ABSTRACT

This study explores the participation in social networks of Year 3 and Year 4 Compulsory Secondary School students with regard to frequency of access and use, gender, ethnicity and special educational needs. The study adopted a mixed-method research design, surveying 2,734 students from 15 Secondary Schools in the Region of Murcia (Spain) who were asked to complete a questionnaire on a 5-point Likert scale. Data collection was complemented with the application of the “Phillips 66” technique to 157 focus students selected depending on their frequency of use of these technologies. The results reveal a widespread use of social networks, whether foreign and special needs students use them to a lesser extent. Students engagement with social networks is not solely oriented to meeting personal interests, but socio-affective and relational needs such as entertainment, being in touch with friends and meeting new people. These students do not hold the perception that social networks might impact negatively their academic performance, leisure time and personal relationships. Statistically significant differences were reported for students’ perceptions about the usefulness of social networks when it comes to improving existing relationships of friendship. In this respect, students with special needs feel less positive, while foreign students use social networks mainly for meeting new people. As for gender, women spend more time on social networks with a view to keeping in touch with people they do not
normally see. They also report to have problems with relatives and friends regarding their use of social networks, and they feel more anxious at the thought of not having access to them.

**KEY WORDS**

Social networks, secondary education, immigration, gender, special education needs

**RESUMEN**

En este trabajo se presentan los resultados de una investigación realizada con la finalidad de valorar la participación en las redes sociales del alumnado de 3º y 4º de Educación Secundaria (ESO). El objetivo ha sido conocer el acceso y uso que efectúan en su vida cotidiana, y las diferencias que se aprecian en función del género, origen (autóctono-extranjero) y necesidad específica de apoyo educativo (NEAE). El diseño metodológico ha sido mixto aplicando un cuestionario tipo Likert, con cinco opciones de respuesta, a 2.734 alumnos de 15 centros en la Comunidad Autónoma de la Región de Murcia y, complementada con la aplicación de la técnica “Phillips 66” a 157 alumnos seleccionados de cinco de los centros, en función del mayor o menor uso de estas tecnologías. Los resultados indican que el acceso a las redes sociales es mayoritario, aunque menor en el alumnado extranjero y con necesidad específica de apoyo educativo. La participación no está orientada únicamente a intereses personales, sino a necesidades sociales afectivas y relacionales, destacando el entretenimiento, la presencia de amigos y la necesidad de conocer gente nueva. No existe una percepción negativa sobre su consumo que influya, desfavorablemente, en las tareas de estudio, ocio y relación personal. Se aprecian diferencias significativas entre el alumnado relacionadas con la percepción que tienen sobre la mejora de las relaciones con los amigos, debido al uso de las redes sociales. Así, se identifica un sentimiento menos positivo del alumnado con NEAE, mientras que el alumnado extranjero las utiliza, principalmente, para conocer gente nueva. En cuanto al género, son ellas las que llevan más tiempo participando con la finalidad primordial de contactar con quienes no ven, manifestando tener discusiones con amigos y familia por su uso, y reconociendo tener más preocupación ante la posibilidad de no utilizarlas.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**

Redes sociales, educación secundaria, inmigración, género, necesidades educativas especiales

**INTRODUCTION AND STATE-OF-PLAY**

The bursting of technologies in our daily life has changed the way we interact with each other, fostered by the progress in the use of mobile devices equipped with Internet connection and, especially, to mobile phones, which have become the preferred mean and have dramatically increased their use among the population and, specifically, among the young (AIMC, 2019; Fundación Telefónica, 2019; INE, 2019). This digital revolution has promoted more intense social interactions but, at the same time, it may involve dependency issues and hazards for the young (Ricoy y Martínez-Carrera, 2020; Soler, López-Sánchez and
Lacave, 2018). The generalized use of mobile phones to access social networks and browse the Internet has given rise to new communication habits and routines among young consumers, who consider it as an ally in their life and a facilitator to develop social relations, finding new friends or reinforcing existing links. In the case of young people 14-19 years old, this device has become an essential socialization tool; they use it frequently and spend most of their time in front of it, as social networks represent most of their activity, together with messages, music, videos and downloads from multiple apps (Gewerc, Fraga and Rodés, 2017).

