

CONNECTING MEDIA, GENERATION AND MEMORY

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Abstract

The objective of this work is to discuss the relationship between media, generation and memory, and more specific, to talk about how these connections can be important in the generational identity (Aroldi, 2011); how people who was born in a specific moment can use the media as a tool to construct their collective identity; in which way cultural and economic differences between people from the same cohort can interfere in their “generational belonging” (Aroldi, 2011). In this empiric research, we used the methodology knowing as focus group and in the sequence of the observations, we concluded that it is almost indubitable that the reality is inseparable from the media. The memories related to technologies of information and communication and their consume habits during their formative years can contribute to shape generational identity.

Key-words

ICT; Generational Identity; Elderly; Media; Memory.

1. Introduction

Since the work written by Mannheim, Problem of the generations (1952), the category of generation has followed a long path through the various fields of Social Sciences to get, more recently, to the studies of media through Aroldi and Colombo (2007). In this line of study, people belonging to the same generation cannot be identified only by sociodemographic aspects such as age, gender, education or occupation, but also by a series of other factors that coexist with each other. In addition to differences that could be explained by personal and lifestyle choices, there is a common point resulting from the fact that people share the same cultural, social and historical environment as well as have very similar experiences related to the media, through the consumption of their content and access to technology.

In this process, we highlight the media as an element of special importance and the main point of analysis in this study: "media play different roles at different moments of this social construction of a shared identity, and that these roles are strongly affected by a lot of variables, both socio-cultural and technological" (Aroldi, 2011: 52). Individuals who shared the same media content develop individual consciences, which act as forms of socialization defined by Aroldi and Columbus (2007) as Gestalt: a peculiar way to notice, to interpret and to evaluate social situations, historical and cultural phenomena.

Therefore, the media play a significant role in this process where historical memories and the media are closely linked. Newspapers, television programs, movies, books, magazines, among others, can be a reference for a whole generation.

Individual experiences can be shared and identified by people who have never met, but who have experienced similar situations, even if in different contexts.

Thus, in addition to aspects related to the particular characteristics of each individual, there is also the influence of so-called "media biography", when the experience that people have with the media, which include the historical development of the media system, innovation and diffusion of the information and communication technologies and the media products can influence the concept of generational identity.

This empirical work is based on the reports of people who were born between 1940 and 1952, with the objective of trying to understand qualitatively if individuals belonging to the same age group, but with different trajectories of life, are able to identify themselves as belonging to the same generation. We also try to understand how these people use the media as a tool for the construction of the collective identity. Thus, we intend to discuss media, generation, memory and, more specifically, how this relationship may influence the construction of a generational identity (Aroldi, 2011).

2. Methods

From the collection of the data analysed in this article, we used the methodology known as the focus group. The majority of the authors agrees that the main advantage of this approach is the interaction of the interviewees with the aim of generating information (Kitzinger, 1995; Morgan, 1996; Merton et al. , 1990). According to David Carey (1996: 226) focus group can be understood as an imprecise technique which consists of "a semi-structured group session moderated by a leader, held in an informal place with the purpose of collecting data on a specific topic". David Morgan (Morgan, 1996: 130) defines this methodology from three main components: "first, as a method of research with the objective of generating content; second, the interaction in the discussion group is the source of such information; and third, this methodology allows the researcher maintain an active role in mediating the discussion". This qualitative methodology is particularly useful to reflect on social and cultural realities, because we can access the experiences, meanings, understandings, as well as the attitudes, opinions, knowledge and beliefs. Kitzinger (1995) summarizes the essential function of this technique:

The idea behind the focus group method is that this process can help people explore and clarify their views more easily than in an individual interview. When the dynamic of the group works well, the participants work together with the researcher, leading the search for a new, and often unexpected, direction (p. 229).

