

# LIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE

## SELF-PRESENTATION, NETWORKING, PLAYING, AND PARTICIPATING IN POLITICS

Pascaline Lorentz, David Smahel,  
Monika Metykova, Michelle F. Wright (Eds.)

Masarykova univerzita Brno 2015



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## INTRODUCTION

Monika Metykova, David Smahel, Pascaline Lorentz, Michelle F. Wright

Some of the most pertinent questions those of us living in developed countries encounter – both as individuals and as members of societies – have to do with how we live in the digital age. The range of scientific, economic, legal, and ethical discussions on the issue may, at times, feel overwhelming. Initial scholarly and policy claims about the revolutionary impact of the internet – on the ways in which we conduct our everyday lives, relate to one another, develop personality traits, and exercise our democratic rights – that surfaced in the early 1990s have gradually become more nuanced as more scientific evidence became available. This book *Living in the Digital Age: Self-presentation, Networking, Playing, and Participating in Politics* seeks to contribute to some of the most up-to-date, complex explorations of the topic. This volume brings together contributions of an international group of scholars, most of whom are part of the Interdisciplinary Research Team on Internet and Society (IRTIS – see <http://irtis.fss.muni.cz>) within the Institute for Research on Children, Youth and Family at Masaryk University, Brno, Czech Republic. This interdisciplinary group of researchers presents their original research in four inter-related areas: self-presentation and impression management in the digital age; online networking among youth; digital gaming and playing; and political participation in the digital era.

The book combines approaches from the disciplines of psychology, sociology, media studies, and political science. Most chapters are based on new empirical data; some chapters include theoretical reflections on current topics. The authors mostly used data from European countries, including data from the Europe-wide project EU Kids Online (see [www.eukidsonline.net](http://www.eukidsonline.net)) and, in one case, the respondents were American. The chapters are also methodologically diverse, using both qualitative and quantitative methods: surveys, focus groups, interviews, and content analyses. We believe that such a diversity of interdisciplinary approaches, samples, and methods will contribute to existing debates in our fields and, ideally, spark new avenues for research.

In each of the four sections, authors offer a critical re-evaluation of some of the most evident presumptions and, in some cases, they venture into more marginal areas of research to raise new questions. While the findings that the authors discuss vary in their generalizability and the populations that they study, the

book showcases the results of a long-term engagement with living in the digital age consolidated under the umbrella of the VITOVIN research project and the IRTIS team. *Living in the Digital Age: Self-presentation, Networking, Playing, and Participating in Politics* is intended primarily for researchers, teachers, and students of social sciences with an interest in the digital age. It can, however, also enrich the understandings of practicing psychologists, psychiatrists, and social workers who, in the course of their work, encounter risks associated with the internet, for example, in the form of addictions or gambling.

The first section of the book focuses on issues of self-presentation and impression management in the digital age. In the first chapter, Monica Barbovski and Anca Velicu link youths' behaviors to identity development through the online environment, and reflect on the implications of personal data misuse and how such misuse alters youths' abilities to create and maintain online identity. In the second chapter, Laura E. Simon, Kristian Daneback, and Anna Ševčíková describe the blurred lines between using online pornography for sexual arousal and sexual education. The authors explain the benefits of online pornography consumption and connect it to youths' sexual exploration. The third chapter – written by Michelle F. Wright – explores how digital technologies can be used to promote youths' popularity among their peers, and how such utilization relates to their cyber social behaviors, including cyberbullying and cyber prosocial behavior. She suggests that cyberbullying perpetration occurs when youths internalize the media's encouragement of pursuing popularity.

The next section concentrates on online social networking, whose popularity has grown significantly in the last years. This section describes the experiences of youths in their complexity and connects youth's online behavior to their developmental processes. Hana Machackova's opening chapter describes "online communities" among early adolescents and illustrates how children perceive the importance and influence of these communities. She shows that communities in which children interact partly online and partly offline have the most potential benefits for youths – members of these communities reported high levels of support, a sense of belonging, and self-disclosing behavior. In the second chapter, Lenka Dedkova focuses on youths meeting online strangers. She shows that the media-generated moral panic surrounding this theme is mostly inaccurate. According to up-to-date research, most youths' meetings with online strangers do not result in negative experiences and the typical "online pedophile" scenario is very rare. She concludes that meeting strangers, both

offline and online, is a natural part of the developmental processes of youths. In the third chapter, Hana Machackova, Martina Cernikova, David Smahel, and Zuzana Ocadlikova challenge the still-prevailing notion that youths do not care about their privacy and disclosures on Social Networking Sites (SNS). The authors describe how youths manage their privacy by applying different types of control over published information and audiences on SNS. They conclude that approaches to controlling privacy boundaries and rules differ dramatically among youths, depending on their individual preferences, developmental stage, and digital skills. All three chapters of this section demonstrate how youths' online and offline lives are interconnected, and demonstrate that youths are mostly using the internet in line with their developmental needs.

Living in the digital age has brought a spread of globally available and easily accessible playing and gaming activities, which are the focus of the third section of the book. The quick spread of online playing and gaming has given rise to unfounded and exaggerated concerns that are frequently voiced in public discourses, and the chapters in this section challenge some of these. Šárka Licehammerová's chapter explores live online betting – a form of gambling that is unique to the internet – which has the potential to become a universal tool for gambling with a high potential for problems due to its wide availability (temporal, local, financial, and social) and the flexibility in the ways of treating and gaining rewards. Gambling, and particularly factors that increase the chances of Czech gamblers' overinvestment in this activity, are explored in the second chapter written by Anastasia Ejova, Licehammerová, Pavla Chomynová, Zuzana Tion Leštinová, and Viktor Mravčík. The authors explore two hypotheses relating specifically to young men – that they are greater risk-takers who enjoy “practicing” in anonymous environments, and that they are more prone to overspending as a result of losing track of time during play. The last chapter in this section explores the playing of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG) and Pascaline Lorentz shows that there is no tangible relation between the amount of time played and the possible negative impact on player commitments.

In the early 1990's, policy makers expected new media to herald a renewal of democracy, providing a fast and easy way of deliberating on (and, importantly, remedying) the most pressing issues of the day. Some scholars were quick to point out the shortcomings of such a technologically deterministic view of society; yet, modified versions of the argument continue to exist, and the book's final chapter challenges some of these. In her chapter, Alena Macková explores the

potential of “e-democracy” in relation to Czech institutional politics, the close – and, in the Czech context, unique – examination of leading politicians’ online communication strategies leads to a less than utopian conclusion. New media has also been scrutinized for its potential role in empowering some of the most disadvantaged groups in European societies and in changing attitudes to these. In her contribution, Monika Metykova takes an innovative approach to exploring how Europe’s largest and most disadvantaged transnational ethnic minority – the Roma – fares in the context of media policies. She argues that the “old” medium of public service broadcasting was guided by more citizen-oriented policy goals than policies related to new media. In the last chapter of the book, Jakub Macek attempts to answer the seemingly simple questions of why and how ordinary people use social media to participate in mundane civic and political practices. It appears that the affordances of new media as such tend to remain in the background, while collective belongings and social pressures, the practices of “being an audience”, and the local and national (institutional and other) political contexts are foregrounded for those engaging in everyday civic and political activities.

To summarize, our book does not provide a comprehensive picture of how we live in the digital age; such an undertaking would have been overambitious. Our understanding of changes linked to the everyday use of new media technologies and their impact on various spheres of individual and collective endeavor are constantly evolving and, hence, our book provides an interdisciplinary and methodologically diverse view anchored to a particular time, mostly in the European context, and partly within the realities of the Czech Republic. The picture that the book paints is colorful and varied, it challenges many assumptions of mainstream public and policy discourses, and it provides new insights and data for scholars. The contributions in the book stress the importance of studying new media technologies and their use in a range of contexts and environments, because isolating the “digital” or “online” dimensions of our lives would lead to unacceptable distortions. Although the research presented here covers a range of topics, the key findings point in the same direction: How we live our lives in the digital age is strongly influenced by our contexts, such as online and offline communities, school or work environments, peers, friends, and families, but also by existing social and political practices and policies. Our online and offline lives are intertwined and new media technologies should be researched within these contexts. We hope that our book will contribute to a better, more complex, and more nuanced understanding of how we live in the digital age.

## SECTION 1: SELF-PRESENTATION AND IMPRESSION MANAGEMENT IN THE DIGITAL AGE

Michelle F. Wright

Many of us were raised to be unconcerned about what other people thought of us. We probably remember our apprehension about meeting new people, and asking our parents for advice. To which, our parents would usually reply for us to be ourselves and to not worry about what other people will think. Despite receiving this advice multiple times in our lives, we quickly realized that people are typically concerned with other people's perceptions of themselves. Sometimes these impressions are accurate, and other times they might not be. Occasionally, we might even find ourselves being concerned with other people's impressions of ourselves. When this concern develops, we might sometimes behave in ways to alter others' impressions. Therefore, no matter our parents' advice, we realize that sometimes others' impressions make a difference, and that it is almost impossible to completely disregard others' perceptions of ourselves in many social situations.

Self-presentation and impression management are not always bad things. In fact, attending to others' impressions is healthy and adaptive because it helps keep our behavior socially acceptable, though sometimes self-presentation and impression management can be problematic. As people become increasingly immersed in the internet and other digital media, it is likely that concerns about what other people think about themselves will extend to their social interactions through these media. Therefore, communication with others in the digital age offers unique opportunities to present ourselves, and to monitor and alter others' impressions of ourselves. This section includes three chapters, which draw on perspectives from psychology, sociology, feminist theory, criminology, communication, and media studies to describe self-presentation and impression management in the digital age. In these chapters, youths, adolescents, young people, and young internet users are used interchangeably to refer to children between the ages of 9–16.

The first chapter, “‘Fraped’ Selves: Hacked, Tagged, and Shared Without Permission. The Challenges of Identity Development for Young People on Facebook”, links youths' behaviors to identity development through the online

environment. The stance of Monica Barbovschi and Anca Velicu is that digital media serve as a playground for youths to navigate developmental issues, particularly identity building. The particular concern noted by the authors is “forced identity,” which is reported as being extremely problematic by youths. Taking an interesting perspective, the chapter reflects on the implications of personal data misuse, and how such misuse alters youths’ abilities to create and maintain online identity. Barbovschi and Velicu conclude with a call for researchers to connect privacy issues and personal identity misuses to youths’ identity development by utilizing a developmental approach and interdisciplinary research to investigate the long-term consequences of these issues.

The second chapter, “The Educational Dimension of Pornography: Adolescents’ Use of New Media for Sexual Purposes”, discusses online pornography and its effect on adolescents’ sexual exploration. Laura E. Simon and her colleagues argue that new media has changed the way that youths interact with pornography as new technology allows instantaneous access to pornography while on the go, with the internet becoming an important place for youths to seek out pornography in an effort to explore their sexuality. This chapter describes the blurred lines between using online pornography for sexual arousal and using it for sexual education. Describing the benefits of online pornography consumption, the chapter focuses on the ways in which online pornography can interconnect with youths’ sexual exploration.

The third chapter by Michelle F. Wright, “The Role of the Media and Cyber Context in Adolescents’ Pursuit of Popularity”, describes the preliminary results from a study focused on understanding how digital technologies can be used as tools to promote youths’ popularity among their peers, and how such utilization relates to their cyber social behaviors, including cyberbullying and cyber prosocial behavior. Another focus of the study is the media’s encouragement of popularity-related activities, and how such encouragement relates to youths’ cyber social behaviors. The findings suggest that there is evidence that cyberbullying perpetration occurs when youths internalize the media’s encouragement of pursuing popularity. Similarly, using digital media for antisocial purposes contributes to cyberbullying.

# ***“Fraped” Selves: Hacked, Tagged, and Shared Without Permission. The Challenges of Identity Development for Young People on Facebook***

**Monica Barbovschi, Anca Velicu**

## **ABSTRACT**

Social Networking Sites (SNS) play an important role in the daily lives of adolescents by helping them to develop two core developmental characteristics – identity and intimacy. SNS can also contribute to developing adolescents’ identities by eliciting peer feedback (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). However, children’s unpleasant experiences with the misuse of their online personal information are among the rapidly increasing online risks, as reported by children ages 9–16 in the Net Children Go Mobile (2012–14) and EU Kids Online III (2012–14) projects. These troublesome situations – e.g., dealing with impersonation through hacked accounts (with the impersonator sending rude messages to damage reputation) or dealing with slanderous pages created by peers – pose challenges to young people’s need for creating and maintaining their online identity in the context of their peer relationships. The types of problematic situations related to privacy issues and Personal Data Misuse (PDM) were purposefully chosen to illustrate young people’s challenges for self-presentation and online impression management as key components of building identity. This chapter will further reflect on the need for revisiting the research agenda for adolescent identity development in the context of online personal data misuse.

## **Keywords**

social networking sites, identity development, adolescent, online privacy, personal data misuse



## INTRODUCTION

Since danah boyd (2007) wrote about their appeal for young people, Social Network Sites (SNS) have been on the rise. SNS use has been reported as the favorite activity for children and adolescents, alongside face-to-face communication with peers. In 2010, the EU Kids Online survey reported that 61% of young people ages 9–16 had an SNS profile, whereas, in 2013, the Net Children Go Mobile (NCGM) project showed that 68% of 9–16 year olds had SNS profiles (Livingstone et al., 2011; Mascheroni & Ólafsson, 2014). Facebook<sup>1</sup> has been reported as the SNS of choice for children in the NCGM project (2013 data).

In their chapter on the psychological development of adolescents and privacy online, Peter and Valkenburg (2011) construct a compelling argument for why we should look at adolescents' online privacy from a developmental perspective and how the functions of privacy actually correspond with the crucial developmental tasks of adolescence. Supporting the call for further research, this chapter presents the idea that privacy issues and online Personal Data Misuse (PDM)<sup>2</sup> are potentially detrimental to adolescents' developmental tasks, including autonomy, identity building, intimacy, and the development of a sexual self. Due to space-related constraints, this chapter will focus on how privacy issues affect adolescents' identity, such as the construction of personal, social, and collective selves, without referring to other developmental tasks. We argue that there is a need to revisit the research agenda of identity development theories in order to align scientific knowledge with the challenges faced by adolescents who are building and negotiating identity in the context of networked privacy (Marwick & boyd, 2014).

Some parallels between bullying and cyberbullying, as well as the connections between cyberbullying and PDM, are useful for making a case for why the latter are worthy of attention in the context of identity research. PDM – as either a sub-set of cyberbullying or another type of cyber-aggression – presents numerous similarities with cyberbullying, including the same features of the social web, the possibility to reach wider audiences, the lack of direct contact, which further limits empathic responses, the permanence of information,

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1 For an overview of Facebook functionalities and architecture, see Wilson, Gosling, and Graham (2012).

2 Personal Data Misuse (PDM) is defined, for the purpose of this chapter, as using someone's online information (including their personal profile) in ways the person did not consent to, with the intention of doing harm. The types of PDM presented in this chapter were reported as most problematic by children in EU Kids Online III and Net Children Go Mobile qualitative research.

and searchability (boyd, 2007; Kyriacou & Zuin, 2014; Storm & Storm, 2006). Other characteristics of online communication, namely publicity and anonymity, make cyber-scenarios “perceived as worse than traditional ones” (Sticca & Perren, 2013). In addition, the risk of cyberbullying extends to young people who would not have been targeted by traditional bullying and, unlike traditional bullying, cyber-aggression transcends temporal and spatial boundaries, constantly putting young people at risk, with no safe spaces for retreat (Kernaghan & Elwood, 2013; Menesini & Spiel, 2012). In addition, children themselves are less likely to report the abuse for fear of having their devices confiscated (Storm & Storm, 2006). Next, features, such as spreading rumors, gossip, exclusion, and attacks against reputations and relationships are common forms of both relational aggression and cyberbullying as well as some forms of PDM (Jackson, Cassidy, & Brown, 2009). Finally, some cyberbullying forms of PDM, such as “revenge sexting” or “sexualized cyberbullying” and slanderous pages, relate more to how one’s image is perceived, whereas other PDM forms undermine trust and social connections, but with the consequence of negatively altering how the victim is perceived (Kofoed & Ringrose, 2012). Sexualized cyberbullying (i.e., a form of PDM that uses the victim’s information in a harmful way without prior consent) has already been indicated as shaping the sexual identity construction of girls (Ringrose & Barajas, 2011):

*Boys who have pics with no T-shirt are cheered on. Very different response for girls.*

(EUKO, Spain, girl, 15)

Given the multiple connections between bullying and cyberbullying, there are reasons to consider the possibility that PDM has negative consequences for identity development.

Furthermore, in the absence of research on the long-term effects of PDM, we argue that the negative short- and long-term effects of bullying and cyberbullying might be similar for PDM. Some of these effects include depression, low self-esteem, anxiety, suicidal ideation, and psychosomatic problems, like headaches and sleep disturbances (Olweus, 2012). Self-esteem is most connected to one’s identity, and lower self-esteem has been consistently linked with cyberbullying victimization (Patchin & Hinduja, 2010). Recent data suggests that there are long-term negative consequences of victimization from childhood into young adulthood, and that these effects include psychological and social aspects as well as health functioning (Copeland et al., 2013). In addition, other research has shown that mental health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and

conduct problems, relate to cybervictimization, and that these problems can persist until mid-life in the form of “toxic stress” (Arseneault, 2014).

In this chapter, we build on the theoretical framework of Hill (1983) for understanding teen behavior in terms of key developmental tasks for adolescence, specifically identity building, as well as on Subrahmanyam, Greenfield, and Tynes’s (2004) extension of the model to incorporate media technologies and the online environment as playgrounds where these developmental processes manifest. We will discuss the necessity of examining privacy issues and PDM on SNS from an identity theoretical framework as well as the necessity for developmental psychologists to incorporate digital privacy issues into research on identity building for adolescents. Several theoretical lenses will be introduced, including developmental psychology, social psychology, and media and communication research. Although fascinating, the legal implications of cyberbullying and PDM are not discussed in this chapter due to space constraints. However, aspects of how societal pressures and legal agendas frame the discussion around cyberbullying and the infringement on privacy rights<sup>3</sup> deserve proper attention.

*Fraped* or *fraping* is online slang for an individual leaving their Facebook profile logged in and unattended, thereby running the risk of another person misusing their account. The word is a combination of the nouns “Facebook” and “rape.” For the purpose of this chapter, “*fraped* selves” is used for instances of misusing accounts (e.g., hacking) or misusing the image of a user (e.g., creating slanderous mock pages). Relevant aspects of “*fraped* identities” will be illustrated with interview excerpts from EU Kids Online III and Net Children Go Mobile, based on qualitative data from nine European countries in each of the two projects.

## **IDENTITY BUILDING AND PRIVACY ISSUES ON SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES**

### ***Identity Building in Adolescence and Identity Performance through SNS Profiles***

Youth has been described as the state of not quite being and it is marked by increased insecurity concerning one’s own identity in which partial, temporary

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3 At the time this chapter was written, Canada was expected to pass Bill C-13 that would make it illegal for anyone to post or transmit an “intimate image” of another individual without that person’s consent, which prompted concerns about monitoring, exploitation, and the abuse of personal data by authorities and commercial entities: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/cyberbullying-bill-inch-es-closer-to-law-despite-privacy-concerns-1.2795219>

identities are formed (Bennett, 1999; Miles, 2000; Sibley, 1995). Although identity building is an individual experience, it does not take place in isolation as others partake in its construction (Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011). Identity develops from personal and social processes, and it is one of the key tasks of adolescence (Adams & Marshall, 1996; Erikson, 1968; Marcia, 1966; Marcia, 1967). Furthermore, the balance between privacy and sociality is central to identity formation for young people (Papacharissi & Gibson, 2011). From the sociological perspective, one of the most cited works has been Goffman's (1958) perspective on self-presentation.

Over the past decade, SNS have become one of the most important venues for connecting, communicating, and socializing as well as identity building and self-expression (Bargh et al., 2002; Livingstone, 2008). Rather than projecting a fixed self onto a pre-existing reality, the folding and unfolding of the self on SNS constitutes a "process of subjectivation" of engaging with oneself and of relating to others in a continuous process of visibility, recognition, and esteem (Foucault, 1992; Sauter, 2014; Van Krieken, 2012). Social and personal integrative needs are at the core of gratification, which account for the massive appeal of SNS among young users (Taddicken & Jers, 2011). As the distinction between online and offline worlds has become more and more difficult to determine, the two become bi-directionally interrelated (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011). SNS have become venues for young people to construct and express themselves.

Longitudinal research on SNS use, authenticity, and self-disclosure online shows that these reciprocal effects are mediated by the amount of social capital users receive as a consequence of their SNS use (Reinecke & Treppe, 2014). Consequently, those who are more vulnerable, with less social capital and lower levels of well-being, are less likely to engage with SNS in a way that fosters authentic self-disclosure and identity experimentation, which is incredibly important during adolescence (Harter, 1999). Research in other cultural settings has yielded similar results (Liu & Brown, 2014). PDM, as an extreme form of personal identity manipulation and violation online, is likely to hold similar effects

In 2008, Hodkinson and Lincoln suggested that "the range of personal and social functions afforded by sites such as LiveJournal may render the 'virtual spaces' adopted by users comparable to the first individually oriented physical space in young people's lives: the bedroom." (p. 28) According to EU Kids Online III and Net Children Go Mobile, young people's profiles are extremely personal, which keeps the "bedroom" metaphor relevant (Bovill & Livingstone, 2001). They spend a lot of time grooming their profiles, checking who posts and

what, receiving and giving “likes” as a form of social currency, commenting on each other’s profiles, and tagging themselves and peers in photos and videos. Adolescents need validation from peers for peer feedback and reciprocity as boyd (2007) argues in her article. The “need to be seen,” especially by peers, is something exacerbated during adolescence and it is at odds with the risk of privacy issues (Tufekci, 2008).

However, the idea of a re-conversion from individual spaces, like online journals, as spaces for expressing identity to groups of peers in a process of co-constructing and negotiating identity goes against Hodgkinson and Lincoln’s (2008) contention that young people favor individual identity expressions. With the rise of shared and collective spaces, especially Facebook, the importance of groups and self-presentation, sharing, participating, commenting, tagging, and posting on other’s walls – a lot of what used to be identity solely controlled by the user – has been re-allocated to the audience of peers. Friends posting on each other’s profiles or cross-referencing each other (e.g., tagging each other, giving “likes” to each other’s posts) increase the status of profiles in a group of peers (Luders, 2011). Unlike Goffman’s (1959) image of stage-like presentations of oneself in front of a seemingly passive audience, SNS profiles resemble Marina Abramović’s participatory performance art shows, where the audience has enormous power when determining the outcomes<sup>4</sup>. However, the danger of the audience misusing that power – the hacking of profiles and tagging and posting without permission – were non-existent or rare with online journals. SNS profiles are still experienced as personal spaces, but more people have the keys to these spaces. As Luders (2011) and boyd (2014) noted, the presence of others in one’s online life is less ephemeral than the face-to-face one because comments, “likes,” and posts are there for all to see.

Users do construct fairly accurate representations of themselves in online SNS profiles, although some self-enhancement usually occurs (Back et al., 2010; boyd, 2007; Waggoner, Smith, & Collins, 2009). Leary and Kowalski (1990) state that people adapt their self-presentation to “the perceived values and preferences of significant others” (p. 41); in that sense, adolescents also adapt their self-presentation to the perceived expectations of others, especially their peers, as part of the general desire to be validated (Pasquier, 2008). Therefore, the distinction between social identity (e.g., being popular) and collective identity (e.g., belonging to a group of peers) is important in the context of

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4 We have in mind Abramović’s Rhythm 0 (1974) performance, where the artist tested the limits of interaction with the audience, assuming a passive role, while the audience took an active and increasingly aggressive stance towards her: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marina\\_Abramović](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marina_Abramović)

adolescents building and maintaining SNS profiles (Cheek et al., 2014). Toma and Hancock (2013) linked the building and maintaining of individuals' Facebook profiles with self-affirmation needs (i.e., process of bringing key aspects of the self-concept, such as values, meaningful relationships, and cherished personal traits; see Steele, 1988), satisfying the user's need for self-worth and self-integrity. Furthermore, SNS constitute venues for intrapersonal benefits for adolescents in the form of affirming self-worth and self-integrity.

Peter and Valkenburg (2011) construct a convincing argument about why we should consider adolescents' online privacy from a developmental perspective. They adopt Westin's (1967) functions of privacy and link these to aspects of development through the acquisition of specific skills, including: a) the function of personal autonomy, enabled by privacy, is linked to adolescents' development of autonomy through practicing individuation, which is the ability to function in aloneness, b) the self-evaluation function of privacy serves the task of identity formation (Erikson, 1968) and of achieving a feeling about who they are, which can be accomplished through online performances to incorporate the responses of peers, c) the function of establishing limited and protected communication through mutual self-disclosure spaces is linked to the developmental task of building intimate relationships, which can happen through establishing boundaries between trusted and not-trusted others, and d) finally, the function of emotional release can be linked to the task of developing the sexual self through sexual self-exploration enabled by online communication. In this chapter, we take a look at the darker facet of developmental tasks and how these can be hindered through breaches of privacy and personal data misuse.

### ***Privacy and Controllability***

Privacy has been defined as "the selective control of access to the self" (Altman, 1975, p. 24). Furthermore, boyd (2008b) explained that privacy "is about the sense of vulnerability that an individual experiences when negotiating data" (p. 14) and "a sense of control over information, the context where sharing takes place, and the audience who can gain access" (p. 18). The concept of audiences and the public are central aspects to privacy as degrees of access might vary accordingly. More and more, the personalized readership enabled by customized privacy settings is linked to increased individual control over who has access to one's information, including who can read or comment on SNS profiles. boyd (2008a) discusses "networked publics," invisible audiences, and collapsed social contexts as key aspects of SNS, with social convergence occurring when disparate social contexts are collapsed into one, resulting in lost control over how personal information is shared. For instance, adolescents and

their peers find it weird when parents or other adults befriend them, perceiving this as an unwelcomed intrusion into their social life; however, they still hold a high need to control others' impression of the self. boyd (2014) further argues that teens develop contextual norms around privacy and identity in opposition to the adult perception of privacy as fixed.

Personal information is the currency of social hierarchy and connectivity and young people are willingly offering it in their exchanges with peers (boyd, 2008b). The Facebook newsfeed works as a catwalk for endless runs of self-promotion; it makes everything accessible and immediately visible, exposing what was once "secure through obscurity" (p. 15). Users quickly adopted newsfeed functionalities to purposefully broadcast information to their friends' newsfeed. Young people, in particular, have enthusiastically adopted the intended audience broadcasting function of social networks as one of the main uses they assign to SNS: communicating and sharing information with peers, as reported widely by children in both the EU Kids Online and Net Children Go Mobile projects.

### ***Personal Data Misuse***

SNS use has been linked to increased social self-esteem and emotional well-being, and they also represent safe venues for identity explorations (Valkenburg & Peter, 2008; Valkenburg, Peter, & Schouten, 2006). Nonetheless, these are also places where relational aggression, such as cyberstalking, harassment, and reputation damage, occur (boyd & Ellison, 2008). Among the effects of cyberbullying and online aggression, negative emotions, self-harm, and feeling "anger, powerlessness, sadness, and fear" have been documented (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Price & Dagleish, 2010). The reported powerlessness and loss of self-esteem as a result of humiliating episodes are relevant for issues related to privacy and PDM because they involve the loss of control over how one's identity is handled or directly threaten the sense of self (Olweus, 2012; Menesini & Spiel, 2012). In their analysis of "digital stressors" for young people, Weinstein and Selman (2014) identified impersonation through hacking and fake accounts, and public shaming and humiliation through slander and forwarding nude pictures as some of the most severe forms of online stressors, with young people rating these stressors as the most damaging and problematic:

*Because you have heard about a lot of those 'hate sites' and things like that. There are many, so if they put up a picture, and someone says something, then others say that you should block that user, because they are 'haters'... Yes, it is like a person that apparently hates a person so much that they make a profile,*

*where they write nasty things about the person and puts up pictures and says, take a look at this fat ugly bitch, she is so disgusting and things like that. And ... I get really sad inside because... why do you do something like that?*

(NCGM, Denmark, boys, 14–16)

Interactions on SNS can be marked by a lot of “boundary turbulences” when users fail to establish effective boundaries and collective privacy rules (Petronio, 2002). Moreover, misuses of personal information (e.g., sharing without permission, hacking an account) violate the rules of privacy related to permeability and ownership (i.e., how much control co-owners have over co-owned information). The strategy of “building fences,” such as the friends-only privacy setting, does not work when the perpetrators are supposedly already trusted “friends” (Tufekci, 2008). Control over one’s environment, and approval and acceptance of others are crucial for maintaining self-esteem, which is a component of personal identity (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). In many situations, young people experience a lack of control:

*Girl: They created a Facebook page that was against me.*

*Interviewer: I see, so you could see it.*

*Girl: They took photos where I was joking with my friends, with weird faces, and this was the image of the profile, of the page, and then it was full of offensive messages. The teachers forced them to delete the page, but it took them some time.*

(EUKO, Italy, girl, 14–16)

However, various types of privacy misuses might have different consequences on identity development, depending on individual factors and the severity of the act. Although the adult perception of the damaging acts might correspond to the actual damage as experienced by young people (e.g., tagging someone in a picture may be less harmful than the hacking of profiles), newer and more sophisticated types of relational aggression on SNS, such as tagging someone in (or creating) slanderous profiles or mock pages, should be given proper research consideration. Children in both the EU Kids Online III and Net Children Go Mobile projects<sup>5</sup> reported numerous examples of privacy issues and PDM, which, as we contend, are damaging to identity construction and self-presentation. Privacy issues and PDM are also damaging to other developmental tasks, including autonomy (through individuation), intimacy

5 For detailed reporting on the qualitative data collection, methodology, and analyses, please consult Šmahel and Wright (2014) for the EU Kids Online III project, and Haddon and Vincent (2014) for the Net Children Go Mobile project.



(through selective self-disclosure and limited protected communication), and sexual self-exploration (through emotional release).

### ***Shared or Tagged Without Permission***

Youth in the EU Kids Online III and Net Children Go Mobile projects talked about peers sharing or tagging photos or videos of themselves on Facebook without their permission. They expressed negative feelings about these experiences, the perceived intended hurtful nature of the act, and the degree of controllability the young person had over the situation once their image was used in a way that they did not consent (e.g., the peers refusing to remove the photo or the tag when the youth requested they do so).

*We were in the train and browsed through a gallery of a mobile and then we found a video. We paused it at a special position where the person was in a funny pose and made a screenshot. Then we posted this in our class chat, but the person was not amused about that [smirks]. It happens a lot that we make a video in the class and then post them in WhatsApp groups.*

(NCGM, Germany, boy, 13)

One of the most harmful ways to share private information about others is “revenge sexting” as a form of gendered and “sexualized cyberbullying” or public shaming and humiliation through forwarding nude pictures, where boys usually disseminate nude pictures of ex-girlfriends to larger audiences of peers (Barbovschi, 2014; Livingstone & Brake, 2009; Ringrose & Barajas, 2013; Weinstein & Selman, 2014):

*There was this girl and she had... Yeah, she was a friend of mine, and she sent a naked picture to her boyfriend. And she told us her Facebook password at the party that was going on at the moment in my house. And some of my friends went to her Facebook profile a few months later, and there they found out about this picture. And then the girl was bullied...*

(EUKO, Belgium, girl, 16)

Some of the consequences of revenge sexting are detrimental to both self-image (e.g., feelings of shame, humiliation, de-valuation) and collective identity (e.g., belonging). Gender differences are relevant for this type of bullying, with girls being bullied, excluded, ridiculed, treated as outcasts, and, in many instances, subjected to victim-blaming, in addition to the damages to reputation they suffer (Cassidy et al., 2013; Ringrose, Harvey & Livingstone, 2013):

*Pfff, well...it's not really bullying, because this girl, well...she's responsible for it.*

(EUKO, Belgium, girl, 15)

Boys are not excluded from serious violations of how their image is used, such as a case described by a German girl, although those violations are more often perceived as “just pranks” in the case of boys whereas girls still have to conform to norms of public morality:

*And we have it quite often in school that the boys sit on the toilet and others crawl to their WC cabins and take pictures which they send to their friends via WhatsApp or post them on the internet or on Facebook ... Some of them cry when they see that they are on the internet.*

(NCGM, Germany, girl, 11)

### ***Hacked, Misused, and Impersonating Accounts***

Other problem area that children reported having negative feelings about was misused, hacked, and impersonating accounts, which encompassed a variety of situations, including a hacked account of the child or a hacked account of child which was then used to send rude messages to peers (Barbovschi, 2014). In addition to the damages to reputation the former can bring, the latter also has detrimental effects on existing relationships with peers. In addition, the creation of “mock pages” as a slanderous act that entails peers impersonating the profile of one child with the intent to hurt by mocking and ridiculing her/him was another practice reported in Net Children Go Mobile (Haddon & Vincent, 2014).

Numerous children reported having their accounts hacked, trashed with rude/ugly pictures and songs, and rude messages sent on their behalf to their friends. What differs from hacking in the case of impersonating accounts is that they do not require breaking into another person’s account, as the perpetrators can set up a Facebook page or a fake profile (i.e., a “mock page”) and fill it with unflattering information (either real or modified) for discrediting and trashing the image of the targeted person, which elicited young people’s feelings of frustration and powerlessness over the lack of control of these situations:

*Well they were downloading my picture and I could see they were and they'd put it on their profiles.*

*... And once, a girl pretended to be me and created a Facebook with my pictures and name. And since then I don't have it.*

(EUKO, Romania, girl, 12)

*Girl: They steal your photo and paste it with a naked body. They leave your head, so it is your face. So, it seems as if it were you... That is, they take a photo, they take the face and they paste it onto someone else.*

*Interviewer: And then what happens to that photo?*

*Several girls: They upload it on the internet and everybody can see it.*

*Girl: They can post it anywhere! It could be in an advert, on Tuenti, on FB, your friends would see it... it stays up there, and it is bad because it is you everyone sees.*

(EUKO, Spain, girls, 9–10)

In another instance, girls talked about the practice of popular girls creating “ugly pages,” which are mock pages where they post pictures of peers they consider less attractive:

*Yes, on Facebook, they have, for example, a page ‘Prettiest teenager in Belgium,’ and then they post pictures of not so pretty girls on this page, and they bully these girls.*

(EUKO, Belgium, girl, 14)

Children spoke about the emotional damage of these acts in words such as “die of shame,” being “shattered,” feeling “very upset or sad,” and “suffer a lot.” Coping strategies reported by children are a reflection of the different degrees of ability to handle the negative experiences, varying from adaptive coping strategies to life-altering responses, such as changing schools or moving to another city (Barbovschi, 2014). Hacked accounts used to spread rude messages can cause severe damage to interpersonal relationships by undermining reciprocal intimacy among supposedly trusted peers:

*Yeah, for example, when you are on Facebook or MSN, and you receive a message. And then suddenly, this is like some kind of hate mail, and it says things like ‘you are a stupid bitch’ or these kinds of things. And then the next day you ask the person about this hate message, but then she says ‘no, I don’t know anything about it.’ And then you don’t know what to believe.*

(EUKO, Belgium, girl, 12–13)

## DISCUSSION

Privacy, including the one constructed on SNS, is a necessary condition for the successful accomplishment of various developmental tasks in adolescence (Peter & Valkenburg, 2011). Acquiring a healthy sense of self might be severely undermined by attacks to one’s personal online image. The extent of the damage is yet to be assessed. The attacks on someone’s identity poses threats not only to their sense of self-worth and self-esteem, but these attacks also threaten one’s social and collective identity dimensions. This occurs because these attacks potential damage one’s relationships and ways of belonging. These particular fears about *fraping* reveal adolescents’ preoccupation with maintaining their identity

both socially (how they are perceived by friends) and collectively (belonging). Such situations are by no means perceived as trivial, since the online and offline worlds are interconnected, with the main concern of young people being the damage done to their “offline life” (e.g., reputation, existing relationships). Cases of young people experiencing severe traumas (e.g., depressive episodes, suicidal ideation, changing schools, moving away) are all indications of the attacks on the self; however, no research on the links among privacy issues, PDM, and the sense of selfhood and personal identity has yet been undertaken. Moreover, the constant fear of relational aggression that young people risk experiencing is building toward a climate of mutual apprehension and mistrust:

*You have to trust the other person. Because at the end of the day, if we all start thinking that if I send this maybe that person will play a rotten trick on me; if I end up thinking about all the bad stuff then I can't just live my life. You can't ever relax.*

(NCGM, Spain, girl, 14–16)

Cyberbullying research has shed some light on the damaging effects of online relational hostility (Hoff & Mitchell, 2009; Price & Dalgleish, 2010). However, much of this research captures the short-term effects utilizing cross-sectional designs. Moreover, as Weinstein and Selman (2014) note, we cannot be sure that what young people report are in fact the most detrimental to personal and relational growth, as many situations might be underreported due to a normalization of otherwise important issues (e.g., the demarcation between “just pranks” or “severe misuse”). In the EU Kids Online III and Net Kids Go Mobile projects, children were asked to report unpleasant online situations, without having enough time to establish a deeper rapport with the researchers. This might have impeded deeper levels of personal disclosure. Finally, the issues around misuses of personal data in what Marwick and boyd (2014) call the “networked privacy” of young people calls for a re-conceptualization of its potential harms. Young people might actually build resilience through experiencing these challenging situations and actually become equipped for managing stress later in life or they might consider such mistreatments as a “passing ritual” for accessing a group of peers (Bonanno, 2005). However, the long-term detrimental effects on physical and mental health into young adulthood, such as the accumulation of “toxic stress,” have recently been linked to childhood experiences of cyberbullying.

As Elliott (2014) contends, there are powerful cultural conventions which shape self-identity in relation to public expectations. In the same way, the new

“technologies of the self,” including those fostered by online communication, offer new opportunities and challenges for the way young people shape and negotiate their personal, social, and collective identities. The degree that the context of peer sociality has dramatically changed to incorporate social media in large scale, extensive ways, adolescents’ identity as co-constructed in this context and the implications for young adult life are research questions yet to be answered (Schachter, 2005).

Although there is no research to date connecting privacy issues and PDM with identity development in adolescence, there is sufficient corollary evidence which indicates the need for thorough investigation. In this chapter we argued for the need to look at privacy issues from an identity development perspective in order to incorporate negative experiences that adolescents face online at increasing rates. We further welcome researchers in the field of developmental psychology to incorporate digital privacy issues in their research on adolescent identity through flexible designs and models, which accommodate “dynamic systems.” However, delegating the topic to just one field is a limitation and instead there is a need for inter-disciplinary research on identity to investigate the long-term effects of PDM on personal identity and other developmental tasks in adolescence.

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# The Educational Dimension of Pornography: Adolescents' Use of New Media for Sexual Purposes

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## ABSTRACT

In this chapter, we discuss the role of online pornography use in adolescents' sexual lives, and its effects on young internet users. The review of research indicates that online pornography may have a multifaceted function. While the most common definition of pornography stems from its purposeful intention to increase sexual arousal, there is emerging evidence that adolescents deliberately access these materials online not only for sexual arousal but also for sex education. Furthermore, we show how the line between pleasure and sex self-education can be blurred. Thanks to online pornography use, adolescents may learn what sexually excites them and how they respond to various sexual stimuli. Finally, we argue that online pornography should not be framed by negative discourse suggesting that it is unsuitable for adolescents. The positive value of online pornography use seems to be worth considering when providing the younger generations with sex education.

## Keywords

youth, sexual explicit material, sex education, internet

## INTRODUCTION

In June 2013, Google Glass, a wearable computer with a head-mounted display, was still a year away from mass market consumer release (Li, 2013). But the app development company, MiKandi, had already unveiled the first Google Glass app for viewing pornography (Oremus, 2013). Called "Tits and Glass," the app would allow Google Glass users to see pornography discretely, and it amassed over 10,000 hits on its website in its first day, inspiring a flurry of articles discussing its controversial release in newspapers, magazines, and blogs. The relationship between pornography and technology, already long and close, had just taken a step forward.