Likewise, most teenagers feel more competent than their parents from 10 years old (Garmendia, Jiménez, Casado and Mascheroni, 2016) and from Secondary Education we have observed that educational roles seem to be inverted as, for students, these instruments are part of their natural environment, whereas adults require an extra effort to become competent (Sola, García and Ortega, 2019). Digital practice has changed group and interpersonal communication among adolescents and is modifying the way they interact with each other, revealing that the communication goal of participation in social networks, mostly used by younger people, is a reality that allows them to join a pre-existing macro community in which almost any relationship among its members is possible and where the need of sharing a public identity is defined by the functionality of this virtual environment, which offers the possibility of exploring and constructing it among their contemporary and peer groups (Boyd & Ellison, 2008; Pacheco, Lozano y González, 2018).

The results of previous research works show that Secondary Education students are looking for a stronger social presence and look after their own image (García-Ruiz, Ruiz and Gómez, 2018). This reason justifies the continuous participation of the young in social networks, mainly due to the increasing importance granted to the construction of their own digital identity, which leads them to look for personal satisfaction and social wellbeing; that is why they try to express themselves and interact with each other through these channels almost exclusively (González and López 2018, Yau & Reich, 2018). The younger mainly participate in social networks for the relations they make more than to transmit any information; therefore, its value is attached to the possibility of meeting new friends, which is more than just having a contact list, fostering the creation of existing social and friendship bonds and the generation of new ones (Manca & Ranieri, 2017). Most users justify their membership in a social network because it allows them to keep in touch with friends and/or acquaintances, with those who he/she meets frequently, such as classmates, and those who are apart, to make
new friends; therefore, the motivation to participate in them and have several accounts involves the need of boosting and maintaining friendship relations outside social networks (Rubio, Jiménez and Barón, 2019; Vizcaíno, Catalina and Ayala, 2019).

Participation in social networks revolves around the need of communicating and they do it from iconicity; their conversations revolve around image, in any format, projecting their feelings and emotions and investing a great amount of time, being aware, sometimes naively, that they have the chance of showing their own profile before their peer group, identifying themselves through the exchange of messages among friends and acquaintances, allowing them to obtain information of interest and share it among followers and peers, who are their role models (Ibrahim, Wang & Bourne, 2017). The value of social networks for teens’ socialization and its early start is a common characteristic that started a few years ago; teens start their activity when they are 12 years old with their first profile and they do it continuously; we have confirmed that around that early age they create an important group that encourages participation (Bernal and Angulo, 2013; Colás, González and De Pablos, 2013; Garitano, Garrido and Andonegui, 2019; Greenhown & Askari, 2017; García, López de Ayala and Catalina, 2013).

This article tries to respond to such questions; therefore, we have suggested as a general goal getting to know the access and use of social networks by Year 3 and Year 4 Secondary Education (ESO-Compulsory Secondary Education) students of the Region of Murcia based on gender, origin (autochthonous-foreign) and special needs (with or without specific educational support) in order to understand their consumption in daily life.

**METHOD**

**Specific goals**

In order to attain the aforementioned general target, we have suggested the following specific goals:

- 1) Assessing the participation in the access and use by the young, considering the membership to the established groups.

- 2) Analysing advantages and disadvantages of participating in social networks.

**Sample**

The sample that produced the research data was made up of Year 3 and Year 4 Compulsory Secondary Education students registered in 15 centres of the Region of Murcia.
The selection was made through a two-stage random stratified sampling, where municipality was the only selection criterion, expecting to represent our universe proportionally to their distribution in the entire region. The 2,734 respondent sample corresponds to a trust level of 97%, offering a ±2.89 sample error.

