

Introduction

Children, youth and media in the era of smart devices: Risks, threats and opportunities

Niños, adolescentes y medios en la era de las pantallas inteligentes:
Riesgos, amenazas y oportunidades

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When this monograph began to unfold, we did not imagine that, at the time of its publishing, millions of people would be experiencing a prolonged period of confinement in their homes, with digital media being consumed more intensely than ever before. Unforgettable moments for all those who lived times of physical enclosure and (even greater) digital connection including new communicative facets for online education. These moments will certainly become part of this generation's identity for the youngest segments of the population and will influence research related to current and future digital opportunities and risks.

Born in digital times, children and teens don't arrive into the world with digital skills. Family mediation by parents, educators and the community, the technological context and the conditions of the countries where they grow up substantially affect their digital and social skills, both to take advantage of digital opportunities and to face potential existing harms (Livingstone et al., 2018). This analytical framework undertaken in the EU Kids Online network, which is also compatible with the Global Kids Online network, can be found in the recent results of four Latin American countries (Trucco & Palma, 2020).

Children and teens increasingly use mobile devices and smart screens to stay in touch with family and friends, do school activities, and access a variety of digital media content and services. These patterns of use and consumption include social networks, music, videos, books and games, and are implemented in all activity scenarios for the child-youth audience. Access to mobile media at anytime and anywhere transforms the daily lives of children and adolescents with possible implications for their socialization, consumption patterns, school-oriented behaviour, teaching and learning, among others. In times of coronavirus, we have in our hands a monograph dealing with these research objects and spaces from a theoretical and methodological perspective, answering many of the academic questions that were openly proposed to the communication and education research community:

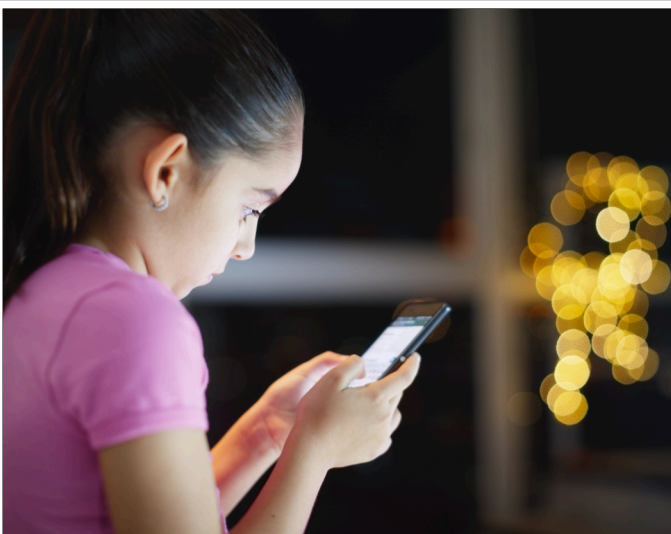
- What do researchers and teachers understand by smart devices and what is their point of view on the use of smartphones and tablets in their educational and communicative practice?
- How are the risks, threats and opportunities of the Internet and smart displays currently being evaluated? With what models and theoretical approaches? What problems does this diversity of approaches pose?
- What models are being used to evaluate the digital competence of children and adolescents? How is the usefulness variable evaluated in the current communicative and educational context?
- What aspects should be included in the traditional educational and communicative designs of media and are not currently present?
- What challenges and opportunities are posed by the transformation that smart displays bring about in today's teacher training contexts?
- What fundamental aspects for teacher training are related to the promotion of opportunities, the prevention

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of risks and the implementation of the safety and protection of minors?

- What aspects related to minors and the media should be addressed due to their possible influence and consequences in the future?

For us as Thematic Editors, this monograph aims to be a positive contribution in an established field of research that owes much to the work carried out by the Kids Online networks, who have recently published results from research in 19 European countries (Smahel et al., 2020). Likewise, numerous research studies and projects of a transnational, national and regional nature (Jiménez et al., 2018), have enabled progress on issues stemming from the digital life of children, adolescents and



young individuals. This suggests differentiated and transdisciplinary viewpoints and perspectives (Montes-Vozmediano et al., 2018; Ponte et al., 2018; Helsper & Smahel, 2019), as well as a diversity of topics and methodological approaches (Mascheroni et al., 2018). This field of research has led to a high degree of institutionalization and associationism, and we have always thought that *Comunicar* was the most suitable journal to tackle these questions.

Under the thematic section 'Children Youth and Media of the European Communication Research and Education Association' (ECREA) and the International Congress 'Children and Adolescents in the era of Smartscreens: Risks, threats and opportunities', held from 19 to 20 September 2019 at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the University of Salamanca and, thanks to the collaboration of the three Thematic Editors and their associated institutions, programs and projects, we are extremely proud to present a monograph that, from our point of view, is relevant and marks quantitative and qualitative milestones in the history of this prestigious journal.

