Young people and digital services: Analysis of the use, rules, and age requirement

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1. Introduction

The spread of access to and use of technological, digital and Internet media into most homes, schools, workplaces and institutions, together with mobile phones and other portable devices used by minors, has led to major changes in the way these minors communicate with one another and exchange information (Caron & Caronia 2007), compared to the way in which adults formerly related to one another. This media access has an effect on education and communication, both vitally important factors in children's socialization during childhood and adolescence.

1.1. Internet use by Basque adolescents

Spain is the European country which makes greatest use of smart-phones to connect to the Internet. 93.3% of the country's inhabitants have used their mobile phones in recent months to connect to the Internet. As far as autonomous communities are concerned, the Basque Country is the autonomous community with the highest number of mobile phones among the under-16 s. 8 of every 10 minors aged between 10 and 15 have a mobile phone (INE, 2016). Furthermore, 84% of homes in the European Union (EU) are connected to the Internet. Within the Basque Autonomous Community, 8 of every 10 homes are connected to the Internet (EUSTAT, 2016).

The situation is similar in other countries, like the United States. According to Lenhart, Duggan, Perrin, Stepler, Rainie, & Parker (2015), 92% of young people aged between 13 and 17 years of age in the United States affirm that they connect daily to the Internet, and in Europe the youngest sector of the population makes the greatest use of mobile devices to connect with one another (Eurostat, 2015).

1.2. Rules of use of internet services

As mentioned in earlier research in this topic, different authors (Estévez, Murgui, Musitu and Moreno, 2008; Olivas, Jiménez, Rubio, 2016) correlate family communication with Internet use, saying that it is an effective tool for preventing compulsive Internet use and, therefore, for reducing certain inappropriate online behaviors.

One of the greatest concerns shared by parents and educators in regard to digital technology use are its negative consequences. These may be expressed in psychopathological behaviors related to depression, social isolation or Internet addictions (Tzavela, Karakitsou, Halapi & Tsitsika, 2017) or to inadequate behavior in educational spheres, such as cyberbullying (Kopecký, 2014; Volkan & Camadan, 2016). In recent years numerous authors have proposed different actions in schools which are currently applied in a number of countries (Ahtola, Haataja, Kärnä, Poskiparta & Salmivalli, 2012; Garandeau, Lee & Salmivalli, 2014; Haataja, Voeten, Boulton, Ahtola, Poskiparta & Salmivalli, 2014).

There is a close relationship between the rules proposed by parents and their children's perception. In the study carried out by Goh, Bay and Hsueh-Hua Chen (2015) on primary 1 and 2 pupils in Singapore, a number of devices are mentioned (computers, tablets, mobile phones, etc.) which parents consider to improve education and where they therefore impose no rules of use. Only 30% had rules as to how long they could stay on the computer. One very common rule set by parents is that they must not use their computer or mobile phone until finishing their homework. By comparison, however, very few students claimed to be aware of the existence of rules for using these devices.

But, why is it important to obey the rules? We understand that, as in the case of the PEGI code (Pan European Game Information), created to advise on the suitable age for video game use, it is also important to respect existing law when using applications and online services, given that we may otherwise expose young people to inappropriate content for their age.

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1.3. The role of parents in the adequate use of digital services

The privileged position formerly held by parents, teachers and other institutions (religious, state, private, etc.) in education and communication has changed, with new social habits and the existence of technology which allows us to be in constant communication with many people. The adolescents recognize and appreciate their experience in technology. It helps them to become more autonomous in their activities, where they consider their parents' supervision to be unnecessary (Shifflet-Chila, Harold, Fitton & Ahmedani, 2016).

In cases like these, education and communication seemed to go hand-in-hand when the source was the "principal" educator (parents, teachers) responsible for transmitting the message, information and norms to the receiver or "principal" learner (son, daughter or pupil), who would listen to and obey these rules, and where the norms were clearly defined. However, the possibilities of communicating with instant messaging and Internet social networks, the ease with which information of any kind can be accessed, the possibility of being constantly connected with devices that facilitate interconnection between multiple users and make control and monitoring by educators and parents impossible, means that minors find many other emitters to "educate" them and consequently become "learner" receivers for many and varied people. And this happens although parents try to regulate the use using different strategies (Wang, Bianchi, & Raley, 2005).

Although the vast majority of risk behavior on the Internet is determined by the specifics of family environment (Lam & Wong, 2015), access to services inappropriate for a certain age group may increase risk for the young population in general, as well as for the young population in the place of the research study (Basque Country). Given that the risk involves other factors, parental mediation of co-viewing, sharing Internet applications with adolescents and, sometimes, discussing them together, has become a risk-reducing element (Aierbe, Medrano and Orejudo, 2008).

