

# The sphere of techno-media consumption and its role in the socialization of a group of preschool children in the city of Medellin: A case study

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## Abstract

This paper presents some of the approaches developed in the doctoral thesis entitled Techno-media consumption and children's socialization: A case study with a group of preschool children in Medellin. The study with a qualitative design and based on a case study with a group of preschool children shows the role played by the sphere of techno-media consumption in the socialization process of the children under study. The work starts from the central idea according to which techno-media consumption - the culture of techno-media consumption - acts as a socializing instance and as an orientation system from which and with whose influence children deal with the world. This orientation system offers different kinds (knowledge, themes, values, beliefs, rules, ways of acting, ways of relating to others and themselves, ritualized ways of acting, material elements and artifacts, images, symbols, among others) to children which, once appropriated and internalized (socialization) become interpretative patterns based on which they elaborate, interpret, and act in the world.

**Keywords:** Techno-media consumption, child socialization, childhood, interpretative patterns, senses.

## INTRODUCTION

This paper presents some of the approaches developed in my doctoral thesis, entitled Techno-media consumption and children's socialization: A case study with a group of preschool children in Medellin. From a study with a qualitative design and based on a case study with a group of preschool children in which information was collected through note-taking (listening), episodic-narrative interviews, drawings, discussion groups, and photo-elicitation, the role played by the sphere of techno-media consumption in the socialization process of the children with whom the research was carried out is shown.

The study starts from the central idea according to which techno-media consumption -the culture of techno-media consumption- acts as a

socializing instance and, therefore, as an orientation system from which and with whose influence children deal with the world.

This guidance system is characterized by making offers of different types (knowledge, topics, values, beliefs, rules, ways of acting, ways of relating to others and themselves, ritualized ways of acting, material elements and artifacts, images, symbols, among others) to children that, once appropriated and internalized (socialization) by them, become interpretative patterns based on which they elaborate, interpret -give meaning- and act in the world (Genner and Süß, 2017).

Techno-Media Consumption as a System of Orientation of Current Societies

Although it is clear that consumption is part of all societies: human beings need to consume to live, feed themselves, protect themselves, etc., the fact is that one of the distinctive features of today's societies is consumption - the expression of consumerism is also used.

The current sphere or field of consumption has acquired such relevance that it penetrates and makes its presence felt in other different social spheres (family, school, work, peer groups) and, to that extent, it has become, on the one hand, a sort of autonomous and hegemonic system that is beginning to function, on the other, as a system of the orientation of the dynamics of society itself. Don Slater (2000) states the following when speaking of consumer culture:

The notion of 'consumer culture' implies that in the modern world fundamental social practices, values, ideals, aspirations, and identities are defined and oriented concerning consumption rather than to other social dimensions such as work or citizenship (civics), religious cosmology or military status (p. 24).

In today's societies, there seems to be no social sphere that is not unaffected by the influences of consumption. Many activities, social practices, ways of interacting, ways of thinking and perceiving the world are, directly or indirectly, related to consumption, to the action of consuming, and, to that extent, play and/or hold a growing centrality in the organization and dynamism of social life in general.

Nowadays, consumption and ICT go hand in hand. The culture of consumption is a techno-mediatised culture and ICT has become an object of consumption (De Moraes, 2007), what is called techno-media consumption. This concept refers to the mass media and the technological supports that make them possible. From the perspective of this text, techno-media consumption refers, on the one hand, and in its literal sense, to the consumption of media and technologies and, on the other, to consumption mediated by such media and technologies. In this sense, it should be borne in mind that techno-media consumption encompasses the following:

- Consumer offerings and services: such as television programs, websites, mobile applications, subscription platform services, broadcasters, video games, podcasts, videos, advertising, and blogs, among others.
- Consumer goods: such as televisions, cell phones, computers, tablets, video consoles, radios, among others.

What does it mean then to understand the sphere of techno-media consumption -techno-media culture- as a system of orientation? First, this sphere is configured based on symbols, knowledge, practices, and specific materialities (languages, gestures, clothing, rituals, themes, values, beliefs, norms, rules, images, symbolic, knowledge, practical knowledge, ways of doing, things, artifacts, ways of relating, etc.) and, in its dynamism, it is passed (socialization) from individual to individual, from group to group, from generation to generation.

Second, as a system of orientation, the sphere of techno-media consumption allows individuals -boys and girls- to cope in and with the world (with things, with others and with themselves). In other words, this orientation system is internalized and configured as an interpretative pattern through which individuals elaborate -give meaning- to the reality in which they live. Third, as an orientation system, it makes individuals construct a sense and feeling of belonging to a reference group, to society, or the orientation system as such. Thus, the sphere of techno-media consumption produces group and social cohesion and is at the base of the processes of identity configuration.

