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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the appropriation of cell phones by rural families in Ervália, Minas Gerais, exploring how habitus and technological capital shape their daily use. The objective was to understand the incorporation of technology into local contexts and practices. Through semi-structured interviews with 27 adults and content analysis, the results highlighted that cell phones are essential for communication, access to services, and maintaining social ties. Furthermore, their symbolic representation reduced the perceived distance between the urban (rua) and rural (roça) spaces, integrating these spaces. The conclusion is that the appropriation of technology occurred adaptively, without drastic ruptures, adapting to the pre-existing needs of the countryside, such as the organization of agricultural work and household management, and reaffirming the local habitus as a connecting element of this process.

Keywords: Habitus. Technological Capital. Rural.

RESUMO

O artigo analisa a apropriação do telefone celular pelas famílias rurais de Ervália/MG, explorando como o *habitus* e o capital tecnológico moldam seu uso no cotidiano. O objetivo foi compreender a incorporação da tecnologia no contexto e nas práticas locais. Por meio de entrevistas semiestruturadas com 27 adultos e da análise de conteúdo, os resultados destacaram que o celular é essencial para a comunicação, o acesso a serviços e a manutenção de vínculos sociais. Além disso, sua representação simbólica reduziu a distância percebida entre o urbano (*rua*) e o rural (*roça*), de forma a integrar esses espaços. Conclui-se que a apropriação da tecnologia ocorreu de forma adaptativa, sem rupturas drásticas, e se adequou às necessidades pré-existentes do campo, como organização do trabalho agrícola e gestão doméstica, reafirmando o *habitus* local como elemento articulador desse processo.

Palavras-chave: *Habitus*. Capital Tecnológico. Rural.

INTRODUCTION

Based on the theoretical concept of *habitus*—as characterized by Pierre Bourdieu (2014) and other academic sources—this paper discusses technological appropriation as part of understanding the incorporation of cell phones into the lives of rural families[1]. Thus, we share the experiences of fathers, mothers, and grandparents of rural families in the municipality of Ervália, Minas Gerais, to contribute to the theoretical discussions. With this rationale we understand that access to and use of mobile devices has changed—and continues to change—family relationships. Within rural settings, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) embody interests and often homogenize forms that ignore the plurality of rural areas and the peculiarities of their unique requirements. Therefore, our goal is to grasp how it integrates into the life and work dynamics of these families, since this process clearly illustrates the characteristics of regional development and its social and cultural repercussions.

The adoption of technology directly exposes how regional development manifests and renews itself in local contexts. The incorporation of cell phones by rural families extends beyond a mere technological phenomenon, actively reflecting and shaping the dynamics of social inclusion, productive integration, and the strengthening of local networks. It interconnects with the specificities of the territory and the socioeconomic practices characteristic of rural regions. This practice assumes the process of local change as a result of interactions between economic, social and cultural factors (Pecqueur, 2024; Cazella; Maluf and Bonnal, 2009).

The accelerated dissemination of technology has fundamentally changed social and cultural dynamics worldwide, including in rural areas. Within the particular setting of Ervália, Minas Gerais (Brazil), adult appropriation of cell phones has become a phenomenon that transcends the limits of mere communication. Adult interactions with this device extends beyond phone calls and messages, and involve accessing social networks, and searching for information, financial transactions, entertainment, and education.

1 A rural family represents a social and productive unit in which work is organized primarily through cooperation among its members, aiming to guarantee living conditions and reproduction. It is an area where cultural values, intergenerational solidarity, and productive practices intertwine. In this context, the figure of the small family farmer - a worker whose productive activity is essentially based on family work, on small properties or plots of land, aimed at meeting the needs of the group - articulates in a subordinate way to market dynamics (Martins, 2010).

This multifaceted use illustrates an adaptation of technologies to rural life, with mobile devices offering efficient and adaptable solutions to practical requirements (Vilela; Borjas, 2021; Pereira, 2018). This also contributes to understanding local specificities within the broader context of regional development. Access to instant communication and social media allows adults to preserve family ties across different locations, although they also raise questions about the quality of face-to-face interactions and the balance between digital and physical presence.

According to Miller and Horst (2006), the appropriation of mobile devices occurs as people integrate them into their daily lives, transforming them from mere technical objects into essential elements of their identities and daily routines. It's not just about using the cell phone for specific purposes, but about incorporating it as an extension of one's own body. This affects behaviors, social relationships, and even understanding of the world. The continuous availability of mobile phones enables the development of shared practices among local agents often in areas that go beyond their most intimate and familiar boundaries.

Consequently, the communication sphere for rural adults in the municipality of Ervália is constituted by agents who, according to Bourdieu (2014), integrate a social universe constructed with institutions and symbolic materials mediated by local *habitus*. These are understood as systems of durable but transposable dispositions that both reflect and produce social structures. Therefore, "*habitus* embodies the generating and organizing principles for social practices and representations" (Bourdieu, 2014, p. 87, our translation), so that social representation can be understood as the symbolic and shared manifestation of *habitus* within a specific social group. It manifests through practices, choices and lifestyles that simultaneously indicate and reinforce internalized dispositions.

