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# Minors as creators in the digital age: from prosumer to collaborative creator. Theoretical review 1972-2016

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## Abstract

**Introduction.** This article presents a chronological review of theories that contemplate minors as digital content creators. **Theoretical framework.** We have selected material that refers to emerging terminology to describe the online behaviour of juvenile users. **Conclusions and discussion.** Results confirm that there are diverse new words and phrases for describing and labelling young people’s online presence and participation. The plethora of neologisms contributes to experts categorizing different users as “generations” of digital content creators yet the time period elapsed between each new generation is very short and we observe that the differences in the way users interact with the technology are very small: we have observed designations such as the WhatsApp, Twitter, selfie and Snapchat generations. Therefore we question what really determines a new generation of young creators of digital content and we argue against the excessive labelling with the word “generation” and propose that groups be referred to by user profiles instead. For this purpose we have compiled information about user characteristics according to the way they interact with technology.

## Keywords

theory; minors; digital contents; generation; *prosumer*.

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Traslated by Elizabeth Bond

## 1. Introduction

Youth —children and adolescents— have always shown the need to participate in society and to express themselves. This need has been transferred to online communication, where young people talk about what concerns them, what they think and how they feel. Young people have begun to make room for themselves on the Internet (a space which was primarily dominated by adults) —at younger and younger ages (Marsh, 2014)—, to the point where they have achieved some equality as “public communicators” (Stern, 2008: 100). This evolution, which defines youth and its cultural characteristics in relation to media has a long scientific tradition in the field of communication and has been thoroughly examined since the 1950s (Parsons, 1951 and Coleman, 1961). The progressive digitalisation of society —especially since the dawn of the Internet— has increased scientific and social interest in the phenomena that occur online, particularly in the last two decades.

The goal of this paper is not only to compile the main theories that describe juveniles and their conduct in digital society since the 1970s to today (2016), but also to codify the amalgam of language that defines them and which we have observed has become quite saturated as there is not even a natural year’s difference between the designations to describe one “generation” to the next. To this end, we have compiled several studies that have provided denominations or nomenclature for referring to the distinct characteristics of juvenile users with respect to the generation that came before them. Therefore, we must insist that we will find several generations of digital content creators even in the same year, even though for authors such as Ortega y Gasset (1975), and others, a period of 15 years should pass before there can be a new generation. Feixa (2015: 122) mentions “off schedule generations”, ephemeral groups “which at times last a year or half of a year —after the Facebook generation, we saw the Twitter generation; after that came the WhatsApp generation, and shortly after that we had the Snapchat generation— every year, every moment there’s a new generational innovation [...]”. The situation which we will see we observe this in the present study, is justified as Feixa, Fernández and Figueras (2016:107) indicate, by the existence of transitions in social movements that affect young people which simply “are synthesised in a terminological change”.

So, this article discusses in a chronological manner all of the terms that have been attempted to explain the “theoretical features” (*Ibidem*, 2016: 109) that are distinct and unique to all of those who were born during the digital revolution, pursuing, as Dávila (2004: 93) proposes “The content that gives rise to the generational identity” that “implicate life styles and particularly juvenile social practices and collective behaviour”, and which furthermore, as the author continues “Also involve values and world views that guide these behaviours”.

The established order for the exposition, comes from the first proposals by McLuhan and Nevit (1972) and Toffler (1990), who determined that any user without distinction, could be a consumer, producer and educator of others, in other words, they observed the individual as a *prosumer*. From then on a series of definitions have surfaced from authors who have different understandings, particularly about the role of children as internet users, sometimes coinciding on the name, although not on the competencies of the subjects. Progressively, after this generation many others emerge

mainly conditioned by technological innovation. This is the case of the *Screenagers Generation* cited by Rushkoff (1999), which is defined by the use of digital interactive screens; the *Google Generation* as defined by Vivanco's (2008), identified by the use of the browser; the *App-generation* identified by Gardner and Davis (2013), who are characterised as such because of their use of mobile apps; the *#Generación*, cited by Feixa (2014), marked by their use of hashtags in Twitter conversations; the child media-television *prosumer* (Aguaded & Urbano-Cayuela, 2014), who is inclined towards technology and audiovisual content; or the *iGeneration*, *Homeland Generation Children* (Hope, 2015), known for their purchase of Apple devices. For the selection of the generations we present for this article, we have taken into account three realities: that the proposal is based on previous solid theoretical ground, that concrete activities carried out by minors are described, and that a novel label with respect to previous theories is provided. Thus, all of the more or less “trendy” denominations that only add up to a name change and do not really suppose a generational jump or a reflexion of a new social movement have been excluded.

