



VULNERABILIDAD Y CULTURA DIGITAL

RIESGOS Y OPORTUNIDADES DE LA SOCIEDAD HIPERCONECTADA

COORDINADORES

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Dykinson, S.L.



**Vulnerabilidad y cultura digital.
Riesgos y oportunidades
de la sociedad hiperconectada**

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The protection of minors in the digital age

Protección de los menores en la era digital

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Resumen

This paper argues that minors are not well protected in the digital age. Because of their vulnerability they are more exposed to the dangers and threats when using the Internet. The main objective of this paper is to find out if the development of ICT respects the children's rights and contributes to their protection and well-being. The paper argues what has been done to protect them and ensure their rights to access and use digital media; at the same time, it intends to outline the next steps needed to strengthen it. These objectives are achieved through literature review and analysis of legal instruments in a theoretical and descriptive approach. The empirical methodologies used are based on studies of children between the ages of 8 and 16 years and show that children are not only addicted to communicating through social networks, but also have very dangerous behaviours putting them and the rest of the family in danger. The results show that age restrictions on the Internet are ineffective against illegal content and result in the clandestine use of many online services, leading children to lie about their age to use prohibited sites. In conclusion, the parents and educators cannot be apart from the changes that technological innovations cause in children. It is imperative to discuss the need to invest in the education of the youngsters, teaching them how to deal with the digital world and their commitment to combat illegal and inappropriate content.

Keywords: Digital age, illegal digital content, Internet, protection of minors, vulnerability.

Abstract

El presente estudio sostiene que los menores no están bien protegidos en la era digital. Debido a su vulnerabilidad, están más expuestos a los peligros y amenazas de la Internet. El objetivo del estudio es averiguar si el desarrollo de las aplicaciones de las TIC respeta los derechos de los niños y contribuye a su protección y bienestar. El trabajo discute lo que se ha hecho para garantizar sus derechos de acceso y uso de los medios digitales. Estos objetivos se logran mediante la revisión de la literatura y el análisis de instrumentos legales, en un enfoque teórico y descriptivo. Las metodologías empíricas utilizadas se basan en estudios de niños entre las edades de 8 y 16 años, y demuestran que los niños no solo son adictos a la comunicación a través de las redes sociales, sino que también tienen comportamientos muy peligrosos, lo que afecta a ellos y al resto de la familia. Los resultados muestran que las restricciones de edad en Internet no son efectivas contra el contenido ilegal y que el uso clandestino de muchos servicios en línea lleva a los niños a mentir acerca de su edad para utilizar sitios prohibidos. En conclusión,

los padres y los educadores no pueden mantenerse alejados de los cambios que las innovaciones tecnológicas provocan en los niños. Es imperativo discutir la necesidad de invertir en la educación de los jóvenes, enseñándoles cómo lidiar con el mundo digital y su compromiso de combatir el contenido ilegal e inapropiado.

Palabras clave: *Contenidos digitales ilícitos, era digital, Internet, protección de los menores, vulnerabilidad.*

1. INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on the protection of minors –children below the age of eighteen years– in the digital age. The problem is that children constitute a particularly vulnerable group, which is therefore more exposed to the emerging problems of the digital environment –the Internet, platforms and social networks– and subject to dangers and threats in many ways. As Livingstone, Carr & Byrne (2016) explained, an estimated one third of the Internet users are children. The overall objective is to research the children’s internet and mobile use.

To do this, the paper examine either the risks and the challenges posed to children, recognized as a substantial group of Internet users, and argue what has been done to protect them and ensure their rights to access and use digital media, such as the the rights to privacy online and data protection regulation; at the same time, it intends to outline the next steps needed to strengthen it (Magriço, Simões, Patrão & Morais, 2018).

It is important to understand how the risk of children been harmed in the digital environment can be reduced as well as how their chances and opportunities in this field could be increased. The Internet and other ICTs have a great potential to improve children’s access to education and learning, information and digital literacy, participation and play. The risks pointed are the grooming sexual abuse and sexual exploitation including child pornography, bullying and harassment, advertising and marketing (Livingstone, Carr & Byrne, 2016).

