**Graduate School of Development Studies**

# New Media and Youths: a Challenge or an Opportunity?

## A study of youth new media use and schooling in The Netherlands

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## List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| AAP | American Academy of Paediatrics Journal |
| DNYEPP | Dutch multi-year emancipation policy plan |
| ECS | Education, Culture and Science |
| EU | European Union |
| FGD | Focus Group Discussion |
| HAVO | Hoger Algemeen Voortgezet Onderwijs<br>(*Senior general secondary education*) |
| HDI | Human Development Index |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IER | International Economic Report |
| MBO | Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs<br>(*Upper secondary vocational education*) |
| MSN | Microsoft Network |
| NYI | Netherlands Youth Institute |
| PC | Personal Computer |
| SEI | Science and Engineering Indicators Report |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization. |
| VMBO | Voorbereidend Middelbaar Beroepsonderwijs<br>(*Pre-vocational secondary education*) |
| VWO | Voorbereidend Wetenschappelijk Onderwijs<br>(*Pre-university education*) |

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# Abstract

In this era of ICT, digital technology and globalization youths are getting increasing hooked up in new media both as producers and consumers. One could hypothesise that Youths' increased interest in media technology has diverted their attention to personal computers, television and cell-phones, often at the expense of academic time management. This exacerbated with ownership of i-Pods, TVs, mobile phones and personal computers their time is heavily occupied with updating social networks and cyber-participation. Since new media provide exciting and interesting ways youths can use their skills and competencies, they are spending more time in the new media and school is losing priority. This thesis has been interrogated in the context of Dutch HAVO pupils in Calvijn and Comenius colleges in Rotterdam. The pupils are in the era where the level of Technology in the Netherlands has risen dramatically in the last five years and its possible for young people even as early as primary school to own new media commodities. The affinity ICT is creating for young people to annotate, create animations and share with friends all over the globe has enrolled the youths HAVO youths to this Net generation. The youths prefer to invest their time in the media and school to them seem out of sync with their modes of learning and communication. This coupled with the increasing gap between them and teachers and parents explain why it's difficult for them to identify with school anymore and their academic performance has continued to deteriorate. ICT shows a shifting interest of the youths which education systems need to address as a deliberate curriculum aim or adopt computer-mediated learning activities otherwise academic performance is declining due to the youths' shifting interest.

## Relevance to Development Studies

Understanding youth, their behaviour and the processes that change their identity is the core of promoting development among the youths and consequently among nations. Since youths make an extremely pivotal group in the development process, this research helps understand how through adopting of new modes of learning, digital skills and competencies school institutions could meet better the knowledge needs of young people and become more interactive institutions in acquisition and sharing of knowledge.. This can only be done by understanding factors that are leading to current under-performance in school and this is what this thesis has proved with HAVO pupils of Calvijn and Comenius.

## Keywords

[Information and Communication Technology, Youth, New Media, Agency, Schooling, Performance, Culture, generational gap.

*'Today's children and those of the future will grow up immersed in the multimedia environment. I anxiously await to see how these children will integrate the various media into their environments, creating and expanding their cognitive, social, physical, and creative capacities….. They are also able to engage themselves in many types of virtual experiences which will allow them to broaden their skills and imagination. However, the question of how these children should best utilize, to their fullest potential, multimedia technologies and how adults who guide these children should scaffold them still remains unclear'*

Dr. Kobayashi

'Evolution of child development from the multimedia environment'

Opening speech, 1998

**Figure 1: ICT and New Media commodities that compete with education**
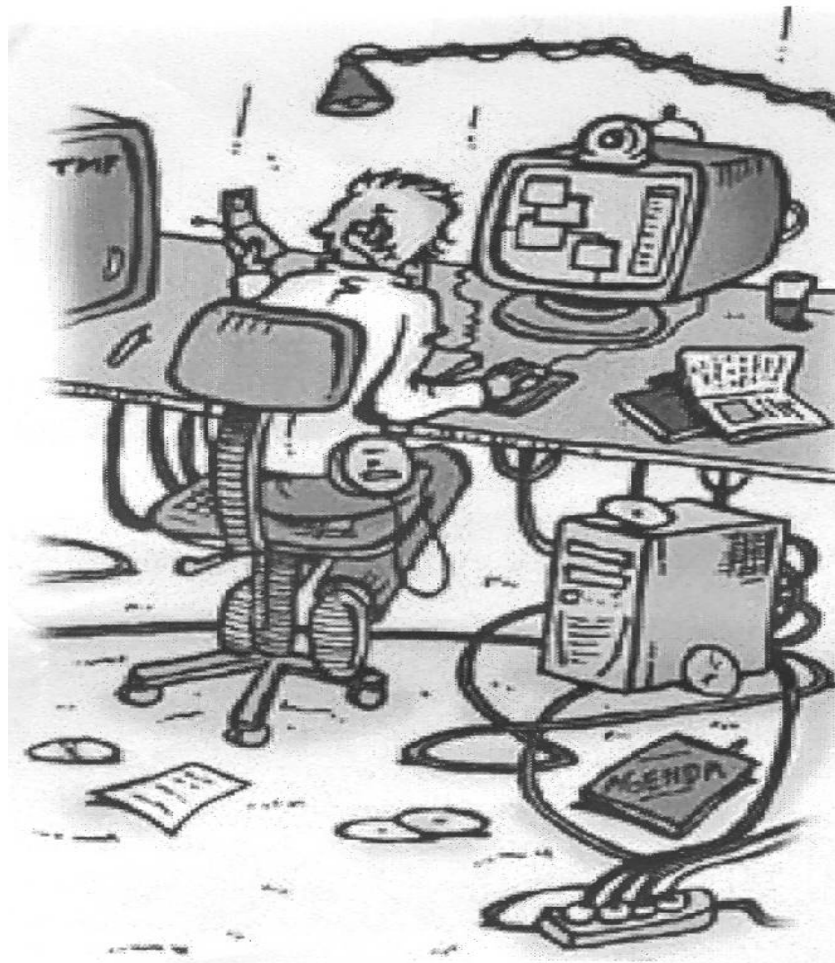


Source: ICT and Onderwijs; Leren van jongeren, 2005

# Chapter 1
# INTRODUCTION

This beginning chapter presents a detailed background of the study conducted among a group of secondary schools pupils in The Netherlands. The study focuses on new Media and whether its' usage has any effect on academic performance. This is explored from the context of HAVO Dutch youths in Rotterdam aged 14-16 years in two schools; Calvijn and Comenius colleges particularly from their peer solidarity and socialization processes. HAVO is one of the four streams of secondary education in Holland referred to as *Senior general secondary education* (HAVO). The stream takes five years and qualifies students to enter higher vocational education (HBO). Some students can also choose to enter pre-university secondary education VWO or MBO education (Dutch Education Journal, 2007). The analysis is based on both qualitative and quantitative findings from Focus Group Discussions (FDGs), structured and semi-structured interviews, drawings, observations and questionnaires. This study considers both the advantages and disadvantages of youth engagement in new media. The study will also attempt to contribute to the wider development discourses in the field of children and youth. The research will conclude by highlighting how new media has played a role in the youth cultures in structuring their peer relationships. For data analysis pseudo names are used for ethical reasons.

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Before delving deeper to this study it's important to have some background understanding on what led me to conduct this particular research and the context to which the research was conducted. The full importance of the context background will be appreciated in the later chapters when disaggregating the research findings. My initial research idea was on the applicability of peer educator's concept in the Dutch context but my preliminary interactions with the pupils, teachers and departmental leaders indicated that youth and new media use is a huge issue in these schools. There

was a concern on the deteriorating academic performance due to the way the pupils are interacting with new media technologies. I decided to interrogate this interaction in the HAVO level along peer socialization processes in order to contribute to the need for information on this matter. Additionally but through coincidence, there was a consultant agency that was hired through the ministry of education on request by one of the colleges to train teachers on how to handle current challenges emerging among students. The school was experiencing difficulties attributed to widening gap between teachers and students, a possible hindrance to academic performance. The informal discussion I held with the chief consultant revealed frustrations teachers are experiencing with the current generation of youths. Information and communication Technology was cited to be causing this gap. Inspiring information on how the teachers view the decline in academic performance and who should take responsibility was generated by this informal meeting.

The study is conducted in Rotterdam, a city whose patterns of multiculturalism are drawing a lot of interests. Not longer than ten years ago the city was inhabited mostly by Dutch Natives but current statistics reveal that immigrants are the majority in the city. Various historical reasons are given to explain these migration influxes and the countries of origin but classification of children from this city due to intermarriages is not obvious. Bearing in mind this complexity in background, this research puts into consideration that the target group could fall into two major categories; 'Autochtoons' which refers to those whose both parents have a Dutch origin and 'Allochtoons'; anyone of whom one or both of his/her parents was not born in the Netherlands (Buruma, 2006). The HAVO pupils both from Calvijn and Comenius colleges where the research was conducted come from a diverse background in terms of origin, culture and social economic status. Their diversity represent one of the most interesting 'youthscape' since its one of the cities in The Netherlands evolving rapidly from a quiet and racially homogenous society into a 'rainbow' of multiculturalism with large numbers of immigrants from Turkey, Morocco, Aruba, Suriname, and other non- industrialized and industrialized nations (Koser et al, 1998). More than 50 nationalities reside in Rotterdam with almost equal number of languages spoken in the city. Different groups migrated to the

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Netherlands for various reasons i.e. economic, social and political. The significance of this diversity cannot be underestimated since the various reasons for migration may determine perceptions and attitude by different groups on the Dutch society. Youths, oftentimes have different modes of expression and lifestyle and chapter 4 discusses youth cultures more comprehensively and its significance in self expression and identity.

According to a recent survey conducted in the Netherlands in 443 cities and villages by different stakeholders working with children, Rotterdam is ranked 1st on poor academic performance in Primary schools (4-12) and 10th in the number of students avoiding school per year (Kinderen en Tel Report, 2007). Deteriorating academic performance is taken broadly to mean declining average grades among the students, declining initiatives by the students for academic guidance from the teachers, demonstration of disinterest in doing homework and lack of remorse from the students when they score low grades in the examination. These trends are supported by qualitative findings from both schools from the teachers in charge of the HAVO department. It's however simplistic to argue that every HAVO student fall in this category because there are those that are doing everything possible towards their academic excellence. The amount of time that pupils spend on communications media been an issue of concern in the two schools and both the teachers and pupils feel it is a factor in the declining academic performance. This relationship between time allocation to new media and school work, and time on other activities, will be interrogated more thoroughly in chapters four of this research.

Today's children and youths inhabit a world where media have reached saturation levels (Roberts, 2000). The growing Information and Communication Technology (ICT) industry and global media culture have affected the youth, or more precisely the student culture in undeniable ways. One can start by asking a simple question; what impact is the new media having on student performance today? Youths patterns of socialization today involve a permutation of ICT components since they are more fun and use skills and competences not possible from tools before. They seem to present the most non-hierarchical source of their youthful solutions. These ICT

competencies have resulted to profound gap between the youth of this era and those of few decades ago (Madunagu, 2004). Even with glaring evidence, the effect of media on youth in schools is still under-researched and does not seem to be gaining attention proportionately.

Media should by no means be taken as a modern phenomenon. On the contrary, the media has always been part and parcel of society in different ways, but it's changing rapidly to suit various component of human existence. Development of media technology in the West has been an impetus by countries to forge forward both conceptual and theoretical development (Ziegler, 1992). ICT industry has witnessed unprecedented growth and immense profits globally in the past five years (International Economic Report, 2008). This has impacted people immensely and particularly the increasing youth's cyber participation has to be looked into more critically. Though school pupils could interact in creative and interesting ways with ICT in their academic and knowledge acquisition processes, performance in schools continues to deteriorate. One could hypothesis that more time spending on e(electronic)-participation than school work could contribute to this downward trend.

Categorically speaking new media has provided youths with opportunities and vulnerabilities. Based on this understanding, a lot of attention has been given to youth debates and subculture theories developed in the fields of cultural studies, the sociology of youth, and anthropology, as an attempt to interpret and deal with the phenomenon. These theories have looked into complexity of factors like globalization and ICT, participation and development. Yet these pluralistic approaches fall short of understanding the world of youth who are media consumers and also products of media in the sense that it shapes their social patterns and embeddedness. Not to mention that media could be a determinant and shaper of the youths identities to a considerable extent.