The results allow us to venture into the imminent future of these generations of digital creators and producers; which will be related to the way they consume information, their contribution to the creation of knowledge on the web and new ways of working in virtual environments which have yet to be invented.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The birth of the Web 2.0 (O'Reilly, 2009) contributed to the leadership of minors in the creation of digital content, who began to separate from their parents in their internet use. The emancipation in content consumption supposed a radical change in the supremacy of adults over the “textual power” (Kress, 2003), which was now also in the hands of younger people. These users “are fanatical media consumers: television, magazines, radio, webpages, *weblogs*; they use all of these media in an intensive manner and often at the same time” (Boschma, 2008: 101). The beginning of the participation of minors on the Internet, according to studies and theories on youth culture the in the present era, could be designated as *Generation Net* which was posited by Tapscott (1998) and points to the development of the concept *after computer* (ac) which gave name to the first young people who began to direct their actions in function of the dictates of the Internet (Feixa, 2011-2014). Even though traditionally adolescents have experimented with different identities (Stern, 2008), having conversation about whatever crosses their minds... In short, “creating a counterculture typical of identitarian experimentation” (Castells, 2001: 12). In the information society, this behaviour was transferred to the web where the possibility of committing to different roles, was multiplied exponentially. Experts establish different practices in children when they are online as content creators, from the most tender years of life (Marsh, 2014). They assure that there are many who participate in the transmission of media literacy within the core of the family through the use of Facebook, either using their parents’ account or those of older siblings or perhaps through their own accounts, which are managed by their parents. In the last ten years, a change has been observed with respect to the experience and communication of minors which has evolved to more complex forms thanks to technology. Today the interaction between children also permits a multimodal collaboration, for exchanging texts, etc., which is produced from one to many and organised by common interests. This phenomenon is a preview of future tendencies (Marsh, 2014b). The study *Producing Sites, Exploring Identities: Youth Online Authorship* about what minors do online (Stern, 2008: 100-107), reveals that youth activity responds to a series of different motivations related to curiosity; class work; peer pressure; or the necessity to show skill online (autonomy and rivalry). This explains why the virtual universe is full of creative spaces for children and adolescents, which are practically abandoned, incomplete or not very safe. Others simply want to be online for the sake

of being online, to have an “online presence” which is merely contemplated as a demonstration of their being in the world. In general, the representations of young people online, should be understood as a construction of themselves and not a mirror image, as these subjects design and configure their personalities in a strategic way, always procuring to show their best sides.

As to content, minors tend to use it to show their emotions and experiences. Due to the ample variety of topics and formats, that can emerge in their online productions and the different roles they play in function of this. Kalmus, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Runnel and Siibak (2009) conclude that different practices exist online and establish a classification by categories of children (profiles) within a generation that they call “C”: *Versatile, blog-centred, Homepage-centred type, News comments centred type, SNS-centred type [01], Forum-centred type and Indifferent type* (different types of users).

In addition to this classification, there are many others which respond strictly to the original sense of the term generation (Morduchowicz, 2008; Feixa, Fernández & Figueras, 2016), and which, in recent years have been updated, redefining and contextualising in time, the role of minors as creators within the digital culture which we will see in the following. We will keep Generation C, as a reference and as proposed by Kalmus, Pruulmann-Vengerfeldt, Runnel and Siibak (2009) we argue for differentiating between user profiles in function of the media, tools, technology and the uses that made of all of them, as we will see in the following sub-epigraphs.

### **2.1. The digital native**

In this group, we integrate the proposals of authors for creating a new generational category based on the concept of “digital native” to designate a user that was born in a technological environment.

Online user interaction began in the first decade of the twenty-first century. The term digital native is used to describe all those students who assimilate, learn, manage the instruments and tools and have grown up playing more in a virtual space than a physical place. For this group the internet is as a channel for free expression, self-realisation, and an opportunity for creating community. In this environment young people feel independent, creative and effective (Bruns, 2006; McLuhan & Nevit, 2011). On the other hand, they have a facility for multi-tasking while they are online; they are used to receiving information quickly and relating this knowledge to other resources. They are also curious, critical and tolerant. They are concerned about social issues and respectful of the environment (Galera, Seco & Del Hoyo, 2013). They have created an emerging informal language, in which audiovisual narration and images take precedence over written language. Additionally, they lean towards information that arrives through other information that is to say through hypertext. They are the *N-Gener*s or the *Net Generation* (Tapscott, 1998-2008). This generation lives, grows, and develops naturally in cyberspace where they are more comfortable and where there are constant and attainable goals (Prensky, 2001).

In this context, the symbols of digital culture such as the “at” sign (@) used for email addresses, give cause for Feixa (2000) to invent a new generation, the *Generation@*; whose members have universal access (although not general), to information technologies and communication; they live in virtual environments (communities), and they break barriers of gender and sex thanks to technology.

On the other hand, this group, seeks flexibility at their work and personal lives, in the same measure that virtual environments grow and they want to be constantly online or socially connected. The digital natives, with time, would also be called the *Millennials*; collaborative and civic-minded

subjects who hope that media education will be useful for their careers in the future (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

## 2.2. The *prosumer*, the original user

This profile corresponds to the meeting of theories that coincide in the role of the *prosumer* as the most complete definition of the user who creates and produces online content and is at the root of the rest of the classifications to come.