These objectives were achieved through the study of the European programs about information, audiovisual and communications technologies, in a theoretical and descriptive approach, as well as the analysis of legislation, especially the European directives and regulations on the protection of minors. As for the empirical methodologies used, these were based on studies carried out on children between the ages of 8 and 16 years.

It is hoped to ascertain whether, and in what measure, the minors are effectively exposed to risks when browsing the Internet or attending social

networks, as well as what is being done by the community authorities and the public authorities of the Members-States to protect children, insuring at the same time a healthy and harmonious development. Finally, we try to understand the degree of concretization of such measures in practice and the role of the parents in the process of autonomation and socialization of minors.

At the next point, the problem will be stated and the literature review will be presented through the review will be presented, through the application of the research methods, the studies carried out and the analysis and interpretation of some empirical data. The review of available statistics and research literature will show if the evidences based on the data are solid, regarding the online risks, threats or even opportunities for children's well-being and rights, and if they reveal several gaps that need to be filled.

Before the conclusions will be presented the results and the discussion, taking into account the obtained results, trying to point out some tending measures, to minimize the problems and main difficulties found, and to enunciate possible steps, on regard to children's rights protection in the digital age.

2. LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

2.1. United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), 1989, establishes the basic standards that apply without discrimination to all children worldwide and specifies the minimum entitlements that governments are expected to implement.

The human's rights, for example, to freedom of expression, assembly or privacy, also apply to children. It calls for specific child-focused mechanisms to ensure that these rights are respected and not infringed. This Convention includes rights that apply especially or only to children, such as the right to development (article 6), play (article 31) and the care and protection necessary for their well-being (article 3, see also 18 and 20).

The CRC appeared before the digital age but never ceased to be applied and is now being debated and applied to issues of the digital age, around all the children's rights, not only the digital rights, as the right to be forgotten, for example (Livingstone, 2016). Furthermore the CRC establishes that all decisions relating to the child should be in the best interests of the child (article 3) so as

to support their survival and development (article 6), and that rights should be implemented without discrimination (article 2) and with the participation of children in matters that affect them (article 12).

Also, the CRC sets out the rights to freedom of expression, access to information sources and to participation in cultural life, what enable us to make media education a basic human right.

2.2. European Union actions on the rights of the children

The Treaty of Lisbon requires the European Union (EU) to promote protection of the rights of the child (article 3 (3) of the Treaty on European Union). Article 24 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union includes the rights of the child as fundamental rights, which the EU is committed to respecting. The EU Charter has become legally binding on the EU's institutions since the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty, 1 December 2009. In addition, all 27 EU countries have ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Children's rights are set out in The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), in the Universal Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and in other international human rights instruments including the United Nations Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, European Convention for the Protection of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, The Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.

The concept of child “means every human being below the age of eighteen years unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier” (article 1 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and article 122 of the Portuguese Civil Code).

The European Commission (EC) carries out policies and provides funding to protect the rights of the child, and those are part of human rights that the EU must respect, protect and fulfil.

Through the Commission Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions of 15 February 2011 (COM(2011)60 final): On a EU Agenda for the rights of the child, the Commission presented a EU Programme for the child rights, in which it aimed to strengthen the rights of children through 11 actions, concretizing in practice the principles set out in its Charter of Fundamental Rights. This initiative showed the EU's strong commitment to the promotion

and protection of children's rights and its strong commitment to respect for the best interests of the child in all policies adopted by the EU from then on. One of the actions concerned the strengthening of Internet safety for children: the Commission will contribute to make the justice systems in the EU more child-friendly and to improve children's wellbeing notably by: supporting Member States and other stakeholders in strengthening prevention, empowerment and participation of children to make the most of online technologies and counter cyber-bullying behaviour, exposure to harmful content, and other online risks namely through the Safer Internet programme and cooperation with the industry through self-regulatory initiatives (2009-2014)"(Annex 9).

The Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Regions, of September 13, 2011, focuses on the implementation of the Council Recommendation of 24 September 1998 on the protection of minors and human dignity and the Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20 December 2006 on the protection of minors and human dignity and the right to respond to the competitiveness of the European audiovisual and online information services industry, entitled "Protecting children in the digital world" [COM (2011) 556 final].

