

SPANISH TEENAGERS USING INTERNET: PEDAGOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS FROM AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The use of the Internet by adolescent population is a social, cultural and economic topic, in the vast majority of developed countries, but above all, is an issue of pedagogical and ethical nature. We consider that education cannot ignore or stop studying a matter that, as everything indicates, is going to determine the formal and informal education in the near future. For instance, in the last few years new virtual platforms are emerging whereby teenagers do their homework, and through which they relate to each other in some different ways from face-to-face type. Moreover, and what is most worrying, bullying cases, violation of privacy are appearing in different realities. This paper speaks about the different uses of the Internet by Spanish adolescents and especially addresses various educational considerations, from an ethical point of view, that these uses could cause.

In concrete, we investigate, among other things: the reasons why Spanish youth are attracted by Internet; the bloom of social networks and its educational and ethical consequences; intimacy and Internet and diverse approaches to this issue.

We consider that present and future pedagogical actions related with such topic should be based on contrasted and reliable data, which complement intuitions of professionals. This paper presents some results obtained in a wider study developed by the Research Group: "El quehacer educativo como acción" (The Educational Practice as Action)- from Universidad Internacional de La Rioja, in which more than 1,000 secondary students, from both public and private secondary schools and different parts of Spain, have been polled. Therefore, we are going to be able to provide some ethical and educational considerations and conclusions founded on a significant sample, which, although are derived from the Spanish context, could be extrapolated to other international contexts similar to ours.

Keywords:

Internet, Social Networks, Moral Development, Spanish youth

1. INTRODUCTION

The research we present focuses on the potential effects that the Internet and social networks cause on the education of Spanish teenagers, specifically in their personal and moral dimension. During 2013 we handed out a 51-item questionnaire to a sample of 1,000 students of secondary school (12-16 years old) from different private and public schools of various autonomous regions: Madrid, Aragon, Andalusia, Catalonia and Castilla y León. The population of Spanish students in 2013 is 1,018,861, which allows us to speak of a sampling error ($p = q$) of 50% and a confidence level of 95% submitted data ($z = 1,95$). The data presented were analyzed with the computer program SPSS 18.0 data analysis.

The Internet and social networks are part of young people's lives today, and in one way or another, affect their daily lives. We face a new generation that has come to be known as digital natives. However, it is interesting to know what Spanish adolescents consider regarding to the use of Internet and social networks, whether it is within normal limits or not. In relation to this, they were asked if they considered

themselves "hooked" to the media. 38.2% of students say they are hooked to the Internet and social networks, and 13.5% of them say they are trying to kick that. 29.6% of adolescents consider they have sometimes thought about this but have not given more importance to it, and 32.2% of them assert they have never thought about that. These data indicate that the Internet and social networks are more than a social media or a tool for homeworks, which have become a *modus vivendi* for Spanish youths.

Below we present several data that provide some clues about the purpose of the research mentioned above. These ones have to do with privacy and autonomy, and with the different relationships that Spanish youth establish on the Internet and social networks.

2. SOME DATA COLLECTED

2.1 Privacy, autonomy and authenticity

The Internet and social networks have a significant impact on the field of privacy and personal autonomy. Virtual world can be seen as a market of information, and in this sense it is interesting to know how Spanish youths make use of such information. For instance, when asked if they cite the Internet source in their homework assignments, 41.5% of students say they never do it, while 6.5% of them say they always do. Even 15% of them say they do not know they have to cite the information located on the Internet. These data speak about the concept that Spanish adolescents have about the information they get from the Internet. Regarding privacy, we must also underline that Spanish youths do not allow their parents to access to their virtual profiles, as it is stated by 53.2% of the sample. 33.3% of students say they allow access to their profiles, and 13.5% of them say they do it, but no to the full profile.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Yes	172	32,6	33,3	33,3
	Yes, but not to my full profile	70	13,3	13,5	46,8
	No	275	52,2	53,2	100,0
	Total	517	98,1	100,0	
Missing	System	10	1,9		
Total		527	100,0		

Table 1. Parent access to personal profile

In relation to autonomy, it is worth emphasizing different results that were obtained. On the question of whether they are aware of what they say or publish on the Internet and social networks is no longer under their absolute control, and can be disseminated by different virtual networks, 45.1% of students say they are fully aware of that. Nevertheless, 34% of them assert that they do not care or have never thought about it. On the other hand, 59.8% of Spanish adolescents consider they should be entitled to delete all the information they considered convenient from the Internet and social networks. 40% of them say they have never thought about that. It seems that Spanish youths are aware that they can lose control of their own information once it has been uploaded in virtual environments, and approve of having more control over it.

