Teenagers' Actions and Interactions Online in Central and Eastern Europe. Potentials and Empowerment, Risks and Victimization

Edited by

Monica Barbovschi and Maria Diaconescu

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Editorial note

Monica Barbovschi,
Maria Diaconescu

The idea that the new communication technologies are able to create new social practices and to shape human behavior has stirred up multiple controversies and radically opposed side takings, especially when it comes to certain social-demographic categories seen as "risk-prone". Recent tendencies in the evolution of computer mediated technology and web content have led to the rejection of a rigid technological determinism and instead, they have shifted the discourse towards a consideration of various influences on behavior and actions, both online and offline.

"Risks and Effects of Internet Use among Children and Adolescents. The Perspective of Evolution towards the Knowledge Society" is a 2-year research project financed by the Romanian Ministry of Education under a CNCSIS (National University Research Council) grant scheme (2007-2008)[1] that proposes an inventory of types of uses, gratifications and effects generated by the Internet use in Romania, with specific focus on the categories of children and teenagers, strongly represented among the Internet users, categories that most certainly present specific problems and risks. A special attention was given to the gender perspective in the context of Internet use. According to the theoretical developments in this area, the research team joined the position that contests a neat and useful distinction between the real life and the one spent in front of the computer (online), as

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[1] The research team consists of faculty members and graduate students from the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work of the Babes-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, as following: project director, Prof. Dr. Maria Roth and members of the research team - Senior Lecturer Cristina Baciu, Senior Lecturer Bela Szabo, Senior Lecturer Imola Antal, Teaching Assistant Maria Diaconescu, doctoral students Mihai Bogdan Iovu, Diana Damean and Monica Barbovschi.

these two levels are obviously intertwined, with uses and interactions characterized by dynamism, continuity, fluidity.

The workshop "**Teenagers' Actions and Interactions Online in Central and Eastern Europe. Potentials and Empowerment, Risks and Victimization"** (Cluj-Napoca, May 23rd-25th), as an important component of the research project, proposed a documented insight into various issues related to teenagers' actions and interactions online in Central and Eastern Europe: potentials for skills development, youth empowerment, as well as risks of online aggressive behaviors and victimization effects of the online environment. The research team was interested in identifying various types of teenagers' online behavior, gratifications and effects generated by the Internet (WWW and especially CMC), with an emphasis on specific problems and risks.

The workshop aimed at bringing together a rich diversity of research approaches and case studies from practitioners in order to: 1. differentiate typologies and patterns of Internet associated performances among teenagers, 2. develop a prevention model that could counterbalance the online oppressive and victimization phenomenon, 3. build a network of researchers and professionals/practitioners willing to research and act for encouraging the useful potentials and empowering effects of online behaviors, to work and consult together in order to stop or at least to prevent online oppressive/victimization phenomenon. The 3 days gathered insightful theoretical approaches and case studies based on the research and practical experience of 25 participants from Romania, Hungary, Bulgaria, Poland, United Kingdom and the Czech Republic. This volume is a collection of 16 individual and team contributions presented during the workshop.

Thematic organization of the volume

For the purpose of thematic coherence, we decided to group the articles according to their main focus. As some of the articles could easily fall into more than one thematic area, the grouping criterion was not to create mutually exclusive categories, but to articulate pertinent divisions according to the primary focus and tone of each contribution. However, due to the fact that the contributions submitted by the organizers of the workshop (the research team from the Faculty of Sociology and Social Work in Cluj-Napoca) were developed and constructed on the same empirical data (both quantitative

and qualitative), the methodological component can be found in an annex at the end of the volume.

The first part is dedicated to setting the stage for teenagers' online actions and interactions. We grouped here both descriptive and explanatory contributions that address issues of identity construction, social capital, action and participation, Internet uses and gratifications, in the context of the more and more ubiquitous presence of the Internet in young people's lives. **Delia Ioana Nadolu** and **Bogdan Nadolu** open this section with an insightful reflection on the implications of Web 2.0 tools for sociability, privacy and communication. The distinction between three types of communicators, i.e. regular users, ghost users and talkative users, could be a starting point for describing the formation of teenagers' identity in a (more and more) digitalized world.

Moving forward, **Diana Damean** examines the purposes of Internet usage and the relationship between the frequency of Internet use and the motivations behind Internet use. The major theoretical framework of her study is the theory uses and gratifications, which is applied to the investigation of the motivations for using the Internet, the gendered patterns of Internet use, the attitudes toward the Internet, and the frequency of Internet use. She tests several hypotheses in connection with the uses and gratification theory, namely: the positive relation between the frequency of Internet use and the attitude towards the Internet, a gender difference in purposes of Internet use (girls more oriented towards instrumental purposes, and boys more oriented towards diversionary purposes), the prevalence of entertainment use of the Internet over the informational use, a more frequent facilitation of significant ties through CMC, a positive relation between frequency of Internet use and one's relationship with friends and family, and last, the motivations of Internet use as predictors of the frequency of use.

Following the distinction between real and virtual social life, **Cristina Baciu** and **Mihai-Bogdan Iovu** explore the multiple connections between Internet use and social capital, proving once again that the Internet does not decrease the number of our social ties, online and offline. One of the conclusions they reach is that the social capital of the Internet users is not diminished by the time spent in front of the computer and by the number of their virtual friends.

Starting the generous topic of online identity, **Anna Ševčíková** and **David Šmahel** argue that there is congruence between virtual and offline or "real" identities of the teenagers. Providing us with extensive empirical data from national representative surveys and qualitative interviews, the authors go further by exploring two of the concerns related to teenage Internet use, namely addictive behaviour and self-damaging behaviour in Internet groups (e.g. "pro-ana" blog communities – anorexic girls who establish communities that encourage risk behaviour and provide support and techniques for the members to become experts in self-damaging).

Drawing her reflections from online interviews, **Alina Gheorghiu** proposes a rather pessimistic view on identity construction online, a dynamic process that is both appealing and challenging for teenage users. She argues that online interactions hinder language patterns and communication development, obstructing accurate perceptions and hetero-perceptions; eventually, the online impedes the very psychological development and the construction of a coherent sense of identity in teenagers.

Based on a perspective of sociolinguistics, **Diana Cotrău** investigates teenagers' strategies of negotiating identity in electronic magazines forums, taking into consideration a series of elements, varying from nicknames, personal data, to the use of emoticons in self-expression and communication styles. Constructing teenage identity is an ongoing process that builds on identity frames offered by the editors to their readers, who instead creatively transform these mainstream spaces through language practice.

With a revised Maslow's hierarchy of human needs as theoretical framework, doubled by a perspective of human communication pragmatics, **Maria Diaconescu** explores the reciprocal influences between offline (face to face) and online (on Instant Messenger) exchanges of messages throughout a series of offline and online in-depth interviews, focusing on aspects like empathy, sympathy, congruence of messages, or projection of feelings and needs.

The most philosophical contribution to the current volume, **Robert Arnăutu**'s theoretical study proposes a spin on the sociogenesis of childhood as a modern construct that responds to certain (modern) social needs. However, in the information era, the position and the role of the child in the educational process need to be reconsidered (and apparently they are reconsidered by the way children themselves assemble their online identity

through various items of life-style, including items that might be characterized as shocking or violent). The author argues that a schooling system (that is still) based on the mere transmission of information is obsolete and should be replaced by a system that provides the cyber-kids with tools for self-creation and self-expression and treats them not as recipients of education but as partners in a project of consistent development.

Dorina Guțu Tudor examines the current influence of the Internet on political knowledge and level of political participation of female college students in Romania. Her study also explores the answers to questions about the Internet's effects on the level of information retrieval and the offline political participation, about the nature of change in the political participation (if any) or about the traits of individuals who use new media tools.

Closing the section of "Online Actions and Interactions", **Gabriel Bădescu** and **Toma Burean** investigate the effects of Internet on the political participation of youth in three countries: Belgium, Canada and Romania, showing that political participation is bi-dimensional and it consists of conventional and protest participation. Their findings suggest that it is protest participation associated with distrust in institutions that are influenced by certain types of Internet use (informational-participatory uses versus recreational uses).

The second part deals with threats and risks of Internet use. Building his study on multiple cases brought to the attention of the Bulgarian Hotline for fighting illegal and harmful content on the Internet (established under the 'Safer Internet Programme' of the European Commission and maintained by the Applied Research and Communications Fund), **Giorgi Apostolov** introduces us to the topic of teenagers' online violence, inviting us to reflect on wider trends within our societies that have undergone significant technological changes which instead have triggered the drastic shift in teenagers' online behaviour. The dyad that organizes the discussion is composed of online (psychological) violence and offline (physical) violence, with an emphasis on the very thin line that separates the two. The question that Giorgi Apostolov provokes us to reflect on, namely "Is there any connection between virtual and real-life bullying and the growing real violence between teenagers?", is addressed bearing in mind a series of risk factors, common roots that facilitate violence online and offline.

Continuing with the large topic of Internet dangers and pitfalls, **Julia Barlińska** and **Łukasz Wojtasik** present the conclusions and prescriptions

of the first Polish research on the cyber-bullying phenomenon, conducted by the Nobody's Children Foundation and Gemius in the first months of 2007. The study maps exhaustively both mild and severe forms of e-violence, varying from verbal abuse (crude name-calling, humiliating, intimidation and blackmailing) or being photographed or videotaped against one's will and/or the publication of embarrassing material, to online impersonation. The findings from the online survey have been confirmed by the Polish Helpline figures that have reached 590 cyber-bullying reports (since February 2007). Last, the authors present the main elements and objectives of the ongoing social campaign "Stop Cyberbullying" (January-December 2008).

Szabó Béla and **Maria Roth** propose a discussion about the way the Internet affects children and teenagers' daily routine and entertainment, focusing on single and peer-related free-time activities, spending time online and engaging in risky behaviour with strangers (with an emphasis on age and gender differences). Their findings suggest that peer activities increase with age but also that the teenagers, especially male that engage in solitary activities (including computer games) in late adolescence, are more at risk. Moreover, data suggest that depressed teenagers are more likely to meet offline the strangers previously met online. As far as the gender and the depression are concerned, female users seem to indicate a higher level of depression, but boys with higher depression are more at risk of negative effects of the Internet.

In the light of the social trends with serious consequences for aggressive behaviour online and offline described by Giorgi Apostolov, **Monica Barbovschi** proposes an exploration of incipient cyber-bullying among Romanian teenagers, in connection to the (lack of) parental monitoring, the use of social networking tools (SNSs and Instant Messaging services) and several psychosocial factors. While the psychosocial factors need further investigations, being social online is not related to severe forms of cyber-bullying (e.g. threatening with physical violence, posting embarrassing photo or video materials). Apparently, the offline parental monitoring (amount and nature) makes the difference between cyber-bullies and non-bullies, with the online monitoring (including SNSs monitoring) having no influence on the online aggressive behaviour. This conclusion may stir up discussions about wider implications in terms of new socializing patterns under the pressure of the fast pace of of technological and educational transformations.

Moving the discussion towards even more severe dangers in the online environment, **Zuzsana Zaleska** proposes succinct reflections on the children's increasing online exposure to pornographic and paedophile content, as part of an ongoing research project within the Safer Internet Plus programme of the European Commission, coordinated by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (National Centre for Scientific Research), a French government-funded research organization under the administrative authority of France's Ministry of Research. Drawing her reflections from the experience and research of Nobody's Children Foundation in Warsaw Poland, she describes the characteristics of peer-to-peer systems (P2P) that facilitate the flow of harmful content and announce the development of a tool that would enable accurate filtering of paedophile content in the near future.

Finally, **Imola Antal** and **Éva László** explore several types of sexual victimization online: sexual solicitations and approaches, unwanted exposure to sexual material and risky online behavior (posting personal information online, restricted profiles, browsing for pornographic materials or searching for sexual information/advice). Several characteristics of teenage behavior put this category at risks of sexual victimization (especially younger and female teenagers).

Part One

Setting the Stage for Youth Online Actions and Interactions. Identity, Social Capital, Action and Participation

The Social Being in the Virtual Space
– preliminary considerations –

Delia Ioana Nadolu
Bogdan Nadolu

A huge part of contemporary society is in a massive changing process, generally named of *digitalization*. The old models are now renegotiated, redefined, or even completely abandoned and replaced with new contents, adapted to the contemporary profile of a society that trends to be more and more based on knowledge. The obtaining of a more extended autonomy toward the living territory and the geographically boundaries – by a more dynamic daily life, by the increasing of new information and communication technology, by the changing of the principle of producing and consuming (such as Mcdonaldisation thesis) – determinates implicitly the generating of new social resources, very consistent and valuable, inclusive for the sociological and anthropological research.

From the 70's, by the extension of the dedicated technologies (the television, electronic mail, later optical cable, mobile phone etc.), communication has become a constant mark of our civilization. The invention of the Web, in the 90's, has generated a new kind of social being: the virtual space (with 48 billion Web Pages on 13 May 2008, according to www.worldwidewebsize.com)[1]. The beginning of this millennium shows the high capabilities of the computer networks (the Internet) to connect people across the world, over many geographical, societal, cultural, economical, and temporal borders. The accessing of the Internet (not quite an easy request all over the Globe) represents the first step to become digital, to communicate with other (unknown) people, to find information, to exchange data and so on. The virtual social space

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[1] According to "Internet World Stats" available at http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm, accessed at 28.09.2007

tends to become a very familiar global space, not for the entire population but for around 1 billion people, especially from the developed regions. The computer networks put the people together by simulating the spatial proximity, and the common tools for virtual interactions offer an accessible way to cross the cultural borders.

For the last 3 years, a new kind of Internet using: the Web 2.0 has been developed. New types of applications were created and they decrease the dependence of a person for a static location. The *portability* has almost replaced the term *personal* from the using of a computer. All we need, use, create and share can be on the Internet: our e-mails, documents, photos, movies, events, information are not any more necessary related with only one computer. All these contents can be stored, somewhere in the network, and can be accessed and used with a lot of applications from the category WEB2.0. such as iGoogle, Gmail, GoogleDocs, YouTube, RSS, blog, wikispace, Flickr, collaborative bookmark, social networking and so on. *The privacy is moved on the Internet and for these, can become transparency*[2].

One of the most relevant implications of the Net users is the alteration of the notion of communication: in the computer mediated space the original sense of *communal* (to connect people by a common message) is substitute by the modern sense of *transfer of messages*[3]. Into these new new-worlds, everybody can generate anything, without any restrictions and thus, the quality and quantity of the messages are out of control[4]. The possibility to emit anything from anywhere[5] in the Internet can generate a huge volume of information without any receiver, without at least one person to access it. In this situation, we actually don't have a communication process but an emitting process. Everybody talks and nobody listens. A veritable Babel Tower, for the world of information generators. Only in 2007 it was estimated that 40 exabytes (4×10^{19}) of unique new information was generated worldwide[6] (more than in previous 5000 years)[7].

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[2] Grosseck, Gabriela: 2006
[3] Noica, Constantin 1996
[4] Nadolu, Bogdan: 2004
[5] The Internet promise of 4 A: „Anybody, to send anything, anytime from Anywhere" (Doheny-Farina: 1996)
[6] *ON Magazine* (2008) available at http://belgium.emc.com/on/2007/q2/news_01.jsp, accessed at 26.03.2008

The basement of social being into the virtual space is assured by the communication. Paraphrasing a famous maxim, in the computer mediated social space can be applied the expression *I communicate, so I exist*. The communication can have various forms, and implicit, the virtual being present different kinds of manifestation. Thus, can be delimitated the following (theoretical) cases:

i. The assure of an *exclusivist position of receiver* – related to a quasi-communication, characterized just by an expose to the messages formulated by others, without generating any feed-back or getting involved in any interactions. This category of users can be named *ghosts*.

ii. The *selective involved in communications* – related with an average participation to synchronic and a-synchronic communications, but limited just to known persons. These are the *regular users*.

iii. The assure of an *expansive position of sender* – related also with a quasi-communication, characterized by the generating of an extended volume of ample messages, without targeting a receiver(s), or a direct feed-back. These represent the *talkative users*.

These 3 labels (ghost, regular and talkative) represent just a personal labeling. Following the Weber's model, these can be considered 3 ideal forms, used with a reduced incidence in the real manifestations. There are more trends for the individual behaviors that can reflect in a more adequate way the profile of an Internet user, into a distinct level of its evolution. With other words, there can be a stage of regular behavior, followed by a talkative stage and after that a period of ghost profile, and again talkative and so on. More than that, into the same time, a user can combine 2 or all-3 kinds of manifestation: a regular user into the professional activity, a talkative user into some hobby activity and a ghost user into another activity (political, for example). These 3 kinds of communication intensity generate 3 different types of Internet using and implicit, 3 kinds of distinct behaviors in virtual space. And the differences among these 3 types of Internet using are obviously.

A *ghost* user is just a consumer. Its presence into the virtual social space is undetectable (without a dedicated technology and approach). The

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7 *** *How much information?* (2003) available at http://www2.sims.berkeley.edu/research/ projects/how-much-info-2003/execsum.htm, accessed at 27.03.2008

presence of a *ghost* into the Internet leaves a minimal trace, some time impossible to detect (the confirmation sent from its IP, concerning the receiving of some data packages). Without engaging any communication process, anyone can assume the role of ghost and assist, like a shadow, or like "invisible man" to some computer mediated communication. Nobody knows how many users accessed a virtual public space (for example, an open forum), just how many IP's. Behind this code, there can be a person, or many persons, behind 2 or more IP's can be the some person (for example, accessing the forum from home and from job). The communicative basement of the virtual social being directly generates this situation. Into the effective reality the equivalent of the communicative manifestation is the biological structure. We are alive, into the effective reality, firstly because our biological system works. We are presence into the virtual social space only after we start communicating. Between the accessing the Internet and becoming visible in some virtual associative structure, we are just readers, we just receive various kinds of messages without generating any relevant feedback, we just make documentary activities and not social behaviors.

The *regular* user is the most common presence into the Internet. The implications in communications (as sender and as receiver) are strictly related with specific goals, domains, contents and structures. The Internet utilization is "normal" and "natural" for communication, documentation, leisure, social interactions and so on. The balance between effective reality and virtual reality is not disturbed; to be on the net is a usual activity without any special priority. The effective social life is harmoniously combined with the virtual social life, booth into a complementary connection. To be on the Internet is similar reading a book, or talking on the phone, or going to theatre, shopping, etc. If the Internet connection is brooked for few hours is not any cataclysm.

The *talkative* users represent a distinct category. They can assure the basement of the virtual social space. They are expansive, looking for new interactions, exploring new areas and spaces, making new friendship, generating more and more contents without a higher dependence with the specific destination. Talkative users assure a large part of the virtual social reality. For them to be on the Internet is one of the most important activities of each day/night, both into synchronic and a-synchronic manifestations. For them, the "net addiction" expression is not just a myth. The balance

between the effective social reality and the virtual social reality is strong lyorientated to the second form. Their life tends to be moved into the Internet. Sometimes this can be a functional approach, but other times this can be a main perturbation of their personality (for example, the Internet trolls).

The interferences among social space, virtual space and technological space generate new socio-cultural manifestations, and the self-definition of identity is one of the main content. All these new social resources are here, in our society and the scientific approaches cannot ignore them. The theoretical definition and interpretation of these new realities remain a main task in the contemporary agenda of socio-human science.

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*** *Internet World Stats* (2008). Retrieved on 03/28/2008 from http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats.htm.

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Internet Uses and Gratifications among Romanian Teenagers[1]

Diana Damean

The main objective of this study is to examine the purposes of Internet usage and the relationship between the frequency of Internet use and the motivations behind Internet use. The major theoretical framework of the study is the uses and gratifications theory, since this theory has effectively provided one of the most relevant perspectives to explain psychological and behavioural dimensions involving mediated communication. In this study, the following aspects of Internet usage are being examined: motivations for using the Internet, gendered patterns of Internet use, the attitudes toward the Internet, and the frequency of Internet use. Initially, it was predicted that a positive attitude towards the Internet would be explained by a more frequent use. This in turn produced the following series of hypothesis:

1. '*The frequency of Internet use will be positively related to the attitudes toward the Internet.*' Since previous research, shows that girls are more school-oriented than boys are, the next hypothesis wad added to the list.
2. '*When navigating on the Internet, girls are more oriented towards instrumental purposes, while boys are more oriented towards diversionary purposes.*' The salience of certain motivations may vary according to gender, therefore gender differences in using the Internet and the CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) were tested.
3. So a third hypothesis emerged, that '*the Internet is mainly used for entertainment purposes rather than for informational ones.*'

4. As previous research showed that CMC helps individuals extend their own social network considerably, it was hypothesized that '*CMC facilitates more frequent contact mostly with significant ties.*'

5. As the Internet often considered to have negative effects upon people's lives, it was also hypothesized that '*There is a significant correlation between the frequency of Internet use and teens' relationships with their friends and family.*'

6. In order to conceptualize the Internet usage patterns, two categories of behavioural aspects were examined: motivations for using the Internet and the frequency of using the Internet, resulting in the following hypothesis: *The motivations of use are predictors of the frequency of use.*

Introduction

The Computer and the Internet seem to have had a far larger and more serious impact on our society than the introduction of television ever has so far. These new technologies affect work, school and personal, family and business relationships, while television is primarily a leisure item. (Surveying 1999, cited in Ebersole, 2000). Social scientists have examined how the media have served to undermine the positive influences of family and social institutions (McLeod & Reeves, 1980; Wartella & Reeves, 1985, cited in Ebersole, 2000). Researchers exploring the effects of educational media, however, have argued from a similar set of assumptions to reach dramatically different conclusions. Instead of exploring the possible negative effects of the media, proponents of "powerful effects" have heralded the positive effects promised by the use of educational media in the classroom (e.g., Kozma, 1994; Salomon, 1978, cited in Ebersole, 2000).

New media technologies provide an abundance of choice and place a greater control over consumption in the hands of the consumer. When educational content is packaged as "edutainment," students may easily skip over the "education" part. Preliminary data collected during a pilot study (Ebersole, 1999) indicated that for middle and high school students accessing the WWW from computers in public schools, the most frequently visited sites were those that were also the least educational and "looking for something interesting" seemed to be the most likely explanation for the majority of sites visited. However, it seems that the few studies done so far dealt with or looked at indicators concerning why and how people use the Internet, while

many of the previous Internet studies tried to explore such unprecedented effects and functions by the Internet (Korgaonkar and Wolin, 1999).

The main objective of this study is to examine the purposes of Internet usage and the relationship between the frequency of Internet use and the motivations of Internet use. The major theoretical framework of the study is the uses and gratifications theory. This theory has effectively provided one of the most relevant perspectives to try to explain psychological and behavioural dimensions involving mediated communication (Lin, 1996). In this study, the following three aspects of Internet use are looked into:

1. Motivations for using the Internet.
2. Gendered patterns of Internet use.
3. Frequency of Internet use.

The Uses and Gratifications Theory

One mass media theory that has and is being regularly cited by many, as holding promise for the analysis of new media is 'Uses and Gratifications'. As an "active audience" theory, uses and gratifications provides a vantage point from which to look at the ways that audiences respond to the information made available by the new media. Newhagen and Rafaeli (1996) have suggested that uses and gratifications theory may be especially useful because of the "mutability" of the Web, and because the diversity of content is much greater for the WWW than for traditional electronic media. While television, radio, and to a lesser degree, print media, are subject to regulatory and societal scrutiny, the WWW is virtually unregulated; because of this, the WWW literally has something for everybody.

A 1995 study of college students' WWW usage resulted in "six motivational categories: entertainment, social interaction, passing the time, escape, information, and Web site preference" (Kaye, 1998, p. 34, cited in Ebersole, 2000). According to the ninth WWW User Survey conducted by Georgia Tech (GVU's 9th WWW user survey, 1998, cited in Ebersole, 2000), the WWW's youngest users (aged 11-20) use the web mainly for *entertainment* (81%), *education* (70%), *time wasting* (67%), and *personal information* (60%).

In order to develop the study's hypotheses and methodology, we review some uses and gratification research as well as Internet related studies.

The uses and gratifications theory is one of those viewed as a psychological communication perspective that focuses on individual use and choice by assessing why people use media and the gratifications obtained from the media use (Severin and Tankard, 1997). Katz et al. (1974) said that there are three basic tenets in this theory: first, media users are goal directed in their behaviour; second, they are active media users; third, they are aware of their needs and select media to gratify their needs.

The evolution of the uses and gratifications research has kept pace with development of the communication technologies. In other words, researchers have investigated the audiences' motivations and decisions to use a certain type of mediated communication tool whenever a new technology enters the stage of mass communication (Elliott and Rosenberg, 1987, cited in Ko, 2000). Therefore, the uses and gratifications studies have dealt with virtually every kind of mediated communication tool and such studies have offered insights regarding the various reasons why individuals use a certain medium of communication, socio-demographic descriptors of various types of media users, media behaviour, and the relations between expected and obtained gratifications resulting from certain media use motivations (Rubin, 1994).

The first and major criticism is that the theory has weak predictive power (Elliot, 1974, cited in Ko, 2000). Second, critics have argued that there is complexity and vagueness concerning key concepts in the theory, such as needs, motives, and behaviour (Rubin, 1994; Severin and Tankard, 1997). Finally, it was difficult to measure internal mental states with the use of self-report data, which is a popular data collection method of this theory (Blumler, 1979; Windahl, 1981, cited in Ko, 2000).

To overcome these limits, Rubin developed *ritualized* and *instrumental* media use motivations in order to distinguish between audiences whose media consumption behaviour is out of habit with less-defined gratification goals and audiences whose media usage is intentional and more involved with media content. Consequently, this theoretical development provided a better way to understand audience activity, which is one of the core concepts in the uses and gratifications perspective. This means that audiences' patterns of media use as well as attitudes and expectations toward media can be more effectively analysed by these media orientations (Rubin, 1994).

On the other hand, the studies that focus on Internet users mainly examined their demographic profiles, their Internet use habits, and their orientation

toward adopting new technologies (Atkin et al., 1998, cited in Ko, 2000). In the beginning, the studies found that the motivations for using the computer-mediated communication tool were directed toward informational purposes, but later studies, showed other motivations, such as entertainment and socialization. With respect to the demographic profiles of Internet users, although Lin's study (1998, cited in Ko, 2000) suggested that age and income are major influential factors on PC adoption, Korgaonkar and Wolin predicted that the role of demographics in determining Internet usage characteristics would be constantly decreased as the Internet becomes more mainstream (1999).

Research Hypotheses

The study extends past research of Internet usage studies by examining the motivations for using the Internet, the gender differences concerning the motivations of use, and the relationship between the frequency of Internet use and the motivations of Internet usage.

According to Conway and Rubin (1991), attitude toward a medium can be rated by the level of importance people attach to that medium. Past research suggested that attitudes vary among users and play a significant role in explaining why and how people use media (Rubin, 1986). Therefore, it was predicted that positive attitudes toward the internet would be explained by use that is more frequent. Thus, the following hypothesis is advanced: *The frequency of Internet use will be positively related to the attitudes toward the Internet* (H.1.).

Since previous research (Kutnick & Kington, 2005) shows that girls are more school-oriented than boys are, another hypothesis emerges *when navigating on the Internet, girls are more oriented towards instrumental purposes, while boys are more oriented towards diversionary purposes* (H.2.).

The salience of certain motivations may vary according to gender, therefore gender differences in using the Internet and the CMC (computer-mediated communication) will be tested. Moreover, based on previous studies (Ebersole, 1999; 2000), it was hypothesized that *the Internet is mainly used for entertainment purposes rather than for informational ones* (H.3.).

Previous research (Boase et al., 2006) showed that CMC helps individuals extend their social network considerably. Therefore, it was hypothesized that *CMC facilitates contact that is more frequent mostly with significant ties* (H.4.).

As other researchers noted (Boase et al., 2006), the Internet is often considered to have negative effects upon people's lives. Therefore, it was

also hypothesized that *there is a significant correlation between the frequency of Internet use and teens' relationships with their friends and family* (H.5.)

In order to conceptualize the Internet usage patterns, two categories of behavioural aspects have been examined: motivations for using the Internet and the frequency of using the Internet. The study will try to explain what variables predict the frequency of Internet use (Rubin, 1994). Thus, the following hypothesis results: *The motivations of use are predictors of the frequency of use* (H.6.). In order to test these hypotheses, the next section presents the research method adopted in this study.

Sample and Data Collection

Survey research is a predominant uses and gratifications method and consistently validated by past studies (Rubin, 1981, cited in Ko, 2000). The original study data was collected through self-report questionnaires; this has been useful for analysing motivations and patterns of media use (Conway and Rubin, 1991). Our study sample consisted of 1806 pupils from 85 classes (5th to 12th grade), from various schools and high schools in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. Respondents ranged in age from 10 to 20. The mean age was 15.53 years (SD=1.70) and the median age was 16 years. 42.3% of the respondents were male, and 57.7% were female[2].

Internet Usage Motivations

Each participating respondent indicated their level of agreement with a number of statements, based on prior research of uses and gratifications, about their reasons for using the Internet. The statements derived from five motivational dimensions: *personal information*, *entertainment*, *infotainment*, *socialisation and connectedness*, *personal identity*. Although motives are different among individuals with diverse socio-demographic backgrounds (Lin, 1999, cited in Ko, 2000), these statements were supposed to cover most of the motivational dimensions of Internet users. A 5-point scale was used ranging from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very often) about each statement.

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[2] For detailed methodological information, see annex.

The motivation scales reported an internal consistency, as it follows: for the Internet navigation motivations of use, alpha=0.80; for the email motivations of use, alpha=0.85; for the messenger motivations of use, alpha=0.85; and for the chat motivations of use, alpha=0.91.

Attitudes toward the Internet

In order to figure out attitudes of respondents toward the Internet, a 5-point scale was used, ranging from 1 (not at all interested) to 5 (very interested) and the respondents were asked to indicate the importance of the Internet in their lives. The mean of the total attitude index was 3.83 (SD=0.89). Boys appeared to be more interested in the internet than girls were (χ^2 =21,536, p<.01, N=1616; girls: M=3.76, SD=0.87; boys: M=3.94, SD=0.90).

The frequency of use was measured by asking the participants to indicate the number of hours they normally spend on the Internet on a weekday (M=2.96, Median=3.00; for boys M=3.20, while for girls M=2.77), as well as on a weekend day (M=5.19, Median=5.00; for boys M=5.80, while for girls M=4.74). By comparing the means, significant differences were obtained (p<.01), therefore it resulted that boys are more frequent Internet users than girls, both on week-days and on week-end days. Participants were also asked to indicate how often they accessed the Internet during the last three months, on a scale ranging from 1 (daily or almost daily) to 5 (not at all). Boys seemed to be more frequent Internet users than girls were (χ^2 = 23,899, p<.01, N=1737), with 68.9% of the boys and 57.8% of the girls accessing the Internet daily.

The data confirmed the first hypothesis: the attitude towards the Internet is a positive correlate of the frequency of use. The numbers of hours per week teenagers spend using the Internet (M=25.36, Median=23.00, SD=15.36) is a significant correlate of the attitude towards the medium (R=.410, p<.01), meaning that the more time they spend on the Internet, the higher is their interest in the medium.

Teenagers' Motivations of Internet Use

To begin with, all the five motivations of Internet, computer and CMC use were looked into and re-examined. The conclusions reached in Ebersole's study (1999) were confirmed by our own results and findings, as according to data, teenagers are not using the Internet mainly for educational purposes.

Instead, they rather browse the Internet in order to learn more about their favourite pastimes (32.9%), to watch what others have filmed (28.5%), and to a lesser extent, to learn more and be better informed about their favourite celebrities (19.7%), or about fashion and clothing (15.1%). Only 22.7% use the Internet often to find out information about school, and even less (10.2%) to find out how to improve their learning skills and to learn how to obtain better results. It appears that the most frequently visited websites are not the educational ones, but those considered interesting and entertaining.

The email (as a mean of asynchronous communication) is not very popular among adolescents; however, it is mainly used to interact and connect with core ties, as 24.9% of the respondents are using it often and very often to communicate with their close friends, 21.7% use it to communicate with schoolmates, and 14.2% with their parents or relatives. As for significant ties, email is mainly used to contact persons who are abroad (19.1%) and persons they met on the Internet (10.2%).

The topics discussed on the email are rather *diversionary*, with 18.2% of the respondents using the email to plan their leisure time with friends and schoolmates, 15.6% discussing about their favourite activities, and 12% forwarding jokes and funny messages, or the addresses of interesting sites (10.3%). The *instrumental* topics are quite scarce, as only 9% of the respondents are using the email to talk about homework and school projects. Just like the Internet navigation, the email is not used for educational purposes, but for entertainment (relaxation, pastime, fun) ones, and for disseminating interesting information among friends.

70.1% of the respondents use the metropolitan network (the hub), of which 96.9% use it as entertainment provider (to download films, music or games), while 27.8% use it for connectedness and social interaction motivations.

The most popular mean of mediated communication among teenagers is, by far, the instant messenger (IM). It is largely used to keep contact with core ties (82.5% of the respondents use it often and very often in order to talk to their friends, and 72.8% use it to talk to their schoolmates), followed by contact with significant ties – a category which can be divided into persons located at large distance (31.3% keep in touch with Romanians who moved abroad, 15.9% talk to people from Romania, and 14.9% talk to persons of another nationality who live abroad) and persons they met on the Internet and never met directly (20.5% talk to people from Cluj and 9%

talk to persons of another nationality). The main motivation for using the instant messenger is social interaction and connectedness.

The chat seems to be used for similar purposes; however, it does not seem to have as many teenage users on it as messenger chat seems to at present. Chat is mainly being used to contact the core ties of those surveyed (29.4% of the respondents use chat often and talk to their friends and schoolmates), followed by contacting significant ties located at greater distances (19.2% talk to friends from Romania, 17.8% talk to Romanians who live abroad, 11.4% talk to persons of other nationality who live abroad), as a cheaper alternative to keep contact. Chat is also being used to meet people and to make new friends. Thus, 14% of the respondents use the it to talk to friends from Romania they have not met directly, 13.1% talk to friends from abroad they never met directly, and 13% start conversations with strangers.

The computer can also be used for playing games, both alone and as part of a team, the latter requiring an internal network or an Internet connection. The most popular games played alone are the sport games (33.4%) and the first person shooter (FPS) games (20.7%), followed by the real time strategy (RTS) games (17.6%), the adventure games (15.3%), and the role playing games (RPG) (14.8%). The same games scored less when played in a team, although the first ones among teenagers' preferences were still sport games (17.7%) and FPS (17.7%), followed by RTS games (8.9%), RPG (8.5%), and adventure games (6.2%).

Teenagers may prefer to play computer games alone as a way to pass their time, to relax or to escape a boring or unsatisfying reality. The games they prefer, whether played alone or in a team, are games that require masculine qualities, such as physical strength and aggressiveness (sport games and FPS games), while games requiring thinking and creation (RTS games, RPG and adventure games) come second; the explanation is indicative that most gamers are boys.

As it resulted from our analysis, teenagers use the computer and the Internet mostly for connectedness and entertainment purposes. Their favourite form of CMC is the messenger, followed by the chat and the email. The results showed that teenagers prefer the synchronous communication to the asynchronous one. Few of the adolescents seem to use the Internet for *instrumental motivations*; however, the search for information is more popular under the form of infotainment.

Differences among teenage girls and boys

From the previous data, a few gender differences resulted. I will try to explain these gendered preferences of Internet use, by focusing on each type of motivation. As the email, the messenger and the chat are means of computer-mediated communication (CMC), it was interesting to see how this affects the use of other means of communication, such as the mobile phone. A gender comparison was made in order to certify patterns of CMC use and mobile phone use.

(1) Gender differences in personal information motivations

When seeking information, girls and boys seem to have different interests. Girls are more likely to search for information regarding school (χ^2 = 71,701, p<.01, N=1724) and health (χ^2 =36,357, p<.01, N=1712), while boys are more likely to search for information regarding fighting techniques ($\chi2$ =173,422, p<.01, N=1699) and advice on sex life (χ^2=18,216, p<.01, N=1708). This supports previous findings on girls being more school-inclusive and boys being more school-exclusive (Kutnick & Kington, 2005), a tendency that remains constant in what concerns the purposes of Internet use as well. These significant differences support the second hypothesis, as, when navigating on the Internet, girls tend to be more oriented toward instrumental purposes, while boys tend to be more oriented toward diversionary purposes.

(2) Gender differences in infotainment motivations

Infotainment can be easily defined as not quite information and as not only entertainment. In what regards navigating on the Internet for infotainment purposes, boys are more likely to read online newspapers and magazines (χ^2=44,758, p<.01, N=1675). To find out more about their favourite activities (χ^2= 86,555, p<.01, N=1705). To find out what events will take place in Cluj (χ^2= 43,151, p<.01, N=1717), and to find pornographic materials (χ^2=318,679, p<.01, N=1684). While girls are more likely to browse for information related to fashion and clothing (χ^2=89,784, p<.01, N=1702). This we feel can be explained as girls are culturally more inclined to pay attention to the way they look more than boys do, and the Internet is the best source of information in terms of accessibility, financial costs, and amount

of information available. On the contrary, boys are raised to be more active in the public space, which explains their tendency to keep themselves informed about the latest events. In addition, since boys are traditionally more interested in and preoccupied with sex than girls are, it is reasonably expected that they should search for sex-related materials on the Internet.

(3) Gender differences in entertainment motivations

We can talk about teenagers' entertainment motivations both when browsing the Internet, and when playing computer games.

When browsing the Internet, boys are more likely to watch what others have filmed (χ^2=89,173, p<.01, N=1712), to download ring-tones for their mobile phone (χ^2=56,048, p<.01, N=1704) and to find materials with violent content (χ^2=279,559, p<.01, N=1711); there were no significant differences regarding the other types of use. The existing differences can be explained as boys spend more time on the Internet and may just browse for fun as a pastime. In addition, they are culturally more inclined towards violence, which may explain their tendency of watching violent materials as a form of entertainment.

As far as computer games are concerned, the results were as expected; boys are far more likely to play various types of computer games, whether alone or in a team. When playing alone, they seem to prefer violent games (FPS) (χ^2=626,372, p<.01, N=1703) and sport games (χ^2=486,384, p<.01, N=1713), followed by strategy games (χ^2=273,324, p<.01, N=1686), adventure games (χ^2=147,092, p<.01, N=1674) and role-playing games (χ^2= 95,486, p<.01, N=1676). As for playing in a team, their preferences range from FPS games (χ^2=598,386, p<.01, N=1709), and sport games (χ^2=378,742, p<.01, N=1701), to RTS games (χ^2=228,893, p<.01, N=1688), RPG (χ^2= 148,001, p<.01, N=1688), and adventure games (χ^2= 96,724, p<.01, N=1686). Once again, boys' more aggressive and more competitive nature explain their preference towards violent games and sport games, both played alone and in a team. Computer games often provide escape from the real world, offering a more pleasurable alternative. Although this is not a general case, most Romanian teenage girls rarely play on the computer. This may be because they do not have the time or they have other preferences in what concerns escapism; or simply because the games are for male users and they are not attractive for "feminine" girls.

(4) Gender differences in social interaction and connectedness motivations

Unlike other types of motivations, connectedness is used a lot more by Internet users. The email, the messenger, the chat and even certain websites are used in order to interact with core or significant ties, or even to get in contact with strangers. There are, however, differences regarding the way girls and boys connect to others.

For instance, boys are more likely to browse Internet websites in order to find dating partners (χ^2 = 67,001, p<.01, N=1711) than girls do.

As for the email (a mean of asynchronous communication), boys use it more often than girls do in order to communicate with their core ties, such as close friends (χ^2=14,824, p<.01, N=1264), classmates (χ^2=12,136, p<.01, N=1258) or parents and relatives (χ^2=21,671, p<.01, N=1234), but also with significant ties such as their teachers (χ^2=17,357, p<.01, N=1237) and persons they have met online, but have never met face to face. Here we can talk about distance in terms of easy or difficult access to the person, but also in terms of whether they ever had a direct contact. Thus, we can talk about email contact with persons the boys have never met face to face, who are located in the same town, making direct access easier (χ^2=18,054, p<.01, N=1252); and also about contact with persons the boys have never met face to face, who are located further (but in the same country), making direct access more difficult (χ^2=15,520, p<.01, N=1251). This happens because boys are more frequent email users than girls, sending more emails both daily (χ^2=35,339, p<.01, N=1210) and weekly (χ^2=16,921, p<.01, N=1194). Therefore, they are also more likely to use the email for other purposes as well, such as dating persons they do not know (χ^2=53,489, p<.01, N=1244), talking about what happens in Cluj (χ^2=27,884, p<.01, N=1241), or asking their friends to call them or to use the messenger (χ^2=17,062, p<.01, N=1253). Thus, boys are more frequent users of asynchronous communication than girls are.

Both girls and boys seem to use the instant messenger (a mean of synchronous communication) in a similar manner; however, a few differences occur, the most notable one regarding setting up dates with persons met online, something boys are more likely to do than girls (χ^2=57,654, p<.01, N=1573). As we have seen before, boys have the tendency to find a date on the Internet more often than either girls do, because they probably perceive themselves to be less exposed or possibly, due to the easier and faster access, the medium provides. For the same reasons, boys are more likely to

talk to persons they have never met directly, whether from Cluj (χ^2=14,306, p<.01, N=1580), from Romania (χ^2=9,680, p<.05, N=1575) or from abroad (χ^2=12,654, p<.05, N=1578). In addition, boys talk more often to persons they met online, as well as face to face, both from Cluj (χ^2=10,474, p<.05, N=1578) and abroad (χ^2=12,910, p<.05, N=1572). This could be due to boys' tendency to enlarge their social network by contacting significant ties more often than girls, who are more focused on contacting their core ties.

The chat –e.g. Internet Relay Chat, acronym IRC- (another mean of synchronous communication) is used for similar ends by both sexes. However, boys seem more likely to talk to friends located at a distance, but in the same country (χ^2=17,379, p<.01, N=619), to talk to persons from Romania they have not yet met personally (χ^2=22,797, p<.01, N=622). That may be because boys tend to expand their social network, while girls are more interested in preserving their core ties.

(5) Gender differences in identity motivations

From the five types of Internet usage motivations we measured, identity issues are only mentioned in connection with giving false information about oneself in order to seem more interesting or possibly less traceable. Thus, girls lie more often than boys do about their real age (χ^2 = 24,738, p<.01, N=1749) and about the schools they attend (χ^2 = 9,290, p<.01, N=1744). There were no significant gender differences in what regards the lies about one's sex, one's looks, occupation or personality.

The gender dimension did not seem to explain enough of the variance in Internet use, meaning that other variables (age, income, parental education, etc.) might be present as well and these should be taken into consideration when analysing the motivations of Internet use.

Mobile phone use

Before the use of computers, the most widespread mean of communication was the mobile phone, therefore it was interesting to see whether mobile phone use supplements CMC. The survey showed that 95.4% of the respondents have their own mobile phone, 1.7% of the respondents have a phone others are using too, and 3% do not have a cell phone. The respondents who have a cell phone use it mostly to connect with their core ties (74.8% talk to their parents, 72.2% use it to talk to their friends, and 51% call their

schoolmates). The mobile phone is also used for its additional facilities, such as sending written messages (69.6%), or beeping others in order to be called back **(**59.9%), but also for taking photos (49.9%), filming (33.5%), playing games (25.7%), and listening to the radio (22.1%).

Mobile phones are still popular, not only as means of communication, but also because they have also started to include most computer and camera features, such as taking photos, filming, recording, playing music, watching films, playing games, sending written and image messages, and newer models also connect to the Internet.

In order to explain communication patterns in the younger generation, these were also taken into consideration. I analysed gender differences in mobile phone use as another form of connectedness that may explain the less frequent use of CMC.

The mobile phone is mainly being used to communicate, but it is also being used for entertainment purposes. Girls are heavier mobile phone users than boys, 97.9% of the girls using their own mobile phone as opposed to 92% of the boys (χ^2=35,704, p<.01, N=1694). Therefore, girls are more likely use the mobile to phone their core ties, such as their parents (χ^2=17,034, p<.01, N=1676), friends (χ^2=15,225, p<.01, N=1697) or schoolmates (χ^2=15,184, p<.01, N=1683). The mobile phone is also used for initiating communication or conventionally asking to be called back by beeping the other, something that girls seem to do a lot more often than boys (χ^2=92,073, p<.01, N=1683). Girls are also more likely to use the mobile phone to send written messages (χ^2=134,874, p<.01, N=1674). Girls' motivations for mobile phone use explain their lesser interest in CMC, as the cell phone grants more immediate access and it is also more wide spread among teenagers (being cheaper than a computer or an Internet subscription). Moreover, they do not need to email their ties when they can send them an SMS or even call them.

If girls seem to use the mobile for communication and connectedness purposes more often than boys do, boys seem to use it for entertainment purposes more often than girls do. Thus, boys are more likely to play games on the mobile phone (χ^2=48,222, p<.01, N=1680) and to film using the mobile phone (χ^2=46,195, p<.01, N=1688). This is consistent with their overall preference for entertainment employing technology. The mobile phone becomes a substitute for the computer (so they can play to pass their time when they are not at home) and a substitute for a camera, helping them

record something interesting which they can later download on their computer or even disseminate on the Internet.

Correlation Analyses

In order to test the third hypothesis, the motivations for Internet navigation were grouped into four categories (Personal information, Infotainment, Entertainment, and Connectedness), and correlated with the frequency of use (the number of hours per week spent navigating on the Internet).

Correlations between the frequency of use (number of hours per week) and the types of motivations for Internet navigation

	Personal information motivations	Infotainment motivations	Entertainment Motivations	Connectedness motivations
Hours per week spent using the Internet	,147**	,211**	,353**	,196**
Personal information motivations		,530**	,387**	,285**
Infotainment motivations			,432**	,213**
Entertainment Motivations				,385**

** p<0.01

The most significant correlate was the Entertainment motivation (R=.353, p<.01), followed by the Infotainment (R=.211, p<.01), Connectedness (R=.196, p<.01) and Personal Information (R=.147, p<.01) ones. In other words, the more time teenagers navigate on the Internet, the more they use it for the above mentioned purposes, but mostly for entertainment, and least for information, a finding which supports our hypothesis (H.3.). Therefore, teens' access to the Internet does not translate into access to information (education), but rather into access to entertainment. By facilitating teens' access to the medium, the schools (and the families) that invest in computers and Internet connections need to be aware that these will be primary used for fun, for social interaction, and only ultimately for education.

As for the fourth research hypothesis, the frequency of CMC use was correlated with contacting core and significant ties.

Although the email is not very popular among teenage Internet users, it was interesting to see the relation between the frequency of email use (the number of emails sent weekly) and the type of connections it gratifies.

Correlations between the frequency of email use
and the contact with core and significant ties

	Emails sent to core ties	Emails sent to significant ties met directly	Emails sent to significant ties never met directly
Approximately how many emails do you send weekly?	,308**	,338**	,301**
Emails sent to connect with core ties		,583**	,471**
Emails sent to connect with significant ties met directly			,647**

** $p < 0.01$

Therefore, it resulted that a higher number of emails means firstly more interaction with significant ties met directly (located far, but met personally), secondly – with core ties, and thirdly – with significant ties never met directly.

Since core ties can be contacted directly, on the phone or on the messenger, email is mainly used to interact with significant ties who live far away and who are more difficult (or more expensive) to contact otherwise.

In addition, there is a stronger motivation to keep contact with them since the relationships established with persons met directly are stronger than with persons never met personally.

Correlations between the frequency of Internet use
and the contact with core and significant ties

	Contact with core ties	Contact significant ties met directly	Contact with significant ties never met directly
Hours per week spent using the Internet	,288**	,267**	,345**
Contact with core ties		,542**	,428**
Contact with significant ties met directly			,638**

** $p < 0.01$

The messenger is, as previously seen, the most popular form of CMC, being widely used to connect with the core ties. However, when correlating the frequency of Internet use with the ties teens connect with, it appears that more time spent online means more connections with significant ties never met directly (R=.345, p<.01). The chi-square analyses showed that messenger is most frequently being used to contact the core ties, regardless of the number of hours spent online. Whenever teens have more time available for Internet use, the possibility to connect to significant ties they never met directly (but probably met online) increases.

The results support the fourth hypothesis as more frequent CMC use, leads to more frequent contact with significant ties. However there is a difference between contacting significant ties using the email (the most frequently contacted significant ties are those previously met face to face) and contacting significant ties using the messenger (the most frequently contacted significant ties are those never met directly). There was also a high correlation between the frequency of CMC use and the contact with core ties, both on email and on messenger. Although correlations were also run between the frequencies of use and contacting ties using the chat, the scores obtained were not significant, probably due to the reduced number of chat users.

In what concerns the so-called "negative" effects of Internet use, such as affecting teens' social lives (isolating and alienating them) or affecting other activities they would normally perform, the results were not at all alarming. On the contrary, the more time they spend on the Internet, the more often they get together with their friends (R=.146, p<.01) and go out with them to the movies (R=.155, p<.01), in clubs (R=.213, p<.01), or simply for a walk (R=.161, p<.01). It appears that spending more time on the Internet does not restrict the amount of time they spend with core ties, but rather increases it and strengthens their social relations.

Moreover, respondents do not consider that the time they spend online affects the time they would normally allocate to performing other activities, such as studying (R= -.123, p<.01), sleeping (R= -.156, p<.01), going out with friends (R= -.074, p<.01) or watching TV (R= -.069, p<.05). Contrary to common fears, the Internet appears to facilitate communication between family and friends. In order to spend more time online, people do not give up interacting with their family and friends, but to less important activities. They claim they do not lose track of the time when they navigate on the

Internet at night (R= -.123, p<.01). However, they seem to have fewer friends since they have started using the Internet (R= -.115, p<.01).

We hypothesized the existence of a significant correlation between the frequency of Internet use and teenagers' social development and relationship (H.5.) These results were contrary to our common expectations: the Internet does not have a negative impact on teens' social lives, but rather a positive one. However, such findings must be taken with a grain of salt. The scores we obtained, although significant, were quite low, meaning that these relations are not very strong. Perhaps teenagers are not aware of how much their social lives are affected by the use of Internet and do not realize they are spending less time performing other activities.