About the EU child protection policies, the Report from the Commission, of September 13, 2011, while expressing the same concerns and questioning whether public policies have been the most appropriate to ensure a high level of protection for minors across Europe, aimed to realize what had already been done regarding the protection of minors in the context of online activities, presenting the measures implemented to strengthen them. The conclusions then presented in the Report show that a positive overall result, obtained by examining the Member States' inquiry into the various dimensions of the 1998 and 2006 Recommendations, was that Member States were aware of the challenges posed to the protection of minors and look for an answer to solve the problem. A less favourable aspect, however, resulted from the fact that the differences and deep divergences between some measures adopted by the Member States, in particular in relation to illegal and unlawful content, were visible. The report ended with the need for Europe to adopt new measures based on the best practices followed by Member States in the ICT sector to protect children in the emerging digital world. Finally, the report found that the application of codes of conduct should be more widespread and closely monitored and that preventive measures should be intensified, particularly in schools.

On the subject of the direct lines, the Digital Agenda for Europe (2013) created a procedure to report offensive or harmful online content. These lines

benefited from the co-financing of the Safer Internet Program. Notification and withdrawal procedures are also in place for ISPs (Internet Services Providers) to remove any illegal content reported by the public through the hotline. However, it is known the European Commission's "Safer Internet" Program on safer use of the Internet is not enough as children continue to be able to access content that is not appropriate for their age, which is illegal and harmful.

Finally, the rights, equality and citizenship programme 2014-2020 aims to promote the rights of the child and prevent violence against children, young people, women and other groups of risk. (Regulation (EU) No 1381/2013 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 December 2013 establishing a Rights, Equality and Citizenship Programme for the period 2014 to 2020).

Livingstone, Tambini & Belakova (2018) analysed and evaluated key EU's policy developments on the protection of minors since 2012, concluding with some important future recommendations.

3. THE IMPACT OF CHILDREN'S INTERNET AND MOBILE USE

Minors' protection became a topic of interest because of the impact that Internet and mobile use can have on children's rights, behaviour, well-being and similar relationships. The debate in this area currently has focus on issues such as services on demand, illegal contents, the impact of the marketing/advertising, protection of children's rights, including data protection and right to privacy, and the dependence of the Internet.

3.1. Services on demand and illegal content on digital platforms, apps and online social networks

Since the last decades of the twentieth century, we have witnessed rapid and constant changes in the use of the media by consumers and especially by minors. Through mobile equipment, more and more children are looking for services on demand on the Internet. Digital platforms, online social networks and apps also have played a central role in this demand, modifying the way minors communicate with each other. In order to identify the safest and most beneficial applications for children, contributing to make them happier, Dias & Brito (2018) have identified the relevant criteria for evaluating the positive aspects of the applications, through surveys of families with children up to 8 years old, the Authors evaluated the digital practices of children, perceptions and digital mediation of the parents in the evaluation and choice of the applications.

Other new technologies will certainly follow in the very near future, which is already today, influencing society as a whole but where the younger and more vulnerable are also included. These social networks present various risks such as illegal content for minors, inappropriate contacts and inappropriate conduct. Magriço, Simões, Patrão & Morais (2018) argued that “trade with images of sexual abuse of minors (in Cyberspace) continues to grow at an alarming rate”, identifying the authors “the potency boomed by the use of the Internet and the informalism of communication as factors that enhance the phenomenon”. (Directive 2011/93/EU, 13 December 2011, combating the sexual abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography).

It is well known that children, in the gradual process of their development and growth, go through several stages, varying their behaviour in the Network and in relation to others depending on the age group in which they are in each moment. It is mainly from the age of 9-10 that the child begins to gain an “elementary knowledge of the market processes” (Santos, 2018), gradually reducing the prescriptive role of the family in the consumption options.

It is noted that the lack of parental responsibility for the choices of minors, beyond what would be desirable and advisable, could further aggravate their special vulnerability. In this sense, Magriço, Simões, Patrão & Morais (2018) considered that “the younger, victims of their curiosity, are especially vulnerable and unsuspecting (for inexperience of life), susceptible of being easily attracted to a situation of sexual exploitation or exposure of their privacy, without being aware of the meaning and consequences of their behaviour”. This is a fact that the advertisers are not unaware of and which they seek to take advantage of by enticing and seducing children and young people with trickery.

