Report:

Media convergence and families: online skills, mediation, opportunities and risks

Link to the report- available just in Spanish language:

https://www.is4k.es/de-utilidad/recursos/eukidsonline-informe-mediacion

https://www.is4k.es/sites/default/files/contenidos/informe-eu-kids-online-mediacion.pdf

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The digital experiences of Spanish families have changed profoundly over the last decade, coinciding most of all with the proliferation of mobile devices. As parents are the ones directly responsible for the (digital) well-being of their children, they have integrated the new digital media into their family life.

As they are social network users themselves, parents share photos or videos of their children, thereby showing memorable occasions of their family life to the world. This practice gives rise to family conflicts, which paradoxically go hand in hand with the concern that something "bad" might happen to their children online, especially the youngest ones.

Spanish families try to achieve a balance in the implementation of new mediation strategies that range from the most restrictive rules, which imply a loss of opportunities offered by the Internet, to rules related to dialogue and communication with children on issues of online safety and how to take advantage of online opportunities.

In this research, we present the most noteworthy results of the survey carried out at the homes of 850 Spanish parents with children between 9 and 17 years of age. The survey was conducted by the research team **EU Kids Online Spain**[1], from the University of the Basque Country- *Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea.* This work has been made possible thanks to funding by the European project SIC-Spain, "Safer Internet Centre Spain", co-financed by the European Union (EU) through the funding programme entitled, CEF-Telecom, Safer Internet call (CEF-TC-2018-1), and coordinated by the National Institute of Cybersecurity (INCIBE) through the Centre for Internet Security for Minors in Spain (IS4K).

The questionnaire was developed by the European research network entitled, **EU Kids Online**[2], and was administered to a representative sample of 850 parents of children aged 9-17 between June and July of 2019. To guarantee representativeness of the sample on a national level, the people interviewed were selected from the most populous Autonomous Regions: The Basque Country (125), Andalusia (125), Catalonia (125), Valencia (125), Madrid (125), Galicia (125) and Extremadura (100). In addition, the sample was stratified by community: 680 interviews were conducted in capital cities

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[1]The Spanish research team is coordinated by Maialen Garmendia, sociologist and professor at the University of the Basque Country/*Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea* (*UPV/EHU*).

[2] Comparative results from the 19 European countries of this first survey can be found in Smahel et al. (2020).

and 170 in other municipalities. The figure of 61% of the respondents were women, and 39% were men.

This report focuses on the digital experiences of Spanish parents as Internet users and mediators of the online activities of their children on the web in the home environment.

The digital family

As far as the characteristics of the Spanish families surveyed are concerned, what stands out is that 42% of the parents surveyed are between 35 and 44 years of age, and 48% are between 45 and 54 years old. The remaining parents have been divided into two age groups: the youngest (from 26 to 34 years old), and the oldest (from 55 to 64 years of age). Each of these last two groups comprised 5% of the total.

Just over half of the families have graduated from secondary school (51%), and over a third have a university education (39%). One in ten families only has a primary school education.

Most Spanish families have a middle-class socio-economic status (56%), while just under a third (31%) have an upper-class status, and 13% are in the low-income class.

Nearly nine out of ten parents share responsibility for the care of their children with their partner (75%) or ex-partner (13%), and only one in ten parents (11%) say that he or she is the only person responsible for the children.

Most parents say they are experienced Internet users: 57% have been using the Internet for many years, 10% have used it in recent years, and 33% have just started using it in the last year. Parents with a higher socio-economic status have been using the Internet for the longest time.

Approximately 96% of Spanish parents use the Internet on a daily basis, although this frequency is lower among low-income families (93%). While daily use of the smartphone is nearly universal (97%), there are notable differences in access to other devices. The pattern of use for both the computer and tablet are clearly influenced by the family's educational level: the higher the educational levels of the families, the greater the number of family members who use these devices. However, the trend is reverse for video game console users: although use of this device is less widespread among families, those with lower educational levels use it more often.