Predicting frequency of Internet use

The sixth research hypothesis concerns the predictive utility of the Internet usage motivations variables for explaining the frequency of Internet use. For this purpose, the frequency of use is regressed on several motivation variables (for different means of CMC), controlling for age, ethnicity, gender, depression, socializing, income, negative effects of the Internet, and mother's education. This equation reveals that only three of the five Internet usage motivations are significant predictors: *Connectedness* (p<.01), *Entertainment* (p<.01), and *Infotainment* (p<.01). Overall, 23 percent of the total variation was explained by the simultaneous predictive power of all the motivation variables through this multiple regression model. In terms of the relative effects of the three motivation variables, standardized Beta values for the frequency of Internet use are .26 for *Connectedness*, .18 for *Entertainment*, and .10 for *Infotainment*. Thus, if the motivation of use is connectedness, it can be predicted that teenagers will use the Internet more frequently. The same may be said about entertainment and infotainment motivations, although, due to their low scores, they are less influent upon the frequency of use.

In sum, the hypothesis is only partially supported by this analysis, as only three motivation variables are significantly predictive of the frequency of Internet use. In addition, two other predictors emerged from the independent variables: *negative effects of Internet use* (p<.01) and *mother's education* (p<.01), both having negative effects on the dependent variable.

This means that, as mothers' level of education is higher; their children spend fewer hours online. In addition, if the Internet has fewer negative effects upon teenagers' lives, we can predict they will use it more frequently. Although the values of these two variables were significant, they were quite low (Beta values = -.11), which means they affect the frequency of Internet use to a lesser extent than the others do.

Multiple Regression Analysis for Predicting Frequency of Internet Use

Dependent variable: Frequency of Internet use

Explanatory Variables	Non-standardized coefficients	Standardized coefficients (β)	Significance
Infotainment	,33	,10	,005
Entertainment	,95	,18	,000
Connectedness	,56	,26	,000
Negative effects of internet use	-,70	-,11	,000
Mother's education	-1,45	-,11	,000

R^2 = 23%

$F_{(15, 866)}$ = 18.57, p=.01

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The Social Capital of Young Internet Users[1]

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Abstract

The Internet has become one of the most important spaces in young people's life. Once with the exponential growth of users, especially among teenagers, one of the greatest fears that our society share is that the constant online relationships will substitute the offline ones, affecting so the social order. It seems that the most frequent activities which are conducted through Internet are the messenger communication, the use of metropolitan network, the social network and the electronic mail. Boys and people coming from the atypical family structures are accumulating more virtual friends in the process of using of these means of communication. Also, in spite of the public fear, it seems that the social capital of the Internet users is not affected by the time spent in front of the computer and by the number of their virtual friends.

Although there is no sufficient data to support the hypothesis that the more virtual friends someone has, the more isolated from the physical world he becomes, these results bring into discussion interesting aspects of the Internet users' social life. Future studies should be conducted in order to understand better the all range of effects that the Internet brings to our life, and especially in the young peoples' life.

Keywords: Internet, social capital

Introduction

In recent decades, 'social capital' has become one of the most popular terms in the social sciences, particularly across the disciplines of sociology, economics, education and public health. The term is generally described as

a resource accessed through social networks (*apud*. Ferlander, 2003). Despite the widespread attention that social capital and his variants have received much confusion remains. In the IT communicational sphere, the term could be easily assimilated with the concept of 'virtual social capital' meaning the social relations that the child is forming in the virtual space.

Social capital

Definitions and elements of social capital

Social capital is an important concept, frequently used in areas like business, organizational psychology, political science and sociology, defined as the advantage that a certain person might have because of his/her particular position in an interactional system. Although the term "social capital" originated as early as 1920, the initial theoretical development of the concept is attributed to French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and American sociologist James Coleman (Portes, 2000). Bourdieu (1986) was the first sociologist to systematically analyze the concept of social capital. He defined social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of essentially institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition (*apud*. Dica & Singh, 2002).

According to Coleman (*apud*. Ferlander, 2003), the concept refers to the benefits gained from strong relationships at organizational level. The social capital becomes both individually and organizationally efficient (Coleman, 1990; Fukuyama, 1995 *apud*. Ferlander, 2003). This view is shared by Putnam (1995: 67) who defines social capital as "features of social organization such as networks, norms and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit". For Putnam, members of communities rich in social capital engage in mutually beneficial collective action. Implicit in the work of Coleman and Putnam is the notion that social capital can be created and built up in communities where it is lacking and ultimately transformed into other forms of capital (Leonard, 2005).

Social capital is defined as the norms and social relations embedded in the social structure of societies that enable people to coordinate actions to achieve desired goals (World Bank, 2000).

Since the 70s there has been a major increase of interest in the concept of social support and many disciplines are concerned about this phenomenon

such as anthropology, gerontology, health education, psychology, social work and sociology.

Social support can be defined as the "resources provided by interpersonal relationships" (Cohen, Syme, 1985: 4). Ganster, Mayes and Fusilier (1986) used a similar approach to define social support with further more considerations. They saw social support being the helping relationships and the quality of them (Ganster, Mayes & Fusilier, 1986).

In the existing literature social support is discussed in terms of instrumental support, informational and emotional support (Cohen, Syme, 1985). A more recent paper underlines clearly that seeking social support is seen as a coping strategy (Carver, Weintraub, Scheier, 1989). We can talk about seeking social support for instrumental reasons, which is "seeking advise, assistance or information" and seeking social support for emotional reasons which can consist in "moral support, sympathy, or understanding" (Carver, Weintraub, Scheier, 1989: 269).

Social capital and Internet

The Internet is a complex landscape of applications and purposes as well as users therefore it should be studied in that way. It is obvious that young people are using Internet in an increasing number and for a number of applications such as e-mail, instant messaging, blogs, and chat rooms. A recent European Commission report (2006) shows that 49% of EU residents access the Internet, 77% among these being aged 15-24:

Table 1. *Internet usage among teenagers aged 1-17*

Age	%
<5 years	9
6-7 years	34
8-9 years	51
10-11 years	68
12-13 years	85
14-15 years	87
16-17 years	88

Source: European commission, 2006: 15

Boys (52%) are using more frequent the Internet with all its applications than girls do (48%), and they tend to do it from an ealry age:

Table 2. *Internet usage by boys and girls aged 1-17*

% Internet usage	Boys	Girls
<5 years	9	9
6-7 years	37	30
8-9 years	55	47
10-11 years	67	69
12-13 years	85	84
14-15 years	91	84
16-17 years	88	88

Source: European commission, 2006: 16

Those who are using the Internet are showing an increasing exposure and commitment to Internet-based activities (Haythornthwaite, Wellman, 2002). This means that they take time from usual activities. The discussion is now about whether taking this time has positive or negative consequences. If we expend our social resources on maintaining ties with distant others or with strangers we may never meet face-to-face, this may compromise our local social relationships, which in turn may compromise our individual well-being (Kraut et al. 1998). Kraut's study *Internet paradox* highlights for the first time the possible negative consequences of Internet usage, meaning that a technology designed for strengthening the social relations could actually lead to social isolation, social anxiety, depression, and reduced social support.

The same conclusion is drawn by another study conducted later (Harman et al., 2005). However, another possibility drawn by literature is that the Internet may help us make connections to others: gaining another source of companionship, emotional support, help with jobs, and so forth, and may fill a void for those who currently operate in an alienating face-to-face environment. Most recent researches are talking about complex correlations, but generally positive between Internet usage and social capital (LaRose, Eastin, Gregg, 2001; Coget, Yamauchi, Suman, 2002; Gershuny, 2002; Postmes, Brunstig, 2002; Herring, 2004; Bakardjieva, Freenberg, 2004; Boase et al., 2006), with visible gender differences: girls are using more the e-mail for

maintaining close relationships with family and close friends, while boys are more orientated in maintaining significant ties (Boneva, Kraut, Frohlich, 2001). Yet another possibility is that the Internet does not embody any dramatic change in behavior but instead exaggerates what we already do: for example, increasing circles of friends for the outgoing and successful among us, and decreasing the circle for the rest (Haythornthwaite, 2005).

But still the statistics do not provide a clear position on this issue and can often be interpreted to support or refute the claim that the Internet is a solitary activity, harmful to social relations with others (DiMaggio et al. 2001; Simms, 2004; Franzen, 2003; Williams, 2007; Miyata, Kobayashi, 2008). There are three different ways in which the effects of the Internet on social capital can be conceptualized (*apud*. Quan-Hasse, Wellman, 2002):

- The Internet as a transformer of social capital, in terms of providing the means for inexpensive and convenient communication forms (Barlow, 1995; Wellman 2001b). This approach is based onto the low costs and often-asynchronous nature of interaction. The Internet users might spend their social-capital-building energies through virtual spaces rather than enhancing their existing real capital, but what matters at this point is that they use the Internet for social-capital-building activities and not that this capital is for online or offline communities.

- The Internet as diminishing the social capital; the Internet through its entertainment and information capabilities draws people away from family and friends. In doing so, Internet users tend to be more isolated and more depressed (Kraut *et al.*, 1998).

- The Internet as supplementing social capital, as an efficient social-building instrument (Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2002; Chen, Boase, & Wellman, 2002).

One potential outcome of virtual communities, as Blanchard and Horan (1998) considered, that might increase social capital is that they may augment face-to-face (FtF) communities and perhaps lessen the problems associated with decreasing FtF community participation. But, there are at least two other possible outcomes proposed by the authors, and these possibilities are that (a) virtual communities could detract from FtF communities and worsen the community participation problems or that (b) participation in the two types of communities might not even be related.

That is why, as participation in virtual space continues to grow and as this becomes more and more extended into our physical life we need a common theoretical framework that can help us understand the complex relationship between the online and the offline individual, and going further, the relationship between the constructed social capitals from both spaces. The lack of studies in Romanian space makes this issue more stringent.

Method

Sample and measurement

The sample consisted from 1806 students enrolled in Cluj-Napoca in secondary and upper-secondary school, aged 10-20. (M=15.53, SD=1.70). 42.2% subjects were boys and 57.8% girls. 78.2% were romanian, 20.6% were hungarian and 0.6% declared themself rroma (for further details see annex). A complex questionnaire of 49 items regarding the Internet usage was applied to the children enrolled in Cluj-Napoca's schools.

Results

Regarding the Internet usage, 30.8% subjects dedicate their time to instant messenger communication, 23.8% to social networks, 22.5% to e-mailing and 19.7% to metropolitan networks, while most unattractive seems to be the electronic journal (blog) with only 3.2%. Gender analysis reveals the following structure (figure 1):
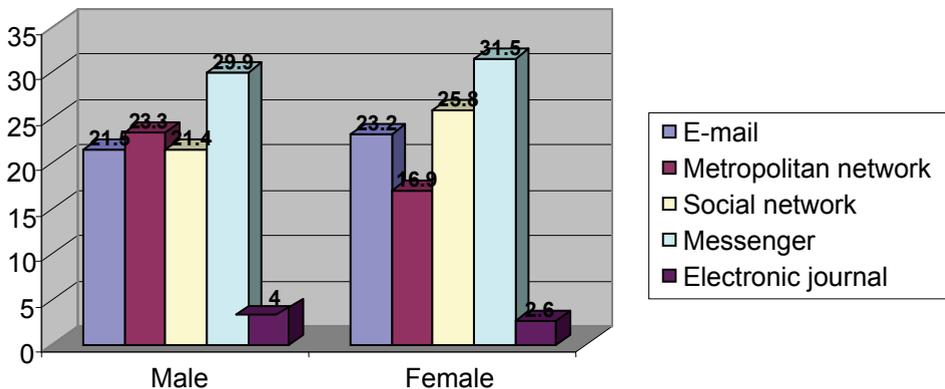
Figure 1. *Internet usage by gender (%)*

Boys tend to use more frequently the metropolitan network (χ^2 = 68.89, df = 1, p<0.05) and electronic journal (χ^2 = 9.40, df = 1, p<0.05) than girls do, but the Phi coefficient is very small (0.198 and 0.073). Girls tend to use more frequent the social network (χ^2 = 23.09, df = 1, p<0.05, Phi=0.115).

For an analysis regarding age and Internet usage we cut the distribution into two subsamples according to the median (Me = 16). From this perspective it seems that the young people tend to use more frequent the blog (χ^2 = 14.87, df = 1, p<0.05, Phi=0.092), and the older ones use more the e-mail (χ^2 = 48.19, df = 1, p<0.05, Phi=0.167) and messenger (χ^2 = 8.90, df = 1, p<0.05, Phi=0.072). Again the Phi coefficinet is very small telling that we could not be talking about a strong relationship. The family structure is important only in messenger usage, those from typical structures using it more frequently (χ^2 = 5.31, df = 1, p<0.05).

In trying to analyse the built social capital through the Internet, we observed that boys have more virtual friends (persons with whom they talk regularly but they have never met them face to face): $t_{(957,34)}$= 3.94, m_b=21.84, m_g=13.33, p<0.05. Considering the manner of usage, probably they take these friends from blogs (they also allow to post messages in the personal page almost to any person 42.1%, the rest being allowed only to close friends). The metropolitan network is used only by 21.6% for talking with friends, collegues and other persons. One possible explanation for this gender differences could be the time dedicated to Internet navigation. Boys dedicate in average 9.04 hours/week, and girls 7.60 hours (t = 5.16, p<0.05).

Another explanation could be the experience of boys in using the computer. Boys start using the computer at 9 years and the Internet usage at 12.13 years, while girls start in average to use the computer at 10.38 years and the Internet at 13.06 years. It seems so that there are statistical reasons to say that there are significant differences regarding the computer usage ($t_{(1673)}$= -10.33, p<0.05) and the Internet usage ($t_{(1275,37)}$= -7.53, p<0.05) between boys and girls.

If we try an analysis between typical and atypical families, children that are from atypical familial structures tend to have more virtual friends than those from typical families, but the p = .06. ($t_{(335,57)}$ = -1.86, m_{typ}=16.16, m_{atyp}=22.73, p<0.06).

Considering this construction of the social capital according to gender and family structure, the next question is how this affects the existing social

capital in the real space. The real social capital seems not to be affected by the construction of a certain virtual capital. The Internet usage is associated to more friends (χ^2 = 55.43, df = 2, p<0.05), and also this does not affects the going out with the friends they already have (χ^2 = 25.50, df = 2, p<0.05).

There are positive correlations between the number of virtual friends and the frequency of meeting with friends (r = .051, p<0.05), with going out to a movie (r = .141, p< 0.01), with going out in the clubs (r = .137, p<0.01) and with going out to a walk (r = .111, p< 0.01). Although the Pearson coefficient is small, it is significant in all cases. The U Mann-Whitney test revealed that the frequency of meeting with real persons is greater for boys in relation to going out in clubs (U = 331136, N_b = 715; N_f= 994, p = 0,012), and for girls in relation to going out for a walk (U = 312468.5, N_b = 717; N_f= 98, p = 0,001).

Discussion

For the first consideration we take into discussion the possible functions of Internet as Quan-Hasse and Wellman stated (2002):

- The Internet as a transformer of social capital, in terms of providing the means for inexpensive and convenient communication forms (Barlow, 1995; Wellman 2001b).
- The Internet as diminishing the social capital; (Kraut *et al.*, 1998).
- The Internet as supplementing social capital, as an efficient social-building instrument (Quan-Haase & Wellman, 2002; Chen, Boase, & Wellman, 2002).

We do not know (or we cannot prove with the data we have) if Internet use transforms social capital into a more virtual one or if it's supplementing it but we do know that the virtual social capital is not diminishing the number of face-to-face relations. To respond to the first two questions we need a comparative approach between users and not users. Into the same direction of the conclusions about Internet roles goes Blanchard and Horan (1998). They consider that one potential outcome for computer-mediated communication (CMC) such as e-mail, chat rooms etc. that might increase social capital is that they may augment face-to-face (FtF) communities and perhaps lessen the problems associated with the decreasing FtF community participation.

So, is internet a social capital builder? Or is it just taking time from other activities, and which are these? (Questions 44-49 regarded such other activities: going out with friends, walking, reading a book etc.) We cannot prove that Internet users are enhancing their social capital benefits because they are talking with their friends (FtF friends) for their problems and having superficial talks with the ones that they do not know. As previously stated we need to look at this in a comparative manner having a control sample of non-users.

We don't know if they enhanced their face-to-face network from the internet because we know that the FtF network is used with the real social capital functions (again, with people that they don't know directly, do they have superficial talks?) Those who are using the Internet mainly for fun do they have smaller social capital? We could try to answer these questions after the qualitative research data analysis or in further researches.

Another possible direction of discussions can be extracted from teenagers' statements. Parts of them were saying that since they are using internet (CMC) they have more friends (50, 4%). We do not know how they measure it but there are also 37.9% teens that aren't seeing any differences in the structure of their group of friends. 11.7% cannot offer an exact measurement of their group of friends before and after CMC using.
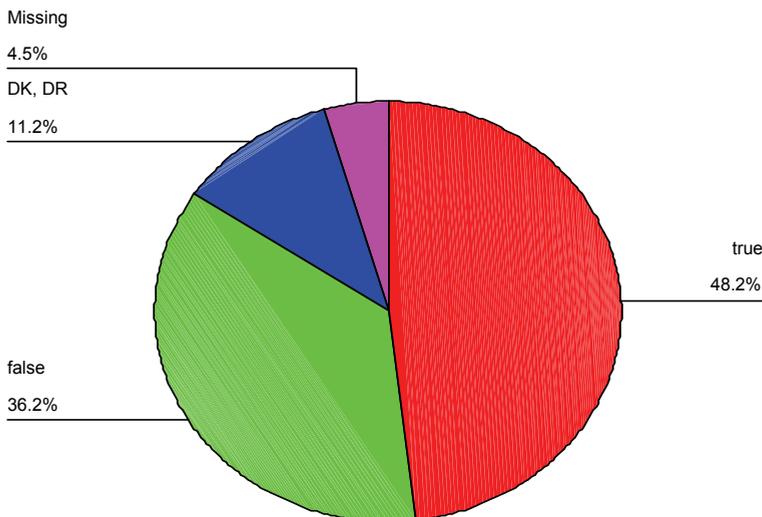
Figure 2. *Since I use the Internet I have more friends*

The above statement is sustained by their increased interest for others perceived by them recently. Only 7, 4% of them declared that they lost their interest in others.

Table 3. *I have lost interest in others*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Does not characterize me	1177	65.2	67.8	67.8
	Does characterize me a little	432	23.9	24.9	92.6
	Does characterize me	87	4.8	5.0	97.6
	Does characterize me a lot	41	2.3	2.4	100.0
	Total	1737	96.2	100.0	
Missing	System	69	3.8		
Total		1806	100.0		

Without research data to sustain the idea, we think that a further possible direction of the discussions can be trying to answer to questions like (a) Are there a couple of other variables influencing both face-to-face and virtual social participation? (b) Which are those capacities, social communicating skills necessary for these? (c) Are they the same or different for both contexts, FtF and virtual one?

In light of these data to support our conclusions we consider, at the end, that there are no proves for negative effects of using CMC, the positive ones needing stronger evidence.

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Czech Adolescents on the Internet: Creating Identity and Risk Behaviour

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Introduction

When dealt with internet as space for communication and working with information of various contents, the Internet is a phenomenon acting upon both establishing and maintaining interpersonal relations, and individuals themselves. In case of Czech adolescents, the importance of the Internet may be boosted by several factors. One of them is the highest share of Internet users in the group of those aged between 12 and 18 years, compared to other groups, whereas the second most frequent Internet users are young people aged 19 – 26 years (Lupač & Sládek, 2008). According to two representative surveys of the Czech population (World Internet Project – the Czech Republic 2006 and 2007), which will be described in further detail below, the penetration of this medium has been rising year by year: in 2006, 88% of the adolescents aged 12 – 18 years had access to the Internet, while a year later the Internet was used by 93% of them. Such results imply that a vast majority of youths are in contact with the Internet. Another specific factor of the adolescents is a relatively low age for them to become familiar with the Internet. From the Internet history point of view, Czech adolescents are the first generation to be socialised, to a large extent, with the help of the Internet. The importance of the Internet among adolescents may also be reflected by the highest numbers of online close

friends they have in comparison with other age groups (Šmahel, 2007). However, online friendship relations are not at the expense of real-life friends (Štětka & Šmahel, 2008). The Internet is thus becoming a place where adolescents establish friendships in the same way they do in the real world.

Descriptive characteristics of the Internet use among Czech adolescents

The Internet environment is highly variable, providing with a large range of applications that adolescents may use. In September 2007, a sociological and psychological survey of the Czech population was carried out, dealing with the use of the Internet (World Internet Project – the Czech Republic). The sample containing 1,586 respondents was made representative with respect to sex, education, age, region, and size of the place of residence. Following the questionnaire survey, it was revealed that the total of 869 respondents (i.e. 55%) had access to the Internet. The following chart (Graph 1) shows the preferences of some online activities Czech adolescents aged 12 – 19 years spend most time with. It includes the shares of only those respondents using the Internet (i.e. 93% adolescents in 2007).

The graph classifies the columns according to "at least 1x daily" and "several times daily". Thus, on the left, there are the activities which adolescents do most often, i.e. those with the highest share of "at least 1x daily". Most frequently, adolescents use the email (53% at least once per day) or, as far as communication tools are concerned, instant messengers (ICQ, MSN) (40% daily). Nevertheless, adolescents also play online games very often: 45% daily, in total 79% at least once per week, while only 7% do not play games at all.

Another frequent activity is downloading or listening to online music (39% daily), searching humour pages (27% daily), and downloading or watching videos (20% daily). Searching for school-related information is also an important category: for this purpose, 60% youths use the Internet every week, while there are mere 6% of them not using the Internet for this purpose. In total, 56% adolescents read blogs at least once a month, while only 21% admitted surfing erotic web pages (thus 79% never browse erotic sites). It may be claimed that such low interest in websites with sexual content could be explained by the form of interviewing which was performed face to face. It is thus quite likely that the real shares of adolescents browsing erotic sites are significantly higher.
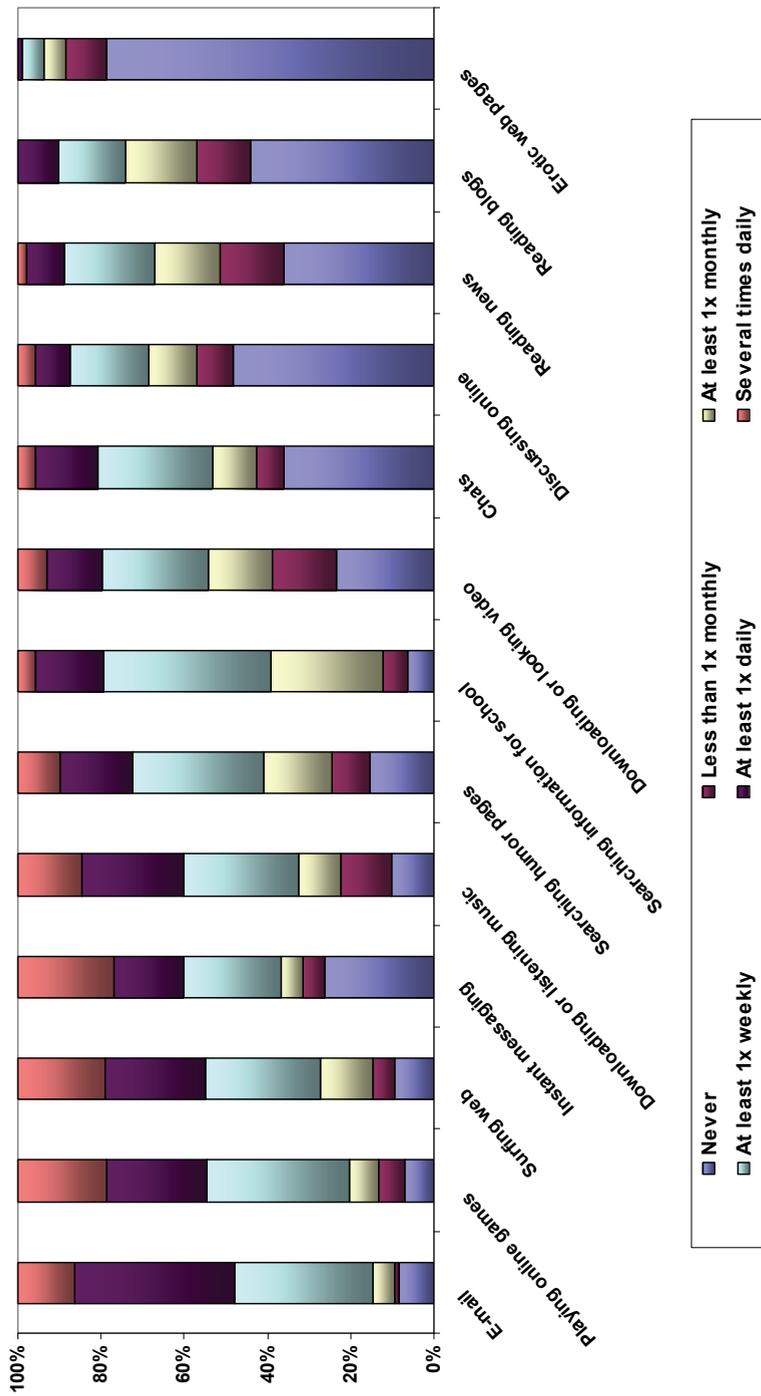
Graph 1. *Czech Adolescents Internet Use (2007)*

Legend:
- Never
- At least 1x weekly
- Less than 1x monthly
- At least 1x daily
- At least 1x monthly
- Several times daily

Categories (left to right):
Playing online games, E-mail, Surfing web, Instant messaging, Downloading or listening music, Searching humor pages, Searching information for school, Downloading or looking video, Chats, Discussing online, Reading news, Reading blogs, Erotic web pages

Forming identities on the Internet among adolescents

Our surveys also paid attention to the investigation into forming the "online identity" among youths, i.e. the construction of virtual identities. The Internet is a specific environment based, to a large extent, on text, albeit recently on picture as well, due to the influence of new technologies (e.g. avatar pictures, photographs, videos, etc.). Nevertheless, in many cases within Internet communication, there is a lack of physical and social information which, in real life, help to identify the others and rank them in certain social structures, while also providing the individual with a certain degree of freedom of self-expression and self-definition. On the Internet, the presence, i.e. being online, is somehow constructed (virtual representations of individuals themselves). One may thus speak of creating a "virtual identity". It embodies what is credited to the virtual representation of the self; it is thus an individual's awareness of the existence of the virtual representation of the adolescents (i.e. of their virtual representation's identity) (Vybíral, Šmahel, & Divínová, 2004). Similarly to the real life identity, virtual identities may also contain social and personal dimensions (belonging to a certain group, the content of the representation of the given person).

The relation between online and real-life identities may vary significantly, ranging from mirroring the real-life identity on the Internet (the individual experiences the continuity of inner feelings, what they are like, on the Internet as well), through fragmentary difference between the real-life and online identities (the virtual identity emphasises certain qualities which the individual does not perceive as their own), to a complete dissonance of the two already mentioned identities (e.g. an inversion relationship in which the users assess subjectively that all what they are online is in contradiction to what they are in their real life).

Among other things, the need to perform any research into virtual identities lies in the fact that adolescence is, in this perspective, a specific age. It is a developmental period in which the adolescent starts to deal with the issues of identity. Adolescents are required to cope with hormonal and physical changes, as well as changing relationship with their parents and to themselves (Macek, 1999). These changes become subject to self-reflection through which they are gradually integrated into the "self". According to Erikson's

model of psycho-social development, it is the individual's task to achieve the feeling of ego-identity at the age of adolescence. It consists in the individual's inner stability where the stability and continuity correspond to the stability of both the individual and his/her opinion of others (Erikson, 2002). The particularity and anonymous environment of the Internet may thus provide adolescents with room for enquiring about "who I am" and "where I belong".

Special attention was paid to the research into the relationship between the real-life and virtual identities. An empirical study was performed sampling 681 respondents, aged 12 – 20 years, studying at grammar schools and secondary schools. In the survey, 78% Czech adolescents agreed with the statement that they have never pretended to be someone else on the Internet. It may thus be argued that among adolescents, their virtual identities are formed by overlapping individual's identity. Nonetheless, it remains true that the safe virtual environment provides adolescents with greater possibility to explore various forms of self-expression than the real life (Šmahel, 2003a). Exceptionally, however, experimenting with identity takes on the form of exchanging or pretending an identity which corresponds, more or less, to the real-life identity. Creating new strange identities tends to be a rare phenomenon.

There is another Czech study demonstrating the congruence between the real-life and virtual identities. The online questionnaire survey of 120 adolescent female bloggers (and several male bloggers) dealing with lying on the Internet revealed a low occurrence of lying on Internet blogs (Blinka & Šmahel, 2008). 56% bloggers claimed never to have lied about any topic on their blog. The bloggers tended to lie least about the category of age, gender and information on their school (up to 2%), while they tended to provide misleading information on partnerships more often (21%) and their family situation (16%). These findings were then confirmed when 12 bloggers from the sample were met and interviewed in person. During the interviews, the respondents were offered small gifts. The congruence between real-life and virtual identities was confirmed for all the bloggers. According to the authors, Blinka and Šmahel (2008), the adolescents' virtual world on blogs usually corresponds to their real lives. This could be explained so that a number of bloggers create a community of "befriended blogs" whose members know each other in their real lives (from school, for instance).

Among the limits of the empirical study, there is also the possibility that the above mentioned findings may not necessarily be transferable onto other online applications in used, such as chat rooms, characterised, on the contrary, by a high degree of anonymousness and a higher occurrence of lies. Therefore, the construction of identities and the level of their modifications may vary according to different online environments.

Contrary to the above mentioned findings, with the tendency to hint at congruence between adolescents' behaviour in online and real-life worlds, differences in behaviour in both environments have also been discovered.

Based on a representative questionnaire survey carried out in 2006 (World Internet Project), performed face to faced and sampling 1,706 respondents, it was found out that 42% Czech adolescents share online different aspects of themselves with their virtual friends, compared to aspects shared with their real-life friends (Ševčíková & Šmahel, 2008). Similarly, 59% youths discuss different topics when communicating with their online or real-life friends. One may thus expect that with the help of different conversations online and in everyday life, the adolescent could better realise different parts of the "self" than in the real world, which means that they develop more easily those aspects of the self, which are neglected in the real life or are put aside.

Furthermore, in-depth interviews of 16 participants aged 14 – 25 years, which the following extracts reflecting the perception of adolescents' behaviour have been taken from, hint at the difference in the self-perception in the online and real worlds (Šmahel, 2003b)."*It's cool, you can be cheeky, and you can change into what you aren't and so on.*" (boy, 14 years). "*Here (on the Internet) you are becoming a new person … I am free here …*" (girl, 19 years).

A more complex view of the nature of the relation between the real-life and virtual identities may be obtained when considering the importance of self-disclosure on the Internet. In the already mentioned qualitative study, some youths emphasised the opportunity to experience the feeling of "true" and "genuine" self on the Internet, i.e. the feeling of expressing their authentic wishes, desires, emotions, or opinions (Šmahel, 2003b)."*Here, my self can be genuine. I can fully express myself here, in reality, the environment makes it more difficult.*" (girl, 19 years)

The above mentioned 2006 "World Internet Project" survey suggests that 46 % adolescents are more open on the Internet than in reality (Ševčíková

& Šmahel, 2008). Therefore, one may also question whether the self-disclosure process is under the influence of the dynamic of the "existing" and "ideal" self, as conceived by Higgins (1987, according to Whitty, 2008). The "existing" self refers to how the individual perceives him or herself or how he/she is perceived by others (1987, according to Whitty 2008). The "ideal" self materialises the individual's desires dealing with what they would like to be and how they would like to be perceived. In the above mentioned quote of the 19-year-old girl, one may talk about her "ideal" self (what she would like to be), rather than her actual self, for the "ideal" self is easier to realise due to the characteristics of the Internet.

Among adolescents, the construction of online identity reflects the "ideal" self, the content of which may be an adequately satisfying level of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Both the feelings of self-efficacy and high self-image are crucial in the age of adolescence, for adolescents face many doubts on their place, role or importance in this world. At the beginning of this age, the level of self-image decreases, starting to rise gradually at around 15 or 16 years (Langmeier & Krejčířová, 1998). Functioning as the representation of the self-efficient and positively assessed self, the online identity helps them to confront experienced uncertainties. The process of creating an online identity is intervened with desires, fantasies and needs which may boost the self-efficacy and self-esteem.

Adolescents' Online Addictive Behaviour

Another important topic referring to the negative aspects of the Internet are the issues of Internet addictive behaviour. The term of addictive behaviour on the Internet stems from the current state of research, within the framework of which two groups of individuals with similar addiction symptoms may be distinguished (Widyanto & Griffiths, 2007). In case of the first group, however, the symptoms are not a product of the effect of the Internet itself but a different form of social and psychological deficiency or discomfort (e.g. loneliness, depression, low self-esteem, etc.), realised on the Internet as addictive behaviour. On the other hand, in case of the second group (which is, nonetheless significantly smaller than the first one), it is actually expected that the Internet may be blamed for being the source of addictive behaviour. Until now, however, it has not been made clear what such

people should be specifically addicted to, while demonstrating the existence of such group remains rather problematic. Some authors believe that the "addiction to the Internet" itself does not exist at all (e.g. Grohol, 2005).

In the Czech Republic, under research team surveyed 548 players of MMORPG games (97 of them were Czechs), exploring the relationship between the players, their game character and addictive behaviour on the Internet (Šmahel, Blinka, & Ledabyl, 2008). Based on Griffiths' study (2000), the construct of online addictive behaviour consisted of the following factors: cognitive salience, tolerance, exhaustion symptoms, interpersonal conflict, behavioural salience, and in part, the factor of losing control over the time spent playing the game. Importantly, it was revealed that young players (adolescents) aged 12 – 19 years (26.9% of the total sample) reached the highest score of addiction in comparison with individuals in the age of emerging adulthood and adults (Šmahel, Blinka, & Ledabyl, 2008).

The results obtained with the "World Internet Project 2007" (Šmahel et al., 2008) also refer to the potential vulnerability of the age group of adolescents. The battery of questions concerning addictive behaviour stemmed from the addition criteria in DSM-IV, adapted by Griffiths (2000) for research into the debated online addictive behaviour. From the viewpoint of gender, men inclined to addictive behaviour more than women, although the difference was mainly given, in particular, by longer periods of time men tend to spend on the Internet. According to the age, it was adolescents aged 12 -19 years who scored highest. Older adolescents (16 – 19 years) showed a higher tendency to label themselves as addicted to the Internet, compared to younger adolescents (12 – 15 years). This is reflected in Graph 2 (the values on the "y" axis show the values of the score only; and they do not have any information value alone). The graph also shows that the levels of the addiction score and perceived addiction decline with age.

Younger adolescents tend to label themselves as addicted less often, although they show the same level of addiction score as the older group, and thus reflect probably less their behaviour on the Internet. When using the Internet, this group of young adolescents aged 12 – 15 years could potentially be more vulnerable than older groups. The higher score of addictive behaviour among young adolescents may be, at least in part, influenced by their different approach to computers and the Internet.

Graph 2. *Comparison by age: addiction score and self perceived addiction*
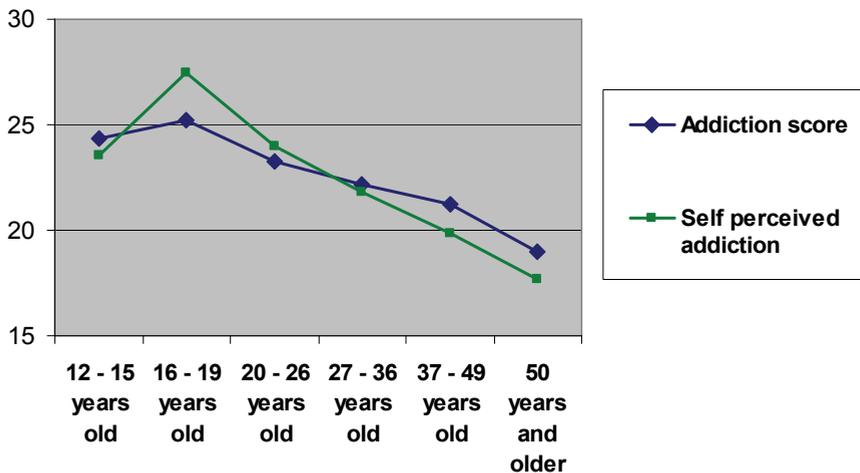
The younger the generation, the more is bound to use information and communication technologies. Besides, the beginning of adolescence is also the age of conflicts between parents and children originating from their growing resistance to authorities and accompanying the process of coming of age and becoming independent. That is why one may take into account higher sensitivity toward potentially occurring conflicts, as well as their overrating (the conflict is one of the essential signs of the existence of addiction). Similarly, the discrepancy between the higher addiction score and subjective addiction assessment among young adolescents may be explained as a reminiscence of children's behaviour, that is to say, delegating the control on the authority, i.e. parents in this case.

Eating disorders (anorexia nervosa) and self-damaging in blogs

The previous section mentioned the virtual world of online games (MMORPG), which tends to be the world of adolescent boys (Šmahel et al., 2008). On the contrary, maintaining a blog tends to be significantly more popular among adolescent girls, both in the USA and the Czech Republic (Subrahmanyam, 2007; Blinka & Šmahel, 2008). In our study, it was found out that 90% of Czech blogs written by adolescents aged 13 – 17 years are maintained by girls (Blinka & Šmahel, 2008).

A qualitative study (Lusková, Blinka, & Šmahel, 2008), based on the analysis of 8 semi-structured interviews with Czech adolescents aged 13 – 17 years, shows that Internet diaries provide adolescents with social support and, in particular, feedback of the published contents. Such feedback then forms the authors' self-concept and self-image. Czech bloggers tend to establish communities based on their common interest and social content of blogs. In some cases, blogging may encourage risk behaviour in adolescents' real lives. On the basis of maintaining a blog on losing weight, a female participant became member of a community of female bloggers with similar topics and objectives, i.e. weight control. Membership in a "pro-ana blog community" meant for her protection against loneliness and a lack of understanding in her real life. At the same time, with the help of the existence of the group, individual bloggers supported one another in subsequent weight losses, which may, in many cases, reach the state of mental anorexia or come on the verge of it. Control over losing weight was delegated onto a virtual community which, within maintaining its existence, retroactively encouraged its female members to keep a weight-reduction diet.

Another qualitative explorative study on the presentation of self-damaging on blogs revealed a similar importance of social support (Černá & Šmahel, 2009). Its authors carried out an analysis of 9 semi-structured interviews with 15-18-year-old Czech girls mentioning self-damaging in their Internet diaries – blogs. All the surveyed respondents had personal experience with self-damaging. Most frequently, self-damaging is associated with consciously, intentionally and often repeatedly causing damage to oneself (self-harming), without any conscious suicidal motivation, not leading to death (Kocourková, 2003). Cuts and gashes are among the most common symptoms. A number of surveyed girls claimed to have been informed about self-damaging on the Internet, which could thus have had a negative educational role.

The girls perceived the weblog as a space for self-expression and self-disclosure (without any risk of condemnation), verbalising motives, and last but not least, as a haven against the real world, where they did not feel socially anchored in an adequate way and lacked understanding as far as self-damaging is concerned. Within the group, several girls have become, with the help of maintaining an Internet diary, experts on self-damaging, expressing their views of such experience and arguing against scientific or expert articles on self-damaging which they were publishing on their weblogs.

Through Internet diaries, they received contacts or established potential friendships with other girls who also had experience with self-damaging and with whom they shared understanding and feeling of not being alone.

Due to the self-help character and expert view of self-damaging some respondents ended up avoiding psychological or psychiatric help, since only someone with self-damaging experience may understand them or possibly help them. In this case, the Internet and its ability to create communities thus play a negative role helping girls to keep to self-damaging as a recognised coping strategy which does not have to be treated at all.

Owing to its specific qualities (accessibility, speed, relative ease to establish a new contact, etc.), the Internet facilitates getting to know individuals with the traits of minority or risk forms of behaviour. On the basis of mutual group support, which is easier to evoke on the Internet due to the absence of social and physical information, individuals may legitimise some traits of behaviour, thus reinforcing them (in the cognitive and behavioural concept). However, the dynamic relation between the individual, behaviour and an online group does not necessarily have to be dangerous. Several studies have shown that with the help of the Internet, some of its users may experience a so-called coming-out, admitting to their minority sexual orientation, which may subsequently progress in their real life (McKenna & Bargh, 1998). The Internet helps to integrate to the overall identity only those elements of the self which the individual would not otherwise become aware of or which would be suppressed.

Discussion and conclusion

The paper has focused on the issues of virtual identities and their construction on the Internet. The "virtual identity" is a construct helping to depict the process of creating an online existence, i.e. becoming visible for the individual him or herself, as well as for the others. Wishes, desires, fantasies, and needs are projected into the individual's virtual representation. The "online identity" may take on the form of self-reflection of the individual's real-life identity (a personal feeling of who they are), as well as being a product of self-presentation (a desire to appear to be better, to become a "star", etc.), on the basis of which the individual behaves in the same way he/she would like to be perceived by the others.

Among adolescents, forming a "virtual identity" is most likely to be affected by the need to increase self-efficacy and positive self-esteem. Creating a virtual identity is probably associated most with self-presentation in the form of the "ideal" self, which is self-efficient and has a highly positive self-image. With the help of specific characteristics of the Internet, the "ideal self" is more easily realised in the virtual environment. The Internet thus may (or may not) help adolescents to confront experienced feelings of anxiety and doubt. In some cases, this content-dependent self-presentation on the Internet has the power to convince the individuals that they really are the same as what they present in the online environment, owing to an absolutely unique context (with the effect of a large number of variables, such as the strength of the virtual presentation, real-life self-image, etc.).

The issues concerning addictive behaviour on the Internet have also been reflected: the surveys carried out in the Czech Republic imply a potential threat to adolescents, in particular, those aged 12 – 15 years. Nevertheless, such results may be perceived as problematic due to the particularities of adolescence, characterised by (early) socialisation with the help of the Internet. Clinical casuistics will be beneficial in order to understand more deeply the factors that may significantly saturate the potential of addictive behaviour among adolescents. Their analysis could, for instance, reveal the character of the interpersonal conflict (between the adolescent and their parents), which is one of the key factors when defining online addictive behaviour.

Gender-related definition of some Internet application is also a noteworthy phenomenon. Adolescent boys tend to prefer online games, while adolescent girls tend to spend their time maintaining their blogs more often. This gender-related definition of both worlds may serve as an impulse for further research explaining, from the psychological perspective, the importance and benefits of application for male and female adolescents using the Internet. It may be argued that boys find the performance-driven environment of online games more convenient, whereas girls may prefer the environment based more on mutual communication, without the comparison being the crucial element of such online environment. Therefore, boys and girls search for those online worlds close to their disposition, providing them with a possibility to cope with certain developmental tasks.

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Building One's Self
in the Context of Online Interactions

Alina Gheorghiu

'A rapidly expanding system of networks, collectively known as the Internet, links millions of people together in new spaces that are changing the way we think, the nature of our sexuality, the form of our communities, our very identities.' (Turkle 1999).

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to try to identify the degree to which the heavy use of online means of interaction, changes the psychological normal development of one's self. This paper will take into consideration the relevance of the promoting of stereotypes, of the hiding of ethnical or gender differences as well as the tendency to go to extremes: either to create an identity that is socially acceptable or one that is more exotic or opposes the rules of society.

Interactions on-line at very early ages of psychological development have a great influence on the manner one understands oneself in relation to others, builds one's identity, and develops patterns of action and social interaction. After several years of online socialization – and creation and recreation of one's self, is one able to answer the question: who am I? This may be indeed the challenge of today's society.

Introduction

It is common knowledge that it is essential for an individual to have social contacts, as it is fundamental for one's development and understanding of the self. Given the *global village* of today's society, it is obvious that the means of interaction have greatly changed. One can now observe the emergence of the *World Wide Web* – a network through which individuals have found

more comfortable and faster means of communication. However, the benefits of the technological development also bring multiple consequences.

First, it is a fact that communication processes today have been fundamentally altered. One is no longer addressing a human being but a computer that transforms one's message and tries to reproduce it – in a standard manner, for the receiver. Hence, it is obvious that set standard forms of expression such as emoticons are replacing the nonverbal alongside the meta-linguistic components of speech.

Secondly, the lack of first hand interaction alongside the possibility of creating and recreating one's self according to the context and the interlocutor, result in a game of masks rather than a healthy social interaction. This means that the *risk prone categories* – the youngsters who are heavy users of internet, chat, messenger, etc., have difficulties in creating an identity since they recreate themselves each time they chat with a new user.

To conclude with, the issues this paper attempts to address are very vast and an exhaustive approach to this matter would difficult to achieve. However, taking into consideration the dynamics of the phenomenon and the relevance to the contemporary society, any research on this subject is most welcome. Furthermore, it does give a valuable insight on the impact that changed communication techniques today have on the psychological development of one's self as well as on the intercultural interactions on line.

Since the USA attempt to create the Advanced Research Projects Agency – ARPA, in 1958 and the World Wide Web of 2008, the Internet has become an essential part of one's life: on the Internet you can shop, pay bills, read newspapers, do business, meet friends, and so many more other things as well. For those who got the "Internet fever" a virtual reality has taken over their real lives. Staying online means being alive – it is perceived as a new form of life and a new meaning for interaction. Specialists in this field assert that there has been a substantial shift between "the little boxes societies and networked ones" (Wellman & Hampton, 1999). The result is a wired world that not only decreases control and involvement in the act of communication, but it also leads to "the proliferation of weak ties" (Wellman & Hampton, 1999).

Given this status quo, Murk identifies the issue of identity as being a "meta-issue of computerisation". His statement is largely supported by researches in the field who make it obvious that heavy use of the Internet

can lead to distortions in interpersonal relations and the self concept – the individual is becoming "techno-centred" (Craig Brod) and slowly, goes through "the ultimate de-humanisation" (Joseph Weizenbaum) – computerisation. Turkle (1999) goes even further by considering the computer and the Internet "a modern Rorschach test upon which we project our current feelings and perceptions about being a human".

It is obvious that interactions online are a serious and well looked into contemporary matter. Since its effects are yet hard to notice, present theories aim at preventing the worse case scenario – individuals who may have serious difficulties in interacting face-to-face, individuals who may depend on virtual realities and connection – individuals who suffer from feelings of loneliness, anxiety, panic or depression when trying to define themselves.

Research

The World Wide Web phenomenon is highly dynamic and the consequences of intense Internet usage by teenagers are likely to be seen further in the near future. Nevertheless, this limitation of the present study does not have any influence on the acknowledgement of the existing issues and the exploration of its features. Therefore, the present study is based on active structured observations on local chats as well as document analysis of the on-line conversations.

The strategy for this research was active observation made on local and national chat rooms. Furthermore, the content of these conversations has been analysed to depict the most common conversation subjects, the most frequent attitudes, and the general tone of on-line interactions. The above mentioned obtained results as are completed by several interviews carried out with teenager aged between 14 and 17, who frequently use the Internet to chat and meet new people on-line.

Firstly, the observations carried out during the chatting on-line made it obvious that each user was trying to emphasize different traits to draw attention and stimulate interest. In addition, their interventions were significantly bold – a clear indicator of lack of shyness when interacting online. Another aspect of online interactions among teenagers is that when asked the "als" – age – location – sex, most of them lied about their age. This

could be seen further on in the conversation when some of them admitted to be younger – when a possible face-to-face encounter could be set.

Secondly, interviews conducted with these teenagers proved that when talking online they have the tendency to pretend and fabricate a completely new profile to meet the demands of the on-line communities. "*I don't think they would be so interested in chatting with me otherwise. I don't believe I do anything extraordinary in day-to-day life.*" states one of the interviewed girls. This seemed to be the basic motivation for pretending – teenagers do not value enough their abilities, interests, etc. and try to "virtually" enrich their profile. *'It's not as easy as it seems: you have to actually keep count what you said and to whom you said that; you simultaneously chat with several people and your state of mind, and sometimes even your personal attributes vary from one conversation to another.'* – stated one of the interviewed teenagers.

Even though the interviewed teenagers seemed to be aware that their personal profile changes were inconsistent from one chat window to another, they did not perceive any difficulties in finding out who they truly are at the end of the day: "*there's going to be plenty of time when I'm older. Now I just want to have some fun, it's harmless.*"

It is essential to mention that the hypothesis of the present paper can only be proved or disproved in the near future, when the digital-born teenagers will have reached adulthood. Only then, can this particular study be completed and its hypothesis clarified, based on the quantitative research.

Nevertheless, this paper gathers opinions of professionals in the field of on-line interactions and behaviour and attempts to give an insight – by means of interviews and observations – on how teenagers perceive their interactions on-line and the way they build a sense of identity. Therefore, the paper aims at creating a base for further research, given the *symptoms* of a future digital disease - *the identity deficiency*.

Context

It is estimated that currently 17.8% of the world population, that is - 1.173.109.925 people, frequently use the Internet. This percentage is continuously growing as the Internet fever spreads to less developed countries, becoming more of a necessity than a luxury. For South Eastern Europe, The CIA World Fact Book (2006) estimates a number of 5.063

million users for Romania, 1.87 million users for Bulgaria, 727.700 users for Moldavia, 950.000 users for Bosnia and Herzegovina, 1.576 million users for Croatia, 1.251 million users for Slovenia, etc. These percentages are very high as they range from 18% to 60%. Given the fact that the Internet phenomenon is rather young, its massive availability and usage raise several issues. One of these is the control of exposure to Internet messages and the influences on teenagers today.

A Pew Internet and American Life Project shows that the number of teens using the Internet has reached 24 % and a substantially majority of these teens, 87%, aged between 12 and 17 surf the Internet. Other researches carried out worldwide show that approximately 47% of children have received e-mails with links to pornographic websites; 64% of teens say that teenagers do things online that they would not want their parents to know about. *(Pew Internet and American Life, "Protecting Teens Online," March 17, 2005.)* Online teens admit that they frequently communicate with people they have never met: 54% have Instant Messaged a stranger, 50% have emailed a stranger, and 45% have participated in a chat room discussion with a stranger *(Teen Research Unlimited, "Topline Findings from Omnibus Research," October 2005.)*

The Daily Mail presents in an article signed by James Chapman that a recent report states that many teenagers under 16 spend more than 20 hours a week glued to the Internet. Face book, Hi5, MySpace and many others keep teenagers online and in touch with others through instant messaging.

This new form of interaction and communication can generate addictiveness: Dr. Block, of Oregon Health & Science University, states in an editorial for the American Journal of Psychiatry that spending a lot of time on the internet creates compulsive-impulsive disorders: "the relationship is with the computer. It becomes a significant other to them. They exhaust emotions that they could experience in the real world on the computer through any number of mechanisms: emailing, gaming, porn".