Viewing it this way, the extent of technology appropriation is defined on Martinell and Alvarado (2016)[2], by the collection of dispositions, capabilities, skills, practical knowledge, and types of use that influence how often and in what ways individuals engage with ICTs. Notably, this technological capital is developed in alignment with the social, economic, educational and cultural conditions of individuals, so that its possession or absence can open or limit access to spaces and knowledge.

2 All quotes and accounts from inhabitants were translated by the author.

The perception of the mobile phone as an instrument of status, modernity, or practical utility highlights the mutual influence between local culture and individual decisions. It also shows how *habitus* shapes attitudes and choices regarding technological uses (Pereira, 2023). Thus, this study aimed to identify the consumption of information and communication technology among rural families in Ervália. We specifically examine the complex relationships stemming from the varied integration of mobile phones into rural daily life, shedding light on the interdisciplinary dynamics of this process and reinforcing its relevance for the field of regional development.

THE *LOCUS* OF STUDY

Digital technologies, especially the internet and cell phones, have transformed social relations, including in rural areas. In Ervália, a municipality with 20,255 inhabitants, this change has also occurred. Located 265 km from Belo Horizonte, the city belongs to the immediate geographic region of Viçosa[3], situated in the intermediate geographic region of Juiz de Fora. This immediate region includes small municipalities: only Viçosa (76,430), Ervália (20,255), Porto Firme (10,569), and Teixeiras (12,255) have a population level above 10,000 inhabitants (IBGE, 2022).

The municipality of Ervália covers a broad geographical area, and the rural population is settled in five rural neighborhoods, often referred to as 'villages'[4]: Santa Cruz dos Godinhos, Ventania, Santa Terezinha, São Francisco das Chagas (Careço) and Dom Viçoso (Grama). These neighborhoods are home to 31 rural locations: Casca, São João, Córrego Frio, Turvão, Campestre, Jetiboca, Matinha, Tabuleiro, Grão Mogol, Pau Mulato, Capelinha, Turvãozinho, Córrego dos Lima, Vargem Alegre, Usina, Córrego dos Ferreira, Córrego dos Sapateiros, Charneca, Poço Redondo and Fazenda Velha, among others. This spatial distribution of rural areas can be seen in Figure 1.

The infrastructure of rural neighborhoods is characterized by the presence of paved streets, squares, shops, a health center, schools, a sports court, electricity, telephone reception, and regional transport networks. These villages, referred to as *bairros rurais* (rural neighborhoods) by their residents,

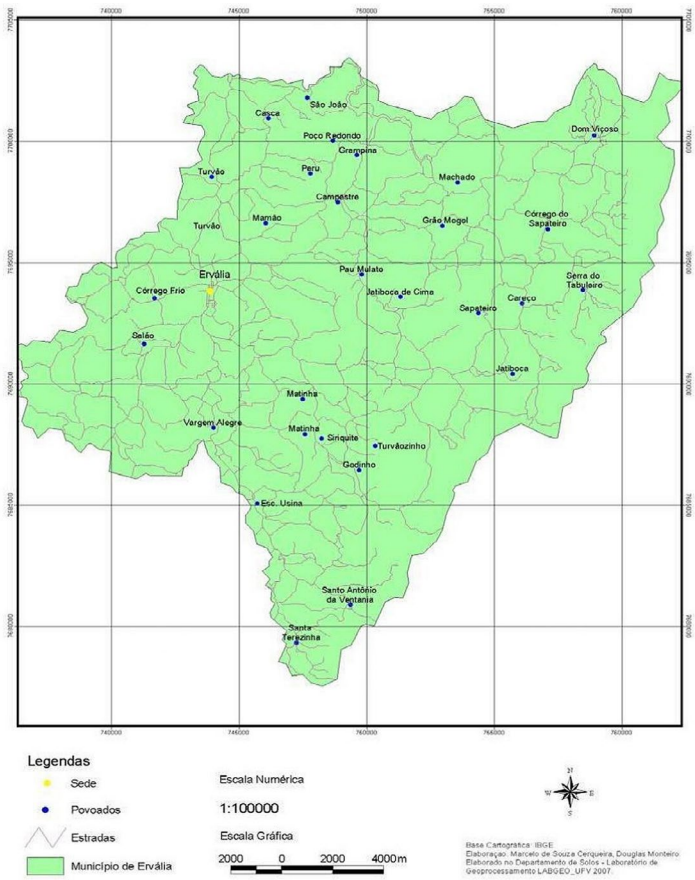
3 The immediate geographic region of Viçosa is made up of twelve municipalities: Araponga, Cajuri, Canaã, Coimbra, Ervália, Paula Cândido, Pedra do Anta, Porto Firme, Presidente Bernardes, São Miguel do Anta, Teixeiras and Viçosa (IBGE, 2022).

4 The terms "bairro rural" (rural neighborhood) and "povoado" (village) were used by Ervália residents when referring to one of these five locations within the municipality: Santa Cruz dos Godinhos, Ventania, Santa Terezinha, São Francisco das Chagas, and Dom Viçoso. Therefore, we utilize these designations for characterizing the countryside.

are located on average 20 km from the city of Ervália. This could elucidate the existence of this urbanized infrastructure—or similar infrastructure to that found in cities—although they still maintain a strongly ruralized way of life. Confirmation of this distance is possible within Figure 1 of the accompanying map, which illustrates the geographical distribution of neighborhoods and some rural areas in relation to the municipal center. A large portion of the population is dedicated to agriculture and livestock farming, wherein coffee cultivation constitutes a principal undertaking. Wood-burning stoves, backyards with fruit and vegetables, and small livestock such as chickens, ducks, pigs, dogs, and cats are also seen in homes.