This methodology was chosen to act as an efficient way to stimulate the process of "remember", because the memories were easily and mutually induced during the session. Then, the open-ended questions and the possibility to express themselves freely produced information that would otherwise be difficult to achieve. The data collection was carried out in a Retirement Home, where five of the six interviewees reside, being the exception the man of 66 years.. We analysed and

interpreted their memories of historical and social events in the years 1960, 1970, 1980 and 1990, chosen by corresponding to the periods of childhood and when they were still in the labour market, in addition to being periods of important events in the recent history Portuguese. We take into account their paths of life and personal experiences, as well as their connections with the media.

We have been careful not only to speech produced by the interviewees, but also the possible gestures and changes in tone of voice that could reveal significant information. The discussion lasted an hour and a half and was organized from five topics: (a) brief explanation of the reasons for the research; (b) presentation of participants; (c) memories and representations of decades of 1960 and 1970; (d) Memories and representations of decades of 1980 and 1990; (e) formulation of the idea of generational unit. The questions that comprised the questionnaires were developed with the objective of exploring fundamental questions such as: historical experience, cultural repertoires, biographical experience, social atmosphere in which they lived, consumption of media content, discourses of identity.

The audio was recorded, transcribed and, for analysis of the information, was used a computer program that allowed for the identification and classification of patterns. Considering the importance of understanding the individual perspectives of each of the issues addressed, was applied a second questionnaire that provided additional information and some characteristics of their lives today related to the consumption of media content. The discussion was made from the point of view of people who have participated in this work. Therefore, we seek heterogeneity for the research and, consequently, we try to work with a group with members with diverse profiles. This group was made taking into account, in addition to age, other aspects such as: geographical location (people who lived in big cities and in small towns); gender (2 men and 4 women); highest level of Education; and finally, people who have spent their youth in Portugal.

Table 1: Characteristics of focus groups

Name	Gender	Age	Occupation before retirement	Place of birth	Education	Marital status
Daniel	Male	66 years	Judge	Porto	Graduation	Married
João	Male	71 years	Bank employee	Marco de Canaveses	Secondary education	Married
Adelaide	Female	71 years	Bank employee	Lisboa	Secondary education	Widow
Paula	Female	71 years	Bank employee	Torres Novas	Secondary education	Widow
Ana	Female	70 years	Bank employee	Castelo Branco	Secondary education	Widow
Helena	Female	70 years	Bank employee	Lisboa	Secondary education	Widow

3. Generational Identity and Memory

To understand the concept of generation we must consider two distinct perspectives, but that many times are overlapped (Loos et al. , 2012): a) Generation understood as a specific period of life, such as, be retired for example; b) Generation

understood as an age cohort, which indicates that all people born between two specific periods of time belong to a specific generation. However, Edmunds and Turner (2005) give a more complex definition when they said that the generation is "an *age cohort* that comes to *have a social significance* by virtue of *constituting itself* as a *cultural identity*" (p. 7), where biographical characteristics are combined with historical and cultural aspects connecting people from a same age group to specific historical experience, developing similar habits of consumption.

Individual experiences can be shared and identified by individuals who have never met, but who have witnessed similar situations, even if in different contexts. Sociodemographic characteristics should also be taken into account, as is the case of gender, education, cultural capital, economic conditions and even geographical location (Azevedo, 2012). Generation is a social phenomenon that represents nothing more than a particular type of identity that embraces age groups related and incorporated in a historical and social process (Mannheim, 1952). Mannheim defines a generational unit as something that represents more a concrete link than a generation in itself, where young people who have experienced the same specific historical problems, may be recognized themselves as part of the same generation. While groups within the same generation who interpret common experiences in different ways, are separate generational units. People who shared the same media content from the individual consciences, which act as forms of socialization, a peculiar way to perceive, interpret and evaluate social situations, historical and cultural phenomena (Aroldi and Colombo, 2007). Therefore, a generation is recognized as such, when it is able to produce a similar speech shared among its members.