We find the origins of digital natives in the term *prosumer* related to the evolution of the consumer (in economic terms), to that of producer (McLuhan & Nevitt, 1972) thanks to electronic technology which would facilitate the simultaneous labor of both the content consumer and the content producer. The first prosumers, informed and bestowed with the right tools, began to intervene in the production of meaning. Toffler and Martin (1990) using the same concept –*prosumers*–, elaborated a model in which even the individual who was far removed from emerging technological advances, fulfils an active role in the mediatization of society. Both constitute perfectly informed subjects, and precisely because of this, both are capable of cultivating a critical spirit and actively participating as creative consumers. These individuals are both consumers and producers and as such, they are also partially responsible for the construction of knowledge, that is to say; they should be engaged in their own educations and as educators of others. Equally, they are subjects with rights and as the same as occurs in the real world society of consumer goods and services, when engaging in online activity, the prosumer is always right (Toffler, 1990). Among the prosumers, Sánchez and Contreras (2012) highlight the figure of minors and their function as consumers and producers even though, unlike other users, they face numerous impediments for fully developing their participation; such as receiving minimal and superficial training at school and at home. The authors criticize the generalization of the use of the term “digital natives” for referring to an entire generation. They argue that just because one is simply born into a technological society does not guarantee that one has the ability to become a *prosumer*. Fonseca, Gonçalves, de Oliveira, and Tinoco, (2009) revise the theories about prosumers and they find in Piller, Schubert, Koch and Möslein (2005); Langer (2007); Xie, Bagozzi and Troye (2008) common characteristics that define prosumers and make them into influential people. *Prosumers* create their own lifestyles which are determined, in great measure by technology; they try to create patterns of behaviour; prosumers make intelligent decisions based on having access to good information; they accept and adopt change and innovation with relative ease; they live for today; connectivity and interaction have no limits in space and time for them; they value each other; they assume part of the design of their content; they imprint their identities on their work; they are concerned about their health; they value what works; they act as arbiters of brands, and most importantly, they are willing to learn and share what they know. They are also “receptive participants” who take ownership of concepts and their meanings, and then make their own versions of these, after placing them in common with other subjects (Lazo, 2005: 345). Carmona (2010) amends the theorists who study digital natives and prosumers as separate generations, opens up new possibilities if one breaks away from this generational limitation. The author explains that prosumers are the real digital natives, without taking their age into account and he argues for examining what people actually do online not so much how old they are, because the most relevant thing, for him, is how effective people are at transcending social media and what they have to offer towards social change. Lastly, Ugalde and González (2014: 24) combine two opposing visions; that of Gherab (2012) who warns that the digital native is the new prosumer that “creates and views YouTube videos, adds and downloads photos on Flickr, publishes and reads news on Twitter, labels and looks for links on Delicious, observes his or her friends’ lives (and is observed) on Facebook, etc.”, and that of García *et al.* (2014) who affirm that in effect, these users depend on

certain media to elaborate content but lack the knowledge to achieve useful benefits for themselves from this activity in a creative way.

### 2.3. The social knowledge producer

This user is the fruit of paradigms which deposit their confidence in creators that are involved in the collaborative economy of digital content production, which contribute to the enrichment of the web and encourage the exchange between participants.

There is a role for the child as content producer within these paradigms. Despite the fact that they have not established a new term for designating these new interactive generations, García, Portillo, Romo, and Benito (2007) extract a series of common behaviours which refer to creative activity online, which they consider should be geared towards the maximum output of common knowledge. On the one hand, they say that they create original and unique ideas from other information about which they have previously thought in order to reach their own conclusions, which they share. They exchange information in every format possible; videos, audios, photographs, documents, or favourite links. They are also facilitators, because they guide other users as to the information by classifying content through *tagging*, which they also evaluate (*rating*), and which then drives others towards the content thanks to the possibilities of collaborative syndication.

On the topic of digital natives, Núñez, García and Hermida (2012: 8), specify that “not only do they receive and produce digital content, but they also take part in the screening that safeguards the administration of the information on the web, as well as the actions of the internet users between the differing media”. This same perspective is defined by Galera, Seco and Del Hoyo (2013: 100) who, further adds that these creators are active online when treating social issues: “Online participation of digital natives is especially made apparent in specific situations. The use of social networks in cases of an emergency or natural disasters is a clear example of how society and the world is changing the way it communicates”.

### 2.4. The digital content creator

The authors recognise this profile to designate the user who creates digital content in the strict sense of the word. It refers to the user who develops different capacities, organises his or her time and manages his or her own production spaces.