Life in rural neighborhoods is marked by simplicity, closeness to nature, and a high value on family and community ties. The inhabitants know each other, maintain festivities linked to their patron saints, and display rural traits in their dress and behavior, such as the frequent use of straw hats, the habit of squatting, and hands calloused from harvesting coffee.

Figure 1 | Spatial distribution of neighborhoods and rural areas in Ervália/MG.



Source: Excerpt from Marques (2007).

The dwellings follow similar patterns: surrounding the houses, courtyards contain clotheslines, vegetable gardens, fruit trees, medicinal plants, and, in some cases, barns or storehouses for storing grains, coffee, and tools. Besides farming, cattle and dairy cows are also raised for family consumption. Within this geographical area, dairy items such as cottage cheese, yogurt, and cheese are extensively consumed and frequently manufactured using artisanal methods on numerous agricultural establishments. As noted by Montes (2019), on rural properties in Ervália, it was part of the local custom:

> [...] to welcome visitors by offering coffee, as it usually comes from the property's harvest, undergoing roasting and grinding without any added substances, resulting in a very pure product. Accompanied by cheese or cornbread (*broa*), or even pure, without taking a sip of coffee, a person will not leave when visiting the families of the region (Montes, 2019, p. 12).

A notable aspect is the intimate association between coffee and dairy products with local customs. Beyond its integration into the local inhabitants' traditions, coffee cultivation also impacts the education of young children. According to Montes (2019, p. 9), during the coffee harvest season, "a significant number of students are absent from school to assist their parents and family members with the coffee harvest."

Regarding recreational facilities, the city offers public squares with outdoor gyms, a club with a swimming pool and soccer field, a nightclub, private pond fishing, and waterfalls. During Carnival, street parades are organized, and during Holy Week, the city welcomes large numbers of tourists for the procession, which incorporates specific theatrical performances. The predominantly Catholic populace upholds various religious practices such as masses, processions, festivities, and the celebration of the saints of the day, traditions that strengthen sociability between the streets (*rua*) and the countryside (*roça*). The primary festivities observed by inhabitants of both urban and rural areas are the patron saint's feast, Holy Week, and the oxcart festival in honor of Our Lady of Aparecida.

The municipality's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) is approximately R$358 million, with 36.9% coming from services, 32.8% from agriculture, 24.7% from public administration, and 5.5% from industry. Urban and rural environments have been adjusting to technological advancements in both production and ICT, especially in the Zona da Mata Mineira region, where geographic proximity favors rural commuting (Fiúza *et al*., 2022). In Ervália, findings indicate that a proportion of the rural inhabitants no longer dedicates itself solely to agricultural labor, whereas urban residents sustain their involvement in cultivation. This urban-rural connection expands the circulation of information, optimizes production and income, and

favors access to services. Coutinho and Fiúza (2019) emphasize that mobility between the countryside (*roça*) and the streets (*rua*) occurs, above all, in search of goods and services in the municipality itself.

Based on the dynamics of digital sociability present in contexts that intertwine urban and rural life in the municipality of Ervália/MG, this article discusses the understanding of the approximation concerning the notions of *habitus* and technological capital as a possibility of explaining appropriation and incorporation of the cell phone in rural areas by adults who are members of rural families.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

To achieve the objectives of this investigation, data collection was conducted utilizing semi-structured interviews, guided by a previously developed script consisting of nineteen questions. The objective was to study the transformations and new *habitus* (Bourdieu, 2014) embodied in the appropriation of cell phones among the different adult members of rural families. This methodological approach facilitated the documentation of narratives and representations associated with *habitus*. The definition of families as a unit of analysis is based on Martins' (2010) conception of the rural family as a space for collaborative efforts and the maintenance of societal patterns.

The interviews took place in person at the homes of the nineteen participating families between February and March 2023. Individuals for the study were drawn from 180 students at a rural high school who had previously completed a questionnaire administered at two state public schools in the municipality. The families interviewed were selected through a random drawing of 11% of this sample on the website Sortear.net, resulting in the inclusion of nineteen youths and their immediate families. All selected families agreed to participate, ensuring diversity and impartiality in the selection of interviewees. Every participant underwent individual interviews, with each session lasting approximately 20 minutes.

To analyze the testimonies, Microsoft Excel, version 2016, and IRaMuTeQ[5], were used, along with the content analysis method proposed by Laurence Bardin (2011). This type of analysis was selected because it allows for a connection between the collected testimonies and the theoretical

5 IRAMUTEQ (Interface de R pour les Analyses Multidimensionnelles de Texts et de Questionnaires) is a free-to-use software program based on R, enabling various forms of statistical analysis. It was initially developed in French and began to be used in Brazil in mid-2013 (Camargo; Justo, 2013).

categories of technological appropriation and *habitus*. Participants were previously informed about the study objectives and signed an informed consent form. Their right to refuse or withdraw at any time was secured. The identities of the individuals concerned were protected by maintaining the confidentiality of their names, which were subsequently replaced by non-specific identifiers (e.g., Family 7, Mother, Careço Rural Neighborhood).

