

Mediterranean Issues, Book 2

Katica JURČEVIĆ
Ljiljana KALITERNA LIPOVČAN
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PUBLISHERS

Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar

VERN' Group

Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts, Scientific Council of Anthropological Research (HAZU)

Euro-Mediterranean Academic Network (EMAN)

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Zlatko Rebernjak (Forma ultima); Photo: Nikolina Štefančić

PRINT

Tiskara Zelina d.d., 2019

ISBN 978-953-7964-77-1 (Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar)

ISBN 978-953-8101-04-5 (VERN' Group)

CIP catalogue for this book is available from the
National and university library in Zagreb
under the number 001034095

The book is published with the financial support of the Ministry of Science and Education of the Republic of Croatia.

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Tihana BABIĆ, Silvija GRGIĆ

NET GENERATION AND PERCEPTION OF THE ELECTRONIC VIOLENCE

THE YOUTH: LIVING IN A WORLD OF CHANGES AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Things that we could not even imagine before are the things we cannot imagine living without today. The Internet, often referred to as the “network of all networks,” has more and more users every day. We live in a time in which networked societies are on the rise (Castells, 2008: 38). Networking has increased significantly with the appearance of social networks. Due to the simplicity of their use and accessibility, as well as the fact they incorporate all known types of media, social networks are gaining users on a daily basis. However, while the number of Internet users is increasing, especially in the context of social networks, the amount of negative and harmful effects and content, such as electronic violence, is also on the rise.

The influence of network environment is so intense that younger generations are defined through media and technology. In the modern society, youth is considered the period of life between childhood and adulthood with the increasing tendency of prolongation. The influence of network surroundings is so intense that the young generation is defined in literature through media and technology more than ever before. This is a generation of young people who have fun, socialize, learn, work, buy and communicate with the help of technology, spending time on the Internet combining fun and learning. The names used for this generation are usually: Net generation, Y generation, millennials or network generation (net gens) (Čačić, 2012: 81). Despite the opinions of certain authors that the affiliation with a specific generation is not determined solely by the time someone is born, but entails someone’s attitude towards beliefs, values, culture norms and material conditions, the Net generation (Y, millennials) in Croatia, which will be analysed in this paper, is not characterized by a digital divide, since most pupils and students have access to computers and the Internet, if not at home, then at least in schools, universities and libraries (Čačić, 2012: 82). While on the one hand, the availability and the exposure to a large amount of information entail the increase in choices and freedom; on the other hand, they carry a certain risk in cases where individuals, particularly children and young people, do not have a formed system of evaluation (Čačić, 2012: 85).

Considering that their lives have been intertwined with information technology, the members of the Net generation do not particularly care about the personal infor-

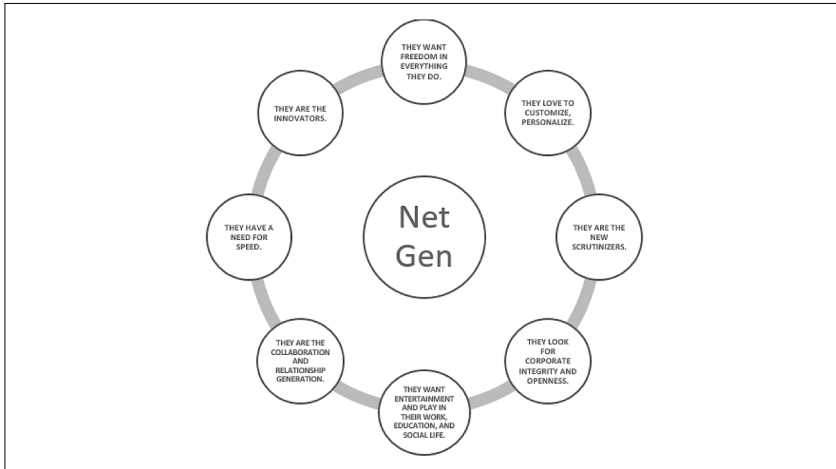


Figure 1 The Eight Net Gen Norms (Source: done by the author according to Tapscott, 2008).

