Children and New Media: A Psychosocial Approach to Understanding how Preadolescents Make Sense of Online Risks

# Details

## Issued

2020

## Language

English

## Authors

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## Type

PhD Thesis

## Topics

* Internet usage, practices and engagement
* Literacy and skills
* Content-related issues
* Risks and harms
* Online safety and policy regulation
* Wellbeing
* Learning
* Digital and socio-cultural environment

## Sample

Phase 1: 1097 preadolescents between 9-12 years. Phase 2: 49 preadolescents between 9-12 years.

## Implications For Parents About

* Parental practices / parental mediation
* Parental digital literacy
* Parenting guidance / support

## Implications For Educators About

* Digital citizenship
* Professional development
* Other

## Implications For Policy Makers About

* Creating a safe environment for children online
* Stepping up awareness and empowerment
* High-quality content online for children and young people

# Abstract

"This mixed methods research employs social representations theory to explore the way
preadolescents (9-12 years) make sense of online risks. Children’s representations of online risk impact their safety behaviours; however, children’s voices are rarely heard and strategies to safeguard children are often based on adult’s cognitions, perceptions and assumptions. Data collection was carried out in three phases: a survey (n=1097) to gain a cross-sectional
understanding of children’s internet usage and risk experiences, six focus groups (n=49) to
explore children’s sense-making of risk, and finally, Latent Class Analysis (LCA) was applied
to the quantitative data collected. Four categories resulted from the LCA (Audacious Explorers, Savvy Adventurers, Ambivalent Users and Cautious Players), based on children’s risk perceptions, risk experiences, skills and safety measures used. To corroborate these classes, children (n=207) were asked to identify which description of the four categories they related to most. The conclusions are that children’s cognitions reflect anchoring and objectification processes related to their own and their peers’ experiences, offline risks, stereotypes, adult and media discourses. Other children only perceive risks when they are tangible, while others have self-serving biases. The main outcome of this study is that protecting children online, needs a multi-faceted and multi-stakeholder approach. Children’s representations of online risks originate, circulate and reflect the systems surrounding the connected child, although such representations do not necessarily produce an accurate assessment of online risks. Shifting these representations requires a shift within the same systems where children’s diverse social representations of risks develop." (Farrugia, 2020; p. iiv).

# Outcome

"Four categories resulted... (Audacious Explorers, Savvy Adventurers, Ambivalent Users and Cautious Players), based on children’s risk perceptions, risk experiences, skills and safety measures used.... The conclusions are that children’s cognitions reflect anchoring and objectification processes related to their own and their peers’ experiences, offline risks, stereotypes, adult and media discourses. Other children only perceive risks when they are tangible, while others have self-serving biases. The main outcome of this study is that protecting children online, needs a multi-faceted and multi-stakeholder approach. Children’s representations of online risks originate, circulate and reflect the systems surrounding the connected child, although such representations do not necessarily produce an accurate assessment of online risks. Shifting these representations requires a shift within the same systems where children’s diverse social representations of risks develop." (Farrugia, 2020; p. iv).