



Internet use and parental mediation: A cross-cultural study



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ABSTRACT

The aim of this research project was to analyze the relationship between Internet use and parental mediation in a cross-cultural sample group. It also aimed to explore the relationship between parental mediation in Internet use and television viewing. The sample group comprised 1238 adolescents aged between 14 and 19, from eight different cultural contexts. The television viewing habits questionnaire (CH-TV.02) was used to analyze the following indicators: reason for use and hours spent on the Internet, parental mediation in Internet use and parental mediation in television viewing. The data were collected both by means of an online platform and in person. The results show a moderate use of the Internet with context-based variations, although the communicative function was predominant in all cultural contexts studied. Although significant differences were found between the different contexts, they were moderate in nature and should be interpreted with caution, given the size of the sample. In relation to parental mediation in Internet use, an exploratory factorial analysis found three types of mediation, with restrictive mediation and co-viewing being particularly relevant. As regards the profiles found, a Cluster analysis identified four profiles in the group of young people studied: instructive, inhibited, co-viewing and restrictive, with the inhibited profile being the one most frequently perceived by adolescents, followed by co-viewing, with significant differences being observed between cultures. Differences were observed in parental mediation in Internet use and television viewing in accordance with the medium in question and the context, a finding which may indicate that parents find it harder to engage in instructive mediation and co-viewing in relation to the Internet, since it is a medium that is less ergonomic and user-friendly than television.

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1. Introduction

It is evident that the Internet has grown exponentially over the last decade, and has become a medium we use habitually in our daily lives to relate to others, find information, optimize our work and escape from reality through a new digital society. The platforms currently at our disposal are multi-screen devices: cell phones, television, computers, the Internet, etc.; and an increasing number of adolescents have managed to integrate these technologies seamlessly into their lives, their use influencing their family and personal relationships, although they themselves only perceive the recreational side of the devices they use so assiduously (Eynon & Malmberg, 2011).

Nevertheless, it is important to remember that adolescents are very sensitive to the period and social environment in which they live, and that new technologies are a major part of their lives (Graner, Castellana, Sánchez-Carbonell, Berauny, & Chamarro, 2006). Although scientific literature tends to highlight the problematic side of cell phones or the Internet, linking them mainly to additions (Berauny, Chamarro,

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Graner, & Carbonell-Sánchez, 2009), we lean more toward the idea that new technologies may have both positive and negative consequences at both a personal level and as regards adolescents' social, professional and family relations (Medrano & Cortés, 2007).

Various studies and research projects carried out in Spain over recent years report an increase in Internet use among adolescents. Thus, for example, in Catalonia, a decade ago Internet connection went from being sporadic (Amorós, Buxarrais, & Casas, 2002; Castells & Díaz, 2001) to being more continuous. In this sense, and in the same region, other authors (Graner et al., 2006) have found that the majority of adolescents (79.5%) access the Internet from their own homes. Just over half say they access the Internet daily, followed by 30.7% who claim to do so on average 2–3 times a week. In Girona (Viñas, 2009), 6.7% of adolescents spend more than 30 h a week on the Internet and 10.2% (especially boys) say they remain on it after midnight. If we look at other Spanish regions, such as Navarra for example, Naval, Sábada, and Bringué (2003) found that over half of all adolescents asked said they used the Internet, and 75.7% said they had a PC. The increase is evident also in Pontevedra (González, Rodiño, Gorís, & Carballo, 2008), where 34.5% of children aged between 8 and 11 have a computer and Internet access, and 22.4% have Internet in their bedrooms. Almost two thirds of those who have Internet in their bedrooms access the net for at least 1 h a day, and the remaining 27.3% do so between one and 3 h a day. Similarly, in Asturias, the vast majority of adolescents have Internet access at home; 42.5% use it for more than 1 h a day on weekdays, and three quarters do so at weekends (Miguel, Echevarría, Ferrero, & Suárez, 2010). And in Granada, the results also show a high level of use. 88% use the Internet, 57.5% use it daily or weekly and 38.7% use it occasionally (Jiménez, Olry de Labry, Bermudez, Garcia, & Salcedo, 2010).

