

# NETIQUETTE AND CYBERBULLYING IN THE CONTEXT OF DIGITAL PUBLIC RELATIONS OF SCHOOLS

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## Abstract

The internet, digital technologies and social media have become integral parts of our everyday lives, whether in their professional or personal aspect, or in the context of education and schooling. Along with teaching, one of the main objectives of educational institutions is the socialisation of students in line with common cultural and civilizational values, which include respecting diversity and tolerance towards the society we live in. Consequently, schools have made it their goal to curb and prevent student violence on the internet. The methods for raising awareness and providing information on this issue, as well as on the rules of proper online conduct, fall partially within the domain of schools' public relations. The opposite of cyberbullying, i.e. online violence, is netiquette. This paper is based on a study of the prominence of netiquette and cyberbullying in the public relations of secondary schools and the process of digital communication in which key actors, their students and teachers, are involved. An analysis of the content published through digital channels, websites and Facebook profiles, was carried out on a sample of 84 secondary schools in Croatia in order to answer the main study question: "How do secondary schools, through their use of digital communication channels, affect the processes of educating/informing students about the dangers of cyberbullying and raising awareness about the importance of netiquette?". The results were analysed using descriptive statistics, after which it was concluded that secondary schools have failed to recognise the potential of digital media and digital communication in the process of educating students about online conduct, mainly due to their insufficient use of digital communication channels in addressing their public. Based on the aforementioned, the study question was answered as follows: "Schools have insufficiently leveraged their use of digital communication channels to affect their students' awareness of cyberbullying and netiquette."

Keywords: digital media, digital intelligence, netiquette, cyberbullying, public relations, school.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Internet community is a large informal community, a metaphorical "cyberspace" that has made tremendous changes to the real world and the social community, by opening a range of digital communication channels, from mass media to social media [1]. "The population of modern users chooses, participates, creates, edits, publishes, communicates, exchanges, criticizes, advises, shops, it is mobile and ruthless, active and picky, computer literate and demanding." [2, p 55] The modern digital population is teenagers who are sitting in high school classrooms around the world right now, with only some of them using digital content intensively, while most only interacting with each other digitally. The benefits of digital media are reflected in the rapid and transparent retrieval of information, new opportunities for easy learning and content creation. Consequently, with the advantages there are also disadvantages, which primarily relate to the risk of receiving unwanted and inappropriate content, creating Internet content that mocks others as well as various forms of digital violence [3]. "Internet violence, known worldwide as cyberbullying, is a general term for any cyber technology communication activity that can be considered harmful to both the individual and the common good. This form of peer violence covers situations where a child or teenager is attacked by another child, teenager or group of children, via the Internet or by a mobile phone. Both the perpetrator (s) and the victim (s) are minors." [4] As in the real world, also in the virtual world, there is a set of rules of desirable behavior in the Internet community, that is, cyberspace etiquette, *netiquette*. Aware of the fact that rules are being violated, it is important to define the rights of children and young people in the digital age [5]. Public Relations, one of the younger professions, deals with the relationship between an organization and its public. Its task is establishing and maintaining two-way communication, creating a specific change in awareness, attitudes, opinions and behaviors inside and outside the organization, resulting in new or preserved relationships between the organization and its publics [6]. Within the scope of this topic, the organization and its public relations activities are viewed from the perspective of schools. [7] "In order to achieve their goals and to fulfill their mission, educational institutions and public relations must recognize, define and segment their publics" [8, p. 433].

## 2 METHODOLOGY

The potential population for the research consisted of all educational institutions in Croatia, but because of the research topic, secondary schools were selected for the sample, grammar and vocational schools for potential participants in the research. One reason for choosing high schools as major research participants is that, during their education, their students gain a scope of knowledge that links subjects such as philosophy, psychology, sociology and ethics. Philosophy is significant because it sensitizes students to critical and creative thinking and encourages them to question what they learn. Also, when enrolling in high school, one can choose ethics as an elective subject which is closely related to the topic of etiquette. Furthermore, vocational schools as the second group of potential participants were chosen to compare the attitudes of students who have ethics-related subjects in class to those who do not.

The survey was conducted during March 2019 by using the method of electronically searching the content of web pages and facebook profiles using the keywords *netiquette*, *internet etiquette*, *cyberbullying*, *virtual violence*, *electronic violence*, *assistance*. The research process began by determining the number of grammar schools and vocational schools in the Republic of Croatia. The exact number was taken from the websites of the Ministry of Science and Education. At the time of the survey, a total of 103 grammar schools and 309 vocational schools were numbered. From the 20 counties, four schools were observed, two of which were grammar schools and two vocational schools. The selection was random. The conducted research included the analysis of official web pages and official facebook profiles of 84 secondary schools in the Republic of Croatia, of which 37 are grammar schools (44%) and 47 vocational secondary schools (56%).