Family concerns

The main concerns of Spanish parents are that a stranger might contact their child (79%), school performance (78%), other children may treat their child in an unpleasant way (77%), and their child's health (70%). The two main concerns related to the online world are that children might view inappropriate content on the Internet (71%), or that they might share personal information (68%). The level of concern regarding social

issues is lower: situations in which their child might drink alcohol or use drugs (62%), or may engage in sexual activity (53%).

The concerns of parents vary according to the age of their children. They are more concerned about their teenage children (13-17 years old) than about the younger ones (9-12 years old). They are especially concerned about the dangers inherent to adolescence: examples include sexual activity, drinking, or drug use.

In general, mothers are slightly more concerned than fathers are, specifically regarding sexual activity (+6 percentage points), contact by a stranger (+5), their children's health (+5), and drinking alcohol or taking drugs (+4).

The educational level of the family is associated with the degree of concern. The higher the educational level, the greater the level of concern, particularly with regard to privacy and children's health. However, in the case of school performance, there is an inverse relationship: those who are most concerned about this issue are parents who only have a primary school education.

Causes of family conflict

The three most frequent causes of family conflict are the time spent online (58%), doing homework (48%), and bedtime (45%). On the other hand, the three least important are what their children do with their friends (20%), money (16%), and how they dress (11%). At the intermediate level of concern would be the activities their children carry out on the Internet with their mobile phone and other devices (35%), their behaviour (31%), what they eat (28%), as well as their homework and doing household chores (26%).

Family conflicts are more frequent among families with adolescent children (13-17 years of age) than among those with pre-adolescents (9-12 years old). The four causes of conflict among families with adolescent children, in order of importance, are the following: homework and household chores, connection time, what they do with their friends, and money.

There are three causes of family conflict clearly associated with the educational levels of the families (the higher the educational level, the greater the frequency of such conflicts), and these three are the following: homework and household chores, what they eat, and bedtime.

Digital skills of parents

All of the parents make certain that their own social/functional digital skills are high, and their level of expertise in the use of mobile devices, navigation and discerning judgment of information is remarkably high, though to a lesser extent.

However, a smaller number of parents claim to know how to track costs generated by their applications, check the veracity of the information they receive online, or create and publish videos or music. Editing skills for creative content have the lowest competence level among parents.

The digital skills of parents vary according to the different socio-demographic characteristics of the families. The higher the level of education and socio-economic status, the higher the level of digital skills, with the exception of creative skills.

Most parents consider themselves efficient in their use of the Internet. This perception is greater among families with higher levels of education and socio-economic status. As far as the gender of parents is concerned, fathers are considered to have more self-efficacy than mothers do.

Their perception of self-efficacy is lower when compared to that of their children, most of all among families with a lower level of education and socio-economic status.

With regard to their digital skills and those of their children, families with less education and lower socio-economic status perceive that they have more of a disadvantage with their children compared to those with more education and higher socio-economic status.

Resources for support

Parents often seek support in the face of dilemmas posed by their children's use of the Internet. The school is the most trusted representative, while families or friends come second. However, a large majority of Spanish parents are calling for the intervention of public administration or industry as a source (or resource) of assistance in guiding children's use of the Internet.

Parental mediation strategies

In general, the most successful strategies among Spanish families are those related to communication with their children and safety, and to making better use of online opportunities (enabling).

It is especially noteworthy that sharing activities with their children (23%) and encouraging them to discover and learn things on the Internet (27%) are the enabling strategies practiced less frequently by parents.

By comparison, the most restrictive rules applied by parents are related to the privacy of their children. With a frequency of 33% and 30%, respectively, families do not allow them to use a computer or mobile phone camera, or to share videos, photos or music online.