Although the coupling of pornography and technology is nothing new, the advent of the internet has brought with it new levels of availability, affordability, anonymity, acceptability, and aloneness (Barak & Fisher, 2001). In particular, new digital media has changed the way we interact with pornography; we can now use our internet-capable mobile phones to access pornographic websites, forums, video sharing services, and apps. According to findings from the EU Kids Online II survey, it is apparent that online platforms are among the most accessed sources of sexual materials, with 14% of adolescents aged 9–16 using technology compared with 12% who viewed these materials on television, films, or video/DVD, and the 7% who viewed sexual materials in magazines or books (Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011). However, thanks to the explosion of handheld devices, one can reach pornographic content in a moment's notice on the go during the commute, at home, in private, or amongst friends or partners. New media has changed the experience and social context of pornography.

This is especially true for the digital generation or so-called digital natives, those adolescents who have grown up using the internet and its new interactive social media (Székely & Nagy, 2011). Having learned to type on keyboards and touch screens at an early age, today's young people have become skilled internet users with a unique relationship to digital media. It is both a reality and a priority for adolescents to use the internet in their daily lives (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). Adolescence is also a period of development associated with sexual maturation, exploration, and risk-taking, and young people in their teenage years are likely to be interested in gathering sexual experiences and information (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Ševčíková & Konečný, 2011; Suzuki & Calzo, 2004). With their reliance on the internet, it has become an ideal place for young people from different corners of the world to seek out sexual content without having to broach the intimate subject with family, friends, or educators (Kendall, 2012; Moran, 2000). Indeed, adolescents report accessing online pornography both intentionally and unintentionally (Dombrowski, Gischar, & Durst, 2007; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2007). They use the internet to consume sexual content more than using other media sources, and they often consider sexual content on the internet to be their preferred use of viewing (Häggström-Nordin, Sandberg, Hanson, & Tydén, 2006; Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011).

Research scholars are aware on adolescents' use of new media for sexual purposes, and in the last couple of decades there has been a significant amount of research conducted on online pornography consumption (for a review, see Döring,

2009). However, this subfield of online sexual activities (OSA) research has also overwhelmingly focused on the risks and negative consequences of adolescents' exposure to pornography, often problematizing adolescents' sexuality and internet usage. Furthermore, few studies have explored the potentially positive effects of adolescents' use of new media to access pornography, including why and how adolescents might consume such explicit sexual material. Yet, some insight comes from the sex education OSA subfield, where there is preliminary evidence that young people also use explicit online sexual material for beneficial sexual information and education (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). Thus, it is worth exploring the division of these two activities that are seemingly considered separate, with varied harmful and beneficial effects. The aim of this chapter is to examine the research on adolescents' use of online pornography, with an emphasis on the potentially positive connection between adolescents' use of pornography and sexual learning. Specifically, we aim to address questions about how adolescents use pornography, in which ways pornography can be educational, and how consuming pornographic content is interconnected with sex education. We will begin by discussing the academic definitions of pornography, then evaluate relevant research, and, in conclusion, determine which definition of pornography is most appropriate considering the findings in the field. We will also consider the consequences of regarding adolescents' use of online pornography as problematic and/or beneficial in a society that is becoming increasingly dependent on digital technology.

## **DEFINING PORNOGRAPHY**

Our conception of pornography has important consequences for how we design and interpret studies about sexual content. It is important for researchers to establish a definition early in their investigations, and to keep it consistent throughout the research study, so that the meaning of the term can be communicated to participants and to the readers of any manuscripts. Such a strategy maximizes validity and aids in reliability. Unfortunately, pornography has not always been clearly defined in the research literature to date.

There has been disagreement and disappointment that pornography is so generally ill defined in the field (Rosser et al., 2012). Some studies have even adopted the phrase “sexually explicit material” or “sexually explicit media” (both abbreviated as SEM), instead of pornography in order to disassociate any discussed sexual content with existing political or negative connotations. However, most studies still appear to use the terms SEM and pornography interchangeably, which we will also do in this chapter (Hunt & Kraus, 2009; Luder, Pittet, Berchtold, Akre, Michaud, & Suris, 2011; Rosser et al., 2012).

For those studies that define SEM or pornography, most also associate the definition with both a type of content and a purpose. For example, Peter and Valkenburg (2011) define online pornography as “professionally produced or user-generated pictures or videos (clips) on or from the internet that are intended to arouse the viewer” (p. 1015). Similarly, Morgan (2011) defines sexually explicit material as “media portraying images of exposed genitals and/or depictions of sexual behaviors that are intended to increase sexual arousal” (p. 520). Carroll, Padilla-Walker, Nelson, Olson, Barry, and Madsen (2008) also see pornography as being media that is purposefully intended to increase sexual arousal. Pornography is sexually explicit content, with slight variations in the type of content, intended to arouse and this conceptualization is consistent with other studies (Lo & Wei, 2005; McManus, 1986; Owens, Behun, Manning, & Reid, 2012). There is some reliability, but pornography is narrowly understood as a tool to arouse the user. As we will discuss later in this chapter, this can be a limiting description as it excludes sexually explicit content that may hold a different purpose or it can be used for functions different than arousal, especially in adolescence.

Few studies have defined pornography solely based on its content and not its purpose. For instance, Goodson, McCormick, and Evans (2001) defined SEM as materials “that either show clear pictures of, or talk/write about sexuality using sexual vocabulary” (p. 105). While this appears to be a definition that does not stipulate a defined purpose, the authors explain “the phrases ‘use of the internet for viewing sexually explicit materials’ and ‘use of the internet for sexual entertainment’ will be used interchangeably throughout the text.” Ultimately, this ties SEM to an entertainment function, which may exclude more arousing, social, or educational uses. However, Haggström-Nordin et al. (2006) defined SEM more openly as “meaning textual, visual, or aural material that depicts sexual behaviors or acts, or that exposes the reproductive organs of the human body” (p. 386). Definitions lacking a specific purpose can also be found in studies employing adolescents that were conducted by Peter and Valkenburg (2009) and Braun-Courville and Rojas (2009). Ultimately, it is this more general and content-based definition that we will employ going forward as it keeps the purpose and use of pornography open to new research findings and broader interpretation. This also allows us to discuss different pornography as holding varied functions, especially when used by young internet users, such as adolescents.

## **THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF PORNOGRAPHY**

To date, the focus of the literature has been on investigating the negative effects of adolescents’ use of new media for sexual purposes (Döring, 2009). The use of

pornography at a young age has been tied to feelings of depression and anxiety, stereotypical and negative body image, sexual callousness, the adoption of less progressive gender role attitudes, more permissive sexual norms, sexual activity, and even risky sex (Braun-Courville & Rojas, 2009; Brown & L'Engle, 2009; Lo & Well, 2005; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Mattebo, Larsson, Tydén, Olsson, & Häggström-Nordin, 2012; Philaretou, Maoufouz, & Allen, 2005; Zillmann, 2000).

Prior research has shown that the link between pornography use and negative outcomes is not straightforward, and instead it is conditioned by factors ranging from predispositions to cognitive, emotional, or excitative responses to sexual media (Valkenburg & Peter, 2013). For instance, the liking of sexually explicit material or perceiving these materials as realistic leads to young internet users' perception of women as sex objects or the development of more recreational sexual attitudes (Peter & Valkenburg, 2006; Peter & Valkenburg, 2009). Similarly, the perceived utility of observed sexual material (e.g., sex on the internet gives you valuable information about sex) is associated with the adoption of more instrumental attitudes toward sex (e.g., sex is just a game or sex is primarily physical) (Peter & Valkenburg, 2010).

However, a closer look at research findings that document the socially undesirable outcomes of pornography use at a young age suggest that the main condition for the negative impact of sexually explicit materials on psychosexual development is frequent exposure to these materials. More precisely, heavy use of pornography, which is more common among boys than girls, precedes these unwelcome effects (Peter & Valkenburg, 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2010). This indicates that adolescents who are negatively affected are overwhelmed with or overexposed to pornography. This might lead to a lack of additional sources of sexual information that would balance the content mediated via pornography websites. However, not all adolescents are heavy users of online pornography and little seems to be known about their motives of consuming these materials (Ševčíková, Šerek, Macháčková, & Šmahel, 2013).

### **PORNOGRAPHY'S POSITIVE USES AND EFFECTS: THE OTHER SIDE OF THE STORY**

Despite a field focused on the negative effects of online SEM use, there is now some research pointing to some positive effects associated with adolescents' use of online pornography. These findings are mainly borne out of in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted with pornography users, which valuably allows those users to express their thoughts and feelings about SEM in their own words (Hardy, 1998). These feelings are often mixed and even critical

of the very pornography they find useful. The benefits of pornography use also do not appear to be universal; they can vary based on adolescents' age, gender, or sexual orientation. However, the initial evidence in the literature suggests some common benefits of online SEM.

Most definitions of pornography include the stipulation that its purpose is one of sexual arousal. Finding that pornography can be arousing in positive ways is supported by the literature. For example, Boies (2002) reported that 82% of a sample of college students found pornography sexually arousing. Increased sexual functioning and sexual pleasure was associated with positive opinions of pornography, particularly among male participants (Hald, 2006; Hald & Malamuth, 2008). Women have also positively connected pornography with feelings of arousal and that mainstream pornography gave them the feeling of being allowed to be more sexually active (Ciclitira, 1998). If the pornography was watched in the context of a sexual or romantic relationship, it could also be mutually arousing or exploratory (Smith, 2013; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010). Young Swedish girls, with an average age of 17, expressed in focus groups that watching pornography with a partner could be inspirational or beautiful (Mattebo et al., 2012). Indeed, a social or emotional use of pornography can have a surprising benefit – one that may be separated or even connected to pornography's arousal function.

There is also evidence – in both the pornography and sex education OSA subfields – of SEM being used for informational purposes. It might be reasonable to expect that adolescents who undergo substantial psychosexual changes seek out pornography due to an insufficiency of formal sex education. However, there are few studies on the motives of online pornography use and their interconnection with the availability of formal sex education that would confirm this hypothesis (Kubicek, Beyer, Weiss, Iverson, & Kipke, 2010). In addition, studying this assumption is problematic due to cross-country differences in the content of curriculum-based sex education (Kirby, Laris, & Rolleri, 2007). Even though there is a trend that the formal sex education provided in Euro-American countries emphasize heterosexuality, the biology of reproductive organs, having sex for procreative reasons, and the privilege of abstinence, the lack of its quality may not be clearly associated with using the internet for educational reasons (Fields, 2008; Jarkovská & Lišková, 2013; Moran, 2000). For instance, even young adults from Sweden, the country known for its elaborate and long tradition of formal sex education, were found to treat the internet as a source of information about sexuality (Daneback, Månsson, & Ross, 2012). However, what seems to be clear is that, in comparison

to curriculum-based sex education, online pornography provides adolescents with qualitatively different information, which will be outlined later (Kubicek et al., 2010; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Smith, 2013).

Generally, a growing number of studies suggest that adolescents who use pornography more frequently are more likely to associate it with educational value and utility, even if it is also acknowledged to sometimes be unrealistic (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Lou, Cheng, Gao, Zuo, Emerson et al., 2012; Tsitsika, Critselis, Kormas, Konstantoulaki, Constantopoulos et al., 2009; Peter & Valkenburg, 2010; Häggström-Nordin et al., 2006). Indeed, adolescents appear critical of the SEM that they consume; they are capable of acknowledging its positive functions while also understanding it to be stereotypical or objectifying (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Smith, 2013). Despite its shortcomings, online pornography is sought out by some adolescents because it might still be a valuable source of sexual information (Sabina, Wolak, & Finkelhor, 2008). This result was also found in a study of online pornography use among Czech adolescents (ages 11–17) (Ševčíková & Daneback, 2014). More than one third of these adolescents accessed pornographic websites due to the need to learn something about sex; boys were twice as likely to do so.

Pornography was perceived as a more useful and anonymous source of information than magazines or formal school-based sex education (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Månsson, 2010; Kubicek et al., 2010). Information about sexual acts and behaviors was the most common type of information cited by adolescents when asked about what they specifically had learned from pornography. Adolescents used pornography to find new sexual positions they could try later, and young Men who have Sex with Men (MSM) specifically cited pornography as a valuable way to learn about the mechanics of anal sex (Kubicek et al., 2010; Kubicek, Carpineto, McDavitt, Weiss, & Kipke, 2010; Mattebo et al., 2012). Additionally, in another study, men more than women viewed online pornography as being useful for generating sexual ideas, new techniques, and tricks, indicating a gender difference in this type of pornographic self-education (Smith, 2013). However, women reported finding sexually explicit material to be informational in a more abstract or general sense. Sexually explicit online text (sometimes referred to as erotica but fitting our definition of pornography) could allow women to learn about their sexuality alone and without needing a partner (Wilson-Kovacs, 2004; Attwood, 2005). It could also allow them to evaluate or learn about sexual behaviors without having to physically engage in them offline (Smith, 2013). Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson (2010) provide another example of the uniqueness of



information that adolescents can gain thanks to online pornography: watching sexual websites with their peers allowed them to observe their own and others' reactions to the actors' and actresses' behaviors, appearances, and bodies.

Apart from learning about sexual positions and specific behaviors from pornography, adolescents have also described learning more broadly about their own sexual desires from watching or engaging online SEM. For example, those young MSM who searched for information about anal sex or sex between men had meaningful experiences in the exploration of their own sexual orientation (Kubicek et al., 2010). Pornography might not be the best source of information – again, flaws like a general lack of realism, were acknowledged – but it could be accessed anonymously and privately and could provide self-education not often discussed in formal sex education curricula. Thus, pornography does not always have to be wholly realistic to provide adolescents with emotional and personally valuable sexual information. However, amateur pornography was seen by some as a better option for online sex self-education than more mainstream SEM (Smith, 2013); it was regarded as being more realistic and representative of offline sex. Women, in particular, discussed amateur pornography in terms of being liberating and even feminist, allowing women to learn about diverse sexual experiences and express their sexuality similarly in the offline world (Smith, 2013; Attwood, 2005; Ciclitira, 2004). Thus, the benefits drawn from pornography can be quite specific to the type of pornography in question and the user viewing or otherwise engaging with it; in other words, context matters. However, it is necessary to acknowledge that the type of pornography adolescents access online remains largely unknown and future research should devote more attention to this issue.

### **BLURRING THE LINES: PORNOGRAPHY AS A SOURCE OF PLEASURE OR SEX SELF-EDUCATION?**

We have described, despite researchers tending to sensationalize the negative effects of adolescents' use of online pornography, the positive aspects to SEM, including the educational value. Negative and positive uses of pornography can also intermingle; adolescents can think of pornography as being both positive – arousing, entertaining, etc. – and negative – possessing negative gender roles, a lack of realism, etc. – and it can still provide valuable educational information. This blurring of the line means that adolescents' sexual scripts for pornography may be more complex and context-specific than previously thought.

Gagnon and Simon's (2005) sexual scripts theory describes how we process sexual information, both culturally and individually. Our cultural sexual

scripts – metaphorical “how to” manuals for sexual behavior – are formed based on repeated exposure to cultural information; adolescents who continually encounter representations in the media depicting pornography as shameful tend to adopt this information themselves. It is also not uncommon for adolescents to begin to form sexual scripts in formal school-based sex education classes, where the curricula may set norms for what sexual information is acceptable to discuss or even what sexual positions or relationships are deemed normal. Even though there are attempts to change school-based sex education and expand the topics, pornography in sex education seems to still collocate with child pornography and other negative outcomes or it is perceived as a topic that should not be included in the curricula (Fifková et al., 2009; Rasmussen, Rofes, & Talburt, 2004; Weaver, Byers, Sears, Cohen, & Randall, 2001). However, the aforementioned body of research studies has shown how adolescents’ scripts can change when exposed to sexual information on the internet, including pornography. In this way, cultural scripts can shift over time when information changes in large-scale ways, which can happen quite quickly with interactive and social media. The amateur pornography movement is relatively new, yet adolescents already describe it as providing benefits that can differ from other types of pornography. In this way, our cultural sexual script for pornography may need to change in the research literature as well; going forward, it may be useful to see how pornography can be used for a variety of functions, not just sexual arousal, and how it can be interpreted based on its specific content and the users’ own needs and interests.

It is especially important that we revisit the cultural script attached to online pornography, considering that adolescents seem to be grappling with their own assessment of pornography. For female adolescents in Löfgren-Mårtenson and Månsson’s (2010) study, pornography was described as “creating ambivalence and different emotions, from arousal to fear and agony” (p. 45). Similarly, young men in the same study felt that pornography could hold a range of messages, inspire a number of different feelings, and ultimately make some people happy and others disgusted. Ambivalent feelings may develop based on adolescents’ feelings and differ depending on their use of pornography; they might feel positively about the information they learn yet negatively about their use of pornography for arousal or the content they are viewing. Indeed, when adolescents describe the functions of pornography as overlapping, this suggests a more complex sexual script than pornography being simply for arousal. Indeed, Smith (2013) interviewed a 19-year-old college student in the United States. She described her introduction to online pornography as such:

*Once I felt like I kind of knew the basics [of anatomy] then I was just like this is fun anyway. You know it got me turned on and stuff so... I think when I first started looking [SEM] up, it was for information. I started using the pictures even for pleasure and masturbating and stuff. And then I got into the videos for kind of the same informational purposes and then going from there again into pleasure ... (p. 69–70)*

She described how two different functional uses of pornography blended together. Pornography was not just about arousal; she also sought out SEM for sex self-education, and this could encompass different materials, including pictures and videos.

The findings from the qualitative study document how pornography enables adolescents to access not only practical information about how to have sex but also learning about what excites them. In other words, arousal as an outcome of watching pornography may include a component of sex self-education. In addition, the extent of information they receive from watching pornographic media seems to be even broader. Smith, Gertz, Alvarez, and Lurie (2000) found that 63% of websites adolescents encountered trying to find sexual health information was actually categorized as pornography. While it may be more likely that some websites are used for sexual arousal purposes and others for sexual health information, it is imprudent to think of these categories as mutually exclusive. What is, therefore, categorized as pornography – thereby being associated with more shameful and negative connotations – and what is categorized as sex education material – which can be positively promoted to adolescents – has important implications for sex educators, clinicians, parents, and adolescents themselves.

## **CONSEQUENCES**

In a society where the sexual script surrounding adolescent sexuality has been one of fear, silence, and shame, it is a priority to shield young people from sexual content deemed inappropriate (Jarkovská & Lišková, 2013; Moran, 2000; Tarrant, 2010). This affects not only the official availability of pornographic websites, which adolescents under the age of 18 are supposed to avoid by clicking confirmation that they are not of legal age, but also the content of school-based sex education which seems to exclude pornography consumption from adolescent sexual life (Fifková et al., 2009; Weaver et al., 2001). Additionally, parents report being very concerned with the online sexual content their children encounter, sometimes employing internet filters (Mitchell, Finkelhor, & Wolak, 2003). Considering this widespread concern, it is important to acknowledge that some adolescents deliberately access

pornography online for various purposes, ranging from pure curiosity to a need to learn about body responses to sexual stimuli or how to have sex. While the research field, primarily media psychology that is studying the undesirable effects of sexual media, has been decidedly negative; there are positive aspects to adolescents' use of online SEM, including educational functions. As it is likely that more parents and educators would want adolescents to be able to access beneficial sex educational material, this may complicate the cultural script attached to online pornography and the measures we take publicly to deter adolescents from accessing online SEM. Of course, whether parents and educators consider explicit sexual content to be a worthwhile educational tool in general is a subject worth greater discussion. Acknowledging the negative effects that pornography may have on adolescents' psychosexual development, especially when pornography is used to an increased extent; the discussion should begin with questions about how to provide adolescents with information that would satisfy their curiosity about their body responses to various sexual stimuli or about how to have sex. Last but not least, acknowledging that adolescents, both girls and boys, access pornography on the internet promotes the question of how to enhance the critical evaluation of mediated content.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has reviewed the evidence for adolescents' use of online pornography. While it is clear that many young people use SEM to be sexually aroused, this is not its only function. Indeed, SEM can also be used beneficially in the context of a social relationship and to provide adolescents with educational information about the mechanics of sexual positions, information about sexual orientations, and sexual diversity. Indeed, pornography can even be used to achieve different purposes simultaneously, blending the different functionalities of online SEM. Some adolescents have also shown that they are savvy users, capable of criticizing online pornography for the aspects they deem unrealistic or negative; this can also occur among adolescents who simultaneously hold positive opinions about online pornography. Considering this nuanced view and functionality of online pornography, we find it useful to continue to utilize and promote. Häggström-Nordin, Sandberg, Hanson, and Tyden's (2006) more general definition of pornography stipulates that pornography consists of explicit sexual content without defining its purpose. By adopting a definition that is more open to interpretation, we believe that researchers will be able to investigate adolescents' use of pornography in a more exploratory and useful manner without defaulting to sensationalism and the negative sexualization of adolescents' online experiences. As digital technology continues to change, the context surrounding pornography will

as well. Immediately after the development of the first pornography app for Google Glass, Google banned the development of apps that promote explicit sexual content (Oremus, 2013). However, it is not likely that Google will be able to keep pornography off Google Glass for long. Adolescents may someday grow up being able to watch pornography with a head set; thus, it is imperative that we fully investigate how adolescents' experiences with SEM can be potentially harmful and/or helpful. In addition, we should investigate the contexts where the educational dimensions of SEM are considered beneficial or awkward.

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# The Role of the Media and Cyber Context in Adolescents' Pursuit of Popularity

Michelle F. Wright

## ABSTRACT

Although adolescents have fully embraced digital technology, little is known about how such technology might be used as a tool to promote their popularity among their peers, and whether utilizing technology to become more popular relates to their cyber social behaviors. Furthermore, little attention has been given to whether the media's encouragement of popularity-related activities has a role in adolescents' cyber social behaviors. To this end, this study examined the media's encouragement of popularity (i.e., social preference, perceived popularity) among adolescents and their usage of the cyber context to boost their popularity in relation to their cyber social behaviors. The participants were 817 seventh graders from the United States. Findings revealed that the media's encouragement of perceived popularity and adolescents' usage of the cyber context to be social and antisocial each related positively to cyber aggression perpetration. In addition, using the cyber context to be antisocial was linked negatively to cyber prosocial behavior. On the other hand, the usage of the cyber context to be prosocial was associated with cyber prosocial behavior. No other relationships were found among the variables examined in this study. The discussion highlights the important role of the media and technology in adolescents' lives.

## Keywords

popularity, adolescent, cyber context, cyberbullying, cyber aggression, cyber prosocial behavior

## INTRODUCTION

Early adolescents (ages 11–14) have some of the highest rates of cyber aggression. Therefore, attention has been dedicated to understanding the risk factors associated with the perpetration of these behaviors. Some literature has focused on the role of adolescents' peer status in their perpetration of cyber aggression

(e.g., intentionally humiliating, intimidating, or threatening someone who finds these behaviors offensive and disrespectful). Eder (1985) conceptualized peer status as consisting of adolescents' social positions within their peer group, and it can either consist of lower levels of peer status (i.e., rejection, unpopularity), average levels of peer status, or higher levels of peer status (i.e., high perceived popularity, high social preference). Findings from one of the few studies to examine this topic revealed that high perceived popularity was linked positively to cyber aggression perpetration, but it was related negatively to cyber prosocial behavior (Wright, 2014). On the other hand, Wright found that high social preference was associated positively with cyber prosocial behavior, and it had a negative relationship with cyber aggression perpetration. Despite these relationships, little attention has been given to whether the cyber context might be used as a tool to advance adolescents' peer status at school. Furthermore, the media might also serve a role in transmitting ideas about popularity to adolescents, which could then relate to their engagement in different cyber behaviors to either promote or enhance their peer status. To address these gaps in the literature, this study had two aims. For the first aim, adolescents' perceptions of the media's encouragement of being popular were examined in relation to their cyber social behaviors, including cyber aggression perpetration and cyber prosocial behavior. The second aim investigated the different ways that adolescents utilize the cyber context in an effort to become more popular among their peers at school, and whether using the cyber context in these ways relates to their engagement in cyber social behaviors.

## **POPULARITY AND CYBER SOCIAL BEHAVIORS**

Researchers have conceptualized of two distinctive forms of popularity, including perceived popularity and social preference (Coie, Dodge, & Coppotelli, 1982; LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002). Perceived popularity refers to adolescents' reputational labeling of peer status rather than their likeability (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004). Perceived popularity is characterized by social prestige and social centrality in the peer group, but these adolescents might not necessarily be liked by their peers. In contrast, social preference is an indicator of likeableness, and it is characterized by social acceptance (Coie et al., 1982). In the face-to-face context, each popularity type is differentially associated with aggression and prosocial behavior (e.g., behaviors that involve a concern for the welfare of others, and includes behaviors such as helping one's peers and cheering peers up when they feel down). Researchers have consistently found positive relationships between perceived popularity and relational aggression (e.g., harming another individual by damaging their relationships or peer status, rumor spreading, friendship manipulation, and ostracism) (Crick & Grotpeter, 1995). This research has also

found negative relationships between social preference and relational, and overt forms (e.g., aggression in which the adolescent causes physical harm, verbal harm, and/or destruction of a peer's property) of aggressive behaviors (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). Social preference is associated with prosocial behavior, but the relationship of perceived popularity to prosocial behavior is more mixed, with some studies finding positive associations and others finding negative relationships.

Despite adolescents' high technology consumption, little is known about the relationship of both popularity types to aggressive and prosocial behavior in the cyber context. The necessity for such research is even more important as the association of perceived popularity and social preference with aggression and prosocial behavior becomes stronger in adolescence (Cillessen & Mayeux, 2004; Xie et al., 2002). Thus, adolescents' high technology usage coupled with their desire to pursue a high peer status might lead them to utilize these technologies to help advance their social standing. Few studies have focused on the role of popularity in adolescents' social behaviors in the cyber context. Similar to the relationships found in the face-to-face context, these studies reveal that perceived popularity is related positively to cyber aggression perpetration (Schoffstall & Cohen, 2011; Wright, 2014). Less attention has been given to cyber prosocial behavior and social preference, and the only study to investigate these variables found similar results as the face-to-face context. In particular, cyber prosocial behavior was associated positively with social preference, and social preference was related negatively to cyber aggression perpetration (Wright, 2014). This study also found that perceived popularity was not linked to cyber prosocial behavior. Although these studies provide a foundation for understanding the association between popularity types and cyber social behaviors, nothing is known about whether adolescents utilize technologies to become more popular within their peer group. In the literature on the face-to-face context, research links children's and adolescents' perceptions of what makes a girl or a boy popular to their aggressive behaviors. Xie et al. (2006) found that children and adolescents who believed that deviance contributed to popularity had higher ratings of aggression as reported by teachers and peers. Thus, it might be reasonable to expect that adolescents' perceptions of their activities in the cyber context contribute to their popularity and relate to their cyber social behaviors.

## **MEDIA AND CYBER SOCIAL BEHAVIORS**

The media has been implicated as impacting a variety of adolescent behaviors, including smoking, cooperation with police, sexuality, and eating (Dirikx & Van den Bulck, 2014; Mastronardi, 2003; Tanski, Stoolmiller, Gerrard, & Sargent,

2012; McCabe, Ricciardelli, & Finemore, 2002). The effect of violent media content on adolescents' behaviors and attitudes is perhaps one of the most controversial topics in this research area (Brown & Bobkowski, 2011). The results of longitudinal studies do link aggressive behaviors in emerging adulthood to childhood and adolescent exposure to violent television content (Huesmann, Moise-Titus, Podolski, & Eron, 2003; Johnson, Cohen, Smailes, Kasen, & Brook, 2002). Intervention efforts have also indicated that aggression was lower among third and fourth graders who participated in a six-month program designed to reduce television viewing (Robinson, Wilde, Navracruz, Haydel, & Varady, 2001). Other research focuses on violent video games as another type of media which impacts aggressive behaviors. The research on this topic indicates that exposure to violent media content through aggressive video game play relates to aggression and violence in the real world and through electronic technologies (Anderson, Gentile, & Buckley, 2007). Such linkages occur across experimental, longitudinal, and correlational studies, and among different samples, including children, adolescents, and adults (Gentile et al., 2009). Although the media might impact adolescents' behaviors and attitudes, it is unclear whether it might also play a role in their pursuit of social standing in the peer group. The media might transmit ideas about popularity to adolescents, and these ideas might become internalized and serve as a foundation for the types of behaviors and characteristics which lead to popularity in the peer group.

### **PRESENT STUDY**

This present study had two goals: to address gaps in the literature concerning the role of the media and the cyber context in adolescents' pursuit of popularity, and their relationship to adolescents' cyber social behaviors. For the first goal, the pressure to be popular conveyed to adolescents by the media was examined in relation to cyber social behaviors, including cyber aggression perpetration and cyber prosocial behavior. The second goal investigated the cyber behaviors and characteristics adolescents associated with being more popular in their peer group, and how these perceptions were related to their cyber social behaviors.

It was hypothesized that the media's encouragement of adolescents to be perceived as popular would relate positively to cyber aggression perpetration and relate negatively to cyber prosocial behavior. Opposite patterns were expected for the media's encouragement of social preference. Such encouragement would negatively relate to cyber aggression perpetration and be positively associated with cyber prosocial behavior. Although the literature is not yet available on the cyber behaviors and characteristics adolescents associated with popularity in their peer group, some hypotheses were generated to guide this second

aim. Guided by the research on perceived popularity and social preference, it was expected that more negative behaviors would be associated with cyber aggression perpetration, whereas more positive behaviors, linked more with social preference, would relate to cyber prosocial behavior (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003).

## **METHODS**

### **Participants**

The participants were 817 seventh graders from seven large middle schools (grades 6–8) in the Midwestern United States. There were 412 girls and 405 boys included in the study. Ages ranged from 11–13, with a mean age of 12.19.

### **Procedures**

Emails were sent to principals of 10 middle schools, which described the study, what students would be expected to do, and the importance of students' participation. Of the 10 principals, seven responded that they were interested in having their school be part of the study. A meeting was set up with the principals and seventh grade teachers. In the meeting, the purpose of the study and what adolescents would be expected to do if they were to participate was discussed. That same day, classroom announcements were made and the adolescents were sent home with a parental permission slip. Of the parental permission slips sent home, 817 came back with consent.

Data collection took place over six weeks. Before the measures were administered, adolescents provided their assent to participate in the study. None refused to participate and only six were absent on the initial day of data collection. The three schools with missing students each had one make-up day, and all six missing students filled out the questionnaires on this day.

The measures were administered in the following order: demographic information questionnaire (e.g., age, gender), self-reported cyber aggression perpetration, the pressure they felt to be popular from the media (i.e., Popularity Pressure Conformity Measure), and what makes someone popular with their peers (i.e., Popularity Perceptions Measure).

### **Measures**

#### *Self-Reported Cyber Social Behaviors*

Adolescents rated thirteen items concerning how often they engaged in cyber aggression perpetration (nine items; e.g., Spread untrue and bad rumors about

another peer online or through text messages) and cyber prosocial behavior (four items; e.g., Cheer other peers up online or through text messages) on a scale of 1 (*not at all*) to 5 (*all of the time*) (Wright, 2014). Cronbach's alphas were .91 for cyber aggression perpetration and .86 for cyber prosocial behavior.

### *Popularity Pressure Conformity*

Before completing this measure, adolescents read a description of social preference and perceived popularity. This measure asked adolescents how much pressure they felt to be popular by the media (e.g., television, magazines, and books). The following stem was included for all items: "The media (e.g., television, magazine, books) encourages me to... in order to be popular." Adolescents picked how often the media encouraged them to be socially preferred (two items; e.g., be nice to my peers so that I can be popular) or perceived as popular (three items; e.g., wear certain clothes so that I can be popular). Adolescents rated the five items on a scale of 1 (*totally untrue*) to 5 (*totally agree*). The media's encouragement of perceived popularity had a Cronbach's alpha of .88 and social preference had a Cronbach's alpha of .83.

### *Popularity Perceptions*

This measure described behaviors or characteristics that were carried out to make someone popular with their peers at school. All the behaviors and characteristics were oriented to the cyber context. Adolescents rated 21 items on a scale of 1 (*very unpopular*) to 5 (*very popular*). There were four scales for this measure, including sociability (six items; e.g., receiving a lot of text messages), antisocial (six items; e.g., calling peers mean names online or through text messages), prosocial (four items; e.g., helping peers out online or through text messages), and technology access (five items; e.g., having access to all the latest electronic technologies). Cronbach's alphas were .89 for sociability, .90 for antisocial, .90 for prosocial, and .86 for technology access.

## **RESULTS**

### **Correlations among Cyber Social Behaviors and Popularity Pressure**

Table 1 displays the results of the pressure to be popular from the media in relation to cyber aggression perpetration and cyber prosocial behavior. Results indicate that the pressure to be perceived as popular from the media is related positively to cyber aggression perpetration. However, the pressure to be socially preferred from the media is not associated with either cyber aggression perpetration or cyber prosocial behavior.

**Table 1***Relationships among cyber social behaviors and popularity pressure from the media.*

	1	2	3	4
1. Media – Perceived Popularity	---			
2. Media – Social Preference	.39***	---		
3. Cyber Aggression Perpetration	.31***	-.04	---	
4. Cyber Prosocial Behavior	-.01	.10	-.02	---

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ .**Correlations among Cyber Social Behaviors and Popularity Perceptions**

Table 2 presents the correlations among cyber social behaviors and the four factors of popularity perceptions. The factors of sociability and antisocial were related positively to cyber aggression perpetration. The sociability factor was associated positively with cyber prosocial behavior. The antisocial factor was related negatively with cyber prosocial behavior. On the other hand, the prosocial factor was associated negatively with cyber aggression perpetration, but it was related positively to cyber prosocial behavior. The technology factor was not associated with any type of cyber social behavior.

**Table 2***Relationships among cyber social behaviors and popularity perceptions.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Sociability	---					
2. Antisocial	.46***	---				
3. Prosocial	.25***	-.26***	---			
4. Technology Access	.54***	.21***	.27***	---		
5. Cyber Aggression Perpetration	.14*	.34***	-.21**	-.10	---	
6. Cyber Prosocial Behavior	.20*	-.23***	.31***	.09	-.02	---

\*  $P < .05$ . \*\*  $P < .01$ . \*\*\*  $P < .001$ .**DISCUSSION**

This study investigated adolescents' perceptions of popularity and the popularity pressure they felt from the media in relation to their cyber social behaviors, including cyber aggression perpetration and cyber prosocial behavior. Results from this study contribute to a growing body of literature on the role of the media and the cyber context in adolescents' social standing among their peers. Furthermore, the present study also provides some additional understanding



to how out-of-school activities, like the media, the internet, and mobile phones, impact in-school behaviors and the pursuit of popularity.

Supporting the study's hypotheses, findings from the present study suggest that the media does have a role in pressuring adolescents to pursue perceived popularity, and that this pursuit relates to cyber aggression perpetration. Such findings are consistent with the literature, revealing linkages between cyber aggression perpetration and perceived popularity (Schoffstall & Cohen, 2011; Wright, 2014). The results concerning the media's encouragement of social preference are not too clear as no relationships were found between this form of popularity and either of the cyber social behaviors. Wright (2014) found that social preference was related positively to cyber prosocial behavior and associated negatively with cyber aggression perpetration. Thus, it was expected that the pressure to be socially preferred would relate positively to cyber prosocial behavior. A possible explanation for the non-significant findings might be that the media does not always encourage adolescents to behave in certain ways to become socially preferred in their peer group. The media might focus more on encouraging adolescents to pursue perceived popularity as it is the most socially central and highly visible form of popularity (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). Therefore, ideas about the conformity to be popular might include more aggressive behaviors rather than prosocial behavior.

Another important contribution of the present study is the finding concerning the cyber behaviors and characteristics adolescents associated with popularity in the peer group, and their associations with cyber social behaviors. The factors of sociability and antisocial behaviors were both related positively to cyber aggression perpetration. The antisocial factor encompassed more aggressive behaviors and the sociability factor included characteristics that represented being socially central, both of which are characteristics of perceived popularity (LaFontana & Cillessen, 2002; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). Therefore, the linkages of these two factors to cyber aggression perpetration are not surprising as these factors represent two core elements of perceived popularity. The antisocial factor was related negatively to cyber prosocial behavior, whereas the sociability factor was associated positively with this behavior. In the literature, some studies find that there are positive relationships between perceived popularity and prosocial behavior, whereas others reveal a negative relationship (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998; Prinstein & Cillessen, 2003). Perhaps, differences in such findings in the literature might be attributed to adolescents' perceptions of the different functions of popularity-related behaviors. In particular, sociability might relate to prosocial behavior among adolescents, whereas antisociability might not. Due to these

perceptions, some adolescents might believe that perceived popularity is more related to sociability, and others might view this form of popularity as being more linked to antisociability, which could potentially contribute to their differential endorsement of prosocial behavior. Using technology to act prosocially in order to become more popular was hypothesized to be more related to social preference than to perceived popularity (Parkhurst & Hopmeyer, 1998). Thus, it was not surprising that the prosocial factor was associated negatively with cyber aggression perpetration, and positively related to cyber prosocial behavior. The technology factor was not associated with either form of cyber social behavior. This was surprising, as spending power relates to popularity (Adler & Alder, 1998). However, the literature does not indicate whether the characteristics associated with popularity are differentially related to social behavior. That is, it might be that spending power or having access to the best technology is related to popularity, but that it is not associated with aggressive or prosocial behaviors.

### **Future Directions and Limitations**

This study provided an initial investigation of the media's and the cyber context's role in adolescents' popularity among their peer group. However, there are a few futures directions and limitations that should be noted to advance the field's knowledge of this topic. For instance, more research should be undertaken utilizing interviews and focus groups to understand the media's pressure on adolescents to be popular, and whether such pressures convey messages that are associated with different forms of popularity. This is especially important when it comes to social preference as there were no significant relationships between this type of popularity and any cyber social behavior. A fruitful step for this research might be to content-analyze various teen television shows, magazines, and books to understand the extent to which popularity themes are conveyed in these sources, and to differentiate these themes based on the popularity subtypes.

One limitation of this research was that the analyses relied solely on bivariate correlations. The present study was conducted concurrently, which does not allow for an understanding of the longitudinal relationships examined in this study. Such a method will allow for a better understanding of the developmental significance of the media's effects on children's and adolescents' pursuit of popularity. Follow-up research should incorporate longitudinal designs in order to understand the temporal ordering of these relationships. For example, this research design might be able to identify an age in which children are most exposed to the media's endorsement of popularity, and whether such endorsement relates to popularity. It also might be likely that children and adolescents who are already popular seek out media with messages endorsing the pursuit of popularity. Therefore, more

advanced techniques should be used in order to control for adolescents' current perceived popularity and social preference.

## CONCLUSION

The present study provides one of the first investigations aimed at understanding the media's popularity pressure and adolescents' perceptions of utilizing the cyber context to boost popularity. Furthermore, it is one of the first studies to examine adolescents' perceptions and popularity pressure in relation to cyber social behaviors. Such examinations are important as researchers are recognizing the prominence of the media and technology in adolescents' lives, and thus such tools might be used to facilitate their social standing among their peers at school. The present study revealed that adolescents feel pressure to be popular, particularly perceived popularity, from the media and that this pressure relates to cyber aggression perpetration. In addition, results also suggest that adolescents utilize the cyber context to become more popular in their peer group at school, and that the different ways they use technologies relate to their cyber social behaviors. This study has implications for clinicians and researchers concerned with identifying adolescents at risk for cyber aggression perpetration as well as those individuals interested in helping to promote positive interactions in the cyber context.

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## SECTION 2: ONLINE NETWORKING AMONG YOUTHS

David Smahel

In recent years, online social networking has grown rapidly in popularity. Social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, and many others, have become important among youths and also adults. But social networking takes place in different online places, such as school information systems, discussion boards, various web sites, etc. However, similar to the offline environment, social networking also includes both positive and negative experiences. That is the focus of this section.

In the first chapter of this section written by Hana Machackova, we focus on “online communities” among early adolescents aged 11–14. The chapter illustrates how children perceive the importance and influence of these communities in terms of the provided support, sense of belonging, and opportunities for self-disclosure. The author differentiates communities where children interact only online, partly online and partly offline, and mostly offline. Interestingly, it seems that communities with mixed and balanced online and offline contacts bring the most potential benefits to youths. Members of these communities reported high levels of support, a sense of belonging, and self-disclosing behavior. On the other hand, the only online communities probably lack stability and influence in children’s lives. The author concludes that there are several important factors besides the developmental stage which intervene in the process in which online communities influence children’s development, like socio-psychological characteristics or the character of the offline environment, such as family or peer relationships.