It is not simply growing together, but also spontaneously observes that the other understands and articulates certain topics in a similar manner (Corsten preliminary ruling, 1999). What is defined here is the concept of semantic generation understood as resources, models of interpretation, principles, evaluations and linguistic devices so that a shared experience is discussed and translated into discourses of everyday life Dhunpath (2000) says that "addressing the life histories is, probably, the only way to understand the reasons and practices and, at the same time, reflect on the individual and social experiences ". Carol Witherall and Noddings (1991) advocate the use of life histories as an efficient search tool and suggest that

Tell our story can be chaotic and liberating, however, is more than that. Stories are powerful search tools. They give us a true picture of the people, in real situations, debating with real problems. They eliminate the indifference generated by sampling and invite us to speculate about what may have changed, and with what effect. Of course, they remind us of our weaknesses, and most importantly, they invite us to remember that we are teaching, learning and searching to improve the human condition (p. 280).

In this process, we emphasize the concept of memory that has been the target of research for centuries. The studies of Maurice Halbwachs (1950) helped us to understand the different elements that make up the concept of memory, and in

addition, was the first scholar to speak about "collective memory". To him "l'idée que d'éléments aussi personnels et particuliers de notre vie qui nous sont toujours le plus présent a aussi marqué dans la mémoire des groupes qui nous tiennent de plus près et ainsi, nous pouvons nous appuyer sur la mémoire des autres quand nous le voulons, de nous les rappeler" (Halbwachs, 1950 : 22). According to his thought, the memory of an individual is connected to groups, the society and its institutions, so the other is an essential element in the individual memory.

Within this context, the language is an important factor in the process of remembering and reporting information within a group. According to Bosi (1979) language is a socializing tool of memory, because it reduces, unifies and brings in the same space, various experiences. Cultural Memory is also based on communication transmitted from person to person via the media, often generated by morality, a basic form of communication, but also in other ways more sophisticated as writing, movies, or even the internet contributing to extending the act to remind both spatially and temporally. The fictional media as serials, movies are characterized by the power of the collective imagination of the past. Cultural memory is constituted by different means that operate in different symbolic systems: religious texts, historic paintings, documentaries, for example. Each one of them has a specific way to recall historical and social events and leave their own brands in the memories that it creates.

Therefore, this collective/individual memory is of fundamental importance to the sense of identity, where a group with a common past, who shared the same historical events, has similar memories contributing to the sense of generational belonging.

4. Analysis

According to Mannheim (1952), a generation comes from experience of large events and social changes, especially during childhood and youth. According to the author, people who during his youth, in his formative years, have faced the same concrete historical problems can be considered as belonging to the same generation. Aroldi (2011: 4) adds that "the affinity between individuals belonging to the same generation unit therefore appears in their sharing of the same contents that constitute the consciousness of the individual members and act as factors of socialization within the group".

In this prospect, a historic event that arose several times in the speech of the interviewees was a dictatorship and the Portuguese colonial war. During this period, Portugal has gone through political, social and economic moments that have marked an entire generation. More than 150,000 Portuguese became involved in the battlefronts of colonial war and both males interviewed experienced events directly related to the war.

On the oversea war I can speak in the first person. I was called to the troop (...). There were 10 days of boat to arrive in Angola and I was there during three years. (João, 71 years old)

When the war began in the 1960s, there were many soldiers that went for the overseas territories. It was situations in which the Portuguese people were

divided between Portugal and the overseas provinces. I did military service in East Timor and I stayed there until the revolution for independence. (Daniel, 66 years old)

Still related to the Portuguese dictatorship, the participants of the focus group spoke about their experiences with the media in this period. We noticed a high cultural capital represented by the habit of listening to foreign radio as an alternative to communication and to escape from the censure imposed in Portugal. The interviewees emphasized the difficulties of access to information, at the same time that they made an antagonism with the current days. Although they did not devalue their childhood, acknowledged that being young today is advantageous, because living in a technological environment facilitates the communication.