Children and youths issues have for a long time been interpreted from adult perspective. There has been a call to understand these issues from the perspective of young peoples themselves (Punch, 2002; Morrow, 1996). This

study borrows heavily from the child-centered approach acknowledging children and youths as individuals who can competently anticipate their situations, identify them and explain them from their own point of view. Child-centered approach is gaining popularity in the children and youth debates since it views children and youth as participants and not objects or subject for research (Ben White Lecture at ISS, 5th March 2008; Punch, 2002). Technology has no doubt provided ways young people can derive fun and engage in social behaviour. The challenge now currently is finding an overlap where technology use by youths and societal expectations from both social and academic spheres can function and coexist (WYR, 2003).

Technically, development of ICT in countries is meant to promote economic growth. Knowledge has become economically important in the investment and production of knowledge based-goods and services (IER, 2008). Many countries continue to enjoy enhanced economic performance and improved human capital through adoption of new technologies. Different economic growth theories have maintained a recognition of the role of technological growth in sustaining economic growth; both from neo-classical economic or endogenous types of economics (IER, 2008). It's also worth noting that acquiring latest technologies defines the current struggle among developed countries to maintain their position and hegemony. With all eyes focused on this objective, the consequence of ICT especially on young people has been significantly overlooked.

To interrogate the two engaging factors; media and academic performance, this research starts by introducing notions operating within the context the research will be conducted. At a national level, The Netherlands is one of the European Union(EU) countries which have undergone 'metamorphoses' in social, political and economic dimensions. Not to mention that on religious terms, it has evolved from Christian to secular state in the 50s and 60s (Buruma, 2006). Enlightenment principles of freedom and respect for individual right are highly valued and children are believed to be growing up in very favourable social and economic conditions with The Netherlands featuring among the top ten countries with high Human Development Index (HDI) (UNESCO, 2004). The Netherlands has invested heavily in technology

and quaternary sector industry; information and services industry and it rates among the top 30 countries in the world (*SEI Report*, 2006). Yet it is less than a decade ago, the internet has become a meta-medium used by teenagers in The Netherlands to punctuate their new culture. The appealing economic situation in The Netherlands, with parents exacerbating ICT ownership among youths by buying Personal Computers (PCs), i-Pods and TV with limited guidance and control in use. However it cannot be assumed that there are no young people who work and buy these things themselves. Though I will refrain from discussing the logic of 'suitable jobs' in the Netherlands as used in child labour discourses, suitable jobs for teenagers above 15 years allow them earn disposable income which could be used for this purpose. Child labour according to Dutch Socialist Party Chairman Jan Marijnissen, has become an essential element of the Dutch economy (Marijnissen, 2001 as cited in Huijsmans 2005) as it is believed to offer young people skills on personal responsibility. Close to seventy five percent of Dutch secondary school youths (aged 12-17) engage in paid employment which co-exists with full school participation (Mckenhnie and Hobbs, 1998 as cited in Huijsmans, 2005; Lavalette, 1999).

So far there has not been a research to prove this relationship between media and academic performance but researches done in US have shown youths are spending more hours interacting with media than in doing school related activities. This research only develops and presents its argument based on the aspects of perceived users time, freedom and availability of use of ICT, where the two factors are hypothesized to be fundamental determinants of the most likely options the young people would fall for. Research conducted using Regression analysis on ICT; relationship between dependent and independent variables, indicates that perceived usefulness, perceived ease of use and user acceptance of information technology is actually a casual indication to perceived usefulness (Davis, 1989). According to Davis (1989) information technology offers a substantial potential for use in social political and educational processes. However, use of ICT need to adhere to clear guidelines since it posses both opportunities and vulnerabilities (Vinken, 2006).

Though The Netherlands is among the developed states, most teenagers did not have personal control and access to computers and mobile phones until 5-10 years ago. Nowadays, teenagers are fundamentally different from those of a decade ago (Keesie Youth Report, 2006). Responding to this 'techno-differences' from a commercial perspective, companies and organizations have immersed themselves in the world of young people in order to gain acceptance and have presented deals and youthful solutions teenagers cannot resist (*ibid*). The interaction of the young people with the 'outer' world regardless of their origin birthed different interests within the home and youth's attraction to the global youth culture challenged Lutz notion about the increasing importance of home as a gathering place and the gradual shrinking of the public sphere (Lutz' Occasional Paper 11, 1991). He describes the living room as the place where old and new ways of life are brought together blending ties of family and kinship (*ibid*). Emergence of a global media-driven youth culture signifies the building of a new landscape of socialization (WYR, 2005).

In school there is a general growing trend of lack of or decreased interest in academic responsibility where the amount of time pupils are spending on school homework is falling nationwide (CBS, 2004). There is no explanation so far on why less time is being spent on homework by the pupils and this research attempt to interrogate whether new media use could account for this trend as is hypothesized in the objective (see research strategy). Furthermore, it will also interrogate the effect ICT has on relationship between school pupils and their teachers; whose knowledge in media technology could be lagging far behind.

An average teenage day has a list of options which appeals to their interest and for the teenagers who can afford access to ICT; they have become consumers of the enticing and neatly packaged technologies. It is very likely that as teenagers spend more time on ICT related activities such as joining their real and 'Cyber- friends' on-line or via their cell phone that school and academic pursuits will lose priority. New media use among the youths is gaining popularity among the Dutch high schools HAVO teenagers in Calvijn

and Comenius both for self expression and social networks and is likely to shift priority on academic performance.

## RESEARCH STRATEGY

### *Objective of the research*

This research has an objective of interrogating the interaction of youths and new media from mostly the students' perspective in Rotterdam city. The study seeks to explore the interaction between new media and school time management among Calvijn and Comenius secondary school peers and how this is reflected in the academic performance trends among the HAVO school pupils. The research also attempts to contribute to the existing youth cultures debates

### *Research questions*

In order to fulfil the objectives of the research, the following guiding question was used

> *How do HAVO school youths aged (14-16) in Comenius and Calvijn colleges in Rotterdam use new media and how does this affect their academic performance?*

To achieve this objective the central question is operationalized into the following more specific sub-questions:

1. How do the youths in Comenius and Calvijn perceive schooling? Do they view it as and necessary means for social advancement and bearing for future choices?
2. How do teenage students prioritize their time? How much time do they spend with academic work versus ICT and new media?
3. What impact has new media use had on the academic performance of teenagers in Comenius and Calvijn colleges in Rotterdam?

### *Methods and Methodology*

Conducting the research in Comenius and Calvijn colleges in Rotterdam was done using qualitative research techniques I learned in ISS. The methods used include Focus Group Discussions, structured and semi-structured interviews, questionnaires and observations which are presented in details later

in the chapter. There are various reasons why I chose these methods in this research. First is to allow the respondents to give their own accounts, secondly to create space of engaging the respondents for more clarity and finally triangulating different research methods gives complimentality in qualitative researches providing insights unavailable from statistical materials or surveys. My past work experience working with youths gave me valuable skills on how to interact and build rapport which was important during the research. Lies and evasions are less likely to occur when a researcher has built up a relationship of trust (Ennew, 1994 as cited in Punch, 2002). Moreover, my unique position as a young researcher from a different country caught the teenagers between curiosity and opportunity. They regarded my presence both as a harmless avenue to vent their constructed ideas and perceptions on various issues and an opportunity to share their feelings and perceptions to someone who would listen from a non-biased perspective. They were made aware about the exercise earlier enough and my presence was still not clear whom it exactly represents. An 'initiation' discussion in the FGD erupted.

Tom: "What do you do in Kenya?"

Tom: "Do you have internet in Kenya and are there computers there?"

Gerald: "Yes though not very accessible".

Bonnie: "How many people like you come to Europe from Kenya for study?"

The answer to these questions I knew would either make them respond to the group questions out of sympathy for me or would provoke a parallel curiosity counter-research from their side and so strict refocusing responses were needed and honest responses to their questions. The questions were also their 'barometer' to assess how accessible I am to them and with the one hour and forty minutes allocated for each group, successful discussions depended on rapport between a Kenyan stranger and Dutch youth. Honest responses created some level of trust and resulted to their incredible freedom in expression. Discussions cut across time spending, school work, social cultural relationship and the role new media plays in peer relations and solidarity processes. As a development researcher I focused on how participants spend

time, perceive school, how their priorities interplay and could reflect on their academic performance.

While this freedom could allow free discussion and exchange in the groups, I had to be aware of my own biases and prejudices that could influence the data collected. Triangulating questions clarified responses and minimized possibilities of getting answers which are socially desired or which do not make sense to a non-Dutch researcher. I sometimes wondered whether by sharing how they watch porn so openly was meant to make them look 'cool' or they simply wanted to show how they belong to a more superior context from where I come from. I took the initial questions they asked as important test on whether I am allowed to interact with the content of their world or I belong to those 'others' they feel scantly understand the world of youth. My interest in European soccer made it possible to identify with time they invest watching games in comparison to how much time I spend myself though others programs I had no clue what they were talking about. The experience made me feel like a blank screen where students with different social, economic and cultural stripes projected their views.

## QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STRATEGY: PRIMARY DATA

### Research Participants

The participants were students and teachers from the Calvijn and Comenius colleges of Rotterdam in the HAVO and one group from Gymnasium. Key target group was the HAVO though listening to gymnasiums; the highest level in Dutch education system, gave insights on their priorities and time spending. In total 201 pupils participated in the FGDs. Further qualitative information came from unstructured interviews with teachers and experts working in secondary schools. Teachers' discussions yielded very valuable information on trends they observe over the years among the youths both in behavior and academic performance and the possible cause for these cultural shifts.

Interviews with the pupils could only be conducted during the summer holidays so I organized with willing students to meet over the holiday. The

availability of willing respondents was based on probability i.e. since children usually accompany their families for holidays it is hard to predict respondents' availability. Twenty students had volunteered to participate but only five could participate in the exercise owing to the mentioned dynamics. Working with a key respondent helped capture all useful information which would pose a challenge when dealing with such big groups. Analysis of the information collected and how it relates with the central research objective is discussed more thoroughly in chapter 5.

### *Focus Group Discussions*

Unlike the FGDs I conducted in the months of April and May, the pilot FGD was done in March. The pilot helped refine the questions and techniques for the major discussions. Since the FGDs were conducted in English, the pilot was an assessment on how well youths understood the questions and how easy they could give responses in English which is only taught as an extra language in the schools. The questions were made very simple to understand resulting to very lively discussions.  My key respondent works with an agency concerned with the quality of education in Dutch secondary school as well coordinating programs with the National Youth council making her knowledge very instrumental in the research. She bridged the language gap when respondents found it challenging to remember some words in English, they would use Dutch and then she does the translation. This worked very well when their worry for mixing Dutch and English was addressed.

This process also entailed their use of pictorial representation on paper and white board. The drew personal timelines and daily calendar of activities generating heated debate because they know each other pretty much and drawings not representing the owners faced stiff challenges and resistance. The drawings illustrated how they use their time and the order of priority on different activities on normal schools days and during the weekends. To ignite more discussion, few propositions were discussed in pairs and shared in a plenary. For example the motion on whether school is important for them was discussed for and against and reason given to support their opinions. The motion touched issues of homework, value for school, conflict with teachers,

boring modes of learning and alternative entertainment offered by the new media. New media cited as the cause for decreasing academic interest and deteriorating performance. Tension and generational gap between the respondents and their parents and teachers was discussed and ICT competencies possessed by the youths attributed to this trend.

A questionnaire helped understand whether media use different among gender, religion and native versus immigrants. Interviews shed more light on this issue. The results of the questionnaire were coded with my own codes ad translated during the analysis.

### *Interviews*

Conducting structured interviews started with the teachers who are responsible for the social welfare of the students. These teachers were of interest to me in understanding current scenarios among the students, trends and views. They explained how technology has contributed to almost two out of every three current cases they deal with among the students presenting a strong case on the effect of new media on academic performance. Their role cuts across student to students, students to the college staff and students to their parents. From their responses academic performance is not a removed entity but a function of choices made, time usage, the environment and institutional support e.g. school and home. I wrote the interview report and later selected the citations which are directly connected to my research objectives.