mation they post on social networks. They carelessly share information about themselves and others on social networks with the intention of exchanging what they find interesting, completely neglecting the fact that the Internet does not forget (Bilić 2015, according to Tapscott, 2011). Respecting others is also considered a significant moral problem of young people in the virtual world. A popular opinion and a misconception about the Internet is that it is a world free of obstacles and limitations, and that no specific rules of conduct have been strictly defined. Furthermore, anonymity is another factor which contributes to the decrease of perpetrators' fears they might be located and sanctioned. In addition, the absence of effective feedback on the harm and the pain their behaviour can inflict on their victims, as well as the opinion that this type of behaviour cannot be considered immoral since there are no visible consequences and there is a distance from the damage their actions cause, they feel more encouraged to perceive the aforementioned behaviour as entertainment or a joke (Bilić, 2015).

According to the Croatian Bureau of Statistics data for 2017, the youngest population (between the ages of 16 and 24) is still on the forefront of computer use and individual computer use, while the number of users is decreasing exponentially with the rise in their age. A similar trend has been observed in the work status structure where pupils and students represent most frequent computer users.

Modern information society is not only "a society of knowledge" but also a society confronted with problems in the educational development, an example of which would be the expansion of values oriented towards a hedonistic or idle concept of living. Press, radio, TV and the Internet are overwhelmingly focusing on providing their viewers with entertainment content at the expense of informative, educational and scientific content (Miliša, Tolić, Vertovšek, 2009: 13, according to Miliša, 2006). The youth and children are not only the most represented age groups on Internet websites but also the most vulnerable age group of the modern information society.

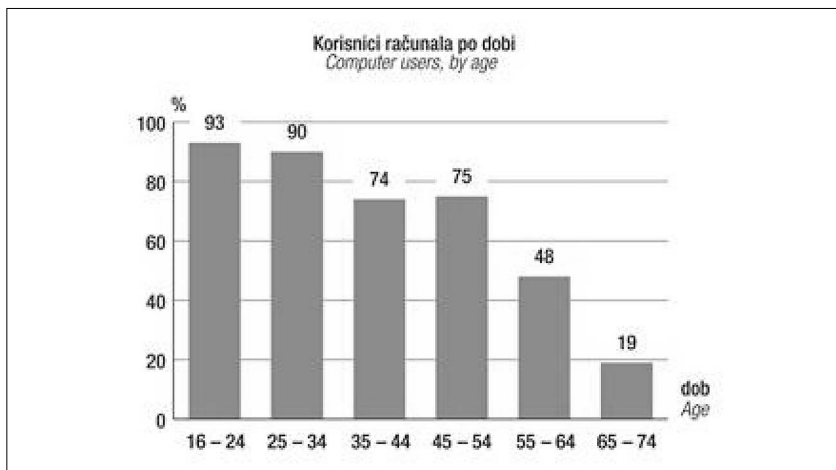


Figure 2 Computer users by age in Croatia, year 2017 (Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics).

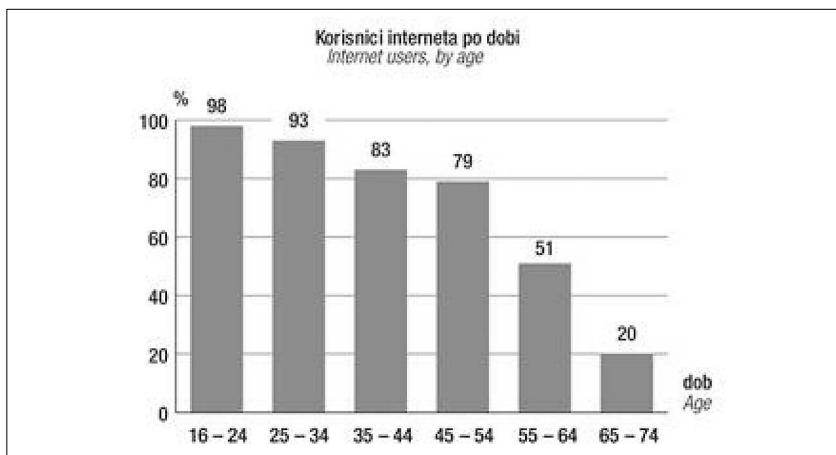


Figure 3 Internet users by age in Croatia, year 2017 (Source: Croatian Bureau of Statistics).