Despite the interest in previous definitions, we consider Bruns’s Generation C (2006) as one of the most complete theories because of its approach to the concept of content creating user. Bruns defines and explains various concepts under the letter “C”. He uses terms which intentionally begin with this consonant, such as: *content creation* referring to the way the term indicates the production of content by the user; *creativity*; which is derived from the latter; in the moment that creativity became popular, Bruns introduced the concepts of *celebrity*; *control* of the means of production or *produsage*, and lastly, *casual collapse* as a point of inflection in the traditional model of industrial production of messages. Previously, the scientist centred the concept of the *producer* (2005) which would be maintained even after introduction of Generation C (2007). With this term, he made allusion to the production of information and of ideas, particularly in collaborative and participative environments where there were no differences between producers and consumers, and where anyone with an interest is allowed to intervene in the creative process. The way of elaborating content breaks with the traditional chain of production. As an action, *produsage*, implies continuous collaboration, without fixed timetables or concrete physical spaces, which extends to the permanent updating of its contents.

When faced with all of the virtues minors reveal online, some authors believe the discourses and theories to be somewhat exaggerated such as those expressed up to now, and they are suspicious of the “spontaneous creativity” of the young people who intervene in the interactive web (Livingstone & Helsper, 2007). But the truth is, despite these doubts, new generations with even greater digital skills will continue to emerge.

In 2008 a new generation of digital natives was born. It was the Einstein Generation, “the first generation since the Second World War that is identified by its intelligence and its positive traits: sociability, cooperation, intelligence, implication, among others. They know media information perfectly well: They understand advertisements, publicity, and communication. They want to do it *anywhere, anytime, anyplace*” (Boschma, 2008: 98). Additionally, “they have a lot of communication skills, they need to express what they think and feel and they aspire to changing the world, so therefore the paradigm of the transformation and innovation of technology would be necessary” (Núñez, 2013: 130).

## 2.5. From information seeking to the user screen

This class of user is fruit of the theories that defend the search for information as an activity that is just as good as any other within all of the activities that define digital content.

In 2008 Google became more popular as a search engine, which lent its name to a new generation: the Google Generation, made up of students who were born on the web and that used the Internet as their (almost) exclusive source for information, relying thoroughly on the results of this search engine (Vivancos, 2008). Stern (2008) believes that these digital natives consider themselves as *public communicators* and see having an online presence as a necessity.

Later, those who “googled” would become known as *Networkers* or the *Net generation*; a member of this group is typically a student who walks around campus immersed in the music playing on his or her *iPod*, while another writes messages on their phone, and another still sits in class “googling” information in real time and sending emails and all the while entertaining themselves with video games, often all at the same time. Lastly, someone for whom the library is more than a resource, it’s also a place to meet up and to socialise (Obligor, 2006; Jones, Ramanau, Cross & Healing, 2010). Faced with all of these common practices, even without referring to the production of digital content but to a similar lifestyle which could pertain to any young person anyplace in the world, McCrindle and Wolfinger (2009) begin to discuss the first technologically skilful global generation, completely adept users of social media, who all access the same web content, consuming the same brands, watch the same films, download the same music, and live the same events and experiences.

In 2010 technological advances facilitated the appearance of new generations. For example, the *Interactive Generation*, made up of subjects who feel attracted to technology because it allows them to break with the hegemony of adult discourse and initiates them in to the practice of producing messages of their own. All things digital captivate this group because of “the personal nature of many of these screens, which allows them to become channels of individual expression, *self-media*, something which is especially relevant when dealing with minors who are searching for their own identities. Additionally, they are technologically equipped; they are good at multitasking, they are mobilised, emancipated, autonomous, interactive, they amuse themselves digitally, they need to relate to one another and they are exposed to new risks” (Bringué & Sádaba, 2010: 87). This attraction to technology is taken advantage of by an industry well-equipped to create tendencies. An example of this is Apple launching the *iPad*, a device with a larger tactile screen than a mobile

phone, connected to the internet, which gives rise to a new generation, known as the *Screen Generation* (Rosin, 2013: 59).

It is true that at the time there were mobile phones but their screens were uncomfortable for smaller hands. Tactile technology was intuitive and based on easy logic for children and it allowed them for the first time, to classify objects in the world not by using words or symbols, but by making gestures. Their hands became a natural extension of their thoughts. The “userability” and easy operation of these devices characterised creative practices, directly leading to a culture of *content motion*, a movement through which users prioritised content based on games and images (Erstad, 2010). This way, audiovisual narrative gained importance and the digital native became a spectator of audiovisual narratives (consumer) but also a creator. In their fondness for interpreting the message of the communication media and making it their own, young people became fans and “text pirates”. This means that they borrowed contents, in order to alter their meanings to construct other parallels with which they identified even more (Jenkins & Tatjer, 2010). Digital natives chose, copied, remixed and combined to their heart’s desire (Staffans & Wiklund-Engblom, 2010). Three years later, Palfrey and Gasser (2013: 114) stated that “one in four young people is remixing content in one way or another, giving new life to new artistic creations”. For the first time, juveniles erected themselves as guides (conductors or *drivers*), taking the reins in the use of the media and showing the rest of their possibilities, all in an interactive manner and in collaboration with everyone else (Rubio, 2010). Although for Clark (2010), these students were simply authors and exclusive consumers of *wikis*.