Researchers mention in the journal 'Advances in Psychiatric Treatment' that between 5 and 10% of online users are Internet addicts. It is useless to say that teenagers are perhaps the most vulnerable class of users, since they find themselves in a process of constantly forming and creating themselves.

These data tend to prove that Internet is an ever-growing phenomenon that is widely accessible and very difficult to control; hence, it is easy for

the teenagers to resort to the many offerings on the Internet, making them a risk prone category. The risk is higher since the teenagers' ability to form judgments of value, to discern between the real and the virtual and fully understand the implications of online interactions, is underdeveloped. Adolescence is a time for experimentation, a time for growth and reflection – and as the present paper proves, heavy use of internet and intense on-line socializing is detrimental to teenagers' development of the identity and the sense of self.

Identity

Adolescence is characterized as "a process that marks the transition period from childhood to adult life and a life period in which the subject has to actively overcome developmental tasks by acquiring necessary information and abilities" (Aneshensel & Gore). This "overcoming of developmental tasks" generates psychosocial stress that implies a temporary disperse of personality elements. The overcoming of these tasks has to be in direct relation to certain aspects of the teenager's life, such as environmental opportunities, knowledge of control or need for control (Evans and Shapiro). According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary, identity means "who a person is, or the qualities of a person or group which make them different from others". One's identity consists of cultural, ethnic, religious, and gender differences that are acknowledged, appropriated and integrated in the inner value system. As it is widely known individuals develop by means of imitation, the cultural component is essential: it provides the individual both a sense of belonging to a certain group and a set of behavioural patterns. The sense of belonging to a distinct group is based on a set of clear rules and patterns that are emphasized by the acknowledgement of an ethnical identity. This allows the individual to understand him/her in terms of specific rituals, interpersonal interactions, and status. Furthermore, national identity creates a linkage between one's origins and the ancestral ways of life.

Modern sociology explains how religion plays a significant part in the forming of identities. The "unwritten" rules of society have proved to be stronger than any laws and thus, the mystic experience of ancestral rites is fundamental to overall understanding of others and one's self. Moreover,

gender identity prescribes certain behavioural patterns: on this basis, one shall build one's personal style and strategy of interaction. For instance, girls are generally orientated towards the resolving of conflicts while boys tend to be more competitive. This stems from the general belief that girls should be shyer, quiet, and calm while the boys should fight to defend an argument.

When interacting with others, one has to label others and oneself according to certain social categories, then choose to be part of one of these categories and in the end, keep comparing it to other groups and make the necessary transformations for reaching a sense on wellbeing. Social influences are fundamental in building one's identity. They serve as opportunities for self-analysis and self-evaluation.

Psychologists such as Erickson agree that one's psychological development can be achieved by means of conflict. The conflict between, for instance, one belief and another may consolidate or change either one's inner system of values or one's overall perspective and understanding of life. Exchanges like this, allow individuals to alter their profiles until they reach the desired one. In the context of on-line interactions, it becomes more and more obvious that the collective identity prevails over the personal identity. In a global culture, differences are hidden and one can no longer talk about individual – that is, personas that differentiate by means of unique features, but mass-produced prototypes of humans.*'When I describe myself, I'm always very attentive to what my chat partner says – I begin with more general traits and after I get the tone of the conversation I decide what to say and what to keep from my online friend; but they all talk about pretty much the same things'* says one of the interviewed girls.

If the usual social interactions take place on-line and the challenges the teenager has to face are strictly virtual, his locus of internal control is going to be built on a virtual basis. Consequently, in dealing with real life situations and interactions, the teenager might experience helplessness, frustration, failure, depression, anxiety, etc.

Due to virtual interactions, teenagers no longer develop their real life coping abilities and at any sign of frustration generated by the external environment, they tend to go back to the virtual space, in the safety of mediated communication. *"It's so much easier in online chatting – you have*

time to think, the other doesn't know if you lie or not – it's really hard to get embarrassed when chatting", states an interviewed girl.

It is well known that one's peers represent a frame of normative and comparative reference. Statistics show that 75% of teenagers aged between 15 and 17 are active in groups of peers (Palmonari & Pombeni). In this context, it is highly important for teenagers to have clear social representations and through their system of values to be accepted by their peers. The forming of their identity is based on these representations and on the answers they find for the changes they may undertake.

Being part of a "support group" is fundamental and decisive for one's personality. However, when virtual realities offer virtual answers to real issues, teenagers face a profound feeling of interior confusion. *"I tried one of my < chat lines > with some girls at school. I did not get the same response. It seems that I was perhaps too bold or something. I really cannot tell"*, admits an interviewed boy.

In the light of on-line interactions, the Eight Stages of Development identified by Erik Erikson (1956) are fundamentally transformed. The learning of basic trust versus basic mistrust (Hope) – that occurs within the first two years of life. The learning of autonomy versus shame (Will), the learning of initiative versus guilt (Purpose) – that occurs at the play-age and the industry versus inferiority (Competence) – the development of self-discipline and strategies of successfully solving psychological crisis depend strictly on the environment the child is brought up.

However, the learning identity versus identity diffusion (Fidelity) is common for children aged 13 – 20. The main concern in this phase is the ability to answer the question "who am I?" and adjust to the age's requirements and issues. It is critical for teenagers to develop in this stage a healthy, mature, and realistic perspective on life. One tries out different roles, develops ideas and personal beliefs, and generally establishes the main traits of his/her personality.

Another important stage in teen's development, according to Erickson - the learning of intimacy versus isolation (Love) stage has to be reached by every young adult. This learning curve is only possible in terms of interaction and quality time spent in the 'real world' with one's own peers.

Successfully reaching this stage means being able to respond to further challenges – the learning generativist versus self-absorption (Care) or the

integrity versus despair (Wisdom) stages. As Erikson states, the fulfilling of each task implied by the eight stages is essential to one's psychological development.

A very important aspect in online interactions is the "id" a user chooses – when entering an online community, one is required to create a virtual persona. The "id", or the virtual identity, is the name the user chooses to represent himself/herself. This aspect is a clear indicator of the lack of responsibility as well as of the tendency to pretend to be somebody else. It is very common for users to have different e-mail addresses – an official one that contains his/her name or initials, and another – that is generally used in chat rooms. The interesting aspect of the second one is that it is often a compound id, considered relevant for the user; this may contain animal names, descriptive adjective, nouns that describe emotions, etc.

A throughout analysis of the id choices is very difficult to complete as it requires good knowledge of the user, but one may assume that the choice of the id is directly connected to the profile the users wants to present on the internet. For instance, *lost profeth* id may stand for a person who wants to seem to be wise and mysterious while the *sweetlove88* id may indicate a young girl who is highly emotional and rather naive. It is obvious that the id is for the virtual world what the name is for the real one: it gives identity to a person; it distinguishes one from another and gives one certain significance.

Hence, the choice of an id, different from the real name – except from initials, can be considered an attempt to create a new profile, to virtually re-invent oneself and emphasize a distinctive trait. *"When I chose my id I didn't even think to put my name out there. I feel free using a different name – I feel more relaxed and I don't feel the pressure of standing up to the expectations"*, confesses an interviewed boy.

Biased communication

It is well known that communication can be verbal as well as non-verbal. The mixture of these two creates the optimum environment for communication to take place. They both make use of symbols and resort to sometimes unconscious tones, e.g. rhythm, tone of voice, body language, etc. While the verbal component of a message is very important as it clearly names the subject of the interaction, the non-verbal component does the rest of the job by making the message some much more than a simple sequence of words.

The non-verbal communication gives meaning to the message and enriches it by adding the details that make the difference. It is easy, for instance to recognise the "good morning" said by your significant one and the "good morning" said by somebody else. The message is essentially the same; the difference is made up of details you consciously identify such as tone of voice, rhythm, etc. Researchers have shown that between 70 and 90% of the transmitting of the message is non-verbal (Dinu, 1999). Therefore, it is obvious that this communication component is fundamental.

When observing the virtual communication environment, it is a fact that the non-verbal component of the communication process is suspended alongside the paralinguistic aspects. The verbal interaction is transformed into text and then shortened for typing as quickly as possible. The message is hence reduced to the maximum and becomes devoid of any other meaning. *"The limited social presence of computer-mediated communication encourages the misinterpretation of remarks, and the asynchronous nature of most conversations hinders the immediate repair of damages, stressing and even disrupting relationships"* (Wellman et al., 1996).

An attempt to restore this biased message is the emoticon. However, it is a timid attempt to make up for the significant loss in the communication process. A smile can have thousands and thousands of shapes and meanings; one standard smiley cannot express any of them. Today's teenagers are obliged to use fixed forms of expressing emotions when using emoticons. It is easier for users to fake emotions and give divergent emotional feedback to several on-line parties they simultaneously write to. This not only disables them to form a consequent emotional structure but also, encourages them to be superficial and easy-going. *"I usually send the smiley or the one that laughs just to keep the conversation going. I'm not really laughing – this may be also because I have to type in different windows and I can't be fully with one conversation"*, confesses an interviewed girl.

To contradict the above-mentioned perspective, Wright (2008) asserts that online interactions are in fact new and improved forms of primal interactions. According to Wright (2008), people are inclined to chat as they are genetically programmed to use symbols and icons to transmit moods and feelings. Oral culture is considered by the majority to be poorly understood and improperly used. This is why, in Wright's perspective it is more natural for individuals to communicate through symbolic icons.

This perspective does not stand the wittgensteinien argument that a coherent form of thought can only result in a coherent phrase. Wittgenstein's work on the connections between language and rational thinking is very vast. His argument is that since the individual has evolved and has the ability to speak, it is only because he/she possesses a higher ability – that of rationally organizing thought, and associating them with certain sounds and symbols. Human language has evolved so greatly, that it is irrelevant to reduce it to standard use of several symbols.

Human communication is complex; its components – verbal and non-verbal, contribute to the forming of a unique message that represents the intellect of the speaker. Hence, chatting on-line by making use of fixed phrases or pre-defined emoticons is detrimental to the real communication potential. Teenagers are part of the risk-prone categories because during adolescence their thinking and their communication strategies are interconnected – if one of them is altered, the other one will also suffer transformations.

'Chatting' online means knowing the netiquette "your way around". Netiquette is, according to the definition accepted by the Cambridge Dictionary Online.'*The set of rules about behaviour that is acceptable when writing an email or talking to people in a chat room (an address on the Internet where people can talk to each other using email). For instance, it's considered bad netiquette to use capital letters in an email because it looks like you are shouting*'.

As a result, the user becomes a netizen or cybercitizen, that is - a person actively involved in <u>online</u> communities. In addition, being a netizen means following the netiquette - following the "rules of the net" implies altering the natural and real strategies of interaction. The Internet allows one to change personality, lack responsibility, and engage in superficial interactions. Furthermore, by altering the code of language and behaviour, it greatly influences the overall perspective on socially accepted attitudes and profiles.

Globalization:

'*Members of virtual community want to link globally with kindred souls for companionship, information, and social support from their homes and workstations*' (Wellman et al., 1996)

David Morley and Kevin Robins discuss in their *Spaces of Identity* the impact the new world order – represented by the global media, has on

domestic users as far as identity is concerned. Under the influence of globalization the identity of the individual – that is, in Morley's opinion, fundamentally connected to culture, suffers great alterations. Culture identification elements are replaced by global trends to the point where "questions of identity and of citizenship have become dissociated" (Morley & Robins, 2000). Given the ever growing influence of global trends, one's cultural identity becomes a confuse field.

This phenomenon is easily observed in the process of the "Americanization" of the world – the American way of life is widely accepted and promotes throughout the world by means of varied instruments economy, politics, etc. However, probably the most important of all is the Hollywood industry that is taking over the cultural values of Europe and Asia. Alongside the Hollywood style of life, the World Wide Web – created and developed in the spirit of American values, functions in the same way. It has become an instrument of globalization, an in the light of this event – an instrument of "denationalization" (Morley & Robins).

Wilson and Peterson argue that the new media and the new technologies are cultural products in themselves. These new means of interaction "mediate the elusive and ambiguous constructions of individual and collective identities" (Wilson & Peterson) encouraging all sorts of communication strategies except for real, face-to-face interaction. Escobar et al (1999) go even further, by asserting that a new culture and new nation has arouse – 'Cyberia' and the cyber-culture.

This may be true to the extent to which users are able to take multiple identities, change nationality, ethnicity, or gender and adapt, in the end, to the worldwide netiquette. "*It doesn't really matter where you are from or what the colour of your skin is. After the usual <als> [age, sex, location], the conversation just flows. You can't actually tell the difference between a Muslim and a Christian*", confesses an interviewed boy.

Culture is by far one of the key elements in the construction of identities. On-line interactions do not only fail to encourage the development of the cultural background, but they also tend to promote a specific type of conformism. Each user tends to acquire a certain "global accepted" profile, to be able to interact and align to the general trend. In the case of teenagers, this process of diminishing the cultural and national differences results in difficulties

of creating a solid identity and hence successfully passes from adolescence to adult life.

Forming an identity means first of all creating a distinct personality – a human profile custom made according to the cultural, social and psychological background of the individual. This profile is to be further presented to others and adjusted according to needs. Therefore, identity becomes more a product of human interaction. Moreover, human interaction means a permanent exchange of information, values, cultural influences, and patterns of behaviour. For one to discover his/her true self and thus differentiate from the others, one has to spend quality time interacting with others and reflecting upon the results of this interaction.

In the case of on-line interactions, not only there is no actual real interaction as it is biased by the lack of human emotion, but also, it makes it easier for users to pick a different profile from one conversation to another. *"This is what I like about chat rooms: you don't have to meet some social standards or be with <the popular> to be accepted; you just go with the flow and be who you want to be."* – confesses an interviewed boy.

Role-play

The age of Internet brought up a new type of interaction – the second hand interaction or the computer mediated communication. Faced with this status quo, the nowadays society has to find new and rapid ways to identify problems and solve them. One of the issues rose from the intensive Internet use among teenagers is the building of personalities in the context of online interaction.

The interaction – known to be fundamental in one's development has greatly changed its structure: the screen filters reactions and tones, *'One's body can be represented by one's own textual description: the obese can be slender, the beautiful plain. The fact that self-presentation is written in text means that there is time to reflect upon and edit one's "composition," which makes it easier for the shy to be outgoing, the "nerdy" sophisticated'* (Turkle, 1999).

In the case of online interactions researches prove that it's all about creating 'contextualized identities' (Wilson & Peterson, 2002): 'identities are negotiated, reproduced and then indexed in a variety of ways'. It is no longer a matter of who one is but who one creates or wants to be.

Although the role-play is very common in adolescence as it is essential in the forming of one's self and the preparing for future experiences, it has its' thin rules and limits. When facing the test of reality, the role is transformed and adapted to current requirements. However, when the virtual space and the online interactions allow teenagers to change personality from one window to another, to preserve it and develop it in any given direction without the test of reality, how far can one go and how does it affect the forming of a "true" personality?

The process of creating one's identity seems to have a strict connection to one's social networks. According to the theory of social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), one's image of the self does imply only the individualistic aspects; it is highly important for the individual to identify with his/her peers and social groups. The tendency to search for self-esteem in relation to others and the social structures and roles one perceives, reveals a discrepancy between the real and virtual worlds that can create anxiety and can lead to a strong feeling of failure and loneliness.

It is well known in psychology that the others influence the individual on a regular basis. This happens because of the expectancies one creates and the roles one undertakes. The created roles are often in response to society's requirements and by constant use, they can become who one is. Linton (1945) named five different social groups that determine the type of roles one can undertake: the sex and age group, the family group, the status group, the professional group and the group of peers. These roles are undertaken, according to Goffman (1961), in two separate stages; in the first stage, one perceives the role as something rather distant that one tries on; in the second stage, one appropriates oneself this role and makes it part of his/her personality. This process still takes place during on-line interactions, but it is biased by several factors mentioned above: netiquette, fake identities, etc.

Research has shown that teenagers tend to recreate themselves during virtual interactions. Although pretending is considered to be developmentally specific, the frequency and the type of pretending prove to be generated by the above-mentioned features regarding online interactions: lack of responsibility, superficiality in interacting, etc.

"After observing teens communicating through chat rooms and instant messaging, one journalist proposed that the Internet's greatest asset to

teendom may the ability to try on identities, the adolescent equivalent of playing dress-up in the attic" (Gross, 2004)

Gross has also carried out a research on the frequency of pretending in teenage Internet users: out of the 175 participants in the study, 49% reported that they had never pretended to 'not be' someone else. 41% admitted they had pretended a couple of times before, and 10% stated that they had pretended occasionally, pretty often or all the time (n = 2). In addition, his research shows that 41 % of the participants in the research have pretended to be older while 19% have pretended to be someone of another gender or sexual identity. *"If I lie? Sure…everybody does it….because its fun. Anyways, after a few hours of chatting, if you really like the person you chat with you might change the tone – less aggressive, more sincere…"*, confesses an interviewed girl.

It is very rare, however, for teenagers to pretend they are a completely new person. Far more frequently, teenagers build their new profile on the most prominent of their traits. They tend to inflate their age, increase experience and change attitude. Online profiles may be the expression of an ideal, generally accepted self. However, the main difference between trying out identities in the attic and the showing off on the World Wide Web is that the latter brings about severe alterations in the normal psychological formation of identities.

Online interaction means consequence-free experimentation. The 'New Communication Technologies' locate the self in new hybrid arenas of action; they mesh public and private, beckon new types of performances, and form new collective configurations' (Cerulo, 1997). By changing the context of creating identities and reframing this process, online interactions make it far easier for youngsters to quickly fall in and out identity profiles. What online interactions actually do is to 'merge' adult work and play worlds, 'link' adult workspaces and children's play spaces, and reconfigure children's play via the world of adult tools'.(Cerulo, 1997*)*

The chat windows stand for a distributed self that exists in many worlds and plays many roles at the same time (Turke, 1999).This leads to a de-centred identity build on virtual experiences thus the Internet becomes a space with infinite opportunities for social interactions. Instruments for teenagers to use in pretending are also infinite. The teenagers' self becomes flexible and adaptive. The problem is that it does not refer to different states of the self and the transitions between these (Philip Bromberg), but to

a fundamentally altered manner of perceiving the process of building identities and creating oneself.

Conclusions:

It is interesting to observe how the dynamics and *second-hand interaction* of the World Wide Web can generate fundamental transformations in the behavioural and the psychological development of teenagers. Anyone is able to be whoever wants to be, may fail to build a strong identity and hence experience, in her/his 20s, feelings of discontent, disorientation, or panic.

In addition, given that there are no actual physical borders or obvious boundaries between countries or cultures on the Internet, each individual becomes a mix of cultural influences of her/his choice. One's online interactions enable one to exchange patterns of action and behaviour, to live the illusion of belonging to certain social groups as well as that of having a rich and fulfilling social life.

In conclusion, teenagers are indeed risk-prone categories in terms of heavy Internet use. Chatting online is detrimental to their psychological development and the shifts in identity profiles lead to severe disorders of perception of both oneself and others. Alongside these aspects, the language and the communication strategies are altered in online interactions. Altogether, these factors represent both a serious drawback of Internet use and an obstacle in the development of a coherent sense of identity in teenagers.

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Teen Lifestyle Magazine *FORUMS*: A Locus for Negotiating Identity

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Abstract

The perspective of this contribution on how teenagers negotiate their individual or communal identities on the Forums of electronic teen magazines is that of the Sociology of Language. The focus is on how the electronic (virtual) medium, which avowedly affords democracy and anonymity, is the locus where Romanian adolescents can construe their identities, deliberately or otherwise, by means of authentic texts posted as comments to the debate topics suggested by the e-magazine editors/moderators.

My aim is to establish the language agency in construing teen identity and, in the process, identify the underlying reasons why teens find this debate arena congenial to negotiating on-line personas, real or fictional, yet valid.

Introduction

It has long been established that there is a straightforward, yet elaborated, connection between society and language. People's speech reflects their social profile and one can derive important information as to an individual's age, sex, class, profession, ethnicity, etc., on account of how they speak. On the other hand, language can be used as a resource for conveying a particular identity/persona the individual so wishes in a particular situation, for identities are flexible rather than fixed or pre-determined, and under construction rather than finite (e.g. a woman may wish to identify herself as primarily female in a romantic context or, by contrast, androgenic in an office with prevailingly male employees). Indeed, most times the language used by interlocutors is determined by the speech context (e.g. the same individual will use different styles when seeing the doctor as compared to chatting to a friend s/he meets in the same doctor's waiting room).

We wish in the following to highlight how language is operational in establishing Romanian teen identities in electronic teen lifestyle magazines. More specifically, we have selected a particular type of discourse – *e-discourse* – as construed through messages posted by Romanian adolescent readers to the Forum of a magazine in order to show that such discourse is particularly congenial to negotiating self- and/or communal young identities. With this goal in view, we have selected a number of Romanian teen magazines and their issues of six months[1] and the messages posted by teen readers over a period of 1 month to the Forum of the Romanian version of *Bravo*, all of which we scrutinized analytically for the ways in which the editorial material subject positions the young readership by offering identity frames in which they may fit and how the young people negotiate this 'offer.' In the process we have noted the important aspect, which has already been established by media theorists[2], that Romanian teen readership, just like other categories of readers, do not passively accept messages, but rather reassign them meanings by resisting or negotiating the age and gender stereotypes suggested directly or obliquely by the magazines. Our main pursuit will be, thus, how Romanian teens can and may use language and discourse resourcefully and creatively to propose genuine self-identities.

Editorial Construction of Teen Identity

It has been noted elsewhere that magazines as forms of media do not merely convey representations[3] of young people but actually construct identities which the latter may find acceptable or, on the contrary, resist. The ways are manifold in which magazines create a prototypical reader with which readers can identify. While their main goal may be to select, organize and maintain a loyal pool of readers to ensure high circulation for

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[1] See the analytic corpus in Cotrău, Diana, (2008). *Youth Identity in Media Discourse. A Sociolinguistic Perspective*. Cluj Napoca: Napoca Star.

[2] Stuart Hall published a seminal, now classical, text "Encoding/Decoding," expressing his views on how television texts could be decoded in a number of divergent ways rather than strictly as they were meant to by the encoders.

[3] Sarah Thornton in her volume *Club Cultures. Music, Media and Subcultural Capital* discusses the role of the media in covering and shaping subcultures and styles, distinguishing the mass media from the niche media and the micro-media.

the magazine, the byproduct of this prevailingly marketing intention is the cultural construction of a young person stereotype. The most visible means of achieving this goal is through their texts and language and it is precisely the editorial language that we have scrutinized, in the first part of this paper, in order to identify the linguistic strategies employed for attracting and maintaining the young readership as intended.

What we have noted from a cursory review of the magazine selection is that while the language of the printed media is supposed to be normative and exemplary, the magazines under scrutiny display several language patterns that are characteristic of what specialty literature collectively calls youth talk[4]. However, the language used is not meant to be a faithful rendition of youth talk. Rather it is cued for the young readers. The media discourse is not meant to replicate that of the target audience, but rather to carry lexical items already laden with ideology laying the ground for a particular range of interpretations and 'sprinkling' the discourse with peculiarly 'young' linguistic items.

e.g.   Headlines, tiles and subtitles: COOL GIRL CEA MAI TARE REVISTĂ PENTRU FETE DIN ROMÂNIA [COOL GIRL the coolest magazine for girls in Romania], *Cool Girl rulz, Coolgirlitze, Orlando rulz*
        Lexical items: *trendsetteritză, cool*

While the incidence of 'young' verbal patterns in the editorial material becomes explicable in light of the marketing strategy we have mentioned above, a secondary, yet equally reasonable, explanation is that many of the editors themselves are within the age range of their readers. This perhaps also justifies the forms of address employed:

e.g. *Câştigă o placă de surf* [win a surf board]

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[4] Sociolinguists set out to research, identify, and theorise within the speech community the markers and speech patterns of 'teen talk.' They concentrated on the distinct regularly occurring phonological and lexicogrammatical features (linguistics) and the norms governing the language production of youth. The study of youth talk has also been influenced by the ethnographic approach to speaking, which focuses on the speech events, the rules for the appropriate selection of speakers and the interrelations of speaker, addressee, audience, topic, channel and setting. Some embarked upon theorising how the language of young people reflected, construed and reinforced the subcultural reality and its symbolism. A more recent type of research has angled upon studying the linguistic production and displays of youth in actual practice.

In Romanian the use of the second person singular with verbs when addressing someone, unless s/he is your superior, connotes warmth, friendliness, and familiarity. Such direct address is meant to narrow target the readership as well as frame a sort of ideal reader who can inhabit the mythical world (of glamour, fame, popularity) created in the pages of the magazine.

The choice of topics coincides with the focal concerns of young people. While 'underground' teen interests may be deliberately omitted (e.g. reference to drugs), all of the mainstream and adult accepted leisure pursuits of young people are dutifully catered for: film and music, sport and fashion, sex and hygiene, etc. Most often than not, they combine practical items linked to daily life:

e.g.   Star Factory Backstage Cei mai cool profesori [the coolest teachers]
         7 piese pentru 7 zile modă [7 items for 7 days fashion]
         SOS Sfaturi de prim ajutor pentru inimioare zdrobite [first aid advice
         for little heartbreaks]

Moreover, the advice is gender directed and, in fact, all of the editorial material is crisscrossed by references, direct or oblique, to culturally accepted sex roles. Young girls and boys are, thus, further socialized into recommended roles.

Negotiation of identity by the teen readership

Readers, young included, are not passive receptors of texts and their messages, but rather come to the meeting with the texts with their own interpretative frames[5]. Teens will actively decode a discourse and, if need be, reassign it meanings in accordance with their individual or subcultural subjectivity. The dynamics of the meeting between the Romanian teen readers and the media texts eventually will determine whether the young

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[5] Young audiences or readers are equipped, when decoding the media texts, with mental models or *schemata* which are confirmed in the act of reading: the texts are cued for the audiences by significant linguistic options. For instance, the use of colloquial lexical items in a written text is a cue to the model in which the text is to be read. Fowler considers that the media texts or their producers and the audiences share a common 'discursive competence' and that the two parties negotiate the significance of the text around the stipulations of the appropriate discourse. Roger Fowler, 1991, *Language in the News. Discourse and Ideology in the Press*, p. 44.

accept, resist or negotiate[6] the identities construed within the editorial material. In order to establish this we have downloaded the messages posted by teen readers to a topic debate proposed by the Forum moderators of the Romanian version of *Bravo* magazine over a period of 1 month: *School*.

The analytical material has yielded some interesting findings, entitling us to draw conclusions as to how the young people themselves build their identities through genuine texts. To begin with, we have noted that the messages and comments posted give, whether intended or otherwise, demographic information about the authors. Perhaps, then, it is appropriate to note at this point that although e-talk has been assessed as democratic (e.g. chatters participate in a chat room on equal footing), and anonymous (in an e-conversation if one so wishes, s/he may withhold any personal details or adopt a fictional/alternative identity) some personal information does filter through and becomes transparent for the analyst.

The age range of the message authors has been quite easy to establish starting with the fact that the individuals posting comments to such topic as *School* are almost exclusively teens still in school. More direct references, such as talking about the *Capacitate*[7], 8th and 9th grades, teachers and school mates have enabled us to narrow down the age range to 14 to 16 year olds.

The elements that have allowed us to reach fairly definite conclusions as to identity building in the authentic texts of young people combine several clues: the graphic features, lexicographic items, semantics, and some macro- and meta-textual traits. More explicitly, we have dwelt on the nicknames used by the message posters, data about their location, references to age, use of emoticons, attitudes expressed and communication styles. We will exemplify and elaborate on each of them in the following.

Nicknames

A scrutiny of the nicknames used by the posters has revealed that some authors do not intend to extend anonymity over their sex as well although

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[6] Hebdige draws on Gramsci's theories of hegemony and rests his argumentation on the one domain through which youth makes a cultural statement: *style*. Hebdige claims subcultures are primarily subterranean and subversive for youth consciously appropriate and subvert signs and symbols of the dominant culture as objectified in commodities and re-assign meanings to accommodate the subculture's own subjectivity.

[7] 8th graders in Romania on completing their studies take an exam for admittance to high-school.

they generally restrict identity details to a minimum. While much creativity and ingenuity is involved in coming up with nicknames (they are meant to be inciting and intriguing even while hinting at the personality of the user rather than neutral or common) the *Forum*-ers may wish to unveil their gender:

e.g.   female nicknames: iullia, deiutza, flaviutza, carmina, kimalaya, linkin-parkytza, ***sweetdreams, HotLips, siby, alina4blue, sweety

male nicknames: pushtyu, blondu, dj-oq, cr4zy, Guest, azazy, bogd_an

Some nicknames, on the other hand, have been found to be deliberately opaque, yet sex-identification could be made based on the content of the message and some morphological items (by contrast to English, Romanian adjectives signal sex and number).

Data about location

As with nicknames, the data required by the moderators about location is either vague, esoteric or, the reverse, gives straightforward information by indicating the city of residence:

e.g.   in the backstreets of a lost city; my name is Luca, I live on the second floor; Tokyo ☺; everywhere; home; somewhere in a club; Bucureşti

With minor exceptions, rather than simply informing on one's hereabouts, such data as forwarded by the authors play with language, make references to subcultural knowledge, combine graphics with lexical items, etc[8]. All in all, they display the creative propensities of young people and an overt or covert, as the case may be, nonconformity and resistance to mainstream norms as to giving information on request.

Use of emoticons and expressing attitude

There has been consistent and substantial debate as to the 'differences' in speech between males and females[9]. Conclusions tend to converge on the

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[8] David Crystal notes some features which set off chat as a discourse type: the language is jocular and esoteric, it expresses shared values and experiences and it entails expertise. It is highly innovative as testified to by the programmatically non-standard spelling and excessive or, on the contrary, scarce punctuation and the unusual and innovative graphology. Crystal, David. (2001). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. P. 16.

[9] Some of the early sociolinguists – Jespersen, Breakwell, Delphy, etc., see women as an oppressed group and interpret linguistic differences in men's and women's speech in terms of men's dominance. Jennifer Coates used the term 'androcentric rule': by which

idea that it is a matter of different conversational styles instead of considering one variety (usually males') as the norm and the other (the females') as deviant or subordinate. Girls are brought up and socialized into cultural roles different from boys', hence the difference. They belong to different subcultures which are gender determined.

On this premise we expected, and did find to some degree, in our analytical material that the female teen posters' contributions to the debate are slightly more emotional (they use more emoticons and more exaggerated punctuation contextualizing emotions such as excitement, fear, apprehension, lack of self-assurance). On the other hand, the male teen *Forum*-ers use quite as many emoticons, but the difference doesn't lie in number rather than in function. While with girls the function of emoticons is to express a state of mind or an emotion and to accompany the solicitation of advice or support, with boys the same are employed to give support, to elicit responses or reactions, or to reinforce, if need be, some forceful opinion.

e.g.   female comment: Mie una mi-e un pic frica de noii colegi, de profesori, de liceu chiar.-daca o sa fac fata sau nu?... cei care sunteti la liceu cum v-ati descurcat la inceput ? [I for one am a little scared of my new colleagues, teachers, high school - will I cope or not? … those of you who are in high school how did you make out in the beginning?]
male comment: *scoala e ca armata ...trebuie sa rezisti:)* [school is like the army ... you have to endure]

Communication style

While e-talk is different from face-to-face communication there are some features of off-line conversation[10] that are present in virtual discussion. On scrutinizing online communication, and in our case the exchange of messages between the *Forum*-ers researched, we have traced some of the features that

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men are seen to behave linguistically in a desirable and admirable way, whereas women's linguistic habits are considered negative and reprehensible. By contrast, the *difference* approach to the issue regards men and women as belonging to different subcultures.

[10] Some authors call chat "written speech," since it is expressed through the medium of writing and yet displays several of the core properties of speech: it is synchronous, time bound, and, like face-to-face talk, it is transient and demands an immediate response as messages can scroll off the screen rapidly. David Crystal. Op.cit. Pp. 41-43.

have informed the seminal statements[11] made by conversational analysts: the communication style of females in same-sex conversation may differ from that in mixed-sex discussions. Thus, we have noted that the comments posted by female teens are more empathetic and supportive especially when explicitly responding to a message posted by a fellow female. As well, they are fairly longer and use more punctuation for mitigation. By comparison, male teens' comments come across as slightly blunt and "expert," addressing either gender.

However, we have a noted an important fact: while e-communication style is differentiated for males and females, like in face-to-face talk, we have noticed that eventually the two detectable gender styles on the *Bravo* Forum seem to intersect more frequently and regularly (over the period of 1 month of scrutiny). There are several explanations for this but perhaps the most pertinent one emerges from the teens' predicament as to whether they should define themselves as (gendered) individuals or as subcultural members with strong affiliations. Indeed, with teenagers personal versus social identity is an essential issue.

Personal vs. communal identity

Many sociological and cultural studies students[12] of young people have felt more comfortable in viewing youth as members of subcultures and classifying them primarily as such at the risk of making generalizations or normalizing their subcultural status. They chose, for theoretical reasons, to

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[11] Robin Lakoff, in her much quoted *Language and Woman's Place*, describes the phonological, morphological and syntactic characteristics of "women's language" grounded on a psychological analysis of the allegedly woman's secondary social status. Deborah Tannen has done substantial research and published some seminal works on this issue successfully showing that male and female conversational styles are different.

[12] We are referring to the mid-1970s and the work in what was called the Birmingham Tradition: the joint studies of the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, UK. The leading members of the group embarked on empirical studies of subcultures located in the UK: *Teds*, *Mods*, *Rockers*, *Skinheads* and *Punks*. The explicative scheme was the Gramscian theory of hegemony focusing on the forms of rebellion expressed by certain youth groups. The leading contributors to the subcultural theory in the Birmingham tradition were Stuart Hall, Paul Willis, Dick Hebdige, Phil Cohen. Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson (eds.) (1976). *Resistance through Rituals. Youth Subcultures in Post-War Britain*. London & New York: Routledge

ignore that young people, teenagers included, are psychologically intent on defining themselves as individuals too. Subcultural identity is a social identity and it is defined by group membership and social roles. This distinguishes it from personal identity, which includes a person's idiosyncratic traits and uniqueness[13]. Teens are at a time in their biological and psychological becoming where they need to belong (to a peer group) as well as to individuate. Two divergent forces are at work, conformity and individualism, and the teens are both under peer group pressure to conform as well as reacting to the inward psychological drive to establish her/his personality. Language is a transparent reflector of these powerful, divergent vectors and, more often than not, the teenager can be seen to accommodate his speech to that of the group he wishes to be affiliated with and establish for her/himself a status within. It would be safe to say, then, that whatever conformity we have noted forming in time among the messages posted by the more consistent teen authors to the Forum under scrutiny it only stands to reason in light of the above argumentation.

Conclusions

Teen lifestyle magazines document subcultures but also construct them. They subject position their readers by offering them identity frames to fit into. This is implemented mainly through the language and messages of their texts. The editors programmatically display a linguistic solidarity of sorts with the young readership which materializes at the levels of the socio-cultural references, the discourse strategies and patterns, and the linguistic variants of the oral and written discourses of the printed media which cue their texts for a 'young' reading.

On the other hand, the teen readers are offered mainstream space to negotiate their own versions of their identity. The mainstream space comes in the form of the *Forums* of the electronic versions of teen magazines, a space which the addressees use expertly and intently as an arena for expressing attitudes, resisting mainstreaming messages and negotiating identity. It can be said that the niche media for young people is a locus where 'dominant' and 'subordinate' ideologies intersect creating the setting for identity building.

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[13] Widdicombe, Sue, Wooffitt, Robin. (1995). *The Language of Youth Subcultures. Social Identity in Action.* New York, London, Toronto, Sydney, Tokyo, Singapore: Harvester Wheatsheaf. P. 27.

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Face to Face & without Face and Sound: Offline & Online Interaction[1]

Maria Diaconescu

Abstract

The paper discusses the evolution of dialogue and human relationship in the current context of computer and internet-mediated communication among teenagers. The questions of the research are based on the premise that dialogue, which requires empathic understanding and response, represents one of the most efficient and durable instruments to disarm violent interpersonal conflicts. It is hard to imagine transforming conflicts into creative and developmental opportunities without this kind of understanding, especially its communicational values; much less its importance in preventing emotional or psychological violence that potentially exists in every human relationship. And last but not least, empathetic understanding can serve as one of the ways to avoid the trap or seduction of gossip. The present research explores the following questions: Q1: What happens among teens in their daily online interaction on instant messenger (IM)[2]?, and Q2: What happens with

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[2] The statistical data of our research in Cluj show that more than 60% of teens (with no difference between females and males) use emails only 2 or 3 times a month to contact their friends, colleagues and relatives. However, 90% of teens use IM: 67% of them talk everyday or almost everyday on IM with their friends; 47% with their colleagues; 25% with people from Cluj they had met for the first time on the Internet, and met later also face to face; 20% with people from Cluj they have never met face to face, and 17% with people from Romania they have never met face to face; 31% with people from Romania

the dialogue – in the offline here and now interaction - in the context of daily online IM interaction? It is possible to exercise and develop empathic understanding in online interactions? And if so, how is it possible? The research method I used to explore the reciprocal influences between the offline and online exchanges of messages was the offline and online interview. In the present study, the oral messages, communications exchanged face-to-face, here and now, are called offline messages. The written messages exchanged via IM – messages exchanged without face and sound, I- here and you- there, both of us connected now to the Internet, – are called online messages.

Keywords: offline, online, instant messenger (IM), perception of the discrepancies between messages, congruence of the messages, interaction, dialogue, sympathy, empathy, projection of feelings and needs.

One day I met face to face a girl who is an internet fan. She keeps downloading daily: music, most recent software, Wikipedia references, e-journals and all. She keeps using email and messenger all day long, her YM lead keeps bleeping, she keeps accessing blogs and social networks. We keep changing thoughts on what the internet does for us and with us and she tells me amazed: *One day I met a guy and I wanted to greet him and instead of opening my mouth I moved my fingers like over a keyboard and I asked myself: what's going on with me? I was blocked. Then I realized that I'd got to switch channels.* Silently I keep a mental record of her account on what's going on: I reduce the amplitude of my regular moves, I wipe any sound or image from my mind and I inhibit this way any movement of my vocal chords and I move silently my fingers as if I were to greet somebody with my fingers. If I want to type hello to a person in front of me without any keyboard or screen, it's like thoughts withdrawing from my vocal chords and the movement of my right hand meaning hello into the tips of my fingers, as if I were playing piano without producing any sound.

Theoretical framework

What and *how* we communicate are two questions which send us to two axioms of the pragmatics of human communication that are intimately

living abroad they have met face to face before talking on IM; 15% with people living abroad they have met face to face (see Annex for details).

connected: the content and the relational aspects of communication (Watzlawick et al., 1967, pp.51-53, 80-86), respectively digital and analogue communication (Watzlawick et al., 1967, pp.60-67, 99-106) as described by Watzlawick and his colleagues at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto. Their research demonstrates that the content aspect of communication is digital in nature: words or arbitrarily manipulated signs or symbols in accordance with a logical syntax of a language. The relational aspect, on the other hand, is predominantly transmitted in an analogical way: movements, mimics, gestures, postures, intensities and rhythms or frequencies in which words are expressed. The Palo Alto school describes nonverbal communication (also called body language) as analogue messages, invoking the relationship and consequently suggests influencing future rules of relation. Watzlawick brings into attention the fact that human interactions fall under the incident of reification[3] anytime communication partners stop or refuse to ask questions with reference to the relationships in which they are involved, and the reciprocal effects of their expressed messages in different situations.

Egan (1994: 95) mentions a study of Mehrabian who initiated his research with the question: what indexes are used by humanity in order to identify sympathy or antipathy towards others? Mehrabian found that only 7% of our messages are verbal or digital. He further discovered that sounds indexes would contribute at a rate of 38%, and facial expressions at a rate of 55%. When facial expressions or tones of voice are inconsistent with spoken words, the facial expression or tone of voice is that detail which is given the greatest credibility. This is illustrated by the following discrepancies or incongruence between statements and nonverbal behaviour: *That question doesn't bother me*, said with a flushed face and closed fists, or *I really love my brother*, said in a quiet tone with averted eyes (Ivey, 1994: 78-81).

According to Egan, the feelings and attitudes experienced by the person *here* and *now* are mostly expressed nonverbally and represent the core aspect of the empathic understanding (Egan, 1994, pp.84-95, 170-175). The empathic attitude works like a mirror – even if an imperfect mirror – which

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[3] The process in which the social relations become object relations; even the human being - from a conscious doer of the social process - turn him/herself into an object, instrument of these social process: Marcu, F., et al. (1986) Dicţionar de neologisme [Dictionary of Neologisms] .

reflects the honest acceptance and understanding of the other in terms of his or her feelings, needs and meanings. The key of empathy, according to Carl Rogers, is *to be present in relationship here and now*. Empathy, as conceived by Rogers[4], means that I feel the inner world of the other with all his/her personal feelings and meanings "*as if*" these were my own world of feelings and meanings without losing the quality of the "*as if*". Empathy means that I feel the anger, fear or confusion of the other "*as if*" these were my own feelings without allowing my own anger, fear or confusion to interfere. However, if I "put myself into somebody else's shoes" in order to see how I do in fact feel "in another's shoes", it means that I attribute my own feelings and meanings to the other (Diaconescu, 2007). This is not empathy; this is projection. In its conscious variant this projection is expressed in the first person as "I feel exactly the same way…" or "For me it means… ". This kind of conscious projection has the potential to generate sympathy and solidarity because I assume responsibility for my own feelings and meanings without projecting or inserting them unconsciously into the "another's shoes". To allow myself to walk in "the other's shoes" or to fall off my own chair[5] when the other is fidgeting or is moving erratically on his/her own chair, suggests that I have lost the quality of "*as if*". This is not empathy; this is empathic identification. The more honest the immediate or the *here and now* feedback from the person who relates the experience (or the more *authentic*, in terms of existentialism), the better the chance of the emphatic message approximating the intended message. Without immediate verification of the understanding gained, every act of empathy or intuition risks becoming pure fantasy or projection. The only way in which we can verify the empathic understanding that we have gained is by verbalising this understanding, *here and now,* in relationship and dialogue with the other who gives us the experience with which we empathise. In this way we

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[4] Kirschenbaum H., Henderson V.L. eds., 1989, *The Carl Rogers Reader,* Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, New York, pp. 226-229: there are different levels of empathic understanding, positive regard/ unconditional acceptance, and authenticity. Only the presence has the quality of the "to be or not to be": to be or not to be in psychological contact, in relation.

[5] Richard Bandler and John Grinder, (1979). *Frogs into PRINCES - Neuro Linguistic Programming,* ed. Steve Andreas, Real People Press, Moab, Utah, pp.81: If you believe that you have to have empathy, that means that you have to have the same feelings that your client does in order to function well as a therapist.

allow the other to immediately point out to us the errors of understanding that we inevitably commit. It is no accident that verbalising our understanding is so important in Rogers' psychotherapy. With this aspect or attribute we remove ourselves from the comfortable episteme of knowledge, and we enter into the fluid and uncomfortable episteme of communication.

Whenever the central theme of communication is the relation – says the Palo Alto research team – we realize that digital language is rendered almost meaningless. Just as this is true between man and animal, it is equally true in circumstances of human life as diverse as courting, falling in love, helping each other, fighting, and definitely in any interaction with very small children as well as patients with a mental disorder. Children, clowns, and animals have always been credited with a particular intuition with regard to the sincerity or insincerity in human attitudes; it is easy to verbally pretend something but it is difficult to maintain a lie in the field of the analogical. In existentialism this phenomenon is known as *authenticity* and in Carl Rogers' branch of psychotherapy it is known as *congruence*, which means the overlapping of analogue and digital messages, or putting it in a simpler way, what we think coincides with what we say and what we do in relation to a given situation.

In the context of *written*, online interaction, the congruencies, discrepancies or dissimilarities between two statements, are obvious. On the other hand, in the context of face-to-face conversations they can be heard. For instance, the following discrepancy between statements: *My son is perfect, but he just doesn't respect me*, can be written online, or uttered in a face-to-face interaction or in a phone conversation. Other congruencies and discrepancies, as described by Ivey (1994: 79-80), are entirely invisible online: for example, congruencies and dissimilarities between nonverbal messages, between statements and nonverbal behaviour, between what one says and one does, between people, and between a person and the situation in which he or she is involved. This phenomenon of *limited physical sensory information*, called *online disembodiment*, means a 93 % decline in nonverbal communication. Because of the decreased nonverbal cues, says Sherry Turkle mentioned by Seok Kang (2007), in online interaction the partners in communication are likely to experience more intense and intimate self-disclosure and less social responsibility towards the others than in face-to-face communication. Consequently, many cultural and gender nonverbal cues remain hidden

online as well. In the face-to-face intercultural and inter-gender interaction, we engage in observation, and recall that each culture has a different style of nonverbal communication (Ivey, 1994: 74). In online interaction, people speaking different native languages do not have to be careful in not assigning, that is to not projecting, their ideas about what is "correct" and appropriate nonverbal communication on other people.

Daniel Yankelovich, referenced by Richard Louv (2006) in his recent book *Last Child in the Wood,* says*:* "What I see in America today is an almost religious zeal for the technological approach of every facet of life. This faith transcends mere love for new machines. It's a value system, a way of thinking, and it can become delusional" (pp.64-66). According to Louv, we can see the rise of what might be called cultural autism: tunnelled senses, and feelings of isolation and containment. What we can see, hear, taste, touch, feel, or smell for ourselves helps each of us to develop our ability to experience our world directly. Louv also cites Moore who asserts that sensory experiences link the child's exterior world with their inner, hidden, affective world. Atrophy of the senses, says Louv, was occurring long before we came to be bombarded with the latest generation of computers, high-definition TV, and wireless phones. Urban children, as well as many suburban children, have long been isolated from the natural world because of a lack of neighbourhood parks, or lack of opportunity – lack of time and money for parents who might otherwise take them out of the city. But the new technology, concludes Louv, accelerates the phenomenon.

According to Louv, much of our learning comes from doing, from making, from feeling with our hands; and though many would like to believe otherwise, he says, the world is not entirely available from a keyboard. Nancy Dess, senior scientist with the American Psychological Association, referenced by Louv, says: "None of the new communication technologies involve human touch; they all tend to place us one step removed from direct experience. Add this to control-orientated changes in the workplace and schools, where people are often forbidden, or at least discouraged, from any kind of physical contact, and we've got a problem". Without touch, says Louv, infant primates die; adult primates with touch deficit become more aggressive. Primate studies, referenced by Louv, show that physical touch is essential to the peace-making process. Diminishing touch

is only one by-product of the culture of technical control, but Dess referenced by Louv, believes it contributes to violence in an ever more tightly wired society.

From childhood experience we learn to trust those who touch us tenderly, says Dreyfus referenced by John Weckert (2005: 107); *trust is based on feelings of security* that babies get in their caretakers' arms. But this experience, according to Dreyfus, is missing online world. His second point on the online trust is based on the fact that trust involves vulnerability. If I trust someone, says Dreyfus, I am to some extent vulnerable; however, I must be in the same room as someone to be really vulnerable with respect to that person, and to know that he or she will not take advantage of me. If our only contact is online, the potential for harm, and hence my vulnerability, says Dreyfus, is not great.

Nissenbaum referenced by Weckert (2005) argues that the conditions for the creation and maintenance of trust offline are not present online. One of these is missing identity; online is not clear whom we are communicating with, so it is difficult to know whether it is someone trustworthy. And because they are anonymous, more or less, there is less reason to believe that they will act responsibly. In addition, it is often difficult to know whether we are communicating with the same person over time. The second problem, according to Nissenbaum, is missing personal characteristics; many of the cues that we use to assess trustworthiness are missing, the communication channels are very narrow, no body language is conveyed, so reliance is purely on the verbal, and that itself is limited to the written word. In the online environment, we have an amount of control over how we present ourselves to others that is not possible in the offline world. Therefore, nobody can get to know our characters in the way that is common in friendship. I know my friends' strengths and weaknesses, and they know mine, says Weckert, but we are friends nonetheless. Although this is an argument about friendship, it is relevant also to trust. If we have a *high level of control over how we present ourselves to others,* it is highly likely that the presentation will contain more of our favourable attributes than the less favourable ones. The possibility of deception is also increased, so not only is the possibility of true friendship lessened, says Weckert, but so is the possibility of trust.

Basic human needs are arranged in a pyramidal hierarchy of less or greater priority or potency: the less potent needs emerge upon the gratification of the more potent ones. According to Abraham H. Maslow (2007/1987: 351),

the gratification of any social, emotional, cognitive, expressive, and aesthetic need is a value and this is true of the love of safety as it is of the love of truth, or of certainty in human relationships. The physiological needs, when unsatisfied, dominate the organism, says Maslow, pressing all the capacities into their service and organizing these capacities so that they may be most efficient in this service. Relative gratification allows the next higher set of needs in the hierarchy to emerge and dominate the ego, so that instead of being hunger dominated it now becomes safety dominated. The principle is the same for the other sets of needs in the hierarchy: love, esteem, and self actualization - to become everything that one is capable of becoming, to be true to his or her human nature (Maslow, 2007/1987: 111). When a person is dominated by a certain need, her or his whole philosophy of the future tends also to change (p.85). There are certain conditions, says Maslow (2007/1987: 94), that are immediate prerequisites for the basic needs gratification: freedom to speak, freedom to do what one wishes as long as no harm is done to others, freedom to express oneself, freedom to investigate and seek for information, freedom to defend oneself, justice, honesty or *authenticity or congruence*. Without these conditions, the basic gratifications are impossible or severely endangered. Just as any danger to the cognitive capacities, such as deprivation or blocking of their free use, must be indirectly threatening to the basic needs themselves, the danger to the above mentioned conditions - such as secrecy, censorship, dishonesty or lack of authenticity or congruence between messages, blocking the communication – threaten all the basic needs.

Jochen Peter and Patti M. Valkenburg's analysis (2006) focuses on how adolescents perceive the controllability, reciprocity, breadth and depth of internet communication in comparison with face-to-face communication. In their study, controllability means that the adolescents can easily control if, when, how, how much and what they communicate to others on the internet. Reciprocity means that the adolescents feel that they and others are more responsive in Internet communication than in face-to-face communication. Peter & Valkenburg have found that younger, socially anxious and lonely adolescents more strongly value the controllability of internet communication and perceive it as broader, deeper and more reciprocal than older non-socially anxious and non-lonely adolescent respondents. Boys perceive internet communication as more reciprocal than girls do. The greater the adolescents'

need for affiliation, the more often they regard internet communication as deeper than face-to-face.