ELECTRONIC VIOLENCE

Any communication activity (via e-mails, web pages, blogs, videos, by means of computers, mobile phones, tablets etc.) which serves to humiliate, mock, threaten or terrorize a person in any shape or form, can be considered cyberbullying. This is particularly problematic in the context of children and young people, since the end goal is always to hurt, disconcert and harm a child in other ways, be it via text or video messages, photographs, calls or negative comments. Cyberbullying can be perpetrated by a single person, multiple people and even children themselves and it is a general term for any kind of communication activity through technology which could be considered harmful to both the individual and the general good.

Considering the fact that, while discussing violence in the media, many scientists cannot come to a mutual understanding on what constitutes violent content, there are three key elements which serve to distinguish between definitions:

- *Intent* — a question is posed whether an intent to perpetrate violence needs to exist; that is, whether, alongside murders and other inflictions of severe physical injuries, one could qualify accidents and natural disasters as violent acts?
- Damage caused by an act of violence — should the pain inflicted on both humans and animals be considered violence, and what about violence committed against material things?
- Types of violence — can violence be both physical and verbal? (Kanižaj, Ciboci, 2011: 15, according to Potter, 1999: 64).

One of the most recent and commonly used definitions is Potter's definition of violence in the media which defines violence as "the harm to one's physical and emotional well-being", covering all the aforementioned elements (Kanižaj, Ciboci, 2011: 16, according to Potter, 1999: 67).

Although the discussions on what exactly online risks and violence entail have not been finalized, generally speaking, one could state that online risks include both intentional and inadvertent experiences which increase the probability of harm at the expense of an Internet user, including pornographic, violent and racist content, content by means of which users harm themselves, as well as content full of violence, inappropriate and potentially harmful content such as soliciting or disturbing, and finally, the issue that has been drawing a lot of attention in recent times — problematic behaviours among peers such as harassing, "happy slapping" or attacks on privacy. The risks could also be categorized by content risks (a child is the receiver of unwanted or inappropriate mass communication), contact risks (child participates in risky peer or personal communication), and conduct risks (a child contributes to risky content or contact through their acts) (Staksrud, Livingstone, 2009).

Apart from the irrelevant information, we are exposed to morally and ethically harmful information on racism, religious intolerance, pornography, violence and information that promote various religious and economic ideologies, some of which are reflected in the so-called digital divide between the information-rich countries and those that do not have access to the information necessary for sustained and balanced development and progress of the entire world, especially poor countries (Nevins, 2004). On the other hand, the use of new media, especially the Internet, is what constitutes an entry ticket to a normal life today: those who are not "media literate" are in danger of being isolated from various aspects of life. Pedagogues and educators believe that they are already late in terms of education and that they need to make up for the time lost or wasted, and their approaches to media education and media literacy education vary (Labaš, 2015 according to Uldrijan, 2011).

RESEARCH AMONG STUDENTS OF ALGEBRA UNIVERSITY COLLEGE

The research was conducted through two separate surveys over the course of two years, and on two different groups of participants with both groups corresponding to the definition of Net generation. The first survey was conducted in June of 2016 in the summer semester of the academic year 2015/2016, while the second survey was conducted in September of 2018 in the the summer semester of the academic year 2017/2018. The results of both surveys are based on the answers given by the participants within the student population at Algebra University College. The data given below was obtained from the survey questionnaires which were comprised of twelve questions and had been anonymously filled out by students. Considering the fact that the students in both groups are members of the Net generation, which increasingly uses the media and social networks in particular as a communication channel, the research tried to determine whether the students of Algebra University College were familiar with terms such as cyberbullying and the concept of electronic violence on social networks. Another research goal was to determine whether the students had ever been victims of electronic violence or participated in some kind of electronic violence against another person on social networks.

