

Chapter 8

Usage of Social Media by Children and Teenagers: Results of EU KIDS Online II

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the results of EU Kids Online II project about the children's and adolescent's uses of the social network sites. The results showed both the main differences and similarities regarding this issue both at the European and at the country (i.e. Romania) level. Although at the European level one can notice the emergence of different groups of users, in Romania, the use of the Internet is only at the beginning and has no clear pattern. The individual characteristics in the self-efficacy variant positively vary with the using of SNS and, at the same time, none of the negative individual characteristics predicts the possessing of a profile on a social network. The strongest connection exists between having competences regarding the use of the Internet and owning a profile on a social network. Moreover, the results agree with previous researches that highlight a complex influence of the parental mediation on the social behaviors.

INTRODUCTION

Perfectly reproducing the structure of the Internet (the multiple-knot one), the social networks have become a sine qua non element of the everyday life for many of the Internet users almost all over the world. Recent results suggest that 73% of the teens and children who use the Internet also use SNS (Pew Research, 2010). In this situation, no wonder the research regarding this phenomenon is so diverse, dealing, one at a time, with issues such as: the time allocated to this activity, the new civic activism the social networks are launching, the issue of creating an identity, network analysis with the purpose of learning how many people can be truly managed in a “friends list” and the distortions of the concept

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of friendship (Livingstone, 2008), the growth of sociability as a result of this use (or, in reverse, social isolation from the real world the “addiction” to these networks leads to), the new marketing and P.R. opportunities (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009) etc.

However, when these networks are used by children and teenagers, there are certain differences in both the usage patterns and the new issues that appear. For example, regarding the patterns, the studies show that while adults use SNS rather to meet new people, teenagers do it in order to consolidate their existing relations (boyd, 2007, 122). On the other hand, as soon as children and teenagers enter the arena of relating to media (Barker & Petley, 2001), the discussions, of any kind, are especially centered around the issue and from the perspective of protection, the new emerging issues being those regarding the risks and, also, the opportunities. Just as we will show hereinafter in greater detail, risks are usually associated with: the time consuming aspect of using the Internet, and, implicitly, the SNS, which takes the issue of addiction to the extreme (Young, 1998; Young, 2004), the issue of coming into contact with strangers (‘meeting stranger’) with different implications, cyberbullying, sexting, individual health issues that can turn into public health issues (infantile obesity) etc. On the other hand, as far as opportunities are concerned, researchers talk about the development, in children, of the ability to socialize from the safety of the physical and symbolic distance (and, sometimes, that of anonymity) that computer mediated communication imposes (Tynes, 2007; Rosen, 2006; Diaconescu, Barbovschi, Baci, 2008). Also, some authors talk about the opportunities of initiating and experiencing certain behavior and age specific emotions, in a relatively safe way, the Internet brings.

The data that was analyzed in this chapter were taken from a European study realized in 2010, that is EU Kids Online, the first study, to our knowledge, ever to use the same methodology for researching the issue of Internet using by 9-16 year old children from 25 states.

REVIEWING THE SPECIALTY LITERATURE

Just as many authors point out, (boyd, 2007, Valkenburg & Peter, 2011, Baker & White, 2010, Holmes, 2009), the research regarding the use of SNS by the youth (from the frequency and motivation of the usage to the opportunities and risks involved) have different and, sometimes, even conflicting results. For example, the motivation of the popularity of SNS among youth has changed in time (boyd, 2007) due to two main reasons: (1) Due to the short history of SNS (Lampe, Ellison, & Steinfield, 2008) and (2) Due to the fast changes at the level of the Internet in general, that accompanied the history of SNSs. As far as the first observation is concerned, even though boyd does not give us an explanatory model for these differences as far as the motivations of usage are concerned, they can be found in the model of the social formation of using a new technology offered by Breton and Proulx (2002). This model, which proposes the understanding of a new technology as a co-operation, a hybrid between the manufacturers and the users, stipulates the existence of three distinct moments, characterized by distinct types of usage, when a new technology appears: (1) The issuing and adoption by the first users; (2) The innovation or the articulation phase of the technical object concept as a result of usage, the phase in which different types of usage can appear, that are not in accordance with the initial concept, such as ‘le déplacement’ (the transfer), ‘l’adaptation’ (the adjustment), l’extension (the extension) and le détournement (the re-routing); and 3. The individual appropriation, but at the weight scale of the new technology, phase that is rather seen as individual and subjective as opposed to the first phases, considered to be rather political and collective (Breton & Proulx, 2002, 260-273). Based on this model we can understand that, if in the

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