Finally, with regard to personal authenticity, 29.3% of Spanish adolescents claim all the information published in their different virtual profiles to be true (Facebook, Twitter, Tuenti, etc.), and 57% of them say that they tell often the truth, but not always.

2.2 Personal relationships

In regard to personal relationships that Spanish teenagers establish between them on the Internet and social networks, it is worth underlining the following data. 32.8% of students say they know the Internet etiquette when they write in virtual environments, while 41.8% of them assert that they were not aware that such requirements exist. On the other hand, 41.6% of adolescents say they do not know anyone who has felt mistreated on virtual networks, while 52.7% of them say that, directly or indirectly, know someone who has felt mistreated or saddened by something that has been said about them in virtual networks.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Nobody	218	41,4	41,6	41,6
	Nobody directly, but indirectly	147	27,9	28,1	69,7
	Some, but not many people(less than three)	129	24,5	24,6	94,3
	More than three people	30	5,7	5,7	100,0
	Total	524	99,4	100,0	
Missing	System	3	,6		
Total		527	100,0		

Table 2. How many people do you know that have felt mistreated or saddened by the Internet

24% of Spanish youths say that have sometimes received sexual proposals through the e-mail, an SMS, a forum or a chat. On the question of whether they have ever been asked to send a compromising photo, 82.9% of young people say that has never happened, compared to 17.1% of them who say that it has. In relation to this, 25% of Spanish youths have some friend who has received threats or blackmail by sending precisely this kind of photos.

24.5% of youths claim to tell things about others or make value judgments about their actions without considering the damage or annoyance that such comments can cause to the person who is the subject of these ones. 39.7% of them say that they have never told things that could harm third parties. However, when asked if they are aware that someone their age has had a hard time finding information, private photos or videos in others` hands, 66.8% of them say that they have been aware, or even they have been well aware (43.1%). On the other hand, 28.3% of Spanish teenagers claim to have used the Internet and social networks to take revenge on someone when they are angry. Only 4.3% of them have done that when the other person was a teacher.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative Percentage
Valid	Yes, sometimes	149	28,3	28,3	28,3
	Only if it has to do with a teacher	18	3,4	3,4	31,7
	Never	358	67,9	68,1	99,8
	Total	526	99,8	100,0	
Missing	System	1	,2		
Total		527	100,0		

Table 3: Use of Internet and social networks when you are angry or as revenge

3. CONCLUSIONS AND PROSPECTIVE

The presented results show some conclusions which should be taken into account on the considerations about the incidence of Internet and social networks on moral development of Spanish teenagers, and therefore, the educational consequences that it implies.

First conclusion. Internet and social networks are seen by Spanish teenagers as an space where information runs freely and without control. This fact makes them aware of that should exist more control about such information. However, this demand of control is referred to their own and private information, but not to the same extend to the information of others. Proof of that is that the most part of them does not care to cite the information that uses to, for example, do their homeworks. Spanish teenagers are aware of privacy of their personal lives become public and manageable since it is upload to Internet and social networks. But this fact, indeed important, does not suppress them showing themselves in virtual spaces. The educational world should not ignore the pedagogical practice of privacy in so far as an important

dimension of moral and human development of person. Internet and social networks seem to be a powerful tool to expression of feelings and emotions, something that, as is well-known, not always should be shown in public anywhere or anytime.

This first conclusion is directly related to the second one. Internet and social networks apparently are the ideal space to show human autonomy and authenticity. Nonetheless, they are fostering an autonomy and authenticity proper of a radical liberalism and relativism. According to it, autonomy is conceived as *personal sovereignism*, as a mere personal choice of thoughts and actions, and an authenticity that does not take into account the patrons of moral thinking which are characteristic of human and moral realization, in the deepest sense of the word. Educators cannot disregard these considerations, and moral dimensions as the personal autonomy and the human authenticity should be important parts of the curriculum, because Spanish teenagers also live in Internet and social networks.

The third conclusion that we would like to stress is related to social relationships of Spanish teenagers. The results obtained indicate that Internet and social networks are revolutionizing relationships that young people have between them. Unlike what would be expected, the majority of Spanish teenagers asserts that the information that they upload is real. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Internet and social networks are not platforms where they establish new relationships between them, or relationships that are losing their place in the face to face context, and that in both senses, they could not be considered morally healthy relationships. In other words, Internet and social networks are suitable spaces for opinions, frequently groundless opinions, as well as for defaming, threatening, and violating the human dignity. The results presented here confirm the social situation observed during last years, where effects such as bullying are increasingly growing and becoming too common on our schools. The world of education, and particularly the educational practice, should consider seriously the use of Internet and social networks regarding the data presented here. Values as empathy, justice and understanding could be affected by theses Information and Communication Technologies.

References

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