Who wanted to know what was happening here had to go to the BBC, on the radio. Little by little to nobody hear outside in the street. (Adelaide, 71 years)

I, for example, was in Luanda on 25 April. The information was so filtered that I knew that there had been a revolution in Lisbon by a broadcaster of Brazzaville. "Il est-arresté" (laughs). I heard the news in French. They reported only two days later. (João, 71 years old)

There was no freedom of press at the time, the films had a vision of censure, there was no free content as currently exists. (Daniel, 66 years old)

Interpret the category of generation from the point of view of education is especially useful, since it avoids the excessive risk of a rigid analysis of generational identity as a product solely of history, of demographic events or as a result of a self-service process with no connection to the earlier and later generations. Thus, a strong generational trait that we identified in this study was the difficulty of access to formal education. To understand better, in the 1960s, 34% of the Portuguese population, aged between 15 and 64 years, was illiterate. Therefore, the participants unanimously demonstrated difficulties to complete their studies.

We concluded that in spite of the interviewees did not know each other at the time they described these events, they spoke mutually, recognizing on the reports of others, their own experiences related to education. Therefore, the sharing of memory plays an important part in the recognition of belonging to the same generation that went through the same difficulties and constraints. However, the influence of personal choice, of each one's life should not be excluded, as we can see below in a discussion of the difficulties in studying in Portugal in the 1960s.

In 1960 I finished the fourth class with distinction. Then, a lady told me: "it is a pity that João does not continue studying". But my father was a farmer "I don't have money!" "you have to go to the seminar, perhaps you will become a Father". In 1961 I had done the admission exam and I went to the seminar. (João, 71 years old)

My husband was exactly the same thing because my father was a simple tailor in a small village. He didn't have money to study. Pity! He did the entire seminar. (Paula, 71 years)

I did my third year of high school and the college was mixed, for boys and girls, and the Minister (ironic expression), made the separation of the sexes. He chose the boys and I went to the street. Difficult, much illiteracy. I am only finished the seventh year after being in the bank. It was the difficulty that the Salazar's regime imposed to those who wanted to study. Most of those who attended were because they had money. (Adelaide, 71 years).

The people who belong to the same generation had unique experiences when they had similar ages, (Edmunds and Turner, 2005), and have memories and powerful impressions of how life was. Consequently, an older people's vision of life is influenced by these same events and memories. Thus, important periods of their personal stories were widely mentioned during the interviews and some were related to the Second World War and the dictatorship.

One thing that impressed me was the II World War. In the evening, there was a drill as if it was an air attack and then, the legionaries with those boots on the street "bum, bum, bum". During the dictatorship, one of my brothers was imprisoned by the PIDE, but only because he was walking on the streets (Ana, 70 years).

I had a cousin who has his name in a street in Lisbon after 25 April, because he was arrested at the time of engineers. The boy was taking a shower and the PIDE take him and spent two years in Caxias. (Paula, 71 years).

As we can see ahead, another important aspect related to the individual and collective memory is its connection with places because it is an important way to build and rebuild memories (Kessel, 2004). As it is well known, the studies about media and audience showed significant differences about the cultural products reception that are determined by a series of factors related to sociodemographic variables such as social class, gender, age, cultural groups and the context in which these products were consumed (in the family, among friends, etc.) and geographical location (Aroldi and Colombo, 2007).

Therefore, we see that the place where the participants of the focus group lived was an aspect of differentiation between them when we talk about media consumption because in some cases, they have access to the media on a limited basis since they live in regions of the country quite isolated. On the other hand, those who lived in large cities, such as Lisbon and Porto, benefited from the easy access of cultural content and media.

For the doctor come in my house, my father had borrowed a horse because he could not come by car because there was neither car nor road (...) The newspaper, the only one who was there in the land, was the father who distributed and was called "A Voz do Pastor ". It was there that we knew all the news. My life was different, Culture was next to anything, I only gathered the people after the church. (John, 71 years old).

My mother was an employee of a broadcaster. Therefore, I never missed a show. It was ballet in São Carlos, It was Rubem de Paime, I saw Vianna da

Motta the last time that he acted. I mean, I never missed anything. (Paula, 71 years).