**Techniques, tools and procedure**

With regard to techniques and tools, we used the descriptive survey method through a questionnaire as information collection instrument. It showed a six-dimension structure: *Identification, Internet, Social Networks, Mobile Phone, Game Console and Television*, drafting a total of 74 items. In this paper, we dealt with the third dimension referred to social networks in order to assess students’ access and preferences on this new communication channel. To this end, we grouped 17 items referred to: participation, purpose of use and time of use, activity performed and perception of the influence it has in relationships with family and friends and in homework completion.

Upon fulfilment of the survey, we first submitted it to a panel of experts for validation and assessment; the survey’s content was subsequently assessed in two stages: a first one, focused on assessing the construct or object of study, and a second one, focused on assessing the content of each item. Tool’s reliability (internal consistency) was 0.784 and, specifically, the study’s dimension reliability shows a 0.746 Cronbach’s Alpha. Upon collection of the information we proceeded to a quantitative analysis of 2,734 students, where we performed a descriptive analysis with the corresponding tables of frequencies and percentages and a two-variable analysis using significance tests, with the Pearson’s chi-squared statistical test.

In order to complement the data obtained in the questionnaire applied to 2,734 students and 15 centres located in different areas, we selected 157 students (6% of the surveyed students) from 5 schools of the region to participate in the “Phillips 66” technique. Such centres were selected considering the criterion of being above or below the average in the use of TIC, avoiding in such selection the coincidence of centres within the same municipality. Upon such selection, we carried out the group dynamic by means of such technique to go deeper in subjects related to motivations, effects, problems and beliefs related to the use and consumption of new technologies.

The procedure followed in order to carry out the “Phillips 66” technique in Year 3 and Year 4 Secondary Education classrooms consisted in making groups of six students, which had six minutes to discuss in small groups each of the questions posed on use and
participation in social networks. Each small group had a spokesperson who collected the contributions of his/her colleagues and exposed them to the group-class in a second stage. The researchers collected these assessments for further study. To analyse this technique, we used a series of categories, established a priori, whose purpose was complementing the information collected in the different dimensions of the survey.

RESULTS

With regard to the identification details of the research’s data producer sample and specifically with regard to the academic year, we can state that they are distributed alike, as 53% are third year students and 47% are fourth year students of Compulsory Secondary Education. With regard to distribution by gender, percentages are very similar, with male presence 1.4% higher in the research work. Regarding the birth place of the young, we have reduced the information collected to two categories for handling purposes: students born within the country and students born abroad. We have identified, according to this classification, that 80.7% of the total are autochthonous and 19.3% are foreigners. Regarding students with special educational needs (SEN), 82.2% of the students do not have such needs, whereas 17.8% do have such needs.

Access to social networks

Focusing in the participation in social media it is worth noting, as we can notice in figure 1, that almost 90% of adolescents of third and fourth year of Compulsory Secondary Education in the Region of Murcia access them; 71.4% of them so it with their own profile, 4.1% with no self-owned profile and 14.5% use both. Only 10% of the sample do not participate in them yet. Considering the differences between groups, as we can observe in figure 1, there is a significant difference in the access to social media regarding the origin of the students ($\chi^2(3)=59.458; p=0.000$), where autochthonous students are more prone to access with their own profile and are more participative than foreigners. This is also the case with students with special educational needs (SEN) ($\chi^2(3) =28.433; p=0.000$); the highest difference has been observed in those who declared not to participate in social media, where the percentage (16.2%) of students with SEN who marked this option almost doubles the other one (8.6% of student with no special educational needs).
Participation time

Most students have been participating in social networks for a while; only 11.7% have been doing it for less than one year, as shown in figure 2. Regarding differences by groups, girls have been participating for longer ($\chi^2(3)=15.646; p=0.001$) than boys. Likewise, students who have been doing it for more than three years are foreign students (25.4%), above autochthonous ($\chi^2(2)= 57.645; p=0.000$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time access</th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Autochthonous</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Without SEN</th>
<th>With SEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No access</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.079</td>
<td>0.188</td>
<td>0.086</td>
<td>0.162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access with profile</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.039</td>
<td>0.048</td>
<td>0.041</td>
<td>0.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access with and without profile</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>0.145</td>
<td>0.144</td>
<td>0.152</td>
<td>0.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access with profile</td>
<td>0.714</td>
<td>0.737</td>
<td>0.62</td>
<td>0.721</td>
<td>0.686</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Figure 1. Access to social networks](image1)

