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**Growing up in a risk-averse internet environment: adolescents and online  
dangers between protective boundaries and identity formation**

**A cross-national analysis with focus on Romania**

**Doctoral Thesis**

*Summary*

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**Key words:** identity formation, internet use, online risks, online performance, emotional motivation, crossing boundaries

This paper aimed to explore and put in perspective the risk factors associated with young people's accessing negative contents in the online environment and the extent to which they have come across dangerous situations in the virtual space. Emphasis was put on adolescents' need to engage in risky activities that might help them experiment various kinds of situations and sensations, including risks, in their pursuit of self-discovery within the process of identity formation. Starting with a literature review pointing to the important role that the internet has had in people's lives during time, producing "electronic revolutions" (Davis, Hirschl and Stack, 2007; Jan van Dijk, 2006; Castells, 1996), inequalities (DiMaggio et. al., 2001), and individualization (Wellman, 2001; Beck, 1992), this thesis shows how media culture is part of children and young people's lives from their early ages. The rapid rise of new technology among young people, which will continue to grow and evolve even more due to broadband penetration and national strategies and policies (European Commission Digital Agenda, 2013), give indications on the fact that media, especially the internet, no longer serve as simple means of communication and interaction. Rather, they have become so much embedded into youngsters' daily routines and have become so natural and habitual that they can easily be considered a form of life in itself which cannot be analyzed separately from the larger environment in which children live (Morimoto and Friedland, 2011). They are important instruments contributing to teenagers' processes of socialization, interaction and identity formation, creating a "lifeworld" in which almost every action is mediated (Bakardjieva, 2005; Habermas, 1981).

In recent years, the internet and new media have gained an unprecedented ascension and have notably become enclosed into people's everyday lives. These are now part of some broad changes that have occurred lately related to how individuals engage in knowledge assumption and production, interaction and information seeking. Unlike the other means of communication, computers and the internet are now always present, commonplace and pervasive, having been embraced by a wide number of persons, households and institutions for various purposes. While digital media are gaining more visibility and attention, both because their associated benefits and inherent dangers, a generation of youngsters is growing up in an era dominated by technological advances that might produce experiences of different kinds in their developmental processes. Although the high-levels use of the internet have been accompanied by numerous hopes related to the positive outcomes it might stand for, feelings of fear and panic have also come into play

when referring to the child-virtual environment alchemy. This is particularly true in the case of adults' and public policy representatives' perceptions of young people as inexperienced users who might easily become targets of the online threats. Since the parental connection with their offspring is considered to have been disrupted and blurred due to the recent virtual amplitude, the authority-based relationship between them has as well been altered. Children and adolescents are in the forefront of experimentation with the multitude of sensations and facilities that the internet offers, therefore they might push back and become resistant to traditional forms of authority.

Even though the internet has got strongly embedded into youngsters daily lives (Lenhart et al. 2013; Haddon et al. 2012; Ofcom 2012; Hasebrink et al. 2011; Kotilainen, 2011; Livingstone et al. 2011; Valcke et al. 2011; Lenhart and Madden, 2007) and accounts for many undeniable benefits related to entertainment, communication, education, creativity, self-expression and information seeking, it is also considered to imply a myriad of risks that are able to influence negatively children's proper development (Valcke et. al., 2011; OECD, 2011; OSTWG, 2010; YPRT, 2009; ITU, 2009; Livingstone and Haddon, 2009; ISTTF, 2008; ACMA, 2008; Hasebrink et. al., 2008). In spite of this protective position perceiving youngsters as victims of the online environment, there are other approaches arguing that risk might be beneficial within youngsters' lives (Hope, 2007; Madge and Barker, 2007). In this sense, the psychological paradigms related to adolescent identity formation suggest that young people's experiences of dangers are normal activities within their identity formation processes (Buckingham, 2008; Hope, 2007; Gill, 2007; Madge and Barker, 2007; Marcia, 1980). Going beyond boundaries and risk-taking, perceived as escapes from the daily life routines, may be essential elements in the process of identity construction (Hope, 2007). Since such activities may produce positive emotions, pleasures and feelings of control (Cohen and Taylor, 1992) over the explorations undertaken, they might also be useful when it comes to adolescents' ways of presenting themselves both in the virtual world, as well as in the offline space. Through these behaviors they might gain a positive reputation that recommends them for further group affiliations and social relationships expansion. The emotional motivation may be the characteristic lying behind the activities children undertake online or offline, especially if they are risky. The way they perform can help them present and maintain an acceptable self, which is part of the process of identity formation.