The subject of the research underlying this paper was the public relations of educational institutions in the Internet community of secondary education, viewed through the prism of digital communication of educational stakeholders, teachers and students, related to *netiquette* and *cyberbullying*. The aim of the research was to determine the impact of digital communication of key public relations stakeholders in schools, teachers and students, related to *netiquette* and *cyberbullying* topics, on development of the level of desirable student behavior in the Internet community. The research was conducted on the basis of a comprehensive problem of *netiquette* and *cyberbullying* in the student population.

The research question was asked: "How do secondary schools use digital communication channels to inform students about the dangers of cyberbullying and raise their awareness of the importance of netiquette?"

## 3 RESULTS

The survey included 84 secondary schools. According to the ownership structure, 83% of the schools are public schools founded by cities and counties, the owners of 9% of schools are religious communities with the right of publicity, and 8% of them are owned by private legal or natural persons. By type of education, 56% of the participating schools are secondary vocational schools and 44% are grammar schools.

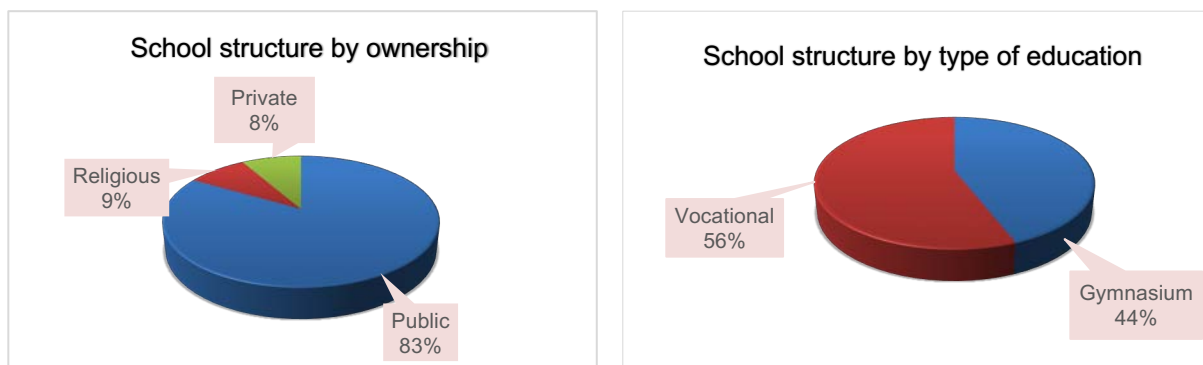


Figure 1. School structure by ownership and by type of education.

All 84 schools (100%) have an official website, while 68 schools (81%) have an official facebook profile in addition to the website. The number of Facebook profile is slightly higher in vocational schools (54%) compared to grammar schools (46%).

The measuring instrument used to conduct the survey was conceptualized into two main thematic units: a website and a Facebook profile. Each of these units has been considered within three aspects of digital communication: text, audio-visual and digital. Each aspect was explored using a specific set of variables. Text: frequency of cyberbullying term, frequency of cyberbullying term, frequency of term help. Audio-visuals: Violence Recordings, Promotional Video on Nonviolence. Digital: Records of Visitors or Followers, Customized Screen for Mobile Devices, Link to Website of Center for Missing and Abused Children. Metrics within individual variables were defined based on the Spearman test, while the analysis of the obtained results was performed using the descriptive statistics method.

### 3.1 Textual aspects

The textual aspects of the digital profiles of schools were analyzed on the basis of textual variables related to the terms cyberbullying and netiquette, analyzing whether those terms were used frequently, rarely or not at all. The analysis of the results showed that terms related to website violence are often mentioned in 7% of schools, rarely in 38%, and not mentioned at all in 55% of school websites. Terms related to etiquette are often mentioned in 2% of schools, rarely in 7%, and not mentioned at all in 91% of schools. As can be seen from Figure 2, the frequency of cyberbullying and netiquette on school Facebook profiles is only slightly represented. Violence terms are often mentioned in 2% of schools, rarely in 19%, but not mentioned at all in 79%, while etiquette is rarely mentioned in 1%, and even not mentioned in 99% of school Facebook profiles.