The responses were organized into a textual *corpus*, called "*corpus* 1," and subjected to three phases of content analysis: 1) pre-analysis, 2) exploration of the material, and 3) processing of results, inference, and interpretation (Bardin, 2011). Ultimately, the process involved a critical analysis of the data beyond their immediate meanings, associating them with the context under investigation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

CHARACTERIZATION OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

The findings of this research dialogue with the academic literature concerning the technology-society relationship and was analyzed through interviews with 27 participants.

The participants were distributed as follows: mothers made up 59.2% of the sample, and had an average age of 42. Fathers represented 37% of the respondents and had an average age of 47. Only one grandmother (3.8%) participated, aged 68. Regarding occupation, a distinctive pattern was identified: all mothers, when asked about their profession, always mentioned being a "housewife," even if they also indicated performing other activities such as educational roles, agricultural work, and commercial transactions. Fathers, in turn, even if they had more than one productive activity, always mentioned being "farmers."

At the outset of the interview process, subjects were asked about their engagement with a mobile handset, regardless of whether it belonged to them. Only 10.4% of participants reported not using cell phones. These individuals are aged 48 to 68 years. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), these individuals are classified as middle-aged adults (45 to 59 years old) and elderly (60 to 74 years old). For Lara (2012), the proportion of middle-aged and elderly people who lack motivation to use ICTs and engage with digital environments often stems from the belief that such inclusion presents a greater challenge than their capabilities. Furthermore, there's a prejudice

held by all age groups, especially middle-aged and elderly people, that the learning process is incompatible with old age. Nevertheless, this challenge in learning primarily originates from a lack of confidence rather than a diminishment of the capacity to acquire knowledge. Moreover, the primary determinant of an individual's technological engagement is their level of education.

It was observed that all respondents who did not employ mobile phones had incomplete elementary education, which reinforces this relationship. From this perspective, inequalities in access to technology, linked to education and income, not only highlight digital exclusion but also directly relate to discourse on regional development, since cell phone use conditions participation in economic, social, and informational networks within the territory. ICT consumption also reflects the material culture of users and non-users, encompassing cultural, economic, symbolic, and political aspects embedded in the process, from the acquisition of a cell phone to its use or non-use (Miller, 2013). The account of a 52-year-old farmer illustrates this perspective:

> [...] I don't use a cell phone. I don't even pick it up. Sometimes my son's cell phone rings, and I just leave it there. One reason is that I don't know how to use it, I'm afraid to touch it and get in the way. And another reason is that I really don't like it. I don't have the patience, and I don't find it useful for me (Family 12, Father, Ventania rural neighborhood).

The testimony shows a lack of confidence and experience with technology, as well as a preference for traditional communication methods. This phenomenon is frequently observed in individuals who rarely interact with electronic apparatus or have not received instruction in their operation. Furthermore, they don't feel comfortable or interested in adopting new technologies, which is preceded by some resistance. The reference to their son's mobile phone suggests a generational difference, in which older children don't see the same value in using a cell phone.

Economic status also influences access to technology, as a 55-year-old housewife points out: "[...] I still don't have a cell phone. Unbelievable, isn´t it?, but I don't. I couldn't afford a cell phone, that's the truth" (Family 07, Mother, Careço rural neighborhood). The expression "I couldn't afford a cell phone" clearly shows that a lack of financial resources is an impairment to acquiring a mobile device. Insufficient economic means underscore the prevalence of social inequities, given that the lack of cell phone use in contemporary society results in exclusion from certain digital opportunities or services.

Competence in the utilization of electronic devices, browse the internet, create digital content, and manage technological tools are not just individual skills, but also valuable assets in a world ever more reliant on technology. However, mere access to technologies does not guarantee their effective and meaningful use. Digital transformation and widespread internet access can democratize access to information and knowledge; however, such an effect is not an automatic consequence. Socioeconomic disparities can impede access to digital tools and technological education, thus restricting the formation of technological capital, as evidenced by the testimonies cited above.