The concept of domestication was also observed in this research. Authors of studies of media use this terminology as a metaphor for thinking about the technologies related to the moral economy of a family (Silverstone, 2006). The domestication is, therefore, in the first instance, to bring technologies to home, ideas or information about the consumption process that can shape social behaviour by helping in the construction of individual and collective identity in the society, in both private and public spheres.

The Portuguese television was launched in 1957, but the massive domestication only happened after 1974, a time when it was greater freedom of expression for the political debates, but also marked by the arrival of Brazilian soap operas and in the following decade, 1980, the introduction of CTVs. Thus, the TV has had an important role in the discussion and was seen as a sign of modernity at the time, an important part of the daily life of people.

As we observed below, this process of domestication took place in different ways among the participants of focus group. For some, the introduction of these technologies in their lives was facilitated by belong to families with high economic conditions and because they live in big cities, and in some cases, they were “facilitators” of access to other people who did not have TV.

We already had television, on 7th March 1956 it was made official and I already had television. I had since the beginning. Then, at night the whole neighbours come to my house. On Saturdays and Sunday they were the children. I remember my living room with 30 children seeing television. (Helena, 70 years).

Mr Soares was in the government and came the soap opera Gabriela and everything was calm. Everyone watched Gabriela. (Adelaide, 71 years)

- It was the first soap opera that we saw here. (Helena, 70 years)

- “Gabriela Cravo Canela”. There were so many people trying to imitate that character. (John, 71 years old)

After came the “Escrava Isaura”. (Helena, 70 years)

- They also stopped the sessions in the Parliament. (Adelaide, 71 years)

- In the Parliament, yes Madam, it's true, the Assembly of the Republic stopped at the time of Gabriela! (João, 71 years)

Of course the place where they were at a specific moment of their lives or even economic aspects could have facilitated or, otherwise, have limited the contact with the media. However, we also noticed through their reports, that these were not decisive factors because they sought alternatives to circumvent less favourable situations related to the concept of domestication.

In my house there was no radio. To arrive in a place where there was a radio it was necessary to cross a small river, a railway, in the Estação da Liberação we walked underneath the train and there was a bar with a radio where we could hear the football. Later, when we wanted to watch tv we went to a bar

that was in Foz (in Oporto), we had to make the minimum consumption requirement that was to drink a coffee. (João, 71 years)

The first record-player that I had was very old. I asked a disc borrowed to see if it worked, and I spent months with this unique disc. (Daniel, 66 years old) The audience surveys indicate that for this age group, the television is an important variable in the determination of generational belonging (Aroldi and Colombo, 2007). Thus, in addition to age, the members of a same generation share the same cultural landscape as well as the same system and media products. This means that determining whether people have the ability to interpret media contenta similarly, it is an important feature to identify members of the same generation.

This theory supports the empirical information of this research, therefore, when the focus group discussion focused on this subject, there was a large amount of information in a very natural and sometimes shared nostalgia among the interviewees. These memories have roots in some popular programs of the time, and which are still used as standards for the interpretation and evaluation of the current programs as is the case of the Eurovision Song Contest.

- The program Zip-Zip was very interesting and had a great audience. There was a series... Bonanza. It was a series that a lot of people liked it. It Had the Perrie Madson, the Santo. These programs are part of television's history. There was also Eurovision festival. (Daniel, 66 years old)
- Ah yes, the Eurovision, the festival, it had beautiful songs. (Ana, 70 years)
- And at that time, it was not as now that no one cares. The country stopped. These programs were a success. (Daniel, 66 years old)
- Now, these festivals are a misery. (Ana, 70 years)
- I remember Antonio Calvario, a singer in vogue at the time, Madalene Iglesias, Simone de Oliveira. These three are still alive. They are programs that were the he pinnacle of the time, they captivate the Portuguese society. (Daniel, 66 years old)

According to Aroldi and Colombo (2007), studies have revealed the importance of a first phase of socialization for the use of technology, because a person who accompanies the emergence of a new ICT, for example, during their formative years - childhood, youth or early adulthood - tends to consider this as an integral part of their culture. The authors cite the example of the television for the generation baby-boomers (born in the 1950s and 1960s). Therefore, the reference is the one they have grown up, that is, with a few channels, almost no advertising, in black and white and it was part of a family ritual. With respect to the new information and communication technologies - the computer and the internet - for the older generations, are often associated with the challenge of keeping pace with technological innovations and also the feeling of pride for having seen the birth of these technologies.