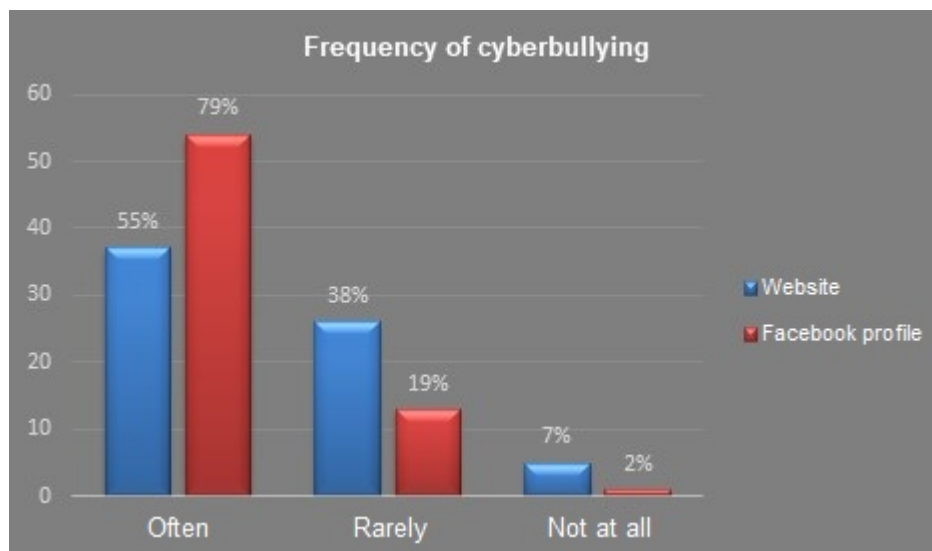


Figure 2. Frequency of cyberbullying on school websites and Facebook profiles.

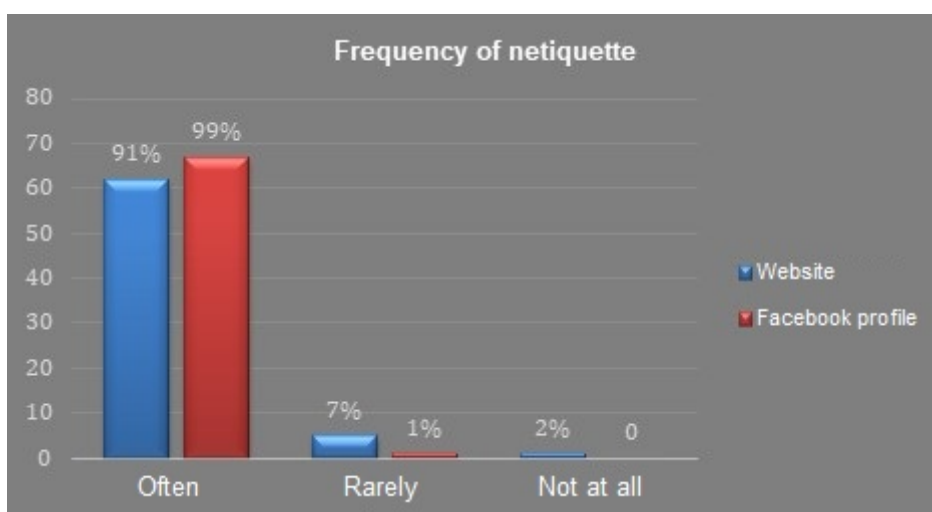


Figure 3. Frequency of netiquette on school websites and Facebook profiles.

### 3.2 Audio-visual aspects

The audio-visual aspects of digital communication were analyzed on the basis of audio-visual variables related to the (non) existence of recordings of violence or (non) existence of a promotional video on non-violence. An analysis of the results showed that bulletins exist on 1% of school websites, while none on Facebook pages. A promotional video on nonviolence exists on 9% of websites and 10% of Facebook profiles of schools surveyed.