Within online communities and social networking, youths also sometimes meet “online strangers” who are known only from the internet, which is the focus of the next chapter written by Lenka Dedkova. The author shows that the media moral panic surrounding online strangers is widely inaccurate. According to empirical evidence, most youths’ meetings with online strangers do not result in negative experiences. And in the cases where they do, there is almost no correspondence to the media’s online pedophile scenario. Also, in contrast to the media portrayal, youths’ meetings with online strangers typically happen in adolescence, not in childhood. The author concludes that meeting strangers is a natural part of the developmental and social processes.

The third chapter of this section written by Hana Machackova and colleagues is focused on youths' privacy management on social networking sites. It explains how youths balance their disclosures and manage privacy boundaries within social networking sites, online communities, and while communicating with both friends and online strangers. Based on the opinions and experiences of European youths, the authors pointed out how the specific aspects of the online environment intervene in the process of privacy management on Social Networking Sites (SNS). The authors challenge the still-prevailing notion that youths do not care about their privacy and disclosures on SNS. They describe that awareness of the potentially risky features in SNS is embedded in youths' online praxes: youths manage their privacy by applying different types of control over the published information and the online audience. The authors conclude that approaches to controlling privacy boundaries and rules differ dramatically among youths, depending on their individual preferences, experiences, developmental stage, and digital skills.

We can conclude that these sections contribute to the understanding of online social networking among youths. The chapters reveal that youths, while social networking and participating in online communities, have both positive and negative experiences. Even the same online experience, such as meeting an online stranger, can have various positive and negative aspects. All three chapters also demonstrate that youths' online and offline lives are strongly interconnected (Subrahmanyam & Smahel, 2011). For example, meeting people online is a natural developmental need for youths, and privacy borders are also often similar in both the online and offline environments. It seems that youths use online networks in line with their developmental needs – and the online networks can be both a very useful and a somewhat problematic tool.

# Online Communities and Early Adolescents

Hana Machackova

## ABSTRACT

The chapter focuses on the role of online communities in the lives of early adolescents. This developmental stage is typical for many changes, including identity development as well as the expansion of social life beyond family boundaries. Children gain new experiences in new social groups, which introduce them to diverse attitudes, opinions, and behavioral patterns. Currently, one of these new groups can take the form of an online community (i.e., a group of people who regularly interact in a specific place on the internet). In the chapter, current knowledge about online communities is reviewed and processes by which online communities may affect children's development are described. Specific focus is given to the form of interaction with community members: whether it is only online, partly offline, or mostly offline. Using the sample of Czech early adolescents (aged 11–14), empirical evidence depicting the character of community membership and how it differs across the three types of communities is presented. Findings show that online communities with partly offline contact are most distinct – they are typical for the highest sense of belonging but also the highest perceived influence on children's behavior and attitudes.

## Keywords

online communities, online and offline interaction, early adolescence

## INTRODUCTION

Online communities are new online social environments in which contemporary youth participate. “Online communities” designate groups of people who regularly interact through some specific virtual environment, such as web sites, blogs, or social network sites. Based on previous studies, we know that membership in online communities may be connected with potential risk (e.g., in the form of negative influence on attitudes or behavior) but can also bring many benefits (e.g., the opportunity to gain support or a sense of belonging) (Černá & Šmahel, 2008; Giles, 2006; Machackova & Blinka, 2009).

But, as most prior studies on online communities focused on the population of older adolescents or adults, we lack knowledge about the role of these communities in younger children. This chapter aims to fill this gap and focuses on community members in early adolescence.

Early adolescence is a sensitive developmental stage between ages 11–14. While still nested in the family, early adolescents are becoming more involved in and influenced by other social groups. This can shape the development of their attitudes, behavior, and overall self-concept (Schave & Schave, 1989). In current “digital society”, online communities can also become one of the influential groups in children’s lives. But the role of online community differs in relation to several factors. Considering that the online social life of youth is often interconnected with the offline one (Subrahmanyam & Šmahel, 2011), I aim to differentiate between three types of online communities based on the types of interaction with members: online communities with only online contact, with some offline contact, and with predominant offline contact. Based on existing knowledge and a theoretical framework depicting the process upon which online communities can become a significant part of children’s lives, I will examine data from Czech, early adolescent members of online communities. My aim is to illustrate how children perceive the importance and influence of these communities in terms of the provided support, sense of belonging, opportunities for self-disclosure, and perceived personal change due to community membership.

### **ONLINE COMMUNITIES: DEFINING THE CONCEPT**

In last two decades, online communities have spread throughout cyberspace and have become an integral part of the online social life of millions of internet users. In the Czech Republic, a country in which the data analyzed in this chapter originates, 27% of internet users older than 12 visited an online community in 2007. The members were most often youth: half of the users aged 16–19 and 37% of the users aged 12–15 (Šmahel, 2008)<sup>6</sup>. Online communities exist in multiple forms (Porter, 2004; Smith & Kollock, 2005), varying in size (with dozens, hundreds, thousands, or millions of members), form of member interaction (a/synchronous, in/frequent, strictly online, or also offline), or in topics and goals. Some are explicitly centered on a specific theme, such as communities of gamers, movie fans, or people with a specific hobby, while some simply emerge in an online place where people meet, for example

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6 It is important to mention that these data are a bit outdated. For comparison, we can consider findings from America, where 15% of internet users (across all ages) visited online communities in 2007, and 17% did so in 2012 (Lebo, 2013).



on social network sites or discussion forums. What all these environments have in common is the label “online community” (sometimes also “virtual” or “cyber” community), applied by their founders, their members, or researchers.

But use of the term “community” for the online environment has been vastly contested and its appropriateness is still in dispute (e.g., Fernback, 2007; Watson, 1997; Yuan, 2012). The reason for this controversy stems mostly from the discrepancies between the perceptions of the virtual environment and the traditional conceptualization of community, which denoted a close-knit group of people living in a specific location; mutually sharing trust, a commitment, and a sense of belonging; and pursuing similar goals, norms, or morals. This seemed to contradict the nature of online (“virtual”) groups and relationships, which, compared to offline ones, were sometimes perceived as weak, deficient, artificial, or not real. But in reality, many members feel a strong connection to their online community. For example, half of American online community members felt as strongly about online communities as about their offline ones (Lebo, 2013). Moreover, many researches also considered overall declining engagement in “traditional” communities and argued that the online communities present new possibilities to re-connect with social life in the neighborhood as well as to spread one’s social network beyond the local horizon (Hampton & Wellman, 2003). This view diminished the importance of “local” in terms of space and emphasized the “social” aspects of community existence. Online communities then could be taken as a symbol of current societal connections: transgressing boundaries and connecting different – yet common – people who interact in seemingly boundless cyberspace. This is why, for some, online communities represent the decline of society, while for others they signify its unstoppable further development.

This conceptual struggle, combined with the notion of multiple community forms (which can’t be easily covered by a single definition) resulted in a variety of definitions of online communities. Some prior studies utilized broad definitions, which cover only the basic aspects of the online community. This would be, for example, Ridings, Gefen, and Arinze’s (2002) depiction of online communities as “groups of people with common interests and practices that communicate regularly and for some duration in an organized way over the internet through a common location or mechanism” (p. 273). Other definitions were more selective, focusing and specifying one or more attribute necessary to label the online group as a community (for different approaches, see Blanchard, 2007; Lee, Vogel, & Limayem, 2003; Porter, 2004; Ridings & Gefen, 2004; Smith & Kollock, 2005). Among the most often used attributes needed

to define an online community belong the following. Members of an online community must, to some extent, sustain an online form of interaction; but, they can also meet offline. There should be rather regular interaction within the community. Members should share some common discourse, norms, informational, or emotional support, and pursue common goals and interests. And, members should feel the sense of the virtual community, i.e., “feelings of membership, identity, belonging, and attachment to a group that interacts primarily through electronic communication” (Blanchard, 2007, p. 827). Inevitably, every researcher must choose which definition and which attributes are most suitable for his or her research goals and questions. The empirical findings presented later are based on a more broad operationalization of online community as a *specific virtual place where people of similar interests or opinions regularly interact and exchange information or materials*. Besides this, I will also specifically focus on one specific attribute: the form of interaction with community members, ranging from purely online to predominantly offline.

### **WHAT MAKES ONLINE COMMUNITIES SO DIFFERENT?**

As described above, sometimes the label “virtual” or “online” for a community might be misleading, suggesting that they are ephemeral or unreal. But similar to offline ones, we can observe rich social life within these communities. The members interact, communicate, and share information, materials, interests, goals, and support. Nevertheless, despite these similarities with offline communities, there are also some specifics which make online communities unique social environments.

Overall, online communities bear specifics which have been recognized in online communication, foremost the lack of non-verbal cues in communication (i.e., absence of tone of voice, facial expressions, gestures, posture, etc.) (Bargh & McKenna, 2004). While interacting, the members do not see or hear each other, and rely only on written text, sometimes accompanied by emoticons or other signs and symbols (e.g., pictures, implemented audio or video, or hyperlinks). This can be limiting for self-expression and mutual understanding, but, at the same time, it can also increase control over members’ self-presentations, as these “limits” can help to overcome constraints present in offline communication (caused, for example, by lower communication competencies).

The members also can stay, or at least they perceive to be, relatively anonymous, and usually interact while at a mutual physical distance. This perceived anonymity is connected to the disinhibited behavior of members, be it in its benign (increased self-disclosure and support) or toxic (increased hostility)

form (Suler, 2004). Moreover, due to anonymity and distance, community members may have no relation and awareness of one's offline social circle and behavior and vice versa. Thus, offline friends and family do not have to know anything about the online community and one's behavior and image within that community. In result, the anonymity and distance can decrease the fear of the possible consequences of a member's behavior within the community.

The information within the community (and also the whole community as an online platform) is accessible and relatively stable. If the community is alive, it can be accessed by members at any time from any internet connection (Smith & Kollock, 2005). Moreover, online communities enable the members to store and share information and materials, including past conversations and events, creating and sustaining a specific discursive environment centered within community topics. Thus, although seemingly ephemeral, an online community may be very real, immediately accessible, and even more stable than an offline community, in which common history can more easily be forgotten or is usually less accessible.

Finally, accessibility is important not only in terms of immediate access, but also with regard to the "spatial" and "social" dimension. An online community could potentially be visited by anyone, regardless of the location. It also is open to all regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, education, beliefs, opinions, etc. Of course, every online community has a specific discursive framework and it is an open question as to how the newcomer will fit in, even when these attributes are not immediately recognizable (Williams, 2009). But, if he or she connects with the community on a basic level (e.g., they share the same interests, goals, or attitudes), those others characteristics, which might limit interaction in the offline world, are mitigated online.

All these attributes vary across specific spaces (and platforms) on which online communities exist, based on their "technical" setting, but also their overall community rules, preferences, and discourse. For example, some communities enable the deletion of some information, while others forbid it. In some communities, members may use live video-chats; in others they prefer asynchronous bulletin board messages. Or, while blog communities offer a high degree of anonymity and "protected space" (Rains, 2012), if the community functions on an online social network site, members are usually highly identifiable (Papacharissi, 2010).

### **Online Community and Offline Interaction**

One of the crucial attributes of online communities is whether members sustain only online or also offline relationships. I mentioned earlier that with ongoing social change the emphasis on “local”, including the physical contact of community members, has decreased. But this is not to suggest that the offline aspect has lost its importance. Due to the current high penetration of the internet, many online communities connect people who are in physical proximity (Wellman, Boase, & Chen, 2002) or rather easily reachable. Currently members of plenty of online communities (almost half of them in America; Lebo, 2013) also interact offline, which blurs the distinction between online and offline communities. Many online communities emerge as another dimension of an offline community like, for example, online communities of people living in the same neighborhood (Hampton & Wellman, 2003). In other cases, some “purely” online communities extend the social life into the offline environment, for example, by organizing offline meetings with members (Machackova & Blinka, 2009).

Some previously mentioned attributes, especially those connected to anonymity, are typical mostly for communities in which members interact exclusively online, but do not apply for others. The form of contact can have substantial impact on how the members perceive the benefits of the membership and how they behave within the community. Offline contact can result in decreased control over self-presentation and limit behavioral freedom (i.e., behavior disconnected from offline norms and roles as described above). This is why some members may refuse to cross the online/offline boundaries (Matzat, 2010). On the other hand, offline interaction can strengthen and deepen social ties, and help increase mutual knowledge, trust, and overall joy from community visits. This is a reason why others strive to extend and sustain community life also offline (Machackova & Blinka, 2009). Thus, despite the fact that the criterion for offline contact is no longer necessary, it still is one of defining attributes in the description of an online community, and an important factor in the assessment of the role of online community in members’ lives.

### **ONLINE COMMUNITY AS A SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT FOR CONTEMPORARY CHILDREN**

The role of online communities should be also assessed with regard to the factors related to the members: their individual characteristics and the specifics of their offline environment. These factors shape the motivation to join the online community, the character of participation, and, consequently, the role of the community in the member’s life. This chapter focuses on a single individual characteristic: the developmental stage of community members.

### **Specifics of Early Adolescence**

Early adolescence, occurring approximately between the ages of 11 and 14, is a sensitive developmental period. According to Erikson's developmental theory (1968), early adolescence is the stage in which the crisis between industry and inferiority (based on experiences in new social environments outside family, mostly school) should result either in the sense of competence or the sense of inferiority, while the new battle between establishing identity versus the confusion of roles begins. Early adolescence is, therefore, typical for behavioral, emotional, cognitive, psycho-social, and physical changes. It is a time of increased psycho-social vulnerability accompanied by increased emotional and behavioral fluctuations. Children are searching for and experimenting with their identity, which is connected to increasing social experiences within groups outside the family circle, most notably peers. These groups can become influential reference social groups in which children search for acceptance (Schave & Schave, 1989; Steinberg & Morris, 2001).

Early adolescence is thus a stage in which "outside" social influences can shape the ongoing changes in children's personalities. Different social groups present early adolescents with examples of different types of behaviors, introduce them to opinions and attitudes which can differ from those socialized in the family, and offer them an opportunity to gain a sense of belonging. Early adolescents seek new experiences within these groups and strive for their approval and acceptance, which might lead to different outcomes: some groups can help children gain sufficient self-esteem and positive self-concept; others have the opposite effect (Shave & Shave, 1989).

### **The Role of Online Communities**

Online communities can become one of the social environments within which children interact. Based on previous findings, we can assume that a substantial part (in fact, more than a third; Šmahel, 2008) of early adolescents visit online communities. But we do not have sufficient empirical evidence about the role and importance of these communities for early adolescents, since most studies were conducted on older populations. Moreover, psychologically oriented research on the younger population has been often focused on risky communities, such as communities devoted to eating disorders or self-harm (Černá & Šmahel, 2009; Giles, 2006; Whitlock, Powers, & Eckenrode, 2006), and less often to more common communities, such as communities of practice or interest (e.g., fan online communities; Machackova & Blinka, 2009). Nevertheless, previous studies provide important insight into the role of online communities, albeit valid mostly for older adolescents. Considering the overall existing body of

knowledge, I will outline the processes upon which an online community can become one of the influential social groups. The next few paragraphs will offer a theoretical approach to the examination of the role of online communities in the lives of early adolescents. But, because we lack sufficient empirical evidence to support these hypothesized processes, this is just a hypothetical framework, which guided the empirical research presented here.

Online communities can provide information and materials on a variety of topics: civic issues, religion and beliefs, or healthy lifestyles. As there are countless online communities, there is also a myriad of possible new information, presented attitudes, or interaction styles. This sea of new information can be very attractive for early adolescents, who reach beyond their family, test new social waters, and seek new information (Shave & Shave, 1989). In online communities, they can encounter alternative views and behavior than those socialized within their family. But simple exposure to such new environments does not equate to influence. The importance of the community would depend on the extent to which children identify with the online community.

This process could be built upon regular contact and visits to the (ever-present and ever-accessible) online community. In time, children can develop a sense of belonging, a necessary component in the social lives of early adolescents who need to belong and be accepted within social groups. This can be encouraged by support provided by community members. While sometimes distance and anonymity can lead to hostile behavior, it can also underlie increased support (Suler, 2004), which has been found in many online communities (Baym, 2007; Watson, 1997). Moreover, the online environment is typical for increased self-disclosure, especially in the relatively anonymous environment (Rains, 2012). If we consider early adolescence as a stage with the increased need to fit in, such support or positive feedback to disclosures can contribute substantially to the development of a sense of belonging in the community. According to Czech data, these processes – i.e., increased positive feedback from others, sense of belonging, and bringing new information – seem typical mostly for adolescent and youth members (until age 26), while disinhibition within the community is relatively high across a wider age range (up to age 50) (Šmahel, 2008).

Upon these processes, children may become members of the community and start to internalize some of its norms and attitudes, and replicate behavior in the online community also offline. Generally, they may develop a social identity (Tajfel, 2010; Turner & Reynolds, 2012) connected to this community. This can be very beneficial: children can find a safe group, which helps them self-

disclose, build a positive self-image, consider different opinions and attitudes, and offer a much needed sense of belonging. But this exact process can have both positive and negative consequences for overall development. Risky online communities – for example communities supporting eating disorders, self-harm communities, or extremist communities (Černá & Šmahel, 2009; De Koster & Houtman, 2008; Giles, 2006) – are also typical for the prevailing support for members' attitudes and behavior – yet, these would be considered harmful. In many cases, it is difficult to assess whether an online community is beneficial or risky. In this assessment, one aspect to consider is the extent to which people in a community are distinct from those in the offline environment, and the extent to which a child behaves differently in the online community compared to the offline environment. Although such questions still do not provide a definite answer to the possible influence of the community, they help assess the role of the online community as compared to offline conditions.

### **ONLINE COMMUNITIES IN EARLY ADOLESCENCE: EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE**

In this sub-chapter, I aim to empirically assess the role of online communities in the lives of early adolescents. I described that online community can offer example of attitudes, opinions, and behavioral patterns, which might influence a child's identity and behavior within it, but can also be extrapolated to the offline world. But such process can vary significantly across different types of online communities. Here, I will specifically focus on the moderating effect of the type of interaction with community members and compare the three aforementioned types of online communities. First are Only Online communities, i.e., those in which children interact with other members only online and do not meet in real life. Second are Partly Online and Partly Offline communities, in which children interact with some members only online and with others also offline. Third are Mostly Offline communities; i.e., those in which children interact with most members offline (but still they sustain online contact). Therefore, I ask how children in different types of online communities perceive the benefits and consequences of their membership. Specifically, whether these communities are similar or distinct from the offline environment; if they provide support, opportunity for self-disclosure, and a sense of belonging; and whether children perceive that they changed in attitudes and/or behavior due to community membership.

To answer these questions I utilized data from a national survey conducted in the Czech Republic<sup>7</sup> in 2012. We asked children whether they are members of

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7 Project RIUDaD funded by the Czech Grant Agency.

an online community, which was described as follows: “On the internet there are a lot of places where people of similar interests or opinions meet. Sometimes these people make groups to which their members come back regularly, they often use a nickname, know each other, talk to each other or exchange information or materials. They can meet e.g., on discussion forums, blogs, chats, or in games. Do you personally visit such a place or group regularly?”<sup>8</sup>

### **Membership in Online Communities**

In our sample, 50% of early adolescents (N=857; 50% girls) indicated that they are members of an online community. From these, 16.5% interacted with members “only online”, 46.8% interacted “partly online and partly offline”, and 36.6% “mostly offline”. In mostly offline communities, girls were a bit more prevalent (56%), while boys were more often members in only online communities (58%). Almost no gender differences were found in partly offline communities. All types of communities showed similar age trends: older youth were members of communities more often than younger ones.

The importance of community in children’s lives can be indicated by several aspects. The frequencies of visits and the length of membership may reflect whether these communities are part of the everyday life of children. There were some differences, with only online communities being visited on a daily basis by 65% of their members, partly offline by 79%, and mostly offline by 67%. Moreover, partly and mostly offline communities were in most cases part of children’s lives for more than a year, while this applied only for 40% of only online communities (see Figure 1).

Online communities can be connected to the offline environment (as we can presume in the case of mostly offline ones), but they can also present a new and distinct social environment. We asked respondents to what extent they perceived their *own behavior within the community as different* from behavior in other settings (e.g., “In this group I behave very differently from how I behave among people I know personally”). According to our expectations, the only and partly online groups both reported higher levels of such behavior than the mostly offline group. More surprisingly, when we asked if they perceived *members as different* compared to people in their offline environment (e.g., “The members are very different from people I commonly meet in person”), there were no significant differences between the three groups.

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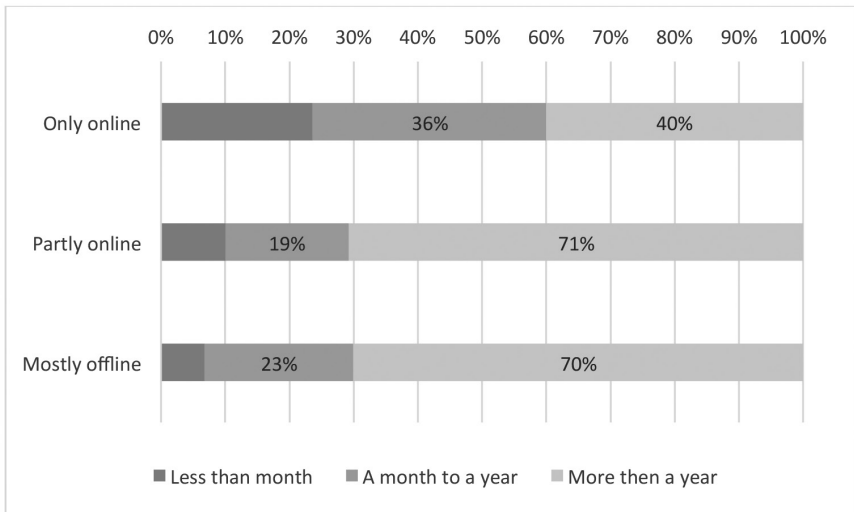
8 The initial results, including measurement and analytical details, are available here: [http://irtis.fss.muni.cz/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The\\_Perceived\\_Importance\\_and\\_Influence\\_of\\_Online\\_Groups\\_poster.pdf](http://irtis.fss.muni.cz/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/The_Perceived_Importance_and_Influence_of_Online_Groups_poster.pdf)



I described that the online communities can provide many benefits, such as a sense of belonging, perceived support, and the possibility for self-disclosure within the community. These factors can fulfill the developmental needs of early adolescents and also underlie the process of identification with the community. For *perceived support* (e.g., “They are willing to help me”), offline contact seems to be crucial, as the two groups with offline contact both reported higher levels than the only online group. It is possible that on average, the strictly online environment is not sufficient to provide as much feeling of support when compared to offline ties. It was a bit surprising that the only online group also reported lower levels of *self-disclosure* (e.g., “I talk also about very personal issues”) than the partly offline group; yet, they did not differ significantly in this regard from the mostly offline group. Finally, *sense of belonging* (e.g., “I can belong to the group”) was highest in communities with partly offline contact. It seems that the online dimension of these community types still offers some (maybe necessary) distance and possibility for control over self-presentation, while some regular offline contact can strengthen the ties and offer more chances to feel accepted.

Thus, these findings suggest that respondents meeting community members partly online and partly offline benefit most from membership in the online community, as they reported the highest levels of a sense of belonging as well as higher levels of perceived support and self-disclosure than in the only online group. It seems that the balanced combination of online and offline contact enables the most trust and still offers a safe environment to encourage self-disclosing behavior. But, they also behaved more differently in the community than the mostly offline group. The only online group also inclined more to behave differently within the group than the mostly offline group, but also perceived less support. Therefore, while this environment probably offers a change to exert different opinions and behavior than the offline one, this is not rewarded as much by provided support.

Finally, we also asked how the respondents themselves evaluated possible *personal change* in their attitudes or behavior due to the membership in the online community (e.g., “Thanks to this group, I started to behave differently from before in everyday life”). The partly offline group reported the highest average of perceived personal change. Also considering previous findings, this can indicate that belonging in a community with both online and offline contact could be most influential on children’s development, as members of this type of community also reported higher levels of support, sense of belonging, and self-disclosure, which all can underlie identification with the community as a



**Figure 1:** The average length of membership in an online community.

social group. To test this presumption, we also conducted separate analyses in which we accounted for single effects of all these factors and examined their association with personal change. In only online communities, personal change was positively linked with distinct behavior of respondents and members; in partly offline and mostly offline communities, it was linked also with increased sense of belonging and self-disclosure. Therefore, while these latter two factors might underlie behavioral change in members of communities with some offline contact, this might not be the case for purely online communities.

## CONCLUSION

Online communities are new social environments which contemporary children visit. In this chapter, I focused on the importance of online communities as perceived by early adolescents, an age at which children undergo significant changes in terms of identity development (Erikson, 1968) and enlarge their social experiences within diverse groups (Shave & Shave, 1989). Acknowledging that the online community is an umbrella term for many different online places, this chapter was focused on one specific attribute: the form of contact with community members, specifically only online, partly offline, and mostly offline.

The findings showed that half of Czech early adolescents participated in some kind of online community. Most often, they participated in a community where

they sustained some kind of offline contact with other members, while strictly online communities were visited by less than a fifth of all community members.

Based on our findings, it seems that it is the community with mixed and balanced online and offline contacts which brings the most potential benefits. Members of these communities reported high levels of support, a sense of belonging, and self-disclosing behavior. But, they also reported the highest levels of behavior distinct from the offline environment and the highest perceived personal change due to community membership. These mixed communities seem to provide both a safe online environment, which enables members to control their expressions and self-presentations, and an environment where they can still strengthen and sustain the ties via offline meetings.

On the other hand, the only online communities probably lack such stability and influence in children's lives. According to our findings, they were rather new environments in children's lives, visited by most for less than a year. Although they offer a chance to practice different behavior and meet people distinct from their offline environment, they fail to provide as much support and sense of belonging. They might urge personal changes due to the possibility to perform distinct behavior and meet distinct people, but, probably because of the barrier between children's offline environment and online communities, even an increased sense of belonging does not lead so often to the extension of the identity and behavior within the community to other contexts.

In the case of predominantly offline communities, we can speculate that most of them emerged due to existing offline ties, which were simply extended to the online environment. Therefore, it is not surprising that the behavior of members within such communities is not distinct from the offline world. Yet, they also do not provide much sense of belonging. This could be because these communities are formed within specific existing environments (e.g., a class) typical for the mixed quality of relationships, while the partly online communities can more often be based on the selection of specific groups (or at least people to interact with offline), who share similar interests and views. Among these, children can feel more accepted, because the common link can be the most pronounced part of community relationships.

The aim of this chapter was to shed more light on the role of online communities in early adolescence. Still, many questions remain unanswered. There are other important factors besides developmental stage which intervene in the process in which online communities influence children's development, like for example,

socio-psychological characteristics (including personality traits, self-esteem, self-concept, and social competencies) or the character of the offline environment (quality of relationships with family and peers, or overall living conditions). Moreover, I focused only on the character of ties with community members, yet there are other important attributes of communities: the topic, discursive nature, or even platform on which they exist. Finally, I also focused on the perceived role in the children's lives, but did not capture its character. Considering the perceived influence, are partly offline communities beneficial or do they present potential harm? We measured potential behavioral change, but the character of such change was not assessed in this study. This aspect is of great importance but also of great methodological complexity, which will pose a challenge for future studies.

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# Stranger Is Not Always Danger: The Myth and Reality of Meetings with Online Strangers

Lenka Dedkova

## ABSTRACT

This chapter deals with the topic of face-to-face meetings with people known only from the internet. First, the popularized picture of online strangers as online pedophiles searching for children on the internet is presented and contradicted to empirical evidence from actual internet-initiated sexual crimes with minors. Next, the chapter focuses on findings from the general population of young internet users and shows the typical meetings with online strangers as an activity which mostly happens among adolescent peers and only in a minority of the cases results in negative outcomes. Lastly, the focus shifts to a description and discussion of the nature of such negative experiences based on both quantitative and qualitative data. The consequences of the inaccurate media portrayal of online strangers are also discussed, as well as future directions for research in this area.

## Keywords

meeting online strangers, cybergrooming, face-to-face meetings

## INTRODUCTION

Face-to-face or “offline” meetings with so-called online strangers (i.e., with people known from the internet one has not met before) is considered one of the most risky online activities in which children and youth may engage (Fleming & Rickwood, 2004; Livingstone, Haddon, Görzig, & Ólafsson, 2011). This is reflected in the high proportion of parents reporting such concerns in the United States (53% of parents were *very* concerned and another 19% *somewhat* about their children’s interactions with online strangers; Madden, Cortesi, Gasser, Lenhart, & Duggan, 2012) as well as in Europe (60% of parents reported being mostly concerned about their children being a target of online grooming; European Commission, 2008). It makes perfect sense – online activities happen, according to the definition of “online” (i.e., in a virtual

space), where youth are physically distant from other internet users, often in their homes and under (at least some) supervision by parents. Offline meetings with online strangers, on the other hand, start as online activity, but then move to the physical world, where we are all more vulnerable – especially when compared to the relative safety of being online in one’s own home.

Concerns over youth safety in meetings with online strangers include mainly the fear of sexual or physical abuse, and these concerns are widely supported by highly publicized cases of online pedophiles or cybergroomers. Empirical evidence, however, shows a different picture: negative experiences from meetings of online strangers are not common and do not correspond to the media coverage. In this chapter, I will focus on this discrepancy between the popular portrayal of cybergrooming and reality, and present an alternative picture of meetings between online strangers that is grounded in empirical data. To understand this discrepancy, it is important to first describe how the media present the problematic of online pedophiles or cybergroomers, therefore it is a subject of next section.

### **Media Portrayal of Cybergrooming**

In general, presentations of any problem in the media are very important because they shape the perceptions of the general public as well as the professionals who can then be requested to propose and implement prevention and intervention strategies. Misguided portrayals in the media can thus lead to misguided policies that target mistaken issues and/or populations. It is, therefore, important to compare the media coverage of meeting strangers with empirical evidence.

When we search for information about meeting online strangers, terms such as “cybergroomers”, “online pedophiles”, and “online predators” are common. Marwick (2008) argues that the online pedophile issue has expanded from a few sensationalized media cases into widespread and disproportional moral panic. Based on the usage of the phrase “online pedophiles” in articles in popular U.S. press between January 1995 and February 2008, she showed how the term became popular in 2007 when 457 articles were found as opposed to 58 in 2006 and only 12 in 2005. She links this spike to the reality show “To Catch a Predator”<sup>9</sup> and a few cases of teens being sexually abused by people met through the social networking site MySpace (see Marwick, 2008 for more details). Similar moral panic, even though based on different cases, could be

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9 In this reality show, volunteers pretended to be minors and set up a meeting with an online stranger for sexual purposes; the stranger was then publicly exposed and arrested by the police.



identified also in Europe (Facer, 2012). This wide media coverage led to a generalized fear of a very specific online stranger both in the U.S. and Europe – an adult man with pedophilic sexual orientation who uses the anonymity of the internet to search for unsuspecting children while pretending to be their age, and then manipulates them to meet him offline where he can sexually abuse them (Fleming & Rickwood, 2004; Marwick, 2008; Wolak, Finkelhor, & Mitchell, 2009).

Wolak, Finkelhor, and Mitchell (2004; see also Wolak, Finkelhor, Mitchell, & Ybarra, 2010) conducted a study to address whether this popular picture of online pedophiles corresponded to reality. The National Juvenile Online Victimization (N-JOV) study focused on internet-initiated sex crimes with juvenile victims. Using stratified sampling from law enforcement agencies in the U.S., they were informed about 1,723 cases of internet-related sex crimes, from which another subsample was randomly selected. This process produced a sample of 129 internet-initiated cases. Most of these cases (73%) were completed crimes (with charges such as sexual assault or the production of child pornography), the rest fell under attempted crimes. The study then focused on the characteristics of victims and offenders in these cases, as well as on the case stories. These are the most important findings which can be compared to the aforementioned media portrayal of online predators: 1) most victims (99%) were between the ages of 13 and 17 (76% between 13 and 15), 1% was 12 years old and there were none younger; 2) offenders were mostly male (99%) and aged 26 or older (76%) with almost half more than 20 years older than the minor (47%); 3) only 5% of offenders pretended to be their victim's age; 4) most offenders (80%) openly discussed sex with their victims during online interactions; 5) most offenders and victims met offline (74%) and most of those more than once (73%); and, 6) only 5% of cases involved violent offenses (mostly attempted or actual rape).

These figures show that, in a typical case, the minor knew who he/she was about to meet (e.g., the age of the stranger) and knew about and agreed to sexual activities with the stranger, resulting mostly in statutory rape because the victims were under the legal age of consent. In half of the cases the investigators even reported that the minor was in love with the offender.

This already shows a different picture from the one presented in the media: offenders (mostly) do not lie about their age, nor their motives, and the minors are willingly (albeit illegally) engaging in sexual activities, possibly because, from their perspective, they are in a romantic relationship with the offender.

Further, the age range of the victims in this study shows that offenders were not pedophiles (i.e., interested in prepubescent children); rather, their sexual orientation might better be described as hebephilia (i.e., attraction toward adolescents). Since adolescents are sexually mature, this preference does not represent deviant orientation (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), even though it does not conform to accepted social and legal norms in Western societies.

Wolak et al. (2004) also explain that the internet is not such a convenient space for pedophiles to look for children. Children usually do not engage in interactions with strangers with the frequency of older youth (e.g., Livingstone et al., 2011), because they are not yet interested in searching for relationships or romance (DeLamater & Friedrich, 2002). They also tend to have more restrictive or supervised access to the internet (both at home and at school) and they are generally more discouraged from interacting with strangers than adolescents (Livingstone et al., 2011). Further, when children encounter something online that makes them uncomfortable, they are more likely to inform parents or another authority and stop the activity when compared to adolescents (Livingstone et al., 2011). This environment is also not friendly toward impulsive and violent offenders, as establishing the relationship with a youth typically requires time and patience (Wolak et al., 2004).

When we recall the online pedophile portrait in the media, we can see that in this sample (i.e., the sample of actual criminal internet-initiated sex crime cases with minors), there was not one that would fit this popular image. Rather, there were cases of adolescents willingly meeting with adults for the purpose of a relationship with a sexual component. However, it is extremely important at this point to state at least two qualifications.

First, this does not mean that pedophilic individuals cannot try and sometimes even succeed in finding vulnerable children on the internet. After all, there have been several such documented cases (see Facer, 2012; Marwick, 2008).

Second, the predominant picture of a minor meeting an adult on the internet for the purpose of romantic and sexual relationship formation should not be understood as a positive message, *per se*. Surely, when we compare such a meeting with an assumed pedophile reaching out to sexually abuse children, it seems that we can exhale with relief that this is an extremely rare reality. But, adolescents forming sexual relationships with (often quite older) adults also represent a major concern because of the inevitably unbalanced dynamic in

such relationships. On the other hand, it is a concern quite different from the one presented in the media.

The popular portrayal of the dangers of unknown people on the internet as online pedophiles is thus widely inaccurate and its representation should be changed, as its current version has led to several unfortunate consequences, which will be the subject of next section.

### **Online “Stranger Danger”?**

Fear for children’s wellbeing and safety both online and offline is a natural and important part of society, and is especially pronounced for parents. It helps to prevent or decrease many problems in children’s lives. But, public concern can also easily lead to exaggerated moral panic, as described above. The main problem with moral panic over online pedophiles is that when people take such a generalized inaccurate picture for granted, they start to fear something which is rare, they start to misdirect public policy, and, as a result, they do not pay enough attention to more real (or more probable) dangers. This also misguides youth as to what they should really be careful about (see Wolak et al., 2004).

What is happening is basically that we now see a new version of “stranger danger” rhetoric, which was previously used in the offline world and should lead to the prevention of sexual abuse and dangerous situations that children may generally encounter. But, there is a lot of oversimplification in this slogan, which eventually led even official agencies dealing with child abuse (such as, for example, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children; McBride, 2005) to withhold its support. These are the reasons why “stranger danger” rhetoric is problematic: 1) it is not clear who constitutes the “stranger”. According to McBride (2005), when asked about a “stranger”, children tend to describe him/her as someone who is ugly or mean – i.e., children do not consider friendly people to be strangers they should fear. Similarly, when children know the person from somewhere, they may stop perceiving the person as a “stranger” and therefore, as a “danger”. “Somewhere” in this instance might be the neighborhood, school, or simply repeatedly seeing someone on the street. And, 2) this slogan also ignores the facts about child sexual abuse – that in the vast majority of cases, the offender is not actually a stranger, but rather someone well known to the child, such as a family member, a teacher, or a neighbor (Finkelhor, Ormrod, Turner, & Hamby, 2005). Thus, “stranger danger” advice fails to address the real problem.

The situation is similar in the case of online pedophiles. Once again, youth are taught to fear someone while ignoring the fact that this specific someone represents only a very rare danger. For example, in the European Grooming Project (Webster et al., 2012), adolescents were asked to describe an online groomer. Their answers covered characteristics such as: old, creepy, fat, bold, mentally disturbed, sweaty, wearing big thick glasses, and more similarly stereotypical ones. This is the person who we teach youth to fear. The problem is that at the same time we also implicitly teach them that they can trust everyone else who does not fit this profile. By spreading around the online pedophile stereotype, we tell them to be aware of online strangers, *because they are creepy pedophiles acting as peers*. In the qualitative research conducted in the Czech Republic in 2011, we interviewed youth about their negative experiences with meeting online strangers. This is an excerpt from one interview conducted through instant messenger with a 15-year-old girl who had met several boys from the internet:

**Interviewer:** *And did you think about the potential dangers of the meeting when you did not know the guy?*

**Girl:** *Not really, that never happened to me... It was always absolutely ok, because I saw them on webcam...*

**Interviewer:** *And when you saw them and talked to them online prior to the meeting, then you thought it is safe?*

**Girl:** *I did, because I was certain, that they are not old pedophiles, who will kill me :-D*

This girl clearly had heard about the dangers of online pedophiles, who might use the internet to search for children, but she assumed that meeting with verified peers was danger-free simply because they were verified peers. Similarly, another girl in the same project said that she did not expect anything dangerous and did not employ any safety or protection measures because she was about to meet her friend's brother, i.e., not a complete stranger.

Similar to offline "stranger danger", the "stranger" label is rather ambiguous and misleading in the case of online strangers. Youth interact with online "strangers" often for a long period of time before they decide to meet in person. There is a valid question whether these previously unknown people from the internet are really "strangers" after this online phase of interaction, and whether we should continue to label them as such. But I will get back to this question later.

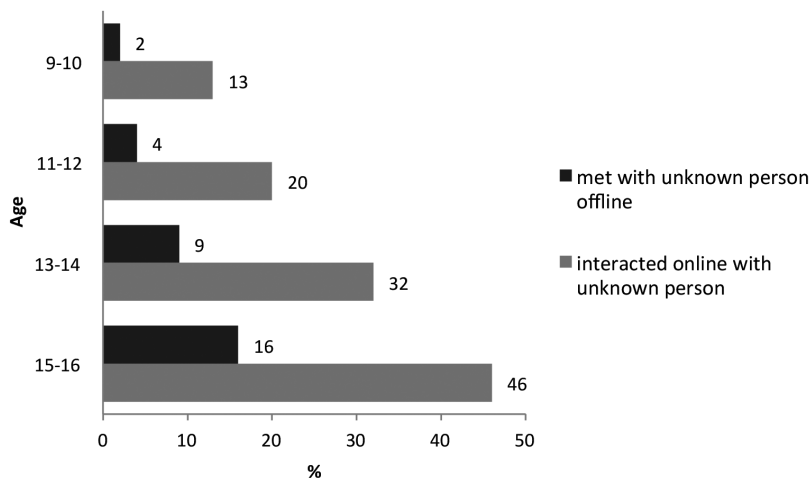
Until now I have shown that sexual abuse from online strangers is problematic and, in fact, quite different from what we would expect based on media reports. But, the issue is more rich than described thus far and it would be a mistake to understand the results of Wolak et al.'s (2004) study as a typical scenario for meeting online strangers. Bear in mind that their data is based only on criminal records and, therefore, shows typical scenarios only for internet-initiated sexual crimes against minors. To learn about a typical scenario of youth meetings with online strangers in general, we have to take a look at empirical evidence that stems from researching the general population of online youth.