## SECONDARY DATA

Secondary data was mainly from the previous researches conducted in The Netherlands concerning the youths, education and ICT and the social changes that youths have gone through and placing these changes in a time context. The history of youths involved in the Netherlands both in the social and political construction of the Dutch society and how they have used media in their participation. Literature on youth and media and the role new media plays in social cultural processes were important sources.

## *Limitations of the Research*

It was not easy to follow the criteria in research methodologies for development i.e. having a maximum number of participants in FDGs which should be 6-12. Since the school system works in a way that different classes in the same level are having different lessons means if you choose to work with a class, it's expected that the whole class will be engaged. This meant that I could have a Focus group of 30 participants and it was not easy to ensure everyone fully participates. Controlling such a group was also a major challenge when everyone wanted to talk at the same time or when a simulating question was being discussed.

Translating words in English and in Dutch sometimes made me loose the real meaning since some words mean very differently when translated directly. Translating drawings was also subjective because different respondents have different way of presenting similar opinions. Coding the drawings also posed a challenge since pictures not drawn to scale is difficult to interpret length and distance

| Table 1: A summary of activities carried out during the data collection process | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Activities** | **How many** | **Period** |
| Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) | 9 | |
| | 1 | March |
| Pilot- Pre-testing group | 7 | April & May |
| FGDs- To collect data | 1 | May |
| Gymnasium class | | |
| Structured interviews | 7 | August & September |
| Non-structured interviews | Several | May- August |
| Drawings | 150 | March-May |
| Questionnaires | 201 | March-May |
| Observations | In and out of school | March-September |

# Chapter 2
# POSITIONING NEW MEDIA IN YOUTH CULTURE THEORIES AND DEBATES INTO AN ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter starts by locating this research in the existing theories on youth culture and the role of media in the broad global youth context. The study investigates how HAVO pupils in Calvijn and Comenius colleges in Rotterdam perceive schooling, spend time on new media in their peer socialization and collective behavior and prioritize school among other preferences. Youth culture provides the framework to analyze the new ICT trends among the youths and whether these trends account to the declining academic performance among the target group of this research.

## YOUTH CULTURE THEORY

Different forms of youth culture; cultural expressions, lifestyle and media play a central role in societies (Fornas, 1989). Youth cultures have been studies to understand tendencies and processes of systems and processes operating among young people. The theory also explores the cultural aspect of everyday life and other forms concerning symbolic expression, forms of consciousness and communication (*ibid*). Youth culture theory goes beyond the deviant youthful subcultures, it also deal with youth social and economic realities, youth psychology and all the aesthetic forms of youth (*ibid*). Youth researchers have been paying attention to cultural creativity and peer relationships for the development of youth identity. ICT is the fastest changing industry but the flexible search for identity among youths could explain the mobility between different forms which are changing as media evolves.

As early as 1989, the effect of media on youth culture was already under scrutiny. A Swedish sociologist published an anthology *ungdom och medier* (youth and media) on how young people interact and are represented in the media (Fornas, 1989). Convention for the Rights of Children (CRC) encourages information access to children as long as it is not injurious to their well being (ENICEF, 2004). Proliferation and globalization of media are among the key

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factors that have shaped and defined the current generation of youth (*ibid*). It is no doubt media has percolated into the schools posing important challenges young pupils have to face in making choices between the enticing media and their academic preferences. The level of involvement of young people in digital technology calls for a critical attention to issues raised by a German social psychologist; Thomas Ziehe in a symposion in 1989 on *Kulturanalyser. Ungdom, utbildning, modernitet* (Cultural analysis. Youth, education and modernity) (Thomas, 1993). New media has offered the school pupils a new mode of socialization and information access, sharing ideas and beliefs. As a social construct, institutions like school should prepare young people to integrate with the wider society in future (Tyyska, 2005). From a functionalist approach, such social institutions serve to further the survival of existing social system as well as contribute to its holistic adaptation and adjustment (Feinberg, 1992). As youths interact with media, such institutional objectives face difficulties as media presents a very simplistic way of looking at life where everything is possible and easily attainable. The notions promoted through media completely depart from the school logic of role differentiation and social solidarity which is made possible in modern societies through formal education (Feinberg, 1992). Based on how HAVO youths in Calvijn and Comenius colleges in Rotterdam use time and set priorities, the research explores whether the new media use trends explains the dwindling academic performance.

Most students never like school. They find it either too formal or too strict with limited chance for fun and alternative forms of learning. Digital technology offers more interactive access to information and modes of communication contrary to the teaching methods which may not be compatible with the current genres of youth (Veen et al, 2005). Unlike the old forms of learning ICT makes learning faster and more lively providing more information in the click of a button that would ever be available to citizens subscribed to the Dutch philosophy of 'lifelong learning' (ECS Report, 2007).

Cyber-participation has played a vital role among HAVO youths in Calvijn and Comenius colleges in determining and shaping their identity. It could be rightly argued that new media is creating a generational shift from passive to conscious cohorts of youths where they can exploit educational resources to

innovate in cultural processes. This is especially gaining significance in youth subculture debates. Subculture debates were associated with deviant youths as early as in 1913 by Robert Park from the University of Chicago in his ethnographic study to understand the interaction and formation of groups (Blackman, 2005). Subculture; any group that chooses to break off from the mainstream culture operating with different patterns of behavior and values and act out their own cultural solutions (Blackman, 2005; Polsky, 1967), does not refer to the youth as persons only but to the processes that lead to breaking from the general youth culture. Borrowing from the rich plethora of debates on this topic, this research will limit its scope to the youth culture which is inextricable for young people. New media plays a central role in the construction of youth cultures as explained by Cohen in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (Cohen, 2002) and is a crucial term in this research.

To understand the role of new media in youth cultures it is important to focus on youth cultural practices (Blackman 2005). There are growing concerns on availability of low quality media for young people featuring violence, sexual content, undesirable role models and lack of diversity (UNICEF, 2004). This research will try to avoid all the interdisciplinary theorization and ideological conflicts and focus exclusively on media use among students at the expense of other priorities like school and how these shifting priorities could be conflicting with the perception young people have about their future.

It's likely that youth have greater chances of interacting with new media. This could be due to the diversity in packaging media which entails internet, digital media and creativity, written material as well as network society all of which have become a real thrill to the youth. I could not have put it any better than Henry Jenkins in his Media theories and Methods syllabus II (2006) entitled *Popular Culture in the age of Media Convergence.* The logic of his argument is that:

> 'We are living in an age where changes in communications, storytelling and information technologies are reshaping almost every aspect of contemporary life including how we create, consume, learn, and interact with each other. A whole range of new technologies enable consumers to archive, annotate, appropriate, and re-circulate media content and in the process,

these technologies have altered the ways that consumers interact with core institutions of government, education, and commerce'.

While new media has been associated with deviance among youth subcultures, it has been proved to be intellectually stimulating (Burbules, 2007). With the intersection and collision of new (fast, dynamic and well packaged) media with the old (limited, slow, and low quality) it is important to understand how youth interact with new media to fully express their creativity, passion and vitality.

Conflict between existing structures and agency began when new media provided youth an alternative model of sharing knowledge and collective production of ideas and innovations (Information Economy Report, 2008). Certainly with new media, potential contribution to knowledge creation and diffusion has been made possible. Youths have found non interrupted 'open accesses of maintaining social networks, acquiring and sharing information on entertainment, sports, 'taboo' topics not addressed by adults and news censored for political motives (UNICEF, 2004). In the last one decade young people have been influenced a lot by the booming ICT industry where as Edmunds and Bryan (2005) argue in their *Global generation* article, rise in ICT and interconnectivity has given rise to 'e-generations' which operates in a more interactive and less hierarchical way, and there is greater scope for mutual influence. Technology is definitely not new but it's apparent that there is qualitative newness. Faster, accessible, mobile, convenient and dual-functional ICT products are available and it is the central role played by ICT in the lives of young people and in society which has becomes 'the social glue' in the current rising generation of digital youths.

# Chapter 3  UNDERSTANDING HAVO IN THE DUTCH EDUCATION SYSTEM

This chapter will attempt to elaborate the Dutch education system and the possibilities available for pupils who enroll in the system on both horizontal and perpendicular axes.

It will highlight the basic expectation in terms of age before entry in primary education and the limits presented by the education model as well as alternatives routes students could pursue to fulfill their academic dreams.

## STATUTORY MANDATE IN THE COMPULSORY ACT

Children in The Netherlands could begin[1] school as early as 4 years though legally it's till the age of five (ECS Report, 2007). The statutory laid down in the act expects children until the end of their secondary education to participate in full-time (five days a week) education[2] (NJI Report, 2007). In secondary schools, children are enrolled according to their ability (Wooning, 2004 as cited in Huijsmans, 2005). VMBO seems to provide a limit to which one can go in pursuit of education but the rest of the levels grant admission to higher education. HAVO and VWO are characterized as selective type of secondary education (http://www.nuffic.nl accessed 8-10-08). This system however provides flexibility of moving from right to left through the system although there are implications of either time or otherwise social when a student decided to pursue education in an alternative route that is not offered in the current school. The most ideal and efficiently practical would be to move horizontally from primary to secondary and finally academic university (VWO), practical university (HBO) or vocational training (MBO) but it should be noted that this depends on the pupils attainment and academic capability demonstrated in primary schools.

This model in figure 3 shows that virtually all the students have potentially the same opportunities in primary school before individual potential later dictates which path one will follow during high school education. Obviously other factors like family support, domestic value placed on education could

determine education outcome but previous research done indicates that generally girls dedicate more time to their homework than boys and significantly important is the less time dedicated to homework by the VMBO students as compared to HAVO (CBS, 2002 as cited in Huijsmans, 2005).

**Figure 2: Dutch Education System and possible movements along the system**
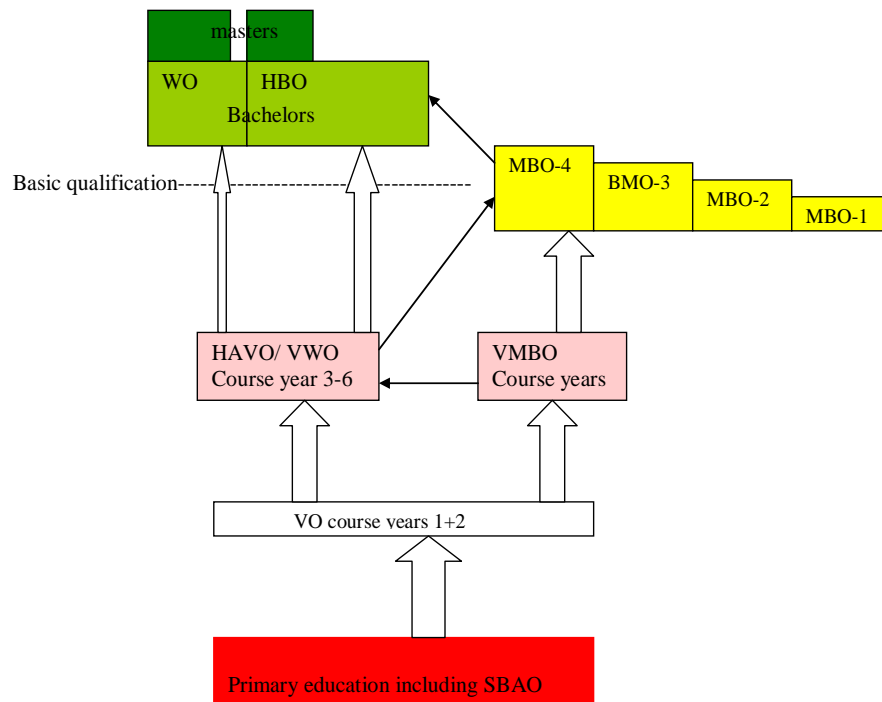


Source: Adopted from Dutch ministry of Education, Culture and Science, 2008.