If we analyze Internet use in the countries nearest us, the Eurobarometer surveys carried out in 2005 and 2008 by the "Safer Internet Programme" found that the number of young people using the Internet in Europe continues to increase. In 2005, 70% of European adolescents aged between 6 and 17 used the Internet. In 2008, the percentage had risen to 75%, although actual Internet use among adolescents had not increased significantly. The most notable increase in Internet use is among younger children, with 60% of children in the European Union (EU) aged between 6 and 10 being connected to the net (Livingstone & Haddon, 2009). In non EU countries, such as Turkey, for example, Internet use is also high, with 7.6% of Turkish adolescents using the Internet for more than 12 h a week (Tahiroglu, Celik, Uzel, Ozcan, & Avci, 2008).

1.1. Internet use by adolescents

As stated above, there is a tendency to relate the use made of the Internet by young people with the negative consequences resulting from said use, such as, for example, dependency, social isolation, the deterioration of family relationships and risks to personal and moral development (León, Machargo, Luján, López, & Martín, 2003). However, regardless of where they come from, adolescents themselves view computers and the Internet in a positive light (Vekiri, 2010), and recognize in them very similar uses.

In a study conducted with adolescents from Barcelona (Spain), Albero (2002) concludes that the Internet is an important means of communication, but only for friends. The use of *Chat rooms* and *Messenger* are normal activities which adolescents engage in on a daily basis. Another study by Naval et al. (2003) supports this, finding that adolescents claim to use computers and the Internet mainly to play and chat with their friends, as well as to download music and films. To a lesser extent, they use it also to take notes, write assignments and search for information. For their part, Amorós et al. (2002) found that adolescents mainly use cell phones for playing games and sending text messages to their friends.

In America, this medium is used principally for communication purposes. Similarly to the results found in the studies cited above, 80% of Latin American adolescents aged between 12 and 17 use the Internet regularly, mainly to send e-mails and online messages (89%), but also to access social networks, chat rooms and blogs, to make online purchases and to find information, etc. In a report by Arribas and Islas (2009), the authors analyze the use made of this technology by Latin American adolescents. The report, which contains data from Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Peru and Venezuela, reveals that 60% of adolescents aged between 14 and 15 prefer the Internet to television. However, the contents most commonly viewed by adolescents vary from country to country. In Bolivia, for example, the use of Internet as a means of communication is fairly common among young people, and chat rooms are the most popular choice for this purpose.

There are a number of different reasons why adolescents opt to use chat rooms (Sosa, 2008). According to this author, the majority of Bolivian adolescents aged between 13 and 15 see chatting as a means of communication, mainly with friends and acquaintances. The majority spend up to 3 h per day chatting, although some young people report dedicating around 9 h per day to this activity. As in Spain, adolescents use chat rooms to talk to friends they have just seen, to chat about what is going on in their lives, to make small talk and to discuss school, etc. They claim that it makes them feel more in touch with others, and helps them feel they have more friends. These data are the same as those obtained in state schools in the suburbs of California, in which adolescent Hispanic students described their social interaction on the Internet as consisting mainly of e-mails and instant messages, focusing mostly on friends and gossip (Gross, 2004).

In other countries such as Israel or Turkey, the uses made of the Internet are similar. According to a study carried out in Israel (Machmias, Mioduser, & Shelma, 2000), the main reason for using the Internet is communication, followed by searching for information. And another study carried out in Turkey found that Internet is mainly used for playing games, followed by general searching for information (Tahiroglu et al., 2008).

On the other hand, a relationship may exist between a compulsive use of the Internet and certain personal and social problems, including personality disorders. According to a study carried out with North American adolescents (Mittal, Tessner, & Walker, 2007), its most compulsive use takes place through participation in chats, online games and, to a lesser extent, e-mail use. These results are similar to those found in another study with Dutch students, in which those who engaged in more compulsive Internet use were those who used social networks, MSM, chats, blogs and, above all, online games (Van Rooij, Schoenmakers, Regina, Van de Eijnden, & Van de Mheen, 2010).

1.2. Parental mediation and the Internet

Parental supervision is a key factor for co-viewing and protecting against risk behaviors in adolescents. Uncontrolled Internet use may place adolescents in situations of serious risk from, for example, cyberbullying, inadvertent exposure to pornography and, potentially, the risk of revealing personal information to sexual predators (Lwin, Stanaland, & Miyazaki, 2008).

According to the results found by Livingstone and Haddon (2009), Spanish parents mediate their children's use of the Internet to a large degree; in many ways their levels in this sense are among the highest in Europe. Spanish parents frequently talk to their children about what

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