

Older people and mobile communication: a case study in Montevideo (Uruguay)

Preliminary results

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Abstract

This paper continues the series of case studies on mobile communication and older people in different cities. We present here the preliminary results of a case study of Montevideo (Uruguay), conducted in June 2012.

The paper discusses methodology, fieldwork and selected results. To facilitate result interpretation, contextualizing them, a first section discusses a set of secondary data on Uruguay regarding its demographic structure and the possession and use of information and communication technologies (ICT).

With ages ranging between 64 and 75 years old, all the participants lived in their own homes in the metropolitan area of Montevideo. Regarding mobile users (13), we discuss texting, mobile phone use while driving, and the role of the mobile phone at home. Regarding non-users (2), we analyze their profiles and their motivations. We also consider the relationship with Internet and computers (11 participants use them, while 4 do not). The paper ends with the section on discussion and conclusion.

Keywords

Older population; mobile telephony; case study; Montevideo; Uruguay

Introduction

Mobile technology is the most popular communication technology in the world. It is, as well, the most popular information and communication technology (ICT) among seniors. However, in every country with available data, older population is the cohort less interested in adopting any kind of ICT (ITU, 2012). As a result, both the industry and the academia consider seniors a peripheral group of interest in ICT studies (exceptions are Loss et al (eds.), 2012; Colombo and Fortunati (eds.) 2011; Selwyn et al., 2003; or the previous work of Haddon and Silverstone, 1996).

The study of the relationship between older people and mobile communication is small (Charness and Boot, 2009; Charness, Parks, and Sabel, 2001; Fund. Vodafone, 2010; Karnowski et al, 2008; Kurniawan, 2008; Kurniawan, Mahmud, and Nugroho 2006; Lenhart, 2010; Ling, 2008; Nasir et al, 2008; Sawchuk and Crow, 2012). Main results show that the preferred mobile service is voice calls. Cost can be a key element regarding adoption; while personal interest, external pressures, available communication technologies and the location –in the country or abroad– of significant ones are relevant as well.

The aim of this case study is to contribute on increasing the evidence and research regarding the older population and their relationship with mobile communication by exploring distinctive characteristics of mobile telephone use and non use (for rejection of computer use see Weaver et al, 2010).

Mobile telephony is not an isolated technology. To analyze it, therefore, it is necessary to take into account the whole range of communication media each individual have access to. This is what we call the personal system of communication channels (PSCC): PSCC can be defined as the set of media –devices or services, as fixed and mobile telephony, computer, or Internet–; that each person would identify as being part of their everyday life (#reference_deleted_for_blind_review). The concept fits into the framework of the communicative ecologies (Tacchi et al, 2003), which refers to “the context in which communication processes occur” (Foth and Hearn, 2007, p.9).

Following Ball-Rokeach (1985) we do not discuss needs but goals of mediated communication. Consequently, we will look at how the different ICT, and particularly mobile communication, help individuals to reach their goals of communication. In this sense it could be possible that a given ICT, or a given service, is not significant for a person –or even been significant for a whole society. However, it would be a mistake to infer that this means the individual is disconnected from their significant ones.

Thanks to this analytical approach it is possible to explore the different ways older people incorporate, or do not incorporate, mobile communication in everyday life: How do older people use mobile phones, if they have one? Who do they communicate with by mobile and why? Which combination of communication channels can be found? What are the motivations to reject the use of mobile telephony? Which is the position that mobile telephony occupies within the whole communicative ecology?

This paper discusses the preliminary results of a qualitative case study conducted in Montevideo (Uruguay) in June 2012. It belongs to a wider research project conducted in different cities under a common methodological framework (#reference_deleted_for_blind_review).

The text is organized as follows: section 1 puts the case study in context by discussing selected Uruguayan demographic and ICT statistics. Section 2 describes the methodology, Section 3 describes the fieldwork and Section 4 develops selected preliminary results. Section 5 contains the final discussion and conclusion.

1. Context data¹

1.1. Demographics

In 2012, the population of Uruguay ascends to 3.3 million. Of them, 0.6 million are seniors, that is 60 years old or over (18.7% of the population, see Table 1, next page). Most part of this cohort (79.7%) are younger seniors aged between 60 and 79. Life expectancy is higher among women; therefore the proportion of seniors is higher among females. Older population is increasing its demographic importance, as 65+ population increased from being the 7.6% of the censused population in 1963 to 14.1% in the 2011 Census (source: INEI, 2012d). Finally, last available data for Uruguay estimate that life expectancy at birth is 81 years old for women and 74 years old for men; while life expectancy at age of 60 years is 24 years for women and 19 for men (United Nations, 2011).