APPROPRIATION OF CELL PHONES BY RURAL ADULTS IN ERVÁLIA: SIMILARITY ANALYSIS

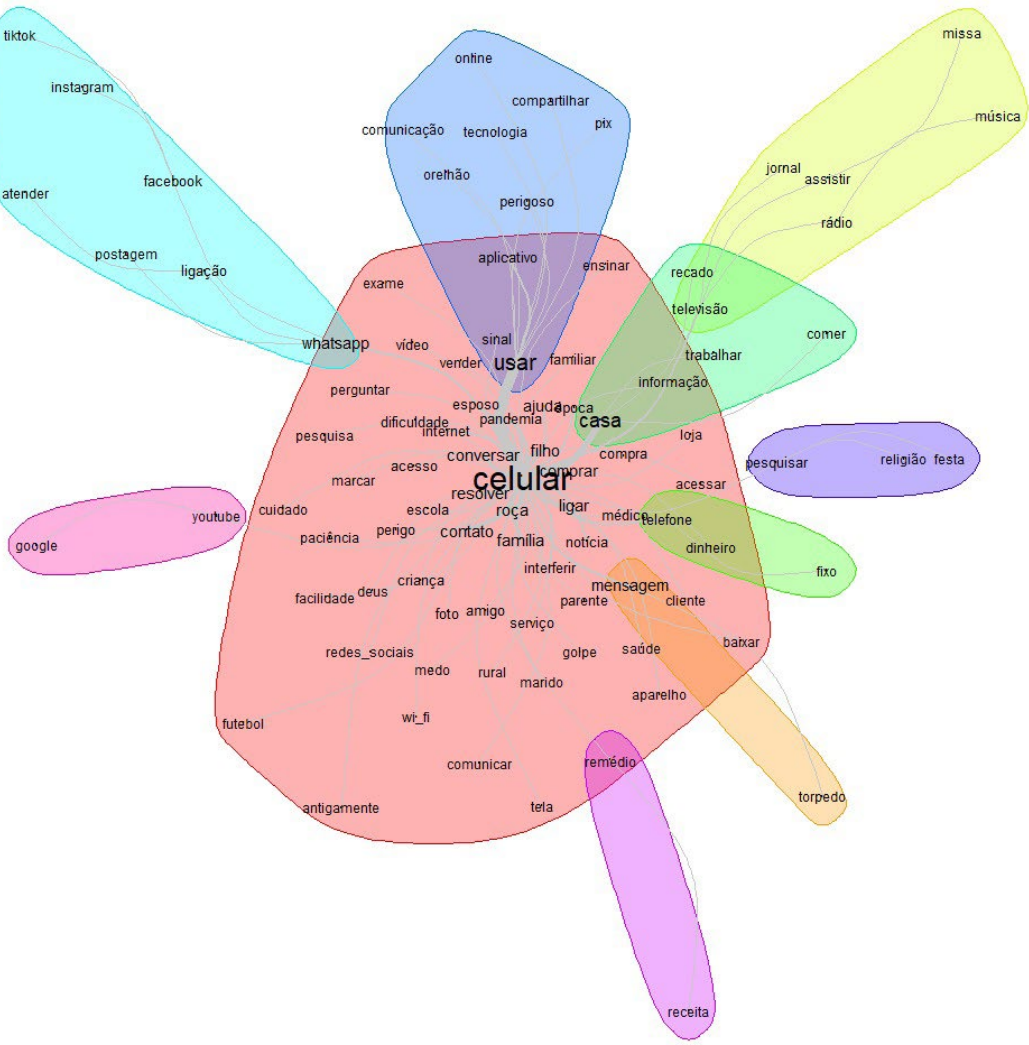
For the Similarity Analysis, the textual *corpus* presented an 84% success rate, considering an expected success rate above 70%. Twenty-seven texts (related to the 27 interviewees) were examined, consisting of 917 text segments (fragments or excerpts) and 2,614 words. The *corpus* also revealed 42,163 occurrences (frequency of words) and 954 Hapax (words that appeared only once), indicating a strong connection between them, that is, this enables understanding how the structure of the representation is formed (Ratinaud; Marchand, 2012).

In the subdivisions linked to the word “celular “ (cell phone), the word “uso” (use) emerged as the most relevant in the interviewees’ statements, surrounded by eight other significant ramifications: “casa” (home), “conversa” (talk), “roça” (farm), “contato” (contact), “família” (family), “WhatsApp,” “televisão” (television), and “pesquisa” (research). When these terms are conceptually connected, it is possible to understand that the appropriation of cell phones manifests the centrality of this device in the routine of the local population, which highlights its versatility and its mediating function in social relations and access to information.

The presence of the words “casa” (house) and “roça” (farm) suggests that their use occurs in both domestic and work environments, highlighting the increased connectivity in the population’s daily lives. The strong association with “WhatsApp” and “conversa” (talk) illustrates that the cell phone is seen as a means of communication that facilitates contact with family and the maintenance

of social engagements, especially in a context where physical distance can be a significant factor. Additionally, its connection to the domains of “television” and “research” indicates its utility as a tool for accessing information and entertainment, complementing or even replacing traditional means of communication. Thus, it can be observed that, for the Ervália interviewees, the cell phone is not just a technological device, but an element for organizing daily life. It allows them to stay in touch with family and friends as well as carry out productive and informational activities. This can be seen in Figure 2, which refers to the similarity graph.

Figure 2 | Similarity analysis regarding the ten core interview groups, conducted in Ervália, Minas Gerais, 2023.



Source: Prepared by the author based on data from the IRAMUTEQ software - version 0.7, Alpha 2 (2023).

Based on the spatial configuration of the word sets, the theme of cell phone appropriation by adults in rural families in Ervália, Minas Gerais, is directly related to ten fundamental groups, as can be seen in Figure 2. The following stand out: the use of essential applications (blue group); their incorporation into different aspects of daily life (green group); the relationship with other communication technologies (yellow group); research aimed at religious festivals (purple group); the costs of this technology in relation to landline telephones (dark green group); the exchange of messages via applications or SMS (orange group); access to health information and medicines (light purple group); the search for online videos and information (pink group) and the versatile adaptation of this technology to the lived context (red group).

Within the municipal context, cell phones have been incorporated into various activities involving technology, communication, and online interaction, with a considerable degree of awareness of potential risks (the word "dangerous" was frequently used in the interviewees' statements). This phenomenon illustrates the personal and societal practices of adult individuals who, despite being immersed in a globalized world, adapt their use of technology to their local needs. Risk perception stems from knowledge acquired through personal experiences, social interactions, and cultural influences, shaping the way people assess, and use their cell phones with caution to preserve their safety and well-being.

