



Disconnect!

Changing expectations around information communication technology (ICT) products and services in Western Switzerland

Marlyne Sahakian, Béatrice Bertho and Suren Erkman
University of Lausanne
SCORAI Conference, Maine: June 17, 2016

Research context

Part of a 3-year project underway at the University of Lausanne on understanding **social practices**, **uncovering norms**, and **learning how to change** (2015-2017), in relation to household electricity consumption in Western Switzerland.

Mixed methods, among differing socio-economic groups:

- **In-depth interviews and observations with household members (2015-2016)**
- National survey among Swiss households (planned: 2017)
- Participative methods / workshops with household groups (planned: 2017)

Aim of this paper

Explore notions of **expectations, entitlement and excesses** around the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT), involving:

- products (e.g., phones, computers, screens, video games, televisions, etc.) and
- services (e.g., access to music, films, social networks, information, etc.).

Introduce notions of **voluntary or imposed restrictions** on ICT usage.

Conceptual framework

- Recognizing the recursive dialogue between **social context, the material dimension of consumption, and competencies** in everyday practices (Wilhite 2010; Shove et al. 2012).
- Considering over-lapping social practices related to electricity services, including **cleanliness and hygiene, food consumption, lighting, entertainment and connectivity**, and aspirations around “**the good life**”.
- Uncovering the role of **social norms in prescribing practices**, while recognizing that norms can be interpreted in different ways by people, in relation to different social fields (Plessz, Dubuisson-Quellier et al. 2014).
- **Giving significance to emotions** in relation to practices, explicitly soliciting emotive responses to uncover tensions/flows in how social norms are interpreted (Schatzki 1996; Collins 2004; Spaargaren, G. (2011).

Looking for cracks in the concrete

Finding tensions in order to **challenging norms** and contest (un)sustainable consumption practices – at the risk of reinforcing them! (Bourdieu 1997; Wilk 2002; Sahakian & Wilhite 2014).





Research results

Expectations around ICTs: current trends

- **Scope:** everything is “directed through” ICT
- **Access :** immediate and endless (mis)information
- **Social connectivity:** instant, across time and space
- **Ownership and experiences:** more sharing (moments, music, films, photos)



Expectations around ICTs: (re)negotiated...

In difference spaces of consumption, e.g., iPhone usage at dinner time, at home vs. restaurants.

Over time, between generations and over **life courses** (e.g., moving in together).

In relation to people, within the **same family**, and **peer groups**.

For her 14th birthday, Alix asked for an iPhone. I ended up saying, OK for an iPhone because your whole class has one so.... And Claire (the older daughter) says, "But mom, it's not fair, I only got my iPhone when I was 17!" And I said, darling, times have changed! (*Sonia, mother of two, Lausanne*)

Expectations around ICTs: (re)negotiated...

In relation to people, within the **same family**, and **peer groups**.



Entitlement around ICTs

Having **the right** to ICT services and **a duty** to access them, in relation to **professional and educational needs**.

Not having access as a **social disadvantage** (e.g., doing homework, professional networking, working from home, etc.).

Having the right to ICT for children, particularly in re-composed families, and in relation to peer groups.

Having the right to ICT and **continuous access and speed of connectivity** is becoming a new norm, for some.



Excess in usage

Frequent use of **drug addiction language** to describe ICT usage, particularly in relation to children:

It's truly a drug, it's just incredible. They have pure moments of pleasure (on the iPad), but when you take it away, they become like addicts. (*Mother of three*)

Changing bodily dispositions in relation to ICT

Connecting to disconnect



Excess in access and ownership

How much is enough?

Controlling access is an issue for many

The difference between what people say, and our observations in the home

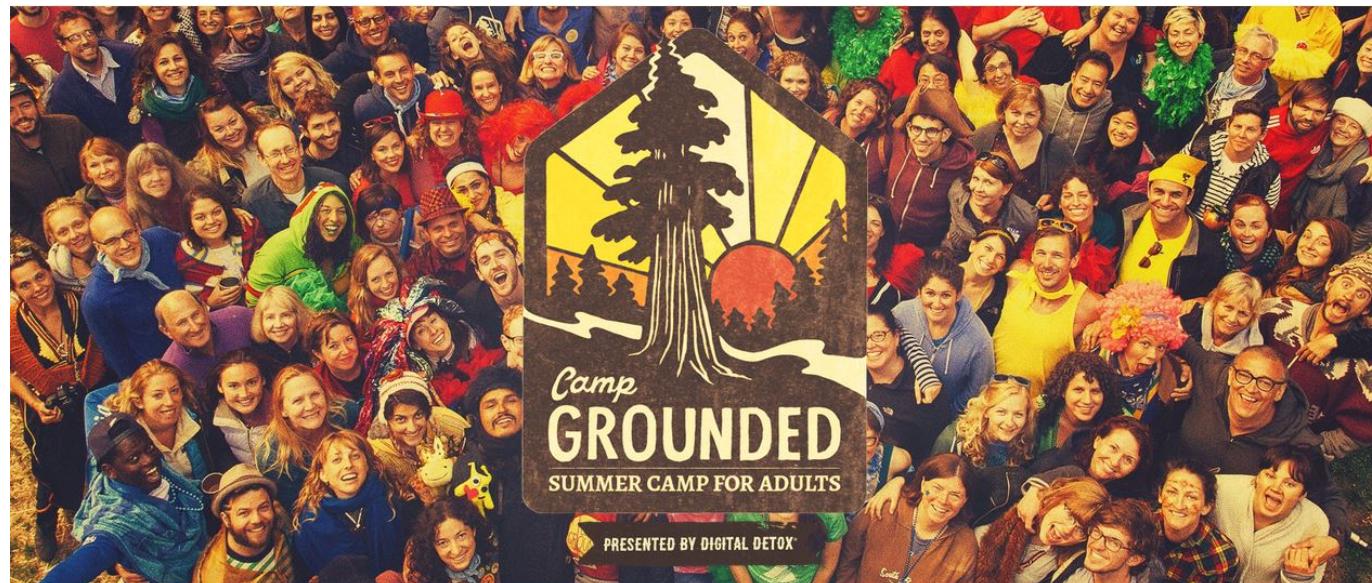


Restrictions

Being disconnected as a way to **avoid bad habits** (e.g., no wifi in the nightclub), **enjoy the moment** (e.g., power outage) or **prompt a change in habits** (e.g., experiencing less connectivity on holidays).