Regarding the weekly time devoted to social networks, from Monday to Friday, about half of the students (41.4%) invest less than 1 hour to this channel, whereas 35.4% invest 1-3 hours, 13.8% invest more than 3 hours and only 9.3% say that they do not invest any time in social media in working days. In weekends, the time investment increases and most answers concentrate between options “1-3 hours” (38.9%) and “more than 3 hours” (23.7%), reducing the option “less than 1 hour” (27%) with regard to the rating obtained during working days; the option “no time” remained in similar values with a 10.4%. It is worth noting that the hours invested in social media during the weekend were significantly higher in girls ($\chi^2(3)=31.325 p=0.000$); the results obtained confirm that more than a quarter of the girls (27.7%) invest more than three hours vs 19.7% of the boys.

Depending on their place of birth we have noticed significant differences in the time of access during the weekend in favour of autochthone students; 24.4% of them. Whereas 20.7% of foreign students invest more than three hours in social media and 40.3% of autochthonous and 32.6% of foreigners invest 1-3 hours; on the contrary, 26.3% of
autochthonous and 32.6% of foreigners invest less than one hour and 9% of autochthonous and 16.9% of foreigners invest less than one hour ($\chi^2(3)=33.804; p=0.000$).

With regard to the differences in the use of social networks between students with and without SEN ($\chi^2(3)=17.823; p=0.000$), the results show the existence of a more intensive use by students without SEN (15.4%) verses those with SEN (9.3%). Likewise, using them for more than three hours is the option selected by 24.5% of the students without SEN and 20% of the students with SEN. Therefore, we observed significant differences if we consider special educational needs, as students without SEN think more often that they benefit or probably benefit from the use of social networks (57.2%) vs (47.4%) of students with SEN ($\chi^2(3)=18.913; p=0.000$) who do not think they do.

**Friendship**

Another issue pointed out by students makes reference to the number of friends that the young have in social networks. Most of the respondents (60.8%) have more than 200 friends, whereas 19.8% have between 100-200 friends and 16.3% have less than 100. Only 3.1% have declared not having friends in social networks. With regard to the typology of friends they contact with they usually are: their closest friends (55.7%), those who they have not seen for a while (19.5%) and classmates (14.7%). Only 10.1% have used them to meet new people.

With regard to gender differences, we observed that girls are more prone than boys (23.7% vs 15.4%) to contacting people that they have not seen for a while. In addition, when it comes to assessing their contact with classmates, we observed significant differences ($\chi^2(3)=49.575; p=0.000$). The results show that percentages are higher in boys (18.5%) than in girls (11%). When we focus on nationality, data reflect that the percentage of autochthonous students is higher when it comes to contacting close friends. However, these percentages reverse in favour of foreign students when we make reference to contacting new people, people they have not seen for a while or classmates ($\chi^2(3)= 84.491; p=0.000$). The later situation is reflected in equal proportions taking into account students’ educational needs, as there is a higher percentage of students with SEN (15.8% against 8.9%) who prefer using social networks to contact new people ($\chi^2(3)=22.245; p=0.000$). If we analyse the number of contacts in the social network, we also obtain significant differences ($\chi^2(2)=65.920; p=0.000$). Foreign students have more than 200 contacts, even if the percentage is lower than that obtained by autochthonous students. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the percentage
corresponding to having “no contact” entails 2.5% for the autochthonous and more than the double for foreigners (5.6%).