Human needs and values in online interaction on IM: joys and disappointments.

First of all, let's see what is happening when one is using IM? In order to find out the answer to this question I have explored the online way of life of teenagers with joys and sorrows using every day IM. The starting questions in the interviews were: *What do you like / enjoy online on IM?*, and *when do you think you lose your patience or become upset online on IM?* The aim of these questions was to identify fulfilled and unfulfilled needs of teenagers. I have started from the supposition that their needs and values expressed both online and offline reflect themselves in their feelings and their significance and are like a blueprint of the rapidly and thoroughly changing contemporary world.

Online Interview[6]: *hmm... on mess'... I enjoy talking... falling in love :D (grinning)… most teens are falling in love, making a lot of new friends[7];)) (laughing)... I received answers to my burdening questions:) (smiling)…it had started from a small talk …now I feel free, not necessarily safer[8]...*

Offline Interview[9]: *I enjoy listening to my friends when they're sad or angry… also to share films, music, jokes, when we are laughing and show all kind of emoticons*

On In: *I am angry when my boyfriend misunderstands me on mess:)… it's normal to get angry.... we quarrel[10]:)... or I met a boy online who tried to lie to me … he*

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[6] Online interview on Yahoo Messenger, (17 year-old girl; the computer is placed in her room; she spends 3-12 hours online each day)

[7] Belonging and love needs; Maslow believes that the tremendous and rapid increase in personal growth groups, and intentional communities may in part be motivated by this unsatisfied hunger for contact, intimacy, and belongingness and by the need to overcome the widespread feelings of alienation, aloneness, strangeness, and loneliness, which have been worsened by our mobility, and by the breakdown of traditional groupings, the scattering of families, the generation gap, the steady urbanization and disappearance of village face-to-faceness. p.91

[8] Need to know and understand in order to get safety, certitude, feel free from anxiety.

[9] Offline interview: face-to-face, (17 year-old girl; the computer is placed in her room; she spends 1-3 hours each day)

*pretended to be another one someone else[11]:)... I was more dodger than him: D ... :))
I verified his IP and discovered he lied to me and I put him on ignore :D*

Off In : *I lose my patience online when somebody buzzes me to answer immediately
and I get in the situation that I have to answer quickly to more than one friend,
when I have to talk to everybody at once … I have to split my attention into
hundreds of directions and have just small talks … or when I cannot see his or her
face in front of me … I guide my understanding just after his or her writing[12] … if
I am tired I could misunderstand and write something wrong because I have to
write quickly and we get to quarrelling...*

As with passive and active voice, human needs, like *to be loved* and *to
love, to be protected* and *to protect* etc., and the values in actions which are
persistently blocked in the existing interpersonal relationships - are reflected
in the current social problems, such as social disengagement and isolation,
duplicity or multiplicity of faces, lack of trust and safety, ignoring, discrimination,
and violence. These social problems which are left as a legacy from the
previous generations are also reflected more and more online, especially
when they remain invisible and silent offline. On the other side, those
human needs and endeavours which are fulfilled, even if they are fulfilled
online or only online, are signs which tell us that teens have access to
important resources of help and support which offer them at least a temporary
safe haven. However, the social problems that teens are confronting, and
their problem-solving strategies *here and now* in their day-to-day life in their
current relationships, are moving faster and faster in the online world:
I here and *you there.*

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[10] Need of unity in contact, intimacy and belongingness, of congruencies between verbal
and nonverbal is blocked online because lack of the presence of the other who gives
immediately nonverbal feedback

[11] Need to search, to know the truth as source of self esteem and to be in control. Honesty as
a condition for online safety; need of safety: to be respected when trust has been given/
extended to somebody

[12] Need of unity; congruencies between verbal and nonverbal messages, between I and You,
are blocked online. Need of safety, of the presence of the other who gives immediate
nonverbal feedback, is blocked online

Expressing messages online and offline.

After having found out some of the things that go on when teens interact online, let's see what differences and reciprocal influences there are between expressing oneself online and offline. In order to find out if these differences really exist I have started with the following set of closed questions: *Is it easier for you to express yourself online or offline? Do you have a better comprehension of online messages as compared to offline / oral messages? What do you think hurts more when gossiping or any kind of verbal abuse: when it's done online or offline?* In addition to that I have further explored the answers which I have received with open questions.

Online Interview: *it's easier to express oneself... on messenger... that's obvious:)... in writing... usually...but it doesn't matter to me, it's all the same:)... only when you write it seems easier:)... if I meet a guy whom I like :D … I'm becoming emotional when meeting him face to face :D... that means... it's easier when you write all those things... you can mask a lot of things[13] when chatting:)... you can use emoticons like ":))" and you can be ironical or cool, at least you can leave the impressions that you're like that... indifferent:)… :P …even when you're very angry... especially then, you say silly things when you speak but you don't write them... there are no words to express exactly what I feel:)…anyway... when meeting someone face to face you can show things without saying them:)... it is different :D… it happened last night:)... online he doesn't understand what I feel, what we both feel:)... when we are face to face with these misunderstandings are not supposed to happen*

Offline Interview: *you've got the courage to say more things online as compared to when you're face to face with someone[14]... I don't find it very easy to express*

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[13] Need of self-esteem that is to avoid showing vulnerable feelings, to keep control on feelings. Being in the others' presence, it is much more difficult to keep the feelings of one's own power, control and independence. On the other side, when the context or relationship is safe enough *to show authentic feelings online*, the words are not enough to describe and express the feelings and their meanings online, therefore the risk of misunderstandings is much greater, and those misunderstandings might easily show up online.

[14] In the partners of online conversation the need to be respected by the other and to accept his/ her otherness begins to emerge more easily. They might feel belongingness and acceptance of the other to be much easier because online they feel safe enough to express

myself online... my feelings and my ideas... probably it's not so difficult online with the feelings expressed, but I encounter problems online with my ideas… I certainly use emoticons but when it's about deep feelings or important ideas, hmm... I don't know, online I can come back to any written message... sometimes, when you're very quick on the internet you may type words that are out of place, you can always come back to the written message and reply as long as you've got the idea... on the other hand I've not enough patience to express all my feelings... I'm uneasy with the keyboard... it depends on the rate... on how fast you think, first of all you're pressed as the other person may respond very quickly, you don't have time enough to express your ideas... on the other hand there's a lot you would like to say but you've lost your patience and are bored with typing[15]...

Off In: *it becomes inevitable to use abbreviations and to mistype words; this is like gossip, when you see a word mistyped, you're a little shocked and think it's ugly... well, you can normally retype the word, but people mistype a lot of words while chatting on the internet, while when they talk to each other... you can correct yourself instantly... mistakes do not become that obvious...*

Off In: *you may go on talking to somebody face to face, you may repeat a joke online, as you get really close to someone only when you face the person, which goes on online, to a certain extent,... while it's more difficult the other way round... I will not give my ID away, but it has happened to me that I was online with a person I knew since childhood and when we actually meet we have difficulties in communicating with one another... at any rate it becomes more difficult to get through as compared to an online relationship*

Online attacks: quarrels, gossip, harassment

Online Interview: *arguments... while chatting? oh, yes... quite often... and we use rude words... I'm turned off in written and oral talk as well... of course, there are differences... may people become more careless... the others... when writing... but it's obvious;)... it's more convenient in writing... the risk is to get the proper message through to the other side:)...*

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negative feelings and crazy ideas without being afraid of extreme or violent face to face criticism or emotional abuse.

[15] The curiosity and the need to access information is gratified easily and fast; on the other hand, thinking fast and organizing information in a very short time does not necessarily means thinking deeply. Knowledge needs time to grow.

Off In: *sometimes you say offending things, words that you had not the courage to utter when quarrels occur;*

Off In: *everybody teases online, like among friends; it's very strange, you extend the chatting over the internet in the everyday life, it happens that you joke on the net and go on face to face with the same joke... things are not necessarily amplified, you burn out your message and it's over, you forget ... it's easier to tease people on the internet, emoticons help you a lot in this respect; it's nicer to do that on the internet, to pick on the other's mistakes, the change is reciprocal, there's never one person that gets all the blame, it's simply funny and nevertheless we are careful not to offend people... in spite of the fact that it happens time and again... and it's not the tough words that have this effect... the gossip... it's strange to see it written instead of hearing... strange and sometimes shocking, it's like someone who talks badly about you in public... it becomes more painful in this sense;*

Understanding online and offline messages

Off In: *it's impossible to notice certain details online, it's different when a person is standing in front of you and you witness the person's happiness and voice congratulations... it's easier that way to notice when someone is honest[16], every user has a personal style online... I'm not sure of my better understanding, still I prefer oral/ spoken/ vocal verbalization/ expression, the latter seems more interesting to me, somehow I'm pressed to answer... an oral/ spoken/ vocal message rather than a written one that can always be postponed,... there are no intonations/ no vocal stress, no change in voice… I don't know but I feel this online sort of communication to be dry... as compared to vocal stress, you understand what the interlocutor considers to be important... I also feel that face to face communication is to be taken more seriously than over the internet; it's also easier to joke over the net; while face to face, you realise when the other person may be offended, and you can stop in due time[17]... over the net you may receive an emoticon that laughs while the other user feels completely differently;*

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[16] Need of certitude, of feeling safe online, is blocked; the congruence or unity between the verbal and nonverbal messages is impossible to check immediately online because the nonverbal aspects of the messages are entirely missing, therefore their authenticity is sooner or later questionable.

[17] Offline, face to face, the sense of responsibility, of caring is much greater. (Sherry Turkle mentioned by Seok Kang)

Sacrificing honesty for the sake of politeness in order to avoid rejection, non-acceptance, exposure to vulnerability, growing tension or loss of control over feelings like annoyance or anger is also met in face to face communication. All the above is hardly to be noticed in an online community where the sensorial, nonverbal, or relational aspects of communication are entirely missing. One of the few signs indicating a change in feelings and significance online is given by the change in duration of time and rhythm in the sequence of written answers. For the partner of conversation who is hiding, and avoids expressing oneself assertively, sacrificing honesty maybe perceived as an advantage of control or strength. On the other side, that partner of conversation might feel a certain ambiguity or confusion in interpreting messages because the absence of immediate nonverbal feedback and control is misleading. The impossibility to observe online the degree of congruence and discrepancy between messages creates also an impossibility to increase any effort in exercising empathic understanding and attitude with regard to online messages (with reference to the conditions of empathic understanding described by Ivey and Egan). In its turn, the fact that any empathic capacity is neither used, nor exercised, and therefore is atrophied, implies less care for the other user (diminished social responsibility online has already been noticed by Sherry Turkle). These statements suggest that online dissimulation is as high as the online freedom to express assertively which is definitely greater than in face to face communication as the study carried out by Peter and Valkenburg (2006), on *individual differences in perceptions of internet communication among teens,* suggests. One of the lessons we may be learning online is that one is able to control what one expresses and does online, while being unable to control any of the answers, reactions or acts of the other users. It is in our power to maintain a reasonable level of credibility or trustworthiness as far as our messages are concerned, while it is beyond our power to control the way the other users react online to our messages. Hopefully, the assertivity of the messages exchanged and learned online might be transferred to offline *here and now,* face to face interactions.

The study of Feng et al. (2004) explores the influence of empathy on interpersonal trust in the textual online communication environment. The authors consider that empathy results from the observation of nonverbal messages in face to face communication. Although these messages are missing in online text communication, people develop a certain degree of empathy

and start trusting one another within certain contexts. The studies mentioned by the authors show that relationships build up and, based on previous face to face encounters, as well as on previous face to face interaction using audio or video or both, encourage and support, to a much higher degree, reciprocal trust and cooperation in online text communication than does online text interaction alone. In the mentioned study, I noticed the so called empathic messages, like "*I feel the same as you do*", in fact, indicate sympathy, not empathy.

My view is based on the definition of empathy in psychotherapy and counselling worked out by Rogers, Egan and Ivey; the implicit definition of empathy underlined by the study of Feng et al. (2004) seems to me inadequate. This inadequacy invites me to reflect on the importance of intonation and other nonverbal signs in empathy and sympathy as well. I wonder if it is intonation and other non-verbal messages that have the partner of conversation perceive and accept a comment as either just as sympathy or rather as a sign of empathy. I wonder what else? At any rate, the mentioned study admits the importance of nonverbal signs in empathy, even if the definition of empathy points to sympathy. In the conclusion to the same study I read that so called empathy, in fact sympathy – as I have already pointed out - encourages reciprocal understanding and trust in the online text communication environment.

In addition, what I consider to strongly support online mutual trust is the offline and online *reciprocal authenticity and acceptance and respect* without advices, criticism or messages of rejection, ignoring or non-acceptance. The implied rule of *sameness* which is given by the common needs, aspirations, feelings, features and actions of teenagers, and on which their reciprocal sympathy is relying: "*birds of a feather flock together*" becomes for teenagers a very important rule of affiliation and their most important source of mutual esteem and respect. Finally, it becomes obvious that online trust results from offline and online acceptance, no matter how conditional, and from resulting solidarity.

Observations and hypothesis for future research

One difference I have discovered is between the number of messages typed online and the number of words said offline within the same unit of time. I became curious to find out how many messages were exchanged by typing within one hour in an online interview that had lasted for almost

three hours using the YM application. I then compared this number with the number of messages exchanged by talking face to face within one hour in an offline interview that had been typed after finishing the interview. I have found that, in an asymmetrical and unilateral conversation like an interview, in one hour I and one teenager exchanged 3.000 online messages during the online interview, while in comparison, I and another teenager uttered 6.000 spoken messages in our *here and now* face to face interview. Consequently, in the same unit of time, in a conversation that takes place face to face *here and now*, we most probably exchange a double volume of messages as compared to a textual online environment. The average is approximately 100 spoken words compared to about 50 words typed online in a minute. This hypothesis needs further verification.

In an online environment, a person answering to an interview takes a lot of breaks or interrupts the conversation, which is highly irritating for the person that is conducting the interview, testing his/her patience. While taking a break one never knows whether the interlocutor is having one or more different conversations online at the same time, is browsing the internet, answering the phone, eating, writing homework or just is not interested in going on with the conversation. Compared to a face to face interview, the online environment permits the interviewed person to disengage more often, by interrupting the conversation any time he/she gets bored or doesn't like the question. This is the reason why, before starting the interview, I have made sure that the interviewee will agree to spend 1-2 hours, dedicating his/her attention entirely to this activity. As compared to a face to face interview, I have noticed my own attitude of disengagement when the answers were coming in slowly, when they were predictable or like coming from a handbook and therefore uninteresting. If the incoming messages increased in rate, the answers were to the point and original, I was instantly alert as I had to cope with this influx of messages and had to evaluate answers instantly and decide upon supplementary questions. This circumstance has made me give up the practice of copy/paste when typing questions. I also modified my interviews so I was taking less of the respondent's time, testing his/ her patience less, and I was able to contribute to a more lively and dynamic conversation. In what way did I do this? The quality of my presence became different from one interview to another. Whenever I was rested, without the burden of other tasks to be

fulfilled at the same time, the quality of my presence was more obvious, my attention was more focused and lively, which generated more diversified, clear and non-predictable answers. The influence of state of being, or of the physical, emotional and social presence of the partners in a conversation, as Rogers puts it, is also an object for further study.

I keep asking myself about the difference in an online environment, typing words into separate windows, as compared to multiple audio or video conversations in the same period of time and conferences on Skype or YM. Would some start talking at once so that nobody would listen and understand anything as sometimes happens in face to face debates and TV talk shows even when the overwhelmed moderator tries to stop everyone talking at once? I wonder, in the context of Skype or YM multiple conversations and conferences what influence would the premature interference (interruption) or inference (conclusion about what is being said) have on face to face and *here and now* interactions. This is a question for further investigations of interactions on Skype, a question that can probably be explored once the cost of using this means of communication makes it more accessible.

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Cyber-kids – Life-styles and Character

Robert Arnăutu

Abstract

The Internet provides a different way of being-in-the-world. The ontological status of children today has changed and, consequently, they have to respond to a new challenge in their development. This change, in turn, creates new challenges for the society. In the first part of my article, I will point out that the image of the child used nowadays is a creation of the modern era and answers modern needs. The modern image is a result of a particular system of schooling, of transmitting information. However, in a knowledge networking society, this system fails us and therefore, it should be replaced by a system that considers the child an actor equally important to the teacher in the educational process. The second part of the article analyses the characteristics of digital self-presentation made by children for whom on-line identity is a 'construct' done by assembling items of life-style. Moreover, these assemblages take violent and shocking forms because of new media characteristics. In conclusion, I stress the need of character development as a response to possible personality disorders that accompany the on-line loss of self in multi-media assembled selves.

A history of "childhood"

A study of childhood is based on the premise of the existence of a distinct, well-defined category of childhood. The first part of my article deals with this essentialist definition and with the contemporary criticism of it, in an attempt to re-evaluate the status of the child in the new media culture. Criticisms of authority, essentialist, and pyramidal-structured society during the mid-twentieth century claim a new approach regarding children, an approach precipitated by the rise of Internet, a general-purpose network and environment for games, creative expression, art, film and photography that allow individuals being away from traditional structures to communicate, share and perform joint activities over computers.

    "Childhood" is not a biological category. The term applies broadly to the stage of human development between infancy and adulthood. This category was constructed along with many other social categories and institutions at the beginning of modernity. This invention is contemporary with other separations and differences, like madness, clinic and prison as analysed by Foucault[1], in the beginning of modernity as the way of establishing the essence of rational, white, adult man. Speaking and dealing with childhood today is indebted on the one hand to the discourses which separate childhood as an ontological category and on the other hand to anti-enlightenment positions that try to re-evaluate modern differences and to recognise the right of suppressed categories to speak for themselves.

    Only since the sixteenth century the children have had a different human condition than adults. As Philippe Aries, a French historian, shows by examining medieval works of art and school records, before the seventeenth century children were represented as mini-adults. The modern quest for an essence of human being isolated the child as an inferior category, a human being *in spe*, with no other purpose than that of being educated to become a full human being. According to this view, the child is not fully human and has characteristics that do not qualify him for an adult. Children are sexless, genderless, have no responsibility. They are to be protected or taught to behave. Children are either angelic creatures that do not tell good from evil and are powerless in front of society evils, or diabolic creatures, that must be limited in their actions until they learn the social norms.

    Both approaches are based on the assumption that the child is incapable to relate appropriately in society. Contrary to this modern, "enlightened" position, Holloway shows that in fact adults also fail to qualify for the essence of adulthood: *'The so-called hallmarks of adulthood: maturity, rationality, social competence, knowledge and so on are just as readily performed by a child as a grown-up. Likewise, adults can sometimes demonstrate naivety, gullibility and other less reasoned responses that are usually ascribed to children. Emotional and social competence is not therefore a stable attribute of a particular*

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[1] See M. Foucault, Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason, The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception or Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison.

age but rather is a fluid, context-dependent performance that can be staged by children and adults alike' (Holloway, 2003, 95).

In fact, adults and children alike have their own contextual way of emotional and social competence.

Children and Education

The concept regarding the immaturity[2] of a child gave birth to the identification of childhood with the educational stage of life, schooling. The child should receive the proper education in order to acquire the adult, mature stage. The considerations of the schooling process should emphasize the three needed stages to become a member of society: traditional, modern and contemporary. This threefold split corresponds to Sloterdijk's conception, which classifies communities in closed traditional ones, national-state communities and the open community of global village. To become a member of society means to develop the appropriate character, to acquire the relevant skills and to occupy the relevant place in society[3].

In a traditional society, this process is partially predetermined by the conditions of birth. Usually one cannot transcend his/her condition. In addition, the roles and skills in a traditional society are learned by doing and being a limited choice, a system for educating one as a member of society is unnecessary. The community is closed and there is only one way of doing things, not because it is impossible to do otherwise but because experimentation is a practice not accepted by traditional society. Speaking of techniques, Jacques Ellul shows that the medieval man preferred to improve its own capacities to do things with the existing technology rather than to change the way of doing, by inventing new technologies. '*There was no great variety of means for attaining a desired result, and there was almost no attempt to perfect the means which did exist. ... Man tended to exploit to the limit such means*

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[2] Maturity and childhood are complementary concepts and questioning one of them undermines the other too. Maturity as opposed to childishness is a way to behave regardless of age.

[3] These categories are to be considered as ideal types, which tend to be predominant in a society or in certain domains. For example, medieval society had a schooling system that transformed the natural pagan into the Christian man. But at the level of schooling, there was no consideration of child as inferior to adult. " Until the Second Vatican Council, each child was instructed that a Christian reaches moral discernment and freedom at the age of seven" (Illich, 1971, 26)

as he possessed, and took care not to replace them or to create other means as long as the old ones were effective' (Ellul, 1965: 67).

The traditional image is changed by the modern ideology of "the best way," as Ellul puts it. Therefore, there is a universal reason that everyone should follow and there is one best human being: the white adult man. As a result, children are raised into this image of the rational perfection and a unique way to pursue it. The modern national state requires the fulfilment of a never-ending project of construction of the perfect man and the perfect state. Modernity imposes an image, an essence of man that requires a system of education to instruct citizens into their roles. To sum up, education can no longer be left in the hands of individuals; society should try to respect one universal curriculum that will transform the raw human material (people) into modern citizens. The modern system in use today fails in a global society as the options have increased manifold, we can no longer aim for an essence to be learnt by everybody.

Modern schooling system

The schooling system is criticized by Illich as missing both its educational purpose and its informational process. *'But if schools are the wrong places for learning a skill, they are even worse places for getting an education. School does both tasks badly, partly because it does not distinguish between them. School is inefficient in skill instruction especially because it is curricular. In most schools a program, which is meant to improve one skill, is always chained to another irrelevant task. History is tied to advancement in math, and class attendance to the right to use the playground'* (Illich, 1971: 17).

The teacher is the supreme authority in the classroom who knows everything and the child is a raw material who should be informed/ created. On the one hand, the children should not have their own voice or thoughts, just to reproduce without knowing why, any information provided by the teachers. Reproducing the information gives the child no skills, no proper ways to deal with reality. On the other hand, the schooling environment is not educational, it does not develop a character in child, the habitual action as Aristotle calls it, because the teacher addresses the pupil with authority, as representing the system and the knowledge.

Baudrillard, Lyotard, and other post-modern thinkers see this transformation in the ontology of childhood as a result of the dissolution of paper-based written culture, a linear and authoritative culture that established the rule of one rational way of doing things. The authorities, as parent and teacher are rationally constructed, are to be criticised on this rational model. The constructed relationships by means of a written linear culture are in crisis because of the new media that takes the place of parents and teachers in a pluralistic, non-linear, and anti-authoritative way. Roger Fidler says in *Mediamorphosis. Understanding New Media*: "for little children, the television became a 'machine for revealing secrets'. [...] The television, especially after 1960, totally undermined this system and contributed to the dissolution of adult authority." (Fidler, 2004: 103).

On the other hand, this independence of children regarding old authorities is accompanied by a similar independence of the parents who prefer to leave the education of their children to the hands of state education and live their lives in a society of endless consumption. As Baudrillard puts it, "the parents are those who liberate themselves from children." (Baudrillard, 2001: 48) By breaking the necessary relationships of education between child and parent, pupil and teacher, the education, primarily that of child (that in modern times was realised at school and at home and only at home in traditional societies) has become an impersonal education.

Parents are too busy and want to liberate themselves for consumption while teachers become a simple formal entity with no power or authority. Therefore, the humanistic education, which is nevertheless a form of violence for Lyotard[4], is transformed in the assemblage of pieces of networked education that surpasses and dismisses the limits imposed by a linear system of formation. Nevertheless, we cannot accept the McLuhan point of view, or that of Illich, that networked and new media education will save us and will represent a revival of traditional and more natural way of being. On the one hand, there is no way back to the traditional society because the 'global village' is constructed by concatenation of (post)-modern metropolis.

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[4] „Every education is inhumane because it cannot succeed without coercion and terror, and I think about the least controlled education, the least pedagogical one, that which Freud calls castration and make him say, related to 'good methods' of raising children, that anyway thing go from bad to worse" (Lyotard, 2002: 8)

The 'global village' does not have the ethics of a village, and the modern ethics, in the form of Kantian categorical imperative, being dismissed as irrelevant today.

On the other hand, there is no '(more) natural' way of doing things. The 'natural way' is just one of the interpretations of the modern 'best way'. The new media is not closer to human nature. As Hannah Arendt puts it, there is at best just a human condition but there cannot be a human eternal essence. Therefore, new media can at least better fulfil the contemporary needs of humans. The criticism of essence (of a supposed essence of childhood in our case) determines a new image of children. They are no longer humans *in spe*, but full humans with rights, responsibilities, and the right to affirm their own culture. The childhood is no more a transitory period of life but a meaningful existence *per se*. As different from adults – because of modernity – children find in the new media the means to express themselves, to acquire a new ontological status. Sonia Livingston points out four characteristics by which this new media contributes to the reshaping the childhood:

1. Multiplication of personally owned media, encouraging the privatization of media use.
2. Diversifying media and media content, facilitating wider trends towards individualisation.
3. Convergence of traditional media, resulting in a blur of traditionally distinct boundaries.
4. Expansion of interactive media, resulting in the transformation of a mass audience into an active anonymous and larger group of participatory users. (Holloway and Valentine, 2003)

The child becomes an owner of very powerful tools, like computers and mobile telephones, the gates of access to a world designed for autonomous modern adults. Children can no more be isolated because the Internet is open and free with all its goods and evils. Computers, that children are more literate in than their parents, are the tools the world is managed by adults as well as by children nowadays. Whereas there used to be a specific time and space of childhood, delimited by the modern assignation of essences, now the children occupy the same cyberspace without even the possibility of identification of the (mis)use.

The effects of this access are growing geometrically as the number of media and media contents are increasing indefinitely. Children do not have

access to a 'modern' world of adults but to a different world (even so for modern adults themselves), a world build by negotiations in which children take part as well. They access a multitude of worlds in which there is no pre-established path. Each user can, and is obliged, to construct in its own way. However, a process of convergence of all media occurs, a bringing together, a Heideggerian Gestell, which makes possible the creation of virtual objects and personas constantly reshaped.

In addition, the last process mentioned by Sonia Livingston, but certainly not the least, is the interactivity of this digital realm. This interactivity is like the Cinderella of the digital world. The first computer networks, Arpanet and Minitel, were not intended to be interactive. As conceived by its creators, they were just systems of network distribution of information. The possibility of interaction in the form of infotainment between users was considered initially a misuse of the network but it became the mainstream of the Internet. Given the tremendous power of today's new media, forms of interactivity change to the point that forms of real-life world interactions do not easily apply to the Internet and mobile phone usage as well.

As we have seen so far, the image of child constructed from the seventeen century onwards does no longer correspond to the realities brought about by new media. The current educational system seems to be 'based on wrong premises' from a contemporary point of view. If modern education was effective in creating the modern man, it fails to answer contemporary challenges. The child is exposed to an infinite amount of information; therefore, a school system based on the transmission of information is simply out of date. Nevertheless, the complexity of contemporary society is more than ever in need of education, an education capable to respond the necessities of our 'brave new world'. This need for education is apparent if we consider the development of adult education in recent years and in the large amount of requalification by many.

A new paradigm of teaching

What Ivan Illich puts as the development of skills following personal choices, I will consider in the next part of my article from the point of view of character development and the assemblage of lifestyles.

In this section, I will consider two images of classroom that can show the characteristics of a new approach to education. Both classrooms are actually implemented. The first is a traditional classroom and the second is an IT classroom. What is peculiar to these IT classrooms is that they were not intended to be so, but the specific of content and material circumstances bring about a new model.

The traditional classroom is based on a pyramidal model in which teacher represents the authority, the keeper of information, of secrets that he transmits to pupils. The only role of pupils is to listen, learn, and reproduce the information. They are simply seen as *tabula rasa* to be written on. The channel of communication is one-to-many, because only the voice of teacher is allowed to be heard, so when a pupil speaks, is for reproducing what the teacher says, any other behaviour being considered either a wrong answer or indiscipline.

The IT classroom model is a lot more different. To emphasize this shift I will use a quote from Sarah Holloway and Gill Valentine's *Cyber-kids. Children in the Information Age*; it analyses the specific geography of some IT classrooms in Great Britain, characteristics that are also present in a large majority of IT classrooms around the globe as well. '*Perhaps one of the most noticeable aspects of the ICT lessons we observed in the case-study schools was their relatively relaxed atmosphere* (Schofield 1997, 35). *A research review of computers and classroom social processes, points to a number of studies* (for example, see Chaiklin and Lewis, 1988; Davidson and Richie 1994; O'Connor and Brie, 1994; Schofield, 1995). *Suggest that the introduction of computers into the classroom tends to be associated with* "*a shift in teachers' roles away from didactic whole class instruction towards more individualised and student-centred interaction.*" [...] *Children found ICT lessons more relaxed than other classes despite the fact many would eventually gain an educational qualification in the subject. This is because of the level of autonomy children have in relation to their learning. Pupils at Highfields, for example, described how their work in other lessons is strictly controlled by the teachers, and they are required to concentrate for long periods, listening to teachers, taking notes from the blackboard, or working from books. In ITC lessons by contrast, the pupils are taught as a group when a new task that will take several lessons to complete is introduced, but are then allowed working through this at their own pace soliciting help from the teacher as and when required. [...] This informality is emphasised for those pupils who are good at IT and therefore find the lessons less demanding. Though differences in ability are evident in all*

classes, they are more emphasised in those, which are not streamed by ability. Here, the brighter pupils can handle the work with ease and are left with time to themselves. Identified as one of the benefits of learning with computers, the relaxed classroom atmosphere that such student-centred teaching encourage, also have other implications. Most notably, social relations between children are more evident here than in strictly controlled classrooms where adult-child power relations are often more important. The IT lesson is thus a space within the school where teacher practice means pupil culture can come to dominat' (Holloway and Valentine, 2003, 49-50).

In conclusion, I emphasise on the characteristics of IT classrooms in opposition with the above mentioned traditional classrooms. The IT classroom is based on a network model in which teacher does not represent the authority, but only a more informed peer. The role of pupils is to discover, to ask, and communicate in order to develop their paths in acquiring the skills of computer programming. The children are peers in a game of development. The channel of communication is many-to-many, because teacher and children play the same role in class interactions. When a pupil speaks, he speaks his own voice, his own understanding of IT. That is more unexpected if we take into consideration that IT is a discipline as strict and as logical as maths.

However, one important aspect that should be emphasised is the presence of the computer that is not only a tool but also an *actant*. Following the Actor-Network Theory of Bruno Latour (Latour, 2005), we should say that the computer is an actor as important as the teacher and pupils in IT classrooms. The geography of the classroom is dictated by the computer: pupils should look not at teacher but at computer and the class is formed by little groups. The computer is the first interlocutor of the child. To paraphrase a Heideggerian metaphor, which said that the voice of the master creates a classroom, here the IT, the computer is what brings together the *actants*. What is also very important is that in IT classrooms pupils do not reproduce what teacher said but they create and develop skills, they take part at and modify the classroom, they become active. These characteristics are emphasized in *The Network Society* by Jan van Dijk, in the chapter entitled "Psychology", where he presents five opportunities of education in the new media age:

"1. Students will be able to *manipulate subject matter themselves*. The order, the speed, and even the complete contents do not have to be determined in advance. [...]

2. Making use of the many choices available in multimedia course material, students are *able to learn by exploring and experimenting* in open environments. [...]

3. Students may *choose from several types of presentation*, each with the same content. [...]

4. Course material used in multimedia education is extremely suitable for *visualising, modelling, and simulating* information. 'Playing' with this material proves to be a very valuable experience. [...]

5. Finally, interactivity enables the student to start a *direct dialogue* with a program in a device. This combination of hardware and software is called 'intelligent'. Students receive direct feedback and immediately know what they are doing wrong." (van Dijk, 1999, 205)

Thereby, the process of education should become a form of entertainment. The new media culture makes a shift in the way of perceiving and experiencing the reality[5].

The transformation of the schooling system as a whole into a new model is hard to acquire because the teachers are not digital natives and they lack IT knowledge and skills that pupils are experts at. Indeed, teachers' modern authority is destroyed in the new framework of the classroom but this is effectively how the things should work in order to develop pupils' autonomous personalities, to let them speak, create and discover.

Cyber-kids

We have seen so far how the image of a child has been actively changed by a new media culture and how this, in turn, affects the current educational system. We focussed first on the schooling system because of two reasons. First, the powerful link created by modern culture between childhood and schooling has the consequence that the criticism and the research of children

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[5] "The distracted person, too, can form habits. [...] Reception in a state of distraction, which is increasing noticeably in all fields of art and is symptomatic of profound changes in apperception, finds in the film its true means of exercise. The film with its shock effect meets this mode of reception halfway. The film makes the cult value recede into the background not only by putting the public in the position of the critic, but also by the fact that at the movies this position requires no attention. The public is an examiner, but an absent-minded one." (Benjamin, 1998)

were mainly directed to school environment. Secondly, giving the fact observed by Baudrillard that parents tend to liberate themselves from children and the growing amount of time that children spend in new media environment (Internet, television, mobile phones), we can state that only two entities educate a child, school and new media. We now proceed to analyse the relation between children and new media from the perspective of how they live the networked virtual world.

First, let us clarify the term 'cyber-kid' used in our article. In 1985, Donna Haraway published the essay *A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century* in "Simians, Cyborgs, and Women". There she introduced the term cyborg to designate the ontological status of technologically transformed human beings. *'A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. […] By the late twentieth century, our time, a mythic time, we are all chimeras, theorised and fabricated hybrids of machine and organism; in short, we are 'cyborgs'. The cyborg is our ontology; it gives us our politics. The cyborg is a condensed image of not only imagination but also material reality, the two joined centres structuring any possibility of historical transformation'* (Haraway, 1991, 49-50).

In our terms, the cyborg is the entity constructed through virtual networks. It does not have to be physically modified by technology. It is enough that nowadays our world is technologically orientated. Technology comprises digital technology, i.e. the Internet and mobile phones. We are hybrid beings constructed by a new understanding of being. To be connected means to understand differently our existence. In addition, our actions become mainly digital, virtual actions. The image of self is digitally constructed. The man with a computer connected to Internet or with a mobile phone is a different kind of being. The Heideggerian being-in-the-world has changed to a digital insertion in the networks. Therefore, we should reconsider the way children have to be conceptualized in a different way, especially because nowadays children are born in a technologically embodied world. They are digitally native. They are cyber-kids by birth.

Self-creation:

One of the main characteristics that the digital realm exhibits is the necessity of self-presentation. On every social network site the child is obliged, by the

structure of the site itself, to create his/her own image. Alternatively, to put it better, to re-create an identity. There are predefined tools, like avatars, layouts, fields to be filled in, that allow the child to choose an identity. Based on those choices a community is also instantiated, the links are automatically created. If the specific identity is more or less one's choice, the network dictates the patterns of construction. The structure of network is like birth characteristics that one cannot change. Each person receives a partial structure of himself or herself when he/she signs up. Moreover, if one does not choose an option, that field will receive a default value. As a result, the network itself is co-constituent of one's identity.

Multiple instantiation:

But the construction of the self is not linear and differs from one environment to another. To construe an identity in Second Life differs from constructing an identity on Hi5 or Yahoo Messenger. Each of them requires different information, different types of content. However, each of them requires a certain creation, a self-definition. In addition, the specific aim for connecting to a certain network requires the construction of an avatar with certain characteristics. One presents him/herself in a certain way on a date-site and in a different way on a forum concerned with cars. These identities could conflict with each other, and certainly they are not identical. Moreover, these multiple and different instantiations of users may be dealt with at the same time, shifting from one another. This process contributes to the fact that identity on the Internet (but with real-life consequence) becomes floating, unstable.

Self-experimentation:

Generally, teenagers are inclined to self-experimentation. Digital media enhance this characteristic. The new media culture puts a high value on being different and on self-experimenting. The multiplication of media correlates with a multiplication of modes of expression that are not only possible but become real. What is technologically possible is or will be instantiated. This need for experimentation seen in children produces content that blurs the limits and shock. For Heidegger, this need for experience of contemporary world is a consequence of nihilism and de-valorisation. If there are no new universal values to follow then we will be left with ceaseless experimentation.

Construction of life-style

In 1984, Albert Borgmann analysed the character of contemporary technology and presented the ubiquity of assemblage, a phenomena taking place in all domains of technological life. The reality is itemised, decomposed in its smallest constituting elements in order to reassemble them in products following the logic of technology assemblage. The logic of assemblage functions at every stage as the principle of deriving an indefinite number of products from some basic items. This itemised restructuring, the de-composition of basic elements, is accompanied by de-contextualisation. Elements should be extracted from their context to become pure elements for furthering life's production line. Life-style is constructed in the same manner.

The only value of these items of life-style is their assemblage value, their capacity to be included in any other construction. '*But when the supporting structure of daily life assumes the character of machinery that is concealed and separated from the commodities it procures and when these become isolated and mobile, then it becomes possible to style and restyle one's life by assembling and disassembling commodities. Life becomes positively ambiguous*' (Borgmann, 1987, 92).

Life itself becomes a commodity. The identity online is an assembled identity. The child is confronted with a large variety of items of life-style that he/she has to assemble in order to construct his/her identity. Moreover, is it a matter of only one identity or of the stabilization of identities? The many identities he/she can, and should, assume are, and should be, constantly reshaped. The reshaping is not a matter of getting closer to the real self, but of creating a multitude of selves. This may result in the development of capacities of expression and of one's personality, but also in the loss of one's personality in the multitude of life-styles she assumes. "At best the increase of opportunities for information and communication will contribute *to a universally developed personality*." (van Dijk, 1999, 216).

However, if one cannot manage the digital assemblage, there can be also personality disorders. Jan van Dijk proposes four related personality types. First, there is the rigid or formalistic personality, people who cannot relate to others in a normal way but only as they relate with computers or other media. Then, there is a computerised personality, who perceives others as just another type of computer. The unsocial personality tends to relate only

by means of computers as a safer environment, Finally, there is the multiple personality, whose roles played online surpass one's personality to such an extent that he/she is only those roles and nothing more.

The assemblage of lifestyles brings us to the problem of character. As Internet provides all necessary information, it also provides the necessary items to self-construction. Moreover, the new media culture is stringent in asking repeatedly for redefinitions of oneself. The Internet does not provide only information but also items of lifestyles as commodities in order for the consumer to construct his/herself. However, this eternal reconstruction becomes schizophrenia or paranoia unless there is a critical appropriation of those new media. For developing a character, one has to have one. This is true for technology and humans as well. Their characters shape each other in interaction. The problem with character is that one cannot acquire one if one does not have one yet. *'Metaphysically, character is neither essence nor accident. Epistemologically, character is neither conceived nor perceived. Anthropologically, character is neither determination nor freedom. Character is a reality always in-between, "Neither universal essence nor particular accident, a limited determination and an equally limited freedom. In it lies the heart of the human condition'* (Mitcham 2000: 133).

Similar to knowledge, which is not a summing up of the amount of items of information, the amount of items of life-style does not sum up in character. Aristotle defines character as produced by nature and habit. If one cannot form these habits, if one loses him/herself in the multitude of the selves assumed on the Internet, then the Internet becomes a weapon of self-destruction rather than a tool for self-creation. To be on the Internet means to create selves and communities by assembling items of lifestyle. The Internet requires the never-ending reshaping of oneself/oneselves. Users' characters and the way the Internet looks like depend on each other because, as Bruno Latour shows in his Actor-Network Theory, humans and artefacts act together and shape each other. On the one hand, the particular path through the network shapes one's character. On the other hand, to create self/selves and communities and digital objects (software, content) means to build the character of the Internet. Children, in this case, are the first victims if they do not have the necessary tools to develop a character, to create a meaningful use of the Internet.

Shocking identities

I will analyse further on an example of children-produced content in order to extract some more characteristics of cyber-kids. The material is one of many homemade videos produced by teenagers that lift the skirts of unknown women on the street. The videos posted on Youtube of gratuitous antisocial acts are neither a use nor an abuse of the network but an act induced by the specific disposition of contemporary technology. These acts were absurd if there were no record and no network to post the content. The record alone is not enough, because the posting part is more important. The academic 'publish or perish' is assimilated by Internet in the form of 'either post or do not exist'.

Moreover, the content of every post should be shocking because of the immense availability of tremendously various contents on the Internet to the extent that things become very insignificant. The trifling nature of things and people in new media is the cause of the violent character of such posts. The other is perceived through media, the other is just an image. This behaviour of recording antisocial performances is also a consequence of candid camera shows. Nevertheless, there are many differences between candid camera and these videos. In candid camera shows, the focus is on the embarrassment of people in strange situations. In addition, there are ethical limits in the case of television.

However, the children that created this type of content act as if others are media creations as well and the violence is purely experimental in character. These videos are centred only on shocking acts. These videos are not some extreme form of manifestation in new media but a normal characteristic.

Even the self-presentation of children is shocking. To post is to post something different. The children create exhibiting selves on Internet. Privacy and intimacy are understood in a different manner. First, it is because on-line relationships are unstable in the first stages. Consequently, the information given during online interactions presume a violent language, shocking content, lies as well as intimate things. The identity assumed online nevertheless has consequences for the real identity of children. They also construct themselves in real life as virtual identities. To be an Internet native means to see the real world as a continuation of the virtual world and not the

other way around as older generations do. The categories of self-presentation for children in real world are therefore different and follow online patterns. This brings again the problem of character, of developing children's personalities.

Therefore, more than ever, education has become utterly important. Children should receive the tools for consistent self-creation because the Internet tends to dissipate the personality. Even if the Internet can provide the tools for exceptional self-expression, it does not encourage it. This education should not assume the inferiority of children but should take the children as partners in projects of consistent development in on-line environments because, as we have seen, the traditional school pattern is unproductive in educating children because of its false premises.

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The Influence of the Internet on the Political Information and Participation of Romanian College Students

Dorina Guțu Tudor

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the current influence of the Internet on political knowledge and involves the participation of young women in Romania. More specifically, the paper presents the results of a survey carried out during February and March (2008) among female college students from two universities in Bucharest. The paper also presents and examines the answers to some research directions such as:

Does Internet usage lead to an increase or decrease (or have no effect) on the levels of information retrieval and offline political participation?

If it produces changes in the levels of participation, do these occur for specific activities? Does the Internet facilitate the access to political information? Are individuals who use this new media more knowledgeable on politics than the ones who do not?

Are they more interested (or motivated) in getting to vote? Only a minority of Romanian young people may use new media, so does the influence extend beyond these users?

The adoption of new media as communication tools has started to make inroads all over the world, in democratic and non-democratic countries as well. In Romania, the use of new media has started to increase due to affordable software and mainstream media that recognized their power as alternative news sources. This phenomenon raises new and rather controversial issues due to the fact that new media has started to play an increasingly important role with consequences for mainstream media and politics.

Keywords: Internet, new media, politics, college students

Introduction

With the advent of the Internet, mainstream media may have lost their monopoly over the supply of political information. It has become obvious that the Internet has become an important medium for various forms of political

communication and participation in recent years. The paper focuses on analysing the impact the Internet has on Romanian college students on two levels, namely political information and behaviour. The majority of researchers have come to accept that "most citizens think and know jaw-droppingly little about politics." (Luskin 2002, p.3) A number of studies indicated that this remark is particularly true where it concerns youngsters. Nevertheless, inspite being one of the more inert groups regarding political participation, studies made by Norris (1999) have revealed that youngsters are actually more likely to engage in information gathering and on-line political participation than they would if they used mainstream media and traditional methods.

However, are individuals who use this new media more knowledgeable about politics? Are they willing to engage in off-line political activities as well, or their interests only related to online issues? Therefore, if the answer to these questions is affirmative, what are the factors that influence their level of political information and political participation? From the current academic studies, we have selected only those who focus on the concept of selective exposure for this research.

The very first attempts to examine the concept of selective attention focused on political campaigns and the tendency of partisan voters to report greater exposure to appeals from the candidate or party they preferred (Lazarsfeld et al., 1948; Sears and Freedman, 1967; Schramm and Carter, 1959). Certainly, there is broad agreement that new technologies such as the Internet put in the hands of citizens a heretofore-unimagined ability to filter and personalise the information to which they are exposed. While at the same time dramatically increasing the amount and range of information which is available to them (and hence the possibility of perceptual overload and the need for selective exposure) (Negroponte, 1995; Rheingold, 1996; Iyengar et al., 2001).

Recent developments in technology have transformed in some respects the nature of political communication, with important implications for the possibility of selective exposure and the attention of young people. The incorporation of the Internet into the political communication landscape has resulted in two schools of thought about their implications.

Optimists have seen the Internet as a means of increasing political information and participation. Pessimists consider that the Internet rather favours political polarization. The theories of this latter school rest on the

mechanism of partisan selective exposure – that is to say, on the notion that, in both online and offline communication processes, young people seek out political views congruent with their existing beliefs, and avoid discordant views. Selectivity could be of importance particularly in the domain of political campaigns, where the volume of information increases and young voters, generally characterised by low levels of information and interest, are rather willing to adopt short cuts towards political decision-making. According to this perspective, the demand for political information would depend on the subjective utility or relevance of the coverage to youngsters.

For instance, as the candidates and mainstream media discussed particular issues, the composition of younger audience would change so that those who were personally "affected" by a specific issue (e.g. unemployment) joined the audience, while others who found the issue of less interest, departed. However, does this situation translate into the virtual world?

It is widely considered that the mainstream media-based campaigns have little impact on the young electorate. However, due to the Internets latest developments, youngsters' political and civic engagement in politics can take a variety of forms: participating or supporting political campaigns, becoming an active member in political organizations, contacting officials or networking with political groups and, ideally, even voting. The Internet as a tool for political participation is particularly useful to certain segments of society such as those that are geographically dispersed (e.g. communities of interests, Diasporas). In sum, the potential of the Internet to enhance political participation is much higher for certain modes of participation (mostly information aggregation such as opinion polls, electronic surveys, contacting elected representatives electronically).

Young individuals interested in political online communication seem to have in common the potential to be an opinion leader in their community more than most average youngsters. A study developed by Institute for Politics, Democracy & the Internet, George Washington University in 2004 revealed that online political activists are nearly seven times more likely than the average citizen to influence their peers when it comes to telling them what to buy, where to go on vacation, and which politicians to support. Hence, an information consumer is also a potential information producer on the Internet. The question is whether the availability of political information on the Internet means that youngsters can access and make use of that information.

Unfortunately, there are still fewer studies showing in detail what people actually do when they are online. Are they using the Internet for political purposes, or is it mostly for private purposes? According to the Digital Future Report produced by UCLA2 in 2004, the most popular Internet activities are email and instant messaging, reading the online editions of newspapers, hobby searches, entertainment and playing games (Digital Future Report, 2004).

Recent statistics provided by Trafic.ro (the most important Romanian provider of Internet statistics) indicate that the situation is the same for Romania, Internet users here being interested less in politics and more in information about entertainment. Nevertheless, the interest for political information seems to grow more likely during election times or important political events (e.g. the NATO summit) and political scandals.

There is some theoretical or empirical evidence that suggests a direct link between the level of information and political participation. One of the most comprehensive studies on political participation made by Verba and Nie in 1972 contends that the availability of information about politics does not affect the participation levels of the public. On the contrary, there are suggestions that low levels of information may render the electorate more 'susceptible to emotional appeals' and increase their participation in politics (Converse, 1972, cited in Bimber, 1998: 6).

Nevertheless, availability of information that is accessible to everyone is an important condition for political participation, although it is not always enough. More specifically, a survey by Pew Internet Centre conducted during the 2004 presidential elections in the US demonstrates that during elections, people who make extensive use of online political information tend to be the same people who are already strongly interested in politics. Online participants are also more likely to be people who are already active in political participation.

Research design

This study is the very first in Romania that focuses on analysing the correlations between the interest and level of political information and participation of college students that use Internet. The study will also assess the effect of the Internet on the level of selective attention of students to elections for the European Parliament that took place in Romania in November last year. The second question to be asked is whatever active online Romanian

students are active offline as well. The last question is whether there is any empirical base for claiming that there is an association between their levels of political information and participation. It is possible to argue that those who are more informed about politics could be more frustrated, which may lead to abstention from participation (Warren, 2002). Are people more informed about what is going on in politics more potentially to participate in online and offline activities because they can see the implications for their lives?

The study was based on a questionnaire applied during February and March 2008 on 344 undergraduate students from two universities in Bucharest (Academy of Economic Studies and National University of Political and Administrative Studies). The questionnaire had 39 questions. Among them, there have been used only 21 relevant for the chosen research topic. The age of the respondents was ranging from 19 to 25 years old. Both sexes answered the questions. However, the number of female respondents (200) is slightly higher than male (144 male). The difference can be considered rather natural and explainable considering the socio-economic profile of the two universities involved in the study, and the national ratio women-men (51% women and 49% men). All of them declared they were unmarried and indicated Bucharest as city of residence. Again, all of them declared they use computer and access Internet on daily basis. Other questions addressed mainly issues regarding their interest in politics, their tendency of persuading their peers, where from they got information about the European elections, but also if they read or have blogs, and their interest in being politically active online and offline.

Results and discussion

The results confirmed the main trends among youngsters as there were described in the latest national surveys (Barometrul de Opinie Publică) and research study on Romanian blogosphere (Holotescu, 2007). The main difference between young men and women identified by the level of information known about politics and the level of interest in politics, in general, and for taking part in political actions.

For instance, only 7.5% of female students declared they are very interested in politics compared to 22.22% of male students. More than a quarter of female students declared they were not at all interested in politics.