Due to the significant appropriation of this medium in their lifeworlds, young people have got to be not only prime innovators and headmasters of the online environment, but also legitimate social actors able to take responsibilities and decisions with respect to the activities they undertake. The present “age of networks” in which they grow up and develop (Jan van Dijk, 2006; Wellman, 2001) may lead to increased individualization (Morimoto and Friedland, 2011) since they have much enclosed this medium into their daily routines and activities. Therefore, the need to understand deeper the relationship between the internet use and young people is urgent and stringent if perceived through the lens of the large scale and speed with which technology evolves and produces changes both at the social and at the individual levels.

The perspective that this paper adopts is included in the wider trend of social-constructivist paradigm, which looks upon people as if they were the ones responsible to build their own realities and social identities. This is achieved by interactions with various situations, with other people and with their cultural expectations projected into one’s personal representations of life, respecting the general rules of social order at the same time. When it comes to children, apart from its general characteristics of continuous development and diffusion which can encourage social change, the internet can also lead to identity construction. Considering this view, young people can be perceived as active forces who are able to find their ways in this modern internet-based “risk society” (Beck, 1992). Even though very often the association of offspring with internet use is perceived as a rather negative relationship entailing upon various kinds of perils, there are though some perspectives arguing that risk might be useful for young people (Hope, 2007; Madge and Barker, 2007). Experiences such as going beyond boundaries, which can be central elements in identity construction (Hope, 2007), are perceived as ways of escaping from the daily tedious routines. Not only does risk-taking have an appealing character which can offer particular sensations, emotions, pleasures and a sense of escaping from the everyday life commonalities (Lyng 1990, 2004) but it can also offer a sense of control over the activities that are undertaken and over some sort of labile circumstances. Such experiences can help the self to develop in ways that might be long-term beneficial, such as gaining a positive reputation or effective integration in peer groups. This might produce a feeling of psychological comfort and even confidence in the fact that things can be managed properly, according to people’s own will. Applied to the internet use, it can give away boredom or loneliness and induce positive feelings

of happiness or joy while surfing the World Wide Web, accessing different social networking sites or blogs, performing various internet connections, or other similar activities.

The way young people perform online can also be a source of manifold experiences taken up. Applying Erving Goffman's classic framework of self-presentation in the everyday life (1959) to the presently ubiquitous virtual environment may stand at the base of a different understanding of youngsters' engagement in risky online activities and of their acts - dependent on the setting in which they are placed and the viewers around. Their social interactions can be perceived in terms of performances that include actors, audience, front stage and backstage, offering support to reconsidering the protectionist paradigm- pleading therefore for the psychological approaches related to adolescent identity formation and on the idea that children are well-skilled and knowledgeable actors who are able to keep themselves away from the intrinsically difficult contexts they might come across during their explorations. According to this perspective, they should not be considered as some innocent victims and targets of the online dangers. Grace to their wide use of the internet and of public authorities' evolving measures meant to ensure that every child becomes digital and online skilled, youngsters have reached higher levels of competencies and developed different strategies so as to extricate themselves from the feared online dangers which are considered to be able to affect their proper development and states of well-being. When speaking about adolescence and its associated transformations occurring in the physical and cognitive dimensions, some "identity crisis" might interfere (Erik Erikson 1968, cited in Buckingham 2008; Marcia, 1980) referring to certain turning points in young people's lives, which can finally lead to identity formation. This period also include a stage of "psychosocial moratorium", through which adolescents search for their pursuit of self-discovery, and need to engage therefore in activities that might help them experiment various potential identities and situations, including risks of various kinds.

In what concerns this latter aspect – risks- despite the vast literature on this topic, there is still little consensus over a commonly accepted definition for this term, even though its general understanding implies some feared and negative consequences over the environment or human health (Madge and Barker, 2007; IRGC, 2005; Cooper, Hetherington, and Katz, 2003; OECD, 2003; Klinke and Renn 2001, 2002; Rosa, 1998). When it comes to online risks, the literature so