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

In the academic year 2015/2016, 590 students with an active student status were enrolled in the undergraduate programs at Algebra University College, while in the academic year 2017/2018, 820 students were enrolled. The total number of survey participants was 146. The first survey had 73 participants, students of the following undergraduate programs: Applied Computing and Multimedia Computing. Table 1 shows the structure of the participants in the academic year 2015/2016.

Table 1 The structure of participants by study program, gender and academic year 2015/2016

Undergraduate Study	Applied Computing	Multimedia Computing
Total number of Students per Study Program (N)	49	24
Number of Students by gender		
Male	46	22
Female	3	2
Number of Students per academic year		
First year	13	9
Second year	22	15
Third year	14	0

The second survey had 73 participants, students of the following undergraduate study programs: Applied Computing, Multimedia Computing and Digital Marketing. Table 2 shows the structure of the participants in the academic year 2017/2018.

Table 2 The structure of participants by study program, gender and academic year 2017/2018

Undergraduate Study	Applied Computing	Multimedia Computing	Digital Marketing
Total number of Students per Study Program (N)	39	19	15
Number of Students by gender			
Male	36	16	9
Female	3	3	6
Number of Students per academic year			
First year	19	10	12
Second year	17	8	3
Third year	3	1	0

The overall ratio of all student participants according to gender is 88% male to 12% female participants. The overall ratio of student participants in regard to their study year is as follows: 43% are first-year students, 12% are second-year students, while third-year undergraduate students account for 45% of the total number of participants. The average age of participants is between 19 and 22.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Apart from the general objective of the research, i.e. determining whether the students who use social networks as a communication channel are familiar with the terms and types of activities concerning electronic violence and the safety of communication, some other issues, such as the students' familiarity with the terms such as cyberbullying, bullying and social network harassment, as well as their general knowledge of the concept of electronic violence on social networks were also tested. The research also tried to determine whether those students who use social networks had ever been a victim of electronic violence on social networks or whether they had participated in some form of electronic violence against a person on social networks. Finally, the research tried to define whether students perceive electronic violence as harmless and/or fun. The lack of will or ability of some participants to fill out the survey for numerous reasons appeared to be the main limiting factor.

INSTRUMENTS

The survey data are collected by means of a survey questionnaire with closed questions and pre-defined answers. In six of the questions students were able to offer their own answer. One of the questions offered the possibility of choosing between two different suggested responses (yes or no), two questions required a student to answer by choosing a level of frequency on a Likert-type scale (never, rarely, sometimes, often, most often), two questions required an answer by choosing an option on a Likert-type level of agreement scale (no, partly no, neither yes, nor no, partly yes, yes) while other questions required the participants to choose between multiple answers. The re-

search was conducted collectively and anonymously. The participants were briefed on the purpose of the research both orally and in writing on the actual survey questionnaire paper. No ambiguities were reported in the questionnaire, so one can conclude that the questions were clear.

The data was processed using quantitative statistical analysis of pre-isolated variables as well as the description of the condition and the identification of casual links between individual components.

RESEARCH RESULTS

It has not been noted that the research results show any differences based on gender, student status or study year, therefore the aforementioned variables were not used to present the results.

The answer to the research goal 1:

Are the students familiar with terms such as cyberbullying, bullying and social network harassment?

The majority of participants, that is 56% of them, consider cyberbullying to be any form of communication by means of cyber technology that could be considered harmful for an individual and the greater good, while 43% of them believe this term refers to any kind of communication by means of cyber technology that is harmful for an individual. In regard to the question on bullying, the possible answers were coded in 6 variables, where five of them offered pre-defined answers, while the sixth referred to the possibility of arbitrary answer entry (Table 3). There was also the option of choosing between multiple answers. The frequency of response was 447 with all the participants offering an answer to the posed question. Out of the total number of participants, which was 146, most of them associate bullying with websites which identify and shame private persons, with photographs which degrade private persons and with sharing personal information in order to blackmail or harass other people with unwarranted friend requests or messages. 5% of the participants chose the answer "other" and offered as a response "in recent times it can be anything" or "I don't know".