## CALVIJN AND COMENIUS: Composition and implication

The two colleges present a striking composition of students who are drawn from different social classes, religion and origin. Calvijn colleges are named after John Calvijn; a reformation theologist whose broad view was on human justice and relation to God (http://reformatica.nl). He championed

education in Christian theology and part of the values that are used in the colleges borrows heavily from his Christian beliefs. Calvijn has more than 60% students with non-Dutch origin and less than 40% students are native Dutch in the HAVO group. Calvijn is a *'Christelijke Scholengemeenschap'* (A Christian Education Community) a conglomerate of seven schools located in Rotterdam city (http://algemeen.calvijn.nl). Vreewijk where I did my research is one of those seven which was initially a white neighborhood but has turned to black neighborhood where only the old Dutch people lives there and the immigrants. It's an area that is experiencing a lot of changes in Rotterdam. The schools draw a lot of children from Pendrecht which is considered to be a black neighborhood.

Comenius on the other hand can be referred to as white school in a white neighborhood. Though a white school it also has an interesting combination of pupils. From the interview I had with the principal of the school, around 25% of the pupils have non-Dutch origin, approximately 10% of the children come from upper-class; i.e. the parents are working in jobs earning, 60% from middle class; family income ranging from and 25% from lower class; with family income….. of and lower. Children though are given equal opportunities in the school. The importance of this composition and differences on the way pupils perceive school and the use of ICT as an attempt to create a non hierarchical space will be discussed in the next chapter.

## DILEMMA OF IDENTITY: I am Dutch or not?

Over the years The Netherlands has evolved in many ways; in terms of economy, politics and social-cultural dimensions. These changes could be connected to the historical events of the country that saw different people move to the Netherlands for various reasons (Koser et al, 1998). Before the migration, the Dutch society was almost monocultural though this ideology to me is still questionable as differences exist within the fibres of the same society. What characterized the Dutch national culture of 'tolerance' and identity is the fact that it is "*burgerlijk*", a German like word commonly used in Holland to refer to both bourgeois and the citizens (Huizinga, 1934 in Cockburn, 2002). It denotes a social-economic rank, behaviors thereof and the

civic and political positions. With all the migration, different forms of culture and knowledge met and could have posed an important challenge to what the Dutch society was known for; accommodating people regardless of race, religion race and culture (Gorashi, 2002). Some migrant societies have tried to exercise their unique forms and sometimes incompatible culture in the wider Dutch culture which have resulted to tension and constrains in the integration and 'uniformalization' efforts in the systems. Living within these realities, on the one hand adopting to Dutch culture and on the other hand maintaining some form of cultural autonomy for the migrant groups have resulted to clash of identity among children and youths who feel pulled towards different poles. Youths find it problematic to position themselves in either of their ancestral origin culture or the Dutch culture they are living in today.

> "I don't feel Dutch and I don't feel Aruban. I was born here and I speak Dutch but I don't want to live and work here. I want to go back to Aruba and stay there after I finish school. I know it's hard because we are not close with my cousins and relatives but I am told they live there. I will find some way of living there but right now I know it's very hard. But you know as a woman you can live anywhere so I am not very sure where I want to go because we will decide with my boyfriend"(Sabrina- explaining her identity)

> "I hear that my grandfather came from India but I never met him. My mother comes from Suriname but migrated to The Netherlands when she got married. I am born in the Netherlands and I speak Dutch. I think am Dutch but I don't even look like Dutch I look Indian like my grandfather. We go to Suriname for our vacation and I have very nice relatives there but I like it when I am in the Netherlands. I love the weather there more than there though!" (Lide- on defining who she is)

> "Holland is good because it is a rich country compared to where my parents come from in Morocco but you can never be happy here. People always think of money and to have more, more, more. To drive a nice car, stay in nice house and have money for holiday. If you don't have that money you feel bad while in Morocco everybody is the same and they look happier. I want to work in Morocco though I have never gone there and I don't know whether I will like it. I watch TV programs from Morocco and there are so many problems there like bad roads and poverty. It's hard to decide sometimes".(Daniël- locating himself in future.)

This crisis of identity was very evident to me during the European Football competition (UEFA Euro 2008) which were held early June. Holland was playing against Italy immediately after the game for France against Romania. There was massive support of France and youths wore T-shirts with

French flag and colours. Others held the French flag and jumped on any attempt to goal. When few minutes after Holland played against Italy the youth fans wore Orange t-shirts those who has only a French flag displaying a unique combination Dutch symbol and French flag while those originally with French T-shirts were now waving Dutch orange flag. This was same scenario when Turkey was playing Croatia in the quarter finals. The supporters of Turkey waved Turkish symbols and were extremely disappointed when Holland lost to Russia in the second category. On talking to several youths I got an explanation of the shifting support and expression of solidarity at other times.

**G:** Why do you support France and Netherlands at the same time?

**R:** I am happy when France wins because I have part of my family living there. We came from France before settling in the Netherlands but that is not even where we came from initially. My grandparents came to Europe to search for work and they lived there first. Part of my family is still there.

**G:** Where did you originally come from?

**R:** It's a bit more complicated to know where everybody came from in the Netherlands. We have moved to so many places because our parents had to keep moving in European to find jobs. It's easy to be misused here and you end up doing dirty jobs. My grandparents were told to come and work and they ended up doing donkey work.

**G:** Where did they come from?

**R:** My parents were born in France though grandparents came from Morocco. When they couldn't take it anymore they moved to look for better opportunities in the Netherlands.

**G:** Then why do you support France if they treated your parents that way?

**R:** I can't deny that France is part of my home. Netherlands is my home too but I go to France every holiday vacation to enjoy the sun and the landscape. I belong to both I think! Migrants are migrants you know and you have to survive, to be clever and to avoid getting too involved because you can be moving tomorrow (….) just enjoy where you are but

remember those you left behind if you can. That is how the world works (…….)

With this level of identity crisis, the extent to which respect for individual freedom, equality and reciprocity of both the majority and minority remain unclear in a multicultural environment (Van der Ven, 2006 in Australian Ejournal of Theology, 2006). Maintaining harmonious diversity is equally an illusion. Migration is caused by different reasons and when migration trajectories converge, there are different social cultural differences values and habits in such environment. Coordinating issues beyond specific cultural demands is daunting since the 'one size fit all' principle will never hold. Establishing partnership and cooperation is not easy as solution may never be satisfactory for everyone.

# Chapter 4  NEW MEDIA AND DIGITAL LITERACY: AN AGENDA TO RETHINK?

This chapter delves deeper on how ICT has developed over the years and what is leading to the youths increasing interest and embrace of new media commodities. It's important to note that the chapter will contextualize the HAVO youth in Calvijn and Comenius colleges of Rotterdam with particular relevance to role of media in youth culture debates.. The chapter will attempt to illustrate how youths' identity has been influenced by new media and the role ICT plays in their daily lives and the place of agency and self-control in the social, cultural and political and educational processes. It will start by elucidating the origin of Technology and new media debates highlighting general trends and characteristics that distinguish between the old forms of media and the new form. The third section will underscore the role agency, identity and self control plays in promoting both the consumption and production of new media. The fourth section will highlight how ICT has been introduced into the education platforms and the rationale behind the combination and finally the last section will highlight how the Sept 11th terrorist attack ushered a new way of looking at media and how this has affected the debates and discourses surrounding ICT.

## ICT: Origin

Technology has been associated with improvement of economic growth but researchers like Bijker and Pinch from Twente university, The Netherlands through their book called *The social construction of technological systems* attempt to elucidate the sociological and historical side of Technology (Bijker et al, 1989). Technology is not just about the messy, complex, problem solving components but it's also about institutions and incorporation of scientific components like books, articles and teaching programs (*ibid*).

The impact of technology on society is clear and unmistakable. Understanding the different phases in the evolution of technology; invention, development, innovation, transfer, growth, competition and consolidation is

far too removed from the scope of this research. The research focuses on the technology as seen from a qualitative sense.   Worldwide trends towards globalization of markets, communication and culture require very specific involvement of global media and communication networks (Cunningham et al, 1998). The current forms of media offers more entertainment and 'infotainment'  rather than education and this coupled by the fact that core business of many media networks is economic contributes to the increasing criticism of  combining media in education.

About two decades ago technology was mostly industrial and ownership of personal effects like phones was limited. Numerous unstructured interviews I have had with teachers, parents and youths who are in their late twenties confirmed that it was not easy to own a computer in the eighties and a mobile phone in the 90s in The Netherlands. The cost was unmanageable and even less for the youth. In the dawn of the new millennia, technology production became the fastest growing industry. Competition globally grew which made it cheaper and easier to own the 'impossibles' of the 90s. The old form of industrial technology was overtaken by a new niche of market among the youths who are mostly concerned with entertainment and social networking. To fulfill the demands among the youth, cheaper, mobile and 'colorful' technology has been youth-friendly packaged. It's this change in quality and cost of ownership that constitutes the 'new mediascape'.

## THE SOFTWARE KID! Who is this youth in question?

The rise of industrial societies in 1900s saw adolescents being studied from the field of psychology (Tyyska, 2005). The rise in communication technology and interconnectivity has given rise to a new generation with an affinity to maintain bonds through cyber-shared ideas. The current youths can be called software generation because through ICT they are able to interact with systems in increasingly complex ways than it has been witnessed before. Through digital technology they are able to relive historical era, investigate scientific complex systems, and manipulate ideas through movies to fit theory (Veens et al, 2005). They are users and producers of new forms of technology that honours their multiple form of intelligence and create fun and play

simultaneously. They can listens as they watch, create images as they communicate to cyber friends or do the aforementioned at the same time. Media space has continued to be a thrill to the young people because they can discover by doing and create while clicking. There is a plethora of engaging activities helping them gain technological fluency and expand their minds through playful learning; they can design and animate characters, make their own digital cards, invent games, publish, and e-mail their creations to friends.

Youths are immersed in media (Roberts, 2000) and statistics among the American high school youths shows that by the time they finish school, they will have spent more hours watching TV (16,000 hours) than in class (14,000 hours) (Journal of Adolescent Health, 2000). Its rather obvious that other time is devoted to other forms of media like Cell phone, computer games and music players and magazines meaning that youth spend more time consuming media than any other waking activity (Roberts, 2000) In the array of commodities found in the youth 'mediascape' they interact daily in varied permutation with the ones presented below:

**Figure 3: Dominant Media components among the youths**

| i-Pods | personal computer | cell phone | video decoder |



*Source: my own creation from the internet images*

Researches conducted focus on how youth use one of the media components with no documented media mix research on how much time youth spend of each of the available media (Roberts, 2000).

The intensive use of new media by the youths makes this generation very and as Veens and Jacobs (2005) puts it:

> "This is the first generation born with a mouse in their hands and a computer screen as their window on the world. Tweens understand icon before they could read. They surf the net with an ease and speed that belongs only to those who are at home with cyberspace."

The extents to which youths can interact with these forms of media and fulfil other responsibilities like academic study remain an issue to be critically examined.

## AGENCY AND SELF-CONTROL: ICT as an enabling factor?

Young people are both consumers and producers of media. The drive to have their own space where they can share ideas and values that connect them globally to other youths, develop a sense of 'we' in youth cultures is the dominating factor behind pupils in Calvijn and Comenius use of new media. Agency entails the capacity of humans to ultimately decide which action to take (Berner, 1998). School on the other hand is a place for developing skills, enforce some rules and train the youths how to function in societies and live valued lives (UNESCO, 1990). Youth have developed websites where they share their opinions amongst the peers and talk to buddies on line. They can share freely what they feel object form others the way they like and their freedom in media is not curtailed. Through ICT young people have also been able to let their voices heard and collective action have been made quicker and cheaper. The barrier to free communications and freedom are usually perceived by the youths as being the adult controlled institutions and media space respect creativity and respect youthful opinions without censure.

> "Young people like different things from what the parents like. I listen to drum and bass, rock, metal breakcore, top 40, pop music and my friends like that too. My parents say that music is so fast hahahahaha… and they listen to old music which is good for them but not music to me. I have a TV in my room, that way I will do my own things". (Saul)

Information and technology was and still is seen as the actual catalyst of change. However, this has destabilized many systems and brought fundamental changes; education systems being no exception. With the growing influence of

entertainment media on youth styles and identity the role of traditional sources of influence; family, schools, community and religion could continue decreasing (UNICEF, 2004).