far has spoken of a complex array of such dangers which have been gathered in different classifications and typologies over time but until now, scholars have not agreed upon a universal one (Valcke et. al., 2011; OECD, 2011; OSTWG, 2010; YPRT, 2009; ITU, 2009; Livingstone and Haddon, 2009; ISTTF, 2008; ACMA, 2008; Hasebrink et. al., 2008). As the number of young people using the Internet increases and the age at which they first go online decreases, identifying and addressing these risks becomes an important public policy objective. Moreover, as their activities, skills and competencies differ and increase by age (Ofcom, 2012; Sonck and Livingstone, 2011; Livingstone et. al., 2011), their interactions with and conceptualizations of the online environment vary as well, offering space for engaging in risky behaviors. Until now, in spite the notable breadth of surveys dealing with children and their internet use, the statistical data about the prevalence of risks among the young ones are limited. Moreover, it is often fragmented, non-representative, taking into account specific areas and their social realities, and offer few possibilities for comparing studies and countries. Generally, while the same spectrum of risks is present in all states, the available data suggest that prevalence rates vary (Livingstone et. al., 2009). In particular, the availability of such data is diverse and dependent on the types of risks surveyed. While other kinds of risks have all been explored in some depth (cyber bullying, meeting strangers or inappropriate content such as pornography), there are some online experiences that, although identified as potentially harmful to children (Livingstone et al. 2011, Valcke et al. 2011, Livingstone and Haddon, 2009) have attracted little research as yet. In this sense, there are few data on illegal interaction, harmful advice, xenophobic contents, online marketing to children, fraudulent transactions, information security risks and privacy risks, probably due to the methodological complexity of collecting the data (OECD, 2011).

According to the Organization for economic Co-operation and Development (2011), the most studied risks are usually those which entail serious immediate consequences, but they may not be the most prevalent. Additionally, the available data is mainly quantitative and analytical while the qualitative approaches meant to better understand youngsters' positions in relation with the internet are rare and do not necessarily use teenagers' own voices (Dooley et. al., 2009). If they exist, they need to be constantly updated since the evolution of online usage patterns increases visibly and previous conceptions and understandings might become easily obsolete. Moreover, there is no recent evidence of the factors that favor the likelihood of accessing risks and the



effectiveness of particular approaches such as parental rules. Therefore, having all these scarcities into account, the aim of this paper has been to explore and put in perspective the risk factors associated with adolescents' engaging in risky explorations in the online environment, and the extent to which they come across dangerous situations in the virtual space. A cross-national comparison has been made, with special focus on Romania, on seven types of online risks, namely meeting strangers, sexual solicitation, privacy risks, online bullying, exposure to pornography, negative user-generated and xenophobic content, paying attention in the same time to the factors that shape young users' safety in the virtual space. For a more clear differentiation between risks and for a better approach and understanding, they were grouped into two categories (contact and content) made out of 7 distinct groups, based on the overview made by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (2011), and also taking into account Livingstone and Haddon's classification (2009).

Additionally, a qualitative analysis was conducted with Romanian pupils in order to better understand their relationship with new media and the internet. Based on psychological paradigms related to adolescents' identity construction which suggest that children's experiences of dangers are normal activities within their identity formation processes (Buckingham, 2008; Hope, 2007; Gill, 2007; Madge and Barker, 2007; Marcia, 1980) three hypothesis were designed in order to test whether adolescents who had high online performance, who were more emotionally engaged in their online explorations and who favored experiences such as crossing boundaries were more likely to encounter more risks in the virtual space than those who lacked these characteristics. Measures such as time spent online, having a personal profile on a social networking site, online skills, online activities, psychological characteristics and parental supervision were used in the analyses.

The present paper was structured around five chapters. The first one aimed to theoretically explore the notion of risk and the way it, next to the evolution of electronic media and internet, can stand for young people's identity formation. It pointed to the fact that youngsters should not be perceived as victims of the online environment. Rather, they should be considered resourceful persons who are able to protect themselves from the dangers that might occur online. The way they present themselves and interact in the virtual space might be indications of the fact that they

actually search for experiences that cross over the protective boundaries in order to escape from the common and usual contexts in which they live, constructing in this way an identity that is more complex and more helpful when it comes to facing negative experiences.