**Perception on dedication**

Regarding students’ perception of taking time away from other activities to invest it in social networks, 68% declared that they do not take time away from anything. In the case of those who take time away from other activities, they prefer to take it away from their studies (15.4%), family (9.2%) and friends (7.3%). Focusing our attention on the fact of disregarding homework to invest time in social media, more than a third of the students think that they never disregard their homework (39.1%) and even more declare that they hardly ever do it (40.7%), which shows students’ positive perception on their organization of time invested in social media. On the other hand, 15.1% declare that they disregard them almost always and 5.1% declared to do it always. However, as reflected in figure 3, there are significant differences between groups regarding this issue ($\chi^2(3)=26.053; p=0.000$). Boys take more time away from studies and friends, whereas girls consider that they disregard their family more. On the other hand, a higher percentage of autochthonous students prefer to take time away from their studies, whereas foreign students prefer to take it away from friends ($\chi^2(3)=47.306; p=0.000$). Regarding differences by groups, we observed a higher percentage of use of social networks by foreign students (10.4%) to do the homework ($\chi^2(3)=24.787; p=0.000$).

Considering educational needs, more students with SEN prefer to take time away than students without SEN from studies and friends ($\chi^2(3)=2.385; p=0.000$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>General</th>
<th>Autochtonous</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Boy</th>
<th>Girl</th>
<th>Without SEN</th>
<th>With SEN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.695</td>
<td>0.619</td>
<td>0.67</td>
<td>0.693</td>
<td>0.699</td>
<td>0.597</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homework</td>
<td>0.154</td>
<td>0.159</td>
<td>0.136</td>
<td>0.174</td>
<td>0.135</td>
<td>0.146</td>
<td>0.194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td>0.073</td>
<td>0.056</td>
<td>0.142</td>
<td>0.085</td>
<td>0.059</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>0.092</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.103</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.113</td>
<td>0.096</td>
<td>0.136</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 3. The use of social networks takes time away*

**Benefits of social networks**

Social networks exercise a great ludic attraction for the young, as it helps them to maintain social relations in a simple manner. In this regard, more than half of the participants (53.1%) have stated that they use the social networks for fun and 35.6% because their friends are connected. Likewise, there is a small percentage who uses them to do the homework (5.8%) or to share photos mainly (5.5%).

In order to complement this information, we tried to go deeper into this matter through the “Philips 66” method, and therefore we asked to questions to the different groups selected:
Why are social networks so fun? and What do they offer you? More than three quarters of the participating students answered affirmatively that social networks are fun and only 12% answered that they do not have fun because of the improper use they may make or because it is a reason to get distracted from their homework. Of all the answers on the benefits of social networks, the most frequent is that referred to communication possibilities; understood in different ways, being communication with friends the most frequent use of the networks, even if it may be useful to contact with their partner of their family as an exception. They also provide the necessary means to share photos, videos or any kind of file, as well as meeting people and searching and watching all kind of audio-visual contents, turning into a source of entertainment and information, as they offer the possibility of finding all the games currently preferred by the young and to play online with their friends or new people they have just met.

We collected some of the answers of interest that prove such statements:

- “Because we get to know new things, upload photos with comments, comment on opinions about people and meet new friends. Because we are bored and we can communicate with friends and people remotely” (3º A15. C10)
- “Because it offers us information, I like them because sometimes there is really fun and good stuff in it. They are cool and we can communicate with our friends and relatives” (4º A7. C5).
- “Information and interest because it is socially cool and everyone wants to participate in them” (3º A11. C4).
- “Because we can talk to friends, play games, make video calls and send photos, videos, locations...” (3º A 19. C6).

Consequences of the participation

Considering the possibility that students remained without social networks for two weeks, 70.1% considered that nothing would happen and even 4.7% recognised that their lives would be better. On the contrary, some students would not know what to do in that situation (17.5%) or believe that their lives would be worse (7.7%). In the situation of not accessing the social networks for two weeks, data show that girls are more dependant than boys, as 11.1% of boys and 23.3% of girls would not know what to do if they disappeared (χ²(3)=68.226; p=0.000).