## **2.6. The guru, the new owner of the Internet**

The profile of the guru is the reflection of the power given to experts in studies on digital content creating users who, with their activity, exercise some kind of influence over the rest of the participants on the internet.

In 2011 Golovinski introduces the term “*common guru*”. He defines a generation of users who make content that later “goes viral” on the internet, thanks to the interest they cause in other subjects, who take it on themselves to promote the content. In this case, experience and training are not a factor. A year later, a new mediated communication system that offers “a special status to adolescents, these being the protagonists of the transformations in the communication system because at the same time, their social category is constituted in relation to communication” (Callejo, 2012: 18). It was then that the internet began to make sense; when young people assumed the control of their group in ways that made fresh new content, language and forms although they respected the rules of the Web 2.0. These users create communities where their tastes and lifestyles are reflected, where others with similar interests can identify and share their skills and knowledge. Despite their initial incursions on the web, a certain immobility in this regard, has been observed on the part of adult participants, more from conformity than lack of imagination (Crovi, 2012).

## **2.7. The value creator**

This typology comes from theories about users as subjects who contribute to the participatory economy with their activity but in a positive way that in some cases, supposes a benefit for other users as well as for themselves.

In 2013 Goyette-Côté, far from administering new sobriquets for internet users’ behaviour, made a revision of previous theories, taking Kleeman *et al.* (2008) and Fuchs (2010), as inspiration, linking Toffler’s *prosumer* to *crowdsourcing*. For the author the *crowdsourcer* participates in a system of

content creation where added value is created, without any kind of remuneration, and from which proprietary capitalistic companies usually benefit from the means of production and online activity. This phenomenon is now an activity that is taking on more and more importance online, as demonstrated by the number of contributors and creators. In this sense, technology, as we have seen it, continues to determine the activities of digital content creators who are minors and with the *boom* of apps on mobile devices, another new generation is born: the *App generation*. The members of this new group use technology to define their personal identities, to organise their intimate relationships and to develop their creativity (Gardner & Davis, 2013).

## 2.8. The influencers

The profile of the influencer or prescriber offers a new perspective to theories about the guru user. It goes beyond that idea, because the influencer not only constitutes a person of reference, but has the ability to influence the behaviour of other users.

The most current theories (2014-2015) about minors participating online, highlight the development of a participative culture through which young people are gradually achieving power and independence backed by new, expansive knowledge, which was elaborated in community, but then little by little has ceased to be configured by a group. Young people are becoming emancipated thanks to the cultural changes offer by the Web 2.0 (Kahne *et al.*, 2014), and youths participates primarily in four activities online; surfing blogs, *podcasts*, etc., cooperating in creative *wiki* environments, producing their own channels of expression (especially set up for composing messages) and interacting with others on social networks (Marshall, 2010).

Alternatively, the emancipation of minors has gone hand in hand with empowerment and gaining significance, in which some have also become influential users or internet influencers. This phenomenon is due to a “perfection” of Generation C from Bruns (2006). Now these young people also create content, which gives rise to a community of users and intervenes in the curation of content, which typically has new features. Ferreras (2014) establishes seven habits which correspond to this behaviour: (1) “hyperconnectivity”, (2) departure from the labels with respect to the rights of Internet users, (3) belonging to a group, (4) having a unique identity as an element that differentiates oneself from other users, (5) an aptitude for creating tendencies, (6) an ability convey emotions, feelings and values, (7) knowing how to be entertaining.

## 2.9. The hashtag user

According the authors, “Hashtag User” refers to technological innovations which would constitute a new generation in relation to their use of a device or tool that is fashionable at the moment.

Recently (2015), new interpretations have appeared which offer us new perspectives on the theories we’ve explored so far, which in turn are either attempts to modernise the existing theories or to introduce some improvement. For example, Feixa's (2014) paradigm involving the Generation@ evolves to become the *Hashtag Generation* or the *Hyperdigital Generation* with the *hashtag*, as a formal code used on Twitter to “tag” conversation topics. This is the generation of social network users that is skilled at making information developed in “glocal” environments go viral. Additionally, García, Ramírez and Rodríguez, (2014: 16) recover the paradigm of the *prosumer* for describing a prototype of this kind of user. Regardless of the age or the generation, the characteristics *prosumers* are generally the following: they are individuals who are the “producers” of content and messages that are “novel, creative and innovative”; they are critical “editors” of their own activities and that of others; they are “observers” of messages and new opportunities; they “select” and “unify”

content to effectively distribute it; they are “manipulators” in the technological sense (skilful in the use of new tools); they are “identifiers” of bad practices; they are “activators” of exchanges between users; and they are “producers” of high quality content. Meanwhile Aguaded and Urbano-Cayuela (2014: 137) examine the audiovisual content, which gave rise to the “young media-television prosumer. This user emerged from a new model of European teaching and learning through which children, involved in either curricular or extracurricular workshops, “use technology to create music videos on mobile devices, in which they record stories, engage in post-production and create short music videos, through which they gain awareness of the power of online distribution” (*Ibid.*).