3.2. The influence of marketing in children’s behaviours

The new technologies, especially the Internet, have decisively brought the youngest audience closer to advertisers, allowing them to easily access content, games and a multitude of products without having to leave the house. If we add to these facilities, the natural way in which children use the technologies, almost as natural to them as breathing, we realize that the conditions are set for them to be displayed on the market and be an easy target for advertising.

The digital environment exhibits an irresistible power of attraction over children by revealing the vision of a new world, a virtual space, which they want to discover, preferably alone, pushing them into consumption, without being prepared to face it.

Reis & Dallafaver (2016) express their concern about the early consumption and the negative influence that advertising, especially online, cause in the development of minors and analyze, in particular, the role of ecological education in the awareness of sustainable consumerism by children and adolescents, defending their need. Internet advertisers take advantage of the lack of self-awareness of minors by leading them to become potential consumers by creating consumer habits. Quoting Vivarta (2013), the referred authors speak of “commercialization of childhood”, a phenomenon responsible for a series of serious impacts on the development process of minors. Among other problems, experts point to eating disorders, early eroticization, violent reactions and alcoholism.

4. DATA PRIVACY AND MINORS. THE GUARDIAN REPORT’S EXAMPLE

About the emerging challenges and risks to children’s privacy, Cunha (2017) considers “this new environment has exposed adults and children to fresh challenges that deserve special attention, especially those surrounding privacy”.

Also, Richardson (2009), Senior Advisor at European SchoolNet, considered that “the majority of online problems young people report to helplines is due to a breach of privacy at some point during their online interactions. Understanding what personal data is, and how protect it, is intrinsic to being literate in today’s world. Children need to learn from early childhood that privacy is their most precious possession –and an essential human right”.

The European General Data Protection Regulation, which came into force on May 25, 2018, predicts the consent of the minor, aged 16 or less, for the processing of personal data related to the direct offer of services of the company information, such as online services, by providing that Member States set a lower age for such consent, predicting that the minimum threshold of 13 years is safeguarded. As Richardson (2009) said, “this Regulation aims to help people protect their privacy, but the most reliable form of protection is sound education from parents, teachers and the whole community in which the child lives and learns”.

According to a recent report by The Guardian, a group of 23 associations for consumer, children’s rights and privacy, filed a complaint to the Federal Trade Commission, denouncing that Google, which owns YouTube, is collecting data from children with less than 13 years without the consent of the parents and to use them for advertising purposes.

4.1. A report about the impact of Internet dependence on minors

About the impact of Internet dependence on children, the “Connected Kids” (research conducted by icon Kids & Youth for Kaspersky Lab) showed that 55% of kids aged 8 to 16 were qualified as dependent on the Internet and were addicted to communicating through social networks and that they also had very dangerous behaviours in them, what makes children extremely vulnerable, placing themselves and the rest of the family in danger.

The research comprised an online survey of 3,780 families with children aged 8 to 16 (boys and girls equally) in seven countries: France, Germany, Italy, Russia, Spain, USA and United Kingdom, in 2016. The sample was focussed on those families whose children and parents said those were addicted to Internet use or used it almost all the time.

Related to the sharing of sensitive information the survey showed that 31% of Internet dependent children are willing to lie online about their age, pretend be older than they really were, and most minors end up sharing “too much personal information” without realizing that the information they share can be seen and used by dangerous people.

The data consulted showed that 71% of the Internet dependent kids, particularly the younger age group, shared on social media information about the school they attend, 60% shared the sites they visited often and 36% shared their addresses. This behaviour has a negative impact on the family relationship, being that, as this study showed, 30% of the Internet dependent children had disputes with parents because of the Internet use comparing with 10% of the non-Internet dependent children. Another effect is that the kids who are Internet dependent communicate less with their parents as a result of their connected devices.

An important conclusion of this study is that “overuse and dependency on the Internet is a very real problem among children. (...) Being dependent on the Internet brings risky behaviour and as kids spend more time online they are faced with more cyberthreats (48% of the kids Internet dependent, compared to 24% of non-Internet dependent children) and an increased chance of viewing inappropriate content” (28% of Internet dependent kids, compared to 11% of non-Internet dependent children). Accordingly, the most common threats faced by the kids surveyed were data loss due to viruses (11%) pornographic content (10%), password theft and account hacking (10%).