These findings are consistent with the findings about their information habits. 44.44% of male students admitted they read press on the Internet every day and only 28.5% of female students declared the same thing. Less than a quarter of women (23%) and 33% of men are subscribed to a newsletter, distribution list or feeder for political information. That indicates that technology alone does not automatically alter the level of information (at least not when it comes about politics). The Internet, for instance, increases information availability, but this does not influence the capacity of processing political information. Having more sources of information available does not automatically lead to motivation to obtain information and to seek different perspectives.
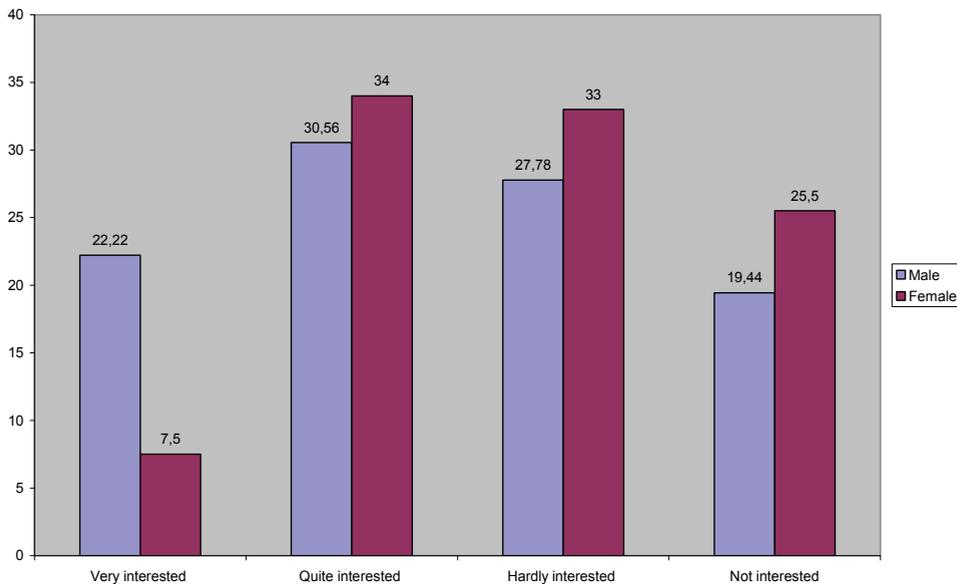
Figure 1. *How interested would you say you are in politics?*

However, the situation is different when it comes to getting information from online sources. The interest for getting information, in general, from blogs is rather high for both sexes. For instance, in the last 12 months, all of them declared they used the Internet for searching for information (work, study, health, travel, cinema, TV, city plans, etc.). Buying a product or a service (food, books, cinema, travel, etc.), using online banking, receiving or sending emails, taking part in chats or forums, phoning over the Net (Skype, etc.),

and downloading files (documents, music, video, software, etc.). Only 43% declared that they never read blogs of any kind. These data indicate resemblances with the previous mentioned Digital Future Report produced by UCLA in 2004. According to it, the most popular Internet activities among American youngsters are email and instant messaging, general web surfing or browsing, reading news, hobby searches, travel information searches, tracking credit cards and playing games.

The situation changes when it comes to getting information about politics or elections. Indeed, the interest for political blogs is higher than for political websites. More than that, even though the number of female bloggers is slightly higher among European and American youngsters, in Romania the number is lower than the number of male bloggers. Only 13.5% of women declared they have blog and 5% declared that they have one, but is not active. 38.89% of men and 33.5% declared that they read blogs of politicians, candidates, and political parties. 55.56% of men and 51.5% of women never accessed a website of a political party or candidate. The results are consistent with the answers at the question "How often do you read blogs for getting information on politics?" 0.5% of women answered "every day" compared to 8.33% of men.
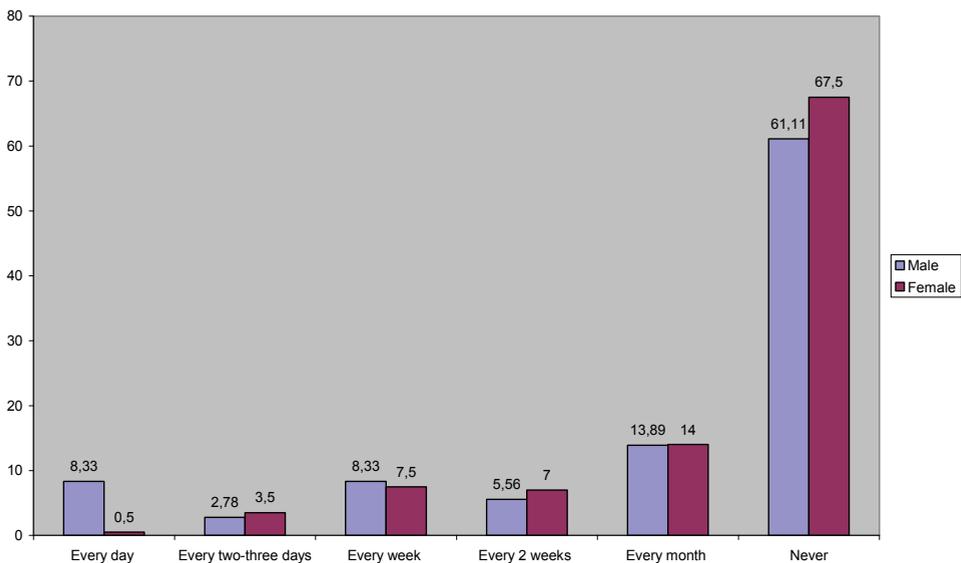
Figure 2. *How often do you read blogs for getting information on politics?*

However, an increased level of information about politics seems to have no impact on political behaviour of young Romanian students. The link between more information and increased participation is not self-evident. Only 31% of women and almost 47% of men voted while 38% of women and 47.2% of men preferred not to vote during the last European elections. It is interesting that 31% of female students declared they couldn't vote invoking various personal reasons compared to only 5,56% of male students. The difference can be explained by using psychological criteria. While women tend to explain and justify their political behaviour (hence the lack of political engagement), men are less interested in providing explanations and justifying their political options. These results also confirm other findings stating that Romanian young well-educated women prefer to be active online rather offline.
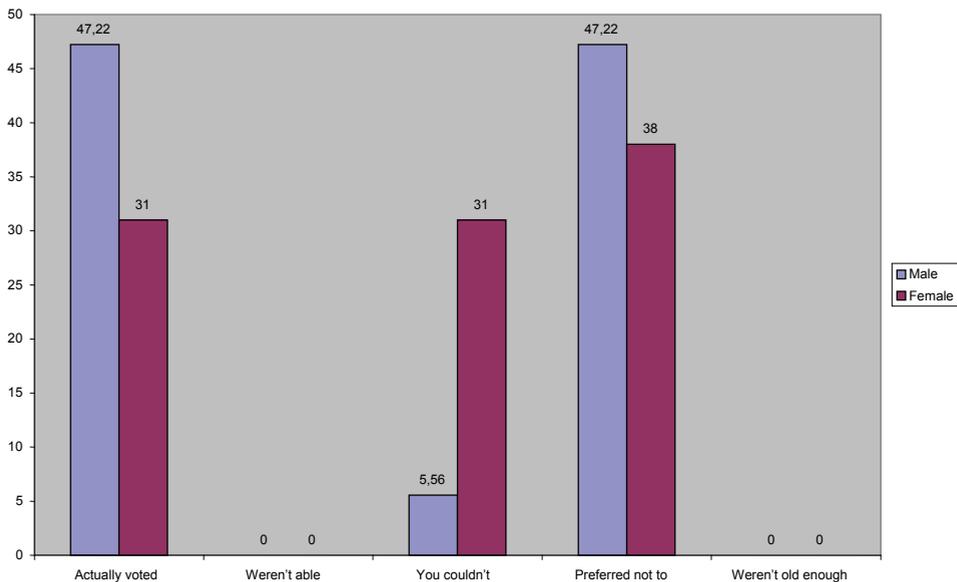
Figure 3. *In the European elections, you …?*

Despite the different interest in politics, both sexes seem uninterested in being active in offline political activities. More than 85% of them indicated that they have never participated in any political activities offline such as attending a demonstration, taking part in a strike, taking part in illegal protest activities (blocking the traffic, occupying buildings, chaining

themselves up, etc.). Or by buying certain products for political or ethical reasons, or to favour the environment, boycotting or not buying certain products any more for political or ethical reasons, or to favour the environment, contacting or trying to contact a politician to express your opinions, donating or collecting money for a specific political cause or attending a political meeting.

Even though the number of students who sent emails or SMS for supporting a candidate or party, with some criticism or a joke about politicians or political parties. Calling a demonstration or other protest action, or with an electronic manifesto or petition is similar (almost 28% for both sexes), the situation is different where it concerns the implication regarding online political activities. In this case, the interest and level of participation of women increases. 43% of female students declared that they did one of the following activities online: contacting a politician or political party, contacting the government to complain or protest, writing comments on a forum or web page, on current social or political issues, signing a petition or joining a campaign or a manifesto. By contrast, only 27.78% of male students declared involvement in online political activities. This result confirms our initial hypothesis that availability of information is an important condition for political participation, but it is clearly not enough.
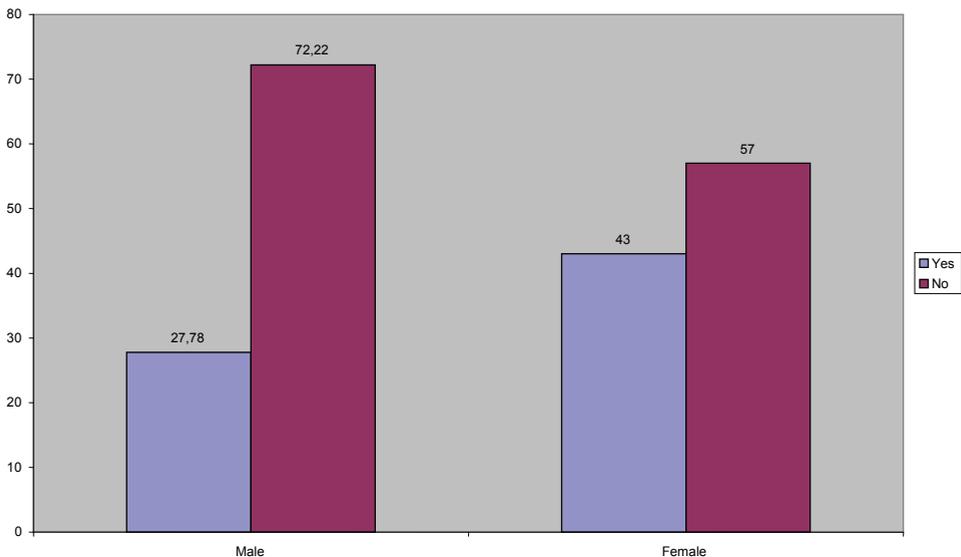
Figure 4. *Have you ever done any of the folowing on the internet*

The situation is similar for women's potential of being an opinion leader. Only 3% of female students talk about politics with their relatives, colleagues, and friends and 10% are trying to persuade them regularly. Their potential is lower compared to male's potential of being opinion leaders: 16.67% of men are persuading often their peers about politics. Even though national and international studies demonstrated that youngsters have an increased potential of being opinion leaders, especially those ones who use Internet and new media, Romanian female college students have a lower level of interest in persuading friends, relatives, or work-mates to share their points of view on political issues. Only 10% try to do this regularly, compared to 45% that rarely do so.
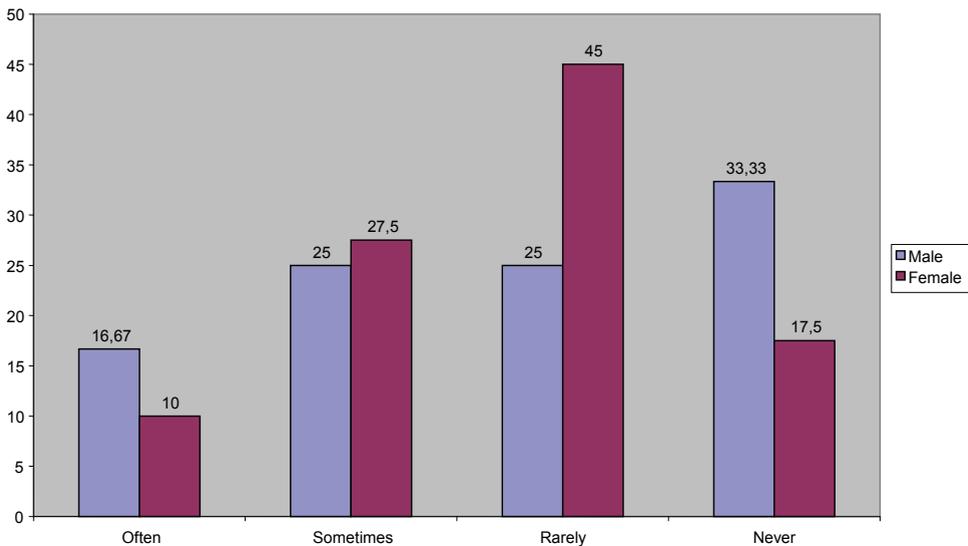
Figure 5. *How often do you try to persuade your friends, relatives or work-mates to share your point of view on political issues?*

In addition, even though numerous national and international studies praise the advent of the Internet and new media and the increased influence of politics, in Romania, young well-educated youngsters still indicated that TV is the main source of information during the build-up to elections.

For instance, during the European elections in Romania in November 2007, 81% women and 66.67 men learnt about candidates and their issues

mainly from the TV, 41.5% from the press and only 6% from blogs and 19.5% from websites.

However, according to previous findings, increased access to, and the availability of information on the Internet does not automatically lead to people being better informed or to more motivated citizens actually voting. In addition, 27.78% men and 29% women declared they read online editions of newspapers everyday. This indicates that although the information available about politics is increasing with the aid of the Internet, that this is a quantitative increase Media conglomerates such Media Pro, Intact, Realitatea-Catavencu shifted for a long time their focus to the online environment by establishing powerful websites and blogs (in terms of daily access).

This data demonstrates that mainstream news sources dominate the online political news environment. Not the personal websites or blogs of politicians or political parties, and confirm Pippa Norris's findings that "the Web seems to have been used more often *as a means to access traditional news rather than as a radical new source of unmediated information* and communication between citizens and their elected leaders" (Norris, 1999).
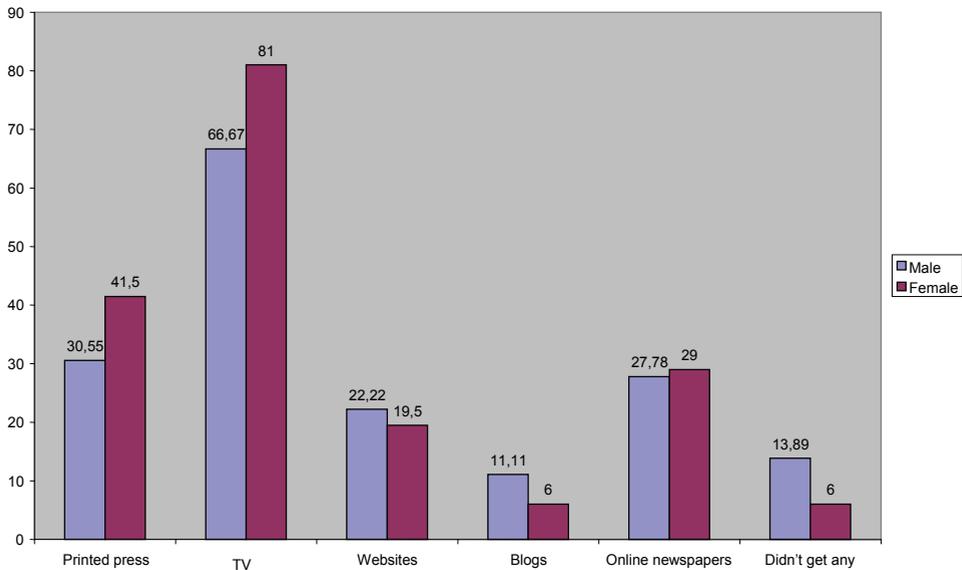
Figure 6. *During the European elections in 2007 you got your political information mainly from…?*

Conclusions

Theoretically, the Internet and new media have made it possible for youngsters to enjoy the best of both worlds - to allocate attention based on partisan preferences as well as the personal relevance of the political issues. The study confirms several trends among Romanian college students. However, there are some significant differences between young men and women when it comes to information retrieval and political activism regarding politics. For instance, young women still tend to be more aware regarding general issues of personal interest.

Political information is still being gathered from the mainstream media, not from the new media. This indicates that young women follow the general Romanian traditional patterns in terms of political behaviour, preferring not to talk about politics and not to vote. However, even though it is generally accepted that a young individuals interests in political online communication seem to have in common the potential to be an opinion leader in their community, Romanian women still prefer not to express their opinions about politics and not to engage in a process of influencing their peers about it. Nevertheless, they definitely tend to be more politically active online rather than offline.

On the other hand, there is also a certain gap between the level of political information and the political behaviour of young Romanian college students. Their demand for political information depends on the subjective utility or relevance of the coverage. This indicates that the relation between information and political participation remains an important area for more theoretical and empirical investigation. Nevertheless, the Internet has the potential to enhance participation for some forms of political participation. That means that a big challenge for politicians still is how to get young well educated women out to vote, not only on websites and blogs, how to get them more involved also in offline political activities.

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Internet Use and Political Participation of Youth: A Three-Country Study

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Abstract

Internet is considered to be a new media of communication that can have overall positive effects on democracies. It enhances involvement of citizens in politics. This paper observes the effects of Internet on the political participation of youth in three countries: Belgium, Canada and Romania. It shows that political participation is two dimensional and it consists of conventional and protest participation. This finding is important for the subsequent results. It is the protest participation associated with distrust in institutions that are influenced by Internet use. The quality of time spent matters for political participation. Blogging, exchanging emails as well as participating in discussion lists improve conventional participation, while downloading music and movies as well as playing interactive games decrease political participation of youth.

Internet and Youth

The level of the citizens' involvement in the polity is a major concern in the nowadays democracies of the world. In older democracies, political participation has shown several signs of decline, making some political scientists to debate on a perceived crisis of the system (Gunther, Montero and Linz, 2002, Katz and Mair, 1991). The creation of the European Parliament alongside with the careful scrutiny of the participation rates at European elections revealed decreasing levels of involvement into politics (Gunter, Montero and Linz, 2002). This goes along with decreased trust in institutions, a sense of alienation and apathy of the European demos.

The most affected social group by this trend is the youth, a social category that is important because of its capacity to forecast how our political

systems will look like. Although there are critics (for example Gauthier 2003) of using youth as a predictor, we target our three country comparison to envision the potential capacity of Internet to improve future political participation. In those terms we argue that we should be cautious on predicting, that youth will ultimately turn into more participatory adults because of Internet. We are more interested in seeing the way political participation of youth is influenced by the quality and the quantity of Internet use in order to evaluate the forecasted capacities of the Internet.

What other social group is more suitable for research than youth? The 2004 European Social Survey reveals that 82% of those aged between 18-29 have access to Internet or had, at least once, during the last year, compared to the only 14% of those that are over 59 (Quinteller, 2008), making it the most exposed part of the population. Youth is rather early exposed to the effects of Internet, several social processes like getting familiar with the political system, trust in others or generalized trust in institutions as well as political participation are easier to observe. Youth is also more influenced by new technology and more receptive to changes in the way people communicate.

The growth in use of Internet with its unprecedented information and communication power was hoped to alleviate decline of political participation (see Norris, 2001). The Internet connects communities that have never actually met and who, in most cases, would have not met in its absence. The Internet can forge communities, can create petitioners, virtual lobby groups, summing up it can provide a new, stimulating ground for bridging the gap between citizens and their representatives. The virtual space is overwhelmingly used by youth and it can be viewed as an alternative mode of youth involvement in social and political activities.

There are many questions that can be raised on what would be the effects of Internet on youth. Would e-mailing, the chat and online conversation replace some of the more traditional ways of communicating, or on the contrary, the new and old means of communication will support each other and their net effect will be amplified? Will youth become more informed and participatory as a result of Internet use, or it will become more dependent and withdrawn from the real life and absorbed by virtual reality?

The effects of the Internet use are likely to be much more complex than that. We assert that certain types of Internet use will have different outcomes on various types of political participation of youth. We look for a multidimensional

view of political participation and the links between both the *quantity* and the *quality* of Internet use. In order to test these questions we will survey data on youth conducted in three countries: Belgium, Canada and Romania[1].

Youth political participation in Belgium, Canada and Romania

Political participation is largely driven by: (1) demographics; (2) resources; (3) efficacy and interest; and (4) social connections (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

Does political participation entail several dimensions? It is divided by involvement in activities that reflect satisfaction with and support for the political system, and activities that are aimed at shaking up the system or at replacing the current order with a different one altogether (the "legitimacy model")? Or is it one dimensional, with activists that are in both traditional and protest activities (the "strategic resources model")?

There are several studies that found support for a two dimensional representation of participation, including one of Eric Uslaner on Romania (2004), who found that the first dimension includes contacting politicians, other organizations, and civil servants; working for a political party, a political action group, or another political organization; wearing a party or candidate badge; and attending a political meeting, whereas the protest dimension includes signing a petition (which also loads moderately on the conventional participation factor), attending a demonstration, going on strike, boycotting products, buying goods for political causes, and taking part in illegal protests.

None of these studies focuses on youth and their dimensional structure of political participation. Our purpose then is to identify these two dimensions of participation in Belgium Canada and Romania and relate them to the amount and scope of Internet usage.

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[1] The three data sets were collected in 2006. The three national samples included 16 to 18 years old youth from Canada, Belgium and Romania. The same survey except few context dependent questions was applied. The data were analyzed and collected by Mc Gill University, Catholic University of Leuven and Babes-Bolyai University from Cluj and these are a part of a longitudinal study on youths attitudes and values in the three countries.

Internet and Political Participation

The effects of Internet use on political participation raised numerous controversies. On the one hand, it is a time consuming activity and people lose opportunities to participate. Putnam (2000) considers that information technology (IT) "reduces real-life interaction and (citizens) will simply remain at home". By using longitudinal data Putnam examined the effects of Internet use on social involvement and psychological well being. Extensive use of Internet was found to be associated with decline of participants' communication with family members in their household and decline in the size of their social milieu and increased depression and feeling of loneliness.

On the other hand, the Internet use has the potential to provide information about issues and civic initiatives, it lowers the cost of participation, and it has a social learning effect by exposure to diversity. Norris (2001), Word and Vedel (2006) argue that with the formation of new communication instruments the awareness of public affairs is increased. New forms of communication provide citizens with new tools to play an active role in the public sphere. In addition, Internet has the potential to alleviate the negative effects that other factors have on participation. Thus, a low level of social trust has been found to play an important role in explaining lack of civic engagement and political participation (Uslaner, 2001). In the same time, low trusters find it easier to interact online than offline with strangers. It is possible that chatting online with strangers enhance trust and, as a result, political participation (Druckman, Nelson: 2003).

Shah, Kwak and Holbert analyzed the time adults spend on the Internet and the types of activities they engage in. Their findings suggest that differing types of Internet use affect civic engagement, interpersonal trust and life contentment. Informational uses are positively associated with the production of social capital while social-recreational uses are negatively correlated (Shaw, Kwak and Holbert, 2001). A similar result was found by Quinteller and Vissers on a study of Belgian youth looking at the Internet as a mobilization structure for political participation. Their results indicate no significant relationship between time spent on the Internet and engaging in public activities, yet the quality of time mattered. Those engaged in information

gathering activities, or regularly checking political websites and discussion forums were more engaged in activities than gamers.

What are the ways we expect the Internet use to influence political participation of youth? Internet has the potential to change (1) motivation to participate, (2) social networks that are a resource for participation, (3) information about the aims and context of activism, and (4) time available for participation.

Various Internet uses can have quite distinct effects on participatory activities. What they have in common is that each could take time from the offline resources for getting informed, and for developing and maintaining relevant networks for participation. In the same time, chat with friends, blogs and discussion groups, and reading e-mails have the potential to contribute to developing social ties, getting information and motivation. Chat with strangers and, to a lesser extent, blogs and discussion groups can help developing *bridging* networks, and by this, enhancing social trust, which has been shown to be a resource of participation.

We expect Internet to be used less by Romanian youth than Belgian and Canadian youth due to Internet coverage. Thereby the effects on political participation should be moderated with respect to Romania. Internet should enhance conventional participation and the same effect would be expected out of unconventional participation. Finally we would run a multivariate analysis that would develop a causal model that explains the relationship between Internet and political participation at teenagers taking into account variables like trust and interest in politics.

The Political Participation of Youth: Data Analysis

In order to analyze political participation we tried to identify two forms of political participation: Conventional and unconventional participation. We used factorial analysis on a list of 11 items that operationalize participation.

When factor analysis is used, our data support the two-dimensional representation in each of the three countries (Eigenvalue is higher than 1 in each case). Table 1 presents the rotated (Varimax) component matrix.

Table 1. *Two forms of political participation: Rotated Component Matrix*

In past 12 months, how often did you	Canada		Belgium		Romania	
	1	*2*	*1*	*2*	*1*	*2*
deliberately wear a patch, sticker, button or t-shirt for a political or social cause	.490	.306	.303	.453	.443	.340
sign a petition	.303	.346	.398	.290	.445	.116
take part in a legal march or protest	.075	.754	.091	.564	.095	.688
raise or donate money for a cause	.415	-.113	.492	.025	.517	-.347
boycott certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	.622	.115	.739	.043	.422	.228
deliberately buy certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons	.709	-.006	.750	.098	.582	-.010
participate in illegal protest activities	-.039	.720	-.130	.677	.074	.693
forward an email with political content	.554	.088	.225	.465	.354	.294
write or display a political statement publicly	.442	.299	.067	.589	.500	.164
attend a show or cultural event with political content	.527	.268	.300	.299	.558	.045

The matrix shows patterns that are consistent across the three countries, and suggest that the first factor approximates more conventional forms of participation, whereas the second factor is closer to a protest participation dimension. Therefore, our subsequent analyses will have two dependent variables: conventional participation (Participation1) and protest participation (Participation2).

How much and what kind of Internet use among Canadian, Belgium and Romanian youth?

The extent of Internet use among the respondents in our data is quite remarkable. The median respondent is in the 1-2 hours/day category in each of the three countries, which is also the median and modal category for time spent on TV. Canadians spent longer time on Internet, with only 3.1% of the youth not using it at all and 44% using it more than 3 hours per

day, compared to 9.3% of the Belgium youth not using Internet at all and 34.3% using it more than 3 hours, and 19.2% of the Romanians with no Internet use and 33.2% with more than 3 hours (Table 2).

Table 2. *Amount of Internet use among youth in Canada, Belgium and Romania.*

	C o u n t r y		
	Canada	**Belgium**	**Romania**
none	3.1	9.3	19.2
less than 1 hour	18.0	19.3	20.1
1-2 hours	34.8	37.1	27.4
3-4 hours	23.1	20.7	18.5
5 or more hours	20.9	13.6	14.8
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

Not only extent but also the types of Internet use are remarkably similar between the three countries. Chat with friends is by far the activity most often mentioned by the respondents. It is followed by looking at websites (the second in Canada and Belgium), downloading music and movies (the second in Romania) and reading e-mails (Table 3).

Table 3. *Types of Internet use among youth in Canada, Belgium and Romania.*

Country	chat with your friends	chat with strangers	look at websites	read e-mails	blogs or discussion groups	interactive games	download music, movies	buy or sell stuff
Canada	**82.8**	3.8	**52.5**	**41.7**	8.7	18.2	**50.8**	2.7
Belgia	**72.1**	8.5	**66.2**	**57.7**	19.2	22.1	**40.2**	2.6
Romania	**60.8**	12.3	**31.3**	**27.7**	7.1	17.3	**44.9**	1.7

Internet use and political participation

Our data show that time spent on Internet is positively correlated to the amount of time spent on watching TV and preference for watching news in Canada and Belgium, and to having many friends in each of the three countries. It is negatively correlated to volunteering in Romania (Table 4).

Table 4. *Correlations between Internet use and watching TV, watching news on TV, number of friends, volunteering.*

Country / Internet use (hours spent on the Internet/day)		*On an average weekday, how many hours do you spend watching television?*	*What do you spend most of your time watching TV on news and current events?*	*How many close friends do you have?*	*In past 12 months, how often do you volunteer your time?*
Canada	Pearson Correlation	.246	.034	.053	.024
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.051	.003	.176
	N	3301	3273	3282	3284
Belgium	Pearson Correlation	.212	.034	.109	-.023
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.007	.000	.071
	N	6255	6240	6206	6129
Romania	Pearson Correlation	-.032	.002	.069	-.093
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.163	.918	.003	.000
	N	1850	1857	1842	1820

Time spent on Internet is negatively correlated with the aggregate index of conventional political participation, statistically significant in Canada and Belgium but not in Romania. It is not correlated to the index of protest participation. If we restrict the analyses only to those who spend more than one hour per day, by assuming that all of these respondents have regular access to Internet whereas some of those excluded do not, the correlations table is virtually the same (Table 5).

Table 5. *Correlations between amount and types of Internet use, on the one hand, and conventional and protest participation, on the other.*

Country		hours spent on the Internet	chat with your friends	chat with strangers	look at websites	read e-mails	blogs or discussion groups	interactive games	download music or movies	buy or sell stuff
Canada	Partici-pation 1	-.072	-.007	**-.045**	**.079**	**.117**	**.080**	**-.088**	**-.063**	-.016
		.000	.674	**.009**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	.346
	Partici-pation 2	.030	.001	**.032**	.008	.015	**.074**	-.021	-.007	-.006
		.087	.940	.065	.657	.376	**.000**	.237	.688	.715
Belgium	Partici-pation 1	-.060	.003	**-.054**	.025	**.080**	.001	**-.060**	**-.089**	-.015
		.000	.827	**.000**	.049	**.000**	.949	**.000**	**.000**	.254
	Partici-pation 2	**.044**	.011	**.048**	.011	.007	**.065**	.021	**.092**	**.072**
		.001	.389	.000	.373	.609	**.000**	.102	.000	**.000**
Romania	Partici-pation 1	-.029	.026	-.010	**.054**	**.079**	-.007	-.033	.016	**-.050**
		.216	.255	.673	**.019**	**.001**	.753	.153	.498	**.031**
	Partici-pation 2	**.083**	.021	.016	**.055**	.028	**.111**	.045	.017	**.051**
		.000	.374	.495	**.017**	.221	**.000**	.054	.455	**.026**

What are the links between various ways of spending time on Internet and the two types of political participation? Reading blogs and involvement in discussion groups is positively correlated to both types of participation in each of the three countries, except for conventional participation in Romania where correlation is close to zero. Reading e-mails is positively correlated to conventional participation in each of the three countries.

Those who chat with strangers tend to be involved less often in conventional forms of participation, statistically significant in the case of Canada and Belgium. In the same time, protest participation is positively correlated to this type of Internet use, statistically significant in Canada and Belgium. Negative links with conventional participation can be found for those who play interactive games and download music and movies.

Political participation and Internet. Developing a causal model

Once identified, the two dimensions of political participation were aggregated and correlated with several dimensions that portray trust in institutions, willingness to vote and participate in an electoral campaign.

Our findings revealed that conventional participation is positively correlated to willingness to vote, interest in joining a party and participating in an electoral campaign, assuming a leadership role in the future, and with higher trust in strangers; protest participation is positively correlated to hanging out with friends and having a large number of friends, to agreeing that it is better to speak your mind in politics. The findings confirm our expectations of bi dimensionality of political participation.

But what distinguishes the two factors most is trust in institutions: it has positive correlations for the conventional participation and negative correlations for the unconventional forms in each of the three countries (Table 6). The more youth are inclined to protest the more youth distrust political institutions and possibly the established channels of contestation offered by institutions.

Table 6. *Correlations between the two dimensions of political participation and an index of political trust.*

Country		Participation 1	Participation 2
Canada	Pearson Correlation	.087	-.120
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	2571	2571
Belgium	Pearson Correlation	.161	-.148
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000
	N	4283	4283
Romania	Pearson Correlation	.154	-.096
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001
	N	1105	1105

This finding provides additional support to the interpretation of the two factors, as an index of conventional political participation for the first one and respectively as an index of protest political participation for the second one.

Multivariate models. What are the outcomes of Internet use when other factors that have the potential to influence the causal mechanisms between Internet and political participation are considered? Our multivariate analyses will include (1) *family resources*, operationalized by the mean level of education of the parents, (2) *social networks*, measured by the number of friends and by volunteerism in organizations, and (3) *political interest*.
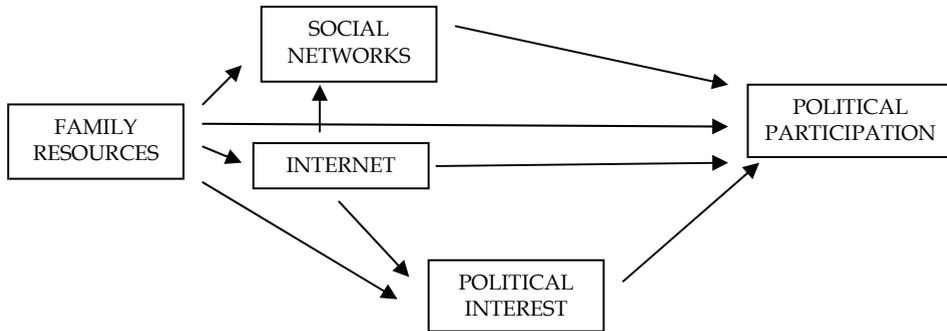
Figure 1. *A causal model of political participation.*

The regression models on conventional participation find that length of Internet use has a negative effect in each country, statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in Canada and Belgium. Social trust and volunteering are the strongest predictors in each of the three countries (Table 7.).

Table 7. *Regression models of conventional participation.*

CONVENTIONAL PARTICIPATION		Model 1		Model 2	
		Beta	*Sig*	*Beta*	*Sig*
Canada	Statusf	.078	.000	.034	.073
	trust_str	.191	.000	.150	.000
	Friends	-.050	.011	-.042	.026
	Volunteer	.151	.000	.127	.000
	interest in politics and public issues			.309	.000
	Internet use	-.074	.000	**-.059**	**.001**
		N=2500	Adj.R²=0.08	N=2485	Adj.R²=0.17

Belgium	Statusf	.090	.000	.057	.000
	trust_str	.193	.000	.162	.000
	Friends	-.080	.000	-.057	.000
	Volunteer	.140	.000	.127	.000
	interest in politics and public issues			.217	.000
	Internet use	-.052	.000	**-.040**	**.004**
		N=4875	Adj.R²=0.08	N=4838	Adj.R²=0.13
Romania	Statusf	-.009	.740	-.035	.221
	trust_str	.133	.000	.123	.000
	How many close friends do you have?	-.002	.926	.009	.759
	Volunteer	.136	.000	.114	.000
	interest in politics and public issues			.206	.000
	Internet use	-.023	.399	**-.019**	.466
		N=1428	Adj.R²=0.04	N=1415	Adj.R²=0.08

Protest participation is positively influenced by the length of Internet use, statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) in all three countries.

Table 8. *Regression models of protest participation.*

PROTEST PARTICIPATION		**Model 1**		**Model 2**	
		Beta	*Sig*	*Beta*	*Sig*
Canada	Statusf	.068	.001	.035	.075
	trust_str	.080	.000	.048	.016
	Friends	.050	.012	.060	.002
	Volunteer	.013	.515	-.007	.729
	interest in politics and public issues			.259	.000
	Internet use	.031	.121	**.040**	**.037**
		N=2500	Adj.R²=0.02	N=2485	Adj.R²=0.08

Belgium	Statusf	.035	.017	.018	.216
	trust_str	.002	.884	-.018	.214
	Friends	.031	.030	.044	.002
	Volunteer	.057	.000	.046	.001
	interest in politics and public issues			.148	.000
	Internet use	.039	.006	**.044**	**.002**
		N=4875	Adj.R²=0.01	N=4838	Adj.R²=0.03
Romania	Statusf	.076	.005	.079	.004
	trust_str	-.001	.979	-.003	.908
	How many close friends do you have?	.019	.477	.028	.283
	Volunteer	.136	.000	.138	.000
	interest in politics and public issues			.075	.005
	Internet use	.064	.017	**.069**	**.011**
		N=1428	Adj.R²=0.02	N=1415	Adj.R²=0.03

Discussion

Political participation of youth as well as its political interest has been found to be lower than of the older people, across most national and cross-national studies. Young generations in all points of time are on the average less interested in politics than older age cohorts making it more difficult to find a structure or mass beliefs about political issues. Therefore it is worthwhile to assess the capacity of Internet to mobilize and to create more active youth. The data analysis on the three countries revealed a complex picture of the relationship between modern communication tools and political participation. We identified two dimensions of participation: a conventional form composed of boycotting and boycotting and protest participation composed of participating in marches and illegal protests. A second interesting element is that Romanian youth uses with the same frequency

Internet as the Belgians or Canadians, disconfirming the idea that Romanian youth encounter difficulties in accessing modern communication tools.

The bond between the type of Internet use and political participation in its two forms revealed differences between the three countries. Conventional participation is declining for those that play interactive games and download music and movies, yet reading emails, blogs or getting involved in discussion groups have a positive effect. Chatting with strangers is related with less conventional participation in Canada and Belgium, but positively related to protest participation. The type of Internet activity matters for participation. Conventional forms are strengthened by interactive exchanges of information and protest forms by chatting with strangers.

We attempted to relate participation, to trust in institutions, social trust and family networks. Trust in institutions revealed contradictory effects. Protest participation was associated with less trust in institutions while the conventional forms were associated with more trust. This finding confirms the necessity for a two dimensional view of participation. It also present a youth ready to engage into protest participation possibly due to the low trust in institutions.

Finally, length of Internet use discourages conventional forms and enforces protest participation. Internet becomes a potential resource for engaging into protest activities.

Internet has the potential to boost political participation. The interactive exchanges of information help youth to get more involved in public matters, while entertaining activities deflate participation. It is protest type of participation that is increasing with Internet use, creating distrustful yet participatory youth.

The three country study revealed a complex image of the effects of the Internet on political participation of youth. Protest participation seems to gain most from Internet use. Thus if we are to assume that youth would not change their preferences throughout the years we are to expect a future generation of citizens that are ready to engage into open contestation and distrust of the democratic political institutions.

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Part Two

Online Dangers and Pitfalls: Cyber-bullying, Sexual Victimization, Harmful Content and Meeting Online Strangers

Bulgarian Teenagers' Behaviour Online: Changing Social Patterns and Growing Violence?

Georgi Apostolov[1]

Abstract

For the teenagers of the 21st century the Internet is no more a virtual space but almost as real as their everyday offline lives are. A great part of their communication, knowledge acquiring, and finally – socialization, happens now online. Therefore, no wonder that habits, values, and behaviour they learn and demonstrate in the family, at school, in the street are becoming part of their online lives, and vice versa. Unfortunately, violence and bullying are among the social phenomena that are growing online and offline as well. Personal attacks, discrediting of the other, violent speech, insults, and identity theft for malicious purposes are part of the teenagers' daily online life.

Parents, educators, psychologists, sociologists, and IT experts are increasingly worried about the growing aggression among teenagers, and any possible correlation that may or may not exist between increased online communication and violent behaviour online and offline; a large number of researchers to date have studied offline behaviour.

The alleged anonymity of the worldwide web accentuates the e-violence. To teenagers the online aggression is often being seen as psychologically different from physical violence offline though to their victimised pals on the Net it comes across in the same way as the real one – cases of suicide due to 'e-bullying' seem to prove this. This poses the question; "Is there any connection between virtual and real-life bullying and the growing real violence between teenagers?" It seems that, yes, there is.

The online phenomenon of stripping the language to its skeleton is being re-enacted in the teenagers' real life. An emotional life of these digital natives seems

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reduced to a few basic routines as well. Today's teenagers have more tools to help them learn, but less skill in inter-personal communication. That makes them less sensitive to verbal aggression (online it is a norm and it is becoming a norm in offline life too) and that could turn them easily into perpetrators of virtual and real violent acts.

So what is the way out of that vicious circle? Today's children need better socio-psychological education and teaching 'netiquette' at schools from an early age as a must. They need to be able to recognise that violence offline is the same as online and, especially, aggression in online communication habits. They need to become aware of how to react to violence and how not to commit it unwittingly themselves, and should be stimulated to reflect on similarities and differences between online and offline aggression.

Introduction

Seven years ago, I bought my 9-year old son his first computer; primarily this was an attempt to keep him away from the computer games clubs here in Bulgaria, as they had a reputation for encouraging illegal activities. At the time, I had no idea how big this decisive step was going to be in our lives. Several computer upgrades later, he has a large number of Skype contacts, quite a few personal websites, is a registered member of a few dozen more, and a large number of software programs installed on it as well.

Before retiring at night and first thing in the morning, he runs to the PC to see what he has missed "Out there" in cyber world and his digital community during his absence. Changes in his life have been dramatic, he is composing music, doing his homework, drawing pictures, chatting to his friends, sharing questions and answers with them and posting after editing all sorts of video-clips and photographs on websites as well. He is also arranging appointments and installing assorted software programs for later use.

What we have witnessed in the last 3-5 years is a drastic shift in the Internet behaviour of teenagers. This is the period when the first generation of WWW-literate minors (some authors name them digital natives) entered their teen years. In the years before, the computer was just one more toy for the children who used it mostly to play games, as the Internet had not yet taken its modern shape of a multi-task-multi-aim communication environment. Today's teenagers are the first children who were able to use the computer from a very early age not only as a toy but also as a tool and a medium for

various types of occupations in an entirely new communication and socialization environment.

Compared to previous teen generations, the WWW-natives are better informed, and far more adept at using various applications and opportunities found on the Net, not only consuming but also actively producing online content, at times seemingly more aware of risks – in short, they are the first generation to have literally grown up in the virtual world of the Internet. Moreover, they have different understanding of the Internet and a differing comparative online behaviour pattern. Only 3-4 years ago, it was habitual for children chatting online to use as avatars (image associated with the user's profile) their personal photos. Nowadays, one can hardly find a personal photo in public discussion forums, chat rooms, and instant messenger profiles. However, many photographs are visible in Mud's (multi-user domains) social network sites. WWW-teenagers normally hide behind nicknames and rarely put any personal or other sensitive information about themselves on the Net – again, with the notorious exception of social network sites. However, it seems that some of these sites are where 'e-violence' and ' e-bullying' appear to have some deep roots at present. This development displaces the focus of attention from online risks for children to online dangers from children, from the child victim of online abuse by adults to the child perpetrator of online violent acts against peers as well as adults.

With many more WWW-teenagers to come, the next generation Internet possibly at 10,000 times the speed of the modern broadband connection in sight and multifunctional mobile devices with Internet access evolving as well, it is becoming very important to analyse how the phenomenon of virtual-turned-reality affects modern children and society today; how and what psychologically, emotionally, and socially modern children need in order to be able to predict and prevent both the known and some still not very well known studied risks today.

One of the modern times' phenomena is the 'e-bullying' – it creates more and more worries and problems and though not so physically dangerous as violence in the street, it still can lead to quite serious emotional, psychological and even physical consequences for children, families, educators and society as a whole in general. Nevertheless, one can equally argue that due to the Internet and the change in communicational habits among teenagers the street gang culture is turning into a new "web- gang" culture and that could

be a fortunate development, as violence online still seems to remain a virtual one. However, some latest developments seem to discard that argument.

Virtual vs. real or virtual equals real

As various studies show, for today's teenagers the Internet is no more a virtual or even a parallel environment but just an integral part of their real lives. They perceive and exercise online communication as part of their "real life" socialisation. Patterns of Internet use and online communication by teenagers are very similar even in countries with a different level of Internet penetration thus turning the virtual WWW-world into the first "real" global village, or at least one for digital natives.

"The Internet is part of the real world…" of adolescents, as it was pointed out at the Council of Europe's Pan-European Forum (2006) on *Human Rights in the Information Society: Empowering children and young people.* Participants in the forum agreed that there are no major differences, if any, in the patterns of Internet use by children in "old" Europe and the "new" one – Central and Eastern Europe. A study conducted by Rideout, Roberts, and Foehr (2005) came to a similar conclusion regarding American teenagers' online habits:

'Today's adolescents are living in a world where using the Internet is an everyday aspect of their lives. Young people aged 8-18 spend 6.5 hours per day – outside of school – in front of a screen. Across the seven days of the week, that amount is the equivalent of a full-time job, with a few extra hours thrown in for overtime (44 1/2 hours a week).'

A 2006 study by the *Bulgarian National Centre for Study of Public Opinion (NCIOM)* found out that: "Over 90 % of all respondents say that they use Internet every day or several times a week. 60 % of them have a computer at home." According to the results of that study, the average time of using the Internet by children, aged 12-18 on a weekday is 2h.40min, at weekends 3h.45min, and an average of 4h.50min, a day during school vacations. Of those questioned, 22% of the respondents said they use Internet at any free time they have. [2]

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[2] National Center for Study of Public Opinion (2006), Children and Risks in Online Communication, Group Discussions and Quantitative Study in Sofia, Burgas, Varna, Pleven and Plovdiv, p.13.

How "virtual" and "real" realities interact and mix in a teenagers' psychology is being heard in their verbal communications offline. The dozens of computer and Internet-related terms that have entered the Bulgarian teenagers' slang vocabulary alone is one example. Words like; *bugged* (meaning *not able to perform normally*; from a *software bug* – script mistake drastically reducing the performance of a program or of a computer); *to shut down* somebody (meaning; *ignore, exclude, expel*); *restart* (meaning; *stop it or/and start over from the beginning*), etc. In face-to-face speaking, they use some words they have shortened for use in online chat – for example *zdr* from the Bulgarian *Zdravei* (*Hello*).

On the other hand, teenagers put in use specific, different from emoticons, onomatopoetic words to express emotions not visible in online textual communication. A 'laugh' is expressed on in several ways: from standard one – *ha-ha*, to spiteful – *hihi* or *hehe*, or resounding – *hoho*. Shouting is expressed by either all the letters in 'Upper Case' or by repetition of the last or any other vowel in a word. For the sake of convenience when writing in Bulgarian using the Roman alphabet some consonants that are to be written by two letters have been replaced by figures – 4 means ch (from the Bulgarian *chetiri*), 6 means sh (from the Bulgarian *shest*) and this entered very quickly SMS-writing even by older people.

The virtual world of Internet is even more real to teenagers as they actively participate in its development by creating and disseminating content – by doing so they "domesticate" and personalize it. In addition, as the WWW develops very fast, it opens more and more new opportunities, not only communication but also compensation and/or substitution of various other activities and important aspects of their lives connected to education, family, and socialisation.

Schools vs. or within Internet

Last year a new online game *Conquiztador* started conquering the globe. Invented in Hungary, it became very fast widely popular and was localised in dozens of countries, Bulgaria and Romania included. Every given second

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During the study discussions with three groups of adults were also held: parents, teachers, and Internet clubs owners and system administrators.

in Bulgaria, 400 to 600 players are playing the game online - a good many of them are teenagers. Three participants randomly selected by the central game server play each game. They have to answer questions from all aspects of life and knowledge for a limited span of time and according to the accuracy and speed, the players receive scores and possibility to "conquer" parts of the game territory - usually the shape of their own country. At the end of each game, players are 'ranked' according to the scores and can receive "*star*" for 1st place or a "*scull*" for third place.·· After a series of games, they may be 'promoted' as well. There is a live chat window during the game so that players can communicate between themselves, a common chat room for all, and playrooms where one can invite chosen friends to play with.

The popularity of the game is due to the number of possibilities and challenges it offers – testing the speed of one's reactions, the ability to build and learn strategy, a possibility to acquire knowledge and to participate in a competition - and all of these in an interactive environment. It corresponds very well to the habits and needs of WWW-teenagers, but sadly, this is not met yet by the education system.

As in many other countries in Europe and around the world, in Bulgaria too there is much talk about the need to reform the education system in order to adapt it to the realities and needs of the information society. In many cases, the steps taken up until now, were to scan and put online textbooks or, in a few better cases – to include some online tests and multimedia material to illustrate the topic of the lesson. Most Bulgarian schools are part of a national Internet education network; however, all school computers are in one specific room, which as a rule is mostly for information technology classes. Only rare innovative teachers are developing teaching material and trying to organise other forms of IT classes in the computer rooms.

Against the background of a rapidly developing Internet and a lagging behind conservative education system, it is no wonder that WWW-teenagers are largely de-motivated to learn the old way. The Internet has already taught them the unlimited richness of information and knowledge, the merits of inter-disciplinary learning, interactivity, cross-referencing, multimedia content and all other aspects of the Internet that have made it conquer the world - community building, competing competencies, creativity and possibility for self-assertion among the others. To the children of today, the old-fashioned

teaching is dull and not inspiring. This situation leads to negative perception of school and teachers.

In a recent study by *European Cities against Drugs (ECAD)*[3], 14.5% of the respondents among teenagers in Sofia said that learning at school is nonsense, 13.6% said they feel bad at school, and 11.5% said their relations with teachers are bad.

In the national analysis for Bulgaria in the *Safer Internet for Children: Qualitative Study* ordered by the Directorate-General Information Society and Media of the European Commission in 2007 (Alpha Research, 2007, p.27), one of the findings about children (the study covered two age groups: 9-10 and 12-14) confronting risks or threats on the Internet was that they 'express a clear preference for informal reporting, namely, to family members and friends. A small proportion of participants mainly older ones were inclined to report to police if serious issues arise (persistent offences, etc.) School and teachers barely surfaced in the discussions; when they did, children did not appear to be convinced of its utility.'

Rapid development of information and communication technologies involving the education system had forced it into an already lost before it started competition, so instead of acquiring knowledge and values, today's teenagers are storing up dissatisfaction and stress at school thus increasing the risk and practically inducing growing violence. Heavy use of the Internet may also stimulate a teenagers' need to compensate for unpleasant experiences at school with even more hours surfing on the Internet.

The Internet and the family

In the same way, teenagers' use of the Internet is to compensate for deficiencies in their emotional relationships and experiences, especially within the family. The *ECAD* study found that 7.3% of Bulgarian teenagers think they are not receiving care and affection from their parents.

Unlike parents, the Internet is always at hand: one can ask questions without fearing counter-questions from a disciplining parent or without fear to be ridiculed for not knowing – as can and does happen at school.

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[3] www.ecad.net. The study results are quoted as they were published in Bulgarian media.

Internet usage gives the possibility to always ask for and find compassion when you need it. It gives a sense of community in the regularly attended social network sites, chat rooms, or discussion forums. The teenager gets the attention he/she needs, the possibility for free expression, and self-assertion.

One of the problems in today's family is that parents rarely communicate with children on the topic of Internet usage and when they do, they are mainly intent on limiting its use. Thus, parents limit themselves only to one of the two-part integral communication and socialisation environment of teenagers – that of the "real" world and have no common ground what-so-ever with the "virtual" life of their children.

Typically, the more a teenager is emotionally unstable (introvert by character or possibly due to problems at school or/and in the family home) the more he or she is prompted to become addicted to the Internet; various teachers had observed this and stated so when interviewed by *NCIOM* (2006, p.6).