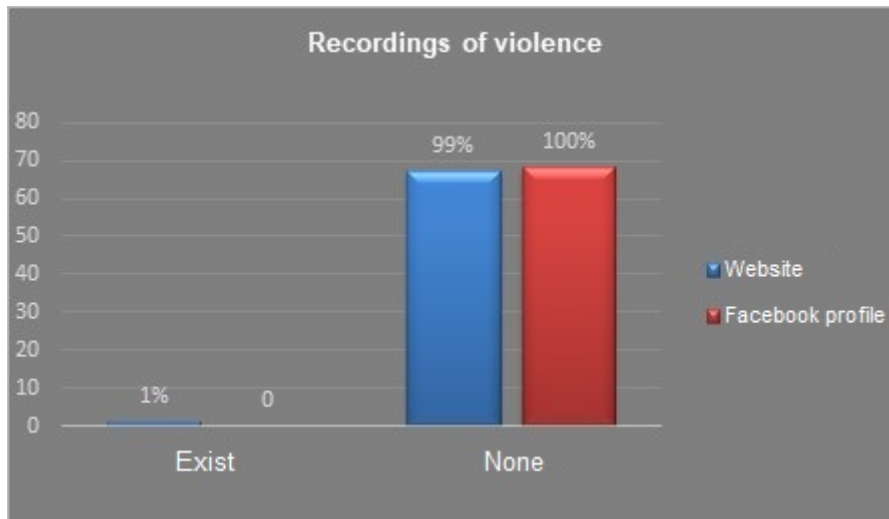


Figure 4. Existence of recordings of violence on school websites and Facebook profiles.

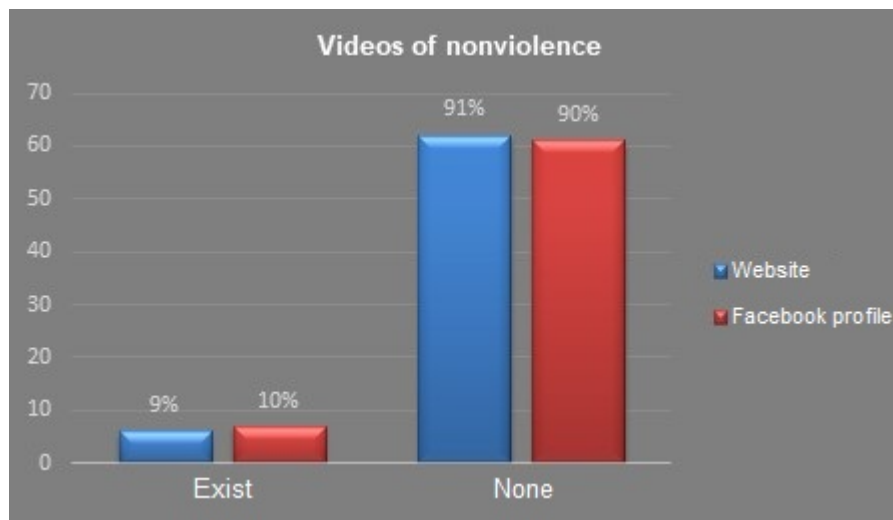


Figure 5. Existence of promotional video of non-violence on school websites and Facebook profiles.

### 3.3 Digital aspects

The digital aspects of communication were analyzed by using a set of digital variables related to the number of visitors or followers, a custom review on mobile devices and a link to the website of the Center for Missing and Abused Children and the Safer Internet Center. Attendance records exist on 46% of school websites, and attendant records on all Facebook profiles (100%). Facebook profiles are, by nature, tailored for mobile browsing, showing a 100% result that is the same for the websites of the surveyed schools.

The results show that 3% of schools have a link to the Center for Missing and Abused Children and a link to the Safer Internet Center, while 25% of them have a link to only one Center on their web pages, and 72% have no link to any Center at all. The analysis of Facebook profile shows that no schools have a link to both Centers, while 12% of schools have a link to one Center and 88% of schools have no link to any of the Centers.

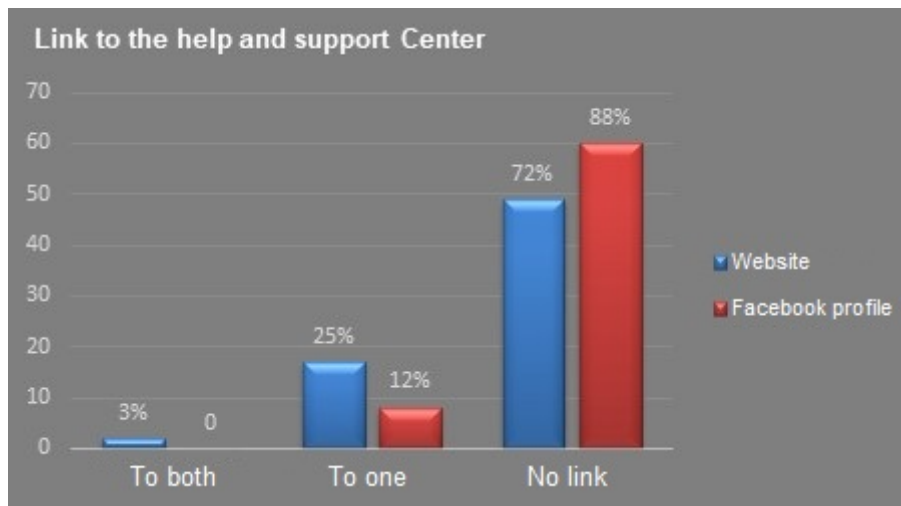


Figure 6. Existence of link to the Center for Missing and Abused Children and a link to the Safer Internet Center.

