Chapter 1
Cyberbullying: A Research Overview
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ABSTRACT
Cyberbullying represents a topical risk, especially for the online generation that is continuously connected and socializes through the internet. This chapter presents an overview of the research on cyberbullying, from the earliest studies to the most recent. It discusses the broad variety of definitions of cyberbullying that exist and highlights its essential differences from traditional bullying. The authors then go on to illustrate and discuss the multifarious facets of cyberbullying, including the (relative) anonymity of perpetrators and the repetition of bullying acts. Further research developments are explored in the light of criticisms of Olweus, who argued that inconsistent findings and exaggerated claims plague much of the research on cyberbullying. Finally, new emerging forms of harassment, such as revenge porn and virtual rape, are also introduced.

THE INTERNET IS A LIVING THING
Over the last two decades, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) have grown exponentially, spreading through all sectors of life. Today, the internet represents the technological channel through which the digital revolution is taking place. It has radically changed the way data is collected, information is exchanged, and interactive communications occur, ultimately
not only between people, but also intelligent programs and smart objects (Curran, Fenton, & Freedman, 2016).

The internet is essentially a massive network of networks that encompasses hundreds of thousands of individual networks worldwide. It originated in the 1960s with ARPANET, a project funded by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, an arm of the US Department of Defense. ARPANET was created in cold war times to safeguard the operability of the US military communications network in the case that the enemy destroyed one or more of its nodes.

In the 1970s, the internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) became the standard networking protocol on the ARPANET and, for the first time, the term “internet” appeared in a conference paper (Cerf & Kahn, 1974), although, initially, the term was used as an adjective to distinguish inter-networking communications. Only in the 1990s, was ‘internet’ used as a noun to designate the network of computers adopting the TCP/IP technology to communicate.

The internet network infrastructure ceased to be public in 1991 when the USA government authorized private individuals to improve and use it for commercial purposes. In the same period (1990-1991), Berners-Lee defined the HTTP (*Hypertext Transfer Protocol*), that allowed the creation on the Internet of content pages and their non-sequential accessing by means of references, called *hyperlinks*, contained in the other pages.

Berners-Lee also created the World Wide Web (WWW), a user-friendly interface based on the Hyper Text Markup Language (*HTML*) through which the structure of internet pages was described. Using HTML, pages containing files, text, images, sound, video, and hyperlinks were created and accessed on the internet by programs, called *web browsers* or, simply, *browsers*. In 1993 the first browser, *Mosaic*, was launched, whose characteristics were similar to current browsers. Nowadays, the terms Internet and Web are essentially synonymous and are used interchangeably.

Over the years, the distinctive characteristics of the Web have changed. In fact, until now, the Web has evolved through four main stages of development (Choudhury, 2014), namely the Web of documents (Web 1.0), the Web of people (Web 2.0), the Web of data (Web 3.0), and the Web of things (Web 4.0). Table 1 synthesizes the main stages of the Web evolution to date.

Following an initial characterized by the ability to access contents recorded in fixed pages linked together by hyperlinks, the Web quickly transitioned towards dynamic pages that assembled data from different page sources and/or resulted from database searches. These web pages were also dynamically created and customized in order to maximize their usability.
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