### **Adolescents' Meetings with Online Strangers**

As mentioned above, children are typically not looking for new relationships or meeting new people online; this is an activity predominantly employed by adolescents. In adolescence, the need to interact with other people increases and it is developmentally appropriate for adolescents to widen their social circle because it is extremely important in fulfilling their developmental goals of identity, intimacy, and sexuality (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011). Meeting new people (i.e., strangers) is a natural part of growing up, as it had been before the internet. The only difference is that contemporary youth have an additional environment in which to meet new people. And as empirical evidence shows, they do use this environment for this purpose quite often:

Fully 30% of respondents interacted with an unknown person (or people) online during the last 12 months, according to findings from the EU Kids Online II project, which questioned children and adolescents 9–16 years old in 25 European countries ( $N = 21,142$ ; Livingstone et al., 2011). But there were substantial differences with regard to age (see Graph 1). While just 13% of younger children (9–10 years old) communicated with a stranger online, almost every other (46%) did so at 15–16. This age trend nicely demonstrates the developmental conditionality of this activity. The same age trend is clearly visible in the frequencies of actual offline meetings with people from the internet, i.e., the focus of this chapter.

On average, 9% of European children questioned in EU Kids Online II had met someone from the internet in the previous year. This number is quite low and shows that the majority of children in Europe actually do not embrace this activity. Even in the oldest group in this research (15–16 year olds), only 16% went to such a meeting. Empirical findings from other studies regarding the frequencies of meeting strangers vary depending on age and the specificity of their sample. For example, a Romanian study by Barbovschi (2009), showed



**Figure 1:** Online and offline interactions with online strangers among European children (EU Kids Online II,  $N = 25,142$ ).

around one third of 10–20 year olds ( $N = 1, 806$ ) met someone from the internet. The American Youth Internet Safety Survey (YISS, Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2002) found 7% of 10–17 years old ( $N = 1, 501$ ) did. And the SAFT Singapore survey concurred with 16% of 12–17 years old ( $N = 1, 241$ ) (Liau, Khoo, & Hwaang, 2005). We can thus see, that even in the sample with the highest proportion of respondents meeting strangers (one third of the respondents in Barbovschi’s study), the majority of the sample still does not meet people from the internet.

Typically, youth meet with a peer or someone of approximately the same age (a year younger or older) and, in the majority of cases, the meeting included a male and a female participant (Livingstone et al., 2011; Walsh, Wolak, & Mitchell, 2013; Wolak et al., 2002), which is also in line with the adolescent’s developmental needs, as mentioned above (Brown, 2004). Moreover, the “strangers” are also often connected to the youth’s offline lives: they are friends of friends or distant relatives, i.e., people somehow “verified” by one’s existing social circle. In EU Kids Online II, 57% of youth who met someone from the internet encountered someone in this fashion (Barbovschi, Marinescu, Velicu, & Laszlo, 2012).

Further, we should ask who the children are who not only communicate with strangers online but who also decide to meet them offline (according to EU

Kids Online II, this is 30% of online interactions versus 9% of offline meetings). Empirical evidence suggests that those who actually meet with strangers tend to be somehow more vulnerable: they tend to have more difficulties in their lives (such as problematic relationships with peers and/or parents), higher levels of depression, and they use the internet with higher frequency than those who do not meet with online strangers (Barbovschi, 2009, 2013; Liau et al., 2005; Wolak, Mitchell, & Finkelhor, 2003). These findings could be interpreted with the so-called “social compensation hypothesis”, which suggests that people may engage in online relationships to compensate for poor, unsupportive offline relationships (for more details see e.g., Laghi et al., 2013; Valkenburg & Peter, 2011).

So when we look at findings based on the general population of young internet users, we see a different picture from the one presented earlier in the sample of internet-initiated sexual crimes with minors. We see youth who seem not to have sufficiently strong (or diverse or frequent) social ties in their offline lives, and who seek to fulfill their developmental goals by searching for new relationships on the internet. We see youth communicating and meeting peers of the opposite gender, perhaps to try to form desired (and, again, developmentally appropriate) romantic relationships or to develop a new friendship. And we see them succeed in their effort, finding new friends or partners, but, indeed, we also see some of them getting hurt by such meetings. That is the topic of next section.

### **Unpleasant Meetings with Online Strangers**

As in the physical world when we meet someone new, not every meeting with an online stranger goes well. Unfortunately, gaps in current knowledge remain when it comes to the question of what went wrong during negative meetings with online strangers. We know that youths’ negative experiences are not frequent. EU Kids Online II findings show that only 1% of all respondents had a negative experience (11% of those who went to an offline meeting). When asked about the extent of their negative feelings after the meeting, about half of them indicated they were bothered “not at all” or “a bit” as opposed to the second half, who said they were bothered “fairly” or “very” (Livingstone et al., 2011). An even lower number of youth upset after meeting a stranger were reported in the aforementioned YISS (3% of those who went to such a meeting, Wolak et al., 2002) and the Singapore study (2.4% of those who went to such a meeting, Liau et al., 2005). It is interesting to note that meetings resulting in a negative experience are not different from other meetings with respect to the level of “familiarity” with the stranger. In other words, meetings with complete strangers are no more or less harmful than meetings with people

known through one's existing social circle (Barbovschi et al., 2012). Moreover, most negative meetings (similar to most meetings in general) are the ones with peers, not an adult, as would be expected based on the previously discussed "online pedophile" scenarios (Livingstone et al., 2011).

To better understand the negative experience, researchers in EU Kids Online II asked youth upset by the meeting what happened. (Due to the sensitivity of the question, only respondents older than 11 were asked,  $N = 231$ ). They could choose multiple answers from these options:

- The other person said hurtful things to me: this was true for 22% of respondents
- The other person did something sexual to me: 11%
- The other person hurt me physically: 3%
- Something else: 10%

Interestingly, a lot of these respondents did not provide a specific answer to this question by choosing: *I do not know* (37%) or *I do not want to answer* (22%) (Livingstone et al., 2011, p. 94). When we add the 10% who reported *something else*, we do not have any clue what happened to quite a large amount of respondents in this project. In the Singapore study (Liau et al., 2005), researchers asked all youth who went to such a meeting (not solely those with negative experiences,  $N = 1,241$ ) if something bad had happened. There were only two respondents who reported that the stranger said nasty things to them and two who reported that the stranger tried to hurt them physically. But they also had quite a large amount of respondents who avoided the answer: 22% stated that they did not remember/did not know.

Besides these obviously missing answers, the pre-specified options typical for quantitative research also do not give us enough specific details about the upsetting experience. For example, the concrete interpretation of "sexual" largely differs among individuals (Savin-Williams & Diamond, 2004) and "something sexual" can thus cover a wide range of behavior, from actual intercourse to non-coital experiences such as kissing (Crockett, Raffaelli, & Moilanen, 2003). Therefore, it is hard to understand the real meaning behind these statistics.

To get a deeper understanding of the nature of negative experiences with meeting online strangers, we interviewed 14 Czech adolescent girls (aged 15–18) who claimed to have had such an experience (Dedkova, Cerna, Janasova, & Daneback, 2014). The "prototypical" negative meeting in this small sample



can be described this way: a girl met a boy or a young man on the internet and interacted with him for some time. During that time, she appreciated his language and attention and she found him attractive based on his pictures. When she agreed to the meeting, it was for dating purpose (even though this was sometimes not explicitly formulated); the girl thought that they might form a romantic relationship if they proved to be compatible. However, when the girl first saw her counterpart, she realized he looked different than she had expected and that she was not attracted to him. Consequently, she felt disappointed and did not find his welcoming kiss or hug as appropriate or desirable. Further, during the meeting, he behaved differently than she expected, tried to kiss her or touch her repeatedly, was rude, or inattentive. The girl felt upset, disgusted, bored, and sometimes scared, but she somehow could not express herself and, rather than directly asking him to stop his actions, she remained silent and tried to avoid physical contact by keeping physical distance or by staying in a public place. After the meeting, the girl shared her experience with someone close (e.g., a friend, a cousin, an aunt), listened to loud music, and participated in other activities to avoid thinking about the meeting. She felt guilty that she went to the meeting in the first place and she also felt angry at herself for not being able to tell the stranger what she really thought.

Based on the specifics of each meeting (e.g., the stranger's specific behavior), the resulting negative feelings of the girls included (and mostly were a mix of) fear, anger, embarrassment, remorse, disappointment, and boredom (Dedkova et al., 2014). We can also identify three main sources of the girls' negative feelings:

1. The appearance of the stranger – his age and physical attractiveness, despite the fact that in most cases the girls knew the (correct) age of the stranger and saw his photo during the online interaction phase;
2. The stranger's behavior – negatively perceived behavior mostly covered the strangers' attempts to physical contact (e.g., kissing, hugging), or actual physical contact (rape in one case and inappropriate touching in another), but also rude language, overconfidence, and aggressive behavior; and
3. The girls' reflections on their own behavior – the girls felt they should not have agreed to meet the stranger or should have acted differently during the meeting.

The main problem thus seems to be the differences between the girls' expectations and reality. However, lots of information still remains unknown or was not captured in our interviews. For example, we do not know the basis for the girls' expectations: was it the strangers' behavior during the online phase that lead the girls to expect a handsome gentleman (which would suggest that strangers did purposefully alter their self-presentation online), or was it the girls' imagination and a projection of their ideal counterpart onto the stranger, facilitated by the lack of audiovisual cues in the online environment? Or did gender and age differences – in other words, non-internet-related factors – play the most important role? While these expectation sources are extremely hard to assess (impossible, even, when interviewing only one side of the interaction), it is plausible that all these processes played some role.

The cue-less online environment allows us to massively project our own wishes and desires onto our counterpart as we are forced to create a complex picture of the individual with a limited amount of information (Suler, 2004). Also, the same cue-less nature of the internet provides users with control over their self-presentation that would be hard to achieve offline. For example, one can think carefully what to write, let the system check spelling mistakes, present only information that shows one in a positive light. At the same time, the receiver of this information mostly cannot validate it (e.g., one cannot verify the information about appearance by simple observation as one would face-to-face; Walther, 2007). These two processes can be easily combined to create an expectation so different from reality that discovering the discrepancy inevitably leads to negative feelings. Furthermore, people tend to self-present themselves in a positive light as well as (often) subconsciously fill-in the gaps in others' presentations. Therefore, these differences could be produced without ill will on either side.

Gender and age differences might also be an important step in the process. A different developmental phase or the socialization of gender roles may lead to expecting different outcomes from the meeting and, therefore, can lead to perceiving strangers' behaviors as undesirable (more in Dedkova et al., 2014). These “demographic” differences work the same way when we meet new people in our offline lives as well – meetings with online strangers are no different from what we already know and experience offline in these respects.

One interesting point was also captured in the interviews and was briefly outlined before in section on “stranger danger” rhetoric. Should we label people from the internet who youths meet in the physical world as “strangers”?

We saw that in more than half of the cases, youths met someone connected to their existing social circle (e.g., a friend of a friend; Barbovschi et al., 2012). Moreover, the online phase of interaction can be quite extensive. For example, one of interviewed girls in our study interacted with her “stranger” for two years and actually reported that they had been in a romantic relationship for three months prior to the face-to-face meeting. This does not strongly correspond with the “stranger” label. On the other hand, several girls in our study did use the word “stranger” or described in different words that the person was in fact someone unknown. And even this particular girl, who said she was actually in a relationship with her online “stranger” during the online phase of their interaction, said: *“We did not know each other and suddenly this”* when she described why she was unpleasantly surprised by his attempts to kiss her when they first met face-to-face. It seems that for these girls, the online interaction phase was not enough to really get to know the person, who, in some respect, remained a “stranger”. But, it is also possible that this holds true only (or predominantly) for negative meetings. The girls might have relied on the stranger label as it provided them an excuse to not engage in unwanted physical contact. For positive encounters, the stranger label may be inappropriate because youth might be meeting an online friend who then continues to be their friend offline and there is no “relationship drop” after the face-to-face meeting.

These interviews provide deeper insight into what went wrong on negative meetings with online strangers and how such a negative meeting might really look, but it is important to keep in mind that the data comes from a small sample of girls who reported, and were willing to share, their negative experiences with meeting online strangers. Therefore, the data should not be generalized to every meeting with online strangers. Furthermore, in this study we have only analyzed interviews with girls; therefore, we lack the perspective of boys and men, which would definitely provide interesting information and explanations for upsetting meetings, and I would welcome future research in this direction.

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to show that the media portrayal depicting online strangers is widely inaccurate and, in fact, leads to some undesirable consequences in the form of misguided advice and policies. According to empirical evidence from many studies presented in this chapter, most youths’ meetings with online strangers do not result in negative experiences, and when they do there is no correspondence to the media’s online pedophile scenario in an absolute majority of cases.

In contrast to the media portrayal, meetings with online strangers typically happen in adolescence, not childhood. Meeting strangers is a natural part of the developmental and social processes: we should not forget that we were all once strangers to our friends and partners and we all have met a lot of strangers during our lives. One's social circle is constantly growing, especially in adolescence, because adolescents simply need other people to achieve their developmental goals. This is why meeting strangers rapidly increases during this life period – it is beneficial and developmentally appropriate. And this is also why advising youth not to meet strangers (online or offline) is, by default, dubious.

Therefore, parents should acknowledge that at some age (adolescence) it is normal that their offspring want to meet new people, and, because the internet is now a natural part of youth lives, children might utilize this environment for this purpose as well and not depend solely on the physical world. Parents should let their children know that under some conditions and while taking safety measures meeting people from the internet can be allowed and will not result in restrictions or punishment in form of e.g., limited internet access. Stating the opposite might lead youth to hide planned meetings from parents and consequently increase the potential risk. Further, it is important to encourage youth to leave the meeting if they do not like the other person.

Fear about strangers also leads to another consequence: it inherently makes children and youth believe that meeting familiar people is without risk. Debates about the dangers of meeting online strangers implicitly suggest that meetings with people not fitting the “online stranger” label is safe (e.g., meeting an online friend; meeting someone connected to offline life, for example, a friend of a schoolmate). However, negative meetings with other people are not a new phenomenon that developed with the invention of the internet and for which complete strangers are to blame. These experiences have always been here (see, for example, the wide literature on adolescent dating violence). And, as empirical evidence shows, harm does often come from familiar people known from “reality” and not from random strangers. As mentioned above, in most cases of child sexual abuse, the perpetrator is someone very close to the child; and meeting and dating people known from real life can and does result in negative feelings, too. Therefore, instead of supporting general “stranger-danger” rhetoric, we should address the fact that every meeting has the potential to be dangerous, be it meeting with an absolute stranger, an online friend whom one has known for two years, or an uncle. Surely, I am not saying that we should be paranoid about every encounter in our lives; rather, I suggest

we should not limit our advice to prevent improbable meetings with online pedophiles, but expand them with more general safety measures.

Finally, in our small sample of negative experiences from meeting online strangers by adolescent girls, the unpleasant feelings in most cases seemed to be based on discrepancies between expectations and reality. The question of whether these discrepancies should be attributed to the strangers' deceptive online behavior (i.e., strangers acting differently online and offline) or the youth's projection and idealization of the stranger remains open and challenging for future research to address. Nevertheless, we should teach children and youth that the features of the internet can lead to distorted perceptions of other people, even if they are not being deceptive or lying, and that they should, therefore, be careful when evaluating other people based on online behavior.

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# Children's Privacy Management on Social Network Sites

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## **ABSTRACT**

The chapter examines the management of online privacy on Social Network Sites (SNS) among children and adolescents. Petronio's Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM) was selected as the primary theoretical framework for capturing the process of privacy management and boyd's features and dynamics of networked publics were used to depict the specific affordances of the SNS environment. Using qualitative cross-national data from European children aged 9–16 from the EU Kids Online III project, the chapter illustrates how current children manage their privacy on SNS and show in which aspects this process has become problematized. Using the CPM framework, several components of children's privacy management on SNS are described: The perception of the ownership (and loss thereof) of private information; different types of control over the published information and the online audience; the rules which guide the control and overall online behavior, including the co-ownership of private information; and the boundary turbulences that lead to the co-construction of privacy rules and boundaries on SNS.

## **Keywords**

online privacy, communication privacy management theory, social network sites, children and adolescents

## **INTRODUCTION**

In last decade, Social Network Sites (SNS) have become important venues for our social lives. Their use is connected with a number of opportunities for forming and sustaining relationships (Livingstone & Brake, 2010), processes which inevitably involve some degree of disclosures (Derlega & Chaikin, 1977). But information disclosed on SNS is persistent, can be easily accessed, spread, and replicated (boyd, 2010). This is why disclosures on SNS may result in a negative experience and even harm if published information and materials are in some way misused. Therefore, many SNS users protect their privacy by



balancing between disclosures and concealments, striving for the most positive outcomes but, at the same time, fearing potential risks.

In this chapter, we focus on children and adolescents, who enjoy SNS for their affordances but for whom they also pose a challenge in terms of privacy. Despite the fact that youth seem to be savvy media users, they still develop cognitive, social, and digital skills needed to sustain optimal levels of online privacy. Although a number of studies have focused on privacy online (i.e., Trepte & Reinecke, 2011), we still lack sufficient knowledge about the experiences of contemporary children and adolescents. We need to understand how they manage their privacy on SNS and how they perceive the specifics of the online environment in this context.

Our aim is, therefore, to capture how youth balance their disclosures and manage privacy boundaries on SNS. To achieve this goal, we will utilize existing knowledge about the specifics of SNS environment (boyd, 2010) and Petronio's Communication Privacy Management Theory (2002; 2010), which offers a useful framework to capture privacy management on SNS (Child & Petronio, 2011). Using data from interviews with European children aged 9–16 in the cross-national project EU Kids Online III (Smahel & Wright, 2014), we will illustrate how contemporary children manage their privacy on SNS and how they avoid possible risks connected to privacy violations.

### **SPECIFICS OF THE SNS ENVIRONMENT**

In past years privacy management has become problematized. People have been lamenting the loss of privacy as well as the unregulated disclosures of private information and materials online (Solove, 2007). The task of keeping privacy online can be more difficult, considering how easily personal information can be published, accessed, and distributed. As privacy management differs across different online locations and platforms, we focus exclusively on the use of social network sites, which currently belong among youth's predominant online activity (Livingstone & Brake, 2010). SNS are designed to motivate users to publish and share information and materials which can have various forms: text, photos, videos, or links to other web sites.

The particularities of the SNS environment as “networked publics” have been described by boyd (2010). As she pointed out, SNS have structural affordances which “do not dictate participants' behavior, but they do configure the environment in a way that shapes participants' engagement” (p. 309). Four specific features typical for the SNS environment belong among

these affordances. *Persistence* refers to the fact that, once published online, information can be stored for a very long time, especially when circulated among a wide audience. *Replicability* indicates that the information and materials posted online can be easily duplicated. This means that they can be very quickly and easily spread and/or stored by another party. Moreover, they can also be altered and, in the end, the true source (and original form) can be nearly unrecognizable. *Scalability* describes that the online information is potentially widely visible. It does not mean that the information is actually accessed and seen by a wide audience; it means that the potential exists. *Searchability* is closely connected to scalability. While online, the information can be reached using search engines (or other tools). Thus, even though the owner of the information (or even the whole profile) does not intend to make the information accessible for other parties, it still might be reachable. It is noteworthy that the extent to which these features are applicable differs across different SNS sites. For example, while some SNS might limit scalability via technical setting, others do not have such an option. But, since we focus on the whole spectrum of different SNS with a wide range of technical possibilities, we focus on all of these features.

These features introduce the three basic dynamics of networked publics. An *invisible audience* emphasizes that, although audience knowledge is crucial for assessing the context of communicating information, the audience on SNS can remain invisible. Further, *collapsed contexts* depicts how different social groups often merge into one audience. When posting on SNS, users can divide their audience into separate groups, or clearly target the information to a single group of people. But, despite these attempts and due to the invisibility of audience, the user is often unaware of all the people in the audience and the fact that information is gathered (and interpreted) by people from different contexts (e.g., classmates, a football team, and parents). In result, because of the audience's invisibility and context collapse, SNS users cannot always sufficiently assess the social context of their disclosures, foresee their consequences, and overall adequately manage privacy boundaries. The last dynamic describes the *blurring of private and public*. In this chapter, we take this last dynamic as the starting point for our examination.

## COMMUNICATION PRIVACY MANAGEMENT THEORY

Concerns about privacy and disclosure online have been especially emphasized in relation to children's and teen's use of the internet, particularly the use of social network sites (Livingstone & Brake, 2010). But while the interest in privacy on the internet is something rather new, the interest in privacy per se has a long

history. There are various conceptualizations of privacy. For example, Westin (1968) conceived privacy as the “claim of individuals, groups, or institutions to determine for themselves when, how, and to what extent information about them is communicated to others” (p. 7). Altman (1975) approached privacy as a temporal dynamic process for the regulation of interpersonal boundaries, “the selective control of access to the self” (p. 24).

Recently, a lot of attention was given to the work of Sandra Petronio (2002, 2010) and her Communication Privacy Management Theory (CPM). CPM has been successfully employed in the family context (Petronio, 2010), but it is also considered extremely valuable for understanding privacy in computer-mediated communication (Child & Petronio, 2011). Petronio views privacy and disclosure (i.e., sharing personal information and feelings which stimulate the development of relationships) as mutually and inevitably interconnected in dialectical tension. Throughout their lives, people keep balancing between disclosing and concealing, taking into account cultural, gendered and motivational factors, perceived risks and benefits, and the overall context. Altogether, these factors are situated within specific contexts and influence the process of privacy management. Central to this process is a metaphor of boundaries, which may range from complete openness to being completely closed-off (i.e., secrets), reflecting varying degrees of willingness to share private information.

CPM is based on five core principles:

1. People perceive the private information as something that belongs to them: they **own the information**. The ownership of private information is based on one’s beliefs and feelings, and also includes the prerogative to manage the information according to their wishes.
2. Hand in hand with the first principle goes the second: when people perceive they own the information, they also assume their right to **control the privacy boundaries** (i.e., they control who has access to the information). The level of control varies with regard to the kind of information and/or context (e.g., high control would appear when one does not wish to share information with anyone or only with a very limited circle of their nearest friends or family and sometimes just one person).
3. When managing the private information, people depend on **rules to control the information flow**. Privacy rules and regulations guide the possibilities of spreading someone’s private information to other people. These rules depend on many factors, from cultural values to specific situations and can be explicit as well as implicit.

4. When information is shared, it is in a sense also **co-owned** with the information recipient. The recipient of private information is expected to follow (preferably, negotiated) rules about privacy boundaries (and, therefore, the process of sharing disclosed information). *Linkage rules* determine who else can be included within one's privacy boundary (and know about the disclosed information), *permeability rules* define how much is actually shared with others, and *ownership rules* depict the extent to which recipients themselves control the information.
5. Privacy management is a dynamic, interpersonally dependent concept, and, as such, privacy rules are constantly negotiated and adapted. Each person can have a different definition of privacy rules and boundaries, and, therefore, when not effectively negotiated, each relationship has the potential for privacy boundary conflicts. **Privacy boundary turbulence** denote such misunderstandings, (un)intentional rules violations, or privacy intrusions, which happen more or less often in interpersonal relationships.

CPM operates not only with the privacy regulation on an individual level, but also with permitted access to the information of others. CPM, thus, allows for the investigation of the flow of private information between and among people in order to understand privacy management on multiple levels (i.e., individuals, dyads, and groups) that occur in many different contexts, including online social media (Child, Haridakis, & Petronio, 2012).

### **PRIVACY MANAGEMENT ON SNS AMONG EUROPEAN CHILDREN**

The aim of this chapter is to describe the specifics of privacy management on SNS among children from their perspectives. To achieve this goal, we adapt the five core principles of CPM (i.e., ownership, control, rules, co-ownership, and turbulence), and we explain their specifics of SNS usage in light of the features and dynamics of networked publics: *persistence*, *replicability*, *scalability*, *searchability*, *invisible audiences*, and *collapsed contexts* (boyd, 2010). Structurally, this sub-chapter will individually address each of Petronio's five principles and illustrate the moments in which privacy management differs due to the character of the SNS environment. This depiction will be grounded in empirical evidence from the project EU Kids Online III. Details about the project and its methodology are described in an available online report (Smahel & Wright, 2014). In this project, children between the ages 9–16 in nine European countries<sup>10</sup> were asked about their online experiences. Within

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10 Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

interviews and focus groups<sup>11</sup> primarily focused on problematic experiences with Information and Communication Technology (ICT) use, children depicted how they perceive, assess, and manage their privacy on SNS. With these data, we will illustrate the specifics of privacy management in the SNS environment as perceived by European children.

### **Private Information Ownership**

The ownership of information – in other words, the declaration and perception of information as something that belongs to oneself – is an essential parameter of privacy (Petronio, 2002; 2010). But when the information is posted on SNS, due to the *replicability* and *scalability* of the information, the (sense of) ownership is challenged. The user can feel that the information is no longer just his or her because the posted information is persistent and “always online”. Moreover, others can search and then also replicate the information. As an Italian boy (11–13 years old) said: “...if someone posts a personal photo on his profile, someone can copy it and everyone can see it”. Such conditions can erode the perception of the ownership of information by individual users, who can ask themselves: Is information which I post on SNS still (only) mine? Some of the children in our research voiced such concerns and reflected perceived *persistence* and *scalability*. A Romanian girl (11–13) said: “Well...everyone could access it and write something or just to see what you’re up to, what pictures you’re posting, where you are...” For some children, this loss of ownership was accompanied by negative feelings; for others, it was a necessary trade-off between the loss of privacy and the social benefits provided by SNS. Still, despite these concerns, many children persisted in their right to be the owner of the information they disclosed. As they described, it is still they who own their information (also in the form of pictures and videos) and they who, therefore, have the right to control it.

### **Private Information Control**

The perception of ownership is, therefore, closely related to the control of the information: while ownership underlies the control, a lack of control can disrupt that sense of ownership. The control over information published on SNS is a very complex task, and children often mentioned how the loss of control limits and shapes their use of SNS. They depicted how control can be problematized due to the *persistence* of posted information, which they often perceived as something irreversible: “*Girl1: As they say: once online, forever online... Girl4: It’s almost like tattoos: we have to think if that’s what we really*

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11 In focus groups, only age range (e.g. 9–11) was recorded; therefore, in some quotations specific age is not presented.

want... Girl3: Or else it will be there for life!" (Portugal, girls, 15). Sometimes, this was connected to the feelings of helplessness, as control was completely lost. "...all the things you disclosed about yourself stay on Ask, even if you delete your profile." (Italy, girl, 11–13). Of course, this did not apply for all children – many debated possible ways to make (at least some) information disappear. The negative consequences of losing control were also articulated with regard to *scalability* and *replicability*, which represented the potential for the misuse of information. In the words of a 14-year-old Greek girl: "...it's just that you don't know what anyone can do with your photos ... cause you hear many things, that they take [other people's] photos and edit them and stuff ... Once, a friend of mine told me that she had a photo and they made her look naked, poor girl!" Finally, the *searchability* of information can also become an issue. Some children discussed how public profiles allow others to find their posts, and some even feared that people could find them and track them. "... also the school can track your Twitter and Facebook accounts ... Because if they wanted to search me they just type in my name, because my name's on Twitter it will come up with me and they could look through what I'm saying and stuff because they've done it before in other schools." (UK, boy, 14–16). It is important to say that all these features are not seen only negatively. For example, *scalability* was also seen as an advantage, such as the possibility to quickly and rather effortlessly reach beyond the nearest social circles and share experiences with a larger crowd of friends and acquaintances. All these features and specifics of the online environment influence how children perceive the possibilities and limits of control over privacy boundaries and disclosed information, which in turn influences how they behave online.

But despite these specifics of the online environment, SNS users can exert different types of control upon their privacy and upon our data. We distinguished the following three levels of control.

- 1) The first level is the basic decision for a child to use SNS. Some children refuse to even create a SNS account because they perceive it as an environment where others can search, see, and reach their (persistent) information, and where they lose all control over their information. As an Italian girl (9–10) said: "I don't want to trust Facebook because I don't like it very much ...my brother has it, but my mum always tells him not to use his own picture because you can never know who it may reach... so I don't want it..."
- 2) On the second level of control, children agree to have an SNS account, but they do not post any (or hardly any) information. As mentioned

by a Spanish boy (14–16): “*On the only social networking site that I use, which is Twitter, I have never tweeted anything.*” In this case, children use SNS in a rather passive way, enjoying some of the benefits, but at the same time significantly constraining their own activities. Such extreme control seemed to be most prevalent among younger children, who had not yet developed sufficient skills to master the third level of control.

- 3) On the third level, the SNS users make more complex decisions about publishing their personal information and the management of online boundaries. Specifically, they consider the character of information, the audience, and the overall context. They ask: What kind of information would I like to post? Under which condition would I like to post the information? And with whom would I like to share it? Thus, on this third level, SNS users also think about whether to publish information, but they also make more subtle decisions. “*I am careful, because I am aware that what you post on the internet stays there forever. So I try to be as careful as I can, with pictures I post, with people I add, with people I let see my posts!*” (Portugal, girl, 14–16).

These kinds of decisions on the third level can also include technical control over information on SNS, with the help of “privacy settings” – some children create groups of users (i.e., family, school, best friends) and then decide which piece of information they share with specific groups. In this way, children manage their online audience and, with regard to the possible *scalability* and *replicability*, children delineate clear boundaries for who can access (and potentially co-own) their information. But the possibility for such technical control over information also depends on digital literacy, and not all children are aware that there are such options on SNS.

According to our research, children differ substantially in their need to keep control of their privacy. Some children reported that they “open” their boundaries when they decide to open their whole SNS profile by sharing their passwords with other children, in most cases with significant and trustworthy others. These children usually emphasized the benefits of such a decision. For example, younger children who shared passwords with parents, appreciated that the parents helped them maintain their profiles and, in the end, increased their control over their privacy. For older children, disclosing passwords to peers was seen as part of trustable relationships, as well as an easy way to mutually “keep tabs” on what is going on in their private lives. “*I actually gave her my password and she gave hers to me.... I will call her, hey look at my chat with someone...*” (Czech Republic, girl, 14–16). But in many cases, sharing a

profile was seen as “too much”, and children kept them secret even from their closest relations and friends in order to keep control of their private spaces. As Spanish girl (14–16) said: *“My passwords are mine. I’ve never talked to a boyfriend about that.”*

Besides sharing whole profiles, children also often make more nuanced decisions related to the different types of disclosed information, differentiating among distinct types of audiences. *“For example when there is something that only your friend may know, I think that the people who are not friends with you on FB don’t have any business with that.”* (Belgium, girl, 11–13). Many children limited their audience, relying on mutual trust, and sharing personal information with just a narrow circle of friends, modifying *scalability* according to their individual needs. *“For example you post one thing for ‘public’ and another thing for ‘only friends’. But on my profile I only post things for my friends, those I know really well. Those people I trust, so the others I put them in the list of ‘acquaintances’”* (Belgium, boy, 15). Still, some children did not make such nuanced distinctions and relied on the fact that their posts are not actually too personal and not connected to any risk.

But despite these strategies, children still voiced fears over the loss of control due to others who can access the information on SNS. For example, children perceived danger linked with “hackers”, who can hack their profiles and get their personal information, such as mobile number or email address. They even reflected that they can use this information to replicate a profile, as described by a Romanian girl (9–10): *“Let’s say that when you go on Facebook, there are cases, it’s happened a lot of times, when hackers, that’s what they’re called, look at your Facebook account and access your page if...you don’t really figure out what’s going on. It’s a page, where you post your pictures, status updates in which you write what you’ve been up to. So hackers take your email and phone number and they have a special software, like that, which they access and create a Facebook account, with exactly the same name and pictures and the exact same phone number and stuff like that.”* Some children also decided to control their privacy by staying anonymous on SNS, such as by using false name.

We can see that although children are aware of the principles of *persistence*, *replicability*, *scalability*, and *searchability*, they control their privacy on SNS by various creative ways.

### **Private Information Rules**

Children in our research differed largely in their individual perceptions about what is appropriate and comfortable to publish on SNS. Children have



developed rules guiding their individual online behavior, which were based on general privacy management rules but also on the awareness of the specifics of this online environment. These rules guide the management of the audience and the decisions about disclosing the content.

Regarding the audience, we can distinguish the two basic aspects of the rules: (1) the management of the audience and its access to information; and (2) rules for the audience and how it should behave with respect to children's privacy.

Ad (1) The first aspect describes the rules in relation to *scalability* (as a visibility), *searchability*, and *replicability*. Children created rules about others to decide who their "friends" are on SNS, who can see their profiles, who can see their statuses, who has access to their private information, and who is trusted not to misuse (e.g., replicate) it. These rules were related to their offline environment and the control over boundaries on SNS was usually interconnected with the control over offline boundaries.

For example, while offline friends were cordially invited within their private online spaces, with increasing age, parents were less and less welcome. This is analogous to the adolescents' growing need to guard boundaries against parental intrusions in the offline environment. In the words of an English girl (14–16): "*First rule of Facebook, I got told by everyone, was, never add your parents as your friends, because then they'll see everything you're up to.*" Besides their offline experiences, children also base these rules on the general awareness of potential risks, such as "online stranger danger". As a Belgian boy (11–13) said: "*When people ask me where I live and how old I am, then I know enough, and I won't add them anyway. Then I call my dad, and if they would continue like that, my dad would call the police.*"

Ad (2) The second set of rules defines what is (in)appropriate in the behavior of others. Children develop specific perceptions of what is right and wrong as they ask: Who should add photos with me? Who should share my photos and/or tag me? These questions are reflected in the co-ownership rules described below.

The rules do not concern audience management only, but they are also related to the contents of the disclosures. There is information which is perceived as "benign", for which the perceived *replicability* or *scalability*, and now also *persistence*, is not an issue. Such benign information is seen as harmless, even if it is shared with the wider public or stored for many years into the future.

But a lot of information, most notably one's photos, are assessed as sensitive. Their publication by users or others is seen as inappropriate, because they are widely reachable and can be stored for a long time and, therefore, possibly misused. As pointed out by a Belgian boy (14–16): *“Especially sending such (sexy) pictures on the internet that is just stupid. Eventually people will find out about it...especially when it's sent to a boy.”* Such information is often subjected to rules which state whether they can even be published, and, if yes, who can get access to them.

In the end, rules about these two aspects – audience management and publishing different contents – are interconnected and function together. For example, some children allow their best friends to post photos with them as pointed out by an Italian girl (9–10): *“This friend of mine who one day on Facebook posted a picture of the two of us together when we were skiing, but I was fine with it because he had also written ‘my best friend and I’.”* But if such photos would have been published by someone else, for example, a more distant acquaintance, it could be perceived as breaking the implicit privacy rule.

### **Private Information Co-Ownership**

As mentioned, there are specific rules connected to the behavior of those to whom children disclose – the co-owners of the information. Children reported the development of specific expectations for how others should treat their disclosed and shared information. Children often expected that their information be understood as more or less private and not permeable to other users or even the wider public. But children also know that these rules can easily be broken, and due to *replicability*, even very complex information (e.g., a whole chat conversation or an SNS profile) could potentially be shared with a wider audience. Specifically, the co-ownership of an SNS profile is a very sensitive issue and is tightly connected to the child's offline relationships – and, conversely, trust in the offline world is closely connected to trust in the online environment. *“No...I wouldn't exchange [a password] with just anyone I mean only with my best friend, whom I've known for seven years and I trust her. I mean I don't just give out my password to anyone.”* (Romania, girl, 16). Although children sometimes share access to their profile on SNS, it is usually with the belief that others will not misuse this trust, and sometimes even with the implicit expectations that others will not actually do anything within their profile.

But co-ownership rules are not only related to the private space demarcated by the whole SNS profile. These rules are expected to also apply to the general

behavior of others within the online social network(s). A lot of information is actually co-owned in offline spaces, or via explicitly private channels: children take group pictures with their friends, they share rumors or experiences in class, they email each other videos, etc. The treatment of this information by others in the SNS environment is also subjected to the rules of co-ownership. Some children have very strict preferences that they explicitly articulate to others. *“Sometimes, there were people who uploaded pictures of me that I didn’t like and I asked to remove them or something. If they didn’t, I could report the situation. I sent the person a message, because there was that option, and she removed it...For instance, when I take pictures with my friends, we have a deal: no one uploads anything before we all decide what we are going to upload.”* (Portugal, girl, 14–16). In their social circles, children develop common rules for what is right and wrong in terms of co-ownership. These rules vary, but usually they reflect the possibilities of misuse of information due to their *scalability* and *replicability*.

### **Private Information Boundary Turbulence**

Turbulence grounded in negative experiences on SNS serve as powerful incentives which influence changes in children’s management of privacy. Considering that SNS profiles are strongly connected to offline life, the misuse of information can result in severe harm. For example, the cases of stolen online identity, in which children’s profiles were hacked and abused, were described as very harmful.

Children described many incidents in which the disclosed information or even a whole private space (i.e., profile) were misused. Some of them talked about their own experiences, which increased their need for control. In a rather extreme case described by a Czech girl (12), the negative experience led her to abandon SNS usage: *“I don’t have Facebook anymore, because I was cyberbullied there. I definitely learned something from what happened with Facebook. And I don’t really want to make an account now.”* Other children mentioned the experiences of others, be it their friends, acquaintances, or unknown people, whose negative experiences circulate as stories depicting the misuses of information published on SNS. After hearing such stories, some children changed their own rules and behavior on SNS to prevent such misconduct from happening to them.

Turbulence emerges upon complications in co-ownership, when a co-owner fails to act upon expected rules which can be expressed explicitly, but sometimes only on an implicit level. But the agreement upon a set of rules

can be complicated on SNS, where the *audience* is often *invisible* and consists of different groups (i.e., *context collapses*). The invisible audience is connected to the fears of possible misuse, mainly by unknown others, “online strangers”, or hackers. The assessment of what is still private also differs across different social groups in the audience. While in one social group the publishing (and the replicating) of a more sensitive photo might be seen as acceptable; in another, this is perceived as highly inappropriate.

These differences might be in the perception of ownership. Some children understood *scalable* and *replicable* information not as private and owned by the user, but as public and, therefore, as information which might be misused. In some cases, children blamed the victim because he or she “should have realized” that misuse happens on the public SNS. Similarly, victims of privacy violations were blamed if they were not efficient in the control of information. But it should be noted that although there is a variety of choices enabling different levels of control over the access to information, most notably the SNS’s explicit privacy settings, these require certain digital skills, which are still developing, especially among children (Sonck, Livingstone, Kuiper, & De Haan, 2011).

Thus, the differences of assessment differ across contexts. But considering the *persistence* of information, the context is changing with children’s development, as well as their perception of privacy and attitudes to disclosed materials, which may as well result in turbulence. What users perceive as benign at a younger age might be seen as less appropriate later – yet the same information is still available. Moreover, as the information stays published, it can be reached after some time, in another place, and in a different context. “*She sent a naked picture to her boyfriend. And she told us her Facebook password at the party that was going on at the moment in my house. And some of my friends went to her Facebook profile a few months later, and there they found out about this picture. And then the girl was bullied*” (Belgium, girl, 14–16).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this chapter was to depict how children’s privacy management is shaped by the “networked public” environment on SNS. Based on the opinions and experiences of European children, we pointed out how the specific aspects (*persistence, replicability, scalability, searchability, invisible audiences, and collapsed contexts*; boyd, 2010) intervene in the process of privacy management on SNS.

Our findings challenge the still-prevailing notion that children do not know or care about their privacy and disclosures on SNS. The awareness of the potentially

risky features of the SNS environment was embedded in children's online praxes. The simplicity of publishing information and materials online and the ease by which they can potentially be misused by a wide audience created many situations where children had to think about what they wanted to disclose.