This chapter also gave insights on how to understand and distinguish between categories of online risks, pointing on strategies meant to manage and handle them properly so as to protect children as internet users. It reviewed the specific literature and statistical data about young people's use of this medium and its risk prevalence. Even though definitions and typologies of risks differ, and survey methodologies vary, making it difficult to compare risk incidence, this section presented a complex classification of countries based on the EU Kids Online work, having into consideration three broad categories of risks: content, contact and conduct. It appears that risks differ from country to country and while they are many and evolving, addressing them requires various approaches and perspectives including legislative, technical, awareness campaigns, skill improvement etc. Children's vulnerability to these kinds of negative experiences results from their lack of experience and understanding of the afferent possible consequences, and not necessarily from the innocent and helpless positions in which they are often situated. While age can help them learn how to be more cautious, it can also facilitate a deeper exposure since their levels of internet use increase. Encountering risks may result in a wide range of effects, the most severe including physical and psychological harm. Besides characteristics of online performance, emotional motivation, crossing boundaries and parental mediation, there are other factors that influence the likelihood of encountering risks. As mentioned in the literature review described in the lines of this section, age, gender, location and devices of use are important variables that need to be strongly taken into consideration when trying to manage and handle risk. Moreover, more research into them is required since they can help explaining why some children are more vulnerable than others, and identify the most adequate risk mitigation strategies.

The second chapter, emerging from the first one and complementing it in the same time, showed that the internet has become a meaningful phenomenon in people's lives, an inseparable medium from their common daily activities, which is endowed with multiple functions and benefits such as education, entertainment, communication or information seeking. It has become an important

instrument accounting for various experiences that could not be explored otherwise, bringing positive as well as negative outcomes for its users. When it comes for children, they have become prime users of the internet, especially since they have been provided by the century in which they were born with the opportunity to go online since very young ages and learn how to live with and adapt to the continuous technological advances.

In spite the large array of positive experiences that this medium stands for, there is though a complex mixture of risks that might influence their online safety, raising dilemmas among public authority representatives, parents and scholars on how to manage them properly so that the opportunities that glide in the virtual environment should not be affected. The European Commission plans in this respect to develop and implement appropriate mechanisms of safety and skills so that the population at large would enjoy safer and better internet explorations. In the second part of this chapter, official data were reviewed and discussed dealing with internet penetration and connectivity. The evidence shows that more households and people throughout the world, not only in Europe, get connected to the digital space, including children and young people, and that their attachments to this medium continue to grow irrespective of age. The rapid rise of the internet and the wide breadth of use, associated with youngsters' low levels of experiences regarding this medium, and their need to explore, learn and benefit from more positive outcomes that this instrument offers, might lead to various situations experimented online, including negative ones. Not only the amount of time spent online might shape children's and adolescents' safety in the virtual space, but also other factors such as the places of access, the online and offline activities that the child engages in, their digital skills and self-efficacy in using the online applications, the use of social networking sites, their psychological characteristics and parental mediation. All these possible predictors of risks were overviewed and discussed in this chapter, pointing to their important role in relation to virtual experiences and encountering of risks. They were further introduced in complex statistical analyses in order to test their actual relationships with the seven types of risks explored in this thesis.

The third chapter aimed to identify the extent to which young European adolescents encountered various types of risks, and the factors that shape their online safety. It was shown (based on the EU Kids Online dataset) that across Europe youngsters take a rather small breadth of online

dangers, in spite the general fear that their explorations are defined by multiple negative experiences (ISTTF, 2008; ITU, 2009; Byron, 2008). Generally, they come across less than one kind of negative experience, online bullying being the least encountered one (but one of the most studied: Kernaghan and Elwood, 2013; Gorzig and Frumkin, 2013; Livingstone et. al., 2011; Gradinger et. al., 2009; Dooley et. al., 2009a; Smith et. al., 2005; Kim et. al., 2005; Ferero et. al., 1999) and meeting strangers the greatest (research on this topic is increasing: Barbovschi, 2013; Livingstone et. al, 2011; Hasebrink et. al., 2011). Below half of the interviewed young users declared they have faced at least one risk out of the 24 they were asked about. While there was little difference between what boys and girls reported as risky experiences, age seemed to matter more. The breadth of negative experiences increase as children grow older. The second objective of this chapter was to identify and explore the factors which shape the types of risks encountered, and adolescents' online safety. In this sense, three hypotheses were stated based on the idea that risk-taking is a natural activity within young people's processes of identity formation (Buckingham, 2008; Hope, 2007; Madge and Barker, 2007; Marcia, 1980). All of them were tested using logistic regressions. According to the first one- *online performance*- in the first part it proposed to test whether adolescents who had a personal profile on a social networking site, who used the internet more frequently, broadly and who had acquired more online skills came across more risks than children who did not enjoy these benefits. The results showed it could be partly confirmed. In the case of all three types of content risks analyzed, having a personal profile on a social networking site was not statistically significant. Instead, more time spent online, more online skills and a larger breadth of activities performed proved to attract more risks for the adolescents who fulfilled these characteristics than for the others. Going further to the four contact risks discussed, except for having a personal profile on a social networking site which was not statistically significant in the case of sexual solicitation, and for online skills which did not count for privacy risks, all the other predictors showed greater odds that adolescents came across each of those types of risks. In the second part of the first hypothesis, it was expected that spending more time online and having a personal profile on a social networking site would count more in the case of contact rather than content risks, since contact risks implied interaction and communication with the others. This was also partly confirmed since owning an account on a social networking profile was not statistically significant for

content risks. As concerns time spent online, it seemed to count more for attracting risks in the case of contact rather than content dangers.