ADAPTABILITY OF CELL PHONES INT HE DAILY LIVES OF RURAL FAMILIES

The versatile use of cell phones reflects the applicability of digital knowledge and answers the question: how are they effectively used in these people's lives and work? Its utilization involved both functional aptitudes and the perceived value of cellular handsets within routine activities. According to Martinell and Alvarado (2014), this incorporation is directly linked to the concept of technological capital. Participants demonstrate their integrated and materialized technological capital through the utilization of their mobile devices for essential tasks, such as family communication, scheduling medical appointments, and social interactions:

> [...], some days when I'm going to work in the fields and when I get there I remember that I need to talk to my wife and I'm in the *roça*, far from home. So I pick up the phone and call her, look for a place with a better signal, and call her on an usual call to tell her what I need

> [...] (Family 19, Father, Careço Rural Neighborhood, 2023).
>
> [...] years ago I had to try to schedule an appointment and then go to the doctor. With my cell phone, nowadays, I call or leave a message, schedule an appointment and go there just for the consultation [...] (Family 14, Mother, rural community of Córrego Frio, 2023).
>
> [...] to find out news about friends and family, I had to go to someone's house or send a message through someone letting them know, it was more like that, today it's easier, you send a message, you call, you can talk every day [...] (Family04, Mother, Ervália, 2023).
>
> [...] using the cell phone really helps, I've even called the health center to make an appointment with the doctor. There are days when I need something, and I can't go out, so I ask my granddaughter to call the market from her cell phone [...] (Family 15, Grandmother, rural community of Salão, 2023).

The emphasis on mobile device utilization in developing or supporting work activities/the world of work brings us to the concept of embodied technological capital, as individuals begin to use technology to enhance their economic and social capital. In the Ervália region, only 22% of adults interviewed (six people) reported using cell phones for work, not in agriculture, but in small local businesses. Initially, there was resistance to the use of technology, but over time, it became essential to the survival of these businesses.

> [...] when the first cell phones came out, I bought mine. I've always been very curious. Because I work in commerce, I am forced to learn how to use these technologies. Like this Pix thing. I use Pix here at my grocery store. But if I didn't have a store, I wouldn't even use Pix. I don´t use it for myself. For example, I never pay with Pix, I only receive PIX from clients. It's more for the commerce here, you know. Because people want to use it, so I end up being forced to have PIX. But I'm not really into this virtual money thing (Family 08, Father, Careço rural neighborhood).
>
> At first, it took me a while to learn many things about using my phone, but since I needed it for work and found it so helpful, I got the hang of it. Nowadays, I use my phone mostly for work. Sorting things out, purchasing supplies, selling and delivering products, and negotiating with customers and salespeople is all very work-oriented (Family 19, Mother, Careço rural neighborhood).

The integration of mobile phone usage at work reveals the importance of internalized dispositions in shaping personal decisions and actions. In small businesses, the telephone has become an essential tool, which requires new technological knowledge. This phenomenon extends beyond the individual realm: it also drives transformations in the local economic and social sphere, expands the possibilities for productive integration, and strengthens regional development dynamics.

Bauman (2004) points out that cell phones and the internet have expanded possibilities in several areas of work, including delivery, banking transactions, and education. However, this expansion has not yet reached all sectors, a fact highlighted by Godoy *et al*. (2022, p. 1): "[...] there is still a digital exclusion among a portion of farmers, which, in turn, is caused by limited knowledge about the functionality of the available devices and platforms."

In this context, understanding the concepts of *habitus* and technological capital is essential to explaining cell phone use. In Ervália, cell phone use is directly related to individuals' social conditions. Those with greater technological capital—that is, skills and knowledge about cell phone use—are able to integrate it productively into communication, education, and work activities. Conversely, those possessing limited technological resources encounter challenges in effectively using technology, which can lead to digital exclusion and limit their ability to take advantage of the opportunities offered by ICTs.

According to Miller and Host (2006), the incorporation of cell phones into everyday life also reveals symbolic meanings such as connectivity, autonomy, convenience, and intimacy. This can be observed in the following statements:

> [...] I use WhatsApp and Facebook a lot to get in touch with friends (Family03, Father, rural neighborhood of Careço, 2023).
>
> [...] I send messages, I call. So I have the possibility of talking every day. I have more contact with my family, I create family groups, organize celebrations on specific dates, or schedule visits with a relative or friend [...] (Family04, Mother, Ervália, 2023).
>
> [...] I use it more because I like it and I'm used to it. Since I don't like other apps, I only use WhatsApp (Family10, Mother, rural neighborhood of Careço, 2023).
>
> [...] searching things online for my crops. I look for fertilizer, a medicine when there's a disease in the production. When I need it, I call, send a message, research, and resolve it (Family 15, Father, rural community of Salão, 2023).
>
> [...] I go to the website, select the products, then I choose, see the price. You can see how much you'll pay, how much you'll get back in change. We choose what we want, the color, the style, everything exactly. It's much easier than going to the supermarket. Then they come, deliver, there's no delivery fee. I don't go to the pharmacy anymore; I send the prescription via WhatsApp, and they deliver the medicine right here at home. I pay via PIX; it's much easier (Family 17, Mother, rural community of Córrego do Mamão, 2023).