The results of the research show the answer to the research question: "To what extent do secondary schools use digital channels of communication to inform students about the dangers of cyberbullying and raise their awareness of the importance of netiquette?" which reads briefly as "Insufficient." Its description is evident from the elaboration of the hypotheses given below.

H1: Secondary education does not sufficiently inform students about cyberbullying and raise netiquette awareness through the use of digital communication channels. confirmed

The notion that schools are not sufficiently influential in informing students about cyberbullying and netiquette awareness is inferred from the analysis of textual variables which show that the terms cyberbullying and netiquette are rarely or not mentioned at all on their official websites and Facebook profiles. Analysis of audio-visual variables shows that only 9% of high schools publish a promotional video about non-violence. A further confirmation that secondary education institutions are not sufficiently influential in informing students about cyberbullying and netiquette is that only 3% of schools have a link to the Center for Missing and Abused Children and a link to the Safer Internet Center on their schools' websites, while 25% on their web pages have only a link to one Center, while analysis of Facebook profiles found that no school has a link to both Centers, and only 12% of them have a link to one of the Centers offered, while the remaining 88% have no link to either one Center.

H2: Cyberbullying and netiquette are underused by high school educational institutions in digital public relations communication. confirmed

The hypothesis was confirmed by analyzing textual variables related to the frequency of occurrence of the terms cyberbullying (virtual, electronic violence) and netiquette (internet etiquette) on school websites and Facebook profiles. The results show that in 7% of school websites, the term cyberbullying (virtual, electronic violence) is frequently mentioned, 38% rarely, and 55% not mentioned at all. The analysis of Facebook profiles shows that only 2% of them often mention the term cyberbullying, on 19% is rarely mentioned, while the remaining 79% do not mention it at all.

H3: Audio-visual aspects of digital communication in secondary educational institutions are not encouraging enough to suppress cyberbullying. confirmed

The hypothesis was confirmed by analyzing the results of the variables from the audio-visual aspect. Nonviolent promotional videos on websites are shared by 9% of schools and 10% share them on official Facebook profile.

H4: Digital communication through web pages is technically adapted to the requirements of standard mobile devices. confirmed

The hypothesis was confirmed by analyzing the results of the variables related to website fitness testing and official Facebook profile previews on modern mobile devices. The test results show

that all websites and all Facebook profiles of schools, 100% of them, are customizable on modern mobile devices.

H5: The most digital profiles, websites and Facebook profiles, of educational institutions have as a component a link to the Center for Missing and Abused Children Center and a link to the Safer Internet Center website. rejected

The hypothesis was rejected based on the analysis of the results of the digital aspect variables related to the research on the frequency of terms of help on school websites and Facebook profiles. The results show that the term help very rarely appears. Only 3% of schools have a link to both Centers on their websites, 25% of schools have a link to only one Center, while 72% of schools have no link to any Center at all. No school on its Facebook page has a link to any of the Centers.

The combined conclusion from the hypothesis analysis points out that public relations of schools are in the early stages of development because it is evident that schools have not recognized the potential of digital media and digital communication with students in the process of informing and educating them about their behavior in the Internet community.

## 4 CONCLUSIONS

The results of the research show the fragmented presence of public relations in schools and the low level of digital communication with their main stakeholders, students, who frequently use them. Consequently, it is concluded that the impact of schools on raising awareness of the desirable behavior of students in the Internet community, as well as raising awareness of the perils of digital violence, is minor in relation to the opportunities available to schools, while informing, teaching and providing education especially in terms of cyberbullying and netiquette.

Adolescence is the most sensitive part of growing up in which it is important for these young people to be accepted, both through real and virtual social networks. A step towards achieving this goal has a starting point and the basis in communication, especially digital communication, which needs to be aligned at school level with the opportunities offered by the digital society and the Internet community in which they operate.

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