted the right to remove content from the internet and to be forgotten (Ghezzi, Pereira & Vesnic-Alujevic, 2014). The power to remove content about oneself and to erase a digital footprint has been reclaimed by users and activists. Data on 'excessive use' among young users (Livingstone *et al.*, 2014) has also highlighted the degree of control audiences feel they have over the internet use they make. So also the right to a conscious and informed use of digital technologies has been reclaimed, without addictive techniques from the industry, notably the social media (Livingstone & Bulger, 2014). Important debates have arisen regard work and leisure time, for instance in France and in Germany with the discussion of the 'right to disconnect' or switch off from work emails as a protection of workers against burn-outs (Rodionova, 2016; Hesselberth, 2017).

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In this paper we aim at tracking people's practices of connecting and disconnecting in relation to their life course. As a concept, the life course refers to the age-graded, socially embedded sequence of roles that connect the phases of life. As a paradigm, the life course refers to an imaginative framework comprised of a set of interrelated presuppositions, concepts, and methods that are used to study these age-graded, socially embedded roles (Mortimer & Shanahan, 2004: xi).

A distinction should be made between life cycle and the life course. The first approach emphasises ages and life stages, while the second puts emphasis on the transitions into those stages (Allatt *et al.*, 1987). Turning points can be defined as "traditional points in a person's life where daily rhythm and routine alter drastically due to a change in a person's role in society" (Helsper, 2010: 355). As people construct their life course through daily choices and practices life stages, which no longer follow a sequential path or individual turning-points (Hareven & Adams, 1982), throughout their life courses, Internet users face different challenges and needs that are expressed in different relationships with technology. There is no linear progression but instead these relationships are related to their "situated knowledges" and specific locations (Ganito, 2017) and keeps evolving over time and the life course (Taipale, Wilska & Gilleard, 2017). As societies become more complex and replace biological life cycle with a socio-biological one (Castells, 1996), the life course approach can account for change and complexity, more than generational analysis.

Our study thus analyses trajectories that are understood as sequences of roles and experiences incorporating social context and individual variation. We base the analysis of these trajectories on the principle of agency, where people construct their own life course through daily choices and practices within the limits and opportunities of given historical and social circumstances (Elder *et al.*, 2003). It is important to understand the differences in touchpoints with technology and the different affordances at each life stage.

We conducted an exploratory study in Portugal, to map perceptions, intentions and tactics that users of the internet develop to build offline spaces where internet access or the use of online services is suspended. We designed a survey combining questions from Communications Market Report on disconnecting (Ofcom, 2016, EU Kids Online and Net Children Go Mobile on excessive use (Livingstone *et al.*, 2011; Mascheroni & Cuman, 2014), and 'Growing up amongst screens' (Ponte *et al.*, 2017). The survey targeted all age groups, and was distributed online, through snowball, in early October 2017.

This exploratory survey allowed us to see that the perceptions of excessive use are not related to the time of use, and that it is especially young people and sole carers feel greater unease with time spent online. People feel the internet takes them time they could use for other leisure activities, more than to spend with family and friends; and that decision-related measures of disconnecting are more used than technical or consumption-related ones.

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