Mobile phones are used to maintain social ties, achieve independence, simplify daily tasks, and share experiences. Thus, it becomes a means of interaction, training, and practicality, shaping each individual's experiences in a unique way. In other words, countless elements can characterize and contribute to the incorporation process. For example, we might note the adoption of cell phones by the surveyed mothers, who direct their skills toward resolving domestic issues, caregiving, family communication, shopping, and medical appointments:

> [...] it turns out that I have used it and still use to contact my family too, but for this function I regulate my use a little, so as not to only have virtual contact with my family (Family19, Mother, rural neighborhood of Careço).
>
> [...] I use it a lot to resolve health issues, when I or my son need to see a doctor. Before the cell phone, if I wanted to schedule an exam or see a doctor, I had to go to Ervália. It's not like that anymore. Now, if I need to schedule an exam or a doctor, I call and make an appointment (Family 2, Mother, Careço rural neighborhood).
>
> [...] it solves a lot of things. Sometimes people are very far away, and you can talk, get news. You call the grocery store and ask for a purchase, they deliver it right away (Family 17, Mother, rural community of Córrego do Mamão, 2023).

These narratives corroborate research conducted by Escosteguy, Sifuentes, and Bianchin (2017) on farming families in a rural municipality in Rio Grande do Sul. The authors highlight that rural mothers tend to intensify their paid work or work that supplements the family budget, which goes beyond the conventional duties of spouse and parent. Similarly, in the Ervália context, most mothers interviewed reported having some type of paid work. This specific variable appears to exert a direct influence on mobile phone usage, although other factors—such as the nature of the work, the income earned, the time dedicated to the activity, as well as cultural and social aspects like enhanced equality within the family unit—also contribute to shaping this reality.

SOCIAL REPRESENTATION AND THE APPROPRIATION OF THE CELL PHONE

Crucial for deciphering social representation, Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* serves to express a range of ideas and social representation. According to Bourdieu (2014), *habitus* is a principle that generates practices, which subsequently dictates analogous individual preferences within the same social class and shaping lifestyles. As a result, individuals' patterns of choice typically remain consistent across different spheres, connecting social practices, consumption, and possessions.

Regarding cell phone usage, *habitus* is evident in the ways individuals and societies perceive, value, and incorporate this technology. These perceptions are influenced by cultural norms, social values, and specific contexts. In Ervália's case, interviewees highlighted how the incorporation of cell phones transformed rural life, reduced the differences between the *roça* and the *rua*, and was generally considered a positive change:

> [...] I think that the ease of technology that we have in the city today also exists in the countryside. I think so, living in the countryside has changed since the cell phone. Life now has an easier access [...] (Family04, Mother, Ervália, 2023).
>
> [...] today, with five minutes on your cell phone, you know about someone's whole life, my goodness, it's changed so much, thank goodness it's changed for the better. In my opinion, now everything is similar. The countryside used to be very different from the city, but today everything is very similar [...] (Family 15, Grandmother, rural community of Salão, 2023).
>
> [...] before cell phones there was a huge difference; even the houses in the countryside were different from the city, they were simpler houses. But, today in the *roça* there are good houses, just like in the city. Even the food is similar, people eat well [...] (Family 07, Father, rural neighborhood of Careço, 2023).
>
> [...] both in the *roça* and in the city, everyone uses cell phones a lot, both in the *roça* and on the *rua*, I see the use of cell phones in everywhere today; children, young people, adults [...] (Family 12, Father, Ventania rural neighborhood, 2023).

The study further indicated that nearly every participant associate cell phone ownership with a positive factor for rural life, especially in the relationship between *roça* and *rua* spaces. According to reports, this technology aids in the transformation of rural areas, fostering more equitable access, and simplifying daily life. According to reports, this technology aids in the transformation of rural areas, fostering more equitable access, and simplifying daily life.

Where rural life presents different conditions and necessities than urban life, adults' *habitus* includes values such as autonomy, efficient communication, and adaptation to local conditions. Thus, the cell phone becomes an essential tool for overcoming geographic challenges and structural limitations. Respondents emphasized their versatility in coordinating agricultural activities, obtaining climate information, accessing health and education services, and maintaining social networks within the community (Bourdieu, 2014; Miller, 2013).

The home was primarily identified as the setting symbolizing the link between urban areas (*rua*) and the countryside (*roça*). For Mother of Family08, this change is evident: "Nowadays, *roça* has everything. People no longer need to live in the city if they don't work in the city. That's how I see it.

Nowadays, a country house (*roça*) has everything a house on the street (rua) has." Furthermore, cell phones have made it possible to solve problems without leaving home, as Mother of the Family19 highlighted: "[...] today I can do research and get information without leaving my place; everything is on my cell phone. So, I think the countryside now has more options [...]." The adoption of cellular telephones confers autonomy and empowerment to rural residents, enabling them to independently seek information, make knowledge-based decisions, and utilize amenities which previously were beyond their reach. This observed autonomy is a manifestation of *habitus*, which values the ability to adapt and improve living conditions.