This monograph aims to lay the foundations for an approach to the analysis and interpretation of the behaviour of children, adolescents and young adults on smart devices and social networks. From this perspective, the selected works that make up this monograph approach these objects of study from varied and multidisciplinary viewpoints.

Firstly, the article by Mónica Ojeda, Rosario del-Rey, Michel Valrave and Heidi Vadenbosch, "Sexting in adolescents: prevalence and behaviors", analyses the practice of sexting among young people when exploring their sexuality in Spain. This study explores this phenomenon in depth through a survey of 3,314 adolescents aged 12 to 16 years old. Among the conclusions, the importance of untangling the diversity of behaviours related to sexting and addressing each one of them from the field of education, as well as the significant differences in age and gender detected, are highlighted. This interesting research project serves as a starting point for educational decision-making and raises awareness about these audio-visual practices and consumption among adolescents based on the evidence and opinions collected.

The second work by Mònika Jiménez-Morales, Mireia Montaña and Pilar Medina-Bravo «Childhood use of mobile devices: influence of the maternal socio-educational level», studies the presence and variety of mobile devices in Spanish homes from the perspective of the level of education and the professional profile and the socio-educational level of the parents. The objective is to determine how these variables affect and influence the patterns of digital

media use and consumption of minors. This research analyses data from 792 primary school children between 5 and 9 years old from three Spanish cities. The results indicate that the lower the level of education and the lower the professional category of the mother, the greater the consumption of content through mobile devices by minors. This research provides a relevant approach to the analysis of the patterns of use and consumption on different smart screens and emphasizes the need to apply educational communication policies depending on the socio-educational strata of the families.

Thirdly, the monograph includes the article «Misfit use of ICT in adolescents: profiles, supervision and technological stress», prepared by Adoración Díaz-López, Javier-Jerónimo Maquilón-Sánchez and Ana-Belén Mirete-Ruiz. This research analyses the use of ICTs among adolescents by means of a sample of 1,101 individuals from 10 educational centres in the south east of Spain. The results show that more than 60% of adolescents consume ICTs in an unsupervised manner, and how the absence of internet in their time allocation pattern increases their stress levels. This article repeats the social and educational need to train adolescents and their parents or guardians in the responsible use of ICTs from the earliest stages of schooling.

Fourth, the research work on “School performance: New multimedia resources compared to traditional notes”, prepared by Daniel Halpern, Martina Piña and Constanza Ortega-Gunckel, aims to detect the normality of the spread of information technologies and communication among young individuals in Chile. Through a survey of 7,217 students from 12 to 18 years of age, it analyses how students incorporate in their study patterns the use of multiple devices and platforms. The study also works with focus groups to further detect how the appropriate use of technologies such as support in the study habits depends on the correct training of students in motivation and time management, as well as the appropriation of skills and selection criteria for available resources. This article concludes that there is an urgent need to implement specific policies and actions to increase the standards and quality of digital literacy in order to unravel the full potential that digital society, smart displays and their mediating instruments offer our adolescents.

The monograph concludes with the article “Teaching mediation practices: Opportunities and risks in the media behaviour of young people”, authored by Priscila Berger. Among the results of a survey of 315 teachers in Germany, obtained through a regression model, the findings indicate that there exists a greater propensity of teachers to maximize opportunities and minimize risks when using ICTs more frequently, and how having received ICT-related training is presented as a significant factor in mediating opportunities. This article presents an interesting discussion on how the concept of mediation can contribute to the development of teachers as media educators.

In short, this monograph contributes significantly to the analysis and discussion of the theoretical and practical aspects related to the educommunicative practice of young people in new devices and platforms, its impact on teacher training and its challenges and difficulties in the present and future.

Finally, we are aware that our socialisation environment is undergoing a rapid transformation thanks to digital technologies and in particular, to the myriad smart screens in the hands of children and youngsters. In recent years, important transformations have taken place in many areas of society, both at the personal and professional levels. These transformations will be accelerated and deepened with the full penetration of high-capacity networks and fully remote, almost ubiquitous connectivity recently accelerated by the Covid-19 technological catalyst. This requires new proposals and methodologies in educational and social models, especially in the training of children, parents and teachers. In this sense, it becomes essential for institutions responsible for formal and non-formal training, in the broad sense of the word, to implement policies in various educational fields and spaces, from initial training to life-long learning, in order to train and research topics related to risks and threats, but, mainly, the immense opportunities that children and young people enjoy on their smart displays. We hope you enjoy an excellent monograph and the objects of research presented here.

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