In the SNS environment, children often perceived the possible loss of the ownership of (otherwise private) information. Considering the features and dynamics typical for the SNS environment, they managed their privacy by applying different types of control over the published information and the online audience. The control ranged from the complete refusal to post any private information to the development of nuanced strategies of audience and information management. The control exerted over their own privacy boundaries was grounded in specific sets of rules. Since SNS are a platform through which children sustain existing relationships and which copies their offline circles (Livingstone & Brake, 2010), online privacy management also copied this offline process. For example, those who are trusted offline (e.g., best friends) were also trusted with private information online. On the other hand, it is the potential of SNS to reach beyond normal offline circles and, in a sense, to be very close and open also with "mere" acquaintances and more or less unknown people, which problematizes this process. Moreover, the rules set for the audience and published content differ dramatically among children, depending on their individual preferences and experiences, developmental stage, and digital skills. Inter-individual differences underlie privacy boundary turbulence. When their borders were crossed, children had to change their behavior and/or set different privacy settings. In this way, the privacy rules and boundaries are co-constructed in a continuous process of decision making about children's privacy.

Our chapter offered a deeper insight into the everyday experiences of contemporary youth and the strategies by which they manage their online privacy and prevent the negative outcomes of privacy violations. But it is necessary to stress that there is a huge variety of approaches toward online privacy among children. We saw that, despite the fact that children often know about the specifics of the online environment, they react very differently. Our research helped to get a closer look at this variety of perspectives and behaviors. But, we also recommend to further pursue this topic and examine how all these variables moderate children's privacy rules and boundary management.

What is also important to mention is the fact that, for most children, SNS represent a "natural" environment through and on which they interact. It is understandable that they were prone to open privacy boundaries and, at

least to some extent, to profit from the affordances of SNS. What is inevitably inherent to SNS use are the benefits of all the features and dynamics. These were not specifically articulated in our study, which was mostly focused on the problematic aspect of ICT use. To better understand the benefits of opening one's privacy boundaries would help us to better understand the whole process and the outcomes of privacy management on SNS.

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## SECTION 3: GAMING AND PLAYING DIGITALLY

Pascaline Lorentz

This third section of this book about living in the digital age will focus on playing and gaming activities. Today, everyone plays, and everyone plays with digital devices. Classic card games are the most cited titles of digital games (Brand, 2014) and mobile phone games with tablet game applications overwhelm our daily lives. With the digital age, gaming and playing games extended to a general audience across generations to become a globalized practice. Piercing common unfounded fears regarding digital playing broadcasted by media discourse was the intention of the authors of this section. They delved into studying these activities, which may impact the daily lives of gamers in terms of money loss and/or time consumption.

First, Šárka Licehammerová presents a new form of gambling – live online betting – that emerged with the internet. She talks about different fashions of gambling before the digital age to locate this practice in the landscape of gambling activities. The intricacies of this activity are astutely displayed by Licehammerová who deals professionally with gamblers looking for help and is conducting doctoral research on gambling in the Czech Republic. Her chapter reveals forthcoming issues of live online betting for gamblers.

Second, the population of Czech gamblers is scrutinized by the Australian expert, Anastasia Ejova, and her colleagues. Australia is a pioneering country in game-related activities. This group of researchers looked to explain problematic gambling in the Czech Republic. Availability added to the anonymity of online gambling and, together, they have increased the chances of over investment by gamblers. The researchers' hypothesis questions the relation between sex, age, and socioeconomic status with gambling. Throughout their research, Ejova and her colleagues elaborate on the appealing link between playing online games and practicing online gambling intensely. In their conclusions, they stress the need for further research on the gambling population to better understand this behavior, particularly because of the proliferation of gambling sites in the Czech Republic.

Third, the ill-appreciated population of intense players of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG) is studied by Pascaline Lorentz, who sets things straight by showing that there is no tangible relation between the amount of

time played and the possible negative impact on player commitments. The intense and former intense players she interviewed clearly explained that they are perfectly able to balance the intensity of their practice with their life obligations.

This third section approaches two major digital gaming practices – gambling and playing online games – and showcases the complex questions researchers of the digital age have to face in their search for understanding people’s behaviors in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.



# Live Online Betting: The Answer to Every Gambler's Wish

Šárka Licehammerová

## ABSTRACT

Live online betting has the potential to become a universal tool for gambling with a high potential for problems thanks to its broad availability (temporal, local, financial, and social) and the flexibility in the ways of treating and gaining rewards. Gambling, generally, has a whole system of specific characteristics and mechanisms. There are some common phenomena, like chasing loses, belief in the possibility for betterment, and searching. However, there are many types of gambling. Each type of gambling has specific, attractive features. Sport gamblers, slot machine players, poker players, casino players – these are the groups of people who have slightly different perspectives on gambling and its positives and negatives; they have different motivations for gambling (conscious and unconscious). In an online environment, gambling becomes more accessible and also more flexible in terms of the game features offered to players. With online gambling, there has also emerged a new type of gambling – live online betting. At first glance it may seem to be just another form of gambling. However, live online betting is more flexible and multifunctional, and it can be handled in different ways. The game can be immediate or long-term, social or solitary, expert or thoughtless, adrenaline or relaxation. From this point of view, live online betting may expose more people to gambling and possibly trap them with addiction or problems.

## Keywords

gambling, live online betting, risk behavior, problem gambling, online gambling

## INTRODUCTION

Problem or pathological gambling is a recognized psychiatric disorder. Although often described by a variety of terms, including “compulsive gambling”, “disordered gambling” or “excessive gambling” (Dickerson & Hinchy, 1988), “problem gambling” is a term which is used to describe a syndrome of gambling-related behaviors that often leads to significant harm

to individuals, to others close to the gambler, and to the community. Across numerous countries, it is recognized that problem gambling is a significant public health concern with between 1–2% of the population estimated to be affected (Delfabbro, 2013). The results in the Czech Republic indicate that the proportion of people at risk in connection with gambling reaches 4.5–5.0% of the general population aged 15–64, which corresponds to 325,000 to 364,000 people. Problem gamblers make up 1.7–2.3% of the adult Czech population aged 15–64. At high risk (i.e., susceptible to a pathological condition) is 0.6–1% of the population (Mravčík, 2014). Thus, the results are comparable.

Problem gambling has been moved from the impulse control disorders section to the addictive disorders section of diagnostic manuals. This change is based on a growing body of evidence which suggests many physiological/neurophysiological similarities between the characteristics of pathological gambling and other addictive behaviors (Conversano et al., 2012).

### **Gambling Mechanisms**

Gambling has patterns and mechanisms that we can analyze. It can be described as a coping strategy (Wood & Griffiths, 2007). Although the players know that their next game will not solve a difficult life situation, they continue avoiding the situation through gambling. This escape mitigates their worries because it can change their mood for a short period. It helps them to block negative feelings or to escape into another reality, the reality of gambling. Gambling remains a coping mechanism, despite the fact that it is reasonably clear that it will not solve long-term problems (Wood & Griffiths, 2007). Gamblers often name gambling as a way of escape. One option is altering moods. This usually involves some way out of reality that was achieved either by increasing the level of arousal (Wood & Griffiths, 2007) or fantasizing oneself as a successful, debt-free and respected player (Bradley, 2009). These are ways to increase awareness of self-efficacy and self-confidence.

Low emotional intelligence may be associated with self-efficacy in the control of gambling because those who are less proficient in processing emotions have less mastery of the experiences associated with the control of gambling behavior, and they would probably not be able to benefit as much from mediated learning by observing the reactions of other players in game situations (Schutte et al., 1998).

For some, the incentive is to increase their gambling level of excitement to the point of experiencing a psychological “high”. This can be both stimulating and relaxing (Binde, 2009). These conflicting states often represent two sides of the

same coin. This pressure may be to fill free time, to drive away boredom and/or postpone consideration of problems (Corney & Davis, 2010), before providing relief from the uncomfortable feeling that comes from the disappointing reality.

Gambling itself has an emotional character. The impulse to play is on an emotional basis and creates restlessness (craving). Succumbing to the impulse leads to the reinforcement of behavior towards gambling. This system displays the same mechanisms as other process and non-substance addictions. These characteristics are referred to as the three Cs of addiction: compulsion, loss of control, and continued use despite negative consequences. Gambling creates a bond between the desired and feelings (whether pleasant, unpleasant, excited, relaxed, stressful, anxious, angry, etc.). To achieve the same result more stimulation is necessary – larger amounts of money or more frequent games.

Over time, gambling becomes an all-pervading essence of a gambler's life. Losing money often leads to indebtedness whether because of the game itself or as a way of replacing the losses. Pathological gamblers often gamble with money originally meant for other purposes, such as rent, food, etc. In the case that only the gambler's relatives and close friends consider gambling a problem it will cost the gambler a lot of effort to keep gambling and all of its consequences secret. If this is not a mystery, it becomes difficult to live together and function. These factors all lead to the fact that the topic of gambling – whether at the level of ideas, emotions, or behavior – becomes predominant in the life of the individual. Gambling becomes a kind of engine that keeps life in balance and sometimes throws it out of balance as well. Adrenaline, which could be the original reason for gambling itself (either as therapy or escape), is often replaced in the later stages by the phenomenon of chasing losses. This keeps the gamblers in permanent tension and stress. Chasing lost money may be a rational explanation for why the cycle continues.

These gambling mechanisms are common for every type of gambling. Gambling activities can hold a place in many different forms and in many different places. Furthermore, different types of gambling will be described.

### **Types of Gambling**

*Electronic Machine Devices (Slot Machines, VLT, etc.)*

Electronic Gambling Device (EGD) are common forms of gambling. They are associated with alcohol, other addictive substances, and night life. Usage of EGDs is a simple activity that can bring adrenaline and/or relaxation. Repetitive behavior can deliver the experience of absorption and dissociation. At the

same time, the game offers the illusion of control; for example, by the choice of the risk behavior level in different settings (Blaszczynski & Nower, 2001; Presson & Benassi, 1996; Griffith, 1994). EGDs are tempting because of their attractive presentation and their auditory and pictorial stimuli. In the online environment, EGDs try to simulate the same conditions and environment as the offline form. There are also games available for points instead of money to make it easier to entice gamblers.

Another popular type of gambling is betting, which has different characteristics than EGD.

### Betting

Betting is an aspect of gambling in which the winnings are contingent on predicting the outcomes of sporting events or propositions. The payoff is directly proportional to the winning ratio (the odds) at which the bet was accepted and the amount bet. Or, in a different model, the amount of the winnings depends on the ratio of winners to the total amount bet.

When we speak of betting, we mean mainly betting on various sports and events. Betting companies also offer betting on a number of propositions, such as the winners in various reality shows or who will be the next partner for a celebrity. These possibilities currently on the betting market seem rather minor. Knowledge and skill are important factors in betting. It can create the feeling that the player has control of the outcome. This illusion of control allows one to consider themselves a successful and skillful player (Bradley, 2009).

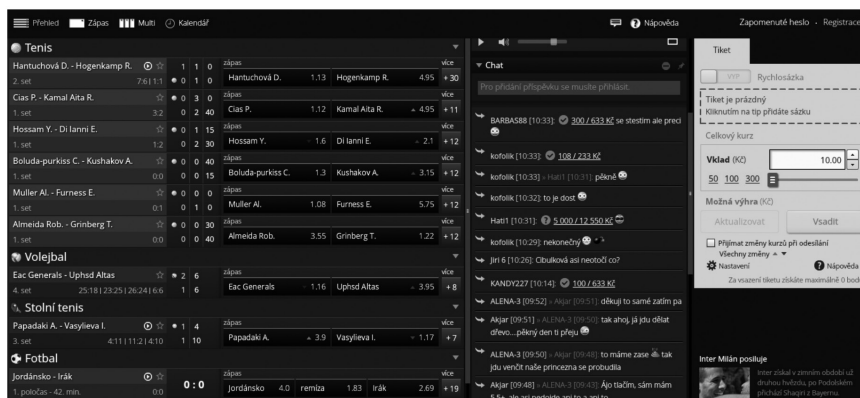


Figure 1: Example of a web page for live bets (from [http://www.ifortuna.cz/cz/sazky\\_live/](http://www.ifortuna.cz/cz/sazky_live/))

Betting as a way of gambling has moved very smoothly and naturally into the online environment. It provides greater comfort, both for the betting and for the gathering of all kinds of data needed for successful wagers. Apart from its availability and simplicity, the online betting system may not differ from land-based betting. Thus, online and offline environments are often either combined or only online gaming. Moving betting to the online environment enables web site providers to add numerous attractive features. These include social media, such as discussion and chat forums, rewards in the form of free credit, and an attractive layout.

Other types of gambling games are casino games, such as roulette, black jack, etc.

#### *Casino Games*

In casino games bettors play against the casino representatives or against each other at tables, often with a pre-determined number of bettors and bet limits. There is professional quality and additional services for players and trained staff. Live gaming in roulette, blackjack, craps, etc., is a hallmark of gambling as entertainment for people of status.

Moving casino games to an online environment does not change the options that the game offers. Bold graphics and sound effects can still simulate the environment of the offline world. For some players, the simulations cannot replace the atmosphere of casino night life. However, these players might find other features attractive. Again, a dangerous attraction may be the possibility of playing “to practice” or to gain membership rewards points as in online betting.

The last type gambling are tournament card games, especially poker, which has lately gained a lot of popularity in the general population.

#### *Poker and Other Table and Tournament Card Games*

Poker is a card game that is based on strategy and bet management. It is often played in a tournament setting. The poker environment still retains some semblance of elitism or bad-boy fantasy. Online gaming is then a safe way to orient oneself in the environment and earn a place as a successful player (Bradley, 2009). Poker is also sometimes called a sport, although it is still a game, partly because poker tournaments are often on television with a similar presentation as traditional sports. There are even professional poker players.

The online form of poker tries to offer the same atmosphere as the offline option. The opportunity to chat at the virtual table creates a sense of community. In addition to the tournament aspect, the online form offers more options to deal

with the game itself in more dangerous ways, like playing on more than one table, re-entering the game with new funds, and unlimited access to the game. There is often the possibility to gamble without real money, and only for points. Thus, it can be enticing, especially for young players, who do not have enough money for real gambling.

Each type of gambling has its typical features and characteristics, which appeal to different gamblers. In next part I would like to describe a relatively new form of gambling – live online betting, which offers a wide range of possibilities to gamble.

### **LIVE ONLINE BETTING**

Live betting is the kind of gambling that is very specific to the online environment. Betting, as such, is considered a safer and more sophisticated way of wagering just because it allows customers to feel that they can have the game under control by having knowledge of the game. An important reason for this is the relative time from placing the bet and getting the results of the bet. Live betting allows one to bet immediately through the game on various aspects of the game – for example, the result of the coin toss or the halftime score. So, with this way of betting it can seem to work the same as with conventional bets, only with a faster response as in the case of electromechanical devices, such as EGDs. The combination of this way of playing along with the actual sports game has the potential to cause an emotional response, a reward for bettors.

In the next sections we will discuss different features and characteristics which are potentially appealing to gamblers to participate in online betting.

### **Social Status and a Feeling of Expertise**

One of the potential benefits of gambling is the satisfaction of social needs (Binde, 2011). Gambling allows for gaining membership in a group and avoiding loneliness. This is particularly visible in elderly people (Schull, 2006), women, women on maternity leave, housewives, and ethnic minorities (Li, 2007; Corney & Davis, 2010). This, specifically, can be found in casino games and poker, where company is a natural part of the game itself. The actual membership in a group or just the feeling of belonging to a group may be a tempting reason to participate in gambling. Even in this context, we can talk about the social status gambler. The online betting portal environment, where it is possible to take live online bets, provides a variety of options to make the presence of the other players clearly visible. Depending on the gambling web site, there are a variety of forums and chat options where players can share their

successes or failures. Gamblers can easily find these rewards just in live online betting.

Social status may also involve the perception of oneself as a successful player. The fear of looking like a loser – in the true sense of the word – can be a particularly powerful motive for problem gamblers to continue playing despite growing losses (Bradley, 2009). Motivation to promote positive self-image can also contribute to the social facilitation of gambling behavior. Of course, gambling is also influenced by the presence of other players. The decision to place a bet is made on the basis of significant stimuli, which includes both the profits and losses of other users. Hope theory suggests that people should be relatively more willing to bet aggressively when experiencing a loss (Rockloff, 2007). Control of self-presentation refers to the need to appear positive in the eyes of others rather than just the fear of negative social rewards/attitudes. One of the specific factors already foreseen for social facilitation in gambling behavior is the desire to use gambling as a means to improve in luck or skill (Geen, 1991). On betting portals, providers themselves show exceptional tickets (the confirmation of the bet) – big wins for a small outlay, bad beats, etc. Providers can also offer and provide success charts for individual bettors. In this manner, the desire could be easily fulfilled by live online betting.

The risk of gambling is mainly determined by its potential to act on player's emotions. The emotions players experience as they satisfy the game's requirements (e.g., skills at poker; information and expertise in sports betting) (Binde, 2011). Some gambling types have the hallmark of a person of high status – specifically poker (Bradley, 2009). Live bettors can have the same feeling of being part of an elite group. Although chance is a major factor in all forms of gambling, it is possible to devote great time and effort to studying statistical tables, results, and various features of sport events. Sport gamblers can have profound knowledge, which gives them a semblance of control. If careful analysis fails, however, some players feel that it is necessary to preserve their perceived status as a proficient player and expert and they are likely to take greater risks and accumulate greater losses. Thus, it is possible to get into a spiral of chasing losses, which can involve not only losing money, but also status and success. We may therefore speak about not only chasing losses in the sense of money, but also the status and self-preservation strategies.

In the next section we will describe one of the main reasons that live online betting is getting a quick contemporary response. This causes the flow and dissociation phenomenon.

### **Flow and Dissociation**

The graphical environment on the internet resembles EGDs in its pronounced handling of the potentially addictive structural characteristics of gambling (Griffiths et al., 2006). These features include vivid colors, sounds, music, and lights, all of which make the game very attractive to support continued playing (Derevensky, 2007). A higher frequency of involvement can be considered one of the key factors that determine the potential of the gambling game itself to develop the problem gambling behavior (Colee, Barrett, & Griffiths, 2010; Griffiths et al., 2006). Live online betting can also provide these features of the game. Another distinctive characteristic of live online betting is that you can play here and now, with the minimum possible response time. Thus, in a way similar to how gamblers press the buttons on EGDs, they can tweak live betting options on a computer, waiting every minute for a possible change of odds or a mistake by the bookmaker. Given these characteristics, we can observe, through live online betting, the phenomenon of flow and dissociation, although these phenomena are usually more associated with gambling on EGDs (Diskin & Hodgins, 1999).

Some studies suggest that the two types of pathological gamblers are the “emotionally vulnerable” gamblers and the “antisocial impulsivists.” The first group is characterized by an underlying anxiety or depression, poor coping, and adverse family experiences. Gambling offers them a means of dissociation and an escape from negative affective states. The second group is characterized by impulsivity, antisocial behavior, dis-inhibition, thrill seeking, and a propensity toward boredom. This means that there is a notion of differing subgroups of pathological gamblers with an underlying pathology and differing motivations for gambling (Ledgerwood, 2006). It is possible that the second subtype of gambler could be considered a flow.

Dissociation consists of a wide array of experiences from mild detachment from immediate surroundings to more severe detachment from physical and emotional experience. The major characteristic of all dissociative phenomena involves a detachment from reality. The theory of dissociation posits that there is a mechanism which causes dissociative experiences during any potentially addictive activity. The mechanism includes three components: (1) a blurred reality caused completely by concentrating one’s attention on a specific series of events; (2) a reduction of self-criticism through an internal cognitive shift that deflects preoccupation with one’s personal or social inadequacies; this is supported by the social setting, which signals acceptance and encouragement for the addictive behavior; and (3) an opportunity for flattering daydreams



about oneself and wish-fulfilling fantasies which, in turn, positively facilitate self-altered perceptions (Wanner et al., 2006). The theory of dissociation, therefore, confirms and supports mechanisms that help gamblers feel good and effective gambler, even though it is only an illusion. They can confirm their social status as gamblers.

Flow is the mental state of operation in which a person performing an activity is fully immersed in a feeling of energized focus, full involvement, and enjoyment in the process of the activity. In essence, flow is characterized by complete absorption (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Flow occurs when the performer is totally connected to the performance and represents an optimal psychological state. Four dimensions (clear goals, unambiguous feedback, sense of control, and balance of challenge and skill) represent the preconditions for the experience of enjoyment and flow. It is believed that flow results from a match between perceived challenge and skills but only if both challenges and the level of skills exceed what is typical for the day-to-day experiences of the individual. Importantly, it is a well-established finding that gamblers tend not to overestimate their skills or the challenge in gambling activities. Consequently, gamblers may perceive a match between high levels of challenge and skills when gambling and they may experience flow. On the basis of Csikszentmihalyi's position that some individuals may be addicted to flow experiences, it can even be hypothesized that pathological gamblers are among these individuals (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). This leads to an interesting comparison of pathological gamblers, recreational gamblers, and athletes, especially because active and professional athletes are populations in which gambling occurs often. The study showed that both flow and dissociation lay on a continuum of subjective experiences across activity groups. Specifically, pathological gamblers experienced lower levels of flow than athletes, whereas recreational gamblers lay between the previous groups in this regard. In contrast, pathological gamblers experienced higher mean levels of dissociation than athletes and recreational gamblers who, in turn, were similar in this regard (Wanner, 2006).

The phenomenon of flow and dissociation may occur in connection with gambling behavior even in the case of live online betting. Dissociation is far more connected to addictive behavior and pathological gambling, yet the two phenomena help to make gamblers feel swallowed up by their activity and thus motivated to spend time. From this perspective, live online betting might have characteristics in common with video gaming (Wood et al., 2004).

**Availability**

Many characteristics that appeal to live online sport bettors have to do with the fact that it is a game operated in an online environment. Some studies suggest that internet gamblers may be more likely to develop problem gambling than offline gamblers (Wood & Williams, 2007). It is argued that the internet brings together a number of interesting features, including audio and visual features, speed, availability, convenience, and anonymity (Griffiths & Wood, 2000; Schull, 2005).

One of the crucial specifics of online forms of gambling is its availability in a wider sense. The main three areas are defined as geographical availability of time, the availability of social and personal factors, and affordability. On closer examination, we find that online gambling games offer most of the alternatives in a broad sense of availability (Thomas et al., 2011). In the next sub-sections, these three main forms of availability for online games are described: proximity, social, and financial.

**Proximity**

Local and time availability is a clear attraction for online gambling. It is possible to play virtually anytime and anywhere, especially with the development of the internet and electronic devices, such as smart phones and tablets. Proximity is a fundamental feature that gives online forms of gaming, including live online betting, a low threshold for introduction to gambling. Players are likely to be entertained by the fact that they can play not only at the present moment, but also continuously throughout the day. Therefore, betting becomes very convenient. Quick availability also makes it very difficult to resist cravings, even if the gambler wants to regulate her/his behavior or stop (Gainsbury et al., 2012).

The high market penetration of mobile phones has the potential to place gambling in the hands of almost everybody, from adolescent to adult (Griffiths, 2003, 2007b). Increased personal access 24 hours a day, 7 days a week could pose potential problems for those with poor impulse control. Accordingly, it is reasonable to hypothesize a higher rate of problem gambling among individuals who gamble on both the internet and mobile phones. With the development of mobile phone and digital television technology, it is becoming possible for consumers to respond to broadcast programming via SMS, set-top boxes, or remote controls. This two-way interaction means that it is possible to vote, enter competitions, place bets on horse races, and purchase merchandise from a broadcaster. And this capability is improving as more efficient return paths

are being established. It is predicted that forms of interactive programming will be particularly appealing to vulnerable sections of the community, specifically individuals who are impulsive and who tend to regularly or excessively view television (Griffiths, 2007a; Widyanto and Griffiths, 2006). Rather than demonstrating that interest in technology in general is associated with a greater risk of problem gambling, recent studies suggest that participants with an interest in specific technologies (i.e., TV and mobile phones) are more likely to be at risk (Phillips et al., 2012).

In addition, live online betting provides the administration of relatively rapid response and game results – even adrenaline. Thus, it can be done during normal activities of daily life. It may quickly become the dominant activity in the life of the player. This aspect may become a secret second life and thus bring even more adrenaline and excitement.

In the next section, social availability is also connected to the invisibility of the behavior and the impossibility of social control.

### **Social Availability**

Social and personal availability is a more complicated phenomenon that involves multiple dimensions, such as a place to spend time in the company of others, being part of a broader social experience, an available refuge, and the attractiveness of the environment (Thomas et al., 2011). Many regular players describe pleasures that can be found through online gambling – adrenaline, gaining skill of game, winning money, social interaction, etc. This includes not only the game but also the social aspects of the site. Women report gaining pleasure from developing the skills, game competition, and victory. It's a good time for them. They can enjoy the game and chat with people from the safe environment of their homes. The gambling game is perceived by them as a very positive and enjoyable activity for which they are prepared to incur financial costs (Corney, 2010). Online gambling offers this sense of social proximity by the virtual presence of other players.

From the position of social accessibility, internet gambling can also be seen as behavior with minimal social control (Binde, 2011). The majority of internet gamblers gamble directly from home (Gainsbury et al., 2012), but, in a way, that does not interfere with families. Sitting at the computer is not visible and is not construed by others to be as problematic as spending time in casinos, pubs, or 24-hour gambling venues. The problem with online gambling becomes a mystery for families, where the behavior may be corrected by family alone

without the necessity of professional treatment. The consequence may be that the issue or the extent of problem gambling via the internet will not be visible in the wider public sphere (Wardle et al., 2007).

Even if the family knows about the gambling, online gambling can be more acceptable for some families just because it is done from home or work and it is not associated with environments such as casinos or sport betting locations. The very place and situation where gambling is conducted can change the perception of the families. Therefore, gambling is more acceptable and treated like a leisure time activity, instead of a perceived immoral behavior related to nightlife and substance use.

For each gambler with a problem, it is estimated that there are another five to 17 people who are adversely affected (Kalischuk et al., 2006). The most common problems reported by family members are: loss of work or family money; quarrels, anger and violence; lies and deception; neglect of family; negatively affected relations; poor communication; confusion of family roles and responsibilities; and development problems with gambling or other addictions in the family (Kalischuk et al., 2006). Gamblers' families and other close people can experience adverse circumstances similar to those experienced by the player. If we consider gamblers and their surroundings, shame and trust are important topics. The gambler must overcome shame to talk about the activities, even in the event of a lapse or relapse (Kalischuk et al., 2006). At a time when the family recognizes gambling as a problem, it is necessary to begin to build trust. It is very difficult especially in the case of online forms of gambling, since this behavior is easy to hide and hard to control.

Social availability is closely connected to the handling of financial representations in the online environment. We describe financial availability next.

### **Financial Availability**

Internet gamblers, according to some surveys, are more competitive, more risk-taking, and less-inhibited people (Cole, Barrett, & Griffiths, 2010), and this may be associated with the lower perceived value of electronic money (Griffiths et al., 2006; Binde, 2011). Electronic representations of money probably do not have the same psychological value as gambling with real money. The same principle applies when people play games with other artifacts that represent money (e.g., chips, tokens, etc.). Loans are another form of virtual representation of money that can, at times, never physically pass through the gambler's hands.

These representations of money may make it easier to bet indiscriminately in comparison to real money (Griffiths, 2003).

Due to lower operating costs and a largely unrestricted market, online forms of gambling offer more favorable conditions (Prunner, 2013). Also, operators can offer benefits that are impossible or extremely difficult to implement offline. Some companies offer free bets when you register, thus enabling a free first bet or a number of practice games. Players can play for points before they try the “live” game for money. This greatly reduces the threshold for entering the gambling environment, especially in games of skill like poker or betting exchanges. Players can try out the game environment without many social or financial consequences (McCormack & Griffiths, 2012).

Availability in a broad sense is one of the possible explanations for why online gamblers play more often compared with other gamblers. Online gaming is becoming more available and it is bringing gambling behavior to the majority population, which has daily access to the internet. The participants in internet gambling have a significantly lower average age (Griffiths & Barnes, 2008). It is probably partly thanks to availability, but also to using the internet as a medium, which is more natural for the younger generations than for older players. Online forms of gambling can be perceived as risky also because some research suggests that exposure to gambling at a younger age increases the threat (Shead, Derevensky, & Gupta, 2010). The mechanism works like in other addictions or risk behavior – the sooner behavior appears, the more it is likely to become problematic. Internet gambling, including live online betting, can affect a wide population in young age groups. That means it could increase the risk of the development of problem gambling.

We discussed all kinds of availability – geo-temporal, social, and financial – to prove that online gambling has a greater potential to become problem or pathological gambling.

## **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter we considered the general characteristics of gambling, reviewed different types of gambling games, and concentrated on the topic of live online betting. We see the potential dangerous characteristics that appeal to gamblers, like social status and expertise, flow, dissociation, and availability (geo-temporal, social, and financial).

Live online betting is a relatively new way of gambling. It offers a wide range of characteristics and rewards that may be tempting for gamblers. It can offer

social entertainment (like casino games and poker), the opportunity to be part of the community (such as a poker tournament), and provide the feeling of being a skillful player and expert. It occurs online but also provides the ability to gamble in a very fast and risky way and a way to fully immerse oneself in the game (like an EGD). Live online betting offers a lot of options – comfort and convenience – simply due to the availability of the internet. All of these characteristics may result in the hypothesis that live online betting can entice a wide population of players and, therefore, may have a greater risk for the development of problem gambling than other forms of gambling. In the Czech Republic, a national study (Mravčík, 2014) already added this category to its research. So far the data for this type of gambling are very small. Maybe there will be some more in the coming years. This theoretical assumption could be investigated more by preliminary qualitative research.

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# The Risks of Online Gambling for Younger Males: Insights from Czech National Surveys

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## ABSTRACT

Compared to offline gambling forms, online gambling has been hypothesized to lead to a heightened risk of developing gambling pathology. Suggestions about who the risks apply to have varied. In light of the finding that online gambling and the associated financial difficulties are reported mostly by younger males, some hypotheses identify younger males as an at-risk group. An alternative possibility is that younger males simply display a trend that will emerge population-wide as online gambling proliferates. In this chapter, hypotheses about the population-wide and young-male-specific risks of online gambling are assessed using data from three nationwide Czech surveys. The hypotheses relating specifically to young men are, first, that young men are greater risk-takers who enjoy “practicing” in anonymous environments, and, second, that young men are more prone to overspending as a result of losing track of time during play.

## Keywords

online gambling, pathological gambling, gender, risk-taking, dissociation

## INTRODUCTION

In countries with legalized gambling venues, serious gambling debts, inability to stop gambling, and resultant relationship problems are reported by one to two percent of the general population (e.g., Australian Productivity Commission, 2010; Bakken et al., 2009; Wardle et al., 2007). This prevalence rate for pathological gambling is much higher than that for heroin addiction, for example (e.g., King et al., 2014).

The causes of pathological gambling have been discussed widely in the psychological and sociological literature (e.g., Aasved, 2003; Sharpe, 2002).

Among the suggestions is that different types of gambling appeal to people with different characteristics. For example, slot machines have been found to be particularly appealing to individuals seeking to lower their emotional arousal and thereby escape life problems. In contrast, horse race betting has been found to appeal to individuals seeking to raise arousal levels to escape boredom (Cocco, Sharpe, & Blaszczyński, 1995). A further suggestion is that different types of gambling involve different amounts of lifetime debt, with card games requiring more concentration and, therefore, involving more moderate spending overall compared to slot machines (Petry, 2003).

Online gambling, an increasingly prominent gambling platform, incorporates many types of gambling, from slot machines to poker. However, in the gambling literature, the question has been raised as to whether online gambling can itself be considered a “type” of gambling that hastens the development of gambling problems (Griffiths et al., 2007). Qualitative and survey-based findings show that online gambling participation and online-gambling-related pathologies are reported mostly by younger males (Griffiths et al., 2009; Wood & Williams, 2011) to whom the medium appeals because of its accessibility and anonymity (McCormack & Griffiths, 2010). Do these findings imply that, because of its accessibility and anonymity, online gambling causes gambling problems to develop particularly quickly? This would account for why gambling problems are observed at an early age among males, a group more likely to engage in gambling (e.g., Abbott, Romild, & Volberg, 2013; Wardle et al., 2007). An alternative interpretation is that gambling problems develop at equal rates online and offline. Under this view, the higher prevalence of online-gambling-related problems in younger males simply reflects the fact that young people are coming to rely on the internet for all sorts of activities. Since males are more likely to engage in gambling, their gambling practices display a visible trend towards becoming more internet-based. A third possibility is that online gambling poses a risk for younger males specifically, or even subgroups within the “younger male” category.

This chapter offers a preliminary test of these competing interpretations using data from a series of large Czech surveys on gambling. The questions and participant profiles of these surveys are described in the first section. One survey, *The National Survey on Substance Use 2012*, sampled approximately 2,000 people whose ages, education level, and other characteristics were distributed similarly to the general adult Czech population (Mravčík et al., 2014). Respondents completed the gambling section of the survey if they had gambled at least once in the preceding 12 months. Among the gambling-

related questions were the Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI) consisting of nine questions (Ferris & Wynne, 2001), a question about which online and offline gambling activities the respondent had attempted, and a question about the frequency with which the respondent gambled on average (from “less often than once a month” to “every day or almost every day”).

As one would expect intuitively, past studies have found pathological gambling to be associated with a higher reported frequency of play, and also with play on a wider variety of gambling types (e.g., slot machines and other casino games as opposed to just slot machines; Fisher, 1993; Welte et al., 2004). If online gambling rapidly leads to an increased probability of pathological gambling, as suggested by the first interpretation above, respondents’ pathological gambling scores (scores on the PGSI) should relate not only to the frequency and variety of gambling activity, but also to whether at least one of the gambling activities was performed online. The full results of this analysis are described in the second section of the chapter.

The third interpretation above suggests that any observed relationship between online gambling and pathological gambling could be due to the effect of online gambling on a certain subset of the population. If the group particularly endangered by online gambling is relatively small, the relationship could be invisible at population level while still being of theoretical and practical significance. Motivated by this goal of identifying potential group-specific effects, we first examined the sociodemographic profile of those who reported online gambling as their main source of problems in a Czech 2013 nation-wide survey of pathological gamblers in treatment. Of the 229 people surveyed, 31 reported online gambling as their main source of problems. As the third section of the chapter describes in more detail, we found that online pathological gamblers were younger than the rest of the sample, but no different in socioeconomic status. All but one were male, which would have been a noteworthy finding had there not been only 15 females in the entire sample.

We proceeded to test two hypotheses regarding the dangers of online gambling for younger males as a group. The first hypothesis is that younger males, a risk-seeking segment of the population, spend even more money in the anonymous, easily accessible online environment (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999; Rolison et al., 2013). It has been suggested that the anonymity feature makes online environments particularly dangerous for risk-seekers who wish to “practice” without embarrassment over their initial and ongoing losses (McCormack & Griffiths, 2012). The *National Survey on Substance Use 2012* provides data

relevant to this hypothesis. We examined whether younger males with online experience reported greater monthly gambling expenditure than all other respondents.

Our next analysis (Section 5) explored some aspects of the hypothesis that online gambling poses risks to young males because of its parallels with video gaming. According to this hypothesis, video games are a source of “dissociation” – a feeling of being so engrossed in an activity that the sense of time and place is lost (Jacobs, 2006). Brain imaging research has suggested that males are drawn to video games and structurally similar activities because they have greater sensitivity to reward in learning tasks (Hoeft et al., 2008). This higher sensitivity potentially enables males to more acutely lose track of time while playing, contributing to their enjoyment (Wood, Griffiths, & Parke, 2007). Numerous studies have established that males play video games more regularly and for longer periods than females (Brockmyer et al., 2009; Hoeft et al., 2008). Arguably, online gambling activities result in the same dissociation and time investment, since they have many features in common with video games. Indeed, it has been argued that improvements in digital technology and internet speed have caused the boundaries between gambling games and video games to blur (King, Delfabbro, & Griffiths, 2010; Wood, Gupta, Derevensky, & Griffiths, 2004). The popular computer card game, *Hearthstone*, is a case in point. The game’s 400 cards can be collected over the course of play, but players also have the option of purchasing some cards for real money. In online gambling, prolonged periods of play are highly likely to be accompanied by financial losses.

A prediction that follows from the described hypothesis is that males who gamble online should report higher levels of dissociation. Relevant data could be found in a 2013 survey of approximately 1,800 people representative of the Czech adult population (Mravčík et al., 2014). In this survey, we examined the relationship between gender, online gambling involvement, and scores on a five-item dissociation measure (Jacobs, 2006).

Thus, after introducing the Czech survey data, we present an analysis addressing the broad question of whether online gambling is more dangerous than offline gambling. In three subsequent analyses, we consider whether the danger is perhaps specific to subsets of the population. First, we attempt to identify the subset of interest, concluding that people with online gambling problems are more likely to be younger, and possibly also male. We then examine risk-taking and dissociation experiences, two reasons why younger males might be at risk from online gambling, more so than from gambling offline.

## SURVEY DETAILS

### **National Survey on Substance Use (2012)**

The *National Survey on Substance Use 2012* is a nationally representative survey of people aged 15–64 living in the Czech Republic’s 14 administrative regions. It was conducted by the Czech National Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Addiction (NMCD) in cooperation with a sociological research agency. The sample ( $N=2,134$ ) was generated using multistage cluster sampling, and matched the Czech population of 15–64 year-olds on gender, age, level of education, and region of residence (e.g., de Vaus, 2002). Initially, 6,210 households consented to providing details about their demographic composition. On the basis of this information, individuals meeting the inclusion criteria were invited to complete the full survey. Sixty-two percent of invited households agreed and the surveys were then completed over the course of two months. Non-response after the selection of individual household members was 14%. The surveys were completed with an interviewer, who had a paper copy of the questionnaire. Further details regarding sampling are documented in a Czech journal paper and a government report (Chomynová, 2013; Mravčík et al., 2014).

While most of the survey’s 204 questions related to the use of licit and illicit drugs, a set of 24 gambling-related questions was included alongside seven demographic questions. Table 1 summarizes the gambling-related and demographic questions used in this chapter’s analyses. Notably, respondents answered, in relation to a list of gambling types available in the Czech Republic (as in Table 1, Question 1), whether they had engaged in these activities in their lifetime, over the preceding 12 months, or in the past 30 days. Approximately 40% of participants ( $N = 897$ ) reported never gambling on any activity. We analyzed the responses of participants who reported playing at least once in the preceding 12 months, and not only on lotteries or with friends ( $N = 206$ ). Of these respondents, 41 reported playing only once. No weights were applied in the analyses<sup>12</sup>.

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12 Notably, when the relevant analyses in Sections 2 and 4 were conducted on a weighted sample, the results were unchanged.

**Table 1**

*Relevant questions in the National Survey on Substance Use 2012. Full English translation of the survey is available on request from the authors.*

<b>Gambling-Related Questions</b>	
1	<p>What type of game/s have you played in the last 12 months?</p> <p><i>Select all that apply:</i> slot machines; online slot machines; casino games (e.g., roulette, cards, dice); online betting at registered Czech operators; online betting at other websites; number-based lotteries... I have never played any of the above games</p>
2	<p>Problem Gambling Severity Index (PGSI; Ferris &amp; Wynne, 2001)</p> <p>Thinking about the last 12 months...</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• have you bet more than you could really afford to lose?</li> <li>• have you needed to gamble with larger amounts of money to get the same feeling of excitement?</li> <li>• did you go back another day to try to win back the money you lost?</li> <li>• etc. (nine items total)</li> </ul> <p><i>Response options:</i> (0) never, (1) sometimes, (2) most of the time, (3) almost always</p>
3	<p>In the last 12 months, how often have you played any of the games listed above?</p> <p><i>Response options:</i> (1) less than once a month, (2) once a month, (3) several times a month (two to three times), (4) at least once a week (one to two times), (5) several times a week (three to four times), (6) every day or almost every day (five to seven times per week)</p>
4	<p>How much money do you usually spend on gaming/gambling in a month?</p> <p>_____ CZK</p>
<b>Demographic Questions</b>	
5	Gender
6	Year of birth
7	<p>Highest level of education completed:</p> <p><i>Select one:</i> primary; lower secondary (vocational school); higher secondary; higher education (vocational); university</p>
8	<p>What is your own net monthly income?</p> <p><i>Select one:</i> I do not earn an income; less than 5,000 CZK; 5,001–10,000 CZK; 10,001–15,000 CZK; 15,001–20,000 CZK; 20,001–30,000 CZK; more than 30,001 CZK</p>

### Survey of Pathological Gamblers in Treatment (2013)

In another survey by the NMCDA, 105 facilities known to be offering treatment for pathological gambling were contacted and invited to inform their clients about the opportunity to participate in a survey. Of the 40 facilities that confirmed they had clients with gambling problems, 27 agreed to disseminate information about the study. Consenting organizations consisted of 13 NGOs, 11 hospitals, two private organizations and a prison. Interviewers from the research group arranged interview times with individual clients after visiting the facilities on nominated days (e.g., when problem gambling support groups were held). Respondents were screened at the beginning of the interview using the lie/bet questionnaire with two questions; one on lying about gambling and one on needing to bet increasing amounts of money (Johnson et al., 1988). At least one of the lie/bet questions had to be answered in the affirmative for the interview to continue. Two hundred twenty-nine responses were obtained, the non-response and exclusion rates remaining unknown. The survey consisted of 61 gambling-related questions and nine demographic questions, of which the questions relevant to this chapter's analyses are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Relevant questions in the Survey of Pathological Gamblers in Treatment 2013.*

<b>Gambling-Related Questions</b>	
1	Have you played any of the following gambling types? List similar to Table 1, Question 1. <i>Response options:</i> every day or almost every day (five to seven times per week); several times a week (three to four times); at least once a week (one to two times); several times a month (two to three times); once a month; less than once a month; never; don't know
2	Which one of the above games (Question 1) do you consider the most problematic for yourself? In other words, which of the games led to the fact that you are seeking professional help now? Select one.
<b>Demographic Questions</b>	
3	Education (at time of entry into treatment): <i>Select one:</i> incomplete primary; primary; incomplete secondary; secondary; higher education (vocational); university
4	Monthly income – as in Table 1, Question 8.