## NEW MEDIA WITHIN THE EDUCATION POLICY DISCOURSE

Blending of media with schooling institutions is among the current efforts for enhancing learning and cognitive development as well as being entertaining (Child Research Net Symposium in Tokyo, Japan, January, 1998). It's now a widely held belief by educational leaders that introducing ICT in education will lead to in and out of classroom use by teachers and students and improved teaching and learning (Cuban & Craig 2001). This research examines this assumption using qualitative methods in two high schools based in one of the cities in a technologically advanced countries; Rotterdam in the Netherlands. While education is useful in transmitting skills, culture and preparing productive citizens (Knezek, 2003; Murray, 2002) technology has brought new language, new library, new experience, new travel and new perception where curiosity and creativity meet. There is little scientifically based evidence on new media contribution to the academic performance among the youth. However, supporters of Education technology insist on its capacity to heighten students' motivation and sharpen their critical thinking (Foltos, 2002).

Over the years the government has taken initiatives to bring knowledge emancipation to both boys and girls in the Netherlands (DNYEPP, 2006). Media literacy; an attempt to enhance peoples' critical skills and competence in communication (Kavoori et al, 2006) in secularized welfare states, is an enormous means and manpower to channel and direct the choices of the people by influencing knowledge, skills, emotions, values, attitudes, and beliefs (DNYEPP, 2008). In Rotterdam, School Enrichment Programs (SEP) take education as one of the 'participants' in the collaborative efforts to enlarge the chances for development among the growing children and students. From the interview held with the Netherlands SEP coordinator, computer literacy is one of the core activities to help achieve the program objectives.

"The youths we have spend at least 50% of their time on TV. What message do they get from the TV; life is easy, how you look is important, your relationships are important. All the things you want to have, it is normal to get things. They don't have to do their best for it. Their responsibility is with parents and teachers and not from themselves" (Teacher in charge of the HAVO department)

"Especially the older teachers experience the problem with new technologies. They feel a great distance between them and the teens. They consider low academic performances to be the result of the way the teens use the new media opportunities. Chatting on MSN, checking someone's hives page, the TV broadcasting on the background and amidst all this a study book is lying which the person is 'reading'. Those opportunities depend on the freedom parents give their children. It is outside school so it increases the feeling of not being able to do anything about it among the teachers". (Teacher in charge on the HAVO department)

While it's important to merge education with media, the question still remains whether youths prefer this medium for social relations and enhancement of their solidarity or as a complimentary element in achieving their academic dreams.

## MEDIA AFTER 9/11TH: The dark side of globalization

This last section in this chapter seeks to briefly discuss how media discourses have changes since the terror attack of the trade centre and Twin towers in New York in September 2001. Avoiding ideological simplicities, the event on this day marked a turning point where globalization was not just seen as something to embrace but also something to be cautious about with possibilities of fast and efficient exchange of ideas and technology. Technology has turned the world to a 'global village' where through interconnectedness, everyone can participate but as Kavoori (2006) quotes Bill Clinton after the September 11th incident, act like terrorism promoted by technology portrays the dark side of globalization.

# Chapter 5 : SCHOOL YOUTHS AND NEW MEDIA

## *PART I:* LISTENING TO PEER'S ACCOUNTS FROM CALVIJN AND COMENIUS.

In this chapter, analysis of primary data collected during the entire research process of February 2008 to September 2008 is presented. However the research will present mostly the responses from the 201 HAVO respondents who participated in the FGDs and filling the questionnaires, four pupils who participated in the personal interviews and two teachers who are in charge of the HAVO department in the two colleges

.The first part presents a summary table on how many hours the key informants spend on different media. Then a presentation will follow on what the pupils take to be important to them and therefore make major component in their social interactions either when they are in school on cyber-space. Following that will be a summary of how the pupils spend their time in the internet giving some specific attention to what they do. A summary of hours the 201 pupils use in the media in comparison with the time spent on homework and school work with then be elaborated.

### *School and cyber participation: Competing factors?*

Table 2 illustrates the time the respondent allocate to different influencers around them. Average time spent on MSN is calculated using arithmetic mean and then added the average time boys and girls spend daily gaming or watching movies or e-shopping or searching information or just participating in a forum in the internet. Using average in the calculations of average time of the respondents, it's important to note that this approach do not reflect the extremes i.e. one students who spends zero time in the internet and 2 hours doing her homework and another one who spends 24 hours gaming twice on weekends and always on weekends.

The time spent here indicates on average time spent by either boys or girls on different activities. For time spent with parents, boys spend one third of the

time spent by girls with their parents. However mostly the extra time spent by the girls with their parents is mostly with their mothers since either the fathers come late from work or work in the evenings or could be due to the high number of pupils who came from divorced families.

| Table 2: Average time allocated to different youth influencers (201 respondents) | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| subject | average time weekdays(hours) | | Weekends/holidays | |
| | Boys | Girls | Boys | Girls |
| Parents | 1 | 3 (mostly mothers) | 1 | 5 |
| Peers (real and cyber friends) | 3 | 2 | 7 | 5 |
| Teachers (beyond class time) | Never | On emergency | 0 | 0 |
| Internet | 6 | 4 | 15 | 10 |
| Cell phones | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Homework | 10 minutes | 10 minutes | 0 | 10 minutes |

From the interview I had with the teachers in charge of the HAVO department from the two school, 13 out of 20 pupils come from divorced families. Over the weekends the girls spend more time with their parents by going for shopping or visiting friends while for boys they go out with their peer, go for sports, chill out with friends blowing, watch a movie or play games on the computer or normal games. There is a significant increase in number of hours spent with friends over the weekend but time spent on school work remains the same for girls but most boys do not do homework at all over the weekends. Time spent over the internet is high during weekdays and higher over the weekends. About six pupils spend 24 hours over the weekend on the computer playing games and watching movies and only one who spend the whole night twice a week playing games. This could not be reflected in the average calculation.

As shown in Figure 4, what is important to the pupils is reflected on their normal discussions with friends. Besides the differences that arise on what

individual experience in their homes, most of the pupils share similar perception on what they deem to be important to them i.e. boy/girl relationship, chilling out with friends, sports, school and watching movies or listening to music. It's important however to note that school in second in priority from boy/girl relationship which could make one to assume that it's a reflection of the value it has in their lives. This is not the case simply because though there are those consulting friends on homework, and perhaps asking questions arising from class lessons or personal study, 61% indicated that they talk about teachers they don't like, how to abscond homework and how to make sure that they have enough quorum to support the boycot.

The primacy of new media need to be viewed as a conglomerate of the many various components like TV programs, football, movie and porn, chatting and gossiping on MSN that make most of the other components of these pupils interactions.

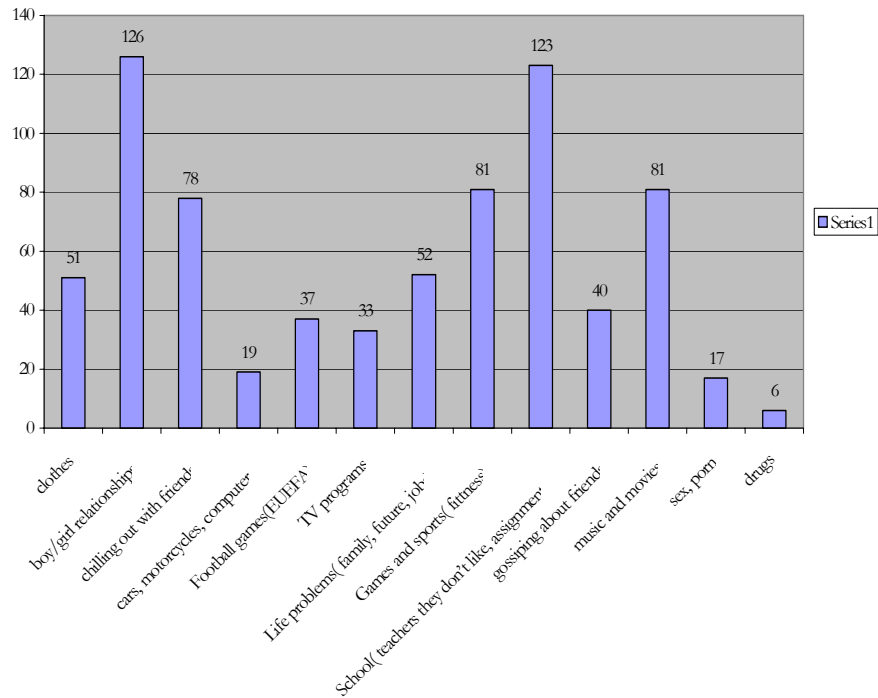**Figure 4: The things pupils perceive to be important to them.**

Figure 5 illustrates what the respondents do in the internet or when in the cyberspace.  79% of the respondents mostly use Hyves which is used in this graph to include MSN Messenger. Second to Hyves is site visit with 59% then gamming with 38% respondents and finally watching movies and music in the internet with 32% respondent. This are not absolute figures representing respondents who are doing one or the other because from the discussions, many of them have more than two of the above mentioned activities running at the same time. They could be watching a movie while they are chatting through Hyves and downloading music at the same time. This is to imply that their actual involvement can only be output related and not by casually attaching numbers to activities done or sites visited.

**Figure  5: How pupils use Internet and other ICT channels**
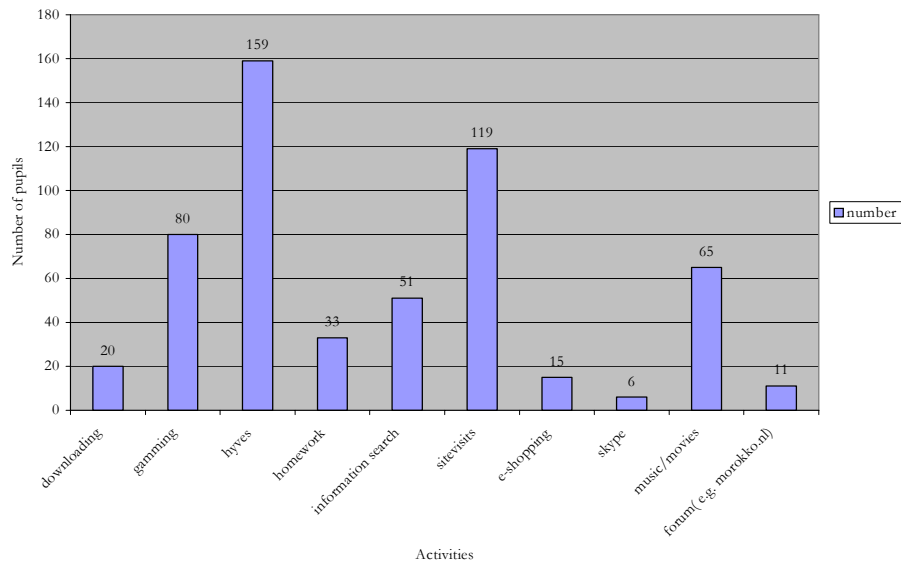


The use of questionnaire was primarily to understand how individual respondents related with media at an individual level since the FGDs face important limitations as explained in the methodology (see chapter 2). The graphs shows the analysis of the respondents who gave a definite figure in time spending but could not reflect the opinion of those who used phrases like every time, uncountable time, always when giving estimates of the time they spend chatting on Hyves or MSN per week. The same goes for the time they

spend viewing TV or playing computer games. Interviews also emphasize this gender differences in media use and preferences both boys and girls have on different activities. There was a mild disparity in the number of boys and girls on the way they use internet to search information for their school work. Out of the 33 respondents who use internet for that purpose, 25 of the respondents were girls while only 8 were boys. However even with this kind of disparity it is not obvious to conclude that there is any difference between the way girls or boys value school.

Though time spending could say something concerning the commitment students has to spare time for school and for leisure more explicit perception on the issue came from the focus group discussions where the respondents could engage each other's opinion. The following part of this chapter will try to combine the quantitative information discussed above with qualitative data that the respondents gave concerning their view for school, the role it plays in their future advancement.