Regarding the second hypothesis- *emotional motivation*- it was based on the assumption that while engaging in risky activities, adolescents might feel various emotions, pleasures and feelings of control (Cohen and Taylor, 1992) that could encourage them even more to behave in a risky way. These could also help them present and maintain an acceptable image of themselves in front of the others, as part of the process of identity formation. First of all, it argued that those who enjoyed experiencing sensation-seeking, who considered themselves effective and confident in their abilities to handle unexpected and new situations (self-efficacy), and those with psychological difficulties were more likely to meet more dangers online than the other children. It was confirmed since the results showed great likelihood for those having these characteristics to come across more risks of various kinds. Even though sensation-seeking was statistically not significant in the case of online bullying, and self-efficacy was not significant in the case of sexual solicitation, all the other predictors accounted notably for the chances that adolescents faced online dangers. This was more evident in the case of psychological difficulties which stood for great values regarding online bullying, privacy risks and negative user-generated content. The second part of this hypothesis expected that sensation-seeking and psychological difficulties would count more for content risks since they imply higher levels of risk than contact dangers (Cho and Cheon, 2005). This was also partly confirmed. Sensation seeking had similar values in both categories of risk (content and contact), visibly a bit higher in the case of content. With respect to the psychological difficulties though, their effects over the dependent variables were considerably higher in the case of contact risks, pointing to the fact that youngsters were able to attract more such dangers rather than content-based ones, if controlling for the other variables in the models used for analyses. Therefore, similar to the first hypothesis, the second one was also partly confirmed.

Stepping towards the third and last hypothesis of this chapter- *crossing boundaries*- it tried to show that those who were risk-oriented online and offline were more exposed to online dangers than adolescents who lacked these characteristics. Both online and offline risky activities that adolescents undertook were expected to count more in the case of contact risks since interaction

is a way of feeding and undertaking their danger-oriented behaviors. The results of logistic regressions showed that this assumption could be confirmed. Both online and offline risky activities stood for greater chances that adolescents came across more risks of each type. Still, their values seemed to be larger in the case of contact risks, showing that the second part of the last hypothesis could also be confirmed.

In this chapter, besides exploring the incidence of risks across Europe and the factors shaping adolescents' online safety, other analyses were conducted in order to see variations and differences in the explanation of which factors account the most for adolescents dealing with each of the risks discussed. In this sense, four blocks of countries were created- Northern, Eastern, Western and Southern- and the logistic regressions for each type of risk were repeated four times. Overall, the general models fitted well in almost all European regions, except for the online bullying, probably because of the low number of cases contained in the analysis.

The next chapter followed the same lines as the third one, focusing on Romanian adolescents as high internet users and risk encounters. In spite of the evidence showing this country's potentially large scale of perils, vulnerabilities and harm (Livingstone et al., 2011; Livingstone and Haddon, 2009), little research has been conducted in order to understand how youngsters perceive the role of the internet in their lives, which are their conceptualizations of online risks and how they place themselves in relation to these negative situations. Moreover, there are no recent publicly available studies that deal with children's experiences and motivations of engaging in risky activities (Stefanescu et. al., 2009; Stefanescu, 2009; Diaconescu, Barbovschi and Baci, 2008; Barbovschi and Diaconescu, 2008). The analyses performed throughout this chapter showed first of all that Romanian young users of the internet, similar with the general European trend, did not encounter a large breadth of risks while exploring the virtual space. More than half of the interviewed ones declared they did not take up any of the dangers asked about, and out those who did, most of them went to meet unknown persons offline. Since the experiences of risks online were rather low, it can be stated that the Romanian young people know how to explore the digital world safely and to avoid the negative experiences that might harm them and their virtual activities. Logistic regressions showed that as compared to the European results, in this case there were many factors that were not statistically significant in the

performed models, controlling for the other variables, probably due to the reduced number of cases introduced into analyses which could not hold all the variables. Therefore, apart from the last hypothesis, the others could be only partly confirmed. Psychological difficulties though seemed to matter notably; consequently they need to be seriously taken into account by adults and policy makers when thinking on how to create effective measures for protecting the young users. They seem to produce higher chances of coming across both content and contact perils, with higher values for the latter ones. Regarding the risky online and offline activities, they were significant for both models, emphasizing once more adolescents' risk-oriented behaviors and the interconnected relationship between the virtual and the real life environments (Shen et. al., 2013; Laghi et al., 2013; Hirzalla and van Zoonen, 2011).