On the other hand, some other studies (Robert Kraut et al., 2001) suggest that Internet socialisation could also help socialisation within and outside the family.

Emotional needs and moral values on the Internet

"…teens and young adults are searching for independence and control, and the Internet gives it to them like no other media" (Harris Interactive apud Mendoza et al., 2003a, p. 2). Online communication is especially attractive to teenagers as it corresponds to their own emotional and psychological needs. Anonymous online communication is free of "civilization hypocrisy" – one does not need to be careful in expressing his or her thoughts, emotions, reactions and in passing judgments on others. It is the environment of ultimate frankness and full equality so much valued by teenagers. At the same time, it opens the possibility for exploration of moral borders. One can be highly provocative just to see how the others react. However, in the end, online community protocol, based on similarities in moral values and internal ethical codes does appear. Like in real-life communities, anyone who breaches the community code is ostracised or punished by common judgment, observations made of teenagers' discussion forums showed.

What seems to give additional attraction to using Internet communication to teenagers is that it feeds their psychological need for self-assertion and control. He/she is free to evaluate what is good and what is bad and then attempt to try to make his or her point in persuading others on the Internet that their opinion is valid. It gives them a sense of independence and power to make their own decisions without an undue risk of shameful situations, as encountered in the 'Real world'. They can judge the others "punish" non-acceptable opinions or behaviour without risking real revenge or remorse for their own decisions.

Can the Internet replace real social experience?

Online communication is the most popular use of the Internet by Bulgarian teenagers, the study by *NCIOM* showed. It stood at first place among teenagers' favourite occupations in Internet with 83% of respondents choosing it, while playing computer games comes second with 76%. Among the respondents, only 43% said they have never met somebody whom they know from Internet. In addition, close to 10% of the children, said that they had more than 10 new acquaintances realized in that way (NCIOM, 2006, p.13).

Various studies prove that Bulgarian teenagers are not an exception: 'Teens are more likely to use the Internet for social purposes, such as communicating with friends, meeting new people, getting personal help, and joining groups. Compared to adults, teens are heavier users of multi-user domains (Mud's) and chat rooms, and are more likely to go online to meet new people' (Subrahmanyam et al. apud Mendoza, 2007).

Nevertheless, according to parents, teachers, owners, and administrators of various Internet clubs interviewed by NCIOM (2006, p.8), "there is the risk that the online communication replaces the real world and real communication". Teachers pointed out that excessive use of Internet leads to "falling out of the habit of natural human communication and use of online communication becomes a substitute". At least one Internet club administrator said that among all of the Internet risks for children the danger of de-socialisation was the greatest one. However, another participant of the same discussion group further in the discussion said; "To children the Internet is their social life" (NCIOM, 2006, p.21).

A teacher participating in the same study answered the question what children are doing on the Internet in the following manner: "They are looking for new acquaintances… They need somebody to share their problems with and in the chat they can always find somebody…" (NCIOM, 2006, p.29).

All of the above seem to demonstrate that children, especially teenagers, use the Internet as a comfortable tool for socialisation and acquiring of social experience at a quite earlier stage of their lives than would have been possible before the advent of the World Wide Web. "Teens, as compared with adults, increased their social support and family communication with more Internet use", reads *Internet Paradox Revisited*. "Teens were especially more likely to use the Internet for meeting new people" (Kraut et al., 2001).

According to the *NCIOM* study, 38% of the children say they have really met a person they have got to know from Internet. However, in response to a control question only 43% answered they have never met somebody they have come to know from the Internet (p.14). Probably some 60% of Internet-using children have met a virtual friend in real life too.

One good side of the heavy emphasis regarding online communication in teenagers' socialisation is the diminished physical risk during some border-exploring experiments typical for the teen age. It helps also developing critical reasoning skills at an early age. The national analysis for Bulgaria in the *Safer Internet for Children: Qualitative Study* (2007, p.31) reads; 'the overall opinion of teenagers in Bulgaria regarding the truthfulness of content on the Internet is one in which scepticism appears to be slightly more prevalent than unquestioned trust.' This 'scepticism' is towards the factual statements currently available on the Internet. The main way of dealing with such difficulty is the double-checking of information and comparison of search results. Overall, children hold the view that people entering the information on the web have no stake in providing untruthful information. Internet information is basically seen to be on par with that provided by other institutions.'

The ultimate egalitarianism of the online environment provides more opportunities for inter-mixing between teenagers with different social, cultural, religious, and ethnic background. It is not strange for today's teenagers to form real-life communities with participants from different schools, which was not typical in the pre-Internet time.

On the dark side of the phenomenon of virtual socialisation of teenagers is the temptation to apply online behaviour to physical life situations. WWW-teenagers tend to be more laconic and aggressive in verbal communication without caring much about others' feelings, teachers say. Today's children are less skilful at reading the other people's faces and more often tend to ignore signals of discontent or disapproval.

Finally yet importantly, they try to provoke real life situations with the intent to use them in their online life – most of them are extreme and a good portion contains violent elements.

E-Violence and 'e-bullying'

So far, we have seen that a close interaction between the two forms of communication – on, offline – exists, and teenagers perceive either of these as a continuation of the other. In addition, it comes to no surprise that teenagers use the online communication opportunities as a tool for violence too.

As far as adults are concerned, aggression seems to be something to do with over-use of the Internet. In the *NCIOM* study (2006), during the discussion with Internet clubs administrators the following observation was formulated; 'One of the risks for children on the Internet is not what they see or don't see but the addiction to certain occupations… 'I have witnessed an incident when a child playing 10 games in a row of *Counter Strike* and after being continuously defeated stood up and crashed the keyboard onto the table'(p.20). In addition, a participant from the teachers' group pointed out that: 'Playing computer games for many hours in a row makes schoolchildren irritable. Children today become nervous and aggressive from an earlier age'(p.28).

Verbal aggression is the typical and most widespread form of 'e-violence' but, due to the rich possibilities offered by today's Internet sites and online applications, it can be reinforced by adding offensive, derogatory or threatening images, graphic symbols, sounds, etc. As in discussion forums, chat rooms and social network sites, groups, and communities form, in some of them collective aggression can be directed at a specific person and sporadic 'e-violence' can turn into 'e-bullying'. Moreover, as teenagers perceive both forms of communications as almost equally real, the emotional effects for the 'e-bullying' victim could not be much different from the

offline bullying though teenagers tend to devaluate it, as discussion lessons in several Sofia schools showed.[4]

In a national analysis for Bulgaria in the *Safer Internet for Children: Qualitative Study* (2007), roughly half of the group of respondents reported instances of cyber-bullying on the Internet. The problem is more widespread among older children with no significant difference being visible among boys or girls, the study showed. In addition, the conclusion follows on that "The practice is not seen as serious threat". Moreover, one respondent added, "If it is not serious, I will deal with it myself..." (Girls group 12-14).

According to the study, children identified two ways for dealing with 'e-bullying' – blocking the source or confronting the person and they very rarely informed parents or teachers about such cases (p.31). The same study (p.22) quoted a girl respondent of the 12-14 age group: "It does happen. In my class, someone got the password of one of the girls and then they started writing offensive stuff, insults, and threats." (Girls group 12-14).

One of the most popular forms of 'e-violence' among the teenagers is towards their own teachers. Mostly in the classrooms, but sometimes on the street as well, educators become objects of video recording and taking of photos with the aim to post them on the Internet and ridicule their teachers. This favourite "Internet fun" in some cases leads to deliberate physical assault against teachers with the only aim to produce "better" video-clips. At least in two incidents in Bulgarian schools groups of teenagers beat up a teacher while their classmates recorded the violent act on mobile phones and the video was uploaded to various popular Internet websites. Reports and interviews with teachers, parents, and children from the schools, which appeared in Bulgarian media, give the impression that the victimised teachers were not necessarily the most hated ones. They just happened to be around when the teenager group's dynamics led to a search for available "object" for producing a "funny" video-clip.

The growing frequency of similar cases in the UK, provoked the NASUWT teachers' union this year to call for pupils' mobile phones to be

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[4] In the framework of the project *Children in Virtual and Real Violence – Prevention by Discourse and Education* started September 2008 by Applied Research and Communications Fund and Bulgaria's Association Parents a course of 20 interactive lessons are being piloted in several schools. The lessons are designed to draw children's attention to similarities and differences between online and offline forms of violence.

'classed' as potentially offensive weapons and to ban them during school sessions, *BBC* reported. A representative of the union pointed out that misuse of the Internet can destroy teachers' confidence and professional reputation.

Last year, Bulgarian authorities forced an Internet company to take back a violent online game, similar to *GTA San Andreas* after the media revealed that it has become very popular among schoolchildren. The goal of the gamer was to beat, shoot, and rape as many as possible virtual teachers. It was produced by a local content providing company and gained popularity very fast through Internet communication channels between schoolchildren around the country before 'being noticed' by adults and the media.

Also, just for fun in some cases, teenagers post on the Internet humiliating and degrading photos or videos of classmates and friends. In one case, the mother of a teenage girl contacted the Bulgarian hotline because her classmates put on the Internet a video-clip recorded by mobile phone of her vomiting in the bathroom at a teenagers' party. The proud authors had explicitly indicated the name of the girl.

The popularity of that kind of video-clips led to the appearance of a new kind of racketeering "business" in at least one Bulgarian town. In late April 2008, Bulgarian media publicised an incident with a 13-old girl at a school in Russe who had her photograph taken by a mobile phone camera while in the toilet by a classmate who asked for money not to post the photo in Internet. According to local media, this was not an isolated case.

The teenagers themselves produce some illegal sexual content. A 13-year old girl from the town of Dobrich recorded herself masturbating, uploaded the video-clip to the mobile phone of a friend who put it on the Internet. In another widely publicised case, a girl and two boys "played" before the camera oral sex in the classroom with the special intent to put it on the Internet. Another girl in a Sofia school was video-recorded by laughing schoolmates while demonstrating a striptease outside the office door of the school principal and the clip posted on the most popular teenager websites.

More frequently now, acts of physical violence are recorded by mobile phones and then put on the Internet which tremendously intensifies the effect for the victim. On the other hand, perpetrators of violence are proud of their "exploits" and try to spread these violent clips as far as possible thus encouraging and provoking others to go the same way.

In the Bulgarian town of Pernik, two groups of teenage girls from adjacent schools initiated a furious battle in the schoolyard; the beating recorded on a mobile phone by schoolmates was put on the Internet. "The problem is that the girls perceive the case as a show instead of being ashamed and having remorse", their teacher said to the media. In a similar case, five students in the village of Karnalovo started a battle also in the schoolyard. (Witnessed and recorded on mobile phones.) This time by boys from the schools, who egged them on and acted as movie directors to be able to shoot a better video-clip.

In addition, while in the two cases mentioned above, all actors were voluntarily participating, in a school in the city of Shumen all children of one class beat up a classmate and uploaded the recorded video onto an Internet site.

Some violence-related incidents have clear connection to Internet-learned experience. In an incident at a Sofia middle school, a 15-year was acting out the 'Russian roulette' routine with a gas pistol in a classroom and suffered a head injury. According to media reports, the student had bought online several such guns, regularly brought the weapons to the school, pointing them at classmates, but no one reported the incidents to the teachers or the schoolmaster. It is almost certain that the idea of Russian roulette playing also came from his online-acquired knowledge.

The son of an ex-minister of the Interior became famous by a filmed killing of a dog; he then sent the video-clip to teachers as a threat. He was trying to get better marks at school.

On May 23 2008, the police made public a sinister murder committed 4 days before by a 19-year old from a Sofia school. The boy wanted to become a medical doctor so he regularly visited websites with video materials from various chirurgical operations. He also bought online various professional chirurgical instruments and killed a former friend of his with whom he had had an argument. Then the perpetrator dismembered the body as he learnt from the Internet and threw the remains in garbage containers in two different districts of the city. There are some worrisome data in Bulgaria about rising crime rate among children. In the region of Razgrad 20% of the crimes were committed by children under the age of 18, the Regional Police Department announced on June 3, 2008.

New virtual-real-virtual pattern

The forms of e-violence related to online identity theft become more and more widespread between teenagers. In a shocking case in February 2007, a teenage girl called the Bulgarian Hotline to complain that somebody placed on her behalf an online advertisement offering paid sex in several XXX web sites making public her mobile phone number. Her phone was ringing day and night; she also started receiving insulting and threatening e-mails. The operator of the Hotline asked her what she would prefer to do. It was a choice of either to send a warning from the Hotline to the e-mail address used by the offender - as it seemed to be somebody close to her, probably a schoolmate - or to transmit the report to the law enforcement and then the consequences for her/him could be quite grave. She replied, "I don't care, report her to the police." Identity theft became very popular among Bulgarian teenagers in the last year. Until the beginning of 2007, the Bulgarian Hotline had received no reports or complaints about such cases. From that period on, it dealt with more than two dozens similar cases. Teenagers are "stealing" others' profiles to post on their behalf online derogatory, insulting, or threatening content – text or images. Perceived as a 'Good joke' by the perpetrators, but not necessarily seen this way by the victims as well. At least one known case took a dramatic turn.

First, the Hotline received a report from the mother of a 13-year old girl from the town of Yambol that somebody hacked the account of her daughter at a popular social network site for teenagers, changed in an indecent and derogatory way her profile, and then changed the password so that it could not be re-edited further. The website owner agreed after the Hotline contacted them to delete the account but two months later, in May 2008, the mother called again to say that the girl had twice been assaulted in the street and severely beaten by a girls' gang. The beating was video-recorded and posted on the Internet. The mother said that the same happened to at least three other teenage girls in the town – first their accounts in social network sites were stolen, personal data retrieved and used for identifying and later to physically assault the girls. Beatings like those mentioned above, are recorded, and later on posted on various Internet websites.

From those shocking cases, it seems that for at least part of teenagers, identity theft, and 'e-bullying' without any consequences for them are a stimulus to take a step further – identifying potential victims and assaulting them physically. The video-recorded violent acts make their way back to Internet where all that started and the vicious circle closes. It seems that this development goes counter the optimistic view that web-gang culture could replace street gangs' popularity. Like in the other forms of mixed virtual-real communication, it seems that street-gang and web-gang cultures are intermixing to generate one new and more complex pattern of bullying.

Conclusion

Today's teenagers in Bulgaria, as in other European countries, live a new, virtual/real world where online and offline activities and actions are in a continuum. To them, online socialisation is as real as in the physical world – nearly 60% of teenage users of Internet have turned at least one virtual acquaintance into a real one. Moreover, a great part of the communication and joint activities with their offline friends is "materialising" online. That kind of dual social experience leads to an intermixed pattern of behaviour. Teenagers use a new, computerised slang in their offline communication and tend more and more to commit physical violence with the aim to 'virtual-eyes' it by videotaping and posting on the Internet. That new phenomenon makes WWW-teenagers dangerously insensitive to real-turned-virtual, and vice versa, violence. Instead of replacing the street-gang culture by a less harmful web-gang culture, that new development leads to intensification and expansion of the real violence against teachers, schoolmates or found online victims chosen by identity and personal data theft, which is mainly happening through social network websites. Real violence committed with the aim to produce "cool" 'e-content' is not being seen as a serious danger or crime by perpetrators, witnesses, or by online viewers. New approaches adapted to the dual nature of WWW-teenagers' social behaviour and experience are needed in order to prevent further expansion and intensification of the virtual-turned-real, or vice versa, bullying.

How to solve the problem

Dissatisfaction from school, family relationship deficiencies, addiction to Internet, introvert tendency – all are risk factors defined by various studies that can lead to e-violence and e-bullying acts by teenagers. The same is true for acts of physical violence too. Just as if physical world teenagers regard communication as continuation of the online communication, 'e-bullying' can easily lead them to physical assault.

The use of interactive and discussion forms by the education boards to address the problem of violence in a holistic, integrated way, may help high levels of school violence to be reduced – both virtual and real violence have the same roots, and occasionally they inter-mix in a teenagers' own violent behaviour. The education or re-education should try to focus upon recognition of violence whilst engaged in online communication. The practice showed that the emphasis on Internet usage attracts more attention on the part of teenagers especially when using appropriate triggers. In addition, teaching them netiquette would mean at the same time teaching them social ethics and principles of non-violent physical communication too. That is exactly what two Bulgarian NGOs – Applied Research and Communications Fund, operator of the Bulgarian Hotline, and Association Parents are aiming at with a new project called "Children in Virtual and Real Violence – Prevention by Discourse and Education". Experts in psychology, pedagogues and teachers participated in designing 20 lessons based on interactive games and short discussion and brainstorming sessions with the aim to make the children reflect on violence – both virtual and real, the different forms of violence, teach them empathy and compassion to victims of violence. The ultimate objective of the project is to make children recognise violence in all its forms and to teach them how to prevent and react to violence positively without joining in the violence. At the start and at the end of the course, follow up sociological surveys to evaluate the impact and possible changes in teenager attitudes are planned as well. The first experience with the course proved that today's teenagers tend not to recognise violent video-clips and photos on Internet websites as real violence. Some of them perceive virtual violent content as funny, others as disgusting but not as a real violence. Only small proportion of children are ready to accept that virtual and real violence today are very close and even intermix.

Method

This paper is the result of observations drawn from two years of active functioning of the Bulgarian Hotline for fighting illegal and harmful content on the Internet established under the 'Safer Internet Programme' of the European Commission and maintained by the Applied Research and Communications Fund. Descriptions of the incidents at schools cited in the paper are from Bulgarian media reports mostly from 2008 and latter half of 2007. An overview of other research papers and studies from various countries, regarding the problems mentioned here, is made to compare and/or corroborate the main conclusions. Where it is necessary to clarify the relevance of the conclusions, the methods used in those studies are mentioned.

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Peer Violence and Electronic Media – research and social campaign

Julia Barlińska
Łukasz Wojtasik

Introduction

The Internet has a strong, modifying influence on human social behaviour and psychological mechanisms engaged in social interactions (Castells, 2001; Wallace, 1999; Batorski, Marody, Nowak, 2006; Willard, 2007). The specific conditions of computer mediated contact cause that people perceive themselves and others in a different way, what may stimulate aggressive, antisocial behaviour and lead to cyberbullying.

"The Internet has features that may unleash certain forms of aggressive behaviour in just about anyone. If we want to lower the hostile temperature and stay out of the boxing ring ourselves, it is important to recognize just what those seeds are" (Wallace, 1999, p. 132).

Research

The *Nobody's Children Foundation* has researched – within the "Child on the Web" social campaign –various aspects of threats to children on the Internet. These studies have been conducted on non-profit basis by *Gemius S.A.* (a research company). The findings provide knowledge on young Internet users' behaviours, their experiences and attitudes and have been used for purposes like the development of media messages and educational programmes carried out within the campaign. The studies have been conducted among Internet users aged 12–17 and their parents.

Surveys conducted in October 2004 and January 2006 focused on dangerous online interactions and young Internet users' experiences in the

area of real-world meetings with people known from the Internet. A study conducted in 2006 concerned children and youth's exposure to harmful content.

In January 2007 the *Nobody's Children Foundation* and *Gemius S.A.* conducted the first Polish research into cyberbullying (Gemius, Fundacja Dzieci Niczyje, 2007). The findings – discussed in this report – were first presented on Safer Internet Day, February 7, 2007, during a conference organized within the Safer Internet programme in Poland.

The study, research methodology

The goal of the study was to determine the prevalence and characteristics of cyberbullying among children and youth in Poland. Children were asked about the following experiences:

- Verbal abuse on the Internet (crude name-calling, humiliating, mocking, intimidating, blackmailing),
- Recording videos and taking photos against the child's will,
- Publishing on the Internet videos, photos and information that humiliate or embarrass the child,
- Impersonating the child on the Internet.

The respondents were also asked about how they felt and reacted in each situation and were requested to identify the abuser. Some questions were addressed to child users' parents, their goal being to assess their awareness of the above listed threats related to cyberbullying.

The concept of the study was developed by Łukasz Wojtasik (*Nobody's Children Foundation*). The research tool (the questionnaire) was prepared in cooperation with *Gemius*' research team.

The survey was conducted through Internet questionnaires displayed on websites using the free site-centric audit stat.pl/PBI. Random display of questionnaires, conducted since Jan 25 to Feb 1, 2007, generated 3252 questionnaires (including 3119 complete ones), which were then subjected to a standard cleaning procedure. The analysis covered the total number of 2981 Internet users, categorized into two target groups:

- the first group consisted of 891 Internet users ages 12–17 (including 241 children under 14),
- and the other – of 2090 adults.

Children aged 12–14 could participate in the survey only upon their parents' consent. Seven percent of the respondents in this age group were excluded because their parents had not given their consent. Thirty five percent of questionnaires completed by children aged 12–14 were rejected due to a high likelihood of lying about the parents' consent (the answer provided after less then 10 seconds).

Research report

Verbal abuse and Internet/mobile telephony

The most common form of verbal abuse on the Internet is crude name-calling (47%). The Internet and mobile phones are also used for more threatening forms of verbal abuse, often linked to emotional abuse, such as mocking and humiliating (21%) or even intimidation and blackmailing (16%). Overall, every second young Internet user (52%) has experienced at least one form of verbal abuse on the Internet or via the mobile phone. Only ¼ of the respondents reported this had been an isolated incident. If verbal abuse occurred, in most cases (52%) there were few incidents, and quite often (30%) – more than 5 such events.

This pattern has also been confirmed by the analysis of the frequency of **crude name-calling**: only 14% of the respondents could recall only one event like this. The others declared there had been a few (41%) or many (30%) such incidents, or that there had been so many of them that the respondents could not remember the exact number (15%).

Also **humiliating** usually is not an isolated incident (only 15% such reports among respondents who have experienced this form of abuse). Usually there have been several (40%) or many (30%) such events. Interestingly, quite frequently children are humiliated by strangers (50%). Other abusers include schoolmates (47%) and other peers known from the real-world (37%) or only from the Web (28%). Adults are by far the least likely to be the source of such distress (only 7% of all cases). One third of the children and youth reported that such situations do not disturb them. However, the young respondents' most common reactions were nervousness (59%) and – less frequently – fear (18%) or shame (13%). Still, half of the children (48%) do not tell anyone about the experience of being humiliated on the Web.

40% tell their peers and only one in ten inform adults (family members –
7% and school personnel – 4%).

Contrary to other forms of verbal abuse, **intimidation and blackmailing**
are often one-time experiences (as reported by 34% of the respondents who
had experienced this type of abuse). Most often, the abusers are peers
known from the real-world (from school – 37%; from outside school – 32%);
the remaining cases involve strangers (46%) or people known only from the
Web (17%). The proportion of familiar adult abusers is 8%. Just like
humiliation, intimidating and blackmailing do not trigger any emotion in
1/3 of the victims; however a large group of children experience the feelings
of nervousness (47%), fear (20%) and shame (11%). In such cases, children
rarely seek support from adults (parents – 6%; school personnel – 10%).
They are more likely to turn to peers (40%) or not to seek help at all (42%).

Verbal abuse on the Internet
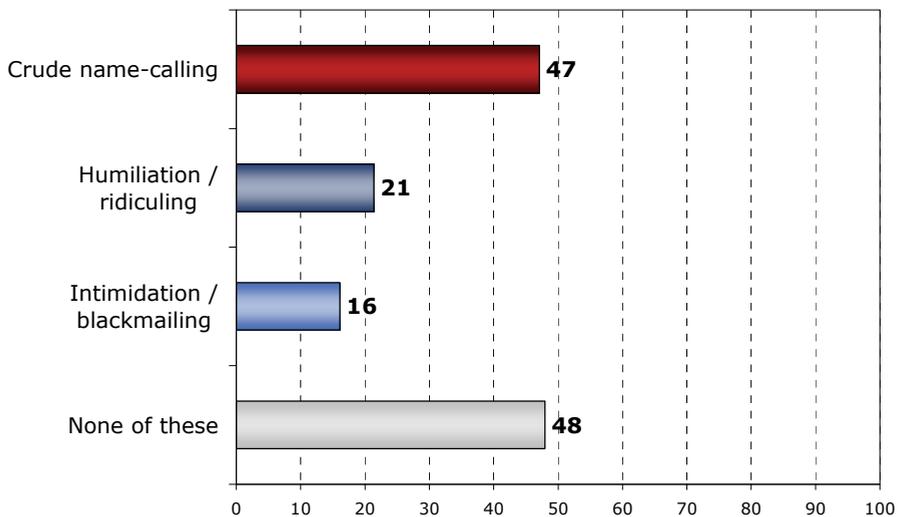
Basis: youth (12-17); N = 790

Verbal abuse on the Internet - total frequency
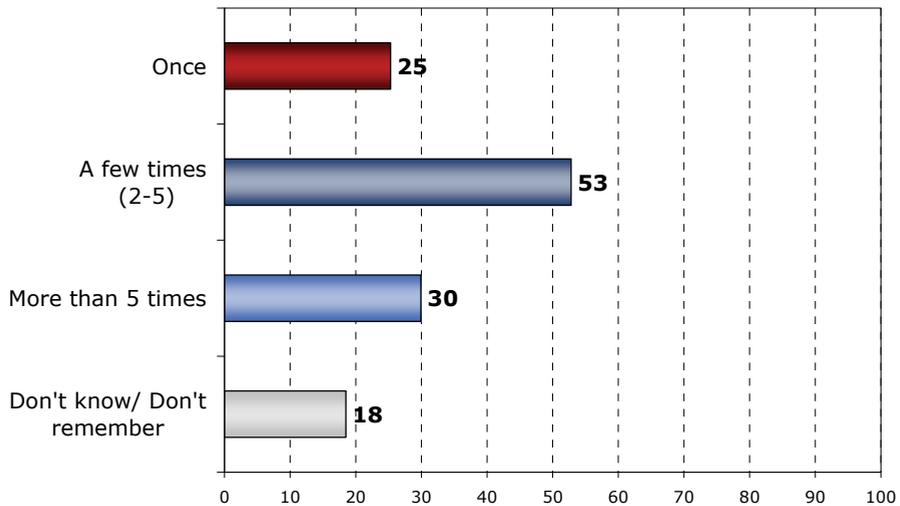
Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 411

Crude name-calling - frequency
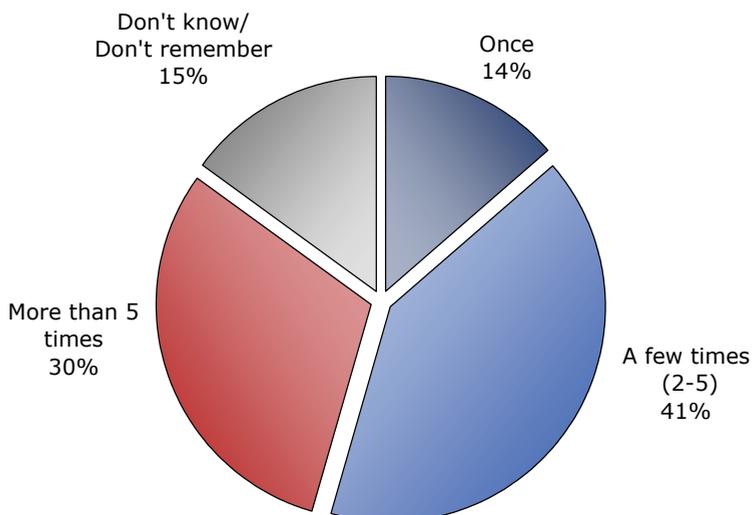
Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced particular type of verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 372

Humiliation, ridiculing - frequency
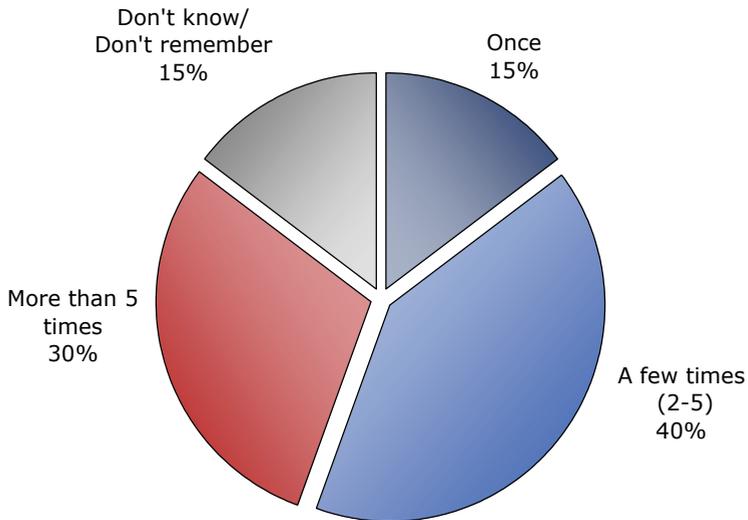
Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced particular type of verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 169

Humiliation, ridiculing - abuser
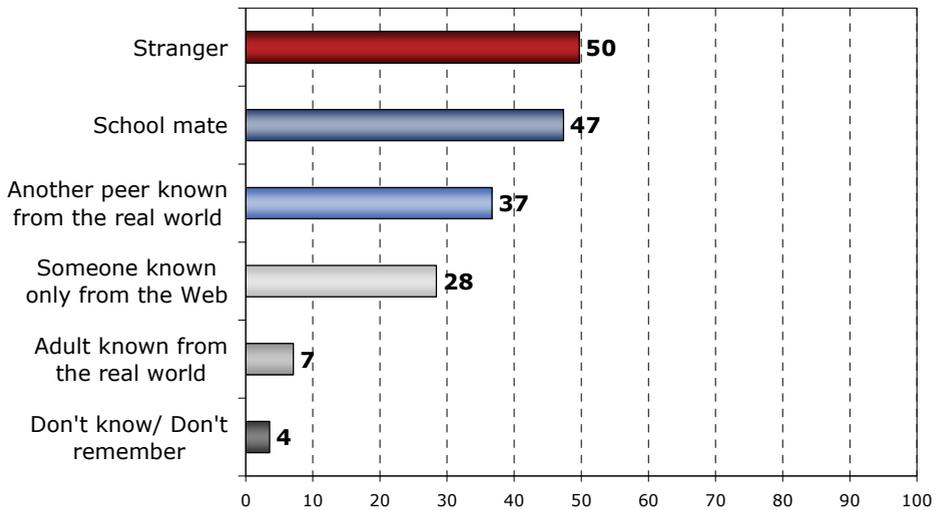
Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced particular type of verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 169

Humiliation, ridiculing - telling others
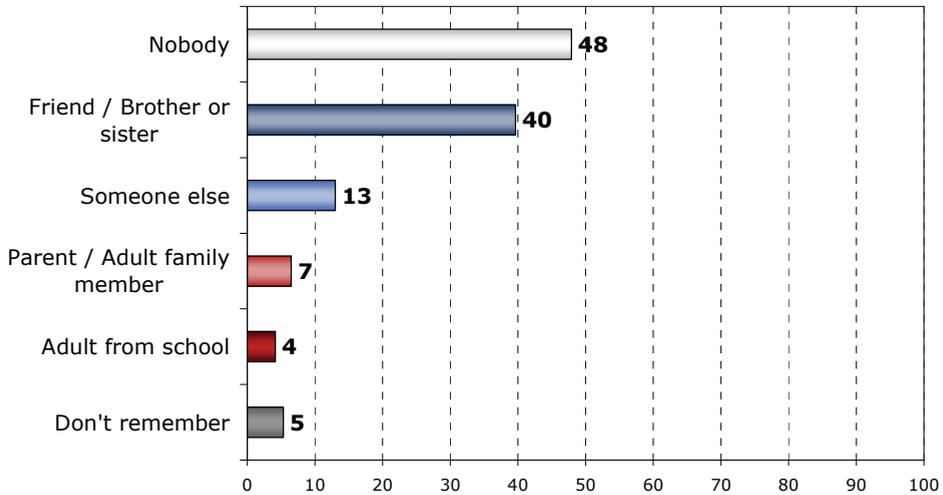
Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced particular type of verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 169

Intimidation, blackmailing - frequency
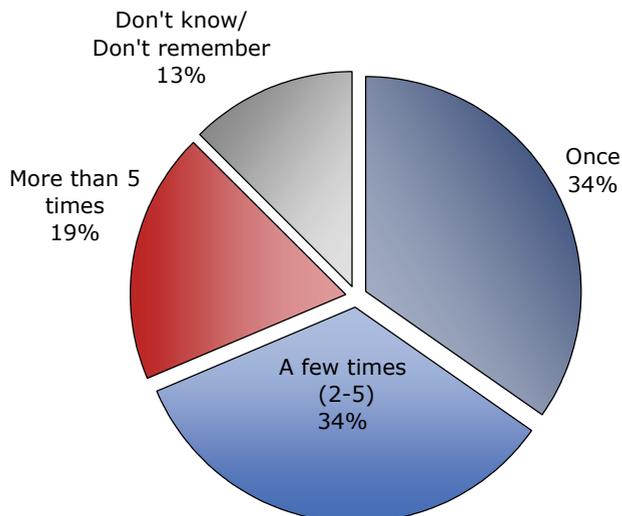
Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced particular type of verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 127

Intimidation, blackmailing - abuser
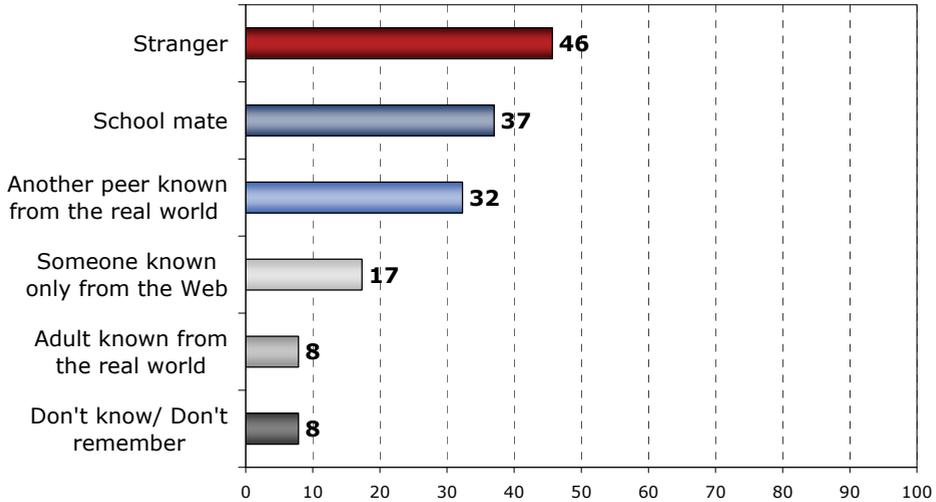
Category	Value
Stranger	46
School mate	37
Another peer known from the real world	32
Someone known only from the Web	17
Adult known from the real world	8
Don't know/ Don't remember	8

Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced particular type of verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 127

Intimidation, blackmailing - emotional reactions
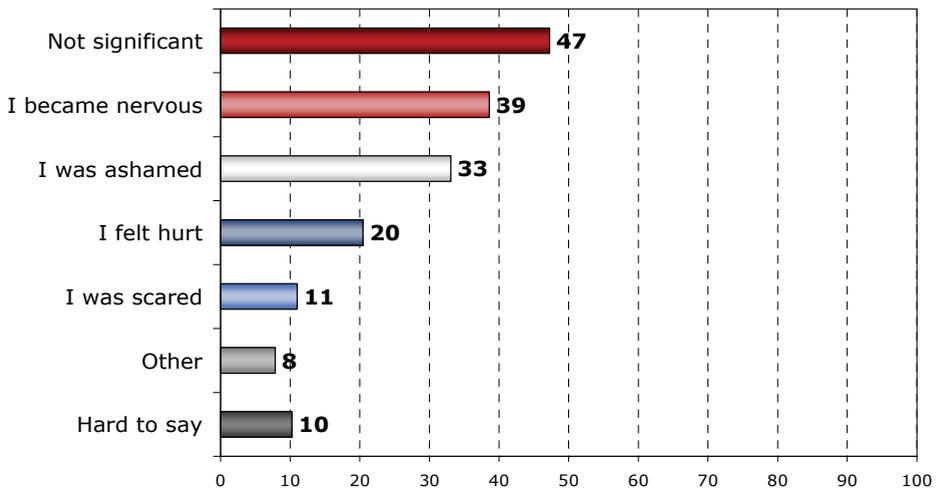
Category	Value
Not significant	47
I became nervous	39
I was ashamed	33
I felt hurt	20
I was scared	11
Other	8
Hard to say	10

Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced particular type of verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 127

Intimidation, blackmailing - telling others

Category	Value
Nobody	42
Friend / Brother or sister	40
Someone else	13
Parent / Adult family member	6
Adult from school	10
Don't remember	8
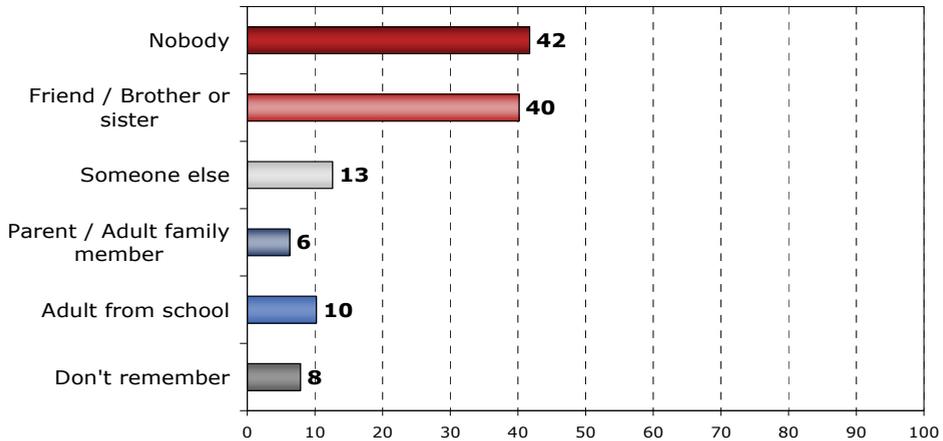
Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced particular type of verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 127

Unwanted photos and videos

More than half (57%) of the respondents in the 12–17 age group at least once have been photographed or video-recorded against their will. Quite rarely this was an isolated incident (18%). In 2/5 of the cases (39%) those were repetitive events.

The authors of such images are usually peers (from school – 87%; from outside school – 30%; and, occasionally, unfamiliar peers – 10%). One in eight "unwanted images" (12%) is produced by familiar adults, and only in 2% of the cases the respondents indicate an adult stranger.

A vast majority (80%) of the „unwanted images" has had a seemingly harmless humorous context. However, half of the respondents (49%) report to have experienced clearly negative feelings in such situations. The most common motives for taking such photos/videos include: spitefulness (21%) and showing off (17%). Every eighth such photo or video has aimed at humiliating or mocking the person (12%).

Most children do not tell anyone about such unwanted photos and videos (54%). If they decide to tell someone about such a situation, they usually choose their peers (24%). They are much less likely to disclose the experience to their parents (6%).

Photos or videos against will – frequency

Don't know/
Don't remember
11%

More than 5
times
15%

Never
32%

A few times
(2-5)
24%

Once
18%
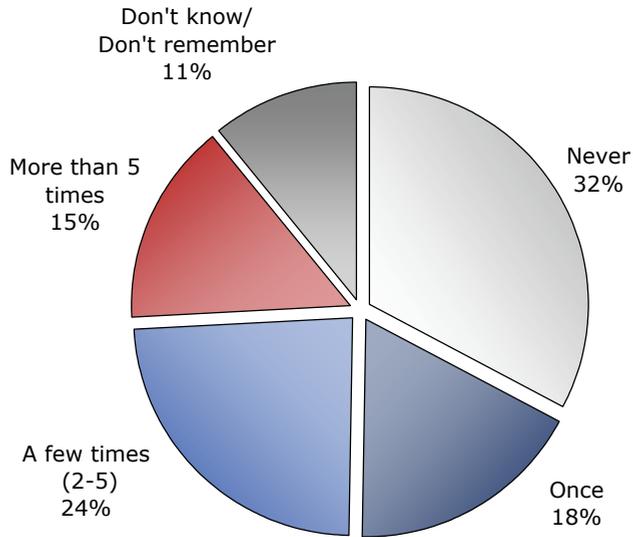
Basis: youth (12-17); N = 790

Photos or videos against will - abuser
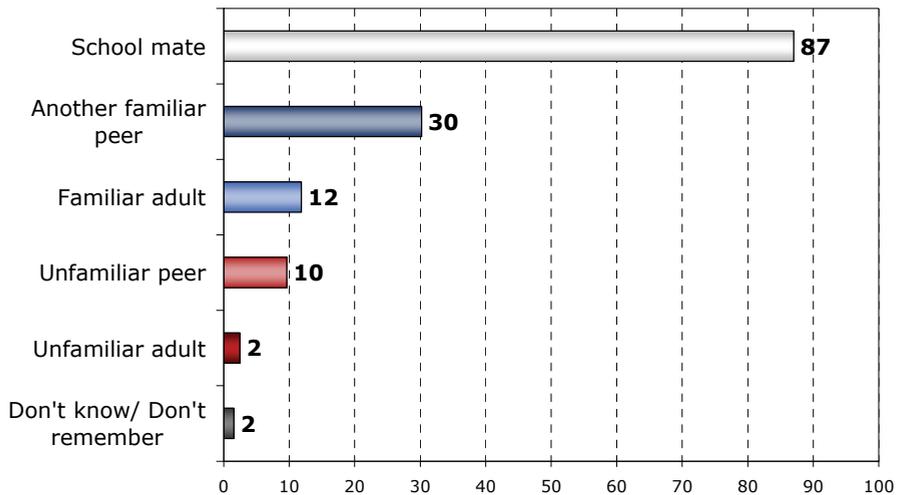
School mate	87
Another familiar peer	30
Familiar adult	12
Unfamiliar peer	10
Unfamiliar adult	2
Don't know/ Don't remember	2

Basis: youth (12-17) who have been photographed or videotaped against their will; N = 447

Photos or videos against will - emotional reasons
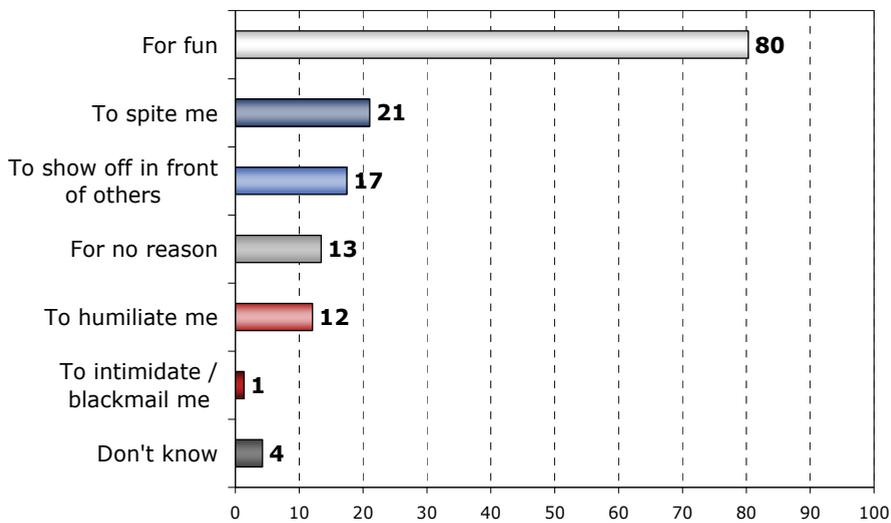
Basis: youth (12-17) who have been photographed or videotaped against their will; N = 447

Photos or videos against will - emotional reactions
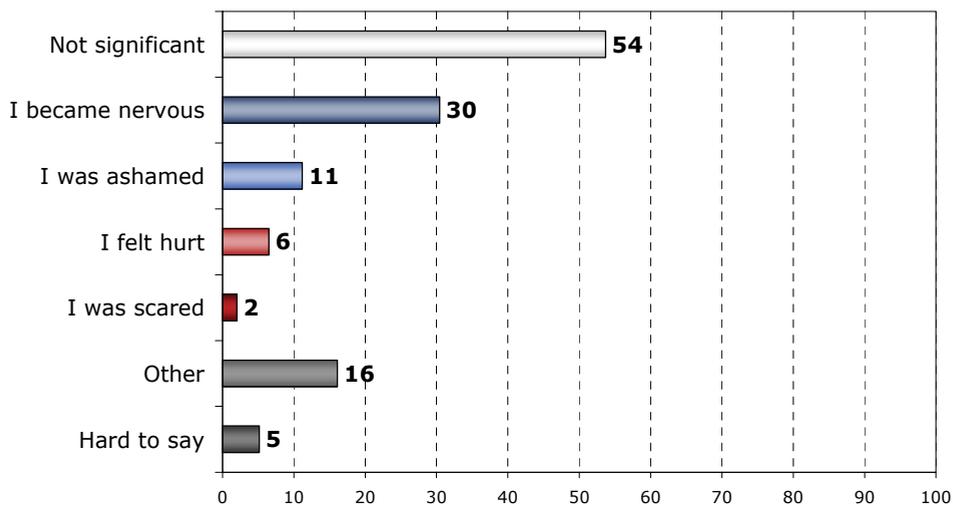
Basis: youth (12-17) who have been photographed or videotaped against their will; N = 447

Photos or videos against will - telling others
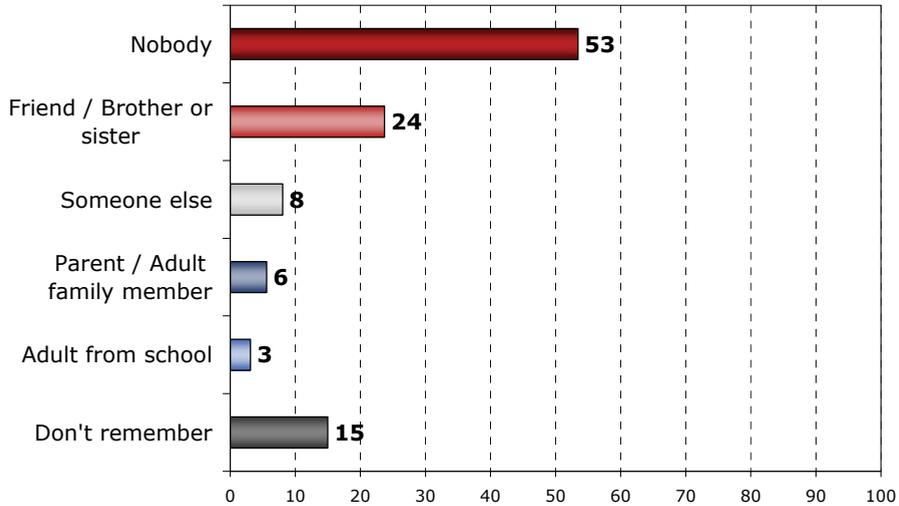
Basis: youth (12-17) who have been photographed or videotaped against their will; N = 447

Publication of embarrassing material

14% percent of Internet users in the 12–17 age group report that embarrassing materials about themselves – information (9%) and photos/videos (5%) – have been published on the Web. Most commonly, such situations occur once or a few times (39%). Only 14% of the teenagers affected by the problem have experienced this form of abuse more than four times.

The abusers are usually peers (from school – 59%; from outside school – 43%). They are much less likely to be familiar adults (10%) or people known from the Internet (13%). In 15% of the cases the information, photos or videos have been published by strangers.

Despite a relatively insignificant scale of the problem, it deserves special attention because of the high level of negative emotions experienced by the victims, such as nervousness (66%), shame (33%), and fear (12%). Compared to other forms of cyberbullying, publication of embarrassing materials is quite often reported to adults (parents – 13%, school personnel – 12%). Only 27% of the victims do not tell anyone about the experience.

