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## **Adolescents' perceptions of their digital rights**

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### **Abstract**

*This article explores adolescents' perceptions of their digital rights. A questionnaire was applied to a sample of secondary school students in Madrid. The questionnaire was designed to explore students' perceptions of their own rights in different digital contexts as well as the uses given by them to different social networks. The survey was designed on the basis of a set of dilemmas made specifically for this study. The dilemmas were designed to explore how students understand their rights when they use digital social networks. This paper argues that adolescents' understanding of their own rights is a very important issue today in the field of education, especially when we talk about the importance of educating children and young people in active citizenship and in the active defence their rights in different social contexts.*

### **Introduction**

Understanding the rights of children and adolescents is a subject of much relevance today, when we talk about the importance of educating our children in active participation of its citizenry, which is achieved only to the extent that they understand their rights, the limits thereof, and learn to put into practice for themselves and their peers in different contexts of everyday life. The daily in children and adolescents is increasingly linked to use of information technology and communication technology (ICT), and in particular is linked to use of social networks through which they are developing most of its socialize with their peers.

In this context, it is very important to do research and do analysis of how these new life situations affect the exercise of the rights of citizens in general and on our children and adolescents in particular. From this point of view, research from educational psychology and developmental (Ruck, Peterson-Badali y Day 2002; Cherney, Greteman y Travers 2008; Cherney y Shing 2008), around understanding of children rights and adolescents have been based principally on protection exerted by adults about them and how does this affect their individual (Melton, 2008); or are based on an understanding of the rights in strictly judicial areas, but have not investigated the interpretations and applications that make teens and their parents of rights called of protection, provision and participation (Liebel,2006) in digital contexts.

In these studies researchers do the analysis of children's rights based on the Declaration of the Rights of Children (UNICEF, 1989), takes a child as anyone under 18. It is important to note this document does not distinguish between children and adolescents, but all fall into the same category of minor which according Ochaita and Espinosa (2002) is a category puts them in not adulthood, therefore denied access to the right of

freedom and understood as denial of participation. In this sense only are considered as objects of protection, which does not guarantee satisfaction of their needs for self-determination and participation. It also as denied the right to formal equality as discrimination on grounds of age is generally regarded as legitimate. In this regard Melton (2005) notes that the Convention (UNICEF, 1989) aims to promote and protect the rights of children in all aspects of life, so it requires a respect for each child as a person according to their evolving capacities, but is very important, both must be taken into account it to promote the development of personality, independence, active participation and decision making of adolescents in their development and training in different educational contexts. However, CRC is still the most important basis for work in understanding of children and adolescents rights, but also, since 2004 we have a proposal made by UNICEF above children and adolescents cyber rights, or e-rights. This is a decalogue which is based on the rights of 1989 Convention, but with necessary modifications for access and use of ICT. However, note that the research and documentation on cyber or e-rights theme is still scarce and even more on understanding children and teenagers about the same. In fact, we could say there is very little publicity given to this subject to general public and children and adolescents in particular.

From our point of view, social networks are posing new challenges in exercise and understanding of the rights in digital environment, not only by children and adolescents, but also by adults (parents, teachers, etc...). These spaces promote their social relations and communication with peers and friends, but in turn are spaces where adults charged with their care and education demand the need for some protection, guidance and care that promotes safe and responsible use of new technologies and responsible digital citizenship in childhood and adolescence.

In our opinion, this is an issue of vital importance today as internet, through social networking is becoming one of most important social spaces for teens. As noted Ochaíta and Espinosa (2002, 2004), for children and adolescents interact with peers is essential, it is a more symmetrical relation, it does not include the care and protection they offer unconditional adults. In these relationships children and adolescents begin to learn the rules and regulations governing relations between equals.