Fourth, as an orientation system, techno-media consumption influences the ways of thinking, doing, valuing, acting, thematizing the world, and relating to others. Fifth, as an orientation system it opens up possibilities for action but also establishes conditions and limitations for action. Sixth, it allows the structuring of relationships and forms of community (peer culture) insofar as it minimizes distances, and becomes shared knowledge; that is, it includes, but also excludes. Finally, as a socializing environment, techno-media consumption is at the basis of the construction of the identity of

boys and girls, as shown in the following scheme:

Therefore, this research also seeks to relate studies on consumption, studies on techno-media consumption, and the new social studies on childhood. In this sense, the analysis starts from the idea that childhood is a historical, social, and cultural construction and that, particularly, thinking about childhood today concerning the consumption system implies understanding it as a changing phenomenon and as a social category. Hence, the interest in socialization processes shows that the phenomenon of childhood is also a cultural phenomenon strongly influenced by contemporary dynamics, among which techno-media consumption stands out.

It is not unknown that children's techno-media consumption has become a matter of particular interest for contemporary research with children and that it is becoming, in the last decade, a focus of attention and debates within the different disciplines, where pedagogy is included.

Nowadays it is almost impossible to understand childhood without considering children as a fundamental part of what some authors have named children's "consumer culture". Today's children are living a kind of childhood of consumption and there are even theorists such as Buckingham (2013) who affirm that there are "new paradigms to rethink the child-consumer".

For this reason, the role of techno-media consumption in the socialization of infants is pointed out in this document. It is shown that this becomes a source of interpretative and guiding patterns of children's daily life, conveyed by the affordances of goods and services. Likewise, it is shown that thanks to techno-media consumption, children constitute new forms of appropriation of media and technologies with which they satisfy their daily needs, solve their problems and orient their actions. The relationships between peers that are mediated by techno-media consumption are reflected upon and analyzed, and some key issues of these interactions between children

must be considered as frameworks and conditions for the formation processes in the respective contexts and that entail conscious and self-organized learning processes.

## Methodology

Under the assumptions of qualitative research and the assumed research paradigm, the study sought to work comprehensively and in-depth on the case studied under a hermeneutic (interpretative) lens. According to Bogdan and Biklen (2007), the importance of qualitative research of a hermeneutic-interpretative nature lies in the exercise of understanding the problems that seek to be clarified. There is then an interest in the meanings attributed to the events of daily life (family, school, and among peers) of the participants.

The information collected proceeded to be analyzed considering the phases of reduction, disposition, and transformation, which led to obtaining the results and structuring the final chapters (Rodriguez et al., 2005) that were interpreted following the horizon of Bohnsack, Pfaff, and Weller (2010) where the data obtained pass through the question of "what is a social reality in the perspective of the actors, to the question of how this reality is produced or how it has been achieved in the daily practice of these actors" (p.102).

## Results

In general with this research, it was found that, from the study of the meaning that the children studied give to techno-media consumption, the sphere of techno-media consumption as an orientation system is configured as a source and offer of interpretative patterns and as a guiding instance of children's daily life. This is shown analytically and interpretatively from four characteristics of this techno-media consumption as an orientation system in the socialization of the children involved in the study.

On the one hand, techno-media consumption as a theme or thematic offer. Boys and girls make

use of topics offered by this sphere that allows them not only to talk about the world but also to interact with others and build preferences and self-understandings themselves.

Second, it is evident that the presence of techno-media consumption plays an influential role in infants' constructions of meaning and that this is facilitated by affordances. Interaction with artifacts leads to an understanding of how to interact with such artifacts, but also to make sense of their use and consumption concerning the world around them.

The third characteristic points out that these affordances make it possible for techno-media consumption to be increasingly present in children's daily routines. These routines become meaningful thanks to the role of such affordances.

And, finally, that techno-media consumption acts and is at the basis of the generation of culture and peer relationships, to the extent that it allows the establishment of relationships, knowledge, and shared topics.

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

In the first place, it is concluded that children are building their modes of appropriation, preferences, and styles concerning the elements of techno-media consumption, which necessarily leads them to create different types of orienting and interpretative patterns that contribute to a plurality of worldviews, since techno-media consumption provides them with options that allow them to cope with their daily life and orient themselves in it in the light of these options. As evidenced in this research, techno-media consumption plays a relevant role in terms of the active structuring of children's daily life.

The thematic orientation in children's daily lives is increasingly based on what is offered by the sphere of techno-media consumption, which becomes a recurrent topic of relevance and interest for boys and girls in the daily life of the family, school, and among peers and friends is increasingly offered by the media.

During the interviews, the discussion groups with the drawings and with what was heard and recorded in the field diary, it was possible to confirm that many of the children come from the sphere of techno-media consumption: they talk about the series and programs they watch on television, allude to the games they play on their cell phones, make reference to games and searches through the Internet, identify with certain characters, appeal to certain emotions manifested within these environments, value the world, relationships, and others according to what they perceive there.

From the above, it is concluded that there is a key issue related to the affordances of techno-media consumption to the extent that they facilitate children's manipulation, use, and navigation of the devices and content offered. These qualities of the objects allow the subjects to interact with the goods and services that result in an offer of possible actions. Unlike other artifacts such as books, thanks to these technologies, children learn not only to handle the devices in a very intuitive and almost autonomous way but also to search for information and interact within the sphere of techno-media consumption. More than reflective knowledge, what is practical and procedural knowledge that is acquired by repetition, trial and error, and example, and which makes techno-media consumption a part of the daily life of children.