Regarding household arrangements, the proportion of people living alone increases with age (see Table 2 next page). In this sense, while 1 out of 3 individuals aged 60-69 do live alone, the proportion increases to 1 out of 2 among those 80 years and over. Retirement homes, on the other hand, are not popular in Uruguay as less than a 3% of 65+ population in 2011 lived in collective dwellings (source: own elaboration based on INEI, 2012e).

¹ This section benefited from Blanche (2012).

Table 1. Uruguay, distribution of Population by age (2011)

	Both sexes		Males		Females	
	persons	%	persons	%	persons	%
Total pop.	3,285,877	100.0	1,577,416	100.0	1,708,461	100.0
Age: 0-59	2,671,376	81.3	1,323,383	83.9	1,347,993	78.9
Age: 60+	614,501	18.7	254,033	16.1	360,468	21.1
60-69	282,338	8.6	128,633	8.2	153,705	9.0
70-79	206,054	6.3	84,511	5.4	121,543	7.1
80-89	107,931	3.3	36,447	2.3	71,484	4.2
90-99	17,659	0.5	4,369	0.3	13,290	0.8
100+	519	0.0	73	0.0	446	0.0

Source: Own elaboration based INEI (2012c), which reports data from the Census 2011.

Table 2. Single-member households, by age (% over total households in each category). Uruguay, 2011

< 30	30-39	40-49	60-69	70-79	80+	Average
20.30	13.00	16.28	30.06	40.53	51.26	23.27

Source: Own elaboration based on INEI (2012a)

1.2. Information and Communication Technologies

While almost household in Uruguay have a telephone (95%), mobile telephony is more common than fixed telephony (87.2% versus 60.8%; see Table 3). There is an important gap between mobile and fixed technologies –with more than 20 percentage points. This constitutes a common trend in less developed economies. While another common evidence is that the lower the household income the higher the possibility of only having a mobile phone, as poorest segments of the population can only afford mobile prepaid subscriptions (Galperin and Mariscal, 2007).

Table 3. Access to selected technologies in the household (%). Uruguay, 2009 and 2011.

	2011
Color TV	96.3
Radio	92.7
Fixed or mobile phone ¹	94.5
Mobile phone	87.2
Fixed line (telephone line)	60.8
Computer	48.2
Internet	42.9

¹: data referred to 2009

Sources: 2011 data: Own elaboration based INEI (2012b), which reports data from the Census 2011. 2009 data: Own elaboration based on OSILAC (2011) which reports data from the Continuous Household Survey.

At a household level, color TV is the most popular communication technology (96.3%) while the radio is very popular as well (92.7%). Less than half of the households have a computer (48.2%) whereas an Internet connection is present in almost 43% of the Uruguayan households (Table 3).

Data on the use of mobile telephony, computers and Internet at an individual level include specific information on older people. Mobile telephony is the most popular of the three technologies throughout all generations –a common international trend (see ITU, 2012). Last available data correspond to 2009 (see Table 4). This year mobile phone users ascend to 62.1% of the Uruguayan population, with 45% of computer users and 38.5% of Internet users.

Table 4. Users of mobile telephony, computers and Internet in Uruguay, 2009. Percentage of individuals, broken by 3 age groups.

	15-74 years old	75+ years old	Average population
Mobile phone	78.3	18.4	62.1
Computer	46.2	3.6	45.0
Internet	40.1	2.7	38.5

Source: Own elaboration based on OSILAC (2011) which reports data from the Continuous Household Survey.

Adoption rates decrease with age (see Table 5 and Table 4). Those above 65 years old show adoption rates always below the average population. The differentiated trend in adoption related to age seems to start at 75 years old for mobile telephony (with 25.6% of users). In contrast, for computers and Internet the digital age divide would start before, at an age of 60 years, as both computer (22.0%) and Internet (18.5%) use is less than half the total average.

Table 5. Senior users of mobile telephony, computers and Internet in Uruguay, 2009. Percentage of individuals, broken by 5-years age groups

	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84	85-89	90-94	95-99	Average population
Mobile phone	62.9	50.2	37.3	25.9	15.7	9.2	3.7	2.3	62.1
Computer	22.0	15.5	9.7	5.3	2.9	1.3	1.2	.	45.0
Internet	18.1	12.7	7.8	4.1	2.0	0.8	0.9	.	38.5

Source: Own elaboration based on OSILAC (2011) which reports data from the Continuous Household Survey.