Monitoring downloaded applications (35%) or monitoring content they access (33%) are also in the group of strategies most frequently applied by parents, together with the use of parental control programs to block or filter web content (35%) or to monitor their activities (29%).

Generally speaking, parents place more restrictions on their younger children (between 9 and 12 years of age) and respect the autonomy and privacy of adolescents by monitoring their activities to a lesser extent. They also install fewer parental mediation programmes on their devices.

Mothers are more active mediators than fathers are, except in technical mediation, in which fathers and mothers seem to be at similar levels. Families with lower levels of education or socio-economic status generally mediate in their children's activities less often, except in restrictions, where the patterns are not very clear.

With regard to "reverse support", parents state that their children do not often ask them for advice on how to act (16%), nor do they ask for help when faced with online situations they cannot manage (18%), and only 12% state that their children talk to them about things that bother them online.

Moreover, families feel that their children do not often assist them when they need help in carrying out tasks they find difficult on the Internet (16%).

Sharenting

The practice of sharenting is not very widespread among Spanish families: only 3% of parents say they share or send digital content (photos or videos) of their children on a daily basis, while 9% affirm that they do so at least once a week, and the vast majority (89%) do so only once a month or less.

In the case of Spanish families, 95% of parents say they share photos or videos of their children to stay in touch with family and friends. With regard to precautions they take before sharing digital material of minors, 14% state that they do not clearly show their son's or daughter's face in the photos, and 24% claim to have asked for their consent before publishing digital material about them. Only 8% of the parents say they regret publishing something online about their children.

Social networks: privacy and autonomy of the child

With regard to the effects that the new regulations established by the General Data Protection Regulation (2018) may have on the privacy and autonomy of the child, 71% of the parents say they strongly agree, or quite agree, that the child will benefit from these regulations. The figure of 70% believe that they will have more control over which social networks and applications their children use, and 67% agree that they will feel more confident that their children will be safer when using the Internet. More than

half (57%) believe that there will not be much difference in the way their children make use of websites and applications.

Regarding the age that parents would require their children to have in order for them to be able to make decisions autonomously regarding the use of websites and various social media, it is striking that the majority (56%) maintain that the freedom to make decisions regarding the use of websites and applications should be determined by the age of consent (the Data Protection and Digital Rights Guarantee Act sets this age at 14 years). Meanwhile, for nearly one in three parents (29%) the appropriate age would be between 15 and 17 years old, and only 15% respond that the proper age would be from 10 and 14 years.

Perception of risks and harm

The perception of parents regarding risky online situations their children have faced revolve around two issues: bullying and the possibility of contact with strangers.

Contact with strangers is the situation of risk that parents consider most frequent among their children: 10% (aged 9-12) and 21% (aged 13-17). As for the remaining risks, the lack of parental knowledge is even greater with regard to being a victim of online bullying, being the one who has perpetrated this action, or having experienced physical encounters with people who had been contacted previously through the Internet. Families find the frequency of these risky situations to be quite moderate and probably unrealistic.

Very few parents (5%) consider that their younger children (ages 9-12) have suffered unpleasant episodes on the Internet (harm). However, among parents with older children (13-17 years), this percentage increases dramatically (51%). There is a tendency to ignore or dismiss situations of annoyance or displeasure among younger children, who tend to be more sensitive to situations of risk and harm, and at the same time overestimate the frequency with which older children feel truly upset or affected by unpleasant episodes.

In general, families feel quite capable of helping their children cope with potentially harmful online situations: 83% of respondents feel that they are "quite" or "completely" prepared to do so. However, the involvement of industry and institutions is still needed in order to reduce the number of families who still feel unsafe in this area.

Parents state that the older their children are, the more experience and resources they have to cope with risks. The figure of 66% of those parents who have children between the ages of 13 and 17 believe that they are either "quite, or totally" capable of dealing with uncomfortable situations; by contrast, for those with children between 9 and 12 years of age, 41% believe that they are not "at all" capable of handling such situations.

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