Stringfellow (2015) recasts the Howe and Strauss (2000) concept of Millennials to add that this generation has surpassed the expectations placed on them, perfectly assimilating the technology in their personal lives. However the greatest challenge they face is adapting their technological experience to their daily work. In this context, the use of smart devices and social networking apps will be indispensable.

### **2.10. The collaborative creator**

Although this profile may be similar to that of others mentioned previously, the idea defines different theories for understanding borderless collaboration, in which the creation of digital content emerges from the productions of others that may later be improved upon, broadened or modified by anyone who wishes to do so.

Finally, we observe two incipient generations. On the one hand we have the *iGeneration* or *Homeland Generation children* by Hope (2015). This group expects to communicate at ever increasing speeds and prefers to interact and create content over passive communication. As to their experiences, their lives have been marked by the economic crisis and they have grown up connected to technology. On the other hand, we have Gil’s *Collaborative Creators Generation* (2015: 5-7), which attests that from five years old onward, “once children have acquired their first technological skills”, they become creators and producers of digital content and wisdom that has a distinct social character. This generation of children belongs to the twenty-first century, according to the author, “they have taken ownership of the media as a team in order to innovate on creative projects that are uploaded to the internet. They clear the path for a novel way of understanding narration by creating from the standpoint of interactions that already exist from which they create new ones”. Equally, this coincides with Jenkins and Tatjer (2010) in the idea that young people are content pirates because they make new versions of other people’s work, adding personal touches to them.

### **2.11. The hyperdigital user**

This profile is suggested by more recent studies alluding to the end of one stage

—digitalism— and the emergence of another —hyperdigitalism— where the user is the protagonist.

Until now, children and adolescent activity online was directed by adults who invited them to upload content to blogs, webpages and other platforms by way of repositories, without their personalities coming through in the “youth digital narrative” (Gil, 2015:80). Today, their publications, in community and interaction with their peers, is part of the creative process, that is to say; they are purely social. Feixa (2014:36) summarises this process as the evolution from the digital (post-digital) to the hyperdigital; and defines the current generation as a hyperdigital generation, which the author understands as a “mature internet society, in which the characteristics of digitalism are intensified and expanded [...]”.

Finally, we arrive to the point where young people enjoy full autonomy in relation to the Internet. And as a consequence, they also become the targets of brands and social analysts who constantly label them, in such a way that we find ourselves with new phenomena like the *Selfie Generation* as per González-Anleo (2015). This author wonders, “Could there be a generation, by definition a large collective of reference, which is constructed from the *selfie*?” (*Ibidem*, 2015: 8). While he describes a generation in which technology is a traverse element young people use to be in constant communication, in order to “live in the information world, to feel a sense of community, to be involved in or detached from the world, to consume... and be consumed” (*Ibidem*, 2015: 11). The preferred format is photography, through which they try to reflect who they are. And they demand the same thing as users before them, immediate communication. To sum up, these are individuals who articulate themselves through technology and trendy social networks, but at the same time, they are very protective of their privacy, keeping the access to their spaces limited to their closest friends. This may appear to be a contradictory position, given the amount they share online, yet one must consider that they project the most positive images of themselves to others, making the *selfie* into a kind of personal brand that they manage themselves, almost professionally, to be consumed by other users. In other words, the *selfie* is “the most sophisticated expression of personal will towards self control” (*Ibidem*, 2015: 10).

In figure 1, we compile the different names minors have acquired in function of the author and the characteristics they define.

**Figure. 1 Generations of child and adolescent content creators in chronological order. Source: self elaboration.**

SCIENTIST	THEORY	GENERATION	CHARACTERISTICS
McLuhan & Nevitt	1990	<i>Prosumers</i>	Creative subjects, consumers, producers, educators of third parties.
Toffler	1990	<i>Prosumers</i>	Producer and consumer subjects who are always right.

Tapscott	1998	<i>Net Generation, N-Geners</i>	Subjects express themselves freely online, where they achieve self-fulfilment and create communities. They feel independent, creative and efficient online. They are multi-taskers. They are used to receiving information very quickly and to linking this information with other resources. They are curious, critical and tolerant. They are concerned with social issues and respectful of the environment. They have created an informal, emerging language. They prefer audiovisual narration over written texts.
Rushkoff	1999	<i>Screenagers</i>	Subjects who coexist with screens: the television, the computer, or other electronic devices.
Howe & Strauss	2000	<i>Millennials</i>	Subjects who spend most of their time online and begin to use it without previous experience or instructions. They are multitaskers; their social relationships take place through screens while they consume or produce information on social media. Technology is an ally for achieving flexibility at work and in life. They are collaborative and civic.
Feixa	2000	@Generation (Generación@)	Subjects who were born online. They have universal (although not general), access to information and communication technologies. They live in virtual environments (communities). They break down gender and sexual barriers thanks to technology.
Prensky	2001	<i>Digital Natives, Generation Y</i>	Multitasking, audiovisual and hypertextual subjects. They are the first generation of children who grow up with fluency in computer language, video games and other technologies.
Bruns	2005	<i>Producers</i>	They are idea creating subjects, participants in collaborative environments, constantly connected.
Lazo	2005	Perceiving participants (Perceptores participantes)	Subjects who make their own versions of other people's content.
Bruns	2006	<i>Generation C</i>	Subjects who are content creators, celebrities, producers and controllers.