Publication of unwanted material - types of material
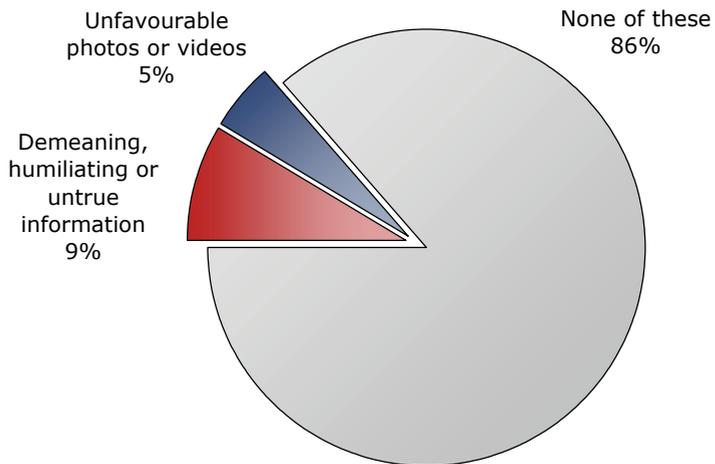
Basis: youth (12-17); N = 790

Publication of unwanted material - abuser
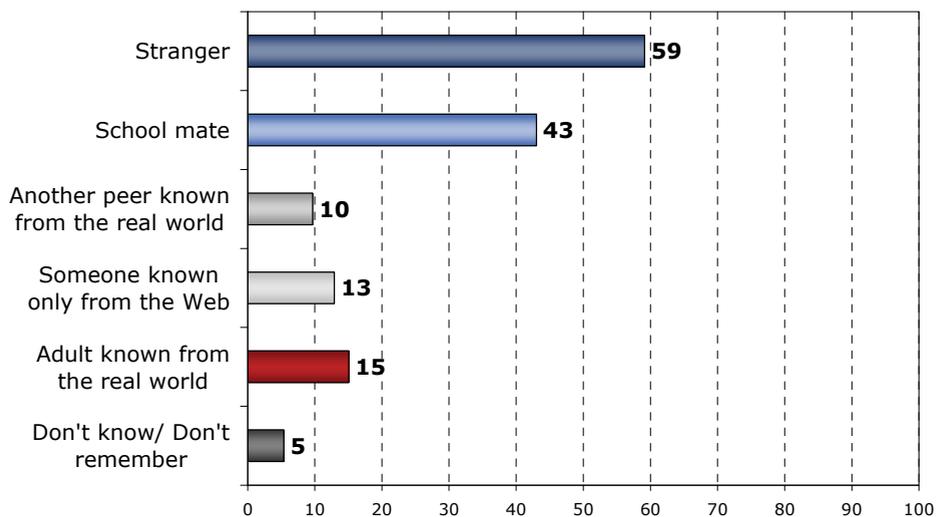
Basis: youth (12-17) about whom unwanted material was published ; N = 93

Publication of unwanted material - emotional reactions

Reaction	Value
Not significant	47
I became nervous	39
I was ashamed	33
I felt hurt	20
I was scared	11
Other	8
Hard to say	10
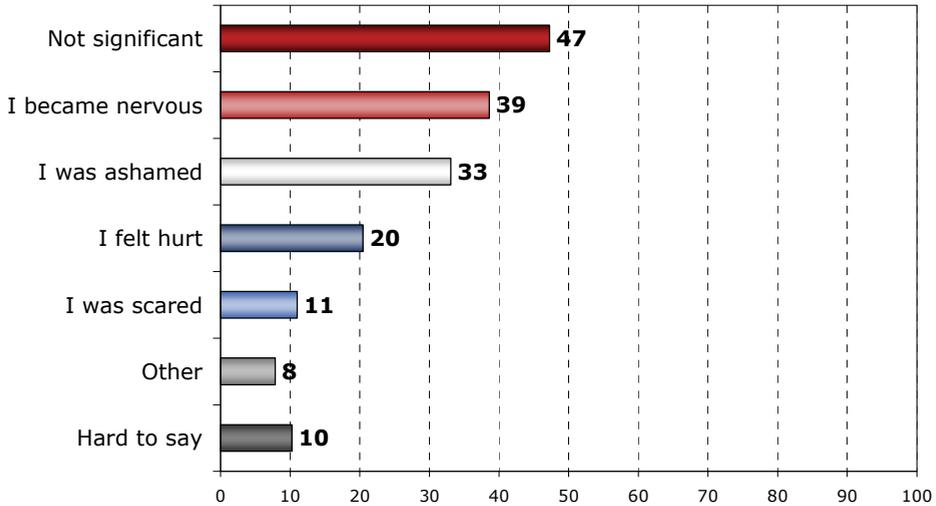
Basis: youth (12-17) who have experienced particular type of verbal abuse on the Web ; N = 127

Publication of unwanted material - telling others

Told	Value
Nobody	27
Friend / Brother or sister	54
Someone else	19
Parent / Adult family member	13
Adult from school	12
Don't remember	10
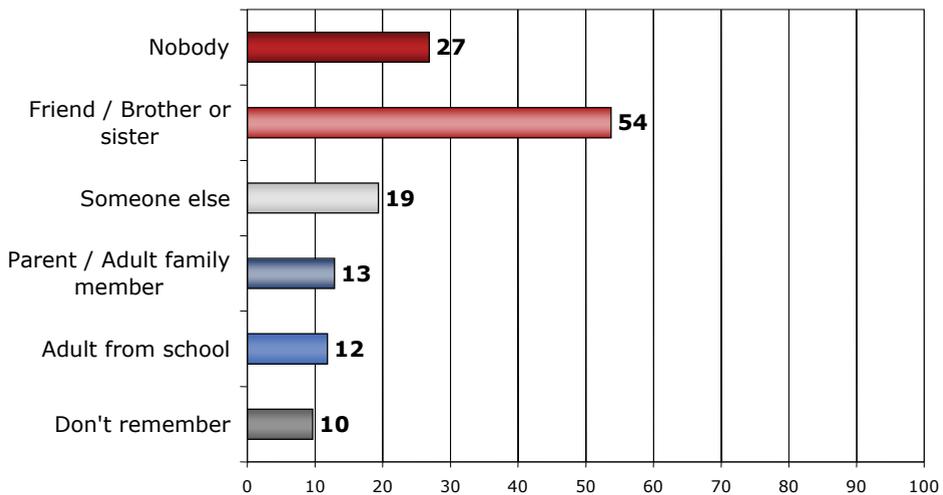
Basis: youth (12-17) about whom unwanted material has been published ; N = 93

Impersonation

Nearly one third of the children have experienced situations, in which someone tried to impersonate them on the Internet. These were usually isolated incidents (19%), and much less frequently – events that occurred a few (8%) or many (2%) times. In most cases the impersonator was the child's peer (from school – 56%, from outside school – 22%); and less often – a familiar adult (5%) or a person known from the Web (6%). In every fifth case the abuse was committed by strangers (20%).

Impersonation is by far the most irritating form of abuse, among those analyzed in this report. 65% of the respondents experienced nervousness, and only one in four reported that impersonation did not disturb them (24%). 14% of the victims felt distress, and 5% - fear.

Impersonating the respondent against his/her will – frequency
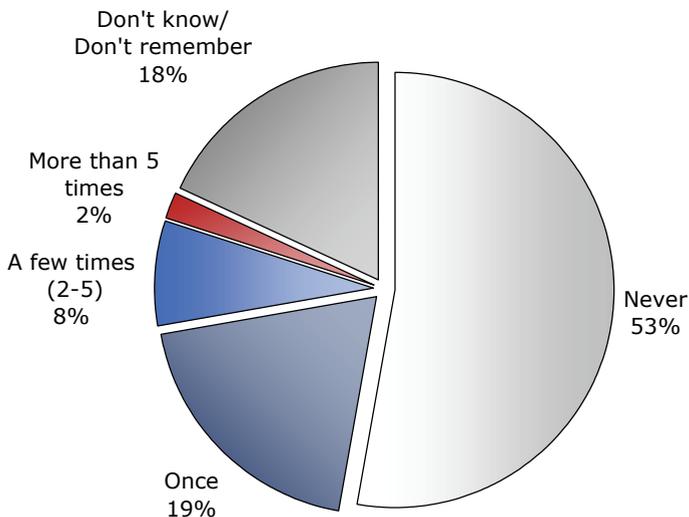
Basis: youth (12-17); N = 790

Impersonating the respondent against his/her will – abuser
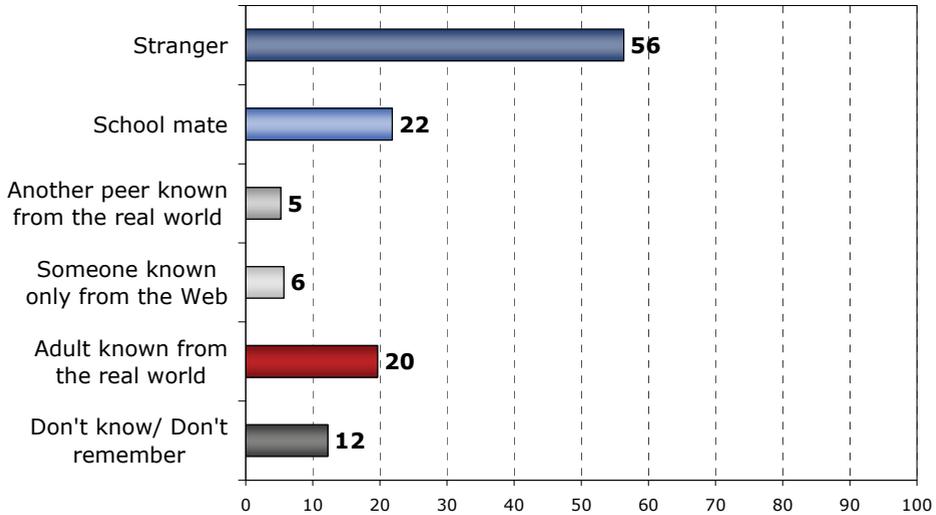
Basis: youth (12-17) who has been impersonated against their will; N = 229

Impersonating the respondent against his/her will - emotional reactions
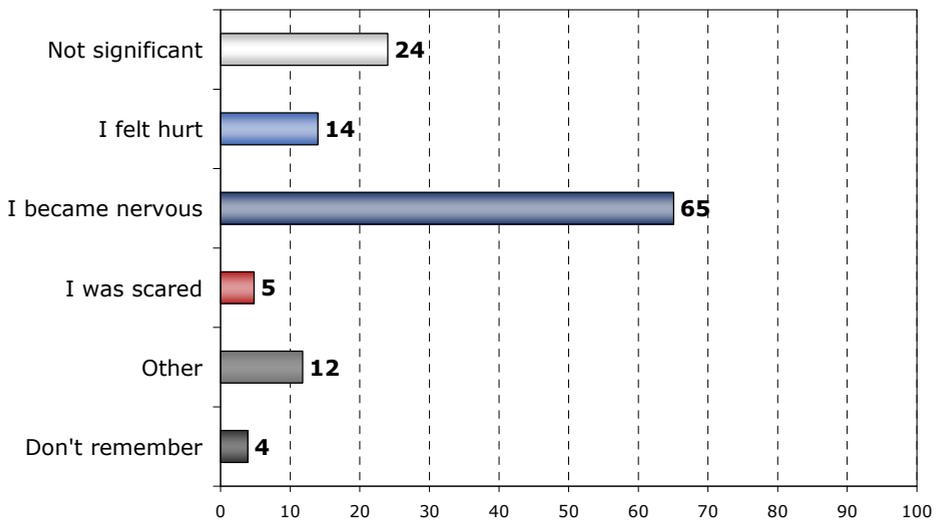
Basis: youth (12-17) who has been impersonated against their will; N = 229

Awareness of cyberbullying among adults

The adult respondents were asked about their awareness of the analyzed phenomena, which make up the problem of cyberbullying. The largest group of the respondents has heard about cases of crude name-calling and video-recording / photographing against the child's will (64% and 62%, respectively). Slightly more than half are aware of the practices of publishing embarrassing information, and humiliating/mocking children on the Web (58% and 57%, respectively). A bit smaller group is aware that the Internet and mobile telephony may be used for impersonating or intimidating a minor (52% and 47%, respectively). 13% of the adults said they had not ever heard about any of the phenomena.

Summary

The findings showed a high level of cyberbullying among children in Poland.

Main findings:

- **Every second young Internet user** (52%) has had some contact with verbal abuse on the Web or via mobile phones. **47%** of the child participants have experienced crude name-calling; **21%** have been humiliated or mocked; **16%** have been intimidated and blackmailed.
- **29%** report having been impersonated on the Internet.
- **More than half** (57%) of the respondents in the 12–17 age group at least once have been video recorded or photographed against their will.
- **14% of the children** report cases of humiliating or embarrassing material about them having been disseminated through the Internet or GSM services.
- Acts of cyberbullying often cause feelings of **irritation, anxiety, and shame** in the victims.

The findings of the survey have been confirmed by Helpline experiences. Helpline.org.pl run by the Nobody's Children Foundation since February 2007 has received 1498 reports – 590 concerning cyberbullying cases.

Practice

Social campaign – Stop Cyberbullying

The problem analysis has obviously shown the **necessity of a programme aimed against cyberbullying**. Therefore Nobody's Children Foundation has planned a **nationwide social campaign** against cyberbullying joining both media and educational actions.

Target groups:

- Children and young people (mainly junior secondary school students);
- Teachers, school psychologists and other professionals working with children;
- Children's and young people's parents.

Project objectives:

- Increasing the teachers and junior high school students' parents knowledge of such important issues concerning cyberbullying as:
  o Forms of cyberbullying and Internet services that might be used to harass others;
  o Psychological, social and technological causes of cyberbullying;
  o Characteristics of the perpetrator, victim and witness;
  o Consequences of cyberbullying for various subjects;
  o Links between cyberbullying and law;
  o Methods of preventing cyberbullying aimed at both victim and offender perspectives.
- Implementing educational standards in schools:
  o Specific definitions for harassment, intimidation and bullying (including the electronic variants);
  o Procedures for preventing cyberbullying (workshops, staff training, curriculum enhancements).
- Raising children's and young people's awareness of the problem of cyberbullying regarded as:
  o Forms of cyberbullying and Internet services that might be used to harass others;

- o   Psychological, social and technological causes of cyberbullying;
  - o   Consequences of cyberbullying for various subjects;
  - o   Links between cyberbullying and law;
  - o   The role and responsibility of the witness of cyberbullying;
  - o   Methods of reacting and seeking for help in cases of bullying (including the electronic variants).
- Developing anti-cyberbullying school policies based on cooperation with helpline.org.pl containing:
  - o   Consequences and remedial actions;
  - o   Procedures for reporting;
  - o   Procedures for investigating.
- Promoting the services of Helpline.org.pl among children, parents and professionals.

General project description

Media campaign

The media campaign "Stop Cyberbullying" has started on the 24th of January, 2008 with a successful press conference. Nobody's Children Foundation has succeeded in encouraging the public and private the media to join the campaign. About 25 TV and press titles decided to support the initiative by publishing ads and spots free of charge. The idea for a campaign against cyberbullying draws on the experience of the "Child on the Web" campaign that NCF has been carrying out since 2003. The campaign involves a 30-second TV spot, print ads, and posters. It is conducted under the slogan: "Stop Cyberbullying". The services of Helpline.org.pl are being promoted using this opportunity.

Educational campaign

Drawing on the enhanced interest in the problem of cyberbullying raised by the media activity, the Nobody's Children Foundation has planned an educational campaign focused at first on junior high students. The campaign is composed of two stages: distribution of the educational resources and classes on cyberbullying conducted by teachers.

Educational resources

To date the educational materials were made available free of charge to download from the project's website www.dzieckowsieci.pl. Additionally, in cooperation with education offices in all provincial capitals across Poland and with schools participating in the "Child on the Web" campaign, a large-scale distribution of the educational resources will be carried out. In 2008 we want to provide the materials to 2 500 junior secondary schools, reaching about 150 000 students.

The educational resources are contained of:

- A two-minute film presenting a case study of cyberbullying (showing the perspectives of the victim, the offender, and a witness),
- A guidebook for teachers (giving information on the problem of cyberbullying, procedure's of cooperation with Helpline.org.pl and information about how to conduct classes on the problem),
- Posters for schools about cyberbullying, containing information on Helpline.org.pl's services for children.

Cyberbullying classes

Based on the distributed materials 90 minute classes addressing the issues of cyberbullying will be conducted. The classes will be composed of the film presentation and teacher-moderated discussion about cyberbullying.

The thematic scope of the class:

- What is cyberbullying?
- Consequences of cyberbullying.
- The offender's liability.
- How to react as a witness/victim?
- Where to seek help?

A form for teachers to report completed anti-cyberbullying classes and a certifying system is going to be designed.

"Stop cyberbullying" conference

Additionally to the actions planned at a national level, in partnership with the Warsaw's Department of Education a conference aimed at raising the schools staffs' awareness of cyberbullying issues has been designed. The "Stop cyberbullying" conference took place on the 7th of May 2008, in

the Palace of Culture in Warsaw. 500 participants from all public Warsaw junior - high schools: directors, IT and ICT teachers, psychologists, pedagogues and representatives of the parents' council were invited. Afterwards he trained school staff led classes for students.

Authority clearance

The project has gained full support from The Department of Education of the City Council of Warsaw as well as from The Consultation Committee, which is an Advisory Board for Saferinternet.pl project in Poland, a multi-stakeholder body comprising among others representatives of Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Ministry of Interior and Administration and Main Police Headquarters. The education offices in most provincial capitals across Poland have given a positive opinion on the programme and have declared cooperation in a large-scale distribution of the educational resources to schools.

Time frame

The implementation of the project is planned from January to December 2008 divided into two stages:
- January – April 2008: media campaign;
- February – December 2008: educational campaign.

It is intended to continue the campaign actions in the following years addressing it to different levels of education: primary school children and secondary school students.

Monitoring and evaluation

A summary report will be prepared giving information achieved by a number of monitoring and evaluation methods:
- Visibility survey of the media campaign,
- Records of the educational resources distribution,
- Teachers' reports and evaluations on completed anti-cyberbullying classes.

Future plans

It is intended to continue the campaign actions in the following years addressing it to junior high schools that will not take part in the project in 2008 as well as different level schools: primary and secondary Polish schools.

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Youth's Attitudes Related to Internet Usage, Entertainment and Gender[1]

Szabó Béla
Maria Roth

Abstract

In this paper we discuss how the Internet affects children and teenagers' everyday life, their daily routine and entertainment. We look at single and peer-related free-time activities of children and youth aged 14-18 (7-12 grade in the Romanian school system). In order to contribute to the complex task of drawing a profile of at risk youth using the Internet, we also discuss the role of age and gender in relation with spending time and engaging in risky behaviour with strangers.

Introduction

According to the affirmation of Jochen and co. (2006), we consider adolescents to be the defining users of the Internet. The age of users is especially relevant for developing countries like Romania, where the proportion of users and other general characteristics of country data for consumers differ from the characteristics of children and teens using Internet. On one hand – according to the latest EUROSTAT (2007) report in the press, Romania is the last one in the European Union as far as Internet usage is concerned. This report says that 70% of the Romanians do not use the Internet. Although there were concerns in the media regarding the data collection method, we have to consider this ranking. On the other hand, the

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latest accessible Human Development Report about Romania (The United Nations Development Program Report) outlines the impressive growth of Internet-penetration in Romania (NHDR, 2007). As local researches show, the typical Internet consumer in Romania is most likely under the age of 25 and lives in urban area (TNS CSOP, 2006). We conclude that the massive growth in Internet usage is due especially to teens and children.

According to Jochen and co. (2006), teens and children not only spend more time online than adults do, but they also integrate Internet-based communication technologies more strongly into their social lives. Specific features of the Internet like anonymity, reduced visual and auditory cues, the insignificance of physical distance and time, and the greater control over one's self-presentation facilitate online contact of young people with strangers.

Use of free time versus age

In our sample of 1806 youngsters from 108 classes (7-12 grade in the Romanian school system), located in Cluj, Romania, we analyzed their use of free time, and enumerated eleven alternatives as listed below:

1	I meet my friends.
2	I go with my friends to the movie.
3	I go with my friends to clubs.
4	I go out with my friends for a walk.
5	I practice a certain sport.
6	I read about stars and their life.
7	I read extracurricular literature.
8	I watch TV.
9	I go for shopping.
10	I listen music.
11	I watch a film on the computer (or DVD player)

Figure 1. *Free-time activities*

In order to answer the questions on the relationship of Internet-use and other free time activities of children and youth, the students were asked to mark each affirmation on a scale from 1 to 5 according with their daily schedule. We assumed there might be a relation between the age of the youth's and the number of the different activities they choose to fill their free time with, although the nature (the direction) of the relation was not clear to us. Looking at this correlation, we wanted to test if the risk of Internet dependency is growing with age. First, the summed factor *Free-time activities,* with the above presented eleven alternatives (Figure 1), were correlated with the age of the respondents. Our results show a low *r* coefficient (it is -0.067), with a strong significance (p<0.008), meaning that a higher age might reduce the frequency of the different types of alternative free-time activities. Noting the negative correlation, we could deduce that the older the child, the more polarized he tends to be to specific preferences. This tendency might increase the risk of Internet dependency of older youth.

We disassembled the alternatives *Free-time activities* in two groups along the *single-peer* dichotomy: face to face contacts (direct socializations) and solitaire activities. Entertainment with friends, movies, going to clubs, walks in groups, participating in sports and shopping (the 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th and 9th affirmations) were consider*ed* as *peer activities,* while the rest of the items were considered *solitaire activities*. Calculating first a correlation between age and frequency of activities that involve peers, we found a small positive correlation, though the value remains close to zero (0.048). The statistical significance level just exceeds the 0.05 by very little, but still indicates that *peer activities* increase with age. This means a slight tendency of growth for the proportion of peer related activities along with the maturation of children, contra balancing the previous tendency of polarization of preferences.

To confirm this finding, and to eliminate the above-mentioned non-convincing significance value, we calculated a factor for the activities that require loneliness. This time the correlation between the age and the frequency of the lonely-activities turns negative (*r*=-0.098, p<0.0001). At this point, we have a much better understanding on the relation between the age and the social activities of youth. One explanation for younger children having less peer-related activities could be the fact that the older a person is, he/she a more extended peer network has, so the chance of having peer-related activities is higher among high-grade students. Another possible explanation

could be parent-involvement: as the child is younger, the parental control is stronger and may produce a decrease in the peer-related activities. We do not have data to test this hypotheses.

The results are even stronger if we select activities like watching television, movies on DVD player or on the computer, listening to music (affirmation 8th, 10th and 11th together). The reported frequency of these activities tends to be higher among younger children (r=-0.118, p<0.0001). The findings show us that growth improves the capacity of young people to balance their sources of entertainment.

We found similar results as we correlated age with time spent by youth on the Internet: the correlation value is slightly under zero (r=-0.068) but statistically it seems enough to be significant (p=0.005), showing that aging goes with a slight decrease of time that youth spent on the Internet.

For a comprehensive overview we present a table of correlations between the age and the different free-time alternatives (Table 1):

Table 1. *Free time activities correlated with age*

		Age
I meet my friends	r	.016
	Sig	.497
I go with my friends to the movie	r	-.034
	Sig	.153
I go with my friends to the clubs	r	.169**
	Sig	.000
I go out with my friends for a walk	r	-.013
	Sig	.583
I practice a certain sport	r	-.147**
	Sig	.000
I read about stars and their life	r	-.043
	Sig	.071
I read extracurricular literature	r	.014
	Sig	.574
I watch TV	r	-.183**
	Sig	.000
I go for shopping	r	-.097**
	Sig	.000

I listen music	r	.061*
	Sig	.011
I watch a film on the computer (or DVD player	r	-.084**
	Sig	.000
peer activities	r	.048*
	Sig	.05
lonely-activities	r	- .098**
	p	<.0001
Free-time activities	r	-.067**
	p	<.008

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

 * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Interpreting our results that indicate the decrease of lonely ICT and other activities with the age of children, from the risk profile point of view, we conclude that older children who spend more free-time activities alone are more at risk for negative effects of ICT on their personality.

Playing computer based games

Continuing to build a typology of youth's entertainment behaviour in relation with the Internet, another topic to analyse is the nature of the games played on computers. As Messerly (2004) and Wood et al (2004) state, games can facilitate social interaction, team cooperation, and enhancement of social skills if they are played in teams or among peers. Therefore we were interested in the social cooperation aspects of playing computer based games. The questionnaire we used had two detailed question: one related to games they could play alone; the second one about the games that include peers etc.

The probability of playing games alone tends to decrease with age (r=-0.252, p<0.0001), confirming our previous statements about the decrease of solitary entertainments with aging. At this point, we were interested to see if there is a gender difference among school-children. We expect, generally speaking more boys to play games on the computer, and we also look at the gender distribution of peer related, and solitary games.

Table 2. *Gender differences on playing computer-based games alone*

Gender	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Male	677	13.8877	6.1004
Female	949	7.8588	3.7095

* Mean values of summed factors indicate the frequency of self ratings on a scale 1 (lowest value) to 5 (highest value)

There is a strong significant difference among boys and girls: the mean time reported by girls is just roughly half of the mean for boys. The value of the t-test is 24.7 for p<0.000. Looking to the standard deviation of the gender groups in our study we notice that in spite their group is larger, the girls are more homogeneous from the point of view of time spent with computer-based games (6,1 by males and 3,7 by females) – (see Table 2). These data on gender differences related to video games confirm previous findings of Lucas and Sherry (2004) that females are less likely to be video game players and played for fewer hours. Gender differences are important to be noticed, because video-games have the capacity to influence both attitudes toward violence and acceptable gender roles (B. Beasley & T. ColIins-StandIey, 2002; J. Barenthin & M. Puymbroeck, 2006).

Could there be a similar result for games involving others? The correlation between age and the frequency of peer-related games shows similar findings with those presented earlier. We have once again a negative relationship between these two variables: r=-0,222, for the level of significance p<0.0001. The differences among boys and girls seem to follow the same pattern as in the case of playing alone (t=22.9, p<0.0001): for boys, there is a higher frequency in playing games with peers, but the group is more dispersed, while for girls there is a lower frequency and they are more homogeneous (see below, Table 3).

Table 3. *Gender differences on playing computer-based games with peers*

Gender	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Male	697	10.8049	5.7898
Female	970	6.0144	2.4954

* Mean values of summed factors indicate the frequency of self ratings on a scale 1 (lowest value) to 5 (highest value)

Reflecting on these findings we might deduce that regardless of the type of the game, girls spend much less time with computer-based games than boys. To sustain this assumption, we merged the two variables that measure the frequency of the different type of games and we divided our sample based on gender. The results are below in Table 4.

Table 4. *Gender differences on playing any kind of computer-based games*

Gender	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Male	663	24.7617	10.5134
Female	935	13.8578	5.5653

* Mean values of summed factors indicate the frequency of self ratings on a scale from 1 (lowest value) to 5 (highest value).

The value of the t-test is 26.8 and the $p<0.0001$, which strengthens our assumption. The merged variables correlated with age (r=-0.261, $p<0.0001$) produce the same statistical values as when single and peer related games were separately compared.

As we consider peer-related games to be more adequate and socially acceptable compared to games played alone, we would consider girls who play alone for longer periods of time to be more at risk for dependency then boys playing usually in teams.

Influence of health behaviour, depressiveness

Moving on in the description of the youth's characteristics concerning the relations between mental health and Internet usage, we were interested to find out how depressiveness could bias the social entertainment by computers. Our questionnaire adapted a shorter version of the Beck Depression Inventory containing nine statements and a different scaling method (the respondents marked each statement from 1 to 4 according to their level of the agreement). In Table 5, we present a general overview on depressiveness by gender.

Table 5. *Gender differences on depressiveness*

Gender	N	Mean*	Std. Deviation
Male	681	13.7445	4.6541
Female	964	14.5456	4.5599

* Scores on Beck Depression Inventory with 9 statements, scaled from 1 to 4

We can again observe a difference among boys and girls (see Table 5): girls tend to report higher scores on this scale. Although the difference mentioned are statistically significant (t=3.480, p=0.001), we wonder – as we did before in previous studies (e.g. Szabo, 2005) – about the underlying sources of these differences. From our point of view a possible explanation for gender differences in depression is related to the tendency of boys to minimize or to neglect the stressful subjects, as part of gender based socialisation process. Our data suggest that males who have a higher depressiveness score are more at risk in front of the Internet compared to other males, but probably also compared to girls with higher depressiveness, for whom the same values might be within, or close to the norms.

Analyzing the depressiveness in conjunction with the game-style, we notice a slightly positive correlation with the frequency of games played alone (r=0.049), although the level of the significance is just above the agreed value (p=0.052). It may not come as a surprise; adolescents with higher risks on depressiveness play solitary games for longer periods.

The fact that there is an even stronger correlation with peer-related games might be curious (r=0.085, p<0.0001). The explanation could be that regardless what type of game they play, those youngsters having higher values on the depression scale tend to spend more time with games in front of their computers.

The relationship of depressiveness to time spent with games cannot be transferred to its relation with general use of Internet. To test the relationship, we divided our sample in two groups, based on their depressiveness scores. One group is composed with those in the last quartile, considered to have the highest risk (their score starts from 17) and another group with the rest of the sample. There is no statistically significant difference between these two groups: the mean of time spent on the Internet and the standard deviation are almost the same (t=0.281, p=0.779) (Table 6). This means that the amount of time spent on the Internet is not easily explained by depressiveness alone.

Table 6. *Frequency of Internet-usage vs. depressiveness*

Depression score	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
>=17.00	444	1.59	.92
<17.00	1206	1.57	.92

This confirms the findings of Gross and collaborators (2002), who suggest that the different socialisation patterns between those adolescents with depressive bias and others are not related with the amount of time spent on the Internet. It is rather the quality or the content of their Internet usage that makes the difference. To explore this issue further, we analyzed the differences related to depression and the use of chat programs. A summary of the chat related items and their correlation with depression-levels are presented in Table 7:

	Pearson Correlation	Sig. (2-tailed)	N
	Depression	Depression	Depression
How often do you talk with your friends?	-.054 *	.034	1527
How often do you talk to persons abroad (other nationality), whom you met face-to-face	.098 **	.000	1512
How often do you talk to other nationality's person, whom you never met?	.098 **	.000	1517
How often do you ask friends to call you or send you SMS?	.076 **	.003	1499
How often do you talk with your classmates/friends?	-.041	.111	1505
How often do you establish meetings with your friends or classmates?	.044	.094	1453
How often do you talk to those who you first met on the Internet (and after face-to-face) and are from your city?	.040	.122	1515
How often do you talk to those who you first met on the Internet (but not face-to-face) and are from your city?	.083 **	.001	1518
How often do you establish direct meetings with those you have met online?	.122 **	.000	1514
How often do you talk to those Romanians you met on the Internet (but not face-to-face)?	.080 **	.002	1514
How often do you talk to those Romanians you know face-to-face and are living abroad?	.063 *	.014	1517

*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

One can also observe that chats with friends or classmates are less frequent for those with a higher depression-score. Instead, they are more likely to engage in conversations with strangers. Although the differences seem to be small, in most of the cases the level of the significance is powerful.

As our project is interested in risky behaviours adapted by youngsters, we looked at the relationship between the tendency of depression as measured in our survey (adapting the Beck Depression Inventory), the reported on line contacts with strangers and the consequent meetings with strangers in real life. It looks like the higher the depression, the more youngsters are ready to meet strangers on-line and then off-line.

Conclusion

In order to detect vulnerability related factors among adolescents we have looked at age and gender differences and we have found relevant data on the use of Internet and other modern technologies for entertainment.

In our sample of children and youth in schools, the older ages did increase the use of peer related Internet activities. Analyzing this relation from a risk perspective, we can say that teens whose Internet usage persists till the end of adolescents in activities played alone are more at risk for negative effects. This relationship is stronger for boys than for girls, who as a group, quiet homogenously, use any kind of computer-based games (including peer related ones) significantly less than boys.

Another conclusion is the correlations between the degree of depression as measured in our survey and the risky behaviours of meeting strangers on line and off line. Our findings indicate that a profile of at risk youth refers to **males** who **in late adolescents** favour **lonely computer games** and other **lonely ICT activities**, instead of peer-related ones. In relation to the often asked question on who are the *at risk youth* for meeting strangers off-line after getting to know them on-line, data show that depressed youth are more at risk. As for gender and depression, more female users seem to indicate a higher level of depression, but boys with higher depression are more at risk of negative effects of the Internet.

From the perspective of helping professionals, we feel important to emphasize that Internet usage is not a cure for depressed youth, but on contrary, it might increase the risks on mental health of youngsters. Among

these we especially mention the on line (which can be followed by off line) meeting of strangers, that might be the beginning of abuse and exploitation.

If instead of looking to the at risk groups, we look to the resilience factors that we found in our data, then we have to emphasize that the majority of the surveyed youth clearly prefer to engage in on-line communication with known people, and protect their intimacy when they are on-line. By aging, they continue to prefer peer-related forms of entertainment to individual ones.

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Being Social and Unsocial Online.
An Exploration of Teenagers' Online Incipient Bullying[1]

Monica Barbovschi

Abstract

This study proposes an exploration of the incipient problem of cyber-bullying (or cyberbullying) among Romanian teenagers, with a focus on different types of bullying behavior in relation to frequent use of social networking tools, parental monitoring and psychosocial factors. The findings suggest moderate relations to the use of social networking tools (SNSs and IM services) and to the offline parental monitoring. No significant relation was detected between online monitoring (including SNS monitoring) and cyber-bullying. Moreover, the psychosocial factors revealed complex implications for the online aggressive behavior. Previous research on cyber-bullying was revisited, comparisons were drawn, findings and implications are discussed.

Keywords: cyber-bullying, teenagers, social networking tools, parental monitoring, psychosocial factors

Introduction

Taking the risk of bringing up a cliché, the use of communication technologies has a changing nature. The Internet landscape in contemporary society has become both more complex and ubiquitous since its early days. New forms of communications and belonging/networking are being created at a fast pace, while dramatically transforming the way young people (children and teenagers) interact with each other.

Although there is no Romanian "born digital" teenage generation, due to a late technology diffusion pattern, young people start growing up digital from an early age. In our survey, the medium number of years of using the Internet is 2.88 (SD=2.123), while the medium number of years for using the computer is 5.74 (SD=2.659). That means there is probably a progressive adoption of various technologies and associated uses, unlike 'digital natives' who are born into a technology-saturated environment. Also, our younger subjects, age 13, have started using the Internet around the age of 10.

Naturally, there was only a matter of time until issues like benefits (positive outcomes, opportunities) and risks (negative consequences, threats) implied by various forms of online communication become the focus of Romanian scholars. Among the latter, main concerns are being developed around issues like exposure to unwanted/ harmful content (violent or sexual), the threat of being groomed online for sexual abuse or the emerging forms of online bullying (cyber-bullying). Therefore, the logical question that one can raise in terms of social intervention is: What can we do to maximize the benefits (positive outcomes) and minimize the risks (negative effects)? This study aims to explore incipient online bullying behavior in relation to several social and technological factors.

Angle of approach

As one can easily notice, most research in this field has focused on 'what the media do to children' as opposed to 'what children do with the media' or, as pointed out in a review of internet usage by Livingstone (2003), most research on the usage and impact of the internet actually ignores children. Therefore there is a need for contextualizing Internet use within everyday practices, for seeing children as active agents, in order to avoid constructing children as passive or vulnerable (Livingstone, 2002). In Livingstone's perspective, the depiction of children as vulnerable only legitimates further disempowerment and adult authority in the regulation of children's life.

Although the debate will only advance when it transcends the futile oppositions between optimists and pessimists or technophiles and technophobes, this rough categorization of opportunities and dangers, from both children's and adults' perspectives, organizes what follows. In addition to this, I will

try to avoid the rhetoric of a moral panic, doubled by the 'moral quality of the discourse of innocence' (Meyer, 2007) intertwined with the sacralization of childhood, as it becomes more and more necessary to view the children as skilled agents in using different Internet facilities, often more skilled that most adults:

On the contrary, the discourse of innocence is reinforced through calls for adults to 'do more to make the internet safer for children'. Such demands assume that children need adult protection, which is incongruent with claims that children tend to be more skilled at using the Internet than their parents. (Livingstone, 2002, p. 89*)*

It has been argued that the discourse of innocence does not protect children, but instead re-produces the children vulnerability representations. One concept that proves to be useful is the concept of structural vulnerability (as opposed to physical or social vulnerability), which is constructed as asymmetrical power relations (mainly between children and adults) and reinforced by the discourse of innocence. The necessity to consider children/ teenagers' violent behavior from the perspective of social agency has also been formulated by Jill E. Korbin (2003), in an increasing need for inclusion of child perspective in the explanation of larger structural conditions of violence.

Research on cyber-bullying

Cyber-bullying can be simply defined as bullying that involves the use of CMC (Computer Mediated Communication) to deliberately (and repeatedly) pick on, harass, threat, mock, aggress other children/teenagers. Willard (2005) identified the following seven ways in which cyberbullying might occur: (*a*) *flaming* involves sending angry, rude, or vulgar messages directed at a person or persons privately or to an online group; b) *harassment* involves repeatedly sending a person offensive messages; (*c*) *denigration* is sending or posting harmful, untrue, or cruel statements about a person to other people; (*d*) *cyberstalking* is harassment that includes threats of harm or is highly intimidating; (*e*) *masquerading* is pretending to be someone else and sending or posting material that makes that person look bad or places that person in potential danger; (*f*) *outing* and *trickery* involve engaging in tricks to solicit embarrassing information about a person and then making that information public; and (*g*) *exclusion* describes actions that specifically and

intentionally exclude a person from an online group, such as blocking a student from an IM buddies list.

Willard further suggests that practically every teenager that communicates online has played at least one of the roles of bully, bullied (victim) or bystander. There is significant research (Unnever, 2005) suggesting that teenagers who play the role of aggresive victims (children that have been bullied but have also bullied other kids) have specific psychosocial background/traits, more closely similar to that of „pure" bullies than to that of the victims. However, agreeing on a common definition especially when it comes to bullying online is not an easy task. As cyber-bullying is definitely not physical, relational bullying or relational aggression (Zhang, 2008), the emotional bullying especially, that might include exclusion and gossiping, is harder to identify.

Obviously, scholars have tried to answer questions like: why do teens bully online? Some of the explanations rely on the convenience motive: "In some cases what we heard was that adolescent cruelty had simply moved from the school yard, the locker room, the bathroom wall and the phone onto the internet. The simplicity of being able to replicate and quickly transmit digital content makes bullying quite easy"(Lenhart, 2007). Others try to encompass revisited theories of adolescent socialization patterns.

As online communication becomes more commonplace and the distinction between behavior offline and behavior online tends to fade, the convenience reason starts to lose ground and the socializing argument becomes more appealing. As Beale and Hall (2007) suggested, teens feel less inhibited to say things that they wouldn't say face to face when they think they can remain anonymous. But in most of the cases, there is no protection of anonymity, usually the bullies and the bullied know each other or at least know each other's friends or colleagues. However, due to the lack of non-verbal stimuli in online communication, the pain one inflicts on another is not easily perceived and the consequences of the bullying behavior are not immediately visible. In a survey conducted in UK by NHC and Tesco Mobile (2005) on mobile bullying, 11% of the subjects admitted they had sent a bullying or threatening message to someone else. Other research found similar results:

Making Private Information Public Is the Most Common Form of Cyberbullying

Have you, personally, ever experienced any of the following things online?	Yes	No
Someone taking a private email, IM, or text message you sent them and forwarding it to someone else or posting it where others could see it	15%	85%
Someone spreading a rumor about you online	13%	87%
Someone sending you a threatening or aggressive email, IM, or text message	13%	87%
Someone posting an embarrassing picture of you online without your permission	6%	94%
Answered "yes" to any of the four previous questions	32%	68%

Source: Pew Internet & American Life Project Parents and Teens Survey, Oct- Nov. 2006. Based on online teens [n=886]. Margin of error for the overall sample is ±4%

One truth that becomes more pervasive is that children are empowered by new technologies and these newly acquired social/technical skills and their relationship to bullying must receive further investigation. Anastasia Goodstein (2007) explains why some of the kids become bullies: they experience anger management issues, they come from violent homes or neighborhoods, they have authoritarian parents or other problems at home or, they might have poor social skills and low self-esteem.

Moving forward, some research address descriptive issues, like gender patterns (e.g. girls are more likely than boys to be victims of online bullying) or comparisons between offline and online bullying. Girls are more likely than boys to say that they have ever experienced cyber-bullying – 38% of online girls report being bullied, compared with 26% of online boys. Older girls in particular are more likely to report being bullied than any other age and gender group, with 41% of online girls ages 15 to 17 reporting these experiences. There is an obvious difference between cyber-bullying and offline bullying, where boys are reported to be more often the victims and the perpetrators of bullying behavior. In addition to this, some voices (Goddard, 2008) say that girls are also more attracted than boys to online meanness.

Another research question that I would also like to address is: Do social networks facilitate cyber-bullying? Today's youth does not necessarily feel that using the Internet, email, IM, and text messaging takes time away from

their friendships (Bryant, Sanders-Jackson & Smallwood, 2006). On the contrary, CMC has become a way to extend and continue offline interactions with friends and classmates. Social network sites are among those tools young people use to stay in touch with their peers. Boyd and Ellison (2007) propose a definition of Social Network Sites (SNSs) as 'as web-based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system'.

Some of the features of the SNSs can foster the potential for bullying behavior online, such as the default public nature of the individual profiles, the visibility of each person's group of friends, the default enabling of comments on pictures and profiles from practically anyone and, more recently (Facebook), the automatic enabling of real-time chat (Instant Messaging) applications inside every individual profile. It is only a matter of time until Hi5, the SNS with the most teen users in Romania, which copied most of the Facebook features, will follow this new trend. It makes sense that more frequent Internet use leads to greater exposure to inappropriate material of behavior online (Fleming, Greentree, Cocotti-Muller, Elias, & Morrison, 2006), as much as it makes sense that greater involvement of teenagers with social networking tools creates greater level of exposure to aggressive/bullying behavior.

Consequently, it seems reasonable to investigate the social bonds created and maintained through SNSs in relation to cyber-bullying (H: more online bonds, more cyber-bullying?)

The issue of different Internet uses in relation with scholastic competence has been already investigated:

"It found that children engage with different kind of media activities and some of these are significantly related to psychosocial factors, however, these correlations were in general quite small. Entertainment usage was associated with low scholastic competence". (Heim, J., Bae Brandtzæg, P., Hertzberg Kaare, B., Endestad, T. & Torgersen, L., 2007)

Another significant study that correlates different Internet uses and gratifications is the one belonging to Cho, de Zuniga, Rojas and Shaw's (2003), who distinguish between interaction, surveillance and consumption use corresponding to particular gratifications of connection, learning and

acquisition. However, if there is a correlation between social networks and cyber-bullying, as the Pew study suggests, it is rather the relation between connection gratifications and forms of online bullying that needs further investigation.

The controllability of the online environment has been used as an explanation for the victimization in online encounters. Adolescents who communicated more on the internet also perceived internet communication as more controllable, more reciprocal, broader and deeper than face-to-face communication (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006). Therefore, the association between social competence and cyber-bullying can provide some explanation for the bullying phenomena through patterns of social vulnerability.

Social competence: this is conceptualized as skilful social behavior, which links to the construct of self-efficacy (Bandura et al., 2003). The scale 'children's self-efficacy for social interaction with peers' assesses how children perceive their effectiveness in social interactions with peers (Heim et al., 2007). *Self-concept* has been defined as social acceptance (assessing how popular children feel themselves to be and if they believe that they have a lot of friends).

Other research goes deeper into identifying specific psychosocial traits of the bullies and bullied. The socialization background of bullies, victims and aggressive victims is reported to significantly differ (Dake, Price & Telljohann, 2003).

As I previously stated, I try to detach myself from a position of moral rhetoric and depiction of children/teenagers as vulnerable, e.g. Brydolf (2007)'s positioning in terms of protection of the "inexperienced social networkers", and try to refer to them as skilled social agents in various asymmetrical power relations.

Hypotheses

Reckless (aggressive) behavior might be regarded as a result of a broad socialization pattern (Arnett, 1995) (lesser enforcement of social rules, less restrictions, unsupervised time by the adult family members). Although I would be careful in applying the label "reckless" to bullying behavior online, it is my supposition too that the presence and nature of parental monitoring determine the bullying behavior (less control, more aggressive behavior) - H1.

It has been argued that different socialization experiences relate differently to the three roles in the bullying triad: the pure bullies, the pure victims

and the aggressive victims. My analysis includes measures of parental monitoring as predictors (described below) of the bullying behavior. Another assumption is the positive relation between intense use of online socializing tools - number of friends, exposure to social networking tools (frequent use of IM services, having a profile on a SNS) - and bullying behavior. (H2).

The third assumption relates to psychosocial factors and socializing background (perception of easiness to make new friends and parental divorce relate positively to bullying behavior; loneliness is supposed to have positive correlations with bullying behavior). So the third hypothesis is that bullies tend to have negative socializing background. (H3)

Method

1806 self-report questionnaires were administered in 101 classes from secondary and high schools in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in November 2007. Approval to conduct the survey was obtained from the local school inspectorate and from the principals of each school included in the sample. Parents were informed through the teachers and the pupils' consent was also asked for the participation in the survey (for further details, see *Annex*).

Although the questionnaire aimed to encompass a variety of activities and behaviors, both online and offline, a series of items were related to several bullying activities online. Due to the partial exploratory nature of the survey, the items of cyber-bullying differ partially from those found in previous research. In terms of socialization patterns, both primary socialization and peer groups have been known to influence aggressive behavior; I included measures of parental monitoring as predictors of bullying behavior, items related to online social activity (having a profile on a SNS and the use of instant messaging services) and two psychosocial dimensions.

Parental monitoring

Teenagers' activity is poorly supervised/ monitored by their parents, 58.6% from our sample declared they do not have any restrictions whatsoever in using the computer and the Internet (N=1806). The most frequent form of parental control is related to the time the children spend in front of the PC (reported by 29.7% of the boys sample and 33% of the girls). However, no significant differences were found for these three items of parental monitoring according to sexes distribution.

I have restrictions/rules about the time I spend on the Internet
(Online Monitoring 1)

		Sex		
		masculine	*feminine*	**Total**
I have restrictions/rules about the time I spend on the Internet	*true*	29.7%	33.0%	31.6%
	false	70.3%	67.0%	68.4%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

I have restrictions/rules about the pages I open on the Internet
(Online Monitoring 2)

		Sex		
		masculine	*feminine*	**Total**
I have restrictions/rules about the pages I open on the Internet	*true*	10.2%	7.1%	8.4%
	false	89.8%	92.9%	91.6%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

I have restrictions/rules about the persons I talk to on the Internet
(Online Monitoring 3)

		Sex		
		masculine	*feminine*	**Total**
I have restrictions/rules about the persons I talk to on the Internet	*true*	5.6%	7.3%	6.6%
	false	94.4%	92.7%	93.4%
	Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Among the parents 43% have restricted, one way or another, their children's access on the Internet. We have also included two other items of parental monitoring, related to teenagers' general relation with their parents, namely: "My parents/tutors always know my whereabouts when I'm not at home or at school" -OffM1 and "My parents/tutors always know with whom I spend my time when I'm not at home or at school"-OffM2 (Pearson's r=.447, significant at the 0.001 level). 30% and 40% of the children gave negative answers to these two items.

Significant differences were found between boys and girls for these two items, girls reporting more general parental monitoring for both items (though the value of the correlation coefficients were rather small, they were significant at 0.01 level (Phi, Cramer's V=.145 for the first item and .200 for the second). An independent T test was conducted for the two items of offline monitoring, that also confirmed the different monitoring for boys and girls (*t*= -5.934 for OffM1 and -8.287 for OffM2 at the significance level 0.001).

About their kids accessing the SNSs, 82.5% of the parents know about it (according to the children's statements), but a large majority (94.7%) are not interested at all in what the children are doing on these SNSs. Concordantly, 93% of the parents are not interested in the persons the children add to their friends lists. However, girls report more parental interest on how they use the SNS (although the values of the coefficients were small, Phi and Cramer's V=.133). No significant differences between boys and girls were found for the item "persons that I add as friends". No differences were found between children who use SNSs and children who do not use SNSs for the items of online monitoring (OnM 1 to 3).

My parents are interested in the way I use the SNS (SNS-M1)

			My parents are interested in the way I use the SNS		
			yes	*no*	**Total**
Sex	*feminine*	Count	50	667	717
		% within Sex	7.0%	93.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	4.3%	56.7%	61.0%
	masculine	Count	12	447	459
		% within Sex	2.6%	97.4%	100.0%
		% of Total	1.0%	38.0%	39.0%
	Total	Count	62	1114	1176
		% within Sex	5.3%	94.7%	100.0%
		% of Total	5.3%	94.7%	100.0%

My parents are interested in the persons I add as friends (SNS-M2)

			My parents are interested in the persons I add as friends		
			yes	*no*	**Total**
Sex	*feminine*	Count	62	684	746
		% within Sex	8.3%	91.7%	100.0%
		% of Total	5.1%	56.2%	61.3%
	masculine	Count	23	448	471
		% within Sex	4.9%	95.1%	100.0%
		% of Total	1.9%	36.8%	38.7%
	Total	Count	85	1132	1217
		% within Sex	7.0%	93.0%	100.0%
		% of Total	7.0%	93.0%	100.0%

N=1217

The nature of the parental monitoring online can be summarized as following: it declines with age, it does not differ significantly for boys and girls in terms of time spent, content or persons the children talk to. Nevertheless parental monitoring offline can be described as characterizing girls more than boys.

No significant correlation was detected between the items of parental monitoring online (both general and SNS specific) and offline. Weak positive correlations were found between the items of general online monitoring and SNS monitoring.

There is no special attention in terms of parental monitoring for children who use SNSs (in comparison with children who do not use these services). Moreover, the vast majority of SNS users (92%) declare that their parents show no interest in neither the way they use these social tools, nor the persons they add as friends in their buddy lists.

Social Networking Pattern

From the total sample, almost 1200 children (70%) have a profile on a SNS, 80% of these have a public profile, visible to anyone (20% have a restricted profile, visible only to accepted friends). 75.6% of them declared that nothing unpleasant happened while using the SNSs, 6% reported

swearing, 4% jokes, 5% sexual solicitations and 4% other types of unpleasant proposals. 64.5% from the SNS users that had unpleasant experiences have told somebody about it (usually a friend or a family member).

The most popular method of getting together online among teens is definitely the instant messaging service, with 90% of our sample using one of these applications (Yahoo Messenger being the favorite). Another important measure of the social skills of a teenager is the number of persons she talks to on a regular basis (regardless if she met them in person or not). Apparently there is a negative (though weak) correlation between the number of online friends and having a profile on a SNS. There is also a positive association between the self-perceived ability to make new friends and the use of SNSs (Phi=.153 at the significance level 0.001). In other words, the ones that use social networking tools are the ones that already possess social skills.

Psychosocial factors and socializing background

Previous research related to cyber-bullying has tried to detach some psychosocial factors as predictors of aggressive behavior (in opposition with victimizing profiles). Among those, loneliness and perceived ability in creating new friendships had been proved to be significant in the bullying process (for both victims and aggressors, though in opposition). In addition to this, the marital status of the parents (whether they are separated/divorced or not) has a great impact on the socialization pattern of the child. 20% of our total sample has reported feelings of loneliness (girls more than boys, though the significant difference is small); 54% think they can make new friends more easily than children of same age/sex (no significant difference between girls and boys). 10% of our sample reported divorced parents.

The cyber-bullying and the cyber-bullies

The cyber-bullying phenomenon shows increasing presence among the teenagers in Cluj-Napoca, with 65.3% (71% of the boys, 61% of the girls, Phi= -.103, at the significance level 0.001) declaring they have at least once made a joke about one colleague with other colleagues/friends (on IM, e-mail or chat), 47.2% have done the same thing at the expense of a teacher (no significant difference for boys and girls). In spite of this, very few move beyond volatile gossip to posting text or video content on a site, profile or blog: only 9.3% have posted jokes about a colleague and 8% about teachers (boys more than girls for both items, although the difference is small), and

9.6% (16% of the boys, 4.8% of the girls, with a significant difference, Phi=-.187 at the significance level 0.001) have videotaped a colleague in an unpleasant situation and posted the material on the Internet. Other behaviors, that can be more easily regarded as cyber-bullying are threats and exclusion: 18.7% (27.5% boys, 12% girls, significant difference, Phi= -.196, at the significance level 0.001) have threatened with physical violence another colleague (on the Internet), 11.6% have asked their friends to exclude/ban from their lists (on messenger or network) another colleague (15.4% boys, 8.9% girls, Phi=-.101, significance level 0.001).