Regarding the relation among family, friends and social networks, 86.2% of the students declare that they have not had “ever” or “almost ever” arguments with their families due to the use of social networks, but we found that 9.9% say that they have arguments...
“almost always” and 3.9% answer that they always have arguments with their family for this reason. Girls are more prone to have arguments with their families due to the use of social networks ($\chi^2(3)=72.303; \ p=0.000$), as you can observe in figure 4. On the contrary, with friends, arguments are almost non-existing (87.6% have never had an argument), even if 6.8% did it for uploading photos without permission, adding tags (2.7%) or sending offensive messages (2.9%). With regard to gender differences, we observed similar percentages, even if in this occasion boys use to argue more and a higher percentage has had arguments for sending offensive messages.

![Figure 4. Arguments due to the use of social networks](image)

Finally, in order to assess our students’ relations with others and if they believe that their relations with friends have improved thanks to the participation in social media, we obtained a divided answer. On the one hand, those who answered with a resounding yes, say that their relations have improved (14.4%), others say that they have probably improved (40.9%) and others think that they have not improved at all (26%) or that they have probably not improved at all (18.7%). If we analyse the results considering students’ educational needs, we see that relations with friends due to the use of social media is lower in the case of students with SEN, as 33.1% declared that this channel did not help them to improve their relations with their closer friends vs 25.4% of students without SEN.
DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

According to the results of our study on adolescents’ participation in social media we observed that access by students of Year 3 and 4 of Compulsory Secondary Education at schools of the Region of Murcia is generalized, as only 10% declared not to use them. These teenagers are digital natives already and therefore they have started to build their first social profile much sooner (Plaza de la Hoz, 2018).

The early start in social media is a reality confirmed by the study participants, as they have recognised that they have been using them for several years and their participation uncovers that, in general, motivations are not only aimed at the personal sphere, but also to cover emotional and relational social needs (Bernal and Angulo, 2013; Colás, González and De Pablos, 2013; Notley, 2009), mainly motivated by prosocial interests, confirming individual and gender differences (Asterhan & Bouton, 2017).

In conclusion, the young feel attracted by social networks because it is a very important communication channel, especially with their closer friends (very few use them to communicate with their family or their partner) and at the same time they can meet new people, insisting in the possibilities that they offer to share pictures and videos through an exchange of images that contributes to a communication transformation (Svensson & Russmann, 2017). A reality that reflects the desires of an interactive generation with social media as an effective ally in their daily life, with interactions between values and feelings linked to a close union between leisure and entertainment, where the gratifications experience with use fuel the motivation to keep interacting (Dhir, Kaur & Rajala, 2018).

With regard to the main specific goal related to assessing the participation in access and use by the young considering their membership to the groups established in our study we can point out that, even if it is true that such an early start in social networks is widely generalized, we have confirmed gender differences in favour of girls and, regarding their place of birth, we have observed a higher participation of autochthonous verses foreigners; it is also lower in students with special educational needs (SEN).

In the case of foreign students, their participation is lower, even if there are significant differences regarding the period of time in which they have been participating in relation to autochthonous, as the percentage of foreign students who have been here for more than 3 years, which may be due to the need of keeping in touch with people from their country of origin and using the social media to meet new people.
Regarding access, we have not noticed any gender-based significant differences, but we have noticed differences regarding use. Girls have been longer in social media than boys and they invest more time in them during the weekend; they are more afraid of losing this channel and they also declare that they have argued with friends and family for the time they invest in them.

We have also confirmed that girls are more prone than boys to contact with people they have not seen for a while, whereas they do it to contact their classmates. In this regard, our results have confirmed those of Fernández, Peñalba and Irazábal (2015), who stated that girls use Internet more often to develop social relations. Female adolescents tend to be more sociable than boys, even if having few mutual relations in social networks is not detrimental for adolescent development and wellbeing; likewise, having an extensive number of friends in social media does not involve having high communication or affective skills nor having a good emotional wellbeing (Li, Hietajärvi, Palonen, Salmela-Aro & Hakkarainen, 2017).

Participation in social media is kept in a daily basis, we cannot forget that the emergence of smartphones increased the number of young people with access to social networks (Viñals, 2016), even if there are important differences between those who invest less than one hour a day and those who invest 1-3 hours. During the weekend, time increases significantly, and we have found differences in favour of girls and among students without SEN vs students of foreign origin, who invest less time than autochthonous students.