Oblinger	2006	<i>Net generation</i>	<i>Googlers</i> who know how to find valuable information online.
García, Portillo, Romo & Benito	2007	Digital Natives (Nativos digitales)	Subjects who share their knowledge online. Their creations are original and unique. They are characterized by being informed and critical. They are social “social taggers” and facilitators of information.
Vivancos	2008	Generation Google (Generación Google)	Subjects who use Google as an information source.
Boschma	2008	Generation Einstein	Sociable, cooperative, intelligent, involved subjects, familiar with media.
Fonseca, Gonçalves, de Oliveira & Tinoco	2009	<i>Prosumers</i>	Influential subjects who are informed, open to change, innovative, constantly connected and interactive. They value one another. They defend the rights to the content they create. They negotiate their own brands. They share what they know.
Coombes	2009	<i>Digital natives, Generation Y</i>	These are subjects that use technology for entertainment, they look for information using key words in trusted search engines although they have few digital skills.
Ramanau, Cross, & Healing	2010	<i>Networkers or Net generation</i>	<i>Multi-tasking</i> subjects: they play music on their <i>iPods</i> , write messages on their mobile phones, they “google” in real time to find information, they send emails and they entertain themselves with video games.
Jenkins & Tatjer	2010	<i>Fan, “pirates” of texts</i>	Subjects who take audiovisual content and alter it to create new products and meanings.
Erstad	2010	<i>Content in motion generation</i>	Subjects whose creative practices are framed within the culture of <i>content motion</i> , specifically in games and images.

Staffans & Wiklund-Engblom	2010	<i>Young producers</i>	Subjects who limit themselves to selecting, copying, remixing and combining sources in multimodal texts.
Clark	2010	<i>Students authors and consumers</i>	Subjects who are exclusive consumers of <i>wikis</i> . Content creators.
Rubio	2010	Conductors or <i>drivers</i>	Subjects who take control of the use of media and show others what their possibilities are. They do this collaboratively and interactively with other users.
Bringué & Sádaba	2010	The Interactive Generation (Generación interactiva)	Technologically equipped subjects, with a bit of everything, mobilized, emancipated, autonomous, interactive, they entertain themselves digitally, they need to relate to one another and they are exposed to new risks.
Ferrés, Aguaded & García-Matilla	2011	Media Prosumers (Prosumidores mediáticos)	Literate citizens, competent in the use of technology and access to media, which they consume with a critical eye, thoughtful in their messaging. They are creative in their production of digital content.
Sánchez & Contreras	2012	Consumers and producers (Consumidores y productores)	Subjects that consume and produce digital content, even though they have minimal training.
Núñez, García & Hermida	2012	Digital Natives (Nativos digitales)	They emit and receive digital content. They are part of the structure that monitors the information on the Internet. They observe the interaction between users on the internet.
Núñez	2013	Generation Einstein (Generación Einstein)	Subjects who are very skilled communicators. They aspire to changing the world.
Galera, Seco & del Hoyo	2013	Digital Natives (Nativos digitales)	Subjects who have a social conscience: Internet allows them to mobilize and participate, multiplying the participation of others thanks to the internet.

Rosin	2013	<i>Touch-screen generation, touch-screen kids</i>	Subjects who follow the logic of tactile technology, classifying objects, not through words or symbols but through gestures.
Gardner & Davis	2013	<i>App-generation</i>	Subjects who use technology to define their personal identities, organize their personal relationships (intimacy). They use their imagination for creativity mediated through technology.
Goyette-Côté	2013	<i>Prosumer, crowdsourcer</i>	Subjects that participate in a system of content generation with which they created added value without remuneration.
Ferreras	2014	Generation C (Generación C)	Subjects that create content, are part of a community of users, practice content curation, are hyperconnected, respect the rights of other internet users, are part of a group, create tendencies, transmit emotions, feelings and values. They are entertaining.
Feixa	2014	#Generation (Generación #)	Subjects who live online or on the social networks. They make information go viral. They develop "glocal" environments.
Aguaded & Urbano-Cayuela	2014	Child Prosumer televized media (Prosumidor infantil mediático-televisivo)	They use technology and different electronic devices, with which they record, edit, produce and distribute videos, stories, music, or short films. They understand the potential of internet for sharing their contents.
Hope	2015	<i>iGeneration, Homeland Generation Children</i>	Subjects who expect communication to be rapid, and prefer interaction and content creation to passive communication.
González-Anleo	2015	Generation <i>selfie</i>	Subjects who articulate their relationships through technology and social media in particular, but at the same time they are very protective of the creations in their environment when they are with peers. Their preferred format is visual and they use photography for expressing their identities in a controlled manner.