Although it is true that Internet provides children and young people a world of opportunities, frequently used by them to learn, communicate, interact and

play, this report showed we need to be very careful about the dangers of online dependence. In fact, one of the survey's main findings were that "as kids get older, their dependency on the Internet has a negative effect on their behaviour at school, their ability to make friends, their intelligence, and relationships with their parents, according to their evaluation".

The report ends with some recommendations to help parents protect their kids online. To avoid or reduce these risks some tips can help parents, such as: talk with their children about their experiences and concerns and try working together on some of the activities; teach children from an early age what can be shared online or not to preserve the family's safety and privacy; or set rules with their kids about Internet use and make sure these rules are respected. Finally, to help parents keep their children safe online, the use of "Kaspersky Safe Kids", specialized security software, allows parents to constantly control Internet and app usage.

The research concludes that "despite growing up with technology, children still need to be educated in how to use it properly and responsibly". (...) It is "vital that parents set a good example and take control of their children's Internet usage from an early age to minimise the damage".

This dependency of the Internet use is in line with other studies carried out in several countries, for example in United Kingdom, the regulator's Communications Market Report – OFCOM (<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/08/04/britons-addicted-to-the-internet-ofcom-warns/>), contains a survey of more than 2,000 adults and 500 teenagers exploring the impact the Internet has had on people's every day, warns that more than half of all users said they were addicted to surfing the web.

5. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN'S RIGHTS: PUBLIC POLICIES OR OTHER STAKEHOLDERS?

It is important to highlight that the responsibility for the protection of children's rights must be addressed not only to EU institutions and Member States but also to "international organisations, industry/business and other non-governmental bodies" (Livingstone, Carr & Byrne, 2015).

In the one hand, in the Conclusions on the application of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (12 October 2017), on the rights of child, the Council

highlights “the importance of protection of children and respect the principle of the best interest of the child (...) and underlines that cooperation and dialogue with stakeholders are key to ensure the respect of children’s rights, through the exchange of good practices, which should be further developed”. On the other hand, those responsible for Internet pages –Internet Services Providers–, which are dedicated to goods or services subject to age restrictions (alcohol, tobacco, games), should take measures to restrict access to them by minors.

Young people, as consumers, have a real importance in the economic context, oscillating between vulnerability and the search for responsibility. The role of teachers and trainers is to contribute to an education of young people for consumption that promotes citizenship with responsibility in conjunction with sustainable development.

A coordinated approach at European and then international level would make it possible to harmonize the protection on the children’s rights on the Internet and mobile use. The implementation of these measures involves the intervention of law-makers, experts and other stakeholders at the international and national levels, but also technological means of control and filtering of information must be used.

6. EDUCATIONAL STRATEGIES AND POLICIES CHANGES

At this point the question to ask is: Do minors need to learn about using Internet or are they digitally literate?

It should be stressed that the problem faced by minors is less technological than it may seem at first glance. In this sense, it has been argued (Lazo, 2017) that young people need digital training in a non-technological base, such as ethical, critical or aesthetic senses.

Lazo (2017) argues that minors need digital training, taking into account “information pollution and the vast amalgam of empty messages”, but also that the design of the Internet should be changed from a purely technological instrument into a pedagogical and educational dimension. Still, the same author asks if the minors, although very capable –“digitally competent”– will have enough training to know how to evaluate critically and claimingly when they surf the Internet? Therefore, the author concluded that they know how to use the tools very well, but this “does not mean that they are digitally literate

and that they know how to use content with a critical sense or that they can effectively control all communicative possibilities in new environments”.

Also, Ferrés & Piscitelli (2012) understood that digital skills have several dimensions beyond knowing how to handle, “technological use”, such as production, language, programming, ideology and values or aesthetics. Moreover, Ferrés *et al.* (2011) argues that young people, in addition to technological skills, know little of the other skills, which has the consequence of “a scarce development of the critical and creative sphere of their digital uses”.

According to a report from the National Communications Agency (ENACOM) of Argentina, more than ever, it is imperative to strengthen education, especially since many teens confuse information with advertising on the Internet. It is interesting to note that “studies conducted in the USA, England or Argentina show that young people read as true what they read on the Internet, that is, they do not seek to know the source of the information, not distinguishing between the given and the advertisement”.