Table 6. Mobile subscriptions in Uruguay, 2011

Mobile penetration	140.75 mobile subscriptions per 100 inhabitant
Mobile subscriptions	4.76 million active subscriptions
Of them, prepaid subscriptions¹	72.62%

¹ Year 2010.

Source: ITU (2012)

Data from the industry show a high diffusion of mobile telephony in Uruguay, with 4.76 million active subscriptions in 2011 (see Table 6). Penetration rate ascends to 140 subscriptions per 100 inhabitants, a figure which is among the first ones in the region in terms of penetration within the region.² Prepaid subscriptions represent almost three fourths of the market (73%).

Finally, texting is a common activity in Uruguay. In fact, it is one of the countries where SMS are more used. Last available data refers to 2010. This year the average SMS sent per inhabitants is over 1500 messages. This means raking in the 20th position of 111 countries with available data (source: own calculation, based on ITU, 2012).

Summing up, older population constitutes a significantly growing demographic group in Uruguay. We can observe different patterns of adoption and/or use among generations. Older ones tend to show lower adoption rates. This is a common result at an international level as we have already argued previously elsewhere (#reference_deleted_for_blind_review).

2. Methodology

This case study is part of a wider research project devoted to the study of population 60 years old and over in different countries (#reference_deleted_for_blind_review). A flexible, interactive research design is taken to incorporate the specific circumstances in which the research is carried out (Maxwell, 2005:7). The common methodological framework allows for comparison of results with other case studies conducted in Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain), Los Angeles (CA, US) and Toronto (Ontario, Canada).

As explained elsewhere (#reference_deleted_for_blind_review), the case study is based in semi-structured interviews that are complemented by three other techniques of information gathering: a short questionnaire, the observation of the mobile telephone –whenever possible and relevant–; and personal notes that are taken after each interview. First of all, every semi-structured interview follows a flexible outline and is guided as a relaxed conversation. Interviews are voice recorded for verbatim transcription and further text analysis. Secondly, the short questionnaire is administered at the beginning of the meeting and constitutes an icebreaker (see Annex 1). It is focused on individual socioeconomic characteristics and is adapted to the context of Montevideo. Respondents can skip any question they do not feel comfortable with. Thirdly, handset observation, when pertinent, is allowed by asking permission to

² Uruguay belongs to the first quartile of mobile penetration in the region. In Latin American & Caribbean (36 countries), average penetration equals 113.7, while median penetration ascends to 113.56. First quartile is 135.08 while third quartile is 86.93 (source: own calculation based on ITU, 2012).

take a picture of the device (pictures not reproduced). This facilitates the observation of how the interviewee handles the cell phone. Finally, notes taken after the interview seek to incorporate non oral information of the whole interaction, relevant pieces of information raised when the voice recorder was off and, in general, researcher reflections before, during and after the interview.

Our focus stays in the analysis of what has been told during the interviews, which usually is a projection, a narrative of what happens in each individual's life (Kvale, 1996).

The goal of the research is to understand the processes and motivations for using (or reject to use) mobile telephony among senior individuals. Therefore, mobile ownership is not a selection criterion. This should allow the gathering of relevant information for a better understanding of the processes of rejection and acceptance of this technology and the relationship of the elderly person with mobile telephony. Particular attention will be paid to the different communication media individuals use in their everyday life, as landline phone, computers and the Internet. They constitute the PSCC of each individual and understanding its role will allow to gain a better understanding of the specific role of mobile communication within the communicative ecology of each individual.

3. Fieldwork and sample characteristics

Fieldwork, conducted in June 2012, gathered information of 15 seniors. Participants were identified through two key informants who made a vital work to coordinate all the activities linked to the case study. Facilitators gave precise information to participants about the content of the conversation and helped in several logistic aspects.

Interviews were carried in private settings: participants' place or in the home of one facilitator. All the interviews were conducted in Spanish. All interviews were conducted individually except of two. In both cases the two members of a couple were interviewed at the same time. At the end of the conversation participants received a complimentary gift to acknowledge their collaboration.

Table 7 gathers some basic characteristics of the sample: integrated by 15 younger seniors, ages range from 64 to 75 years old. The average age is 68.1 years old while the mean age, that is the age that divides the sample by two, is 67 years old. Within the sample there are more women (10) than men (5). Educational attainment is relatively high, considering the age of the individuals, as almost all have completed at least secondary studies. All the participants live in their own home, with up to 11 living with at least one relative.

With respect to use and ownership of communication media, almost all the participants in the study are mobile users (13), with only 2 non-users. Up to 11 participants are regular Internet users, in front of 4 non users. All Internet users are, as well, mobile phone users (Table 8). Finally all the participants have a landline phone at home.