New sense of time when disconnected, a certain freedom for some. A "**slowing down of the frenzied pace**" of everyday life.

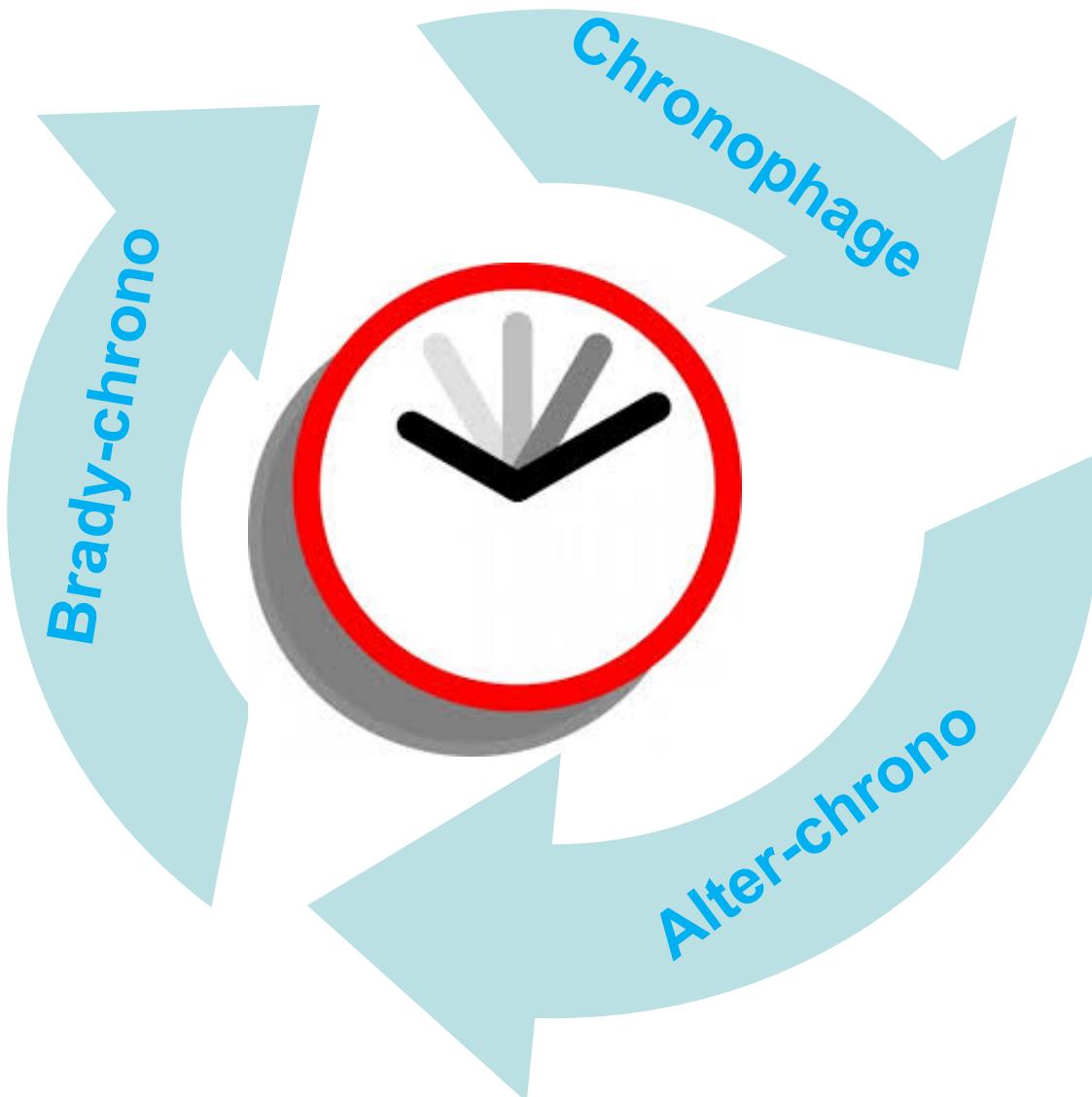
Increasing amount of **adult and children unplugged camps**, where you are obliged to disconnect.





Conclusion and discussion

ICTs and our changing relation to time



Summary

- There are **no stable norms around ICTs, norms seem to emerge from the practice.** There is no inter-generational reference or sense of “oughtness and rightness”; but, increasing expectations around more/faster access.
- **Several “cracks in the concrete” or tensions are apparent,** representing opportunities for contesting norms:
 - Conviviality and commensality: **social vs anti-social connectivity;** being connected worldwide/instantly vs. not physically present
 - Connectivity **as access to faster and more information, films, music, interactions vs sufficiency or shared consumption**
 - Connectivity as **time saving vs. time consuming**

The right to be (dis)connected?





Thank you

Contact: Marlyne.Sahakian@unil.ch