*Making jokes about other classmates/ schoolmates
is the most common form of cyberbullying*

At least once…	*Yes*	*No*
I made jokes about a classmate or schoolmate, together with other classmates or schoolmates (on IM, e-mail or chat)	65%	35%
I made jokes about a teacher together with other classmates or schoolmates (on IM, e-mail or chat)	47%	53%
I posted jokes about a classmate/ schoolmate on my blog or in my profile (Facebook, MySpace, Hi5)	10%	90%
I posted jokes about a teacher on my blog or in my profile (Facebook, MySpace, Hi5)	8%	92%
I videotaped a classmate/ schoolmate in an unpleasant situation and I posted the material on the Internet for other classmates to see	10%	90%
I threatened a classmate/schoolmate with beating (on messenger, email, chat)	19%	81%
I asked my classmates/ schoolmates to exclude from their list of friends another classmate/ schoolmate (from messenger or SNS)	12%	88%

*Source: Risks and Effects of Internet Use among Teenagers Survey, Oct- Nov. 2007. Self-administered
questionnaire, in class [n=1771].*

However, there is a pattern of bullying behavior that can be observed from bivariate correlations (all items showed significant positive correlations):
- gossiping about colleagues and teachers (Pearson's *r*=.414) correlates positively with all items, but most with threatening with physical violence (*r*=.215 and .202 respectively, at the significance level 0.001)

- posting jokes about colleagues and teachers (r=.425) showed significant moderate association with filming and posting embarrassing material (r=.340), but also with threatening and exclusion.
- filming showed significant moderate correlations with threatening and exclusion (r=.346 and .350 respectively, at the significance level 0.001)

The gossipers are not the ones that post information online about colleagues. Those who videotape are, as expected, the ones that post information; threatening with physical violence is related to all other types of bullying behavior, but more to exclusion and videotaping. In addition to this, boys tend to engage more in mild forms of bullying (gossiping online with other friends), but they also engage more than girls in serious forms of cyber-bullying (threatening and exclusion).

Results

Social Networking Tools and Cyber-Bullying

The results show interesting relations between belonging to a social network (group) or IM use and different forms of cyber-bullying. There is a positive association between SNS use and making jokes online about a colleague together with other colleagues/friends (Phi and Cramer's V=.192), making jokes about a teacher together with other colleagues/friends (Phi and Cramer's V=.142), as well as between IM use and these two items (Phi and Cramer's V=.188 and .145, respectively).

No significant differences between SNS users and non-users were found for posting jokes about a colleague on the personal profile or blog, for posting jokes about a teacher on the personal profile or blog, filming a colleague in an embarrassing situation and posting the content online, threatening of a colleague with physical violence, asking friends to exclude from their buddy-list another colleague. The same pattern was detected for IM use.

Apparently, the milder forms of bullying are moderately correlated with SNS membership or IM use. Children that use SNSs tend to gossip more, but they don't engage more than non-users in serious forms of cyberbullying. Also there is a negative correlation between the number of persons teenagers talk to and all forms of online bullying behavior, apparently bullying online doesn't relate to online social networking tools (SNSs and IM). A safe statement would be that H2 cannot be confirmed.

Parental monitoring and cyber-bullying

a) Online monitoring – no differences for children that report OnM1 and OnM3 (versus children that do not report online time and relations monitoring) with regards of all forms of cyber-bullying, only very small differences were spotted for children that report OnM2 (versus children that do not report content monitoring) with regards of gossiping about colleagues and teachers- negative correlations.

b) Offline monitoring – children that report offline monitoring engage less in online gossiping about other colleagues (Phi =-.109 for OffM1 and -.090 for OffM2) or teachers (Phi=-.115 for OffM1 and -.113 for OffM2), they post jokes about colleagues or teacher less than children that are not monitored (although the coefficients were rather low), they film less other colleagues in embarrassing situation with the intention of circulating the content on the Internet (Phi=-.130 for OffM1 and -.127 for OffM2), they have threatened another colleague with physical violence less than unmonitored children (Phi=-.169 for OffM1 and -.171 for OffM2), they have asked their friends to exclude somebody from their buddy-list less than unmonitored children (Phi=-.104 for OffM2).

c) SNS monitoring- does not influence bullying behavior. With the exception of SNS monitoring of friends negatively correlated with gossiping about teachers (Phi=-.112), children that report SNS monitoring do not differ from those who reported no SNS monitoring when it comes to bullying behavior online.

Note: Data about SNS monitoring collected only from children with SNS use, N=1195.

Children with higher offline parental monitoring declared less bullying activities of all types (the strongest negative correlation with threatening with physical violence). Surprisingly enough, online monitoring does not appear to be correlated with forms of online bullying (although data show low negative correlation between content monitoring and gossiping).

Therefore H1 is only partially confirmed for offline monitoring, but not for online monitoring.

Psychosocial factors and socializing background in relation to cyber-bullying

Contrary to previous research, our results showed no correlation between reported feelings of loneliness on one hand and bullying behavior on the other hand. There is only a very low positive relation between reported feelings of loneliness and the exclusion item (Phi and Cramer's V=.090, at the significance level 0.001), which might need further investigation.

The reported easiness in making new friends is positively correlated with making jokes about colleagues (Phi and Cramer's V=.142) and teachers (Phi and Cramer's V=.129), with posting jokes about colleagues (Phi and Cramer's V=.099) and teachers (Phi and Cramer's V=.116), filming and posting embarrassing material about a colleague (Phi and Cramer's V=.100), threatening with physical violence (Phi and Cramer's V=.124), all coefficients significant at the .001 level. The self-perceived ability to make new friends shows only low positive correlation to bullying behavior online (consistent with previous research). The divorce item showed no correlation with all items of online bullying.

In conclusion, the third hypothesis, the influence of negative socializing background (loneliness and family background) on bullying acts cannot be confirmed. Apparently, only the extraversion item might be connected to engaging in different forms of online aggression, as well as other psychosocial factors (less self-reported *sensitivity* is positively correlated with threatening with physical violence, Phi and Cramer's V=.127 at 0.001 significance level, being *popular among the other sex* correlates significantly with making jokes about colleagues or teachers – Phi and Cramer's V=.218, with posting jokes about teachers – Phi and Cramer's V=.125, with threatening a classmate, schoolmate with physical violence– Phi and Cramer's V=.178, with asking the exclusion of a class/schoolmate, friend– Phi and Cramer's V=.123, self-reported *hostility* towards others shows positive correlation with making jokes about colleagues– Phi and Cramer's V=.120, with the exclusion item– Phi and Cramer's V=.165, with the threatening item– Phi and Cramer's V=.158 and finally, self-reported *nervousness and irascibility* shows positive correlation with making jokes about class/schoolmates– Phi and Cramer's V=.128, or teachers – Phi and Cramer's V=.111, with filming embarrassing material – Phi and Cramer's V=.116, with threatening with physical violence – Phi

and Cramer's V=.163 and with the exclusion item – Phi and Cramer's V=.155. All coefficients were significant at the 0.001 level).

Limitations

One of the limitations of this study is that despite the large size of the sample, the data were collected from a rather homogenous population. Another bias that limits the generalizability of the results is the data collection technique. In-class self-report questionnaires are more exposed to the danger of subversive responses, i.e. providing false or joking responses (Hill, 2006). In addition to this, the individual completion of the form cannot be controlled exhaustively as class-mates can influence each others' answers. The authority bias might have influenced the results, as suggested by the very low non-response rates (both general and partial), although most of the teachers were not present during the administration of the questionnaires.

Discussion

The Internet and the various forms of computer-mediated communication and more recently, the social networking tools, have been met with public concern about their effects on children's and teenager's wellbeing, a topic that stirs up emotional and over-protective responses, in connection with a specific view on the nature of childhood, that usually encompasses the imagery of vulnerability and innocence. Following the idea of exploring not what the technology does to children, but rather what children are doing with the technological tools, this study proposes an exploration of incipient forms of bullying behavior online with a focus on the bullies as competent, skilled agents. Three independent elements were tested in relation to the bullying behavior online: parental monitoring, use of social networking tools (SNSs and IM) and psychosocial factors.

For the first item, the findings suggest that is rather the offline monitoring that influences the online bullying and not the supervision of the children's online activities, time spent online or contacts. For the second element, the two types of being social online, namely having a profile on a SNS or the use of an IM service, data suggest moderate relations between their use and the milder forms of bullying behavior (gossiping about class/schoolmates and teachers). The problem that might appear in the context of the discourse

about online violence is the inclusion of gossiping or exclusion in the sphere of bullying behavior that might distort the attention from other forms, far more serious, or even trivialize the whole discussion about cyber-bullying as a severe problem. However, the other side of the argument is the necessity to address and respond to less severe forms of aggressive behavior before they escalate into more dangerous and harmful ones.

The third element, the psychosocial factors revealed inconclusive results: negative items (loneliness and dysfunctional familial background) showed no relation to cyber-bullying. Other items like self-reported easiness in making new friends, popularity, nervousness and hostility showed positive associations with various forms of aggressive behavior.

Further investigations should explore the relationship between bullies and bullied, in connection with numerous psychosocial factors, with a special attention to the category of 'aggressive victims' that previous research had discovered.

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Paedophile Content in P2P Networks

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Abstract

This presentation aims at giving an overview of P2P network-related problems and threats to children, and concerns topic 3 (Cyberbullying, sexual victimization/ abuse, harassment online).

Summary:

1. *Impact of unwanted exposure of youth to sexual material on the net*
2. *General idea of P2P systems and its technical aspects*
3. *Threats to children and youth concerning P2P*
   - *Patterns of use*
   - *Paedo-pornographic content*
   - *Availability*
   - *Implications for prevention*

Internet use patterns among youngsters and harmful online content

There was a dispute whether the Internet is or isn't an open source of pornographic content and whether the contact with it is unavoidable or not. First of all, we need to define what unwanted exposure is. It means being exposed, without seeking or expecting it, to pictures of naked people or people having sex, during on-line researches. Surveys proved that 25% of children using Internet regularly experienced more than one such exposure (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2003: 340). In most cases it happened at home but 15% of cases of exposure at school is also a significant level.

Mainly, they encountered naked people but 32% of the pictures showed people having sex and 7% showed also violent content.

Even though there are arguments about relations between pornography and violence or sexual abuse as a result of it, it is already known that

violent pornography may reinforce aggressive behaviour and negative attitudes towards women (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2003: 333)

Children, who are more vulnerable to come in contact with such content, are especially those who experience:

- Troubles, defined as low/lower perceived quality of life
- Parent-child conflict relationship
- High Internet use
- High online risk behaviour (Mitchell, Finkelhor, Wolak, 2003: 334)

According to the survey conducted by the Nobody's Children Foundation and Gemius Research Agency in September 2006, 71% (N=2559) of young people aged 12-17 have contact with erotic or pornographic content online. Among other types of harmful content there were as well: violent scenes and xenophobic and racist material. Unwanted contact with pornographic or erotic material is reported by 74% of girls and 46% of boys. 43% of boys and 37% of girls visit erotic sites intentionally, spending there approximately one hour. According to another Gemius's research of young Internet users in Poland, 50% of 7-14 year-olds are heavy users and 40% of overall child and young Internet users use some kind of a peer-to-peer client as well. Knowing that 25% of children report their parents aren't interested in the way they use the Internet at all and only 9% of them admit being accompanied by parents when on-line, the problem of safe Internet use among the youngest and their vulnerability towards various threats become an important issue.

General ideas of peer-to-peer systems[1]

Peer-to-peer systems are computer architectures designed to enable quick, efficient and flexible computer content exchange. They accelerate communication and reduce collaboration costs, as no intermediation of a centralized server is necessary. Each member of the network does some administration and maintenance-concerned tasks. A matter of discussion is still the exact definitions of peer-to-peer systems but generally it is possible to distinguish broad and narrow ones. Strict definitions assign peer-to-peer to those systems where the equality among members is absolute and no

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[1] Paragraph based on Androutsellis-Theotokis, S., Spinellis, D., A Survey of Peer-to-Peer Content Distribution Technologies, Athens University of Economics and Business, 2004.

privileged instance, such as a server, exists. In this case, systems such as Kazaa or others, which use a central server to execute non-core tasks (bootstrapping, ratings) are excluded, in spite of being commonly accepted as peer-to-peer architectures.

However, broader definitions highlight taking advantage of resources available at the edges of the Internet. The differences might be crucial to an academic debate but describing peer-to-peer systems "externally" and objectively rather than subjectively, it is important to emphasize the characteristics of this kind of systems. These are:

- Scalability
- Resistance to censorship and centralized control
- Easier access to resources
- Distributed ownership / administration
- Resources shared directly between the users (nodes)
- Nodes, which don't rely on any centralized structure, who actively participate in every aspect of data exchange process: searching, locating and caching the content, distributing messages, connecting or disconnecting from other nodes
- Quite high stability and tolerance to failure, which is an essential characteristic for these systems
- Distributed and central management resistant structure.

As content distribution is one of the most important tasks of peer-to-peer systems and is also a key issue to the main topic of this presentation, let's focus on different types of content distribution in peer-to-peer structures.

Peer-to-peer applications are simply content distribution systems based on peer-to-peer technology. They can be divided into:

- File exchange systems – which offer simple file exchange between nodes and provide instruments for searching and transferring files between them. This kind of applications is mainly responsible for poor reputation of peer-to-peer architectures in general.
- Content publishing and storage systems – they serve as content distributing medium that offers persistence and security. Accessibility is controlled, content management is possible and anonymity and censorship resistance is also offered.

- Peer-to-peer infrastructures don't function as working applications but rather as frameworks and therefore are not a key issue for this presentation.
- Summing up this technical part, essential characteristics of peer-to-peer systems in general are: user anonymity, distributed management and independent file transfer as well as resistance to censorship.

Measurement and Analysis of P2P Activity against Paedophile Content[2]

Based on our knowledge on how young people use the Internet, what kind of harmful content can be reached by this means of communication and knowing how peer-to-peer structures mediate in content distribution, European Commission, within the Safer Internet Plus programme, decided to conduct a research on peer-to-peer-based paedophile activity. The project is coordinated by the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique (National Centre for Scientific Research), which is a French government-funded research organization under the administrative authority of France's Ministry of Research. Other partners are Nobody's Children Foundation (Poland), University College Cork (Ireland), University of Ljubljana (Slovenia) and INRIA Lorraine (France).

The main goal of the project is to provide law enforcement agencies and child protection organizations with an appropriate tool to protect and detect files that may possibly contain paedophile content. With this tool user will be able to rate the file and estimate the possibility of child pornography. The rating system is going to be the first step to enable filtering P2P content by Internet Service Providers.

Another result of the project will be a dynamic list of key words. This will help detecting newly emerged keywords according to which paedophile files are being described and searched. To avoid misuse (by paedophiles themselves) only limited access to this list will be provided

Such work requires a huge amount of data to be collected and analyzed, meeting the criterion of anonymity and respecting personal data protection. Currently, for June 2008, the project team collected data from eDonkey P2P

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[2] Paragraph based on the project's website: http://antipaedo.lip6.fr/ (2008.06.30)

client, anonymizing it and doing some statistical generalization on it. The project is expected to produce first results in September 2009.

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Sexual Victimization Online[1]

Imola Antal
Éva László

Introduction. Definitions and classification of online sexual victimization

The Internet opens a large way of knowledge, entertainment, brings new possibilities for communication and interpersonal networks. It can have an empowering function in relations but, especially for children or teenagers, it can also have a deteriorative effect.

The lack of control, of filters that could insure the quality and the correctness of information, the difficulty of finding out where the data come from make out of cyberspace a provider of new facilities for criminal acts against children including child sexual abuse and other sexual offenses (Harrison, 2006; Wolak, 2008). Internet related sex crimes against youth (children) is impregnated with false beliefs, myths (Wolak et al., 2008, 2007; Ybarra et al., 2008), the bulk of sources being more from the world of media then science, which provides a new theme of research (Ybarra, et al., 2008; Wolak et al, 2007).

The literature defines the Internet Related Sexual Victimization as any computer-facilitated (initiated or realized) sexual abuse of children. The following classifications are described:

- Sexual solicitations and approaches: Requests to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk or give personal sexual information that

were unwanted or, whether wanted or not, made by an adult or a minimum 5 years older person.

- Aggressive sexual solicitation: Sexual solicitations involving offline contact with the perpetrator through regular mail, by telephone, or in person or attempts or requests for offline contact.
- Unwanted exposure to sexual material: Without seeking or expecting sexual material, being exposed to pictures of naked people or people having sex when doing online searches, surfing the web, opening email or instant messages, or opening links in email or instant messages.
- Harassment: Threats or other offensive behavior (not sexual solicitation), sent online to the youth or posted online about the youth for others to see (Wolak et al, 2006, p.17).
- Child pornography: refers to any recording (photograph, video, or audio) at least sexually suggestive involving a person younger than 18.

It is important to know that not all these incidents are distressing to the teenagers who experienced them (Wolak et al, 2008, 2007, 2006; Dombrowski et al., 2007). For example, most youth had no negative reactions even to their unwanted exposure, but one quarter said they were very or extremely upset (Mitchell, K. J. et al, 2003, Wolak et al, 2007). Nowadays the search for information on sexuality would inevitably imply accidental default to X rated sites. According to Flood (2007: 330), the youth are „routinely exposed to sexually explicit images". 75% of 16–17-year-olds have been exposed accidentally to pornographic websites, while 38 % of boys and 2 percent of girls have deliberately accessed them (Flood, 2007). In the U.K. 38 % of Internet users have come across pornographic content (pop-ups), 36% have visited accidentally, 25% have received emails (Dombrowski, et al, 2007). In US, in 2000 there were 25% and in 2005 there were 34% (YISS-1 and YISS-2[2]) of youth came across sexual material they did not want to see when they went online to do searches, surf the world wide web, or use email or instant messages. Most of these exposure incidents (83%) happened when youth were surfing the web. Another 17% were related to email or instant message use (Wolak, et al, 2006, 2003). 2.4 % of youth Internet users were

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[2] In 1999 and 2000 the first Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-1)was conducted and then repeated in 2005- the second Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS-2)- see Wolak et al., 2006

asked to take sexual pictures of themselves and send them to online solicitors (Michell et al. 2007) and 18 % of the offenders sent photos of themselves in sexual poses to victims (Wolak et al, 2004).

Just as offline abuses the most invisible forms of Internet related sexual assaults are non forcible sex crimes, the offender (who can be an acquaintance or family member) uses Internet to tighten relationships and to gain 'confidential relationship' or 'love' with the victim to an eventual face to face abuse, an act the victim does not realize as exploitation (Wolak et al. 2008; Walsh & Wolak, 2005; Mitchell et al, 2005).

Another category of sexual abuse is the distribution and the download of child pornography, storing it in computers, discs, CD's DVD's or in form of digital pictures, and films displaying child pornography. This last form is not punished by the law in Romania (the storing of child pornography is punished only with intention of spread, Law no. 196/2003), but it is recognized by specialists as a form of abuse, considering the ease at which one can distribute it on the Internet, multiply it, the risk of these sorts of content to circulate on the virtual 'market' and 'offline' thus being really high and permanent (Wells et al. 2007, Alexy, et al, Wolak et al. 2005).

The first category to be targeted is the one of the teenagers, the second one refers to younger children as they use Internet a lot less often to maintain relationships with others, or to make new friends. (Wolak et al, 2008). The Internet in case of infant victimization is the instrument of child trafficking (may they be parents or others), who look for pedophiles and child abuser networks (Mitchell et al, 2005).

The protection of young people from these criminal acts is a challenge that needs first of all to identify the methods of the offenders, their profile, the vulnerability and protection factors of young people.

How we measured online sexual victimization in our survey

As we presented above young people may be victimized online in many ways. In our survey we asked about two kinds of sexual victimization (prominent in discussions of youth and the Internet) — sexual solicitations and approaches, unwanted exposure to sexual material, and we also approached risky online behavior. In this study we will also approach the effect of parental protective behavior on victimization.

Sexual solicitations and approaches: Sexual solicitations were measured by affirmative responses to the following questions: "There were persons who made me sexual proposals" on the metropolitan networks and on the social networks and "There were persons who made me indecent proposals" on chat. In the case of Internet initiated meetings we measured solicitations by affirmative responses to the following questions: "Some of the persons I met were at least 5 years older", "Some of the persons I met were at least 10 years older", "Some persons I met did not tell their real occupation" "Some of the persons I met did not tell me their real intentions"," Some of the persons I met made me sexual proposals".

Unwanted exposure to sexual material: Being exposed to sexual material, whether wanted or not, when doing online searches, surfing the web, opening email or instant messages, or opening links.

Risky online behavior: Posting personal information (telephone number, home address, city name, e-mail address, name) online, limiting the access of foreign persons to the youth person's profile and engaging in online sexual behaviors such as surfing to find pornographic material or advices about sexuality.

Results

1. Sexual solicitations and approaches

As we can notice in Table 1, the girls get the most sexual solicitations on social networks and on instant messages, while the boys on metropolitan networks. On metropolitan networks 2.7% of boys and 2.5% of girls, on the social networks 1.5% of boys and 7.4% of girls, while on instant messages 1.7% of boys and 5.7% of girls got sexual proposals.

It is not unusual at all that girls claim to have received somehow more sexual proposals on the social networks than boys. If we look at Table 2, we can see that even seventh grade children receive proposals, seventh graders most often on social networks (3.3%), and eight graders on metropolitan networks (6%). On the social network and chat the proportion of the ones who got proposals rises with the age.

Table 1. *The percentages of persons who got sexual proposals online(by gender)*

There were persons who made me sexual proposals / indecent proposals	Gender		Total
	Male	*Female*	
On the metropolitan network	14	16	30
	2.7%	2.5%	2.6%
On the social network	9	63	72
	1.5%	7.4%	5.0%
On instant messages	13	58	71
	1.7%	5.7%	4.0%

Tabel 2. *The percentages of persons who got sexual proposals online(by grade)*

There were persons who proposed me sexual activities	The grade of the respondent						Total
	7 th	*8 th*	*9 th*	*10 th*	*11 th*	*12 th*	
On metropolitan networks	4	11	2	2	6	4	29
	2.6%	6.0%	1.0%	.9%	2.9%	2.1%	2.5%
On social networks	7	4	9	15	18	18	71
	3.3%	1.8%	3.9%	5.4%	6.9%	8.0%	5.0%
On chat	2	8	10	19	14	17	70
	.8%	3.1%	3.4%	5.6%	4.3%	6.1%	4.0%

Dates started on Internet

In Table 3 we've done a synthesis of the answers young people gave about their dates with people they met on the Internet. One can see that 20.8% of the ones who fixed this kind of dates say that the person who showed up was five years older then them, 10% say that that person lied about their profession, 18.2 % say that they lied about their looks, 12.5% say that that person lied about their intentions, 7.3% claim that that person made them indecent proposals (5% other kind of unwanted proposals) 1.1% (10 teenagers) claim that some persons tried to hurt them (in none of these cases they report any physical violence or verbal or other forms of victimization). There is no significant difference on this issue between boys and girls. Only answer 'Some persons have made indecent proposals' gathers some 9.7% of boys' responses and 5.6% of the girls'. Affirmative answers to 'there have been persons who made indecent proposals' do not necessarily

indicate the proportion of the victimized young people. The literature adds that the dynamics of sexual abuse in the case of Internet initiated dates resembles the dynamics of sexual abuse encountered in direct encounters – in the majority of cases there is no use of physical constraint, and the young are seduced – fall in love with the abuser, thus his propositions cannot be labeled as indecent date.

Table 3. *Percentage of people categorized by the characteristics of meeting with strangers(by gender)*

	Gender		Total
	Male	*Female*	
Some persons I met were at least 5 years older than me	*89*	*95*	*184*
	21.8%	19.6%	20.6%
Some persons I met were at least 10 years older than me	*19*	*10*	*29*
	4.7%	2.1%	3.3%
Some persons did not tell their real intentions	*46*	*65*	*111*
	11.3%	13.3%	12.4%
Some persons made me indecent proposals	*39*	*27*	*66*
	9.7%	5.6%	7.4%
Some persons made me other unwanted proposals	*16*	*25*	*41*
	4.0%	5.1%	4.6%
Some persons tried effectively to hurt me	*4*	*6*	*10*
	1.0%	1.2%	1.1%

2. Unwanted exposure to sexual content

A large percentage of young persons: 60.5% are being exposed to pornographic content, more boys (78.8%) than girls (47%) (see Table 4). Regarding the age of respondents (Table 5), 52.4% of those from the 7th grade are exposed to such material – this number grows with age, around 65% of students from 11th and 12th grade encountering pornographic content while navigating such web-sites. 19.9% of the respondents find these contents interesting, while 21.3% find them repulsive. There was a difference between boys and girls (Table 6) – more boys (30.9%) than girls (6%) find pornographic web-sites interesting and more girls (31.7%) than boys find them repulsive.

Table 4. *Percentage of people exposed to pornographic contents(by gender)*

Did it happen to you to open pornographic contents sites?	Gender		Total
	Male	*Female*	
Yes	576	470	1046
	78.8%	47.0%	60.5%
No	155	529	684
	21.2%	53.0%	39.5%
Total	731	999	1730
	100%	100%	100%

Table 5. *Percentage of people exposed to pornographic contents (by class)*

Did it happen to you to open pornographic contents websites?	The grade of the respondent						Total
	7 th	*8 th*	*9 th*	*10 th*	*11 th*	*12 th*	
Yes	130	153	170	213	208	180	1054
	52.4%	59.3%	58.8%	63.2%	65.2%	65.2%	61.0%
No	118	105	119	124	111	96	673
	47.6%	40.7%	41.2%	36.8%	34.8%	34.8%	39.0%
Total	248	258	289	337	319	276	1727
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Table 6. *Percentage of type of affection (by gender)*

How did these contents affect you?	Gender		Total
	Male	*Female*	
Indifferent	332	293	625
	56.1%	62.3%	58,9%
Repulsive	77	149	226
	13.0%	31.7%	21,3%
Interesting	183	28	211
	30.9%	6.0%	19,9%
Total	592	470	1062
	100%	100%	100%

3. Risky online behavior

Restrictions as protection efforts and their effects

From the Table 7 one can see that many young people are imputed restrictions on their use of Internet (31%1). To 8.3 of them, the restrictions are linked to the content of the sites, and for 6.9% the restrictions are because of the persons on the Internet they chat with. To 59.1 % there are no restrictions imposed. Seventh graders have to put up with most restrictions- followed by eight graders, the restrictions diminishing when older .

Table 7. *Percentage of parental restrictions(by grade)*

	The grade of the respondent						Total
	7 th	8 th	9 th	10 th	11 th	12 th	
I have restrictions on the time I spend on Internet	104	109	109	113	69	43	547
	40.5%	41.6%	36.9%	33.1%	21.2%	15.5%	31.1%
I have restrictions on the images I open on Internet.	41	32	33	19	15	6	146
	16.0%	12.2%	11.1%	5.6%	4.6%	2.2%	8.3%
I have no restrictions to talk to anyone on the Internet.	41	26	19	12	16	7	121
	16.0%	9.9%	6.4%	3.5%	4.9%	2.5%	6.9%
I have no restrictions at all.	109	122	150	207	231	220	1039
	42.4%	46.6%	50.7%	60.7%	71.1%	79.1%	59.1%

We checked with Chi square test if there was significant difference between those who had restrictions and those who didn't in the case of dates started on the Internet: the results are synthesized in the following scheme (Table 8), and there were no significant differences in none of the analyzed variables.

This is because restrictions are first of all related to time, and on the other hand they are validated by scientific results in this area – the prevention is not attained mostly because of the restrictions but through the knowing of this phenomenon, the good child and the parents, reaching help are the most important protection factors.

Table 8. *Crosstabs: Parental restrictions by characteristics of meetings with strangers.*

	There are restrictions imputed		Total
	No	*Yes*	
Some persons I met were at least 5 years older than me	*111*	*80*	*191*
	21.8%	19.6%	20.6%
Some persons I met were at least 10 years older than me	*18*	*13*	*31*
	3.6%	3.1%	3.4%
Some persons did not tell their real occupation	*48*	*43*	*91*
	9.6%	10.2%	9.9%
Some persons made me indecent proposals	*36*	*31*	*67*
	7.3%	7.4%	7.3%

We asked youth about the risky behaviors in which they engaged that could possibly increase the chances they would experience unwanted sexual solicitations and approaches and exposure to sexual material.

We measured two such categories of risky behaviors:

1. Posting personal information online and limiting the access of foreign persons to the youth person's profile
2. Engaging in online sexual behaviors such as navigating to find pornographic material or advices about sexuality

Posting or Sending Personal Information

Most Internet safety information direct youth not to post, send, or otherwise share personal information via the Internet with people they do not know in person. Usually this information it is not clear in explining how risky it is to reveal personal information online and it is not clear what kinds of information are particularly problematic.

In this survey we measured several types of information, such as limiting the access of foreign persons, including telephone number, home address, the city the person lives in email address and name (Table 9). We found that the 81.2% of young persons do not limit the access of foreign persons to their profile.

Tabel 9. *Percentage of people who post personal information (by grade)*

	The class of the respondents						Total
	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th	
Only my friends can have access to my profile	55	44	45	28	44	37	253
	32.7%	22.9%	21.4%	12.2%	19.5%	17.4%	20.4%
I included my telephone number in my profile	16	13	6	5	7	9	56
	10.1%	7.1%	3.0%	2.2%	3.2%	4.3%	4.7%
I included my home address in my profile	18	17	8	11	8	8	70
	11.5%	9.2%	4.0%	4.8%	3.6%	3.8%	5.8%
I included the city where I live in my profile	92	121	147	182	174	165	881
	58.2%	63.7%	72.4%	79.1%	78.0%	78.9%	72.6%
I included my email address in my profile	52	54	60	53	55	50	324
	33.1%	28.9%	29.3%	23.1%	24.7%	23.8%	26.8%
I included my name in my profile	42	40	41	43	48	44	258
	26.8%	21.3%	20.3%	18.9%	21.7%	20.8%	21.4%

Table 10. *Percentage of people who post personal information (by gender)*

	Gender		Total
	Male	Women	
Only my friends can have access to my profile	107	150	257
	22.0%	19.7%	20.6%
I included my telephone number in my profile	32	24	56
	6.9%	3.2%	4.6%
I included my home address in my profile	39	32	71
	8.4%	4.3%	5.9%
I included the city where I live in my profile	289	595	884
	61.2%	79.5%	72.5%
I included my email address in my profile	148	179	327
	31.5%	24.0%	26.9%
I included my name in my profile	128	134	262
	27.2%	18.0%	21.6%

Most of the boys and girls are aware of the danger in sharing personal data by having a profile on social networks (Hi5, Facebook, etc.). From about 1200 subjects that have such profiles (70%), 4.6% had posted their telephone number, 21.6% posted their real names, 5.9% posted their home addresses, 26.9% had posted their e-mail addresses and 72.5% the city where they live (Table 10). Unfortunately during the interviews we did not have the possibility to gather details about the contexts of these postings.

There is a meaningful difference between boys and girls concerning the sharing of the telephone number on the profile: boys post their phone number more often (8,563, p<0.003), their home address (8,501(b), p<0.004), their personal e-mail (8,563, p<0.003) and their full name (14,57, p<0.001), and girls post their hometown more often than boys do (48,652, p<0.001).

Revealing personal information online may occur more often as the Internet is becoming more integrated in the lives of youngsters. We need more information about the circumstances in which youngsters are disclosing such information so we are able to better assess the risks and inform young people, as well as adults, about risky and safer disclosures.

Further on we checked how risky is to reveal personal information. We checked if there are any significant differences between those who have posted personal information and those who haven't, regarding the features of the persons they met on the Internet. We studied the following variables:
- Some people I have met were 5 to 10 years older than me
- Lied about their job or their look
- Some of the people I met had indecent proposals for me
- Tried to harm me.

Our results (Table 11 contains just the significant differences) show something that we didn't expect at the first sight. 13% of those who have posted their phone number and 24.3% of those who haven't posted dated people that didn't reveal their real intensions. Those who haven`t posted their phone number, received more sexual proposals, in comparison with those who have posted their phone number.

Is still under discussion if the subjects who have posted personal information limited the access of unknown visitors or not. If not, it is difficult for us to analyze the results – and we remain to the classic interpretation: sexual abuses are committed by familiar persons, the subject has trustful or dependent relationships with.

Tabel 11. *Crosstabs: People who posted personal information,*
characteristics of the meetings with strangers

	Posted their telephone number		Total	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	No	*Yes*				
Some persons did not tell their real intentions	9	85	94	3.823	1	.051
	24.3%	13.0%	13.6%			
Some persons made me indecent proposals	6	42	48	5.179	1	.023
	16.2%	6.4%	7.0%			
	Posted their home address		Total	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
	No	*Yes*				
Some persons did not tell their real intentions	12	82	94	6.479	1	.011
	26.1%	12.8%	13.6%			
Some persons made me unwanted proposals	32	5	37	3.098	1	.078
	5%	11.1%	5.4%			

Online sexual behavior

We measured two kinds of sexual behavior: Internet exploration for searching pornographic materials and Internet exploration for searching sexual advices (Table 12, 13, 14 and 15).

Table 12. *Percentage of people who navigate to find pornographic material (by gender)*

How often do you navigate to find pornographic materials	Gender		Total
	male	*female*	
Very rare or never	425	930	1355
	60.5%	94.8%	80,5%
Rare (2-3 times in a month)	122	40	162
	17.4%	4.1%	9,6%
Weekly or almost weekly	63	4	67
	9.0%	.4%	4,0%
Often (2-4 days a week)	30	1	31
	4.3%	.1%	1,8%
Very often (daily, almost daily)	63	6	69
	9.0%	.6%	4,1%
Total	703	981	1684
	100%	100%	100%

Table 13. *Percentage of people who navigate to find advices regarding sexual life (by gender)*

How often do you navigate to find advices regarding sexual life	Gender		Total
	Male	*Female*	
Very rare or never	436	656	1092
	60.6%	66.3%	63.9%
Rare (2-3 times in a month)	151	218	369
	21.0%	22.0%	21.6%
Weekly or almost weekly	71	64	135
	9.9%	6.5%	7.9%
Often (2-4 days a week)	30	33	63
	4.2%	3.3%	3.7%
Very often (daily, almost daily)	31	18	49
	4.3%	1.8%	2.9%
Total	719	989	1708
	100%	100%	100%

9% of the boys and 0.6% of the girls visited very often the websites containing sexual materials; the percentage of those who navigated at least 2-3 times a month to find these sites was 39.5% for boys and 5.2 % for girls.

Accessing pornographic materials differs from boys to girls. The division of the answers for the two items is similar according to respondent's gender. 30% of the teenagers consider that the access to pornographic materials should be permitted only to adults.

After that, we checked if there wasn't any meaningful difference between those who accessed this kind of sites and those who haven't, regarding online victimization. Those who are interested in sexuality and explore the Internet for this purpose are more vulnerable in having unwanted sexual experiences (indecent proposals) with persons whom they haven't met personally.

Youngsters that explore the Internet more often for finding pornographic sites, date older persons (Chi-square=23,086, p<.001) that hide their real job (Chi-square=18,162, p<.001) or people that hide their real intentions (Chi-square=35,127, p<.001). There are meaningful differences regarding the receipt of indecent proposals (Chi-square=25,351, p<.001) between those who explore pornographic sites and those who don't. Unfortunately we can not say yet anything about a deeper relationship between the two variables.

Table 14. . *Percentage of people who navigate to find
pornographic material (by grade)*

How often do you navigate to find pornographic content materials?	The class of the respondent						Total
	7 th	*8 th*	*9 th*	*10 th*	*11 th*	*12 th*	
Very rare or never	*192*	*177*	*235*	*271*	*254*	*212*	*1341*
	77.7%	70.8%	82.2%	83.9%	80.9%	81.2%	79.8%
Rare (2-3 times a month)	*27*	*33*	*27*	*25*	*33*	*24*	*169*
	10.9%	13.2%	9.4%	7.7%	10.5%	9.2%	10.1%
Weekly or almost weekly	*6*	*18*	*12*	*7*	*14*	*12*	*69*
	2.4%	7.2%	4.2%	2.2%	4.5%	4.6%	4.1%
Often (2-4 days a week)	*4*	*7*	*8*	*5*	*3*	*5*	*32*
	1.6%	2.8%	2.8%	1.5%	1.0%	1.9%	1.9%
Very often (daily, almost daily)	*18*	*15*	*4*	*15*	*10*	*8*	*70*
	7.3%	6.0%	1.4%	4.6%	3.2%	3.1%	4.2%
Total	*247*	*250*	*286*	*323*	*314*	*261*	*1681*
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Tabel 15. *Percentage of people who navigate to find advices
regarding sexual life (by grade)*

How often do you navigate to find sexual advices?	The class of the respondent						Total
	7 th	*8 th*	*9 th*	*10 th*	*11 th*	*12 th*	
Very rare or never	*182*	*160*	*189*	*197*	*194*	*160*	*1082*
	74.0%	63.2%	65.4%	59.3%	60.8%	60.2%	63.5%
Rare (2-3 times a month)	*38*	*44*	*68*	*81*	*78*	*67*	*376*
	15.4%	17.4%	23.5%	24.4%	24.5%	25.2%	22.1%
Weekly or almost weekly	*12*	*20*	*20*	*33*	*25*	*24*	*134*
	4.9%	7.9%	6.9%	9.9%	7.8%	9.0%	7,9%
Often (2-4 days a week)	*7*	*11*	*8*	*11*	*16*	*10*	*63*
	2.8%	4.3%	2.8%	3.3%	5.0%	3.8%	3,7%
Very often (daily, almost daily)	*7*	*18*	*4*	*10*	*6*	*5*	*50*
	2.8%	7.1%	1.4%	3.0%	1.9%	1.9%	2,9%
Total	*246*	*253*	*289*	*332*	*319*	*266*	*1705*
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Discussion

The present study has several limitations, and we would like to start with these. It is part of a larger pilot study, that didn't make possible to study the sexual abuse phenomenon in particular (it wasn't possible to include important questions, like details regarding the offenders, important events, crises in the lives of the teenagers and so on). The questioning methods of teenagers has the disadvantage of not revealing the cases when offers, approaches or sexual relationships are not perceived as unwanted; in those cases when teenagers are attracted to, attached to or even in love with the abusers (statutory rape, non-forcible sexual abuse, Wells, Mitchell, 2008; Mitchell, et al, 2005; Walsh, Wolak et al., 2005) – situations in which we wanted to deal with the difference in age between the teenager and the person they met after dating through the Internet. The third limitation is that any study concerning the abuse of children rises a series of ethical problems, so the approach of sexual abuse must be done with much precaution and responsible planning – aiming a larger topic, this was not possible in our survey.

The majority of the results in our study show similarities with those from the literature. Studies show that age is one of the major factors of suffering these types of abuses (Wolak et al, 2008; Wolak et al, 2004). Curiosity concerning romantic relationships, sexuality, testing the limits and autonomy are typical, normal characteristics of teenagers, together with poor ability to manage interpersonal relationships. They act immature, without experience in asserting themselves in relationships, and this makes them vulnerable especially in sexual themes when confronted with the strategies of manipulative abusers (Wolak et al., 2008). Although the results of the studies from US show that the most vulnerable age-category is between 13-14 years, in our study group the frequency of unwanted requests, as well as the exposure to unwanted pornographic materials grows with age, the only exception being the sexual requests in metropolitan networks.

Regarding the description of youth targeted for sexual solicitations and approaches, results show that, in accordance with other studies girls to be more targeted (in National Juvenile Online Victimization Study 75 % girls-Wolak, et al. 2004, in YISS2- 70% were girls and 30% were boys). Regarding

the direct meetings, in our study-group also, many make acquaintances through the Internet and the majority of these relationships are problem-free, long-lasting relationships are formed based on common interests and preoccupations (Wells, Mitchell, 2008). Frequently they share very personal information that they wouldn't reveal otherwise, after that they can meet face-to-face (Dombrowski, et al 2007).

Though using the Internet may be a sign of vulnerability (Wells, Mitchell, 2008) discussing with unknown persons on the Internet together with the decreasing interest in communicating with friends online may be clues that show attachment problems with peers and to create an opportunity to get involved in inappropriate relationships (Wells, Mitchell, 2008). Other studies show that visiting chat rooms and communicating rather with strangers than with friends about sexuality or homosexuality (Wolak et al. 2004), engaging in aggressive behavior online (Wolak, Mitchell, 2008) can show other signs of vulnerability.

Displaying personal data on-line seems to be signs of vulnerability, but our results as well as the literature show that these acts as the manifestations of a risky behavior can be mostly considered a myth and not a risk factor in itself (Wolak et al, 2008). What seems to be relevant is the online sexually provocative behavior (unfortunately we haven't studied these aspects), like: displaying pictures with sexual connotations seem to „attract" more sexual requests online (in 2006, on the site "My Space" 5% of the pictures displayed youngsters in swimsuits or underclothes - Wolak et al, 2008).

As for the contact of children with pornographic materials, our results are similar to those obtained by other studies and are thought-provoking as well. Our group of youngsters is less exposed (60,5%) than youngsters in Australia, where the percentage of those who have been exposed accidentally to pornographic websites is 75%, and in the same time 38% of boys and 2% of girls have searched these materials. Likewise, 75% youngsters watched an X-rated movie (Flood, M., 2007). 52,4 % of the 12-13 years old children have been in contact with pornographic materials, and this percentage grows with age, a fact that deserves more attention. Some specialists have the idea that the visitation of X-rated sites could be related to sexual curiosity of teenagers (especially boys). The idea seems to be sustained by the fact that less than a quarter of the youngsters found the materials repulsive, just like in the other studies. Furthermore, 33% of the boys and 15% of the girls

think that pornographic material should be accessible without restrictions. However we believe that we also have to take into consideration the point of view of those suggesting that online pornography "may lead to a variety of negative consequences, including undermining of accepted social values and attitudes about sexual behavior, earlier and promiscuous sexual activity, sexual deviancy, sexual offending, and sexually compulsive behavior" (Wolak et al., 2007, p.255).

Another concern is the relationship between online and offline consequences (Wells, 2008, Wolak et al., 2008, 2007). Knowing the complexity of negative effects of sexual abuse offline – even they may appear after a while – we can be worried regarding online abuse, too. At the moment, it is too early to say if this kind of teenagers' behavior is unhealthy or not (Wolak et al., 2007, Mitchell et al., 2007).

Restrictions related to the program and the people the teenagers interact with, as a method of protection, seem to be insufficient in our country as well. Researchers sustain that the use of the filtering and blocking software (Wolak et al, 2003) and the informing programs for teenagers (Wolak et al, 2007) was associated with a modest reduction in unwanted exposure. Restricting the time of the access does not seem to influence the vulnerability of the youngsters.

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Annex

The data collection included a survey that took place in October and November 2007.1806 self-report questionnaires were administered in 101 classes from secondary schools and high schools in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, in October and November 2007. Approval to conduct the survey was obtained from the local school inspectorate and from the principals of each school included in the sample. Parents were informed through the teachers and the pupils' consent was also asked for the participation in the survey. This group was considered acceptable as it represented a significant portion of the Internet population. The questionnaire was designed to test the risks and the effects of Internet use among adolescents. The sample is representative for the pupils of classes 7 to 12 (Romanian system), with a maximum tolerated error of +/– 2.26%.

From the total sample, 42.3% were boys, 1.7% of the sample were 12 years old, 13.2% were 13 years old, 16.4% – 14 years old, 16.6% – 15 years old, 18.8% – 16 years old, 18.3% – 17 years old, 14% – 18 years old (SD=1.707). The sample included both pre-university and technical profiles. In terms of ethnicity, 78.2% were Romanian, 20.6% Hungarian, 0.6% Roma, and 0.6% other.
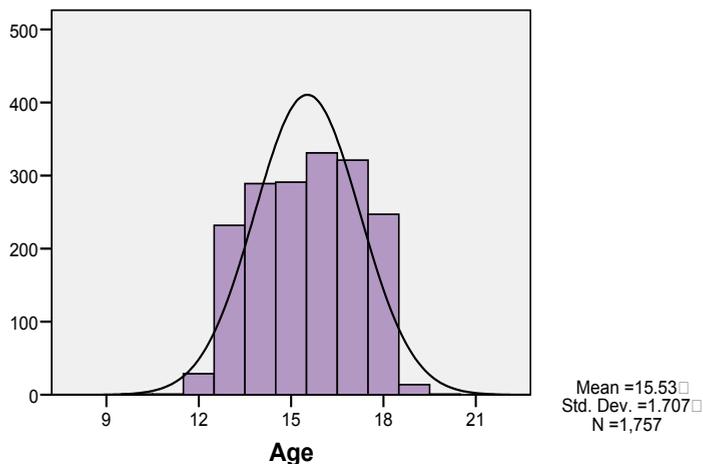

Mean =15.53
Std. Dev. =1.707
N =1,757

Figure 1. *Age distribution of subjects*

Table 1. *Gender and ethnicity*

			Ethnicity				Total
			Romanian	*Hungarian*	*Roma*	*Other*	
Sex	*feminine*	Count	786	214	5	5	1010
		% of Total	45.0%	12.2%	.3%	.3%	57.8%
	masculine	Count	580	146	5	6	737
		% of Total	33.2%	8.4%	.3%	.3%	42.2%
Total		Count	1366	360	10	11	1747
		% of Total	78.2%	20.6%	.6%	.6%	100.0%

N=1747

86.8% live with their parents; 84.3% come from bi-parental families (married parents), 10% of the children come from a family with divorced parents.

Table 2. *What is the family status of your parents?*

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	*married*	1477	81.8	84.3	84.3
	divorced	176	9.7	10.0	94.3
	separated	20	1.1	1.1	95.5
	widow/er	55	3.0	3.1	98.6
	never been married	22	1.2	1.3	99.9
	both deceased	2	.1	.1	100.0
	Total	1752	97.0	100.0	
Missing System		54	3.0		
Total		1806	100.0		

N=1806

On average, children and teenagers in Cluj-Napoca spend 3 hours online on a week day (Std. deviation= 1.929) and 5 hours a day during weekends (Std. deviation= 3.575); they use the computer from the age of 9.8 (median value = 10) and go online at 12.6 years old (median value = 13).

More than 60% go online on a daily basis and 22.7% go online several times a week (N=1782). 61% declare they are interested or very interested in the Internet, with boys being more interested than the girls (Phi and Cramer's V=.115, at the significance level.001).
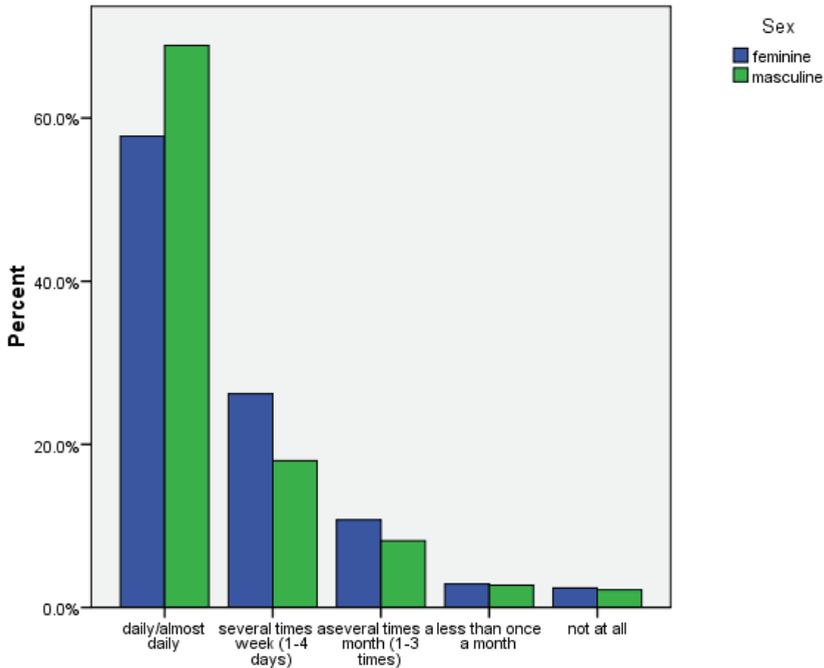
Figure 2. *How often did you go online in the past three months?*

Table 3. *In general, how interested are you in the Internet?*

			In general, how interested are you in the Internet?					Total
			Not at all interested	*2*	*So-so*	*4*	*Very interested*	
Sex	*feminine*	Count	9	33	341	343	211	937
		% within Sex	1.0%	3.5%	36.4%	36.6%	22.5%	100.0%
	masculine	Count	5	19	213	219	223	679
		% within Sex	.7%	2.8%	31.4%	32.3%	32.8%	100.0%
Total		Count	14	52	554	562	434	1616
		% within Sex	.9%	3.2%	34.3%	34.8%	26.9%	100.0%

The statistical data show that more than 60% of teens (with no difference between females and males) use emails only 2 or 3 times a month to contact their friends, colleagues and relatives. However, 90% of teens use IM: 67% of them talk everyday or almost everyday on IM with their friends; 47% with their colleagues; 25% with people from Cluj they had met for the first time on the Internet, and met later also face to face; 20% with people from Cluj they have never met face to face, and 17% with people from Romania they have never met face to face; 31% with people from Romania living abroad they have met face to face before talking on IM; 15% with people living abroad they have met face to face

When it comes to their self-protection online, our data show moderate signs of concern. More than 90% do not send (or send very rarely) e-mails in order to meet strangers from the Internet. 8% of the boys and 3% of the girls search online often and very often persons to date (on specific dating sites). The differences are significant, Phi and Cramer's V=.198, at the significance level .001.

Both boys and girls are aware of the dangers of publicly available personal data in personal profiles (on SNSs like Hi5 or Facebook). From the 1200 children who have such a profile (70%), 95% have not made public neither their phone number nor their home address (94%), nor their full name (78.4%). With the exception of full name, which boys tend to disclose more often, (Phi and Cramer's V=.109), at the significance level .001, there are no significant differences between boys and girls.

33% of the children declare they have met offline somebody they have previously met online (no differences between boys and girls); half of them have met with 1-3 persons.

83.5% have told somebody about their encounters (friends or/and parents), 44.5% have taken somebody to the meeting, the most frequently a friend or a sibling. The girls are more likely to share that information (91.5% of girls to 74.8% of the boys, Phi and Cramer's V=.228). Similarly, 53.8% of the girls who had this kind of dates have taken somebody with them, as opposed to only 31.8% of the boys (Phi and Cramer's V=.220).

20.8% of those who had this type of dates declared that the person was 5 years older (than the child/teenager), 10% said that person lied about their occupation, 18.2% said the person lied about their appearance/looks, 12.5% declared that the person lied about their true intentions, 7.3% said

the person has made them indecent proposals (5% other types of unwanted proposals). 1.1% - 10 adolescents - declared that some persons tried to harm them (but none of them reported verbal or physical violence or other serious forms of victimization). There are no differences between boys and girls for these items; only the item "Some persons have made me indecent proposals" collects 9.7% from the boys' answers and 5.6% of the girls', which might be explained through male teenagers' propulsion towards answering in a shocking or playful manner.

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