In this respect, it is easy to let the main responsibility as the principal agents of socialization fall on parents with adolescents (aged 12 and 17) on social networks, as maintained by some studies carried out in the USA by Sengupta & Chaudhuri (2011). In their results they highlight the importance of interaction between parents and their adolescent children. In the same sense, other research on Internet access at home by minors aged between 6 and 16, Sureda, Comas & Morey (2010), concludes that just over 53% of minors aged between 6 and 14, and 62% of those aged 15 and 16, browse the Internet without any limitations set by their parents. Moreover, when rules of some kind are set, they are generally restrictions of a temporary nature. Therefore, according to this study, it can be inferred that parents are not aware of the dangers of the net, or at least that they do not act in very rational way. This shows the need to raise awareness and train families to take on their educational responsibility.

1.4. The digital anomia concept

Here we should point out that the term "Anomie" is a concept introduced and used by Durkheim (1893) to describe the lack of norms or inability of the social structure to provide certain individuals with what they need to achieve their goals in society. The term (etymologically, it means *without norms*) is also used in sociology to refer to a deviation from or breakdown in social norms.

With regard to the "digital" concept, it is considered from a technological point of view which includes the use of multiple devices, tools and programs to present information in different formats – written, audio, images, video or a combination of these – for its dissemination, exchange and communication.

In the field of social sciences (education, pedagogy, psychology, sociology, law and others), digital anomie is used to refer to non-compliance (whether conscious or unconscious) with norms, in order to ignore and not abide by what is laid down in the privacy policies and terms of use by the very numerous online services, digital platforms, blogs, wikis, chats, applications (apps), websites and social networks. Most of these services, used on personal computers, portable devices, mobile phones and so on, require a minimum age and agreement to terms of use that few people read, are familiar with and/or put into practice. Therefore, digital anomie is characterized by not taking any notice of the norms set by digital and communications companies, states and/or services, and in most cases this non-compliance may be entirely unconscious, not involving any active objection to the norms or even criticism or rebellion against them. That is to say, the norms are not followed and an ethical indifference is shown, meaning that there is no awareness of doing anything wrong, perhaps because those setting the norms are not considered to have the legitimacy to do so, or because there is no risk of punishment (among the main reasons).

This widespread non-compliance with established rules and data protection regulations was detected, in a study with minors, by Altuna, Lareki, Martínez de Morentin & Amenabar (2015). According to them, within this supposed non-compliance with norms in the digital sphere that characterizes digital anomie, the following situations can be highlighted:

– Ignorance of and/or non-compliance with the minimum age necessary to use email, social networks, blogs, online platforms, chats, forums, wikis and other Internet services.
– Ignorance of and/or non-compliance with the privacy policies and terms of use of any Internet service.
– Ignorance of basic norms and manners on the network, also known as "Netiquette", as well as not abiding by them when using when using any Internet device or service.
– Supplying too much personal information or posting content and/or data about third parties without their consent (or paternal/maternal consent in the case of under-13 s).

This study intends to establish whether the young people at the schools surveyed do not abide by the rules when using digital media. The objective is to expand upon the knowledge acquired in the previously mentioned studies.

The objectives sought are the following: (a) to determine the levels of use of different digital services by young people, and the differences between ages in these levels of use; (b) to determine the percentage of young people who use various online services (WhatsApp, Facebook and others) without meeting the minimum age requirement; (c) to assess whether the law is being infringed; (d) to show whether young people are familiar with the age requirement set by on-line service providers.

2. Material and methods

An exploratory, descriptive study was conducted in order to achieve the aforementioned objectives. The research is also ex-post facto, cross-sectional and quantitative in that it sets out to describe and explain the phenomena being studied, aiming to identify relations between different variables. The implications of this study are explained in the section on conclusions and discussions.

Within the descriptive research a survey-type study was chosen of the kind used to find a solution to problems arising in education, In particular, an on-line survey was designed taking account of the accessibility and usability established by Lumsden (2007) and the recommendations of Norman, Friedman, Norman, and Stevenson (2001) which advocate the creation of short, easy-to-read questions, using a fast and easy-to-complete format, being a short questionnaire, easy to access and browse. According to the Spanish data protection act (13/XII/1999), students, parents and the principals of the schools were informed about the objective of the survey in an information letter, asking for their participation and permission. The online questionnaire was answered in the schools with the teachers' explanations and supervision.