



Digital Characteristics of Young People from Spain in Front Violence in Virtual Environments

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to present the partial results of a study, funded by the BBVA Foundation, on young people's perception of the risk of perpetrating cyber-violence, of their competences to protect themselves against such violence, and of their own high-risk online actions. An online questionnaire was used as a data-gathering instrument. The sample comprised 4,536 high school students aged from 14 to 16 from several regions of Spain. The results suggest that as a group, young people of this age use many virtual environments, see themselves as competent users, think that these are dangerous environments where exercising cyber-violence is easy, but despite this also perform high-risk actions without being properly aware of them.

1. Introduction

The internet has become an area for making relationships and socializing among people, sometimes as a reflection of the non-virtual world and at others as an adaptation to the new tools offered by cyber-space.

Participating in social networks is especially popular due to their wide outreach and rapid growth. A large majority of users are young people. In Europe 75% of young people use the internet and the social networks [1]. Most of them access these from mobile devices, numbers of which have increased sharply since the appearance and spread of smartphones. Often in these virtual arenas people are exposed to various types of online violence, particularly young people, since they make especially intensive use of them [1]. The clearest example can be found in the use of e-mails or messaging services to harass, insult or threaten people, a practice which has come to be called cyber-harassment.

Studies indicate that this type of harassment has increased notably among young people in recent years [2], growing from 6.5% to 24.6% in the last decade [3]. Some analysts explain this rise in cyber-harassment by the appearance and proliferation of smartphones, nowadays found everywhere and constantly available [4].

The purpose of this paper is to identify which areas of the internet are most used by young people, and their perceptions of the risk of exercising cyber-violence, of their competences to protect themselves against such violence, and of their own high-risk actions in virtual environments [5].

2. Method and sample

A study was carried out via a survey, using as a data-gathering instrument an online questionnaire (Donoso et al., 2014) administered to 4,356 Spanish high-school students from the regions of Catalonia, Aragon, Galicia, Andalusia, the Balearic Islands and the Canary Islands. The sample was made up almost equally of females and males (51.2% and 48.8% respectively), in their third and fourth years of high school, and with an average age of 15. Almost half (43.1%) thought that they had some factor of vulnerability towards violence, their bodies being the most common, at 31.5%

3. Results

3.1. Resources used

The most-used ICT resources by adolescents in our sample were WhatsApp, YouTube and Instagram, as table 1 shows. Facebook followed these, and those least utilized were Tuenti, Ask.fm and Skype (table 1).

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Table1. Resources most used by participants

Resources	Mean	Standard deviation
What resources do you use most often? [WhatsApp/Line/Telegram]	2.88	.41
What resources do you use most often? [Facebook]	1.87	.80
What resources do you use most often? [Tuenti]	1.05	.26
What resources do you use most often? [Twitter]	1.70	.79
What resources do you use most often? [Instagram]	2.43	.80
What resources do you use most often? [YouTube]	2.56	.54
What resources do you use most often? [Skype]	1.52	.66
What resources do you use most often? [Ask.fm]	1.28	.59
What resources do you use most often? [Others]	1.57	.79

3.2. Resources the where most violence was perceived

The resources on which the highest risk of violence was perceived were Facebook, WhatsApp, Instagram and Ask.fm, all interactive resources, whereas YouTube, despite being one of the most popular (and also having interactive options) stood out for being perceived as having less risk than the rest. The averages are shown in detail in table 2.

Table 2. Resources where the most violence was perceived

	Mean	Standard deviation
In which online resources do you think there is most risk of suffering violence? [WhatsApp/Line/Telegram]	2.42	.63
In which online resources do you think there is most risk of suffering violence? [Facebook]	2.63	.56
In which online resources do you think there is most risk of suffering violence? [Tuenti]	2.24	.71
In which online resources do you think there is most risk of suffering violence? [Twitter]	2.28	.67
In which online resources do you think there is most risk of suffering violence? [Instagram]	2.36	.67
In which online resources do you think there is most risk of suffering violence? [YouTube]	1.83	.76
In which online resources do you think there is most risk of suffering violence? [Skype]	2.18	.77
In which online resources do you think there is most risk of suffering violence? [Ask.fm]	2.31	.77
From the following list, in which resources do you think there is most risk of suffering violence? [Others]	1.56	.73

3.3. Perception of risk in online behaviour

In general participants perceived some online behaviours as risky, amongst which *posting personal information on the internet* and *repeatedly chatting with someone you have no information about* stood out. Yet they did not see posting personal photos or videos as being so dangerous (table 3).



Table 3. Perception of high-risk behaviours in virtual environments

High-risk behaviours	Mean	Standard deviation
Posting of photo of myself	2.43	1.14
Posting a video that I appear in	2.53	1.15
Having an open profile in social networks	3.09	1.25
Posting personal information on the internet (your address, school, telephone number, etc.)	4.04	1.07
Repeatedly chatting with a person you have no information about	3.97	1.09

3.4. Where the most violence was perceived

In the main our sample of adolescents was of the opinion that there is more violence online than offline, as well as perceiving a certain impunity in the internet. Thus 90% stated that the online environment is more violent, and 84% thought that in general people acting illegally or harmfully on the internet were not punished.

3.5. Digital competences to combat cyber-violence

In terms of digital competences for online security, it was notable that a high percentage of participants perceived that they possessed these on a general level, as table 4 shows. The most used competences were blocking offenders, with 98% positive responses, and changing privacy settings in social networks, with 93%. The least used was disabling the location function of mobile phones, although it should be noted that 74% stated that they knew how to do this.

Table 4. Young people's digital competences for combating cyber-violence

Competences		Number	% of N of the table
Do you know how to block people who bother you online?	NO	97	2.1%
	YES	4431	97.9%
Do you know how to change the privacy settings in the social networks you use?	NO	339	7.5%
	YES	4189	92.5%
Do you know how to disable the location tracking on your mobile so that people can't see where you are?	NO	1183	26.1%
	YES	3345	73.9%
Do you know how to report photos posted on the internet without your consent?	NO	476	10.5%
	YES	4052	89.5%
Do you open suspicious e-mails from unknown sources?	NO	3506	77.4%
	YES	1022	22.6%
Do you have an antivirus in your computer that warns you of or blocks dangerous websites?	NO	829	18.3%

4. Conclusions

Our study shows that the adolescents in the sample used a wide variety of virtual environments and networks, especially WhatsApp and the YouTube and Instagram networks.

They were of the opinion that the social networks are an environment where violence can be carried out more easily than face-to-face, and the online environments where they thought most violence could be exercised were Facebook, WhatsApp, Ask.fm and Instagram, applications that they used habitually. Seeing these as dangerous did not encourage them to stop using the platforms, which indicates that they need specific competences to protect themselves there.

They were not aware of the risk of certain actions, such as posting personal photos or videos in social networks, which may predispose them to suffering violence in general and gender violence in particular, as they are continually exposed to others. The naturalness with which young people use the internet makes them see the medium as just another social arena, without giving any importance to the consequences of acts such as exchanging private information or images which are evidence of trust between friends or a couple (Torres, 2013).



In conclusion, we would stress the need to undertake educational actions to address and if possible to prevent cyber-violence, aiming to train users to be alert to the dangers in each application, how to foresee them and how to protect themselves from them, in addition to the need to report cases and types of cyber-violence. In this endeavour we would involve schools as appropriate socializing agents.

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