Hence, techno-media consumption acquires an important and widespread role in children's daily life. On the one hand, sequential and repetitive rituals and behaviors are developed, which have particularity in the sense that they are not permanently reflected upon by children, but become part of the procedural knowledge that guides their daily life. So much so that the organization of their times and spaces are transversality by the sphere of techno-media consumption. Techno-media consumption is not only important as a socializing element from a macro-social level but also at a micro socio-practical level. Techno-media consumption cuts across the immediate daily spheres in which children move and allow them to structure their daily life and give them meaning.

In this scenario, it is concluded that, in this everyday life, techno-media consumption also plays an important role as a mediator of peer relationships. The relevance of these relationships between boys and girls is highlighted to the extent that they become key components that have to be considered as frameworks and conditions for the learning and training processes in the respective contexts, since, as was read in previous chapters, techno-media consumption allows, outside the institutional scenarios, to generate spaces in which confrontation and discussion exercises are deployed concerning certain topics and issues that, in turn, lead to conscious and self-organized learning processes. The contents that circulate employing techno-media consumption frequently acquire thematic relevance individually and collectively and are available as a store of knowledge for the thematization of the world and as contents of interactions. Children build their relationships with others based on shared themes and activities promoted by the sphere of techno-media consumption.

In this line, another of the conclusions of this research is specifically related to the role of techno-media consumption in the configuration and establishment of a children's peer culture. Techno-media consumption allows for a space of interaction and exchange that is actively constructed and created through symbolic and material practices and in which relationships within the peer culture are very relevant. This also offers an important opportunity to address in greater detail the power relations between adults and children and their changing dynamics. Techno-media consumption as a mediator and as a referent in peer-to-peer exchanges gives clues about the treatment and conceptions of childhood and the structuring of generational orders.

Another of the conclusions highlighted by this research work is that techno-media consumption goes beyond the sphere of use. Children not only build knowledge and interpretative patterns conveyed by the sphere of techno-media consumption that allows them to orient themselves in the world, but such consumption takes an active part in the construction of an individual and group identity

of boys and girls. Technological goods and services enter in this sense as a status symbol that allows the construction of a sense of belonging or not belonging to a group. In the same way, the sphere of techno-media consumption is a space of offers in what has to do with the construction of children's identities. This is not only because they identify themselves and want to be like the heroes, artists, and other outstanding characters of the media, but also because consumption itself, having a Facebook account, knowing how to handle an App, having a cell phone of type X, allows them to build a view of themselves and others which, of course, is linked to processes of inclusion and exclusion. Hence, the child may or may not belong to a group to the extent that he/she has the knowledge linked to it (game rules, tricks, handling of certain Apps, or possession of certain types of cell phones, games, among others). Therefore, techno-media consumption is a space of projection of oneself, of what one wants, of tastes, of desires, but also a space of offers with which to identify, adhere and even build a sense of the pleasant and the unpleasant.

For discussion: Techno-media consumption as an orientation system and interpretative pattern of children's daily life complies with:

Social functions: Offering motives and topics of conversation among the family and peer groups. Shapes opinion and promotes certain knowledge. It helps the social configuration of certain groups and communities of interpretation (gamers, YouTubers, fans of certain sports, followers of artists, etc.). As part of these interpretative communities, boys and girls display certain media competencies and skills, negotiate certain interpretations of the world (that Messi is better than Ronaldo or that a certain video game is better, friendlier than another, etc.) and routinize methods of use and consumption of such media and technologies. It helps in the construction of group identity, and individuals position themselves within that world.

Establishment of relationships: Techno-media consumption offers the possibility of coming into contact with others; building friendships

and maintaining them; determining friendships and attributing or removing them and placing them or not within the peer group; allowing the establishment and institutionalization of friendships; and offering the possibility of exchanges

Exchange of knowledge regarding: What's new; what is fashionable; what lifestyles are in fashion; aesthetic preferences; guiding knowledge, and values.

Situational and specific functions: To inform; to amuse and entertain; fill time and combat boredom; regulation of moods; escape function (escapism) and break with daily life and routine; habituation (time structuring).

Functions related to the work of biographization and identity construction: Development of personal and group identity (norms, models, referents, ideals); self-confidence and empowerment; reflexivity and self-thematization (who I want to look like and who I don't, what I like about myself, what I like to show about myself, what I identify with, how I want to be perceived, seen, etc.); offering solutions to personal issues and crises; and work on emotions

Work on self-image and self-presentation by children: Communicating and presenting one's preferences and tastes; an option to present oneself beyond face-to-face interaction; showing facets of oneself that are usually not possible to show in the preschool context; to define oneself concerning certain friends.

These functions cannot be attributed to a particular device or service, and although there are some media or technologies that fulfill some of these functions very well, the truth is that all this depends on the active role played by individuals with it. Thus, such functions also have to do with the interests and preferences of boys and girls, their habits and customs, their biographical experiences, and with certain thematic preferences.

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