Table 7: Sample characteristics (I)

	Female	10
	Male	5
Age range (min. – max)		64 – 75 years old
Mean age		67 years old
Average age		68.1 years old
Education		
	Tertiary studies (university)	6
	Secondary studies	8
	Primary studies	1
Housing		
	Own home, alone	4
	Own home, with relative(s)	11
	Total	15

Source: own elaboration.

Table 8: Sample characteristics (II): Mobile phone and Internet users

		Internet		Total
		User	Non-user	
Mobile phone	User	11	2	13
	Non-User	0	2	2
	Total	11	4	15

Source: own elaboration.

Taking into account available indirect indicators of income and socioeconomic class, it is possible to infer that participants in the case study can be identified as medium class, with some of them belonging to the high-medium class and others to the lower-medium one. These indirect indicators, sometimes raised during conversation and only partly reported in this section, are: level of studies; current or past professional activity; neighborhood of residence; driving license –for woman– and car ownership; and communication devices ownership.³

³ Data available by request.

4. Preliminary results

Preliminary results reported here correspond to a first analysis of the transcribed interviews and personal notes. More detailed and in depth analysis will be developed in the future. In what follows, results and discussion refer to the sample under study – otherwise stated, with no aim of generalization regarding older population living in Montevideo or in Uruguay. To guarantee anonymity, participants in the research are identified by gender, a number and their age.

Mobile phones are popular among participants (see Table 8), as it is a widespread technology in the country. Nonetheless, different users describe different ways appropriation. In this sense, some individuals report a really conscious, limited use of the mobile phone while others use it more intensively. Man12 (70 years old) belongs to the first group. He is an active retired man who prefers the landline to the mobile phone and strongly rejects texting. He explains he does not really need the mobile phone that much because his daily routines allow him to be away from a landline only for short periods of time. He lives in a very central neighborhood in Montevideo, a small capital, so he usually only needs a short drive to arrive everywhere during the week. Even though he prioritizes the landline, his mobile phone guarantees him connectivity, particularly when out of the city during weekends or holidays. On the other hand, Woman02 (65) is an example of intensive users. While she does not go online with the mobile phone (yet), she reports using voice, SMS and MMS. The mobile phone is as important as the landline for connectivity. But she also explains non-connected uses, as taking pictures and using the alarm clock daily.

Participants do not consider mobile telephony expensive. It seems that they have convenient price arrangements. Prepayment, on one hand, allows keeping costs under very strict control. On the other hand, there is a very popular postpaid contract within the sample that includes “free” calls to one number, plus a very convenient price for a limited set of numbers. Voice calls to these numbers tend to be longer. For the rest of the calls it is common to minimize cost by means of short calls or by using SMS. There is a general consensus that long conversations should go through the landline, as it is significantly cheaper. Within this logic, the landline is central for social visits on the phone because it is significantly cheaper.

All of them have a home landline, so they use both lines in combination. This means, for instance, calling to a landline from a landline; and to a mobile phone from a mobile phone, as explained by Woman 1 (69) and Woman14 (67). An exception is Woman01 (69) who mentions usability issues for ending up calling her most important ones on the landline regardless the price of the call. In any case,

Finally, those who have domestic service report communicating with workers, as maids or gardeners, through the mobile phone. Usually, low income workers would only have access to mobile telephony, consequently so texting and short voice calls are common.

4.1. The importance of SMS

After voice calls, SMS constitutes the second most popular service. All mobile users in the study report texting with different degrees of intensity. In line with industry data (see section 1.2); there is a general perception that SMS are widespread among different population segments and generations:

Yes, [texting] is widespread. And, fundamentally, it first started among the young ones, but nowadays older ladies also start to use them. (...) Even more, it may happen that a housewife would text more than (...) call. Man06 (70)

Popularity of SMS is perceived to be directly related to its costs:

I think (...) it [communicating by SMS] might have to do with cost (...). Just now it [voice communication] is getting cheaper, but it was a little bit expensive for some sectors of population. Man15 (64)

Texting is well accepted and participants use them both with their younger relatives and with peers of their age. However some mobile users explicitly reject SMS. For instance, Woman01 (69) explains she mainly uses the mobile phone to make calls. She would write SMS when necessary but doing it “kills her”. She texts very short messages like “Ok, kisses” to confirm received information but she would avoid long texts as she gets tired off the small buttons of the device. In the same sense, Woman13 (75) prefers voice calls as she is “too lazy” to text. Even though all her friends send SMS, she never texts back.

