Chapter 34
Skills of Digital Literacy to Address the Risks of Interactive Communication

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ABSTRACT

New technologies are fully integrated into the lives of children, so every day they spend more and more time using them. It is noteworthy that technologies offer many opportunities and benefits for children, but they are also associated with disadvantages and dangers. For this reason, parents and educators fear that children could suffer any of the network risks: exposure to pornography, cyberbullying, sexual harassment or grooming, sexting, contact with strangers, and impersonation. In this situation, the authors should not deprive minors of the use of digital technologies. Nevertheless, the solution is to provide them with digital skills so they become digital literate and can use these tools safely. Therefore, through this study they sought to identify the skills that compound digital literacy: technological or instrumental, communication, information, critical, and security. Finally, the authors propose the implementation of a literacy intervention with the aim of providing the children with these skills.

INTRODUCTION

The digital society is characterized by an extensive use of technologies. In consequence, digital technologies play an important role in our everyday lives and, obviously, in minors' lives. For this reason, over the last few years minors have massively increased their use of interactive technologies (such as the Internet, computers, mobile phones, smartphones, tablets, and videogames). Thus, each day they have more and more technological equipment and they spend more time using it. "As ever more families, schools and communities gain broadband and mobile access, online activities are becoming thoroughly embedded into the timetables and spaces of children's daily lives" (Livingstone, 2013, p. 15). As a result,

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the vast majority of them are Internet users (Newspoll, 2013). So, two in ten 4-year-olds go online, and this percentage rises up to about 90% of adolescents aged 13-15 (AIMC, 2012; Ofcom, 2014). Moreover, 67% of 12- and 13-year-olds, 87% of 14 and 15-year-olds, and 94% of 16 and 17-year-olds have a mobile phone (Newspoll, 2013).

In addition, the technological equipment of the minors' rooms has been heightened, and this has led to the bedroom culture. This means that children and young people spend more and more time in their private spaces with digital and communication media (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001). Consequently, half of European 9- to 16-year-olds year olds use always the Internet in their bedroom, and two-thirds go online there weekly (Livingstone, Mascheroni, Ólafsson, & Haddon, 2014). This has caused parental controls of time, content, or uses of the media to be much lower than previously (Garitaonania, Fernández, & Oleaga, 2005). Thus, one in three parents of children aged 12-15 do not check what their children are doing online (Ofcom, 2014). In conclusion, we have a situation where children spend more and more time with digital devices, but parents increasingly ignore the type of use that minors make of these devices.

In this situation, interactive communication has become a very important part of minor's lives. According to Scolari (2008), interactive communication is communication mediated by digital technologies, such as computers, mobile phones, video games, and the Internet. Adolescents use it almost daily for various purposes (leisure, relationships with friends or family, educational purposes ...), and it is so attractive to them because it enhances the controllability of self-presentation and self-disclosure, due to its anonymity, asynchrony, and accessibility. Thus, the asynchrony allows adolescents to change and reflect on what they write before they send their messages, the online anonymity may lead to less concern about their physical appearance, and the accessibility allows them to interact with peers whom they may not have seen for a long time or whom they cannot meet easily in their lives (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Therefore, interactive communication may involve users who are strangers, acquaintances, friends, family, or colleagues (Lin, 2009).

In any case, it is a kind of communication that offers a lot of possibilities and benefits for its users. For example, it keeps individuals connected in society (Lin, 2009). Thus, people who are thousands of miles away can stay in touch and interact instantaneously, something that would otherwise be unthinkable. However, "there is growing concern that these online opportunities are accompanied by an equally diverse array of risks" (Livingstone, 2013, p. 15). And these risks are of particular concern in the case of minors because of their extensive use of digital media and because they form a part of the population that requires special protection. Therefore, they are considered to be immature, emotionally unstable, and irresponsible, and they may not have sufficient resources to cope with these dangers (Catalina, López de Ayala, & García, 2014; Tolsá, 2012). In consequence, "many youth today are seemingly whiz kids about how to use these devices, but deficient in comprehending the ramifications of some of the uses to which these technologies are applied" (Chisholm, 2006, p. 82).

Therefore, although they are "very sophisticated users of technology and often lead the way in adapting new technologies to everyday use, their technological savvy, combined with the ability to be online without much adult supervision, can lead to behaviors that are high risk" (Agatston, Kowalski, & Limber, 2007, p. 59). So, given the extensive use of these technologies, youth are exposed to numerous threats (Ktoridou, Eteokleous, & Zahariadou, 2012).

For this reason, throughout this paper we attempt to describe the risks of interactive communication and why are they so important in the case of minors. In addition, we propose digital literacy as a solution and we seek to identify the skills that compound digital literacy.