### Schooling vs. media consumption

The position of new media for young people is paramount. Everything else is important after young people spend sufficient e-time, updating social cyber networks, gamming and in animations. School in those moments could be easily seen as interference in their new Utopian world created by ICT where everything is possible in the click of a button. School learning is at odd with 'edutainment' offered by ICT and other social practices that take place beyond the school gate (Lankshear and Knob, 2003 as cited in Veen et al, 2005). 'New modes of truth' created by digital media is displacing the older forms of typed and printed words (LankShear and knob, 2003) which is the mode of teaching in the schools. In peer relations and solidarity, internet has become a platform where opinions are expressed without fear or censure and communication with cyber friends made easier otherwise impossible in the physical sense. However this claim could be termed modern educationist optimism. New media also exposes pupils to information like dating, sex, drugs at an early age. Research has shown that this could contribute to the rise of delinquencies among the youths who may not be prepared to deal with the potential emotional and

psychological impact of this information (ScienceDaily journal, 2007). A new technology provides youths a new challenge of acquiring learning skills and applies multiple forms of intelligence. It makes perfect sense to argue that ICT makes a rich tapestry with the multiple forms of intelligence the youths could apply in their playful exploration. Figure 6 shows the percentages of respondents and their priority among internet, parents, school and friends.

Among all the respondents only 1% are of the view that internet comes last in their priorities. 60% of the respondents felt internet plays a major role compared to parents and school. During the focus Group Discussion, the motion on whether school is important for respondents saw majority argue that knowledge is important but school is not. They claimed that there are faster and more enjoyable ways of knowledge acquisition rather than the 'go-to-school' way.

**Figure 6: Priority among pupils**
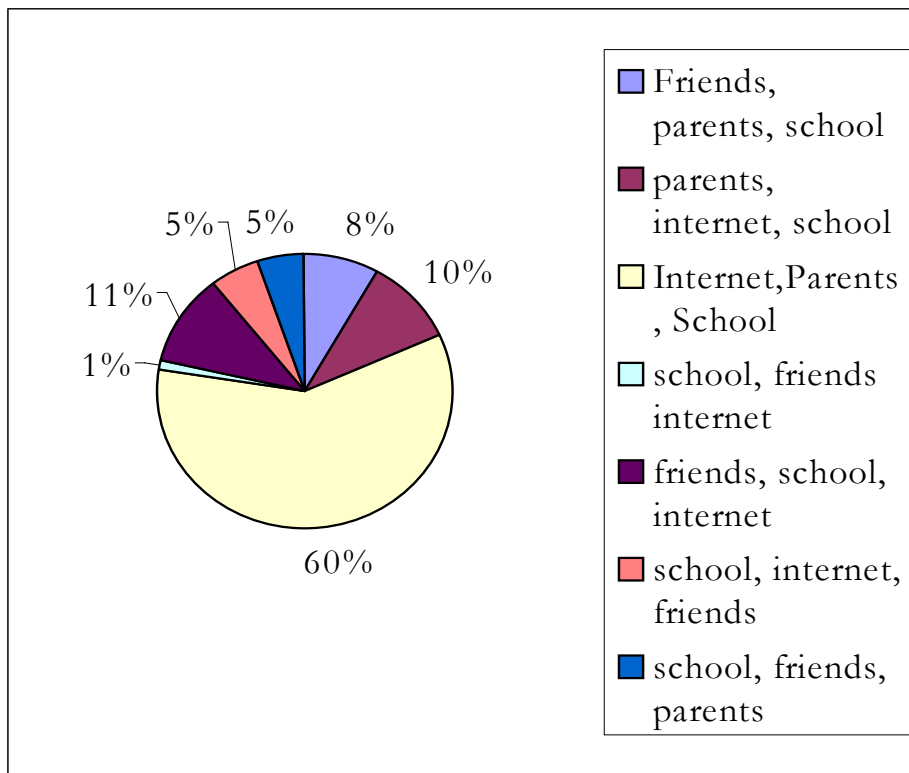
The role of parents and teachers as second in priority was explained as due to generational gap. Experiencing generational gap between teachers or learners is not new. However in the era of ICT it could be correctly argued that this generation gap may have increased between young people and teachers, parents and other adults in terms of technical knowledge and differing perceptions of the learning technologies (Maddens et al, 2005).

> "School is important for me but a bit for later. Maybe when I am 20 years and I go to search for work I will need it. I have friends now and it is more interesting to hang out, chat on MSN and go gamming. We have more interesting things now and cannot be like coming to school where we are forced to listen to boring teachers and blow our nose standing in front of the class with that toilet paper you see in the front there. You can't even breathe". (Mark)

> "I think education is important but school is not. We can get education even from home via internet and sharing ideas with the rest of the world. With computers it's possible and the teachers do not believe that. I g to school to make friends but I don't think school has any other value on me'. (Morgan)

> "I go to bed late after watching TV, or watching porn in the internet I don't like waking up to go to school. It's so boring, actually it's terrible! I want to sleep a little bit but since I have to go, I do it. I spend six hours daily on my PC and TV and 24 hours on weekends and winter time when it's too cold to chill out with friends". (Ronald)

### New forms of rebellious behaviours

The youths feel they have more digital competence than the teachers and parents and are therefore being disadvantaged by the learning arrangement that fail to recognize or at least is blind to the unique proficiencies they have acquired. From the pupils accounts, ICT has been a useful tool to help them counter the hegemony of the school system since collective opposition can be initiated managed and executed in a more salient and non-confrontational manner than before

> "We have more knowledge on technology and teachers and our parents do not have. Even the young people of ten years ago did not know the many things we know today. Our problem is that we have all these TVs, phones, PCs, music and it's hard to do stupid homework when Ajax is playing Feyenoord. We also have to chat with friends and watch movies with friends so we postpone the homework and then we end up not doing it". (Richard)

"We send a message to the class on MSN on who has done the homework and if someone has done, then it's easy for us and if none has done we just say it's hard and we tell the teacher that in class the following day". (Lenny)

Though there are tremendous efforts to adopt ICT in the learning system, the current low levels of technical and cultural knowledge on the side of teachers continue to contribute significantly to the conflict between schooling and media usage among the pupils.

"There are many things in the computer we know and the teachers they don't know. When you give an example some teachers do not know they abuse you. They get really mad like teacher Jessica she gets mad and scream at us and abuse us but we are used to it, you should see her, she gets angrily and screams like a mad person". (Renate)

Since young people have their own unique symbols of communication, these sparks political and social confrontations and the youths are caught up in the medley of conflicting expectations of institutionalized rules and youth cultures. The freedom provided by new media distort the view on school as an adult  institutionalized cartel which determine and define what is best for them without a proper understanding of their world.

## *The role of ICT in promoting youth Agency*

The extent youth are able to interact with media commodities, apply their skills and competencies  as global citizens committed to global solutions (iEarn Newsletter, 2008) gives abundant control on what they choose to learn. They find it extremely limiting to fit their creativity and vitality in the school curriculum and ICT provides a broader way of thinking beyond the written text. To them education system is a way of colonizing their minds and teachers are agents that work for the colonizer to make sure that they have no way of escaping the school doctrine which gives limited bearing to the life beyond the school gate.

"The teachers think they have power, they think they know everything and this makes us very annoyed and prevent us from performing well. It's obvious nowadays young people are smarter than them and more fashionable. We are more modern because of the new invented things". (Lisa)

"Parents are less concerned with what we do. They know there is more freedom in this society and they want us to fight for it. My parents say they fought their battle and it's our chance to continue. In the forums we share

what we want and how to get it. Sometimes we write emails to some people who we think are a danger to us or make songs to pass the message. Hip hop, Moroc hop and other songs for young people. They can't beat us in this game you know what I mean?" (Rachid)

From Figure 6, youths can share their opinion to each other and give their own. As opposed to when they have to follow rules given by 'the adults' ICT create a platform where ideas are shared, rejected or changed at will by anyone. Forums have also been created where youths can give their opinions concerning certain issues affecting youths. 11 youths in Figure 6 indicated that they belong to the Morrok forum where they participate after school by sending opinions concerning particular issues posted in the forum. This could be constructive or inflammatory issues yet internet makes it possible to respond to both without refrain. Concerning issues the pupils might feel intimidated to share openly, internet provides the needed freedom. Through collective support, this presented to relevant authorities as was witnessed in November 2007 when high school pupils throughout the country went on strike protesting the increment of school hours. Communication was done through SMS and MSN mobilizing all the high school to boycott classes and match toward the education ministry to petition adding extra hours of study. It's estimated that out of the 24,000 youths expected, 15,000 responded and participated in the strike (International Herald Tribune, 2007). This happened within few days giving an indication of the role of new media in promoting collective action which is a form of exercising agency.

Youths use ICT to escape authority and young people understand pretty well how to match the two.

"The police do not like seeing teenagers in groups on the streets so when they are moving around we send text messages so our friends who are blowing in the other corner so that they can disperse and when the police pass they regroup again". (Fabio)

"I have so many friends in Hyves and we share many things, sometimes it's just gossiping and talking useless thing. We talk about boys, little secrets and many social stuff. Maybe I can allow my mother to join my Facebook but with restriction but my dad never! I don't want my dad to see the things we discuss….. Teachers too I cannot let them in my Facebook. I would rather not chat with teachers". (Lide)

The '*Facebook republic*' presents a modest example of how youths can be in charge of their decisions. In this republic, decisions on whom to involve, what to share with different people and whom to allow access to their personal issues is directly under their control. From the questionnaire, respondents spends an average of 3 hours per day in MSN talking about soccer, chatting with family and friends in Turkey and Morocco, and Suriname, homework, event in school that day and participating in global youth debates.

The role new media plays in this consumerism patterns where young people exercise control in their clothes fashion, the kind of music to listen to and ICT facilities to buy has been under-researched and under-theorized in sociology debates. The common-sense understanding is they are under school and family control yet new media has provided alternatives beyond the borders and limits of these institutions.

### New media: Promoting of consumerism?

Children and youths researches conducted in The Netherlands presents the position of youth as consumers in the Dutch society (Huijsmans, 2004). Their disposable income is mostly acquired through jobs done on weekends or 'holiday jobs' (Morrow, 1996). Free time is increasingly 'colonized' by commercial organizations (Huijsmans, 2004) making money a requirement in their social interactions. In many developed countries childhood is seen as a period of dependency which should be nurtured within the institution of family and school (Morrow, 1996). Rising trends of paid employment among youth (De Volkskrant, 1999) should not reduce children to mere consumers but it could be explained by their demand for 'goal oriented self-control' (Hesmondhogh, 2005). The fact that children are expected to invest time and energy in education, does not prevent these *'common-sense'* ideals to be challenged by the more prestigious alternatives offered by new media. Girls spend time reading magazines on lifestyle and searching for products promoted in the magazines through the internet. They work to earn disposable income and spend substantive amount of time over the weekends shopping for the items advertised on media or shared about by friends in MSN.

"I am confused and that is why I don't do my homework. Education will give me a good job and a good future but what about my friends? You have to go out with friends and have fun. Shopping is also fun but it's very expensive if you don't plan your money well, going for cinema, internet and music is cool. I like all these things(….)I work in a hotel two days a week and I don't like it very much. I will think about good job when I am twenty but now I don't need education". (Cynthia)

"I think there are other ways like sport which are more interesting and faster ways to earn more money so why care about school? You can also deliver newspapers and earn your money". (Robin)

From Figure 5, 119/201 respondents spend most of their time in the internet visiting sites like fashion sites, advertisement sites, celebrity corners and other commercial websites. The commercial sector is investing a lot of money on marketing research on the tastes and preferences for young people (UNICEF, 2004). This places a demand on youths to participate in paid jobs to acquire purchasing power. Peer influence which is made more robust in the era of ICT makes more and more youths to get involved. 15/201 respondents order their clothes through the internet. Internet gives youths latest fashion updates and producers are investing billions of dollars to promote consumerism on internet, young people being a primary target.

"I work four days a week in the hospital. My parents give me pocket money for school but it's not enough to load credit to my phone and you know ladies we use the phone a lot. To earn extra money I work after school for three days and then on Saturday. I do my homework after work, that is if I ever do it but you know it's okay even if I don't". (Misa)

There were numerous cases like Misa where students participate in paid work parallel with their study to have some amount of disposable income. Either to commodities advertised in the internet, buy ICT products like i-Pods and cameras. While working is recognized in the Netherlands as a way of training young people to be responsible on their own it could also be argued that these demands could be contributing to declining academic performance where its stretched beyond limits of healthy coexistence between par time job and full time study.