This conclusion is based on a study by the same entity, made in 2017 with 350 students from public and private schools in the Argentine capital. About 80% of respondents then admitted that they “select the first page that appears on the screen” when they search the Internet. In the same survey, 5 out of 10 high school students admitted to use a single website to work, sparing comparisons with other pages - thus eliminating the risk of contradiction.

The confusion between information and publicity does not seem confined to Argentina. “The difficulty in distinguishing these two genres is common and there is an unbelievable faith in relation to what is on the Internet,” said Roxana Morduchowicz, who compared the research done in Buenos Aires with investigations carried out in England and the United States.

According to a Stanford University study from the last year, with a sample of 7,800 high school students from various cities in the United States, most teens do not distinguish information advertising and also believe that all information that is on the Internet is true.

In the United Kingdom, a study of 1,500 children developed by OFCOM (The Office of Communications, which is the regulator of all British commercial broadcast media), a body that regulates the British media, found that seven out of every ten pupils aged 12 to 15 did not distinguish these two disparate realities. Morduchowicz shows that: “Adolescents do not identify the source of the news but trust them without any problem. Even when they do not know

who produced the information they are sharing. This problem is at the root of a current and dangerous phenomenon: fake news or fake news. “The same person advises young people to pay attention to news headlines and to analyze their relationship with the rest of the text, since information is not substantiated.

As pointed out in the Conclusions of the report of the Commission of 13 September 2011, the Member States had committed themselves to strengthening media literacy. However, the involvement of all children and parents as well as the harmonization between schools and Member States remains a problem that needs to be addressed. Teachers must help their students to grow-up online by using eSafety resources with the Web We Want (<http://www.webwewant.eu/>). Parents should set an example by establishing familiar rules for the use of technology. The Safe Internet site can be a starting point for a more in-depth discussion of the risks that exist online, from Cyber Bullying to Fake News and other forms of manipulation. On the site you will find information and various resources that can be useful for parents and educators to help make the Internet a safer place for young people. If they understand the risks and see how they can protect themselves, children will be able to use the Internet more safely, but they will also find references about what to do and who to contact when they feel threatened.

A positive initiative was the presentation, on September 19, 2018, in Portugal, the Digital Chromium Caderneta “Surfing the Net in Security with Xico and friends”, in a partnership with the IPDJ (Portuguese Institute of Sports and Youth) and the Internet Centre Safe from the Youth Portal. The main objective of this initiative is to inform and raise awareness among the youngest public and parents of the safe and responsible use of the Internet. It covers several themes, in a playful way, through BD strips: Online Games, Data Protection, Social Networks, False News, Cyberbullying, Privacy and many others.

About what policy changes we want to initiate or contribute, several European Commission reports outline measures taken by Member States to protect children in the context of online activities, such as the European Commission’s “Safer Internet Program” on safer use of the Internet. It is important that the ways young people use the Internet are considered when online technologies, networks, services and policies are developed. However, as Livingstone (2016) highlights “some evidences showed that this objective has not yet been achieved”.

In addition, it is necessary to develop and publish researchs related to policies affecting children. In this sense UNICEF Office of Research-Innocenti

coordinates and facilitates cross-national research on children's Internet use in the South hemisphere by creating a research toolkit named "The Global Kids Online" network. The purpose of this project is to develop a research toolkit and central coordination of resources and expertise to support national partners in generation and sustaining a rigorous evidence base. The Global Kids Online is conducted in partnership with the London School of Economics and Political Science, the EU Kids Online network and with the collaboration of several researchers and experts from different parts of the world. In 2017, with the support of the Global Kids Online methodology was collected data from nearly 10,000 children across 4 continents, available at www.globalkidsonline.net.

Yet, this is not enough because children continue to be able to access content that is not appropriate for their age, which is illegal and harmful, without great difficulty.

While Internet's use varies considerably by age, circumstance and country, more children are going online, more frequently, via more devices and services, at an ever-younger age, and for more activities – many of them now essential to daily life (Livingstone, Lansdown & Third, 2017).

The results show that age restrictions on the Internet are ineffective against illegal or harmful content on the Web and result in the clandestine use of many online services, leading children to lie about their age to use prohibited sites, platforms and applications.