5	<p>How would you describe your work / job?</p> <p><i>Select one option describing the job that you consider major:</i></p> <p>employed; self-employed (sole trader; entrepreneur); employed and at the same time self-employed; pensioner; disability pensioner; student; at home; on maternity or parental leave; unemployed</p>
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### **Citizen Survey: Attitudes Towards the Health Sector and Healthy Lifestyle (2013)**

The NMCDA negotiated the inclusion of eight gambling-related questions in a larger population survey on attitudes towards the health sector. Responses were obtained through face-to-face interviews with 1,797 people selected through quota sampling by a market research company to match the Czech population on gender, age, and region of residence (e.g., de Vaus, 2002).

Questions relevant to the present analyses are described in Table 3. It can be seen that separate questions were asked about offline and online gambling activities in the preceding 12 months. For online play, it was possible to indicate that the games were not played for money. The targets of our analysis were 228 people who reported playing for money in any activity other than only online and offline lotteries. As with the *National Survey on Substance Use 2012*, it is noteworthy that a large portion of respondents (1,192; 66%) reported never having gambled for money.

**Table 3**

*Relevant questions in the Citizen Survey 2013.*

<b>Gambling-Related Questions</b>	
1	<p>Have you played any of the following in the past 12 months?</p> <p>slot machines and video lottery terminals; casino games; sports and non-sports betting at betting offices; number-based lotteries; etc.</p> <p><i>Response options:</i> yes; no</p>
2	<p>Have you played any of the following on the internet in the past 12 months?</p> <p>sports and non-sports betting; live betting; poker; casino games (roulette, bingo, blackjack); number-based lotteries</p> <p><i>Response options:</i> yes – through websites for which it is first necessary to register at a branch; yes – with no pre-registration; yes, but without real money; no</p>



3	<p>Have you played computer games or video games (on a mobile phone, computer, or other device) in the last 12 months? This includes games of all themes: adventure, racing, combat, puzzle, etc.</p> <p><i>Response options:</i> yes; no</p>
4	<p><i>Dissociation scale</i> (Jacobs, 2006)</p> <p>The following questions are about feelings and experiences associated with playing. We are interested in your experience.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• After a session of playing, have you ever felt like you have been in a trance?</li> <li>• When playing, did you ever feel like you had taken on another identity?</li> <li>• When playing, have you ever felt like you were outside yourself – watching yourself playing?</li> <li>• Have you ever experienced a memory blackout for a period when you have been playing?</li> <li>• Have you ever lost all track of time when you have been playing?</li> </ul> <p><i>Response options:</i> (0) never, (1) rarely, (2) sometimes, (3) often, (4) every time</p>
<b>Demographic Question</b>	
5	Gender

### RISK IN THE POPULATION AS A WHOLE

An emerging question in the psychological and media literatures is whether online gambling poses more risks than offline gambling to anyone who attempts it. We examined the question using data from the *National Survey on Substance Use 2012*. It was reasoned that, if online gambling increases the risk of gambling pathology, any experience with online gambling should be associated with higher levels of gambling pathology after accounting for the effects of gambling frequency and variety.

As preparation, we divided the respondents who gambled on more than lotteries in the preceding year ( $N = 206$ ) into those who were not at risk of gambling pathology according to the PGSI, and those whose PGSI score implied a risk or presence of gambling pathology. More specifically, as per PGSI scoring instructions (Ferris & Wynne, 2001), we divided participants into those who scored 0 to 2 on the PGSI, and those who scored 3 or higher. These groups contained 158 and 42 people, respectively. Our measure of gambling frequency was based on Table 1, Question 3. Respondents who reported gambling only once in the preceding 12 months were instructed to skip this question, so we

made provisions for them by giving them a score of 0 on the gambling frequency question. Otherwise, as Table 1 indicates, responses ranged from 1 (“Less than once per month”) to 6 (“Almost every day”). The mean gambling frequency score in our sample was 2.3 ( $SD = 1.69$ ). As regards game variety, the number of games selected in response to Table 1, Question 1 ranged from one to six.

Since only 12 people reported playing more than two games, however, we transformed the game variety variable into a variable on which respondents belonged in one of two categories: “one” ( $N = 158$ ) and “more than one” ( $N = 48$ ). Experience with online play was also expressed as a binary variable, based on responses to Table 1, Question 1. One hundred and thirteen participants reported no online play in the preceding 12 months, while 93 reported experiences with online slot machines, online betting, or online casino games. Since nine respondents did not answer either the PGSI questions or the playing frequency question<sup>13</sup>, our analysis was based on 197 respondents.

The analysis consisted of a hierarchical logistic regression in which PGSI category served as the outcome variable. Predictors were entered into the model one by one: first, playing frequency; then, game variety; and, finally, online experience. Results are presented in Table 4. It can be seen that neither game variety nor online experience accounted for PGSI category membership, once the effects of playing frequency were accounted for in the first step.

Since online gambling can take place at home, it was necessary to check whether play frequency levels related to online gambling experience. A Student independent samples *t*-test revealed a significant positive relationship between play frequency and gambling experience ( $Mean_{Online} = 2.9$ ,  $SD = 1.59$ ;  $Mean_{Offline} = 1.8$ ,  $SD = 1.58$ ;  $t(195) = 5.04$ ,  $p < .001$ ). However, when we conducted a hierarchical regression that did not include play frequency, game variety did not have a significant effect in the first step and online experience did not have a significant effect in the second (full results not reported here). Given the relatively small number of people who reported gambling online, all these results must be interpreted with caution. Their implication, however, is that, while online gambling is associated with a higher frequency of play, it does not place all who experience it at additional risk of developing gambling pathology.

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13 Six respondents did not answer the PGSI-related questions, and one of these was among four people who provided no answer to the playing frequency question. A different four respondents failed to answer only two items or less on the PGSI; for them, a PGSI score was computed by summing the available responses.

**Table 4**

*Final model of a hierarchical logistic regression in which playing frequency, game variety, and online gambling experience were modeled as predictors of pathological gambling risk (as per PGSI).*

Predictor variables	B	S.E.	Odds ratio
Playing frequency	.322**	.117	1.381
Game variety (reference: 0)	-.312	.412	.732
Online gambling experience (reference: no)	-.201	.388	.818
Cox and Snell (1989) index of goodness of fit: .06			

\*\*  $p < .01$  based on the Wald  $\chi^2$  statistic

### IDENTIFYING GROUPS AT POTENTIAL RISK: YOUNGER MALES

The above population-level analysis does not rule out the possibility that online gambling holds particular risks only for subgroups in the population. In this section, we identify a subgroup that is potentially at risk. The analysis is based on the results of two recent studies. A 2014 study of Finnish residents involved logistic regressions much like in our previous analysis, albeit predicting pathological gambling status for males and females separately (Nordmyr et al., 2014). For men, pathological gambling status was predicted by online play exclusively and in combination with offline gambling forms. For women, only offline gambling involvement predicted pathology. This suggests, tentatively, that males might be a more at-risk group for any harm caused by online gambling. Meanwhile, a study of Australian residents who had gambled online at least once in the preceding 12 months (Gainsbury et al., 2014) compared pathological gamblers to all others on basic demographic characteristics. Age and socioeconomic status were found to be differentiating factors, with the pathological gamblers being younger and less educated.

The *Czech Survey of Pathological Gamblers in Treatment* enables the identification of at-risk groups in a novel way: by examining the sociodemographic characteristics of people who report online gambling as the source of their gambling pathology. We identified 31 respondents who named an online gambling form as their “most problematic” in Table 2, Question 2. In light of the Finnish and Australian results, the sociodemographic variables of interest were gender, age, and socioeconomic status.

A comparison of the “online” group to all others based on gender proved impossible, since 30 of the 31 online pathological gamblers were male and there were only 15 females total in the sample.

A Student independent samples *t*-test was used to determine whether the online pathological group could be distinguished from all others based on age. Online pathological gamblers were found to be younger ( $Mean_{Online} = 30.2$ ,  $SD = 9.01$ ;  $Mean_{Others} = 34.3$ ,  $SD = 9.84$ ;  $t(223) = 1.88$ ,  $p = .03$ ).

Finally, the two groups were compared on socioeconomic status, which we quantified based on questions about education, income, and employment (Table 2, Questions 3, 4, and 5). Participants were classified as being of higher socioeconomic status if they earned an income above 20,000 Czech Crowns (CZK), the average monthly rate in the Czech Republic. Those classified as being of middle socioeconomic level were students, people earning an average income (15–20,000 CZK), or unemployed people and pensioners with complete secondary or post-secondary education. All others were classified as being of lower socioeconomic status. As is apparent in Table 5, which shows the distribution of status across the “offline” and “online” groups, the groups were not significantly different ( $\chi^2(2) = 1.38$ ,  $p = .50$ ).

**Table 5**

*Pathological Gamblers Survey: Socioeconomic status of those reporting online and offline gambling as their most problematic.*

Reported most problematic gambling activity	Socioeconomic status (based on reported education, income, and employment)		
	Low	Mid	High
Online	9	16	6
Offline	71	80	47

### **GREATER RISK-TAKING AMONG YOUNGER MALES?**

The preceding section’s analysis suggests that younger people and, most likely, younger males, are a sub-population potentially at risk from online gambling. One reason for this might be young males’ propensity for risk-taking, which has been noted widely in the psychological literature (e.g., Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999). Arguably, the “practice” sessions valued by risk-takers in the anonymous online gambling environment can become costly. Using data from the *National Survey on Substance Use*, we assessed whether spending on gambling was higher among young males with gambling experience. Income levels were also taken into account, since people with higher incomes would be expected to spend more in many domains.

In statistical terms, we were interested in whether online gambling experience (as defined in Section 2) “interacted” with sociodemographic profile (being young and male) in predicting reported typical monthly gambling expenditure (Table 1, Question 4). That is, we were interested in whether expenditure was higher for those with online play experience, *especially among younger males*. Younger males were defined as those below the median age of 36.0. As preparation for taking income into account, responses to the question about income (Table 1, Question 8) were collapsed into three categories. People reporting no income or a monthly income of less than 10,000 CZK were classified as “low-income”. The “middle-income” category consisted of people earning 10–20,000 CZK per month. People earning over 20,000 CZK were classified as “high-income”. Eight respondents in our target group of 206 did not answer the income question. Overall, 190 target respondents answered all the questions relevant to the analysis, and four respondents who reported an extreme expenditure of more than 10,000 CZK were excluded. A table showing expenditure means across online gambling experience (yes or no), sociodemographic profile (young male or not), and income (low, middle, high) categories can be found in Appendix A.

Thus, in our analysis ( $N = 186$ ), there were three categorical predictors, with expenditure as the outcome variable. A generalized linear model with an assumed negative binomial distribution and log link function was fitted using Type II Sums of Squares in *R Version 3.1.0* (packages: *MASS* and *car*; see References). The generalized linear modeling adjusted for the skewness of the expenditure distribution towards lower values ( $M = 437.0$ ,  $SD = 606.12$ ,  $Skewness = 2.96$  ( $SE = .18$ ),  $Kurtosis = 10.42$  ( $SE = .36$ )). Results are presented in Table 6.

**Table 6**

*The results of generalized linear modeling with reported monthly gambling expenditure as the outcome variable and online gambling experience, being a younger male, and personal income as predictors.*

Predictor variables	Wald Chi-Square	df
Online gambling experience	12.77***	1
Sociodemographics: younger male or other	3.20	1
Income	16.94***	2
Interaction between online gambling and sociodemographics	6.04**	1
Interaction between online gambling and income	4.44	2
Interaction between sociodemographics and income	4.12	2
Three-way interaction	0.52	2

\*\*\* $p < .001$

\*\* $p < .01$

The observed two-way interaction between sociodemographics and online experience is consistent with the risk-taking hypothesis. That is, the results, combined with the mean expenditure values in Appendix A, indicate that younger males spend more than others online, regardless of their income. Independently of this effect, higher expenditure was also observed among all people with higher income, as well as among those with online experience.

While our results can be considered to reflect greater risk-taking by young males in anonymous online environments, it must be noted that absolute risk-taking levels among respondents were not high. Following the exclusion of four respondents who reported spending between 10–50,000 CZK, the maximum reported monthly expenditure in this analysis was 5,000 CZK (approximately US\$210).

### **GREATER DISSOCIATION AMONG YOUNGER MALES?**

After finding support for the proposal that online anonymity encourages higher spending among risk-seeking younger males, we turn to another possible online-gambling-related risk for younger males: the opportunity for dissociation. As discussed in the Introduction, dissociation involves losing track of time and entering a trancelike state. In qualitative studies of video gaming, the dissociative state has been described by players as a rewarding experience (Wood, Griffiths, & Parke, 2007). A brain imaging study (Hoeft

et al., 2008) has, further, suggested that males are more likely than females to become engrossed in problem-solving and achieve dissociation as a result. Data from the 2013 Czech *Citizen Survey* allows us to test the hypothesis that males achieve higher levels of dissociation than other groups during online gambling, just as they might with video games. Unlike offline gambling, online gambling can be engaged in at home, where long hours of play are possible.

Dissociation was operationalized as the sum of responses to Table 3, Question 4. Gambling experience was defined as experience in play for real money on any activity except lotteries listed in Table 3, Questions 1 and 2. Alongside gender (Table 3, Question 5), the analysis also took into account video gaming experience, where experience was reflected in an answer of “yes” to Table 3, Question 3. All respondents who had gambled at least once in the preceding 12 months and not only on lotteries ( $N = 228$ ) provided complete data on these measures.

In our analysis, dissociation score was the outcome variable in a generalized linear model (negative binomial distribution, log link), that provided some correction for skew in the dissociation score distribution ( $M = 2.9$ ,  $SD = 3.49$ ,  $Skewness = 1.80$  ( $SE = .16$ ),  $Kurtosis = 4.11$  ( $SE = .32$ )). There were three categorical predictors: online gambling experience (absent or present), video gaming experience (absent or present), and gender. Appendix B displays the mean dissociation across levels of the predictor variables and Table 7 shows the generalized linear modeling results with Type II Sums of Squares.

**Table 7**

*The results of generalized linear modeling with dissociation score as the outcome variable and online gambling experience, video gaming experience, and gender as predictors.*

	Wald Chi-Square	df
Gender	0.25	1
Video gaming experience	10.17**	1
Online gambling experience	0.36	1
Interaction between gender and video gaming	0.54	1
Interaction between gender and online gambling	0.54	1
Interaction between video gaming and online gambling	5.87*	1
Interaction between all three predictors	3.77*	1

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

It can be seen from Table 7 and the table in Appendix B that increased dissociation was related to the presence of video gaming experience and to video gaming experience in combination with online gambling. In relation to our main hypothesis of greater dissociation among young males gambling online, we observed a significant interaction between all three of the model's predictors. Inspection of the means in Appendix B suggests that males with both types of online experience – gaming and gambling – reported the highest levels of dissociation. Thus, our results point to dissociation-proneness as another characteristic of young males that potentially renders them vulnerable to risks from online gambling. To fully test this hypothesis, the connection between sociodemographic profile, dissociation, and gambling pathology or expenditure, needs to be demonstrated within a single study.

## CONCLUSION

Our results suggest that online gambling is a novel gambling form that might be particularly dangerous for young males. The trend is not so strong that online gambling is associated with increased gambling pathology in the general population. However, the *Czech National Service on Substance Use* did reveal that online activities attract more frequent play and greater spending by high income earners. Further analyses suggested that young males contribute disproportionately to this expenditure, which is consistent with the broader hypothesis that the anonymity of online gambling encourages experimentation with risk in this particularly risk-seeking segment of the population. In another survey, young males reported greater levels of dissociation when combining online gambling with video gaming. Thus, we observed preliminary evidence for two mechanisms by which online gambling might predispose younger men to pathological gambling: appeal to this group's risk-taking tendencies, and encouragement of dissociation.

The datasets available to us were unique in terms of their recency, appropriateness for a variety of hypothesis tests, and cultural consistency. Unfortunately, their content and size did not enable us to identify other groups potentially at risk of online-gambling-related pathology. These might include poker players (Wood, Griffiths, & Parke, 2007), video gamers who invest money into play, people generally high in dissociation-proneness (e.g., Kihlstrom, Gliskey, & Angiulo, 1994), and people engaging in live online betting (Gray, LaPlante, & Shaffer, 2012). The well-being of these groups requires extensive research as gambling and gaming acquire digital platforms and converge in offering real monetary rewards.



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**APPENDIX A****Typical monthly gambling expenditure as a function of online gambling experience, being a younger male, and personal income: Descriptive statistics**

Online gambling experience	Young male	Income	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
No	No	Low (below 10,000 CZK)	116.9	147.23	9
		Middle (10,000 to 20,000 CZK)	471.3	593.60	23
		High (over 20,000 CZK)	422.8	387.50	16
	Yes	Low	150.0	227.43	19
		Middle	368.2	331.92	19
		High	354.6	562.01	13
Yes	No	Low	169.8	113.77	10
		Middle	438.7	529.96	15
		High	438.9	261.94	9
	Yes	Low	675.0	1049.69	18
		Middle	609.1	828.68	22
		High	800.0	738.24	13

**APPENDIX B****Dissociation score as a function of online gambling experience, video gaming experience, and gender: Descriptive statistics**

Online gambling experience	Video gaming experience	Gender	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>N</i>
No	No	Male	2.9	5.57	25
		Female	2.0	3.19	11
	Yes	Male	2.9	2.70	42
		Female	3.4	3.28	16
Yes	No	Male	0.9	1.73	27
		Female	2.3	4.31	13
	Yes	Male	3.7	3.34	75
		Female	3.3	3.00	19

# Playing Massively Multiplayer Online Games: A Dangerous Time-Consuming Leisure?

Pascaline Lorentz

## ABSTRACT

Individuals are at risk when they use the internet. Video gamers playing online games are at risk when they play too much. What is too much? The amount of time is often used for assessing the border between a safe and a potentially dangerous gaming practice.

Quantitative research on addiction to video games uses the amount of time played as a strong indicator to foresee problematic behavior. Easy to measure and easy to ask, the amount of time played appears to be the perfect indicator for any potentially harmful practice. Gamers are even classified according to playing time. The scholarship strongly indicates a link between time played and the prevalence of problems.

However, the massive number of video gamers in today's world does not coincide with a huge threat of gaming addiction. Why not? Among intense gamers, most drastically reduce the time played or even suddenly stop. Although time played is an indicator for problematic play, why do some gamers play intensely without encountering any issues?

This chapter argues that intense gaming does not encroach upon gamers' lives because gamers prioritize their activity according to their available time, their social life, and their commitments.

To better understand this moment of rupture in intense playing, 20 in-depth interviews were carried out with intense and former intense players of Massively Multiplayer Online Games (MMOG). Results showed that intense players handle their activity because video gaming is a passion resulting from a history of play. Then, the integration of their gaming into their lives is related to the overall

amount of free time, not just the time played. Last, gamers strongly advocate for their autonomy to make choices and to commit to their engagements.

Video gaming is a passion that is lived with ups and downs, that is as necessary as the air we breathe, and that makes the players' hearts beat.

### **Keywords**

leisure, online gaming, third place, MMOG, intense gamers, addiction, time

### **INTRODUCTION**

The use of the internet has become overwhelming in contemporary life. It is as much for working purposes as personal. Consequently, individuals can enjoy the advantages of the internet at any time, even as a leisure activity. According to leisure studies research (Blackshaw, 2010; Blackshaw & Crawford, 2009; Rojek, 1995; Smith, 1990), defining leisure is a subtle exercise because of how people imagine their time and dedication to it. Etymologically, leisure has three different meanings, two in Latin and one in Greek. In Latin, the word comes from *licere*, which means “being allowed to”. The current meaning evolved from that original idea to stand for the time needed to do something without any constraints. This newer definition suggests the notion of freedom, a time an individual can use for any allowed activity. The Greeks said that leisure comes from *skhole*, which is an “ideal state guided by the appreciation of moderation” (Blackshaw & Crawford, 2009, p. 118). Leisure for the Greeks is an important use of the time free from work. The emphasis is placed on the purpose of the activity undertaken during this time of leisure. Aristotle included leisure in his three goals of human life along with happiness and theoretical wisdom (Smith, 1990, p. 179) and by doing so Aristotle significantly enriched the purpose of leisure.

Century after century, the meaning of leisure did not change much, but the Roman Empire reshaped it and the idea was first transmitted by the Catholic Church and then slightly modified by the Protestant Church after the Reformation. Over time, leisure remained a free time from work. Free time activities were an important concern of the church especially when money was involved (Robert, 1991).

Following the church control over leisure activities, time is a sensitive topic in capitalist societies, too. Indeed, time has to be efficiently used to produce something that will provide money; wasting time is not permitted. As Rojek claimed in his book *Decentering Leisure* (1995), leisure is related to the context – notably with gender, social class, and aging factors – in which the individual

lives. To sum up, leisure is here defined as a meaningful activity chosen by individuals, according to their context of living, to spend their free time.

A public concern has grown with the increasing use of the internet regarding time allocation. Online gaming lies among these internet-related activities (Beranuy, Carbonell, & Griffiths, 2012; Chai, Chen, & Khoo, 2011; Haagsma, Pieterse, Peters, & King, 2013; Lee, 2011).

However, the literature about addiction to online games strongly underlines the amount of time played as a predictor for addiction (Haagsma et al., 2013). Researches differently assess the “too much” time spent playing. For instance, Hussain and Griffiths state that playing more than 30 hours a week is excessive (2009, p. 748) while Wan and Chiou put that line at 48 hours a week (2006). For young users, Gentile mentioned 24 hours a week as a gate to pathological gaming (cited by Messias, Castro, Saini, Usman, & Peeples, 2011). How much time played is too much?

According to these researches there would be a time when gamers are addicted to their favorite activity. What about intense players giving up on their own? How do they manage their activity in their lives?

Although the literature repeatedly delivers warnings against the risk of intense video gaming, this chapter supports the notion that intense gaming does not encroach upon a player’s social life because gamers explain how they prioritize their activity according to their history of play, their available time, and their commitments. Intense players manage to organize their gaming life in a balanced fashion because playing is part of their life history. In fact, playing games was first introduced into their lives in a family setting before it becomes a personal experience. Intense gamers also adapt to their overall free time. There are times in their lives more prone to playing and there are times in the day devoted to gaming. Last, intense gamers claim their ability to decide for themselves by making choices proving their autonomy and their sense of priorities.

## **RESULTS**

The argument stated in this chapter is supported by evidence garnered from qualitative research that collected 20 in-depth interviews with intense online gamers (MMOGs) in order to circumscribe the borders of the gamer social life. The aim of this research was to map the social process of attachment to virtual relationships. Participants were recruited with snowball sampling.

The focus was more on playing activity than on the game itself, and concentrated on the impact of gaming within the gamers' social lives and their global socialization. In addition, another objective was to pinpoint the pivotal moment during which ex-gamers realized that they wanted to stop playing heavily, and then identify the reasons.

The hypothesis formulated that gamers have a "career" of gaming that drives them to behave in a certain way. In order to highlight this movement, interviews touched on products they used, the situation in which they started playing, who offered them their first games and console, and whether they played with parents and siblings. The goal underpinning the collection was the identification of part of the primary socialization in their gaming history as well as any social tension related to their gaming activity. Furthermore, the dedication of gamers to other leisure activities was taken into account. For instance, we asked if heavy gamers gave up practicing a sport they liked or an activity they valued in order to create more time for playing video games.

Then, they explained their shift from single player games to online games and MMOGs. One specific MMOG was chosen by the gamer and they explained the reason. Interviews thereafter concentrated on the gaming activity related to this specific MMOG. Gamers talked about their social lives in the game and out of the game. They described their avatars and how they feel about them, and what they like and dislike in their in-game and out-of-game social life. For deeper reflection, gamers were asked if they had ever wished to engage in only one world, either the flesh or the synthetic world. Gamers talked about possible conflicts or troubles due to their gaming, and any solutions they had developed. Addiction was discussed so as to gather data about what gamers would call addiction, what their opinion about a possible addiction to video games was, and about how media relayed the topic. Finally, ex-gamers were asked to talk about the time they drastically reduced their gaming. Current gamers instead mentioned how they envision life without video gaming.

The interviews lasted from 1 hour, 45 minutes to 2 hours, 50 minutes. Phenomenology was adopted for designing this research. During the analysis, I tried to identify emerging themes. Then, those themes were classified under two theoretical patterns to explain how gamers maintain the balance between their social lives. The first pattern envisioned video gaming as a leisure activity like any other leisure, which forms part of gamers' daily lives. The second pattern presented video gaming worlds as virtual third place in the overall social lives of gamers.



## A HISTORY OF PLAYING VIDEO GAMES

### **Playing Video Games is a Family Business**

As a continuum of toys and child play, video games are introduced to the household by family members. The first video games experienced by the sample respondents aged 18–57 were published during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. Participants confessed two sources for their first games: their parents and relatives of their parents. When the purchase of the first video game was the result of children's supplications, parents or relatives were still the ones who made the decision to introduce the leisure into the household. As with any other leisure, video gaming is conditioned by the social factors of the family household. Not only do video games have a cost, but they also require an electronic device. The technological aspect of video games makes middle class families more likely to adopt this leisure (Vincent, 2011).

In Australia, the installation of a reliable internet supply enjoyed tremendous costs, owing to the size of the country. As a result, Australian video gamers often had to wait for a long time to enjoy a quality connection. Respondents recalled their frustrations as they wanted to take part in the world community of online gamers. Eventually, internet providers in Australia properly covered the country and Australian players could go online. A part of the interviewed gamers shed light on this moment in their gaming history by stressing that embedding the internet connection in their playing activity reshaped their entire relationship to playing video games. Indeed, they underlined the opening of the new world of online games. Additionally, half of the players interviewed diminished the importance of the internet connection in their gaming history as they gave priority to the experience of playing with significant people.

The content of the interviews clearly demonstrated the importance of parental feelings regarding video gaming. In fact, when parents introduced video games to their household with a positive mindset that held video games as a tool for having fun, children were more likely to develop a healthy relationship to their beloved games. Recently, research showcased that games are now used in Australian families even as a mediator to communicate and form in-family memories (Brand, Lorentz, & Mathew, 2014, pp. 19–20).

The introduction of a classification of games in Australia in 1994 (Commission, 2012, pp. 47–59) reinforced parental responsibility regarding the purchase of video games appropriate for their children. In this respect, parents proved over the time studied to enjoy the better knowledge of the classification (Brand, 2012, p. 14; Brand et al., 2014, p. 24).

Growing-up video gamers reach a time when they do not play with their parents and when moved out from the parental house they handle their playing by themselves.

### **Playing Video Games Leads to Personal Experience**

Even if the first video games are introduced by family members, the very experience of video gaming remains today a singular one (Brand et al., 2014, p. 18).

Respondents reported at length the collection of their favorite games, casting light on the experience lived rather than on the style of game. The charismatic pixelated character of *Mario* (in *Donkey Kong*, Nintendo, 1981) is familiar to all gamers and often appears on the list of favorite games played. Interviewed players avidly talked about their avatars created in online games. They were asked to concentrate on their favorite avatar and describe their relationship with it. The terms used suggested a deep friendship. These player comments largely confirmed previous scholarship on the avatar-player relationship.

Conflicts are part of the online gaming experience. First, conflicts can emerge from in-game interaction. Characters chosen in a game come with a range of actions that they are more likely to perform. Players often pointed out that their game experience was strongly conditioned by their avatar's abilities. A mage fulfills a specific role in the game life which differs from what a warrior does.

Second, a capricious internet connection may generate tensions in the gaming experience. Respondents overwhelmingly denied having encountered any significant tension as a result of an internet disconnection. They confessed being upset, but they explained that they simply moved to another activity, albeit with resignation.

Playing video games is originally a family experience before becoming a more personal activity. Like the nature of the experience, the amount of time dedicated to video gaming also evolves throughout the gamer life.

### **HOW DO YOU FIND THE TIME FOR PLAYING VIDEO GAMES?**

The time dedicated to playing online games is almost systematically used to assess potential problematic gaming behavior. However, this work argues that intense gaming does not encroach on gamers' lives because the interviewed players explained that time played has to be contextualized. When studying time played, a distinction has to be made between times of life (e.g., childhood; adolescence; adulthood) and times of the day (e. g. leisure time and working time).

### **The Intensity of Play Changes During a Lifetime**

Along with respondents' descriptions of their history of playing, variations in the intensity of playing emerged. Indeed, parts of the life span are more suitable, such as childhood and the teenage years, during which players enjoy more free time. Contemporary adulthood also presents moments for intense playing under specific conditions.

Childhood is characterized as particularly important regarding the amount of free time available to play. Indeed, play is an important aspect of development. Australian gamers mentioned a time when they played video games before going to school. Like other countries, Australian schools free their students early in the afternoon, thus providing an opportunity for play. For children not engaging in a busy leisure life, playing video games is available to kill time.

The teen period of the players interviewed is interesting for the widening of the range of games played. Adolescence is the peak for experimentation, when players seek their identity through different games and use gaming worlds for experimentation. Role-playing games offer fantastic conditions for identity exploration and experimentation. The teen period can be prolonged by giving birth to emerging adulthood. Playing inappropriate games is also viewed as emancipating for teenage gamers. In the sample composed of adults this aspect was, however, not mentioned.

One of the new characteristics of current adult life is the non-linearity of its professional history. Economic crises fostered a tense job market that left its mark on individuals' working lives. Periods of unemployment are today used by players to dedicate an important part of their time to their beloved activity: playing video games. The players interviewed stressed that the time freed by the end of studies or the loss of a job vacated an important time requirement. Consequently, players expressed their astute ability to justify their unemployed status by utilizing their online gaming as an office-hour activity. Thanks to internationally played online games, servers operate 24/7 and they are always full of players ready to share time and play. As demonstrated in other research, playing video games enhances self-esteem and is often used by players as a coping strategy. Indeed, players who emphasized that the internet had changed everything in their gaming experience shed light on the constant availability of other players online.

### **Playing Depends on the Time of Day**

Video gaming is commonly attributed to the schedules of childhood and youth. Therefore, adults do not necessarily envision this activity as being worthwhile

during the day. Gaming has its moments in the day, and playing intensity varies according to the moment chosen.

*Leisure is an extraordinary meeting place of the real and the unreal ) an extraordinary meeting place of the serious and superficial. ... In other words, these leisure situations are realities in which the real and the unreal, the serious and the superficial, come together.* (Blackshaw, 2010, p. 31)

Respondents stressed regularly that they play according to their other commitments. For instance, students pointed out that they balance their study time with their gaming activity. When an important exam is in sight they reduce their gaming. As this was raised earlier, the same happens with the unemployed. Intense gamers highlighted the volatility of their gaming activity.

As video gaming is a social activity, the intensity of playing is also related to the intensity of the out-of-game social life. For instance, players mentioned that being single allowed them to play more intensely, whereas being in a committed relationship did/does/will diminish their playing time. The same contextual situation exists for mobile students and workers. When being uprooted from their usual social environment, respondents confessed to spending more time playing video games as a tool to interact with the friends they left behind. Consequently, usual times used for social life and/or love life are dedicated to playing games and in-game interactions.

The passion for playing video games expressed by some of the interviewed intense gamers can lead to a professional vocation. Respondents seeking jobs in the video game industry first studied in this area before working in the sector. The social environment of gamers supported this choice as soon as they recognized that the video game industry provides a number of jobs and professional opportunities. Then, video games are necessarily part of the daily life.

This decision shapes the life of intense gamers and respondents strongly claimed their right to do so: it is a personal decision. The freedom of choice, as it was called by intense players, proved the lucidity and maturity of the respondents regarding the running of their life activities.

### **PLAYING ONLINE VIDEO GAMES INTENSELY IS A PERSONAL DECISION**

Intense video gamers specify their activity by stating that it is their choice. They claim the freedom to choose their leisure activity without being judged.

**Intense Players of MMOGs Make a Call for Their Autonomy**

At the beginning of this chapter, the introduction of video games into respondents' lives was understood to be the consequence of a parental decision. When growing-up children play games they are monitored by their parents. Their gaming practice is controlled by their parents, who express opinions about their children's activities. Players make the choice for video games and assume this choice. Indeed, they mentioned that even when their parents were reluctant about the idea of their child spending their time playing, players took on their activity and played anyway. At some point, reluctant parents capitulated and trusted their child instead. How intense players run their gaming activity is similar to the path to adulthood. By choosing to play, intense gamers become independent and assert themselves.

Along with their history of video games, intense gamers build a specific and personalized culture. By doing so, they detach themselves first from their family and then from their peers. Unlike the present-day, video games were not that popular when the gamers surveyed were younger. Therefore, intensely playing video games would put them into the "geek" group. Asserting their identity as gamers is part of their lives. The amalgamation of playing video games and being addicted to this practice is strongly contested by intense gamers, who do not deal with the people making it. When mentioning the question of addiction to video games and how players answer to others' criticisms, respondents replied that they don't react. If others react well to gamers coming-out and revealing that they are video gamers, then respondents enjoy sharing their passion for games with the new acquaintances.

Online gaming opened a new space to be shared by video game lovers. Players interviewed stressed the relief they felt for being among peers in online games environments.

*I like the fact that other people are playing the game with me. ...I don't like PvP (Player versus Player) but enjoy being in a group and chatting while we do something. ...I sometimes play Sims 3, but that's rare, and usually only when I don't feel like playing WoW. It feels empty and quiet without people to chat to while I play. (Female, 22, Australian)*

However, they also mentioned the presence of idiots with whom they did not want to deal.

*I like this virtual life compared to my real life because I don't have to deal with people I don't want to. (Female, 22, Australian)*

Playing an online game intensely is an experience close to joining a secret society, which is not that secret. Online game worlds work like societies or communities. There, players can fully express their passion and their identity as a gamer. Respondents pointed out the importance of being part of a group of gamers. Like with what other research found (King & Delfabbro, 2009), intense players enjoy the social status that comes with their in-game avatar activity.

When being asked about the weight of their in-game commitments, intense players explained that they chose to join the group and other players rely on their participation. Sometimes players leave the group without any notice. Respondents acknowledged their disappointment, but they confessed that they easily coped with it.

*My friends in the virtual world were organized around shared activities, mostly PVP combat. We would chat about other things, but the focus of the relationship was on the shared game activities. ...I don't really consider WoW as being a different life, maybe just a different component of the same life. It's no different from being one person in the workplace, and another person who is a member of a political party for example. ... When I was still playing a couple of people quit. Some said goodbye, others just dropped out silently. I suppose I felt a little abandoned by those who just dropped out, because even though the subject matter of the relationship was shallow, the friendship still seemed real. (Male, 35, Australian)*

When interviewee priorities change, their gaming practices evolve, too. As adults, players questioned in this research asked for independence in monitoring their lives.

### **Intense Players Adapt Their Gaming to Their Chosen Priorities**

The priority given to playing video games can, of course, change over time. By claiming the free use of their time, respondents showed that they are aware of the temporality of the intensity of their practice. Half of them talked retrospectively of times during which they played intensely, but those times were over at the time of the interview. Hence, light was shed on the specific moment when players decided to reorganize their priorities. Respondents mentioned two types of factors – internal and external – in their decision to reduce or stop their gaming activity.

The game played intensely can change in its nature following updates or even trends in gaming. For instance, a majority of former intense gamers of *World of Warcraft* (Blizzard, 2004) stressed the changes in the nature of playing this

game due to its huge success and the significant number of newbies (i.e., new gamers). Indeed, intense players no longer found what they were looking for. As a result, they left it and/or moved to another game of the same genre. Moreover, newly released games can also attract players who then decide to change to the new title. Plus, the enjoyment of the gaming experience is related to the gamer needs. If those change, the game experience is consequently impacted. Respondents said that they did accept others making the decision to leave, and they themselves did not stop playing. They emphasized the nature of the experience rather than the specific players.

Players do not attach to the game experience. If it no longer brings what they are looking for they adapt their activity as a result. When making this decision, there are external factors which can also influenced player decisions to leave the game.

As mentioned earlier, players looking for a substitute for their social life in playing online games do not feel the need when they have a fulfilling out-of-game social life. Often mentioned reasons why intense players reduce or stop their activity are being in a committed relationship, getting married, and/or having a baby.

*I think in some ways I'm not really gaming that much now like two times a week is hmm I think if it became boring or they raised the cost to a certain amount or if I got so busy get married and have kids it will be like just no time for it. (Male, 42, Canadian)*

Similar to this is the starting of a new school or a new job to which players want to give priority. Whether the time is not available anymore or if what they want is not that strong, the trigger for modification in the behavior remains the decision made by the gamer. In the words of surveyed players, balancing their situations is pretty simple as soon as they have made up their minds.

Overall, respondents demonstrated that balancing their lives is possible. Sometimes the desire for play is felt and players dedicate a significant number of hours to play. Sometimes another priority arises and players adapt their playing as a consequence.

### **DISCUSSION: TO BE (VIRTUALLY SOCIAL), OR NOT TO BE?**

This chapter successively studied the history of play as a family business and then a personal experience; the free time available for play at specific times in life and at specific moments of the day; and the claim for independence of intense gamers with a search for autonomy and a sense of priorities. One cannot help but notice that intense players claim the possibility to monitor their lives

as it pleases them. They, indeed, manage to handle all their commitments since they organize their lives around their priorities.

Throughout this chapter it was presented that the lives of intense players of online games are whole, which is not reducible to the part dedicated to playing. Thus, the amount of time played does not matter so much, but the choices individuals make for it do.

Rojek (1995) added an important point to leisure studies by saying that the context in which a leisure activity emerged is essential and has to be understood in relation to the environment of the individual. The amount of free time available might influence the intensity of playing activity. So, on one side, there is work time, which modifies the free time available, and, on the other side, there is the individual free will to undertake an activity or not. Moreover, other factors – such as time and localization – could significantly impact the choice of activities. For instance, Australian children are prone to outdoor leisure related to the sea because they benefit from the geographic conditions of their country. Conversely, Canadian and Russian children will more likely ice skate. Besides, material conditions are typical of the society wherein individuals live and determine the genre of leisure activities. In fact, with the advent of television then computers, new leisure activities emerged, but first of all in the families who had such tools available.

In addition, the family environment also impinges greatly on individuals' choices because of parental encouragement and expectation. This is the reason intense gamers were asked whether they were sensitised to video games by their parents. In reality, a leisure activity is never really chosen by its young practitioner, and that is also the case for video gaming. In fact, family activities are part of the primary socialization imposed by parents.

In this way, documenting adult intense playing allows one to cast light on gamers' responsibility for their lives. As leisure is a freely chosen activity, this specific activity is meaningful for individuals. That is to say, this activity enhances individuals' lives, which is in agreement with the Greek definition of leisure. This is the reason scholars should ask gamers what their activity brings to their lives. It is no longer possible to research video games and video gaming without considering gamers' points of view and discourses (Lorentz, 2013).