## *Enticing gratification*

As was discussed in chapter 3 school is seen to be an institution where young people are trained in order to function in the society (Feinberg, 1992). This functionalist approach has faced a lot of criticisms for its simplistic way of presenting children and youth as 'becomings' not as 'beings'. The way media commodities are packaged, they almost seem to be sending a message, what you see on the screen of the computer is out, you can have it, go get it! With this pursuit of gratification, school could easily loose priority. On the responses given on importance of schooling the arguments were that education make people independent, make people get good jobs, thus make good money, buy good clothes, cars and house. They shared contrasting opinions on how to acquire the aforementioned things.

> "There is nothing interesting in school. All you have are teachers who yell and abuse you when you blow your nose. You sit in so many hours and get bored. But it's nice to come to school because you meet beautiful women and you can share about your family problems. Who said all of us should go to school to have a car, or have a house?... young people should be allowed to make a choice what they want and not discriminated if they are not schooled( ……) even with education it's not a must to get a job" (Melissa)

> "We know from school we can learn things which are important for the rest of our lives but it's boring and you can't sleep. To have a good job, money and family you have to go to school, besides it's not good to be a criminal." (Anneloes)

> "School sucks! But it is important, the lessons and the teachers are boring because they make it too strict. It's better to run a company or join the army. There you get money easier and faster". (Robert)

It was not very clear sometimes for me how I should understand the contradiction the teenagers expressed when discussing the importance of school and the need to have fun. They are ware of the importance, the distraction and what this means for future. From a psycho-social perspective, one could argue this as pubertal blurredness in knowing what 'should' and what 'is' due to limited personal reflective capacity at their age. Robert expressing very deep dislike for school because of strictness and then preferring to join the army where the rules are even more strict shows how misconstrued his perception of school as opposed to the life out there.

When I asked their opinion on the current academic trend, more than 60% of all the respondents drew a declining trend on academic performance. This was based on personal academic records and peers sharing of their performance but majority attributed the decline to the distraction caused by new media technology and diverted interest.

### *New media and its role in peer relations*

Keeping contacts with peers is no longer a problem with new media. Peer influence has also been made easier and faster through new media. Peer learning in the 60s to late 90s was seen as process of continual interaction where individual who share same age learn from others motives, feelings and cognitive knowledge. Through this process peers educate their contemporaries in their daily patterns of informal interaction (British Education Research Journal, 1998). With new media information sharing has been made faster and an idea 'hatched' by one peer could reach hundreds in a short time. Some pupils use this advantage and are able to communicate to fellow peer in the evening either to abandon their home work or simply portray rebellious attitude to certain teachers in school. This negative peer influence could be counterproductive in the learning environment. Peer influence is not only negative, peers can benefit tremendously through being influenced with inspiring ideas. Combining new media with other learning and teaching methods could enhances active participation and develop skills in cooperation and social interaction among peers. Since new media provides non hierarchical platform (Vinken, 2006) it receives more peer preference than any other forum. Hunters (1984) argues that peer are not 'closed-to' or in objection to disagreements, they prefer cooperative challenging, defense of ideas and testing out varied views without being coerced by people who believe they have more superior views by the virtue of age and experience (Frankham, 1998). Adults are highly unwelcome in their *Facebook republic'*.

However with pupils spending 13 hours on the internet per week, it hints how significantly new media could be contributing in the peer patterns in the era of ICT.

The longest time the participants take before responding to a message sent to them in the internet is 12 hour. This can be equated to the time they take in school perhaps for those who do not have mobile phones which are connected to the internet. This period could be getting less in the coming few years are technology get more developed and dominate peer relations and solidarity processes.

## *PART II:* OTHER ENGAGING FACTORS BEYOND THE 'MEDIASCAPE'

This section will discuss other factors that contribute to declining academic performance. Though media may take a central role diverting interest among some pupils as discussed earlier in the chapter, other factors could be contributing to the trends. This section tries to explore those other factors affecting pupils in HAVO in Comenius and Calvijn colleges whose effects cannot be simply under-estimated from their perspective.

### *Family expectations?*

The interaction between family institution and the youth culture is not that of resistance and rejection but they question the authentic family role to motivate and encourage them not as siblings but as scholars. Rutger expressed how the parents put pressure on him to work hard because they regret for not putting enough effort in education. While this could be a motivation, he felt pressured too much and consequently opted to buy his own TV and PC to have control over his preferences and give the parents some fake impression of study.

> "I invite my friends when the parents are not at home and we play computer games the whole night, like on weekends. Weekdays I chat with my friends through MSN and Facebook. We discuss beautiful girls in class and about love but mostly with boys. I don't want my parents to know am doing that with friends". (Rutger)

> "Expectations from parents sometimes prevent us from performing well. In this society people never have enough, they want more and more and so you have to work hard for the parents and for yourself. Sometimes when the weather is so good (sunny) we want to sit outside with friends and talk about what to do in the evenings and weekends and enjoy. We talk about it in class anyways but it depends with the teacher". ( Rutger)

### *Holes in the fabric of parenthood?*

Research has shown that education level of parents is a powerful indicator for children success or failure at school (NJI Report, 2007). This is in cognizance of the position parents hold in influencing children in almost every dimension of their growth (American Academy of Pediatrics Journal, 1999). This happens through interaction identification and transmission of values and shared beliefs within the family. Children cognitive abilities, ethical values and their beliefs result from diverse interaction of these influences in a complex manner (*ibid*). The way parents affect their children is however difficult to quantify with opposing imperatives which recognize need for empirical evidence on the one hand and on the other the error of awarding significance to only what can be objectively measured (AAP Journal, 1999). On this issue, this study only attempt to suggest that parental qualities may contribute to the psychological, emotional, social and cognitive profile of their children but is not the determinant of their children particular outcome.  As Peterson (1991) puts it in his article *Is education a Public Good?*

> "At the family level, the education of the parents should benefit the children…. Children of [educated] parents are more likely to attend college…. There is also a tendency for at least part of the knowledge gained by parents during their school years to be transmitted to their children…. At the community level, the education of individuals makes the community a better place to live for all".

ICT skills could create a feeling of inadequacy to venture in to the lives of the young people from parents and worse if the parents themselves are not learned. They may feel they have no input to give to their children in terms of education.

> "My parents are least concerned about how I perform in school. They went to VMBO themselves and it's a level lower than HAVO so they think am doing well. I choose what to see. They watch boring old programs of the 60s and I watch series and fun movies in my TV in my room. Sometimes we watch the movies through the internet with friends". (Mohammed)

Fragmentation of families through divorce, parents choosing to live as partners and perhaps come together on appointments could be contributing to pupil's lack of concentration and they opt to find solace through cyber friends. This is a hindrance to concentration and could be reflected in their academic

performance. From the interviews with the teachers one out of three parents are separating in The Netherlands and in the school 15 out of 20 children come from divorced families or at least unstable families. They find a more peaceful space in the internet with their friends and that is why becoming a member of the new media subculture is relatively very easy.

> "Home situations sometimes make it impossible to concentrate in class. The parents are divorcing a lot nowadays and that prevent our concentration. And there is more cheating in families coming up". (Nina)

> "I was sharing how my sister is stressed because my mum and dad are fighting all the time. Actually they are planning to divorce and this has really affected my sister. It has also affected me so much but I am worried more about her. She is going crazy! Maybe my friends cannot help much but it is good to tell someone your problems". (Pierre)

The participants for the study come from mostly lower class and middle class and education especially in the Dutch society determines significantly the social class. They feel their parents have little to offer to them and in Figure 8, 5% have nothing to share with their parents. When at home, they give their physical self but in essence they are in a cyber-world connected to a wider space than the border of family. Historically, the notion of education has faced similar opposition in the UK where children from middleclass families ended up reproducing their position in middle class jobs despite efforts to promote egalitarianism among the British society (Willis, 1977). Inadequate parental support in encouraging children on the value of education which could promote upward mobility in the social status either because the parents themselves are uneducated or because their socio-economic position demands them to be work longer may leave little time for parents to follow on education progress of their children. This social position has resulted to parents of particular social classes to occupy particular neighbourhoods. The danger of this way of living is that there is no opportunity to challenge each other in bettering the situation and more often than not the *status quo* could be reproduced. There is a possibility that some young people could be using new media to open another window of the world outside their 'normal' neighbourhood but others are using it to vent their frustrations and blaming

existing systems which their parents could be involved to make them believe that it's to blame for their predicaments.

### *Policy discourses compared to everyday life?*

Unequivocally, cannabis is illegal in The Netherlands. However in 1976, a national drugs policy model in the Netherlands was adopted that allows interested Dutch adults to carry small quantities of marihuana, up to 30 grams, for personal use which was later reduced to 5 grams in the 90s (Ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken, 1995). The application of *gedoogbeleid* among the Dutch is build on the philosophy of 'harm reduction' or 'harm minimization' (MacCoun, 1997). After years of controversy, more countries are giving a thought to the Dutch model (MacCoun and Reuter, 1997) since such a policy in developed society is meant to liberate rather than oppresses individuals by offering avenues for individual expression through a range of commodities and resources which can be worked into particular lifestyle sites and strategies (Bennett, 1999). With epidemiological evidences and other researches revealing a dramatic rise in consumption of illicit substances among the young in different countries (Duff, 2003; Shildrick, 2002), the *de facto* legalization and depenalization of cannabis possession effect on school-youth in The Netherlands need to be interrogated. Identity formation within youth cultures offer important insights on understanding these trends where technology combined with conducive policies like the *gedoogbeleid* gives an interesting starting point. Youths as modern media consumers show affiliation to certain identities (Bennett, 1999 in Hesmondhalgh, 2005:5). The identity codes could be developed from role models available, influencers operating within the proximity of the youth or could be developed from what they see in the media among other sources though ICT remains their most attractive option. From the participants of the research, they spend an average of 4 hours every day watching series in TV and music channels which oftentimes weaves celebrity with drug use and sex. The youths develop a self-constructed notion of identity (Bennett, 1999:) which later forms part of their larger youth culture where they enjoy freedom to exercise their agency on media acquired consumption choice. In the nine FGDs done for the study, about 4 out of 10 students have taken

marihuana while 1 out of 10 takes it quite consistently. 6 out of 100 have tried other drugs like cocaine and *Hasj* but none expressed any consistency in usage. Assuming the rule to sell a certain amount of marihuana to grown ups within Holland, the policy is not clear on how to prevent the 'weed' reaching underage persons where from the research almost 90% of the respondents who have taken marijuana got from their brothers or sisters or from friends who could have gotten it from their own brothers and sisters. This becomes a chain and since there is no limit to the number of times you can purchase the 'weed' per day there is a likelihood that grown up siblings can purchase more for their younger siblings. The *gedoogbeleid* becomes more complicated when it condones ownership of two marihuana plants within the home because consumption control is purely entrusted upon the responsibility of the consumers. To be cool like the singer on TV who rocks the music world purportedly with a roll of bhang in his mouth could be highly tempting to the curious pupils to try the supply in the backyard and this could lead to being hooked up in drugs.

> "School can never be important for me; I will earn more by doing illegal deals like selling drugs in the black market. Nowadays it's very easy to do that; there are ways of communication which are safe (……..) you can organize with customers through the internet and they deposit your money (….). Then they come and pick the thing. There is a way you can do these things safely and I know guys near home who are very rich (…) you don't need school you only need to be smart". (Mohammed)

> "Mostly we hang out in the evenings and weekends partying, drinking, smoking and trying other drugs. Drugs are legal but you have to be careful if you are in school and a teenager because when the police get you, you have a problem". (Martin)

Besides the drug policy which most likely could be contributing to the access of drugs to the young people, the '*Studiehuis*' concept could be a source of tension among the pupils. According to this concept, pupils should enjoy more independence and exercise their power of choice on the subjects they wish to study and in choosing educational activities (NJI Report 2007). This is believed to contribute to their sense of independence and responsibility. The perception that this policy is undermined could lead to pupils feeling disrespected in the school system and subsequently lack confidence in the

motives of the system. Though teachers' guidance could make the subject choice more objective and suitable to individual students potential, the student's involvement in selecting their line of career is paramount as emphasized by the Studiehuis concept.