This analysis was continued in the last chapter which explored Romanian children and adolescents' perceptions and attitudes towards the modern means of communication and information, their characteristics of internet use along with the associated risks, and the child-parents-online environment relationship. It aimed to understand how young users themselves conceptualized and perceived the relationship between internet use and risks in an environment governed by technological advances, addressing the lack of research on youngsters' discourses related to their online experiences. Comparing the answers of three samples of pupils using a focus-group approach, this analysis allowed capturing various interpretations and perceptions related to the online dangers that might occur while exploring the virtual space, by positioning young people at the center of discussions. Since they constitute a group whose voice is seldom heard (Ponte, Simoes and Jorge 2013; Hundley and Shyles, 2010; Davidson et al., 2009; Dunkels 2008), their own reflections were the focus of this section. Consequently, this research did not only pay attention to the types of risks that involved children and adolescents but it also allowed these young users to position themselves in relation to these perils and to speak about their understandings of such experiences, trying to emphasize as well the unexpected information that arose within discussions. The purpose was to explore whether pupils saw risks as potential dangers affecting their activities and safety online, or they evaluated these as normal and natural features of the digital space that could be easily avoided and handled. Throughout the discussions, they were attributed several roles- advisors, receivers of online content, actors

involved in risky situations- in order to capture their perceptions and understandings of the virtual environment and all its characteristics from different angles and perspectives.

The overall picture of these group interviews revealed the fact that young respondents had positive and strong relations with the internet, which was emphasized as well in previous quantitative findings (Helsper 2013; Haddon et al. 2012; Ofcom 2012; Hasebrink et al. 2011; Livingstone et al 2011; Valcke et al 2011; OSTWG 2010), as well as in some qualitative studies (Optem 2007; Davidson et al., 2009; Hundley and Shyles, 2010). Youngsters appeared to be confident and skilled users rather than naïve and unable to see actual threats. They were in fact very aware of these perils but tended to disregard them and resort to various developed solutions for avoiding them, showing in this sense their high levels of responsibility with regards to their safety. In spite of their young ages, they seemed to be on their own when it came to their internet knowledge and strategies for dealing with the negative online factors, as their parents were perceived as occasional and inexperienced users. Recent technological developments which favored the apparition of many new and modern means of communication seemed to have changed children's and adolescents' lives in a positive way, opening doors for much interaction and information access. Even though there was also space for dangers, focus-group results have showed that childhood is not a time of innocence threatened by perils but rather a period in which youngsters consider themselves very skilled and knowledgeable actors who like to experiment different situations (including risks) ignoring the possible negative outcomes. It was emphasized various times during discussions that participants were reflexive with their understandings of risk and responsible for their online activities, rather than innocent victims living among a variety of online dangers that threatened their proper development (Helsper 2013; Haddon et al. 2012; Ofcom 2012; Hasebrink et al. 2011; Valcke et al 2011; OSTWG 2010; Livingstone and Haddon 2009; Dooley et al. 2009; ACMA 2008; Byron 2008; Cho and Cheon, 2005). Consequently, Livingstone and colleagues' recommendations, as well as European Commission's (Digital Agenda 2013) purpose to create the paths for every European to become digital should be very much considered when it comes to young users. They should be encouraged to become responsible for their own internet safety by developing the appropriate digital skills and confidence needed for this purpose.



Although this paper tried to offer an in-depth approach over the relationship between internet use and its impact on children and adolescents, and the risk experiences faced, several points still remain for future research. One such is to explore the harm associated with the negative experiences that might intervene in youngsters' digital explorations. The actual incidence of dangers does not say much about its further consequences on children's behaviors. Also, the strategies of coping and resilience to perils need more attention since it can help understand better the ways in which young people approach and relate to their online experiences, being in the same time an important resource for policy makers who can take better and more focused measures of safety.

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