Chapter 3

Cyberbullying and Social Networking Sites

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ABSTRACT

Media pay considerable attention to episodes that involve children and adolescents and the internet. Usually, the excessive time spent on social networking sites is highlighted as the principal source of risk for cyberbullying as well as for the various types of cyber addictions that can develop. Anonymity is reported to be one of the principal factors that favor cyberbullying, whilst sexting and homophobia are indicated as being among the principal circumstances that bring victims to commit suicide. In this chapter, some relevant aspects of the use of social networking sites will be illustrated and some notions regarding how the internet works will be introduced. Other questions, such as the spread of cyber hate and online incivility will be discussed, and a case of the incautious use of Facebook by a higher public education institution will be reported. Many concepts highlighted here will be useful in the following chapters in which strategies for the prevention of cyberbullying will be considered.

INTRODUCTION

Over the last two decades, the growth of the internet in every field of contemporary society has been spectacular. The impact of digital media has been without precedent. Internet users can, at the same time, be both content consumers and content producers, directly addressing a large number of other
potential users. To all effects, they are prosumers (producers and consumers),
to use the term coined many years ago by Toffler (1980).

Young people are often portrayed as being ever connected and spending
their time exchanging messages with virtual mates, and various negative
effects of social media have been broadly underlined (Smith, Morgan, &
Monks, 2017; Turner & Lefevre, 2017; Vossen & Valkenburg, 2016). On the
other hand, many educators exalt the positive contribution of social media
to learning, since it offers exceptional opportunities for the lifelong learning
process and for building personalized educational paths. Digital Social
Learning has been attracting the interest of many researchers, who share
the notion that “learning is a social activity” where individuals achieve their
learning goals by interacting with each other (Hamid, Waycott, Kurnia, &
Chang, 2015; Liao, Huang, Chen, & Huang, 2015).

A large segment of the total users of the internet are children, adolescents,
and university students, and they tend to view the internet as their primary
means of socialization.

The Pew Research Center indicates that a full 95% of the USA teens
have access to a smartphone, and 45% say they are online almost invariably
(Anderson & Jiang, 2018). Eurostat (2016) has observed the situation to be
similar in Europe (Figure 1).

Figure 2 shows that roughly half (51%) of the USA teens, aged 13 to 17,
claim they use Facebook, notably fewer than use YouTube, Instagram, or
Snapchat.

Figure 1. The proportion of people making daily use of the internet in 2016, by age
and by formal educational attainment
Source: Eurostat, online data code: isoc_ciegi_ac and isoc_ci_ac_i