**Культурология. Текст 1.**

**Remote living: Exploring online (and offline) experiences of young people living in rural areas**

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**Abstract**

This article investigates the online and offline experiences of young people living in rural communities. It draws upon data from the AHRC-funded research project, ‘Young people’s creative understanding of their mediaworlds’ (2008–10), in which young people aged 14–15 created ‘identity boxes’ to explore the place of media in their lives. The article demonstrates that many young people in rural areas were disengaged with new media and highlights why, for some individuals, online inclusion increased their feelings of cultural exclusion. The article reveals that many young people in rural areas made use of new media technologies only when they saw them as having a practical value relevant to their lives. The article further demonstrates the use of a creative visual method as a process which elicits reflective comments about a taken-for-granted world, and contributes empirically to knowledge about young people’s uses of new media within their everyday lives.

**Keywords**

Digital divide, internet, rural communities, social exclusion, young people

**Introduction**

It is often claimed that the traditional notion of the media ‘audience’ is collapsing, espe­cially for young people, as engagement with popular culture today means creating and sharing media as well as consuming it (for example, this has been the starting point for each of the ‘Transforming Audiences’ conferences 2007, 2009 and 2011; see www.trans­formingaudiences.org.uk). Traditional models, which were based around notions such asthe ‘reception’ of television broadcasting or the ‘reading’ of mass-produced media prod­ucts, are now only partially useful. Today’s media consumers also can be media produc­ers, sharing images and music that they have created online, making online presentations of self (as on Facebook and Twitter), collaboratively producing knowledge in wikis, and using

various Web 2.0 tools to communicate, share information, ideas and media materi­als, and to express themselves.

**Культурология. Текст 2.**

**Research context**

Previous studies have gathered data about young people’s access, usage and preferences in relation to new technologies, and connected them with issues of regulation and paren­tal involvement. In the UK the most significant study of this type has been the ESRC-funded ‘UK Children Go Online’ (Livingstone and Bober, 2005; see also Livingstone, 2009), alongside more specific surveys such as Marsh et al. (2005), focused on children from birth to six, and Valentine et al. (2005), which concerned young people’s home use of new technologies for educational purposes. Industry surveys may have gathered simi­lar information, but often their findings are not fully accessible. Furthermore, Buckingham (2007; Carr et al., 2006) has conducted a number of studies of children and new media in terms of children’s culture, gaming and educational policy, and other studies recently have examined user-generated content, MySpace and the YouTube phenomenon (see for example, Burgess and Green, 2009; Gillmor, 2006; Snickars and Vonderau, 2009).

In addition, writers such as McMillan (2006) have sought to develop models of inter­activity and, more broadly, the multitude of ways in which people are using the internet to communicate, interact and express themselves have been discussed in the collections edited by Gauntlett and Horsley (2004), Tremayne (2006), and others. There have also been many contributions to theories of the information society proposed by writers such as Benkler (2006), Castells (2000, 2009) and Webster (2006). Nevertheless, many of the empirical studies tend to be predominantly policy-orientated (‘Do we need to be worried about teenagers’ use of X?’) or take technology as their starting point (‘What are users doing with technology X?’). Moreover, what becomes apparent when looking at the existing literature on young people’s uses of new media is that there are relatively few empirical studies that focus on rural young people’s online experiences within their eve­ryday environments and practices (see Valentine and Holloway, 2001), and much of this work is specific to the USA (e.g. Bell et al., 2004; Ito et al., 2009).

**Культурология. Текст 3.**

Another important context for this project is the growing interest in creative and vis­ual methods within social research, in which a diversity of techniques – such as collage-making, drawing, video-making, photography and building models – have been employed to explore people’s attitudes, feelings and experiences on a particular issue (e.g. Belk et al., 2003; Bloustein, 1998; Guillemin, 2004; Holliday, 2004; Radley et al., 2005; Raggl and Schratz, 2004; Young and Barrett, 2001). For example, a study by Radley et al. (2005) asked homeless adults to photograph places and activities of personal signifi­cance in order to ‘collect a series of glimpses of the city as seen through their eyes’ (2005: 276). The researchers then discussed the images produced with the participants, which led to insights into homeless life. Importantly, the photographs did not constitute an object of study in themselves, but served to engender communication which itself became intrinsic to the analysis. Hence, the researchers claimed that this kind of inter­view can be conceptualised as a dialogic relationship between researcher and participant through which meaning is produced in a dialectical process, and therefore not imposed by either party. Examples of this kind, as well as our own successful exploratory studies in which participants were invited to make video, collage and three-dimensional models (see Awan, 2008; Gauntlett, 1997, 2007), gave us confidence about the benefits of crea­tive and visual methods and their ability to produce insightful findings.

As well as understanding what young people do with the media in all its forms – which to some extent we know already from academic and commercial studies – this study sought to get to grips with the motivations, tensions and conflicts that drive and affect media use and communication, and had an impact upon the outcomes (such as how the self is presented, how new information is responded to, which trends or issues become popular and have advocates, or are deprecated and have detractors). Consequently, this study began with young people’s own sense of self and identity, and then sought to explore how traditional and new media fit into this sphere.1

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**Method**

Traditionally, media audience researchers have focused on the consumption of one type of media, or even one particular programme or product (for example, Ang, 1985; Hermes, 1995; Hobson, 1982). However, this study was based on the assumption that in order to gain richer understandings of the place of media in young people’s lives we must take a broader view by recognising that individuals encounter and engage with many types of media every day, and that all of these are significant together. Furthermore, it is already becoming clear that traditional quantitative and qualitative research methods only give us a partial understanding of people’s media experiences, and as such we need new forms of empirical research to understand more fully the everyday experience of living and participating in a complex mediaworld (see for example, Bird, 2003). This connects with the shift in media audience studies which argues that research participants should not be merely expected to generate talk about their media consumption, but should be given opportunities to create, and then reflect upon, creative artefacts themselves (Gauntlett, 1997, 2006, 2007).

*Participants*

As this study set out to develop broader understandings of young people’s identities and the place of media within their everyday lives, it was deemed appropriate to select male and female participants from a variety of class and ethnic backgrounds to allow for a wide spectrum of responses. In order to achieve this, schools in Newcastle, Manchester, London, Southampton, Dorset and Cumbria were selected and provided a combined total of 10 groups of young people aged 14–15 for the project (see Table 1 below). Five of the schools had a predominantly ‘white’ student cohort, while the other three were emphati­cally multicultural, and the schools were situated in both socially and economically deprived as well as affluent areas. In addition, it was emphasised to teachers that partici­pating groups should not be selected by ability; rather, they should be generally repre­sentative of the student body