

Title: Uses and gratifications of Chatbot Generators amongst young people in Portugal

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The relationship between young people and the media is a complex and interesting one, that long draws the attention of scholars, educators and policy makers, whose views are very often polarised and contradicting in terms of the advantages and disadvantages of media consumption and use by this group.

Despite such arguments, the media is nevertheless pervasive and increasingly embedded in young people's daily routines (Livingstone, 2002; McMillan and Morrison, 2006; Rideout, Foehr and Roberts, 2010), intersecting and overlapping in ways that enable them to make sense of their societies, communities, and performances of civic participation (Anderson, 2004; Jenkins, 2016). For some scholars working in this field, the media also appears to offer a plethora of opportunities to connect young citizens globally, by extending new ways to learn and develop information beyond local and national contexts (Livingstone and Bovill, 1999; Buckingham, 2007).

Media literacy is generally described as a set of skills and competencies that enables people to critically access, evaluate, analyse and produce media messages (Aufderheide, 1993). In other words, media education as the process to increase media literacy or digital literacy encourages critical thinking about the media from both perspectives of a consumer and producer. Given the pervasive nature of media in our lives, media literacy is considered a "vital skill for all generations in today's society, as it empowers people to effectively cope with complex and rapidly evolving media landscape" (Droog et al., 2023, p. 12).

One of those fast evolving technologies is Artificial Intelligence (AI) and algorithms. Within the media literacy field a new area of studies has emerged over the past two decades, specifically focusing on the challenges posed by AI. This new area is often called algorithm literacy. Algorithmic literacy has been approached through various disciplines and lenses. Bawden, Robinson, and Floridi (2022) describe it as a better understanding of “the algorithmic decision making and its potential for inaccuracy and bias” (p. 337).

Algorithms are part of everybody’s lives nowadays. They influence us while we use social media, search engines, streaming services, or use voice assistants and other Chabot generators, such as ChatGPT, which in turn have also recently generated a great deal of debate over its impact across different contexts.¹

ChatGPT, as other competitors of the like, use algorithms and machine learning to examine existing contents and generate new contents as asked by the user.

Most of these solutions have reached a great degree of such efficacy that they now provide many new opportunities as well as risks for its users. For example, people can turn to Chabot generators to create new stories, new critical essays, curriculum vitae, or many other written or visual outputs. However, issues about copyright infringement, bias and misinformation messages are still unclear.²

Additionally, as it happens with other digital media (UNICEF, 2021), most Chabot generators were also not designed with young people in mind. Regardless of what can be done in terms of regulation and when it may happen (Future of Life Institute, 2023), Chatbots are here and free of charge. They are used every day by people from all walks of life, including young people with different sets of literacy skills. However, little is known academically as well as from the perspective of young people’s uses and

¹ ChatGPT is an online chatbot launched in the end of 2022 by the company Open AI who promotes it as a way for the users to get “instant answers, find creative inspiration, and learn something new” (OpenAI, n.d.). Its name means Generative Pre-trained Transformer.

² Another notable concern has been raised by scholars within different fields of study, from psychology to computer sciences. In an open letter they ask to slow down the development of AI. These professionals are concerned with the velocity that this technology is evolving and demand a pause in AI development so that policy makers have time to prepare against the potential risks of this fast evolving technology (Pause Giant AI Experiments: An Open Letter, 2023).

practices of these new AI platforms. Yet, young people are a particularly vulnerable group, given that they are still emotionally, socially and cognitively maturing and developing (Gabriel, 2014, Livingstone, 2014) and as a result more research is needed in order to explore this further.

Overall, a better understanding of the uses and gratifications (Katz, Blumler & Gurevitch, 1973) young people have of ChatGPT is necessary and as a result, this paper proposes to look into these fields and areas from a media and youth-centric approach. We claim that a study of that kind could certainly contribute to improving future media interventions aimed at enhancing algorithmic literacy. Additionally, it could also arguably indirectly contribute to improve young people's agency of the uses they make of such technologies, in what is often an unbalanced power relation (with companies with plenty of financial and knowledge resources on one hand, and machine learning technology hard for most humans to comprehend on the other hand).

In this study, still in its piloting phase, we drawn upon a quantitative approach to answer the following research question:

- a) What are the uses and gratifications young people are getting from chatbot generators?
- b) To what extent parental/adult/peer mediation is useful and might be considered here as an important step towards an appropriate use of such chatbots?

In order to answer the above research questions, we will conduct a survey put forward to a sample of young Portuguese participants, within the age bracket of (11-25), on their usages, practices and gratifications of ChatGPT or any other bots of the like. The choice of this age group is based on the fact that it covers the so-called Generation Z, with the potential to become strong future users in the long term, while the effects are yet to be fully grasped.

The results will be analysed through a multivariate statistical analysis taking into consideration possible co-relations with other variables like socio-demographic

characterization, computer and Internet access and consumption, parental mediation (Abel, et al., 2024; Jiow et al., 2017; Livingstone and Helsper, 2008; Zhang et al., 2022), media literacy (Maksl, Ashley, & Craft, 2015; Vraga, Tully, Kotcher, Smithson, & Broeckelman-Post, 2015), and algorithmic literacy (Dogruel, Masur, & Joeckel, 2022).

The final paper proposed for this conference aims to contribute towards the debate on future and usage of AI, including a reflection on where we are heading, by presenting the findings that characterise the current situation, which may be of interest to both researchers, practitioners and potentially policy makers.

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Provisional title: Uses and gratifications of ChatGPT amongst young people in Portugal

Intro

The aim of this paper is to present some of the key findings from the questionnaires put forward to a sample of young Portuguese participants, within the age bracket of (x-y), on their usages, practices and gratifications of ChatGPT.

Literature review

1. Youth and the media
(youth and digital media)
(the role of parents/adults' mediation)
2. Media use, needs and gratification
(other phenomena and the contemporary case of ChatGPT)
3. Media literacy
4. Algorithm Literacy

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