Gil	2015	Collaborative Creators (Creadores Colaborativos)	Creative, innovative subjects who produce digital content and knowledge in communities. They are social, interactive and they prefer cross-media narratives. They are digital content pirates who make their own versions of what they find, imprinting them with their own style.
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### 3. Conclusions

The compilation of the theories discussed in this article and their exhaustive comparison allows us to confirm that a phenomenon is occurring which translates to the loss of the sense of the concept of the generation, which is used excessively for labelling social movements led by young people. Sometimes it seems to correspond more to the needs of promoting of scientific results and technological innovations than to any real change in terminology that truly corresponds to new realities within social movements or describing young people’s behaviour. The use of tendencies to support a label has particularly twisted the concept of the generation. Keeping in mind what we stated at the beginning of the article, we found up to seven generations that participate online in the same year (2010), where there is barely any difference between one or the other. Feixa’s theories (2000-2016) denounce the science that has been subject to terminological trends. And technological innovations seems to affect the digital rhetoric used for describing the behaviour of minors online (Buckingham & Willett, 2013). “There are constant *revivals* that try to recover fashions, aesthetics and behaviours from the past and this causes there to be no exact connection between age and generation —as occurs with grunge and hipster culture—” (Feixa, 2015: 122). This harms research because it makes it very difficult to delineate what the real substantial changes are between one generation and another, and additionally it favours the obsolescence of studies and is subject to fads and commercial trends. Therefore, we propose that many of the so called generations that we have looked at in this article more aptly correspond to user profiles than to a new generation of young content creators, which are appropriately digital.

So, we have made an attempt to see the common elements between the different generations studied. Our intention has been to find the elements that really differentiate one group from another. The results show that all of the groups coincide in their capacity for multitasking; they all need to communicate and like to be constantly connected or online; they all have a demand for immediacy; and they all like content creation as an exercise of freedom of expression and being collaborative.

On the other hand, after observing the evolution of users in correspondence to the appearance of new social networks and new tools, as well as the formats themselves, which the former permits, we can say that young people who participate online are described by the activity in which they engage, than they are for belonging to a determined period of time or the use of particular technology, because as we can see, not everyone by the mere fact of being born in a digital environment, necessarily participates in it, that is; birth at a particular time does not automatically translate to a complete identification or involvement with all of the digital customs.

However, the authors coincide that there are common aspects such as the familiarity of the youngest users with audiovisual formats and their capacity for producing and consuming them through different screens, perhaps even using different devices simultaneously. In general, they feel a

necessity to always be connected to other users because they are social subjects, and they like to collaborate in creative spaces together. And they show, as a characteristic, a certain audacity when they examine the content that other users have adapted, retouched, redone, by appropriating these creations in “acts of piracy” as they are qualified by Jenkins and Tatjer (2010).

Despite their “piracy”, they are considered as civic-minded, socially aware users and therefore they confide in their ability to change the world. They have developed a critical viewpoint, which allows them to moderate the power brands exercise over them. They know how to find the information they need and at the same time they are facilitators thanks to the work they do by tagging words, information, topics, etc. They are the greatest prescribers or influencers. Additionally, they believe that thanks to technology barriers that previously limited their participation, such as sex or age, have been broken. Regarding all of the characteristics that repeat themselves, we consider that names like Generation C, N-Geners, Generation@, Generación #, App generation, iGeneration, etc., are products of the tendency to create new concepts, labelling and relabelling phenomena that is connected to the evolution of technology, which we argue sometimes has very little nuance. Our position is that, if all of the theories we’ve revised are taken into account, the mere fact of having been born in a world full of digital environments does not automatically make one a digital native.

We can confirm that there are a lot of young people who are digital content creators and within their online participation, the ways in which they take advantage of the technology, the development of their digital skills, the degree of interaction, the frequency and quality of their content, their commitment, their motivation and their involvement, are absolutely different and one definition does not do justice to the infinity of practices in which they engage. This is why we prefer to refer to them as “minors who create digital content” rather than using a concrete and reductionist term. We also consider that the dizzying rate of technological innovation that imposes and then retires labels in consonance with the appearance of new social networks or the latest virtual platform also recommends not embracing certain neologisms. Therefore we propose considering much of the new terminology as descriptions of user profiles which refer to online activities performed by users as the determining characteristic that differentiates them from other users with different realities.

#### **4. Limitations and future lines of investigation**

This theoretical revision will continue and it will be updated every five years, considering the observed reality and the fact that new generations emerge, as well as the labels to categorize them, in very brief intervals of time. This allows us to contribute to codification of this area of communication and to serving as a reference which will help other researchers.

We should also point out that we did not consider generations such as Generation X or Generation Y, or others that are used to describe young people but we focused terms where technology is reduced to a necessary tool if one wishes to gain employment in said generations.

#### **5. Note**

[1] SNS: was one of the most popular and active social networks among young people in Estonia in 2007.

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