Another example is Man15 (64), who would mostly use SMS in a reactive way for local communications. He will answer incoming texts but “it’s unlikely that I start with and SMS, I start with a call”. However, when he needs to talk to any of his three children –all of them living abroad, he sends and SMS to coordinate a Skype conversation later on the same day. Finally, Woman09 (67) asked her daughters and friends not to text neither e-mail her, as she prioritize voice communications. Yet, she would deal with non-verbal communication if it is justified, for instance when friends or relatives are abroad. She would also accept using SMS if they came from low-income people who can not afford voice calls.

Some mobile users, in contrast, are very intensive texters. For instance, Woman02 (65) describes a frequent use of SMS and MMS with peers and relatives. She would text her children every day, a habit she acquired before retirement. If she forgets texting them, her daughter will check if she is OK. She has a group in her mobile phone for her three children, so she could write them the same:

Often I send them “From this sunny Saturday, with no [MD] guard duty.” Because before [retirement], I used to send “from this guard duty Saturday, whatever” Woman02 (65)

Woman14 (67) regularly texts her husband so he can call her back with no extra cost (he set her number as a “free” number). Also, in some occasions she would

prefer to text her children –instead of calling them– so she does not feel as being intrusive. Finally, she describes expressive uses of texting, as in the Friend's Day (20 July), when she interchanges greetings with friends.

In general, texters explain they try to respect orthographic norms. They make few word contractions, usually very common ones, and accept writing without accent marks –which are important in Spanish– as they are difficult or impossible to put in SMS:

I write the whole [word]. (...) The only thing I summarize is "kisses". (...) I even put commas. (...) What I don't put are accent marks. Woman14 (67)

I write the whole thing. Because (...) there is a way to abbreviate words, you can't do it any which way. (...) [Then] I don't know if I will abbreviate correctly, so then I write the whole word. Woman04 (65)

Finally, two participants complain about non desired SMS. First, Woman11 (71) reports receiving lots of SMS from a contact list she never subscribed to. She had got up to 12 or 13 SMS at the same time, which bothers her. She has to figure out how to unsubscribe and stop this. Second, Woman 09 (67), who does not like receiving advertisements from her mobile company, mentioned that she should talk to the company to stop receiving these messages.

4.2. Driving and talking on the phone

A number of participants, both women and men, do regularly drive. Woman03 (71), summarizes a common idea stated by drivers: even though it is banned, "here, there are lots of people who talk on the cell when driving". She is concerned about the danger associated with the lack of attention and hopes "never to be a victim [of them]".

Drivers in the study do not have a hands free device, so they negotiate whether to use the mobile phone and how to use it. In fact, they see hands free devices as something more suitable for young adults with a more active life.

Women tend to describe safer behaviors. In general, participants would not start mobile conversations while in the car. In general, only women drivers would not answer incoming calls or would stop the car if the call is important. In this sense, Man15 (64) says he could answer incoming calls when driving under certain circumstances. However, he would not start a call or send an SMS when driving because "it seems dangerous to me". Woman09 (67), on the other hand, describes a routine that includes making specific calls before leaving home. The mobile phone is for emergencies so, to her, there is not a need of calling while driving. In case she got a call she would park the car before answering, and call back if the incoming signal already stopped.

Finally, Woman02 (65) explains she usually turns the mobile phone off in the car. By doing this she guarantees not using the mobile in the car. Her motivation is a

fine she got for talking while driving. While she had a good reason for answering that very call, she also agrees that it constitutes a dangerous activity because it is highly distractive. This case exemplifies the dual discourse regarding what “must” be done when driving and what is “actually” done. Another example illustrates this duality. One participant who during the interview explained he would never start a call while driving incurred in a contradiction. That participant made a call while driving the researcher to a private household. It was necessary to reach the destination on time, so the driver made a very short micro-coordination call while going at a markedly slow speed. It was a very quiet neighborhood with almost no traffic. In this case, it seems that the situation justified proceeding with the banned activity.

4.3. The mobile phone at home

While the mobile phone is highly valued on the move, connectivity at home is guaranteed through the landline. Therefore, the mobile phone at home can just play a secondary role in some cases, while in others it remains as central as the landline.

This is the case of Woman01 (69), who will carry the cordless phone and the mobile phone to the room where she is planning to stay, as she does not like to hurry up when phones ring. Woman03 (71) will even bring both, the mobile and the cordless fixed phone, to the bathroom. She also has the mobile phone to the bedroom at night, as some other participants have. It complements the landline they have in the night stand to reassure their reachability. This is the case of Woman02 (65) who argues: “as I live alone, I keep it [the mobile phone] near me”. A consequence of the proximity of the device, she currently uses the mobile phone as her alarm clock.