O'Neill (2018) observes "as children go online and use digital devices at ever-younger ages, new emerging challenges for their safety and for digital parenting emerge. The Internet of Things, for example, poses challenges and risks for children both in terms of privacy and security of devices in the home". In turn, technical systems such as filtering, age verification systems or parental control systems can be useful, but they cannot guarantee complete restriction of access to content by minors.

The real dangers of minors accessing illegal content on the Internet, visiting pornographic sites, downloading files with improper content or conduct or being victims of aggressive publicity campaigns, should interest the entire educational community and lead them to take an interest in defending the most vulnerable against the dangers of the digital world.

While Internet is a major challenge for minors, it is also true that it exposes some of the weaknesses of our time, including the educational system, which needs to be strengthened in order to protect young people in the digital world.

It is a challenge that, for now, has not yet found the most satisfactory answer (Santos, 2018).

In a Workshop organized by the EP's Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, was held on 22 February 2018, Lievens (2018) addresses the various regulatory instruments to realize the child rights in the digital age and identifying solutions and policy dilemmas regarding minors' protection. Withal, the workshop was focused, among others, on recommendations for EU policy developments on the protection of minors in the digital age and Livingstone, Tambini & Belakova (2018) recommended that "the Strategy for a Better Internet for Children includes the development of a comprehensive Code of Conduct for the converged digital environment that sets minimum standards for providers of services used by children, to replace the historically separate codes applicable to different sectors".

7. CONCLUSIONS

This paper has examined the available evidence regarding minors' protection in the digital age, in order to understand the threats and the opportunities in the digital environment.

Develop educational strategies is necessary. It is important to discuss the need to improve investment in education of the young and to teach them to deal with the digital world, as well as the commitment to combat illegal and inappropriate content. Dangers exist and will continue to exist.

We live in the digital age, there is no alternative than to face the problem. Therefore, it's important to develop educational strategies and others, which do not aim to the segregation of minors from the virtual environment of high technological sophistication, but rather to prepare them to face the inherent dangers through training and education, making them more capable and safer.

We conclude that parents and educators are not yet well prepared to continue to deal with the changes brought by technological innovations on their children.

It is imperative to discuss the need to invest in the education of the young, teaching them to deal with the digital world, as well as the commitment to combat illegal and inappropriate content.

At the same time there is a need to maximize their opportunities in terms of learning, participation and creativity. The new technologies must be used and contribute to the well-being and happiness of the children.

As it has been shown, consumer education is a measure that can help to bridge some of the gaps felt by young people in the digital environment in the use of ICT, presenting itself as an opportunity that opens up good prospects in the future. It has been growing in the priorities of the public policies and in the demand of the educators and in charge of education.

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El impacto de las Tecnologías de la Información y la Comunicación (TIC) en la sociedad contemporánea ha desencadenado un repertorio de oportunidades y amenazas que han devenido en elementos constitutivos de la cultura digital.

El ecosistema digital, precisamente porque abre nuevas posibilidades, plantea a las sociedades retos de índole muy diversa. Las estructuras de las naciones desarrolladas descansan hoy sobre un entramado tecnológico e informático para el que ya no hay vuelta atrás. Casi todos los órdenes de la vida se han visto influidos y, en ocasiones, modificados, por una nueva forma de interacción de las personas entre sí y de las personas con su entorno.

En un abrir y cerrar de ojos, la vida humana se ha vuelto virtual, interactiva, ubicua, hiperconectada, hipertextual. Ningún ámbito escapa al influjo de las redes digitales de comunicación y su cultura líquida de la visibilidad y la instantaneidad, es decir, del ser y del tiempo, los dos elementos que articulan las relaciones del hombre y su contorno.

Ahora bien, si la Sociedad de la Información es consecuencia del progreso tecnológico, este desarrollo no garantiza, por sí solo, el acceso universal y libre a dicha información (UNESCO, 2005). Es necesario dar un paso más hacia la Sociedad del Conocimiento, concepto que implica decisiones éticas, políticas y sociales mucho más amplias, y que tienen que ver con el desarrollo de tecnologías de la comunicación que permitan a los hombres acceder, en igualdad de oportunidades, al conocimiento, la educación y la cultura con los que afrontar su presente y construir su propio futuro.