The respondents link the integration of mobile phones in rural areas with the overcoming of the perception of urban dominance over these areas, previously seen as less technologically developed. Today, *roça* is recognized as a prosperous place to live, as Father of the Family07 describes: "[...] at present, living in the *roça* is nearly more pleasant than in the city; here you have a much better quality of life. And everything I need, I have no trouble using [...]". He further emphasizes: "[...] today, everyone has internet and cell phones at home. The *roça* today is just like the city; there's this song that a singer wrote saying that the countryside is a winner, I think that's exactly it [...]".

This perception is linked to social transformations, digital connectivity, and new cultural representations. The *habitus* influences individuals' perception of technological access, leading them to reinterpret the relationship between rural and urban areas. The widespread adoption of digital connectivity, even in rural areas, has led to a growing belief that mobile phones can effectively address inequalities between these areas (Bourdieu, 2014).

Cell phones have eliminated barriers previously stemming from social isolation, offering access to news, services, and educational opportunities, offering access to news, services, and educational opportunities. This has created a sense of equality, even superiority, in some aspects of rural life. The contemporary *habitus* values communication and information, and as technology advances, residents realize they have access to platforms and resources previously restricted to urban environments. This digital inclusion strengthens the reassessment of the differences between the streets (*rua*) and the countryside (*roça*). Furthermore, cell phones have become a tool of empowerment, allowing people to overcome geographical barriers and improve their quality of life. This shift reinforces the viability of rural living and transforms perceptions of rural life.

In the academic literature, these transformations are addressed from various points of view, including agricultural development and economics (Slavova; Karanasios, 2018), generational changes (Vilela; Borjas, 2021), economic and cultural transformations (Lin; Kloet, 2019), rural extension (Bede; Okry; Vodouhe, 2020), production management (Conceição; Schneider, 2019; Brusamarelo *et al*., 2021), local development (Franceschi; Deggerone; Bombardelli, 2020), and strategies for family farming (Godoy; Sanssanoviez; Pezarico, 2020). Thus, the use of cell phones not only expands opportunities in rural areas, but also reverses negative statements of rural life and strengthens the relationship between the streets (*rua*) and the farm (*roça*). This transformation, previously documented in academic studies, is also observed in the experience of residents of Ervália, in the countryside of Minas Gerais.

The distinct differences in lifestyle preceding and following the acquisition of a mobile phone is evident in the interviewees' testimonies, which express their opinions, beliefs, and emotions regarding the device. This is illustrated by the Mother of the Family10:

> [...] it happened when I was trying to receive maternity leave benefits that I bought my first cell phone. It was 15 years ago, I never forgot. Cell phones back then were a simple thing, very different from today's devices. I remember leaving the store with it in my hand, and feeling happy [...] (Family 10, Mother, rural neighborhood of Careço, 2023).

She highlights the acquisition of a cell phone as a notably important and desired event, even in the face of financial hardship, when she had to resort to government assistance. From this perspective, researchers such as Miller (2013) and Godoi (2009) emphasize that cell phones reflect individuals' desires and needs, becoming a form of personal expression since their acquisition to their customization.

Additionally, the relationship between Moscovici's (2015)[6] and Bourdieu's (2014) concepts highlights the influence of the symbolic in the construction of social knowledge and the transformation of reality, given that *habitus* is inherently linked to the way we interact socially and incorporate new technologies. The testimonies reinforce that acquiring a cell phone is perceived positively, associated with joy, satisfaction, and belonging. The Mother of Family14 illustrates: "[...] it's been a while now, about 5 years or so since I had my first contact. When I bought my first cell phone, it was pure joy! Everyone was using their cell phone, talking about it [...]". A significant social implication of the cellular phone has been identified, not only for its functionalities, but also for what it represents: digital, social, economic and communicative inclusion in an increasingly connected world (Godoi, 2009).

6 Moscovici (2015) defines social representations as particular forms of knowledge that influence behavior and communication between individuals. The role of these representations is to standardize objects, people, and events, assigning them meanings that guide individual and collective attitudes (Bertoni; Galinkin, 2019).

CONCLUSION

The "mobile technology *habitus*" of rural adults in Ervália reveals a complex process of appropriation and redefinition of digital technologies, highlighting both potential, and apprehensions in daily use. Serving as an indispensable communication device, the mobile phone facilitates connections between *roça* and *rua*, enabling the expansion of social horizons and increased access to information without abandoning pre-existing cultural and productive dynamics.

The selection and use of apps are characterized by a pragmatic approach and the resolution of immediate needs. WhatsApp, for example, is consolidating itself as a space for interpersonal exchanges, product and service negotiations, and a means of resolving basic everyday issues, such as shopping, medical appointments, and organizing farm work. Concurrently, digital platforms are instrumental in facilitating socialization and the dissemination of knowledge, particularly concerning religious beliefs, health information, and agricultural methods.

Nevertheless, the integration of this technology invariably introduces certain challenges. Apprehension as to excessive exposure, concern about cyber scams, and distrust of certain cell phone uses highlight a cautious process of appropriation, in which the boundaries between public and private domains are constantly redefined. Digital time management likewise exemplifies this approach: far from being thoughtlessly dependent, rural adults in Ervália adapt their cell phone use to the demands of work, family, and community.

Therefore, the study's aim was met by illustrating how the adoption of cell phones by rural adults in Ervália reflects the relationship between *habitus*, local culture, and regional development dynamics, and reveals both the adaptation and tensions present in this process.

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