> "Initially we used to select our subjects combination but since last year the teachers are doing it for us. It's like they want us to study for them not for ourselves. I think they are doing a new experiment with these subjects and they are using us like rabbits to do the experiment (….) it is not good and when we complained about it nothing happened. I hate mathematics and they forced me to do it". (Leornado)

### What gymnasiums have to tell

The difference was evident right from the start because almost everybody in the group had arrived 5 minutes before the expected lesson time unlike the other groups where some could arrive ten minutes into the discussion. The group was quiet and very attentive. They however chat through MSN and use internet like the other HAVO participants but there was a major difference in the way they did it. MSN chats mostly are on politics, schoolwork, homework, and training for games competition. When I probed more the difference between chatting on homework and schoolwork Monica said:

> "We chat about the work we are given in school but we also chat about the trouble we are having with school subjects when doing our own reading. We are in the highest level and everyone expects you to do the best. Sometimes the expectations are too high and we also want to have fun with friends and spend sometime in the play station".(Monica)

When I posed the same question whether school is important for them they all of them said it's the only way to a better future and a good job. They also said that it a place to get good friends. When I asked why they are specifically interested with school friends and not make friends outside they responded that it's much easier to do it in schools and make plans together. This argument could mean that it's easy to know the people who have similar vision with them when they are spending time together because apparently only one had a girlfriend in the lower VWO. The others dated Gymnasium friends. Bashir, the only non-Dutch native student in that class said,

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'Sometimes I feel I have not done my best. My parents keep telling me and I know it myself that I am lazy. They encourage me a lot and they don't allow me to spend too much time on TV or playing computer games. I know education is good and most of my friends complain about the Dutch society while they are not working hard enough in school. Sometimes home situations can also make our grades not look so good'. (Bashir)

The explanation was similar to what most HAVO students said about the home situation. Many parents are going through divorce and the tense atmosphere at home has a part in their MSN chats as they ask their friends for advice and share their situations. Among the most common statement was that homework is boring,

"It is not boring, it's actually horrible!" (Guus)

These kind of statements are not unusual among students. Due to their evolving reflectivity, it's not obvious for them to perceive school as a place individual responsibility and sacrifice as the stepping stones to success. However it makes a big difference when dealing with this kind of a group which has a different attitude and energy from the HAVO respondents.

As opposed to the HAVO where majority listen to English music and watch TV for entertainment, majority of Gymnasium students cited building English vocabulary as a major reason for their interest on TV programs and downloading English music from the internet.

# Chapter 6     CONCLUSION

This chapter converge theoretical insights and the analysis of the empirical data as presented in the previous two chapters. The chapter then finalizes with an attempt to join different pieces of the study together towards answering the central research question "*How do HAVO school youths aged (14-16) in Comenius and Calvijn colleges in Rotterdam use new media and how does this affect their academic performance?*"

## EMERGING TRENDS ON NEW MEDIA USE IN CALVIJN AND COMENIUS

This research addresses the issue of new media use among pupils of Comenius and Calvijn colleges in Rotterdam.  It starts by giving summarizing literature on ICT and globalization trends and how this weaves with the fibres of youth culture.  Major views and trends collected during FGDs, interviews (both structured and unstructured), questionnaires and drawings and observations are presented on the effect of using new media on schooling, prioritizing and socialization among pupils in the two schools.

It seems school systems have to adopt ways of accommodating the current generation of youths whose ICT is like oxygen to them. They spend 3 hours per day on average on Hyves, MSN, Blogs, Chats and internet games but maximum of 10 minutes on school work beyond the taught environment. Of priority are mobile phones, TV, and remote game controllers. They seem to have become a member of an online community that only understand communication through the internet.

These youths are a generation of children that is growing up in a fast globalizing digital world and adopting to new ways that have fundamentally changed their social-cultural and educational behavior. A cohort that displays characteristics of the Net- generation marked by interactivity, innovation and creativity is calling for innovative redesigning of education institutions. There seems to be an emerging internet community through which chat rooms, MSN, SMS and emails provide a new virtual identity. From the research it

shows that new media use forms an integral component of the everyday life of these HAVO youths creating new ways of social networking, interacting with the world and information. It's evident from the findings that new media is making it possible for the youths to interact with a wider range of software outside the formal 'taught' environment which provides them with a more faster, colorful and exciting ways of interaction and learning. School has turned 'boring' compared to the fascinating packages offered by new media and digital technologies. As Barham (2004) argues kids are not stupid for school, perhaps it's the school that is too stupid for them (Veen et al, 2005). ICT seem to be fitting in all elements of youthful life; relationship building, shopping, peer solidarity, entertainment, searching information, navigating the world, animations and annotating the things around them taken as 'taboos'. The interest in school is shifting  because new media allow interactive access to information, a way to vet their ideas and thought processes contrary to 'content' and method of knowledge delivery within schools.  I am right to argue that school seems to be out of sync and lagging behind in the arc of time on the new modes of learning and communication in the era of ICT.

The fact that pupils spend more time in new media and less time in schoolwork cannot be interpreted to mean they do not want to learn. Children instinctively want to learn but are more drawn to modes of learning that combines information and entertainment. The commercial aspect of new media offers this combination but makes the social and educational processes highly 'commondity-ized' and 'technology-ized' with youths as primary target. It should be no surprise when pupils begin to question the classroom ways they are asked to learn perhaps because these 'horribly boring' and 'restless' form of teaching is out of touch with the more interactive information access offered by alternative modules of learning.

New media has equipped the pupils with new skills and competencies widening gap between pupils and teachers  who they say 'do not understand them anymore'. Formal education system needs to find ways to intersect with new modes of e-learning as a valid curriculum aim if it has to accommodate the new generation of 'digital kids' and prevent further decline in academic performance..

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Though the quantitative material of this research can be considered to be perfectly representative of this particular group in HAVO (see methodology), the results obtained from the study remain limited to be able to understand the situation in other colleges. However the interconnectivity of youths in the net generation leaves no doubt that the situation among most youths may not differ too much. With more entertaining alternatives media commensurate with an escalating ownership of expensive cell phones and i-Pods and exchange of websites for  peer socialization processes and networking, pupils free time after school is no longer free but it's increasingly 'colonized' by ICT. Time management is undermined by late night programs on internet or TV which could contribute to the body and mind fatigue to be productive in school.  Findings from the study therefore shows that new media use is a major contributing factor to the declining academic performance among the HAVO teenagers in the two schools.

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# Annex I: The Netherlands Map
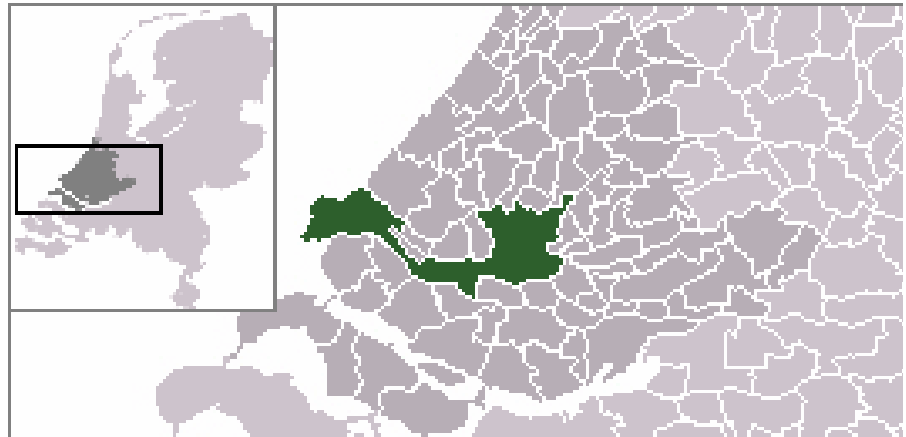


Source:http://www.reisgraag.nl/pictures/nederland/foto_Kaar
t%20Nederland.gif/Kaart%20Nederland.gif

# Annex 2: Summary Table of the FGDs

| Group | Summary | Remark |
|---|---|---|
| FGD 1 | Things they are busy with<br>Computer games, chilling with friends, dating, gossiping.<br>What means a lot to them.<br>Friends(Boy/girl and best friends), Internet, classmates, role models, magazines. | Was a pilot group for the other discussions |
| FGD 2 | On average those students with own PCs and TVs go to bed around 12.30 am in the night.<br>Those without PCs and TVs go to bed one hour earlier-11pm<br>Student read a book before on the bed if no TV or PC. This could include homework.<br>Waking up time different from those with personal computers and TVs with at least 1 hour.<br>Chatting through MSN, dancing, chilling out, TV, computer games, drinking, the most important things<br>Average of 14 hours on Saturday or Sunday on computer and TV. | The reasons they gave for they dwindling grades<br>Attention stolen by internet<br>Play stations<br>Its the school system that keeps demanding more so they felt they are not to blame. |
| FGD 3 | Things important to them, Friends, dating, fashion<br>Girls more interested with dating and boys more interested with soccer and computer games.<br>Girls go to bed on average at 10.30pm on weekdays while boys extend with 2 hours their average time- 12.30.<br>17 out of 29 had personal TVs and PCs in their rooms<br>Everyone owns a phone and 25/29 have parents pay for their phone bills which have limits.The rest work to pay their bills.<br>Everyone receives money from parents as pocket money but they do small holiday jobs for extra money; hanging out, pay extra phone bills, cinema . | Girls more outspoken than boys.<br>The boys were shy and avoided engaging the girls in discussions.<br>The ones whose performance is deteriorating blamed TV Internet and Sports( both physical and computer games for distracting their time management. |
| FGD 4 | What is preventing them concentrating in school; TVs, computer, cycling, music, football, boys/girls relationship, chilling out, cinema.<br>3 had their performance improving, 11 had it remaining the same, 3 had it dropping gradually while 4 have their performance falling sharply. The rest did not share. | |
| FGD 5 | They share with parents about; school, food, family, shopping, entertaining places.<br>8 only share with parent about marks.<br>Things they don't tell parents; smoking, sex with their boy/girl friends, gabbling, roller coaster, Kermis, disco, drinking.<br>They don't share with teachers or parent about social stuff.<br>A lot of fighting happens within the group (Rozie met mensen). Calling names and arguing are the most common but physically maybe ones a week. | They felt that both parent and teachers do not understand them.<br>To them things are different and the adults do not understand that.<br>Parents and teachers are judgmental. |
| FGD 6 | Parents having a major influence on the academic performance.<br>Time organization different. Homework done first before other social activities.<br>A higher number of students who do not have own PCs<br>Students spend time over weekend doing homework.<br>Students take academic performance to be part of their responsibility<br>Boys spend on average 4 hours in the internet while girls spend 3 hours.<br>Boths boys and girls goes to bed much earlier than the girls though there was also a difference of 30 minutes minimum but the latest on weekdays goes to bed at 11pm.<br>School importance was acknowledged by everyone. | The gymnasium group demonstrated a lot of differences with the HAVO in terms of attitude towards school and energy.<br>They shared similar struggled though on new media interest. |
| FGD 7 | Almost none does homework over the weekends.<br>Boys on average sleep around 2am in the night on week- | |

ends
Girls sleep around 12.30 midnight on weekends.
6 have taken cocaine-4 of them were girls
About 20/30 have 'blown'. Many out of curiosity but less than half continued.
Most had their grades going down while few said they are the same everytime.

FGD 8     The all agreed education is important but they doubted whether school is important.
Being in the army, selling drugs, doing business are some of the jobs they suggested they want to do requiring less education.
They use msn to rebel against the teachers they don't like i.e. absconding homework through msn.
2 had their academic performance improving, 18 had the performance falling gradually while 5 said their performance had drastically fallen. 4 said nothing on their performance.

FGD 9     School is less interesting because the felt they belong to a society that does not require it anymore.
Other things are important like fashion and dating at their age but school is for later.
Priority, chatting, e-gaming, hyves, clubbing
Treated like rabbits in the school and abused by some teachers.
Many Parents not so handy in the learning process because they are also not learned.

# Annex 3: Scanned drawings from respondents