### **Objectives**

1. Knowing the use of Social Networks by secondary students in Spain, and determine their level of experience in them.
2. Knowing the level of students understanding about rights in the digital environment (social networks).
3. Determine whether a relationship exists between level of experience and understanding of rights in the digital environment.
4. Get opinions and performance of secondary students in hypothetical cases on rights violation

### **Participants**

Participants of this study were students of 1st, 2nd and 4th of Secondary Education of a private college in Madrid, involving a total of 67 students.

### Design questionnaire

We used a questionnaire consisting of 13 questions, which was divided into three parts: Part One main objective was to know social media that students use most often and their activities within them, including also some situations where that their rights have been threatened or violated by others, and other similar situations related to rights violation, but this time caused by themselves or they have done to others, this part of the questionnaire is based on the questionnaire designed by Ortega, R., Calmaestra, J. y Mora-Merchán, J. (2007). The second part of questionnaire raises a hypothetical situation related to rights infringement in digital environment in which students had to choose different response alternatives. The third part consisted of a series of open questions, which were shown several cases of young people over the use of social networks and relationships with parents.

### Results

*Level of experience in use Social Networks:* Was assigned a level of each participant experience between basic, intermediate and advanced, taking into account number of social networks used and quantity of activities performed on them, as seen in Table 1.

**Table 1. Classification of levels of experience in social networks**

Activity/networks	Level of experience		
	Basic	Middle	Advanced
Number of social networks	1-2	3-5	6 or more
Number activities in social network	1-2	3-5	6 or more

From experience levels, we examined whether there were significant differences between experience level, academic level and gender. Data show no significant difference between experience levels related to degree ( $X^2(4)=2.90$ ;  $p=0.57$ ) or gender of students ( $X^2(2,)=1.83$ ;  $p=0.39$ ) (Table 2 and 3).

**Table 2. Comparison between grades and experience level**

		Experience			Total
		Basic	Middle	Advanced	
Degree 1º	Count	10	10	7	27
	ESO % within degree	37,0%	37,0%	25,9%	100,0%
Degree 2º	Count	9	15	3	27
	ESO % within degree	33,3%	55,6%	11,1%	100,0%

4 <sup>o</sup> ESO	Count	4	7	2	13
	% within degree	30,8%	53,8%	15,4%	100,0%
Total	Count	23	32	12	67
	% within degree	34,3%	47,8%	17,9%	100,0%

**Table 3. Comparison between gender and experience level**

		Gender		Total	
		Female	Male		
Experience	Basic	Count	13	10	23
		% within Experience	56,5%	43,5%	100,0%
	Middle	Count	17	15	32
		% within Experience	53,1%	46,9%	100,0%
	Advanced	Count	4	8	12
		% within Experience	33,3%	66,7%	100,0%
Total	Count	34	33	67	
	% within Experience	50,7%	49,3%	100,0%	

*Social networks most commonly used:* By comparing experience level of with social networks used by students, we found that the social network Tuenti and Messenger does not show significant differences because most students use them regardless of their experience level, being Tuenti the most used by adolescents (77,6% of the participants). Moreover, Facebook social network showed statistically significant differences in their use depending on experience ( $X^2(2)=33,10$ ;  $p=0,000$ ). All students with advanced level of expertise use Facebook, while 91.3% of basic level not used.

*Activities in social networks:* As for activities in social networks, we find significant differences in implementation of activities depending on experience level. Adolescents with more experience tend to do more activities, these are more diverse and more 'complex'. Adolescents with an advanced expertise level in using social networks more photos hang on their walls ( $X^2(2)=13,79$ ;  $p=0,01$ ) and use more entertainment links ( $X^2(2)=13,4$ ;  $p=0,01$ ) than those with less experience in using the same. Similarly, teens who have more experience in using social networks tend to publish more public comments on walls ( $X^2(2)=21,37$ ;  $p=0,000$ ) and use private messaging network ( $X^2(2)=26,09$ ;  $p=0,00$ ).