Then, the common point among all gamers interviewed was the inclination to be social in their play, whether by sharing this activity with others in the same physical space or in the same gaming world. Therefore, intense players choose



a genre of social life built around video gaming. Then, the question remaining would be whether there is a point at which individuals are too social. With the development of technologies and the internet, individuals prove that while using different tools, they remain the same: social beings.

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## SECTION 4: PARTICIPATING IN POLITICS

Monika Metykova

In this section we provide a taste of research carried out under the heading of new media and politics by a team of researchers in media studies, sociology, and political science at Masaryk University in Brno. As always, some disclaimers are due before we outline the contributions that appear in this section. “Politics” and “political” are terms that have increasingly become descriptive of wide areas of our (everyday) lives – ranging from culture through sexuality all the way to how we dispose of our rubbish. In this section we attempt to provide a selection of our research that covers areas from institutional politics through citizens’ participatory practices to the fate of Europe’s largest and, arguably, most neglected minority – the Roma.

In her contribution, Alena Macková reports on the ongoing research into the use of new media technologies by mainstream Czech politicians vying for the electorate’s attention in elections between 2012–14 (Regional Council, Senate, Chamber of Deputies, and President). It has been important for the researchers to ask not only whether politicians have already taken up new media, but also how they use it and – crucially – whether political communication changes substantially as a consequence of the adoption of new media. The results are, perhaps, disappointing for citizens as they suggest that a regular online politician-citizen dialogue is marginal in the Czech Republic. It appears as though contemporary politicians perceive new media merely as a useful tool, particularly for campaigning, rather than an effective method for communication with citizens.

A similarly sceptical – or realistic or critical – stance on new media is presented in Monika Metykova’s contribution to the role of media in the representation and empowerment of the Roma minority. She argues that, rather than entrusting new media with resolving deeply ingrained inequalities, the limitations of a technologically deterministic view – often readily embraced by policy makers seeking quick solutions – should be acknowledged. Also, we should be ready to discuss the changing roles of the “old” technology of public service broadcasting that was originally designed to empower citizens within the framework of changing European societies. Unfortunately for the Roma, media policy makers tend to think about citizen empowerment within the confines of nation-states and, hence, ignore Europe’s largest transnational minority.

The final contribution in this section of the book attempts to answer the perennial questions of why and how people use social media in their mundane political and civic practices. Jakub Macek offers his observations on – and his theoretical integration of – three different types of social actors: members of media audiences; members of particular organic, virtual, and imagined communities, as well as members of networks of social relations; and citizens of the nation-state.

The authors whose work appears in this section do not by any means attempt to provide ready-made watertight answers; rather, they provide case studies that are intended to spark further debate and empirical work in a complex and exciting interdisciplinary field of study.

# **Czech Politicians Go Online: Is this e-Democracy or Just a Campaign Move?**

**Alena Macková**

## **ABSTRACT**

The last few years have witnessed an intensified academic debate on the potential of new media in politics in the Czech Republic. However, discussions on new media's impact – democratic potential, mobilization of the electorate, dialogue between citizens and politicians, etc. – tend to involve political parties rather than politicians as individual users. This chapter is mostly based on data analyzing the individual use of new media (and, specifically, social networking sites) by politicians. The aim of the chapter is to provide an insight into research that we conducted in 2012–14 on how Czech political actors used new media in four different elections. We believe that it is crucial to ask not only whether politicians have already taken up new media, but also how they use it. We need to ask whether political communication changes substantially as a consequence of the adoption of new media. Our data suggest that regular online politician-citizen dialogue is marginal. It appears as though contemporary politicians perceive new media merely as a useful tool for campaigning rather than effective communication with citizens.

## **Keywords**

new media, politicians, campaign, democracy, election, social network sites

## **INTRODUCTION**

The 2013 Czech presidential election – the first ever direct election for this position – sparked interest in the democratic potential of new media among the general public as well as scholars. However, the ensuing discussions focused mostly on mainstream political party websites and profiles on Social Network Sites (SNS) rather than on political actors as individual users. Politicians in particular have recently become the focus of attention in the shift towards exploration of the use of SNS (Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, & Hindman, 2007; Strandberg, 2013). The focus on politicians as new technology users is

both interesting and important, especially since new technologies offer new opportunities in communication between citizens and politicians as both types of actors can bypass gatekeepers in mass media and communicate directly.

This chapter explores the current trends in Czech political communication as well as political actors' perception of new technologies. Although the debate on new media and politics refers mostly to the potential of "e-democracy" in terms of greater opportunities for political action for citizens and political actors, more recent research conveys less optimism in this respect (Graham, Broersma, & Hazelhoff, 2013). In the three years of our research we gradually mapped the usage of new media by Czech politicians. However, we argue that it is crucial not only to map whether and how professional politicians use new media but, crucially, whether such use merely copies the use of "old" media and, most importantly, whether the practice enhances democracy or establishes another way of soliciting votes.

Even though some politicians declare the importance of new media adoption, our data indicate politicians' distrust of and inability to use new media efficiently in their interactions with citizens. We argue that the model of computer-mediated, routine, politician-citizen dialogue is not widespread; on the contrary, new media are mostly perceived only as campaign tools.

In our research (based mostly on content analysis and interviews) we explored different elections from 2012–14 (Regional Council, Senate, Chamber of Deputies, President).

## **POLITICIANS IN A NEW ERA OF COMMUNICATION**

New media has been on the radar of political communication scholars for more than two decades and countless research has been conducted since the attempt to map the transformation of political communication in "the third age of political communication" (Blumler & Kavanagh, 2009), in "the fifth information age" (Bimber, 2003; Smith, 2010), or in "the digital age" (Farell, Kolodny, & Medvic, 2001). New media is often seen as a solution to problems in democratic societies where citizens are becoming increasingly disinterested in traditional political institutions and their participation in elections is decreasing. Although the Czech Republic is quite a young democratic state that embarked on the transition from a communist to a democratic political regime 25 years ago, it – similar to many other democratic countries – faces a decline in electoral participation (Linek, 2013) and a growing alienation from

both political institutions and politicians.<sup>14</sup> Crucial factors contributing to this disillusionment during the period of democratic and economic transformation included an economic slowdown and the first political crises and corruption affairs of the main political parties in the second half of the 1990s that resulted in growing discontent with political elites and distrust in the responsiveness of the system. According to Coleman (2005), citizens have become more cynical and reserved and less willing to trust political elites that are perceived as distant, arrogant, and not worthy of trust. It is assumed that new media cannot only become an important source of information when traditional sources of information are abandoned but that it can also help bridge the growing communication gap between political elites and citizens (Coleman & Moss, 2008; Graham, Broersma, & Hazelhoff, 2013). According to Coleman (2005), politicians' online activities represent a response to the deepening gap between citizens and politicians, with politicians attempting to gain new, direct, and straightforward access to voters (Coleman & Moss, 2008; Coleman & Blumler, 2009).

The research on politicians and new media is dominated by a focus on the adoption of new media, especially as tools for electoral communication (Herrnson, Stokes-Brown, & Hindman, 2007; Howard, 2006; Williams & Gulati, 2012; Larrson & Kalsnes, 2014), following Barack Obama's success in the U.S. presidential election in 2008 (Cogburn & Espinoza-Vasquez, 2011). However, several recent studies have extended the scope to a more detailed analysis of communication and new media content produced by politicians (Graham, Broersma, & Hazelhoff, 2013; Vergeer & Hermans, 2011; Grant, Moon, & Grant, 2010) or have – in addition to politicians – included citizens in order to map the influence of new media on voting behavior (Strandberg, 2013).

However, research that would sum up the findings thus far and outline clear general trends in how political elites use new media has been missing. While studies characterize the transformation of communication between politicians and citizens as moderate, their findings are often contradictory. This is probably because they explore limited phenomena (they typically focus on a short period of time, one medium, one campaign, etc.), which makes it complicated to understand the broader context or identify more general trends (Wright, 2012; Dahlgren, 2013). Hence, in this chapter I attempt to connect the findings

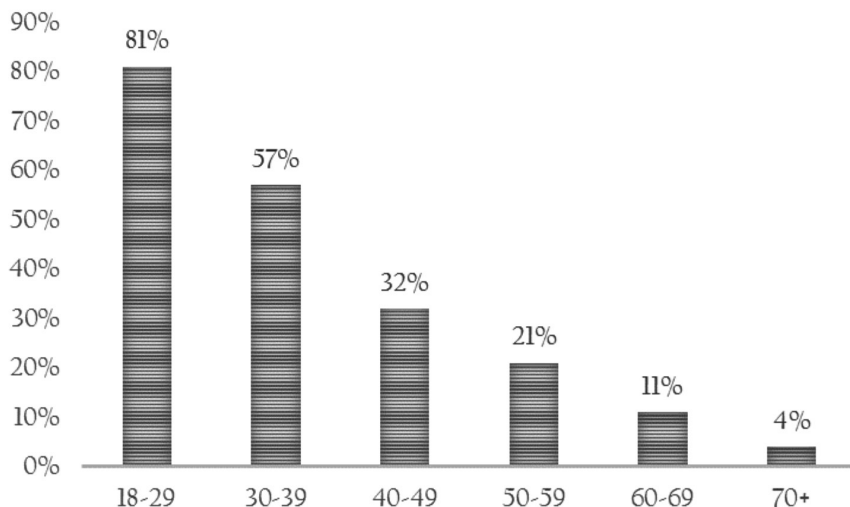
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<sup>14</sup> Voter turnout in the first parliamentary election (Chamber of Deputies) in 1996 was 76.4% compared to 59.5% in the 2013 parliamentary election.

of our studies and identify a more general model of political elites' new media communication.

## RESEARCH AND METHODS

Before I delve into the findings of our research, some disclaimers are necessary. This chapter does not aim to provide the findings of a single study; rather, it attempts to summarize findings of research on Czech politicians' new media use conducted by myself or in conjunction with other Czech scholars over almost three years, from April 2012 to October 2014. Some of the research that I refer to here is ongoing and, overall, it tends to focus on Facebook, the most commonly used SNS among Czech citizens and politicians. According to the most recent findings (Macek et al., 2015; Macková & Macek, 2015) 38% of Czech citizens (47% of internet users) used Facebook actively in 2014 compared to 3% active Twitter users. Facebook adoption, as well as other types of activities on SNSs, significantly differ in age groups (Figure 1). For example, only 6% of respondents declared SNS as their source of news, but these were



**Figure 1:** Usage of Facebook by age groups.

Source: Macek et al., 2015; Macková & Macek, 2015.

important sources for the youngest (ages 18–29) citizens (20%) who also use the internet (96%) and SNS (81%) more often than older citizens. Nevertheless, there is a rather limited tendency to discuss or deal with politics on SNS. Only



13% of SNS users (3% of all respondents) said they friended or followed a candidate or similar political figure.<sup>15</sup>

I refer to four studies in this chapter. The first took place in autumn 2012 during the Czech regional council<sup>16</sup> and senate<sup>17</sup> elections. It was the first comprehensive study on the adoption of new media by Czech politicians (see Macková, Fialová, & Štětka, 2013). Since not a single study dealt with the spread of new media among Czech political elites at the time, we focused only on some tools that were adopted by candidates before the 2012 regional and Senate elections (N=484).<sup>18</sup>

The second research took place during the presidential elections at the beginning of 2013. This time we focused on contents produced by all nine candidates (see also Štětka, Macková, & Fialová, 2014)<sup>19</sup> before the elections, concentrating on SNS activities and the prevailing style of communication.

The third study was conducted under my supervision by MA student Kateřina Peroutková. In summer 2013, Peroutková conducted in-depth interviews with members of the Czech Parliament (from both chambers) (N=10) to explore their Facebook use and motivations as their new media use in a non-election period (Peroutková 2014).<sup>20</sup>

And finally, the fourth research was a longitudinal study on both the activity (adoption and frequency of SNS use) and communication style (content strategy) adopted by members of the Lower House of the Czech Parliament. Data collection involved all deputies (N=200), i.e., gathering information about the adoption of new media and Facebook content themselves, in three monthlong waves:

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15 According to Pew Internet Research (2013), 20% of American users in 2012 friended or followed candidates.

16 The Czech Republic is divided into 13 regions and the capital Prague. Regional assembly representatives (the number of seats depends on the population of the region) are elected every four years. The assemblies form regional councils that elect the presidents of the region (*hejtman* in Czech).

17 The Parliament of the Czech Republic consists of two chambers: the Lower House – the Chamber of Deputies (200 members) – and the Upper House – the Senate (81 members). Members of the Senate are elected for six-year terms. Elections take place every two years and one third are elected in one-seat constituencies.

18 We collected data on the use of several tools (personal websites, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and blogs) by all candidates in the senate election and by party leaders in regional elections.

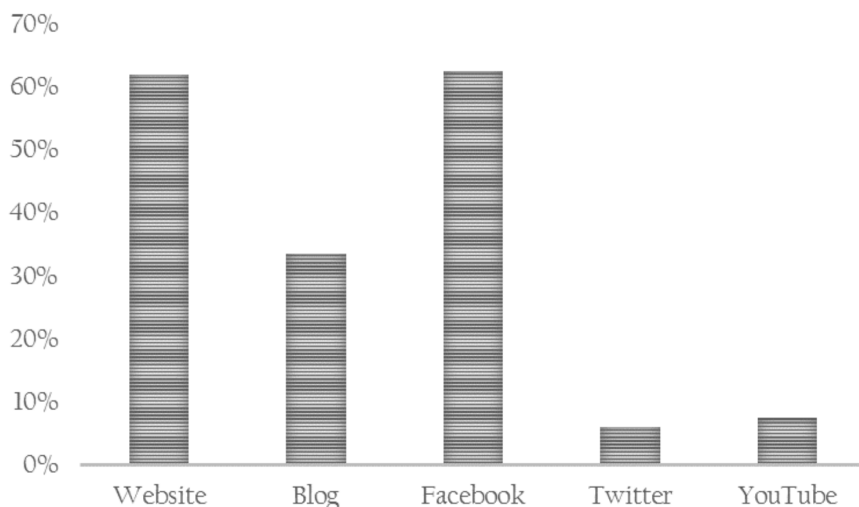
19 The data from Facebook and Twitter cover two periods: 23 November 2012 to 12 January 2013 and 13 January 2013 to 26 January 2013.

20 The data was used with Peroutková's permission.

- (1) May 2013: non-election period;  
 (2) September-October 2013: period before early parliamentary elections<sup>21</sup>;  
 (3) May 2014: non-election period.

#### CZECH POLITICIANS ONLINE

There is no doubt that new media has gradually become a common tool for Czech politicians. In autumn 2012 almost a third of the candidates (26%) for regional president had their own website, as did twice as many candidates for Senate seats (60%). The most widespread SNS in the Czech Republic, Facebook, was used by more than half of the candidates in the two elections (55%). A similar picture emerged in the case of Czech deputies elected in 2010 (Figure 2). Actually, in May 2013 more than half had a (more or less active) website and a profile or a fan page on Facebook where they could publish/receive information and communicate with citizens. Twitter was used by only 6%, similar to the most popular video-sharing website, YouTube.



**Figure 2:** Adoption of new media by Czech deputies in May 2013 (non-election period; N=200).

Source: Author

<sup>21</sup> Early elections were held on 25 and 26 October 2013.

A considerable share of politicians obviously use new technologies actively and many of them like using online SNS as part of their communication.

*It is an amazing and very strong tool in political struggle, Facebook. You can systematically create a smear campaign that you could not have even imagined possible. You cannot set it up like that anywhere, in no print media, like on Facebook.* (Senator, male)

*Well, communication [on Facebook] is really fast, I really can't be happier with it. If we want to come to see each other, it gets arranged right away. We used to have to wait for a letter and then for a reply, then exchange numbers so that we could arrange an appointment...* (Deputy, female)  
(Respondents as cited in Peroutková, 2014)

Despite the relatively widespread adoption of new media and the enthusiasm of some politician-users, there are many who use new media in limited ways or not at all. Almost half of the monitored deputies' Facebook profiles and fan pages were, at least during data collection in May, without any posts or the posts were not entirely public.<sup>22</sup> Quite a few politicians seem to be more sceptical and careful about using SNS for political purposes, which may relate to their personal or mediated negative experiences, or to the fact that SNS communication does not suit them – they do not internalize this style of communication (Peroutková, 2014).

*After I gained initial experience two or three years ago I found [Facebook] such a waste of time... I don't doubt that many politicians see it differently...* (Senator, male)

*I don't like online chat and I don't like text messages. And I don't particularly like emails either. And that's all for the same reason, the fact that you need to simplify everything, and the risk of offending someone or explaining something inaccurately increases significantly.* (Senator, male)  
(Respondents as cited in Peroutková 2014)

The belief that politicians should use new media tends to be a strong motivation for setting up an account, a profile, and/or a fan page. However, this initial motivation tends to remain the key motivation. Using new media and presenting oneself in this way tends to be understood as an obligation – in sharp contrast with the enthusiastic adoption of new media mentioned above.

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22 Only public contents were entered into the analysis.

When adopting new technologies, some politicians even knowingly present themselves as “progressive” and “modern” (Nilsson & Carlsson, 2013: 9), since new technologies are seen as a necessity for a modern politician.

*And why am I on Facebook? Well, that is simply key to a modern politician's presentation... I would just feel deprived of a chance to present my opinions.* (Deputy, male)

*We were one of the first ones who started using [Facebook] in the campaign quite purposefully. We knew that it is a tool necessary for us in order to get across.* (Deputy, male)  
(Respondents as cited in Peroutková, 2014)

This sense of obligation/necessity to use new media stems from (perceived or actual): (1) public/social pressure in terms of a necessity to be available and reachable (online, up-to-date), presenting oneself as a modern politician (propagation, self-presentation), as transparent, or authentic; (2) pressure from political collaborators or opponents as explained by the so-called “me too effect” (Sudulich, Wall, Jansen, & Cunningham, 2010) in terms of an effort to “keep up” with colleagues; and (3) pressure from one’s own political party to use these communication channels for promotion, especially in the pre-election period, which can also speed up the adoption of new media technologies. Nevertheless, such a sense of obligation does not ensure the effective use of the medium. On the contrary, Peroutková’s data show that politicians often do not know what is expected of them in relation to this medium – whether they should use it for promotion, self-presentation, or communication with citizens.

## NEW MEDIA IN ELECTION CAMPAIGNS

Politicians thus often involve new media in their activities. Nevertheless, the adoption of new media does not tell us a lot about politicians’ communication and, hence, we must also ask: What characterizes politicians’ communication using new media? What is the difference (if any) between this “new” way of communication and the “old” ways of using “traditional” media? Can we qualitatively identify new aspects of political communication that are the consequence of the use of new media? Kruikemeier, van Noort, & Vliegthart (2013) point out that the use of new media is closely connected to the personalization of political communication, which has a positive influence on people’s engagement. Candidates now have their own low-cost channel for communicating on their own behalf, a place where they present themselves directly to citizens and some even refer to the “intimization” of

political communication (Stanyer, 2013). Another attribute that can support engagement is interactivity, which encourages two-way communication and the exchange of information between politicians and citizens. However, this does not happen often. Many Czech politicians use new media primarily for one-way communication in the course of a campaign, or for strictly formal communication, particularly for disseminating information about developments in their parties. Such use, highly motivated by campaigning purposes, is probably most visible when politicians direct contents to citizens as part of pre-election activities and outside campaign periods.

### **“Let’s discuss” the campaign**

Our analysis of candidates’ SNS contents in the Czech presidential elections showed that they did not use Facebook to present their opinions and connect with citizens. On the contrary, candidates’ profiles/fan pages were more akin to information channels about the campaign itself, emphasizing information about events, reports from the media, or invitations to join the campaign. A surprisingly small segment of communication was devoted to the candidate him/herself (Table 1). Even though some posts included a higher share of a candidate’s statements, when analyzing the content of these statements in greater detail, we found that, on average, only every seventh statement was devoted to political issues, problems, or topical events (Štětka, Macková, & Fialová, 2014). There could be several explanations for this. Firstly, the campaign period was very short, some candidates were non-politicians, and some of them did not use SNS before, so they did not have time to build an audience and develop a communication strategy. Secondly, the power of the Czech president is relatively limited, and his/her smaller agenda can thus explain why only a few topics were communicated. And the most general reason (not limited to this election) is that the Czech electoral system is centered on parties rather than candidates.<sup>23</sup> We cannot really talk about a distinct tradition of pre-election clashes between politicians.

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23 Apart from the presidential election, it is only the Senate election that is strictly candidate centered. However, in recent years there has been a trend toward strengthening the candidate’s position by implementing (or strengthening) the principles of preferential voting.

**Table 1***Content of posts by presidential candidates on Facebook.*

Candidate	Candidate's statements (%)	Promotion and campaign (%)	Information (%)	Others (%)	Number of posts
<b>Bobošíková</b>	32.0	34.0	34.0	-	97
<b>Dienstbier</b>	21.2	42.4	35.4	1.0	99
<b>Fischer</b>	40.3	42.9	11.7	5.2	77
<b>Fischerová</b>	12.6	66.3	18.6	2.5	285
<b>Franz</b>	15.9	47.3	31.9	4.9	182
<b>Roithová</b>	22.5	62.5	15.0	-	40
<b>Sobotka</b>	44.4	41.3	12.7	1.6	63
<b>Schwarzenberg</b>	38.3	48.9	9.2	3.5	141
<b>Zeman</b>	25.0	59.4	14.1	1.6	64
<b>Schwarzenberg – 2<sup>nd</sup> round</b>	18.9	71.7	7.5	1.9	96
<b>Zeman – 2<sup>nd</sup> round</b>	42.7	52.1	3.1	2.1	53
<b>Total (%)</b>	25.6	52.6	19.3	2.6	
<b>N</b>	306	629	231	31	1197

Source: Štětka, Macková, &amp; Fialová, 2014.

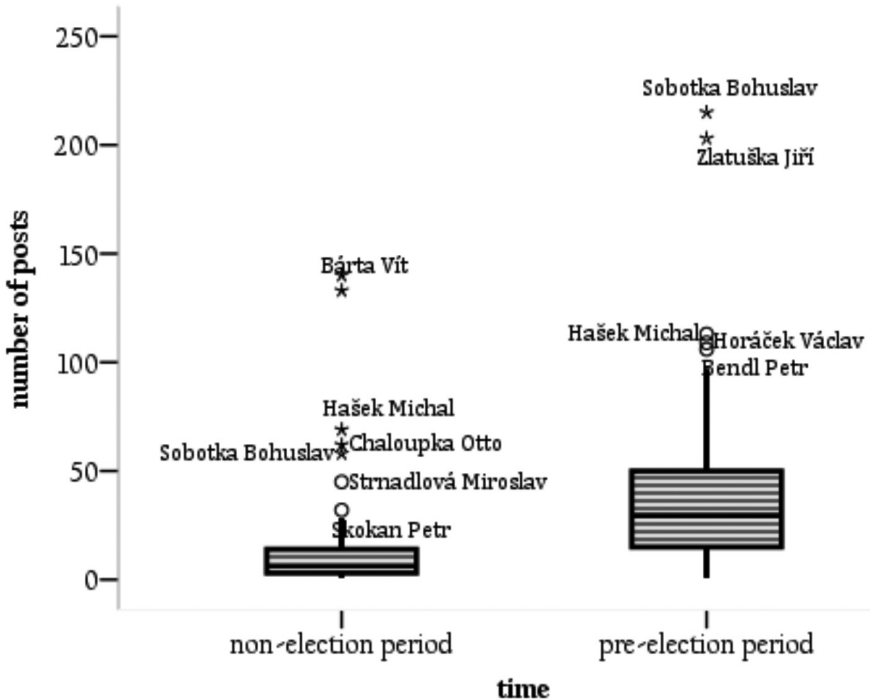
The above mentioned issue of intimidation (i.e., exposing private information) does not seem to materialize in our cases. It seems that Czech politicians tend to be rather cautious when disclosing private matters (Peroutková, 2014). Strategies founded on a personal approach or openness (both content wise as well as an actual engagement with new media) seem to be scarce among Czech politicians and, hence, we cannot talk about a new trend in political communication.

*Sure, as soon as you make something public you can't keep it from spreading everywhere you can think of, you know... it's like a needless opening up of private space, of privacy.* (Senator, male)

(Respondent, as cited in Peroutková, 2014)

### During the Pre-Election Period

New media effectively opens a direct communication channel with citizens and that channel is permanent, exceeding concentrated communication in the pre-election period. However, politicians communicated much more on Facebook during the election campaign than three months earlier (Figure 3).



**Figure 3:** Deputies’ use of Facebook in non-election and pre-election periods.  
Source: Author.

The share of active Facebook profiles or fan pages also illustrates the difference in politicians’ communication in non-election and pre-election periods. In fact, in a non-election period the proportion of inactive profiles in the total number of deputies’ Facebook profiles was 45% compared to 28% in a pre-election period.<sup>24</sup> It is obvious that many politicians not only created their profiles/fan

<sup>24</sup> By “inactive” we mean a profile/fan page that did not demonstrate any activity during a monthlong period (or longer) or posts were set as private.

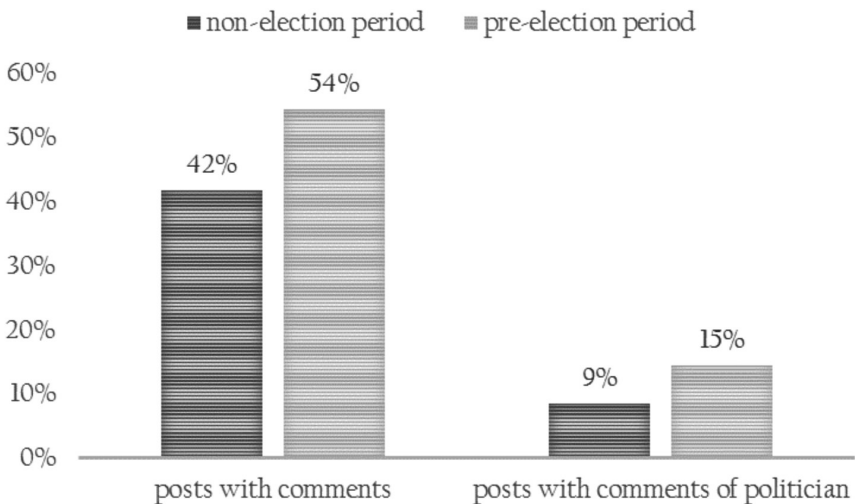
pages because of elections but they also intensified their communication in a pre-election period.

*Let me confess, I did it for the elections. So that's how I somehow joined Facebook before the elections. I felt this more of an obligation than my own desire.* (Senator, male)

*I created my website in the year 2009, which was before senate elections in which I was going to fight for my seat. And I joined Facebook for opportunistic reasons, to use it as a tool in the election fight.* (Senator, male) (Respondents, as cited in Peroutková, 2014)

### NEW MEDIA DO NOT CONNECT

Thus, Czech politicians use new media, or rather Facebook, which has been the main focus of our research, as a campaigning tool rather than a tool for building and maintaining a long-term relationship with voters and, hence, overcoming a democratic gap between politicians and citizens, as suggested by Graham, Broersma, & Hazelhoff (2013). However, these authors show in their study on Twitter that, despite optimistic expectations, Twitter does not bridge the communication gap between elites and ordinary citizens because interaction, which is a precondition of discussion among users, is low on the



**Figure 4:** Responsiveness on deputies' Facebook fan pages/profiles in non-election and pre-election periods. Source: Author.



part of political representatives. Also, generally speaking, Czech deputies often do not join discussions related to their own Facebook posts (Figure 4) apart from a small group in our sample who actively participated in discussions on SNS, and that same group of politicians also produced the vast majority of comments in our sample.

Many of them are more likely to avoid online discussions for many reasons, including lack of time or unwillingness to join discussions in general. A mistrust of new media or perceived weak spots and threats that politicians associate with new technologies are other main reasons (Nilsson & Carlsson, 2013).

*... Young consultants tell me that Facebook should be more interactive than I perceive it...but let me get this straight; I actually see the political profile as a different form of my website...But a person does not have sufficient physical and mental energy to keep doing this every day.. (Senator, male)*

*Well, Facebook is just flooded with fake profiles, there are many guerillas out there on Facebook and I'm just not gonna waste my time on people who don't actually exist or on some interns... (Deputy, male)*  
(Respondents as cited in Peroutková, 2014)

Thus, a more conservative attitude to new technologies seems to dominate in Czech institutional politics. Even though politicians use SNS, their communication often remains predominantly one way, i.e., they talk at, rather than with, other users. It is rare to see an effort at involving more citizens in both online and offline activities and at getting feedback from citizens; this, however, does not mean that such efforts are completely absent.

### **Still Some Hope?**

Politician-users who like communicating on SNS are an exception. They enjoy this type of communication and their profile or fan page on SNS serves as a place for advice, a discussion forum for feedback from citizens, or an arena for rehearsing argumentation for the media or further debates with other citizens or politicians.

*...the discussions below my posts are pretty extensive, I sometimes even have 100 posts, which is a lot, and I am, as a matter of fact, interested in those opinions that disagree with my post more than those that agree. Because that tells me what my potential or actual political opponents think and I can get my arguments ready based on Facebook as well. (Senator, male)*

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*And I have to admit that I enjoy it a lot because I get feedback from people out there, which helps me improve my arguments that I can, for example, use when negotiating with ministers or when dealing with other participants when trying to get the point across. (Deputy, female)*  
(Respondents, as cited in Peroutková, 2014)

These politicians appreciate the speed and openness of new media and the ability to overcome distance, which can be very helpful for prominent politicians. Although these politicians are aware of the limitations of new media, these are outweighed by their advantages. They are able to turn the disadvantages associated, for example, with critical comments or aggressive argumentation in their favor. This enthusiasm, however, can be seen only in the case of politicians who use SNS for discussions with other users, and those who are generally more open to direct confrontation and two-way communication rather than among those who use these media primarily for campaigning.

## CONCLUSION

Even though the potential of new media to involve those less visible in mainstream mass media in public debate has been discussed widely (Dahlgren, 2013), this chapter focused on the connection between established political actors and citizens. Even established political actors – who are already visible in mainstream media – can easily profit from the offerings of new media and, besides, they are, unlike marginal actors, at an advantage in terms of financial and other sources (Rethmeyer, 2007) so this may lead to their faster adoption and more effective use of new media.

The aim of this chapter was to provide a summary of our team's research and outline general trends in the use of new media, especially SNS (i.e., Facebook), by prominent Czech politicians. We were interested not only in whether politicians use new media but also how they do so. In other words, we wanted to explore whether politicians in our sample can use new media to re-establish a relationship with citizens, and also whether new media use can help bridge the gap between political elites and other citizens (and users) who are represented by these elites.

Similar to the findings of Graham, Broersma, and Hazelhoff (2013) and Grant, Mood, and Grant (2010) our research does not support Coleman's optimistic assumptions (2005; Coleman & Moss, 2008) that new media are able to effectively connect politicians with citizens and bring advantages to both. Our research indicates that even though the adoption of new media is relatively widespread among Czech politicians, they frequently cannot be considered

routine users; their use of new media is usually more careful and reserved. Instead of connecting with citizens and getting feedback, politicians often remain isolated in their profiles or on online SNS that, as our data indicate, many of them use especially as a one-way campaigning tool. Although we can find some exceptions – politicians who have truly adopted new media and use it to communicate openly and regularly with citizens, including during non-election periods – many of them are rather discouraged because they do not trust media or are unable to accept the rules or, indeed, learn them.

Moreover, the fact that the online presence of most Czech politicians is largely ignored and their social media presence does not help them engage citizens is probably not due only to the politicians' inability to use this media. It is more likely due to the fact that most Czechs do not care much about candidates, unlike citizens in strongly candidate-centered political systems such as the United States – as Nielsen and Vaccari (2013) and Karlsen (2010) note. Only 3% of adult Czechs followed or friended politicians on SNS in 2014, which does not seem to be strong motivation for politicians to adopt this media as they would reach too few voters to make a difference. Hence, we can conclude, in line with Karlsen (2011) and Miller (2013), that new media can be more useful tools for some candidates in some countries, but, at the moment in the Czech Republic, these communicative channels are less effective or useful, although they potentially offer new opportunities for direct contact with voters – at least for some of politicians and some citizens.

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# **New Media, Old Inequalities: Technological Fixes, National Containers, and the Roma**

**Monika Metykova**

## **ABSTRACT**

Much has been written and discussed about the potential of new media technologies for re-invigorating European democracies in the past 25 years by policy makers, activists, and academics. One of the widely recognized roles of the media in this respect is the provision of a space for public discussion where diverse opinions and representations thrive. This chapter argues that, while in the early 1990s policy makers – at least rhetorically – recognized the potential of new media (Web 2.0, in particular) in creating such a space, the underlying rationale for much new media policy has shifted toward economic and developmental goals. Also, from the onset, policy makers founded their expectations of new media as a technological fix for inequalities on misguided notions. This chapter contrasts the policy expectations linked to new media with the social and democratic roles that underlie policy making related to the “old” technology of public service broadcasting. It uses the example of the Roma – the largest ethnic minority in Europe and arguably the most marginalized one – to suggest that new media technologies do not automatically create an inclusive mediated public sphere. The Roma living in the European Union cannot fall back on a nation-state in which they would form a majority and, because the “national container” – the belief that the nation is the defining unit of political, cultural etc. life – still dominates policy making, more effort is needed to envisage media policies that would serve the Roma minority.

## **Keywords**

technological determinism, new media, national container, Roma, European Union

## **INTRODUCTION**

The spread of new media technologies in the past 25 years went hand in hand with developments in policies. In the early 1990s, the internet was linked to

a wide range of transformative powers in policy making circles at national, pan-European, and global levels. The internet enabled a much coveted vision of a global information society with political, commercial, and social benefits for all. Between 1993 and 1996, governments all around the world, as well as transnational actors such as the European Union, announced plans for a global information infrastructure (a concept established by Al Gore – then Vice President of the United States – in a speech at the International Telecommunications Union conference in 1994) that was largely driven by underlying economic goals (Hollifield & Samarajiva, 1995; US Department of Commerce, 1995).

Although the overarching focus of much policy making was the economic benefits associated with new media technologies, hopes were also raised about a re-invigoration of liberal democracies. Twenty-five years later it may well seem that policy makers lost sight of the democratizing potential of new media and shifted their attention to their use in the so-called War on Terror for mass surveillance (the National Security Agency scandal has been widely covered; see also McCoy, 2013). This chapter argues that from the onset, policy makers' understanding of new media technology as a ready fix for social inequality was deeply flawed. Indeed, policy making – at the national as well as the European level – has, in the 25 years since the emergence of the internet, lacked new approaches that would make the mediated public sphere more inclusive, particularly in relation to ethnic minorities. The “old” technology of public service broadcasting has been associated with policy goals related to the democratic and social roles of the media and, although it has been subjected to criticism, this chapter continues in the vein of those who have already argued for a re-thinking of public service media in light of socio-demographic and technological developments. Media policy – as it stands now – has serious shortcomings when it comes to multi-ethnic European societies as demonstrated in relation to Europe's largest ethnic minority without a nation state – the Roma.

### **NEW MEDIA: A TECHNOLOGICAL FIX FOR (ALMOST) ANYTHING**

There is no doubt that the search for readily available technological fixes for social problems – by policy makers and others – pre-dates the emergence of the internet. A technological fix, Jeff Douthwaite argues, “is an attempt to answer a social or human problem using technological devices or systems without any attempt to modify or alter the underlying social or human problem.” (1983, p. 31) Technological fixes are also problematic because technologies are often seen as a solution brought in from outside the society. In his seminal 1974

*Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, Raymond Williams argued against the conceptualization of technology in isolation from society. He argued that technologically deterministic accounts assume that

*new technologies are discovered, by an essentially internal process of research and development, which then sets the conditions for social change and progress. Progress, in particular, is the history of these inventions, which 'created the modern world'. The effects of the technologies, whether direct or indirect, foreseen or unforeseen, are as it were the rest of history. The steam engine, the automobile, television, the atomic bomb, have made modern man and the modern condition. (p. 5)*

At the time of Williams' writing it was television that had supposedly altered the world, in the 1990s the same world altering – revolutionary – effects were associated with the internet. And this latest new technology followed the logic described by Williams in relation to its development as well as the conditions of progress.

The internet was to bring about improvements in every aspect of our daily lives as well as a new type of economy/industry and, indeed, society. The expectations for a new type of society quickly advanced to the highest levels of policy making as illustrated in Chapter 1 of the *Bangemann Report*, which outlined recommendations to the European Council on infrastructures in the sphere of information in 1994:

*Throughout the world, information and communication technologies are generating a new industrial revolution already as significant and far-reaching as those of the past. It is a revolution based on information, itself the expression of human knowledge. Technology now enables us to process, store, retrieve and communicate information in whatever form it may take – oral, written or visual – unconstrained by distance, time and volume.*

Although the underlying policy goals were mostly linked to economic benefits (and competitiveness), politicians also voiced expectations in relation to democracy and the (political, cultural etc.) empowerment of ordinary citizens. Gore (1994), for example, envisioned that the global information infrastructure would promote a new Athenian age of democracy, “enhancing the participation of citizens in decision-making.” Hence, the internet was a technological fix for social and political exclusion.

The aforementioned utopian visions have been criticized because they represented social problems and inequalities in contemporary societies,



exclusively in terms of a failure to communicate<sup>25</sup> (Robins & Webster, 1999). Policy makers embraced the internet as a way of solving “problems generated by the accelerating dynamics of marketization and the decline of public welfare systems. ... It was relatively inexpensive in terms of the public investment required, it offered scope for partnerships with private companies, and it could be presented as a creative and forward-looking response to the inevitability of technologically driven change” (Murdock & Golding, 2004, p. 245). Critiques of these visions have been abundant since. In the late 1990s, Tod Gitlin argued that “there is one problem which the new means of communication do not address and may even worsen: the existence of a two-tier society. To those who are information-rich (or information-glutted) shall more information be given” (1998, p. 172). Indeed, critics have pointed out that gender, race, and socioeconomic status continue to be relevant in the case of new media technologies as well. The digital divide – a term that covers inequalities in access to and use of new media technologies – runs along gender, ethnic, and income lines. In her 2014 article, Celeste Campos-Castillo argues that with the growing uptake of the internet in the United States, studies of the digital divide shifted from questions of access to those of use; yet, in the period between 2007 and 2012, women and Whites continued to be groups most likely to have internet access.

Universal internet access continues to figure on policy makers’ radars both in the United States and in Europe. However, compared to the initial (albeit arguably marginal) democratic benefits, market-based or commercial rationales have become dominant (McChesney, 2013; Stewart et al., 2006; Murdock & Golding, 2004). In 2011, following the Arab Spring revolutions in North Africa and the Middle East, U.S. President Barack Obama referred to the utopian vision of the internet as a policy tool.

*Across the region, we intend to provide assistance to civil society, including those that may not be officially sanctioned, and who speak uncomfortable truths. And we will use the technology to connect with – and listen to – the voices of the people. For the fact is, real reform does not come at the ballot box alone. Through our efforts we must support those basic rights to speak your mind and access information. We will support open access to the internet<sup>26</sup>, and the right of journalists to be heard – whether it’s a*

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25 Politicians have, of course, evoked gaps in communication as a reason for a variety of failures, including the European Union democratic deficit, see e.g. Kaitatzi-Whitlock, 2005.

26 For a nuanced analysis of the actual role that social media played in the Egyptian revolution, see Lim, 2012.

*big news organization or a lone blogger. In the 21st century, information is power, the truth cannot be hidden, and the legitimacy of governments will ultimately depend on active and informed citizens.*<sup>27</sup> (Obama, 2011; cf. Morozov, 2011)

However, a different approach to new media technologies became gradually evident. In 2013 – with Edward Snowden’s National Security Agency leak – it became worldwide knowledge that the Obama Administration’s approach to openness and the internet has a more restrictive side. In addition, one of the most debated cases of 2014 was a ruling by a U.S. Appeals Court that undermined the so-called net neutrality rules which the U.S. Federal Communications Commission had adopted in 2010 to guarantee transparency and prohibit blocking and unreasonable discrimination. In other words, these rules aim to guarantee that internet service providers treat all traffic the same, not giving any clients, for example, “fast lanes” (for more, see <http://www.fcc.gov/openinternet>). For a summary of criticisms of President Obama’s internet policy, see Ammori, 2014). It is clear from this short discussion that, although the inclusive and emancipatory potential of new media has been recognized in policy, it has been based on the underlying search for a quick readily available technological fix for inequalities in contemporary liberal democracies. Turning the World Wide Web into the 20<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of the Greek agora proved to be a marginal and short-lived policy goal.