Reachability can be described in a markedly instrumental way. This is the case of Woman09 (67), who explains she would need the mobile phone to manage the alarm system in the house in case there were a power cut. Man06 (70) will have it close to the bed by night just in case there is a call, an usual behavior in his profession.

For all these individuals the mobile phone is as important as the landline for assuring connectivity. In other cases, however, the most important channel is the fixed phone and users can even ignore the mobile phone while at home. In this sense, Woman13 (75) explains that she never brings the mobile phone to the bedroom as the fixed device she has there is enough assure to be reachable: “those who’d want to find me; they know how to do it”. She also adds that she usually tries to put the mobile phone in a place that allows her to hear incoming calls. However, sometimes she forgets it “in the purse” and does not hear it. In the same sense, a couple explains that the mobile phone becomes a secondary channel of communication when they are at home: she usually leaves it in her purse (Woman11 (71)) and he would take out of his

pockets the wallet and the mobile phone. To him, “it’s as if it [the mobile phone] wouldn’t exist until the next day” (Man12 (70)).

4.4. Mobile phone non-users

The profiles of the two non-users of mobile telephony in the study bring interesting insights to the motivations of non-adoption. First, Woman05 (67) has a clear ideological position of rejection. She decided not to use the mobile phone her son gave her as a present, and even she keeps it in a drawer, she defines herself as a non-user:

I don't have a cell phone because I don't feel I need it. Woman05 (67)

She has a very active life and created specific strategy for being always reachable. She leaves notes at home indicating where she is planning to be and the mobile phone of those friends she is going to be with. This information would her son, the one who lives with her, to reach her. On the other hand, in case she needed to talk to her family a friend would lend a phone, at least for sending and SMS.

This strategy is one of her ways to face the external pressures he faces fro not having a mobile phone. In contrast, she appreciates very much having a landline. The fixed phone “is [good] company” to her and she spends lot of time on social visits on the landline. Finally, in case she had to be in a hospital for a while, or in case she moved to a retirement home, she would use a mobile phone for sure. Connectivity is important to her and this will be the only way to stay in touch with her personal network.

The other mobile non-user is Man10 (68). The moment of the interview he had user a walker and a caregiver was with him. He describes a sedentary life: he has “the life of a retired person”. He defines himself as a person of few words who will have short conversations on the fixed line. While he considers the mobile phone “a great invention”, and all their close relatives have one, he has never been interested in it. He says that he might be “too old” for mobile phones and computers. He would not reject a device if he received it as a present, but he has never considered having one and was never given one. Mobile phones seem not to be significant to him and he does not explain his non-adoption in ideological terms. In fact, his relatives never asked him to have a mobile phone and he describes no external pressures.

Lifestyles of these two participants are different, so they are their reasons for not having a mobile phone are different as well. This is also illustrated by the fact that Woman05 (67) –highly connected to a very active social network– could dispense with the TV but not with the landline. However Man10 (68) –more sedentary– would keep the TV instead of the phone.

4.5. Internet

All the 11 participants who have a computer have also Internet connection and regularly go online from home. They report different levels of use and attachment to the computer. Among those who have incorporated Internet beyond the e-mail, Woman 11 (71) really likes the Internet, as it allows her to access international contents and news from around the world: “it’s like having the world at your feet”. A couple talks about their imminent holidays in a European country –Woman07 (66) and Man08 (67). They arranged everything online: from designing itineraries to finding hotels, as well as the purchase of every related service. When on holidays they usually use public connection points to e-mail their children, as this is the cheapest way of communication. Even though Internet is important to them they mention they will not bring the laptop with them to this trip, as they do not find it worth enough. However, they would bring a tablet if they had one –they seem to be considering the purchase of one. For Man15 (64) Internet and computers are vital: “To tell you the truth, I more often use computers, e-mail and Skype than telephones.” Internet means access to international news, creation of contents and connectivity. At a professional level, he has a blog and relies on social network sites, as Facebook and Twitter, to strength it and increase readers. At a personal level, he uses different channels to manage one-to-one communications.

Some Internet users describe a more distant relationship with computers. For instance, Woman09 (67) explains she goes online for “commercial purposes”. That means, looking for practical information, reading newspapers from abroad and dealing with specific e-mails and tasks related to the family business. She has a very bad opinion of social network sites and she does not Internet to communicate with her significant ones because none of them live “far enough”.

Finally, Woman13 (75) reports usability problems and how her daughters would fix her Internet connection problems. She says she does “almost nothing” with the computer and identifies herself as belonging to an “older generation” not used to information and communication technologies. Like other persons who describe limited use, she likes playing games in the computer.