With regard to the second specific goal, Analysing advantages and disadvantages of participation in social networks, participation in social media in linked to entertainment and leisure, recognizing that they are investing part of their time in a highly satisfying activity, with the added friendliness of a screen to socialize and interact with others at any time (Bayer, Ellison, Schoenebeck & Falk, 2016; Punyanunt-Carter, De La Cruz & Wrench, 2017), whereas the young do not notice that this relationship channel and the time investment that it requires is incompatible with other activities such as study, friendship or family; we have confirmed that the young use ICT for personal communication purposes, aimed at entertainment and fun during their leisure time, than to practices conducive to educational development (Almansa, Fonseca and Castillo, 2013; Colas, De Pablos and Ballesta, 2018).

In this regard, the user-friendliness provided by social networks to establish social relations is another aspect mentioned to keep participating in them. More than a half of the students use them for fun and to connect with their friends; the need of searching information for educational purposes is well below. However, it is worth noting that its use has not been
an essential improvement factor of friend relations for all the participants, as we have confirmed that only half of them recognises an improvement in such relations, with existing differences regarding the perception they have on the improvement of friend relations thanks to the use of social networks, being more negative in students with SEN, where we have noticed a smaller sphere of friends.

Regarding the potential negative influence of participating in social networks, when it comes to reducing the time invested in other activities in the fields of study, leisure and personal relations, in general there is not a negative perception that prevents a proper time organization; in their opinion, it does not prevent them from doing their homework. However, a quarter of the sample has recognized a reduction in the time invested in studying (boys and autochthonous), family relations (girls) and friends (autochthonous and students with SEN) admitting that they can have a negative influence (Grion & Manca, 2016), while they are aware that social networks may take up time to do the homework, as very few use them for that purpose (García, López de Ayala and Catalina, 2013 ), a socio-educational implication of great interest that should be taken into account.

With regard to family relations, there is not a worrying perception among students, even if it can be a controversial point for a small group (we have observed discrepancies with parents among the girls with regard to the time they invest in social media). However, we have noticed a more permissive and unequal attitude that evidences that families are unaware of the potential risks (Livingstone, 2008; Livingstone & Haddon, 2011). We have suggested certain improvements, derived from this research work, aimed at training families at schools.

As a final recommendation we think that, given students’ participation in social media, education should not ignore them, but to assume a guiding role to ensure a proper use of these technologies (Colás, De Pablos and Ballesta, 2018; Plaza de la Hoz, 2018; Vázquez and Cabero, 2015; Koh, Jonathan & Tan, 2019), recognizing that their work must be focused on educational prevention for digital media use for a great diversity of students with different educational needs, coming from different cultures and socio-economical situations, where equal opportunities and their offsetting power must be ensured (Livingstone et al. 2019; Martínez-Piñeiro, Vila and Gewerc, 2018).

Finally, we would like to point out certain limitations in this article recognizing, on the one hand, that what we have presented is just a part of a wider research work, as commented in the Method section; due to this fact, certain essential subjects have been addressed in other previous works and which have not been addressed at the moment.
Likewise, we think that it is not advisable to generalize the about the results as such, as the sample has only collected data from the Region of Murcia and not from all the Secondary Education students, but just from Year 3 and Year 4 of Compulsory Secondary Education.

On the other hand, when it comes to select students for the qualitative technique, such number had to be reduced, choosing five centres. We think that, in order to obtain conclusive results on this subject area, it would be necessary to extend the number of participants in the Region of Murcia, and even develop it in other Autonomous Regions.

Finally, we think that the future research should study in depth the phenomenon analysed, with direct observations and other instruments, in order to obtain a deeper image and validate the present findings; more detailed qualitative studies shall be required on adolescents’ socio-digital practices.

NOTES

1 The codifications used are:
Level: 3rd. 4th.
Student: A and register number.
Centre: C and number.

SUPPORT

BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES


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