I was lucky because I could watch the birth of informatics. The first time, I started to reject everything, because everything that is new for us with a certain age, makes confusion, but when I started to understand things, I started to love it. I started to see that with this object I had to work less, I would make everything much quicker. (João, 71 years old)

I have never been on the crest of the wave of technologies. I was acquiring when I had a need. I bought a computer when I saw that was in need, but at that time already a lot of people had a computer. A cell phone, I only had one until today, it is black and white, in 2003 it cost me about 500 euros. Still works well. (Daniel, 66 years old)

As the focus group was made up mostly of women, issues related to gender were mentioned. In the 1960s, only 13% of women worked and in the following decade this number rose to 19%. The fact that Portugal was at war and in a moment in which the emigration was common (especially among male individuals), women began to be part of the labour market. Therefore, in a period of Portuguese history in which they had very limited social role, this new vision of the woman working generates prejudices and taboos about professions that are considered less acceptable.

- At that time, some occupations were ... (João, 71 years old)
- There were the artists! (Adelaide, 71 years)
- Fernanda (his first wife) wanted to be a nurse and her father said no: "nurses are all hookers". (John, 71 years old)
- I wanted to be a doctor and my father did not approve. (Helena, 70 years)
- And the telephonists too. Nurses and telephonists could not marry. They gathered together because the government does not let them marry. (Adelaide, 71 years)
- People who worked in the theatre and in the ballet too. When I was at school, before going to Africa, I was about 9 years, and Madame Breton was a dance teacher and she talked to my mother, because I had snack for the ballet. My mother saw me in front of the mirror dancing with the music and said : "no way you will show your legs in the theatre! ". (Paula, 71 years)

5. Conclusions

In accordance with the observations described above, we note that there is no doubt about how our reality became almost inseparable from the media. The memories related to technologies and media driven consumption habits during the formative years helping to shape the concept of generational unit. Certainly, the fact that five of the six interviewees know each other previously, has contributed to a more relaxed setting which favoured the interaction and the production of information.

The relevance of the act of remembering by older people is more than the memory of each one, is also the memory of the family, the group, the society and of a whole generation. Therefore, first of all, we must highlight the importance of memory to the development of this empirical work, that served as a support for the narratives of the participants of this research.

When we say: "this appeared on television", "I remember that I saw this in the news", "I saw in the tv" is no longer just an option that we have to add information to socialize and communicate, it is also observed that the media are used as a way to sustain the truth in oral discourse, helping to think and act. Thus, within a social scientific perspective, we believe that the media and the information and

communication technology are important in the construction of narratives related to generational belonging

Therefore, in order for a group of people to have the same generational identity should be taken into account much more than individual sociodemographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, occupation, but consider several other factors at the same time as lifestyles, media consumption, the environment they live in, the social networks in which they are inserted. We noticed that the historical processes, technological development, the processes of domestication and incorporation of new information and communication technologies, and many other cultural and social factors may influence the generation to which they belong.

Our interpretations were influenced by social, cultural, financial and even geographical positions. The fact that there were men and women in the interview allowed greater diversity during the discussions. A high cultural capital (knowledge of other languages, interest in culture, experiences with travel), even for today's standards, was essential to make the focus group more interesting and productive.

To be involved in the same historical and cultural experiences and to have similar media consumption practices, help us to conclude that the media are important for defining generational unit. Of course, obvious differences that could be explained by personal and lifestyle choices, brought complexity to the definition of generation, but it does not prevent us to identify ourselves with "the other".

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