There are 4 computer non users in the study. Two of them had never used a computer and do neither use mobile phones -see section 4.4. The other stopped using the computer at certain point. Man12 (70) was introduced into computers at work. However, when he was appointed to a senior position he stopped using them and now he is retired he has no interest on them. He recently received a laptop as a present but he does not use it at all. He strongly rejects computers and relies in close relatives who usually assist him in different tasks: from typing documents he dictates or handwrites, to purchasing online by his request.

Finally, Woman01 (69) brings an interesting example of the utility of Internet in specific moments of life. Her son moved abroad for one year with his family. During

this period of time she used to go online in a nearby cybercafé. There she would send long e-mails and Skype with them. The owner of the cybercafé would help her in case of any technical difficulty. She stopped going to the cybercafé when they returned back to the country. The moment of the interview the telephone and face-to-face meeting are the ways she communicates with her children and grandchildren, and she explains she does not use computers or the Internet anymore.

Skype, in fact, is important for those who have children abroad. This is the case of Man15 (64), who has a long experience on using Skype both with his children, all of them living abroad, and with friends and colleagues in different countries. However, not all Internet users would use Skype. Woman 11 (71); a regular Internet user with one daughter living abroad, prefers the regular telephone rather to talk to her. Even though the landline is more expensive, they have a special price plan at home so they can make international calls at a reasonable price.

5. Discussion and conclusion

Participants in the study are young seniors –from 64 to 75 years old, who live in the metropolitan area of Montevideo. In general, they have easy access to information and communication technologies due to their vital trajectory. While some nuances apply, available indicators point that participants constitute a middle-class group. While a majority of the 15 participants were mobile users (13) and Internet users (11), not a single senior complaint for not having any specific communication technology. Following results refer to the sample under study.

First of all, mobile phone constitutes a complement of the landline for those who use it. Mobile phone users use the device in a very autonomous way but always in combination with the fixed land. In fact, any participant uses only a mobile phone, as would happen among lower income classes in Latin America (Galperin and Mariscal, 2007). Mobile telephony is used for communicating with a variety of interlocutors in order to reach a variety of communication goals (Ball- Rokeach, 1985). As in the Barcelona case study, it seems that once the device is adopted it is used regularly (#reference_deleted_for_blind_review).

Second, texting –a significant practice in the Uruguayan society– constitutes a common activity among participants. While acceptance is heterogeneous, mobile users show a good knowledge of SMS and can use them both with younger relatives and with same age peers. This is a specificity of this case study. Evidence from North America (Los Angeles and Toronto) showed that texting is not in the landscape of seniors who participate in a similar case study. The Barcelona case study, on the other

hand, shows that SMS are not that popular among senior participants, and are most used with younger people (#references_deleted_for_blind_review).

Third, drivers have a clear discourse regarding the use of mobile phones: it is dangerous to talk in the phone while driving. However, despite it is a banned activity, specific individuals would challenge the law in given situations. None of them have a hands free device. They consider they do not need hands free devices which are useful for younger people who spend main part of the day in the car.

Fourth, mobile phones are highly valued for connectivity and reachability. Landline can be the only relevant channel for connectivity when there is one at hand. In these cases, the mobile phone is almost ignored once the individual is at home. In other cases, the mobile phone has the same status as the landline to guarantee reachability while at home so it is kept as part of the media landscape in the different rooms of the house and during different times of the day. However, this attachment to the mobile phone at home does not mean having long conversations with it, as social visits tend to be carried on the landline.

Fifth, this group of seniors does not perceive mobile telephony as an expensive service. Nevertheless, a conscious use allows participants to reach their communication goals without incurring in what, for them, could be high costs. They do not waste money and follow some basic rules to keep costs under control, making the most of their personal subscription in combination with their closer network's subscriptions.

Sixth, non adoption can be based in a diversity of reasons. In fact, the two non-users of mobile phones illustrate that richness. They are in their late sixties but the woman (67 years old) has a very active life while the man (68) is markedly sedentary. Their different lifestyles would be related to the different reasons supporting their decision: the woman explicitly rejects using mobile phones although fixed line is really important to her. The man never thought about having a mobile phone and does not give too much importance to the fixed line. They do not feel disconnection to their network, as both are happy with the communication media they have. This evidence, which is common to other cases studies (#references_deleted_for_blind_review), allows us to claim that non-use needs to be analyzed with detail.