### **THE “OLD” TECHNOLOGY OF PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING**

Economic goals are clearly demonstrated in policies related to new media; for example, the roll-out of broadband is understood to bolster regional economic development. Although policies also refer to the social benefits of broadband, these are much more difficult to trace and – even more importantly – it appears that the most deprived groups do not benefit (see van Winden & Woets, 2004 for an overview; LSE Enterprise, 2012; OECD Development Centre, 2011). Actual uses of new media technologies for democratic purposes have been widely explored in academic scholarship in the past 25 years (for an illustrative range see Metykova & Sapag, 2014; Dahlgren, 2013; Jenkins & Thornburn, 2003); however, I would like to turn to an “old” technology that has been associated with democratic and social roles in a number of European societies and that has been recognized as such in national and pan-European policies – public service broadcasting. Public service broadcasters – such as the British

27 One should also remember another policy tool – the US Congress-funded Middle East Broadcasting Networks, Inc., see <http://www.bbg.gov/broadcasters/mbn/>. For academic studies on these broadcasters, see Fahmy, Wanta, & Nisbet, 2012; Christie & Clark, 2011.

Broadcasting Corporation, Czech Television, and the German ZDF – operate under special provisions. The now-defunct Broadcasting Research Unit (from the United Kingdom) identified the following principles of public service broadcasting: universal accessibility (geographic); universal appeal (general tastes and interests); particular attention to minorities; contribution to a sense of national identity and community; distance from vested interests; direct funding and universality of payment; competition for quality programming rather than for audiences; and guidelines that liberate rather than restrict program makers (as quoted in Raboy, 1996, p. 6). In more abstract terms, Garnham identifies the strengths of public service broadcasting in that “(a) [it] presupposes and then tries to develop in its practice a set of social relations which are distinctly political rather than economic, and (b) at the same time attempts to insulate itself from control by the state as opposed to, and this is often forgotten, political control” (1986, p. 45). According to Hall (1993) the public service idea clearly has its basis in the claim that there is “such a thing as ‘the public interest’ – a *social interest* – at stake in broadcasting” (p. 24, original emphasis), he goes on to identify some of the roles of broadcasting in modern societies (source of knowledge, creator of a discursive space, a key link between ‘the governed’ and ‘the governors’) to argue that “access to broadcasting has thus become a condition, a *sine qua non*, of modern citizenship” (ibid., p. 25, original emphasis).

Public service broadcasting thus takes into account that we are not only consumers but also citizens within a democratic system with a right to be adequately informed about matters of public importance. This right, Curran argues, is best guaranteed by public service broadcasting because “it gives due attention to public affairs, and is less dominated by drama and entertainment than market-based broadcasting generally is” (Curran, 1998, p. 190). The role that public service broadcasting plays in European Union member states is also recognized at the pan-European level, in the *Protocol on the System of Public Service Broadcasting in Member States* (part of the *Treaty of Amsterdam*), which acknowledges that the public service broadcasting system is “directly related to the democratic, social and cultural needs of each society and to the need to preserve media pluralism” (*Treaty of Lisbon*, 2007). However, similar to many national policies, the European-level document, remains vague in defining exactly what these needs are. In the 1990s, Curran pointed out “access” was defined as access to broadcast signals (an entitlement to reception rather than expression) and “diversity” was understood in terms of delivery (mainly invoked in relation to non-political programs) (1998, p. 191). More than a decade has passed since Curran’s observation and policy documents now use

a different jargon (Malik, 2013), and formulations in relation to provisions for minorities remain vague.

While public service broadcasting is explicitly tasked with providing programming for minorities, we also need to bear in mind that it is a national institution that plays an active role in building a national culture and, hence, it is of key importance to understand which minority groups in a given society are included in the national cultural project and which remain at the margins. Smith (as quoted in van den Bulck, 2001, p. 54) alerts us to the crucial role of media in the nation building project.

*In looking at the role of the media in creating a certain uniformity within the nation-state, we are in essence looking at the process of nation-building, and at how the media are consciously brought into play to construct a 'national' culture and a 'national' community. Nation-states must have a measure of common culture and civic ideology, a set of common understandings and aspirations, sentiments and ideas, that bind the population together in their homeland.*

This focus on national culture can be problematic, particularly in relation to the changing make-up of European societies, which is linked to greater social and ethnic diversity and “the consequent pluralisation of cultural authority, which makes it increasingly difficult for broadcasters to see society as ‘a public’ at all or to speak to it as if it were still part of a homogeneous, unified national culture” (Hall, 1993, p. 28).

Hall goes on to argue that broadcasting has a role –

*perhaps the critical role – to play in this ‘re-imagining of the nation’: not by seeking to reimpose a unity and homogeneity which has long since departed, but by becoming the open space, the ‘theatre’ in this which cultural diversity is produced, displayed and represented, and the ‘forum’ in which the terms of its associative life together are negotiated. ... This cultural negotiation about the terms on which the centralised culture of the nation can be reconstituted on more openly pluralistic lines, remains broadcasting’s key ‘public cultural’ role – and one which cannot be sustained unless there is a public service idea and a system shaped in part by public service objectives to sustain it. (ibid.)*

In the 2010s – the age of on-demand online content – it may seem unfounded to explore whether public service broadcasting offers a more focused policy tool

for dealing with inequalities in the mediated public sphere. However, there are at least two distinctive features of public service – as compared to commercial – broadcasting: a commitment to programming for minorities and a focus on news and current affairs that results in “higher levels of political information in [European] nightly TV programs and foster greater knowledge of public affairs among viewers. The more market-driven and entertainment-centered television system of the United States, on the other hand, was shown to offer smaller amounts of hard news and to trigger less awareness for public affairs in the audience.” (Esser et al., 2012, p. 248).

### **MARGINALIZED VOICES: MEDIA AS A THEATER OF DIVERSITY?**

The scope of this chapter is not sufficient to discuss media and diversity in relation to the “new” and “old” technologies at length, instead I will briefly discuss how Czech public service broadcasting policies define service to minorities and are then translated into actual structural components in broadcasting. The Czech Republic is one of the “new” European Union member states (joined in May 2004) and it has been 25 years since it became a liberal democracy in the aftermath of the fall of the former Eastern bloc. The Czech public service broadcasting system crystalized in the early 1990s. Public service is defined as

*the production and dissemination of programs and the provision of a balanced selection of programs for all groups of citizens with regards to religious beliefs, culture, ethnic, or national origin, national identity, social origin, age, or gender so that these programs reflect a diversity of opinions and political, religious, philosophical, and artistic currents with the aim of strengthening mutual understanding and tolerance and supporting cohesion in a pluralist society. (Act of the Czech National Council No.483/1991 Coll.<sup>28</sup>)*

European Union legal obligations also apply to Czech public service broadcasting. The abovementioned *Protocol on the System of Public Service Broadcasting in Member States* importantly ensures that jurisdiction over public service broadcasting remains with the individual member states; however, legislation aiming to secure fair competition (e.g., in relation to state aid funding for these broadcasters) applies also in the case of public service broadcasting (for a compilation of state aid rules see [http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state\\_aid/legislation/compilation/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/competition/state_aid/legislation/compilation/index_en.html)). The example of programming for the Roma in particular shows the limitations of broadly worded policies and

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28 All translations from Czech are by the author.

also of policy thinking caught within the national container (Beck, 2006). Such policy thinking is seriously flawed, as Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2002) argue: “almost no thought was given to why the boundaries of the container society are drawn as they are and what consequences follow from this methodological limitation of the analytical horizon – thus removing trans-border connections and processes from the picture” (p. 307).

The case of the Roma is highly relevant for a number of reasons. They are the largest (trans-national) European ethnic minority group with about 10–12 million Roma (Gypsies, Sinti, Travellers, etc.) living in Europe (of these about six million are in European Union member states). The Roma do not have a nation-state in which they form a majority group and this has serious implications for media policy because, despite the existence of the pan-European EU legislative framework, individual nation-states are responsible for aspects of the media that relate to cultural and language rights and empowerment. In the words of a European Commission civil servant, “Who funds the media? It’s national states. If you are a transnational community then it’s a deal breaker basically, if you are not based in a country. Maybe these [the Roma] are the people who should be equipped with iPhones from day one. Perhaps that’s the future. But basically not much is happening” (Anonymous interviewee, personal communication, May 27, 2009). The Roma are among the poorest and most discriminated against people in Europe (see report on the implementation of national Roma integration strategies [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma\\_implement\\_strategies2014\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/roma_implement_strategies2014_en.pdf); see also European Roma Rights Centre <http://www.errc.org/>; Poole, 2010; Fekete, 2014; Pogány, 2012) and their media representations have been described as stereotypical and outright racist (Schneeweis, 2012; Schneeweis, 2013; Imre, 2015). However, policies at the national and pan-European levels have focused almost exclusively on a few select areas, and the media and the broader cultural industries do not figure among these. The focus of the latest EU-level initiative, the 2011 EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020 targets socioeconomic issues, more precisely discrimination against the Roma in education, employment, healthcare, and housing (see [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/roma/index_en.htm)).

According to data from the 2011 census, there are 10.4 million people living in the Czech Republic, including more than 5,000 Roma. However, estimates put the number of Roma living in the country between 150,000 and 200,000; these estimates suggest that the Roma are the country’s largest ethnic minority

group.<sup>29</sup> The Czech public service broadcasters – Czech Television (Česká televize) and Czech Radio (Český rozhlas) – have special obligations in relation to minorities and supporting social cohesion; these, however, are not stipulated in much detail in legal documents. As already suggested, television systems that include public service broadcasting tend to better inform citizens about news and current affairs. This also applies in the case of the Czech Republic: regular monitoring of television news and current affairs broadcast on Czech Television and its two commercial counterparts (Prima and NOVA) shows that the public service broadcaster represents minorities “mostly in a balanced and sensitive manner, with effort made at not succumbing to stereotypical thinking” while its commercial counterparts “devote minimum attention to this issue” (RRTV, 2014, p. 8).<sup>30</sup> In the section on the representation of ethnic minorities, the report argues that Czech Television news and current affairs pay very little attention to “the everyday lives of national minorities, e.g., their cultural and social events, actually no such coverage was found in the monitored period [February and March 2014]. ... In this respect the broadcaster can refer us to special programs<sup>31</sup> in the schedule which focus specifically on the lives of national or ethnic minorities ...” (ibid., p. 7) In contrast, the report notes about one of the commercial broadcasters, Prima: “news that involve the Roma minority have become something of a characteristic, particularly in the program Crime News [Krimi zprávy]. In all cases when Roma are mentioned, they are identified as perpetrators” (ibid.).

Czech Radio has had a Roma editorial group since 1992 that produces a weekly one-hour program “O Roma vakeren Romové hovoří” at the time of this writing. The program title is in Romani and Czech, and translates as “The Roma speak”. The program is broadcast on Saturday evenings, mainly in Czech and it forms part of the radio’s news and current affairs programming. Its main aim ([http://www.rozhlas.cz/radiozurnal/porady/\\_porad/114](http://www.rozhlas.cz/radiozurnal/porady/_porad/114)) is to promote positive representations of the Roma. Programs have covered successful Roma individuals from all walks of life (intellectuals, singers, business people etc.), non-governmental organizations that work on improving the lives of the Roma, the history of the Roma etc. The program aims at reaching not only the Roma but, importantly, also the majority population. The usage of Czech

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29 On issues related to statistical data on the Roma population, see Clark, 1998.

30 All translations from Czech are by the author.

31 Czech Television does not have a production group or a specific television program devoted to the Roma but they produce and broadcast series of programs – often documentaries – that deal with the everyday lives of minorities (such as Babylon, see <http://www.ceskatelevize.cz/porady/1131721572-babylon/>).

may indicate this opening up to the general population, at the same time it can also be a pragmatic choice as there are a number of Roma dialects spoken in the Czech Republic and they are not necessarily mutually understandable. The program can certainly be understood as part of the public service mission of “strengthening mutual understanding and tolerance and supporting cohesion in a pluralist society”. The wording of the legal document is broad and for Czech public service broadcasters – similar to others – it has been crucial to “translate” broad policy aims into measurable and – importantly – quantifiable goals that can be monitored, and that would satisfy the supervisory bodies to which the public service broadcasters are accountable.

In 2013, Czech Television introduced a new system of measuring and quantifying its service to the public, following the examples of the UK’s BBC and the Dutch NPO. Czech Television’s 2013 annual report is the first that worked with the new methodology<sup>32</sup> and some of its findings are relevant to my arguments here. While the report provides information on Czech Television’s age and qualification structure, no data are provided about the ethnic makeup of the staff. Interestingly, 67% of respondents were satisfied with the space that Czech Television devoted to the representation of national and ethnic minorities in its broadcasts (Czech Television, 2013, p. 188) yet less than half expect the Czech Television to devote space to genres that are typically associated with public service, such as programs for minorities, children, on culture, music, or religion. The report goes on to point out that the majority of viewers do not consider such programs to be important for themselves; indeed, fewer than 5% of respondents thought it was important for Czech Television to broadcast minority and religious programs (*ibid.*, p. 193). While concerns have been expressed about the ways in which value associated with public service broadcasting is measured in a number of European countries (on the BBC public value test, see Goblot, 2014 and Michalis, 2012; and on Dutch public service broadcasting, see Bardoel & Vochteloo, 2011), it is striking that such a small number of respondents share the underlying policy goals associated with public service broadcasting. It is clear that there are limitations to the ways in which public service broadcasting policy and its actual manifestations serve diverse European publics, particularly marginalized members of these societies. However, public service broadcasting has important social and democratic roles to play even in the digital age.

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32 Unfortunately, neither the annual report nor easily accessible documents explain the exact methodology behind the so-called tracking research that is conducted every six months.



## CONCLUSION

While conducting fieldwork on Roma media in the Czech Republic, Ivan Veselý (the founder of the NGO Dženo) told me about his failed attempt to establish an online transnational Roma radio station – Radio Rota – to provide a voice for the Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Spain. This is just one example that illustrates that the availability of cheap and accessible technology in itself does not serve as a fix. The case of the Roma is also an example of policy making in which the reliance on the national container results in failure. Some of the Roma I have spoken to expressed high hopes for European Union policies and ways in which they can improve their access to the mediated public sphere. However, these hopes have not materialized due to the limited jurisdiction that the European Union has in the spheres of media and culture, as argued in this chapter. This chapter has also argued that, in order to respond to changes happening on the ground in Europe, policy makers do not necessarily need to replace an “old” technology that was intended to serve social and democratic roles with a “new” one. It seems important that the social and democratic roles of “old” public service broadcasting are better defined and embraced (rather than questioned or dismissed) by policy makers. It also seems that – at least in the case of the Czech Republic – the public needs to have a clearer idea of what the roles of public service broadcasting are and why these are important for the society at large. And, most importantly, what is required from policy makers is new thinking, “there are arguments by scholars that Europe should be about new political identities. Are we building those through current national media policy? The answer is no, we’re entrenching more or less the 19th century” (Anonymous interviewee, personal communication, May 27, 2009).

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# Social Media and Diffused Participation

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## ABSTRACT

The chapter deals with diffused participation and the role of social media in mundane civic and political practices. Drawing on previous research and employing a structuration model of media for its theoretical framework, the chapter aims to illustrate that the uses of social media are structured by affordances of the media as well as by the immediate and broader social, cultural, and political contexts in which political and civic practices are embedded. Three distinct perspectives have emerged in the course of ongoing research – the first emphasizes the role of collective membership and the pressure to conform; the second focuses on being a member of a performative audience; and the third takes political contexts into account.

## Keywords

social media, diffused participation, diffused audience, political practices, structuration model of media

## INTRODUCTION

Social media – as a new arena for practically all human activity – have recently become one of the most central, “sexiest” research topics, including in research on political participation. This chapter aims to challenge this centrality by putting the relationship of social media and political participation into a broader context. The chapter revolves around two simple questions: why and how do people use social media in their political practices? The inevitable partial answer has been shaped as theoretical (though research-based)<sup>33</sup> notes on three crucial perspectives: when thinking about the role of social media in political practices, it seems appropriate to take into consideration that the social actors we address are (1) members of media audiences; (2) members of particular organic, virtual, and imagined communities, as well as members of networks of social relations; and (3) citizens forming their agency within the

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33 Some of the empirical research that we conducted in the past three years under the auspices of the VITOVIN project has been published in Macek 2013a; Macek, 2013b; Macková & Macek, 2014; Macek et al., 2015; Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015; Macková & Macek, 2015.

context of a particular political and public sphere.<sup>34</sup> These three perspectives do not contradict one another; on the contrary, they are inevitably complementary. And, they enable me to propose a working concept of diffused participation, a concept that was briefly introduced in an empirical study and that refers to normal participatory practices on social and mobile media (Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015).

However, I open this chapter with a short discussion of the general theoretical framework that was employed in our research – the structuration model of media.<sup>35</sup> The model provides an underlying net that keeps together the threads that I explore here and, importantly, it also highlights the emphasis on the materiality and textuality of communication technologies within the immediate and broader contexts of participation and use of social media. In this regard, this chapter further illustrates Monika Metykova’s argument (see previous chapter) about the implausibility of the “technological fix” logic by showing that the political implications of social media can hardly be presented as the direct result of the technological affordances of new media. How these affordances are actualized depends on contextual factors, an issue that I will return to later.

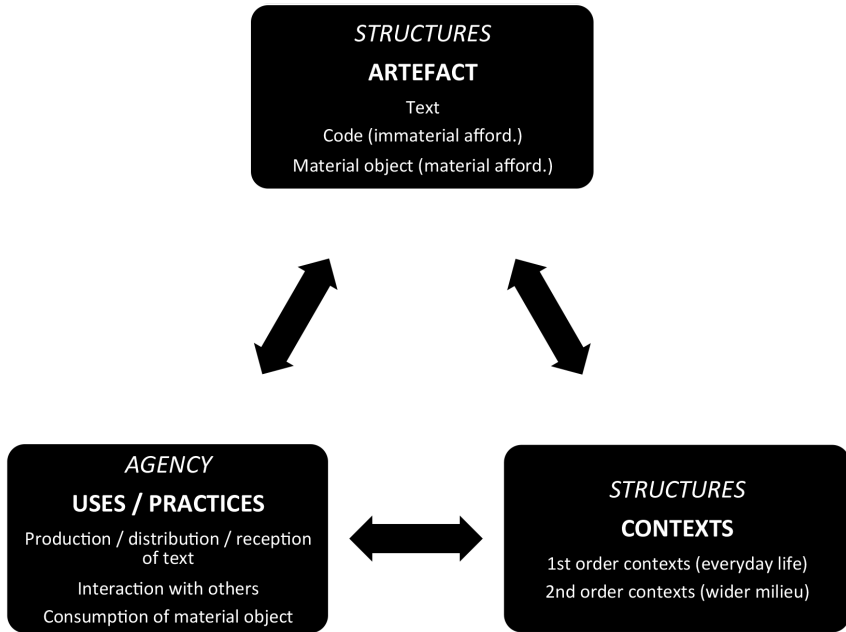
### STRUCTURATION MODEL OF MEDIA

The structuration model of media approaches media in three mutually constitutive dimensions – as (1) a techno-textual artefact which is (2) used in a certain way by certain users in (3) specific contexts of immediate everyday-based environments and the wider socio-cultural, economic, and political milieu.

The model draws on Anthony Giddens’ theory of structuration, which reconciles the structuralist, functionalist, and interactionist approaches to the social world, and “linguistically” emphasizes a recursive relation between social agency and structures. The agency is structured by material and symbolic structures, and these structures are restructured through the agency (cf. Giddens, 1976, 1984).

34 In the chapter I distinguish between the adjectives “political”, “civic”, and “public”. By “political” I refer to issues related to the sphere of institutionalized politics. “Civic” covers issues in which people relate themselves to the state, municipalities, etc., and their institutions. And the term “public” refers to general issues “located beyond the private sphere – issues related to events and relations in the public space” (Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015), including cultural or sport events, charity, associations, etc.

35 The model is explored in more detail in Macek, 2013a: 95–106, where it was first published.



**Figure 1:** Scheme of the structuration model of media (Macek, 2013a).

In the structuration model, the underlying relationship between agency and structure helps to explain how the techno-textual artefact (structure), contexts (structures), and practices (agency) are related. The agency – understood here as political and civic uses of social media – is conditioned by a social actor’s socially formed intentions, knowledge, and needs. At the same time the agency is structured by the textual, material, and immaterial technological affordances of the particular medium. And, last, the agency is structured by contextual structures which fall into two categories: Firstly by the immediate contexts of the first order that constitute the actual everyday-life environment that surrounds the social actor (the private home, the public workplace or school, and other semi-public and public spaces like streets, cafes, malls, etc., and social relations saturating these places and spaces); and, secondly, often in a less explicit way, second-order contexts – by the political sphere, the nation-state, the economy, cultural system, etc.

Yet, as the above figure and the theory of structuration imply, the connections

among the three dimensions are mutual. In other words, the structuration model explicitly takes into account that the technological and textual affordances of media are, for example, regulated by legislation or shaped by economic pressures or interests. Or, that the immediate and broader contexts can be eventually and retrospectively structured through the use of technologies. In what way does the model contribute to our inquiry into the political and civic uses of social media? Without going into further details of the model or Giddens' theory (Giddens, 1976, 1984), the model helps to establish a holistic picture of social media and their users as it makes it possible to include the techno-textual affordances of social media and the formative role of the contexts while the model still centers on social actors and their agency (in this case, the people using social media for various kinds of involvement in the public and political spheres). Moreover, the model helps to keep in mind another simple and, yet, important fact: social media are not isolated phenomena and they can hardly be analyzed as such. Firstly, they are part of the immediate and broader social and cultural order. Secondly, they are part of a growing number of communication channels and their place in our lived experience is inevitably shaped by their relationship to other media-related practices.<sup>36</sup>

### WHAT PRACTICES?

The notion of diffused participation itself deserves some thought before I focus on the particular contexts that link it to media audiences, collective identities, and the political sphere. Firstly, the use of the word “participation” in the phrase “diffused participation” is a synecdoche – it is not terminologically precise in relation to the conceptual apparatus we use in our research. Originally inspired by Nico Carpentier's arguments (Carpentier, 2011), our analyses of politically and publicly oriented agency distinguishes between practices of reception, interaction, engagement, and participation. People using (old, new, social) media receive public and political content and information; they interact – speak – with others about political topics; they actively engage in public or political events, organizations, or communities; and, finally, they may aim to participate in deciding about these events etc. These four types of practices are intertwined – engagement precedes and conditions participation and the conative practices

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36 On the role of new and old media in everyday life, see Macek, 2013a (particularly pp. 136–143) where I discuss how people organize their media-related practices, media texts, and technological objects into the media ensembles – more or less reflexively constructed classificatory systems structured by particular needs; by cultural, social, and economic capital; and impacted by the spatiotemporal organization of their everyday lives.



of engagement and participation cannot occur without the communicative practices of reception and interaction. Diffused participation, therefore, actually covers the whole range of these practices, not merely participation as such.

Secondly, the practices constituting diffused participation are political and civic practices that are typically experienced as formative parts of the individual's everyday life and that, at the same time, utilize communication media to blur recently physically evident boundaries between distinct situations and between private and public spaces. In other words, due to the use of social media and mobile technologies, diffused participation is experienced as permanent and as diffused in everyday routines, not as a distinct event. This is the first moment in which the notion of diffused participation refers to Abercrombie and Longhurst's theory of a diffused audience (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998); it will be discussed in more detail below.

Thirdly, the notion of diffused participation addresses forms of mundane political and civic practices that are experienced as a more or less a spectacular performance for other people. This is another aspect that connects to the original notion as developed by Abercrombie and Longhurst (*ibid.*) to address the increasing importance of social media – for Czechs mainly the social networking site Facebook<sup>37</sup> – as a performative social arena, and it underlines the fact that social media saturate the older cultural needs of self-performance.

And, fourthly, the notion of diffused participation refers to political and civic practices embedded in the everyday lives of common social actors. Therefore, it is appropriate to say that it operates with the phenomena referred to by Ulrich Beck (1996) as “subpolitics” and by Maria Bakardjieva (2009) as “sub-activism”. However, since more detailed attention has been paid to this topic elsewhere (cf. Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015), I would just note here that practices framed as diffused participation vary from explicitly public activism to the sub-activist forms of public engagement performed against private ties and mundane routine practices.

### **BEING “US”: CONNECT AND CONFORM**

The first dimension of diffused participation is the collective one. Political and civic practices are inevitably connected to collective belongings and identities:

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37 According to a survey conducted in December 2014 (N=1998), 33.5% of Czechs actively used Facebook on a daily or weekly basis. In comparison, 6.3% used Google+; 2.5% the local service Lide.cz; and 1.3% Twitter (Macek et al., 2015).

with the construction, experience, and maintenance of “us”. Diverse types of collectivities – from the large-scale imagined communities of nation, class, race, gender, and generation through subcultures, political movements, and organized groups such as NGOs and political parties to local communities, local beekeepers’ associations, and simple networks of social ties – are sources of group interests and stages of political and public agency. And, at the same time, they are also built on and sustained through (though not exclusively) the communication practices of reception and interaction.

Media affordances play a crucial role in this regard. The affordances of the mass media of press, radio, and television with their ability to provide a means of mass communication met the needs of imagined communities relatively well, as classic texts repeatedly argued (cf. Anderson, 1991; Williams, 2003; Curran, 1998; etc.). Also, mass media co-structured modern forms of engagement and participation that were dominantly tied to institutionalized, party-based politics. Although mass media obviously failed to provide us with a Habermasian public sphere (Habermas, 1992), since the 19<sup>th</sup> century it has played its role in establishing the common symbolic – cultural and political – space of modern society. On the one hand, as a consequence of setting agendas on a mass scale, mass media served as a platform for cultural and ideological consent (cf. Herman & Chomsky, 1988), of articulating social distinctions, and of affirming the positions of certain collective identities within the society. On the other hand, they created a public space in the privacy of the home and, while bridging spatial distances, they opened the nation-state to horizontal mobility (Williams, 2003). Basically, mass media is crucial for those collective identities that emerged with imagined communities and, therefore, it could be seen as a source of traditional political engagement and participation.

And what about social media? Its affordances obviously differ from those of mass media: most importantly they enable their users to set up, maintain, and manage interpersonal connections; to distribute and recirculate both user-generated and mass media content; and to interact with this content with others. Even collective identities tied to imagined communities – such as the nation – are expressed and reproduced in online social arenas as a not insignificant proportion of content spread over social media as mass media content. Nevertheless, through their affordances, social media tend to support identification with social peers in terms of social and cultural capital, and with community.

In this regard, I have noted elsewhere that users' production and recirculation of textuality in social media could be seen as an exposure of taste, and that it is partly motivated by a will to conformity (i.e., by a need to ensure myself and my online audience that I do not differ in taste and opinions from "us", from "our" people, "my" social peers, Macek, 2013b). This remark was based on an ethnographic inquiry into the everyday uses of new media that was focused on textuality in general and included, not only politically and publicly oriented textual practices, but also, importantly, practices related to popular content. As research conducted with my colleagues indicates, this conclusion is also plausible in relation to online political activism and subpolitical engagement (Macková & Macek, 2014; Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015). The motivation of online activists from the local "Žít Brno" group to engage and participate does not suggest that Facebook and other online tools were effective in their repertoire of collective action (Tilly, 1984); rather it was the fact that their online-exposed political practices were appreciated, or even expected, by their online-gathered peers. In other words, first-order contexts – represented by social relations and shared normative expectations – matched the affordances of social media. We can arrive at a similar conclusion in the case of the active citizens my colleagues and I on the Vitovin team encountered in another study – this time the motivation linked to their sense of belonging to a local community (Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015).

Besides the unsurprising finding – that the specific context of social relations and shared values can be a source of peer-pressure to conform, and that such conformity can motivate for specific agency (such as taking part in political or civic activities) – we arrive at another hypothesis: qualitative data suggest that such uses of social networking sites serves as a source of social pressure towards a particular "expected" agency in contexts with weak or absent physical communities (ibid.). In such local contexts (hypothetically more typical of cities) social ties are maintained in a physical space that lacks a particular physical focal point and where the local, physically concentrated community cannot serve as the main source of "us-identity". In these contexts, social media are used as a substitution. Due to their affordances they serve as tools that bridge the fragmented social space and as tools recreating the permanent visibility and reachability of others typical of physical, organic communities.

This argument is demonstrated in the illustrative fact that respondents participating in local communities express a different attitude to the use of

social networking sites: they simply do not need to use Facebook to be in touch with their communities and can thus avoid its pressure towards conformity (Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015). Their communities, as platforms of local “us-identity” and as sources of collective motivation for political and civic practices, are clearly and physically set. In their case, social media are conceived as a means of connecting with the outer social space or with specific members of the community (namely the youth) rather than as acceptable or routine tools for the reproduction of local community.

Last, when talking about “us” and political and civic practices we cannot leave aside imagined communities – first and foremost the nation. Interestingly, it appears that motivations to use (or not to use) social media in activities (reception, interaction, engagement, and participation) related to imagined communities are subject to peer pressure amplified in the environment of social media. Imagined communities intersect with social media through the recirculation of mass media content that represents the public agenda, and through interaction over such content. And both, the content sharing and interactions, happen in front of a permanent audience that consists of the above-described social peers – in semi-public contexts shaped by the expectations of others’ similarity and conformity. However, imagined communities and social media use has not been satisfyingly researched yet and, currently – especially in light of growing nationalist and xenophobic sentiments among Czechs that have been sparked by the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and the threats of Islamism – we understand it as one of the crucial axes for future research. Hence, in this chapter I can only offer highly speculative thoughts in this respect.

### **SOCIAL MEDIA AUDIENCE: PERMANENT AND PERFORMATIVE**

Those using social media as part of their political and civic practices should be treated not only as media users but also as media audiences because they use social media for the reception, production, and recirculation of content; they express their opinions and values; and they expose themselves as political and public persona. It is important to stress the performative character of social media that markedly differs from mass media – specifically, social networking sites are constructed as ego-centric platforms to enable individuals to conceive their reception, production, and recirculation as managed self-performance targeted at other users, other members of the audience. In contrast with the previous, collectively oriented perspective, this standpoint accents the

individual self: being a politically and civically active member of the social media audience equals being a self-performing member of the audience.

Alena Macková's chapter in this section is illustrative of this phenomenon – the self-exposure of Czech politicians on Facebook shows that social media should be seen as platforms for setting specific conditions for the construction and performance of the self in the media-saturated and media-based environments. I have described this source of motivation for online practices as the will to self-performance (for more detail, see Macek, 2013b), a distinct source of motivations complementary to the will to conformity. Social media practices are driven not only by the need to be in consent with others, but also by the need to perform in a unique and appreciated way: conformity itself is not enough; it has to be visible and it has to be reflexively and carefully performed in a proper and satisfying way. The exposure of one's tastes and opinions has to euphemistically enrich and uplift the "expected" conformity with an "unexpected" performance.

To be clear, in the logic of the structuration model of media, the will to self-performance is linked to first-order contexts as a stage of performance and to second-order contexts, specifically to the wider milieu, as the sources of the cultural motivations for performance. Here, I clearly and explicitly draw on Abercrombie and Longhurst's concept of the diffused audience (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998) which served as the inspiration for the phrase "diffused participation". Abercrombie and Longhurst insightfully identify two important modern cultural sources, specifically structuring relations between the modern subject, society, and media – cultural narcissism (drawing on the work of Christopher Lasch, 1991) and the construction of the social world as a spectacle (following Guy Debord, 1983). These two contextual cultural forces do not only mutually reinforce each other; they emphasize the role of media in both everyday and broader contexts, and underline the importance of "being an audience" for the social actors.

In media-saturated environments – where media technologies and textualities have literally become ubiquitous – "being an audience" has become, as Abercrombie and Longhurst note, a performative, permanent, and constitutive experience. "Being an audience" is linked to a construction of everyday life as a spectacle and as a constant performance – "we are audience and performer at the same time", the authors conclude (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998: 73). The everyday, media-related practices lost the strict rituality of distinct, exceptional

situations and melted into other everyday routines. “Being an audience” is thus one of the axes of everyday life on the individual “self-level” as it is one of the axes of the socio-cultural identity on the collective “us-level” of the story.

Although Abercrombie and Longhurst wrote about the state of affairs prior to the spread of new media and understood the performance in a Goffmanian sense as implicit and hidden (cf. Goffman, 1990), their understanding of the diffused audience has found an obvious application in new – social and mobile – media. Social media users perform in technologically mediated spaces, and they are increasingly “always on”, as Sherry Turkle states (Turkle, 2011).<sup>38</sup> And their social surroundings, shared through feeds and timelines, have become more spectacular than ever. While mass media keeps its position as the common symbolic reservoir for the performance,<sup>39</sup> uses of social media bring the experience of “being an audience” to a new qualitative level, and made the originally “invisible” performance explicit and expected. The intersection of the contextual principles of narcissism and spectacle, with affordances for social media, puts the subject, the social actor, into the center of her or his own perimeter – a mediatised perimeter – more clearly than ever before. Social actors have become the media. Although, this is in a slightly different way than Dan Gillmore promised in relation to social media and grassroots journalism a decade ago (cf. Gillmore, 2004).

Online political and civic practices are not exceptional in this regard; apparently they are not distinct from other online practices. On the contrary, they can and should be treated as clear examples of the narcissism- and spectacle-driven agencies as practiced by the diffused audience. The politicians studied by Alena Macková manage the online performance of their political and personal lives with the same explicit reflexivity as the online political activists from the “Žít Brno” group (Macková & Macek, 2014) or our respondents who considered themselves interested in public and political issues (Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015): the game of statuses, likes, comments, photos, created and joint events, and petitions is subjected to the rule of impression management (Goffman, 1990).

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38 In December 2014, 41.3% of the Czech population owned smartphones enabling being permanently online and 19.8% of the population admits being permanently online (cf. Macek et al., 2015).

39 In December 2014, 89.9% of the Czech population received news via TV broadcasting and 47.2% of the population watched it just on TV (cf. Macek et al., 2015).

**POLITICS: DUTY AND DISCONNECTION**

Finally, this chapter pays attention to the contexts of national and local politics – social actors practicing diffused participation are not only members of a diffused audience, communities, and networks of social ties, they are also citizens. While the already discussed two contexts could help us understand the ways in which online political and civic practices are not actually different from other online practices, exploring diffused participation within the political context helps understand it as part of the political sphere.

The broader political contexts consist of authoritative resources (power), regulatory rules of legislation (from constitution to election laws, etc.), habitual norms regulating the political agency in a narrow sense, and constitutive rules (including political ideologies and cultural values) constituting opinions and collective interests. At the same time, these contexts include the systems of social, political, and economic relations – from the formal system of political parties to the networks of personal and economic relations. Together, these contexts constitute the political sphere that plays a role as a frame of reference for the mundane political and public actors: people practicing diffused participation are entering the political sphere “from the outside”, remaining in their ambitions and particular goals outside institutionalized national politics.

When talking about diffused participation in Czech politics, it is obvious that active citizens define themselves in opposition to the national political sphere. In our most recent study suggested that their attitudes to political agency – including online practices – and their willingness to participate in the public sphere are substantially structured by the way they perceive institutionalized politics and politicians, and by the way they experience themselves as citizens (Macek, Macková, & Kotišová, 2015). In relation to institutionalized national politics, respondents showed clear signs of discontent, they viewed national politics as alienated and detached from citizens, democratic institutions as hardly functioning, mass media as failing its mission, and other citizens as apathetic. In contrast, respondents considered their own public activities to be a civic duty – and the perceived apathy of other citizens they disregarded as a residual of the past communist regime. Their actual practices, therefore, could be interpreted as a reflexive adaptation to the tension between the sense of duty and the sense of disconnection. As a result, they redirected their will to civic duty from national politics to local politics and the local public sphere. Importantly, the use – or refusal – of social media as tools for these practices

appeared secondary, as one of the instrumental decisions, not as a motivation for being active.

The contextual structures of local politics necessarily differ from those of national politics; they presumably structure the diffused participation more directly as they co-create the immediate space of local public and political life. Still, the local contexts can – as we have illustrated in the case of the activist group “Žít Brno” – produce similar patterns of motivations as those identified in the contexts of national politics (Macková & Macek, 2014). Although the group practicing online activism became popular for their successful use of social media for protest politics and for their humorous challenges of municipal politicians in Brno (the second largest Czech city), our conclusion was that that new media played “an important albeit fractional role as sources of particular tactics” (Macková & Macek, 2014). The key to the explanation of the activists’ political success lay in “the group’s ability to address municipal politics in line with the expectations of the local public” (ibid.) – in their understanding of local politics and the local public sphere. The activists’ agency was, in other words, structured by the local political and public contexts. Importantly, the group addressed local political elites – the mayor, above all – with similar arguments as the citizens mentioned in the previous paragraph.

## CONCLUSION

Although my answers to the opening questions (why and how people use social media in their political practices) was not intended to be exhaustive and, although I focused on a specific aspect of the problem, a closer look at some selected phenomena that structure the uses of social media in mundane political and public practices revealed several insights that contradict any unfounded enthusiasm about the potential of the newest of new media. The notion of diffused participation and the application of the structuration model of media suggest that we need to steer away from a completely media-centric approach. The research that I carried out with colleagues, as well as related theoretical work, support the argument that it is necessary to approach social media – at least when studying them in relation to mundane political and public practices – as just one particular facet of a bigger picture.

Firstly, I argue that diffused participation and related uses of social media are structured by collective belongings and social relationships, and that peer pressure to conform is amplified in the affordances of social media. Secondly, I suggest that in media-saturated environments – where media technologies and textualities and



related practices are literally ubiquitous – “being participatory” is inevitably linked to “being an audience”. These two experiences are connected through the practices of reception and interaction and “being an audience” in terms of Abercrombie and Longhurst’s concept of the diffused audience (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998) which emphasizes that mundane political and public practices are performative, permanent, and constitutive in relation to everyday life. And, thirdly, the political practices of mundane actors (and the related uses of social media) are structured by the contexts of local and national politics. The recent research that my colleagues and I conducted illustrates the relevance of Peter Dahlgren’s conclusion that new forms of civic and political practices should normally be seen as an attempt to bypass the unsatisfactory and alienated institutionalized politics, and that our understanding of the political agency related to new media is conditioned by an understanding of the political in general (cf. Dahlgren, 2011).

These conclusions are hardly revolutionary. They show that – although social media are at the center of our interest because they are relatively new phenomena – they are not central to the social world we investigate. Social media inevitably involve alterations in mundane political practices – social media structure and enable them in new ways as they set up new interaction arenas and reception channels. Social media therefore broaden the scope of possible agency, which had previously been limited to physical encounters and mass media. But, at the same time, social media obviously serve the existing needs and amplify existing cultural trends, as I have illustrated with the example of the diffused audience.

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**LIVING IN THE DIGITAL AGE**  
**SELF-PRESENTATION, NETWORKING,**  
**PLAYING, AND PARTICIPATING IN POLITICS**

**Pascaline Lorentz, David Smahel, Monika Metykova, Michelle F. Wright (Eds.)**

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## Living in the Digital Age: Self-Presentation, Networking, Playing, and Political Participation

This book reflects the current issues in today's life in society which are influenced by digital media. In four parts, the book focuses on the field of online self-presentation and creating an impression; online networking among young people; digital betting and gaming; and political participation in the digital era. These topics are described using the latest research from the fields of psychology, sociology, media studies, and political science. The book explains and corrects many preconceived myths regarding the use of the Internet and digital media, such as online pornography, encounters with strangers from the Internet, and playing online games.

The authors of this book are members – or connected researchers – to the Interdisciplinary Research Team on the Internet and Society (<http://irtis.fss.muni.cz/>), which covers a number of research projects focused on the Internet and cyberspace.

This book is intended primarily for researchers, teachers, and students who are interested in the themes of life in the digital age. There may also be benefit for psychologists, psychiatrists, social workers, and those who work with people who are somehow threatened via the Internet, such as by online addiction, betting, and so on.



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