Table 3 Offered answer options and frequency of response to the question:
What constitutes bullying and harassment on social networks (for instance on Facebook)?

<i>Answer options to the question What constitutes bullying and harassment on social networks (for instance on Facebook)?</i>	<i>Frequency of response in percentages</i>
a) Websites which identify and shame private persons	67%
b) Photographs which degrade private persons	67%
c) Photographs or video recording of physical bullying published in order to shame the victim	64%
d) Sharing personal data in order to blackmail or harass people	66%
e) Continuous targeting of other people with unwarranted friend requests or messages	38%
f) Other (what)?	5%

Answer to research goal 2:

Have the students who use social networks ever been a victim of electronic violence on social networks?

Four participants did not answer the question; the total number of participants was N=142. 73% of the participants stated that they had never been a victim of electronic violence on social networks. 17% of participants stated that they had rarely been a victim of electronic violence on social networks, and six of them stated “sometimes” and only 3% of participants “often”, while 1% stated they had most often been a victim of electronic violence on social networks. It is interesting to use comparison with the results of this research goal which state that only 8% of participants are aware of what electronic violence constitutes, which then poses the question whether the high percentage of people who claim they had never been victims of electronic violence is the consequence of their lack of awareness of what this type of violence actually is. The participants who stated they had been victims of electronic violence indicated privacy attacks, spreading violent and offensive comments and sending viruses, photographs and unwarranted content to e-mail addresses or mobile phones as the most common forms of this type of violence.

The answer to research goal 3:

Have the students who use social networks ever participated in a form of electronic violence against a person on social networks?

Six participants did not offer any answers which means that the total number of participants who offered an answer was N=140. 76% of participants stated they had never participated in electronic violence against a person on social networks. 12% of students stated that they rarely participated in electronic violence against a person on social networks, 6% opted for “sometimes”, while 3% of students chose the “often” and even “very often” option. It is interesting to notice that a small difference is detectable in the sense that with the rise in awareness about electronic violence, the frequency of this kind of violence and participation in it decreased. The participants who stated that they had participated in electronic violence indicate the following as the most common forms of violence against others: encouraging group hate, attack on privacy, spreading violence and offensive comments and false representation.

Answer to research goal 4:

Do students perceive electronic violence as harmless and/or fun?

4% of participants did not answer the question, while 65% stated they did not consider electronic violence harmless and fun. 9% opted for the “partly no” answer, and 2% of students agree with the claim that electronic violence is harmless and fun, while 5% “partly agree”. 15% of the participants of this research do not agree nor disagree with the notion that electronic violence is harmless and fun.

Table 4 Offered answer options and frequency of response to the question:
Do you perceive electronic violence as harmless and fun?

Answer options to question Do you perceive electronic violence as harmless and fun?	Frequency of response in percentages
a) No	65%
b) Partly no	9%
c) Neither yes nor no	15%
d) Partly yes	5%
e) Yes	2%

CONCLUSION

The results also show a small increase in the awareness of what electronic violence means from 4% in 2016 to 11% in 2018, but only 11 out of 146 students were fully aware of what the term security on social networks refers to (average 8%). Every fourth student recognized themselves as a victim of electronic violence on social networks. Every fifth student participated in some kind of electronic violence against another person. Every tenth student considers electronic violence harmless and fun. We can conclude that the students are not fully aware of what the term security on social networks refers to although they are familiar with terms such as cyberbullying. Also, the results of second research show that over the past two years, students' awareness of electronic violence has slightly increased but is still at a low level. Learning about responsible behaviour toward oneself and others is crucial for the future of young people and education should have a leading role in that process.

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