*Understanding rights:* By comparing experience level with number of parents who are part of children' social networks, we found no significant differences in experience levels, although you can see an increase in number of parents who belong to their children's social networks in students of advanced experience level (Table 4)

**Table 4. Comparison between experience level and parents who belong to social network of their children**

		Parents in social network			Total	
		NK/UR	Yes	No		
Experience	Basic	Count	1	4	18	23
		% within Experience	4,3%	17,4%	78,3%	100,0%
	Middle	Count	3	8	21	32
		% within Experience	9,4%	25,0%	65,6%	100,0%
	Advanced	Count	1	5	6	12
		% within Experience	8,3%	41,7%	50,0%	100,0%
Total	Count	5	17	45	67	
	% within Experience	7,5%	25,4%	67,2%	100,0%	

By comparing experience level and wish that their parents belong to their social networks, no significant differences between different experience levels, saying basically that no teenager wants their parents belong to their social networks. Among reasons given for this situation is that they do not like their parents are part of their social networks mainly refer to are not interested to see they photos have with friends or that they know the things that speak with them, they want them to ask questions about personal issues, they understand as a form of control and supervision over them. Further, adolescents who do not want this situation mainly justified considering that they are entitled to protect their privacy, and believe that more girls than boys.

Regarding the choice of whether parents are entitled to know what their children on social networks and with whom they communicate and interact, we found no significant differences by experience level, but there is a greater tendency in adolescents with basic level to choose this option over those of more advanced level.

In this regard we found that most older students recognize the right of self-determination, between 15 and 16 years, while younger students (between 12 and 13) tend to recognize more parents authority, their right to engage in any area of life and to prohibit the social networks use of their children. In this age some students consider normal the parents are part of children' social networks and who are entitled to see what they do there.

Most Tuenti users of all experience levels believe that adolescents have the right to keep and protect their privacy, although there were no significant differences between the different experience levels. Similarly, when asked whether parents have the right to enter the intimacy of adolescents, Tuenti users at all experience levels feel that they don't have that right, which is consistent with the right to keep and preserve privacy (Table 5).

**Table 5. Comparison between experience level, use of Tuenti and adolescents' right to keep and protect their privacy.**

Experience			Privacy		Total
			0	1	
Basic	TUENTI No user	Count	7	1	8
		% within TUENTI	87,5%	12,5%	100,0%
	User	Count	8	7	15
		% within TUENTI	53,3%	46,7%	100,0%
	Total	Count	15	8	23
		% within TUENTI	65,2%	34,8%	100,0%
Middle	TUENTI No user	Count	4	1	5
		% within TUENTI	80,0%	20,0%	100,0%
	User	Count	9	18	27
		% within TUENTI	33,3%	66,7%	100,0%
	Total	Count	13	19	32
		% within TUENTI	40,6%	59,4%	100,0%
Advanced	TUENTI No user	Count	2	0	2
		% within TUENTI	100,0%	,0%	100,0%
	User	Count	7	3	10
		% within TUENTI	70,0%	30,0%	100,0%
	Total	Count	9	3	12
		% within TUENTI	75,0%	25,0%	100,0%

In fact, in dilemmas of open response questionnaire, one of the most common reasons given by teens for Tuenti users do not have their parents on social networks is because they believe that they could ask them to remove some of his 'friends'.

## Conclusions

Overall results show that teens use social networks as one of main ways of interacting with their friends and peers, besides being an important 'space' of entertainment, communication and expression. Similarly, the data show like teens understand the digital rights through different scenarios presented, and what is their perception regarding the violation of these rights in digital context. Another important aspect is related to the fact of how in some situations the adolescents rights conflict with the responsibility or the right of parents to protect them from risks and dangers of Internet, especially in case of students smaller, or who have a more basic level user. Finally, we note that while the data from this study are limited because it is an exploratory study, however, we believe we provide an interesting and general overview of the understanding of digital rights by adolescents.

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