Seventh, there is a high use of Internet among participants (11 out of 15). Some show a high attachment to computers and a high level of use of different online services. They appreciate access to information and are connected to their relevant ones. Some individuals also participate in social network sites. In contrast, other users see the computer as an instrument, a tool that must be used for specific tasks even though other channels of communications, as voice calls, are much more appreciated. Among non users there is a range of motivations, from explicit rejection to just unawareness, or vital distance, to computers.

Finally, all those who face any difficulty by using computers or mobile phones reported having a warm expert (Bajardjeva, 2005); that is, a close relative helping them from time to time. However, the warm expert is much more important for dealing

with computers than for dealing with mobile phones. In fact, mobile phone users are pretty autonomous and few individuals refer to external help.

Summing up, the most distinctive characteristic of the case study in Montevideo is the extended use of SMS among seniors who have a mobile phone. In addition, mobile telephony becomes part of the daily communication practices of mobile phone adopters.

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Annex 1

Questionnaire, in Spanish⁴

Edad:

Lugar de nacimiento:

¿Cuánto tiempo hace que se trasladó a vivir a Montevideo?
(Si no es de Montevideo)

¿En qué barrio / zona de la ciudad vive?
(No buscamos una dirección concreta, sólo el área / barrio)

¿Vive usted solo/a?

Sí

No

→ ¿Con quién vive usted?

¿Tiene empelada del hogar?

Nivel de estudios

Sin estudios (no tuvo oportunidad de ir a la escuela)

Estudios primarios

Estudios secundarios

Estudios terciarios

...técnicos

... universitarios

¿Dónde viven, dónde se encuentran... sus familiares y amigos/as?
(Es decir, las personas que son importantes para usted)

⁴ Participants were informed that they can leave unanswered any question they want to. Flexibility allowed for different ways of delivering the questionnaire. Therefore, even though it was designed to be an oral questionnaire, in one interview the circumstances guided to a written by one of the interviewees.

¿Está usted jubilado/a?

Sí

→ ¿Cuánto tiempo hace que se jubiló?

→ ¿Cuál era su actividad? (¿En qué trabajaba?)

No

→ ¿A qué se dedica? (¿En qué trabaja?)

Resumen

Este artículo continúa la serie de casos de estudio sobre comunicación móvil y personas mayores en diferentes ciudades. Presentamos los resultados preliminares del caso de estudio de Montevideo (Uruguay), que se llevó a cabo en Junio de 2012.

El texto presenta la metodología, el trabajo de campo y una selección de resultados. Para facilitar la interpretación de los resultados, contextualizándolos, una primera sección discute un conjunto de datos secundarios sobre Uruguay relativos a la estructura demográfica y a la posesión y uso de tecnologías de la información y las comunicaciones (ICT).

Con edades comprendidas entre los 65 y los 75 años, las 15 personas que participan en el estudio viven en hogares privados en el área metropolitana de Montevideo. En relación a las personas usuarias de móvil (13), los aspectos que se desarrollan son el envío de SMS, el uso del teléfono móvil mientras se conduce, y el papel que juega en móvil en casa. En relación a las personas no usuarias (2), analizamos la diversidad de sus perfiles y sus motivaciones. También analizamos la relación con Internet y los ordenadores (11 participantes lo utilizan, mientras que 4 no). El artículo finaliza con la sección de discusión y conclusiones.

Palabras clave

Tercera edad; telefonía móvil; caso de estudio; Montevideo; Uruguay

Resum

Aquest article continua la sèrie de casos d'estudi sobre comunicació mòbil i gent gran a diferents ciutats. Presentem els resultats preliminars del cas d'estudi de Montevideo (Uruguai) que es va dur a terme al Juny de 2012.

El text presenta la metodologia, el treball de camp i una selecció de resultats. Per tal de facilitar la interpretació dels resultats, contextualitzant-los, una primera secció discuteix un conjunt de dades secundàries sobre Uruguai relatives a l'estructura demogràfica i la possessió i l'ús de tecnologies de la informació i les comunicacions (TIC).

Amb edats compreses entre els 65 i els 75 anys, les 15 persones que participen en l'estudi viuen en llars privades a l'àrea metropolitana de Montevideo. En relació a les persones usuàries de mòbil (13 individus), els aspectes que s'estudien són l'enviament d'SMS, l'ús del telèfon mòbil mentre es condueix, i el paper que juga el mòbil a casa. En relació a les no usuàries (2 persones), analitzen els seus perfils i les seves motivacions. També estudien la relació amb Internet i els ordinadors (11 persones usuàries i 4 que no ho són). L'article finalitza amb la secció de discussió i conclusions.

Paraules clau

Gent gran; telefonia mòbil, estudi de cas; Montevideo; Uruguai

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