Immigrant Children and the Internet in Spain: Uses, Opportunities, and Risks

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* children
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## Sample

This qualitative research is based on in-depth interviews using a semi-structured conversation guide.
A total of 52 children of different origins resident in Spain were interviewed. 30 were of Maghrebi origin, 11 Ecuadorean, and 11 Sub-Saharan. The children interviewed were aged between 10 and 17. Most interviews were individual, except for a small number in which two people participated simultaneously. In the first case, the interviews' length was around 30 and 40 minutes. The interviews in which two children participated lasted about an hour.
The groups were selected to reflect their representation among the immigrant community in Spain.
In order to take into account the variable of socio-economic vulnerability, minors were contacted through collaboration with a number of organizations running projects providing
support to children at risk of socio-economic exclusion.
All the children in the sample were in situations of exclusion or risk of exclusion, in most cases due to their family’s lack of financial resources. The families of these children came to the centres mentioned in this study in search of economic and educational support.
The interviews were conducted on the premises of these collaborating associations and were based on a semi-structured questionnaire that included issues related to access, use,
risks, opportunities and mediation received in the use of the internet.
Permission to conduct all interviews was received from the minors’ families or guardian institutions.
To try to provide a greater variety of cases and situations, the interviews were conducted in six Spanish provinces: Madrid, the Canary Islands, Barcelona, Seville, Valencia, and Biscay. The interviews were conducted in the capitals of the four Autonomous Communities with the largest populations in Spain (Andalusia, 8.4 million inhabitants; Catalonia, 7.5 million; Madrid, 6.5 million and the Valencian Community, 5 million), and in addition in the Basque Country and in the Canary Islands, both of which have a combined population of 2.1 million.
As well as the children themselves, a further five interviews were held with educators from the centers attended by some of the minors, to obtain another opinion regarding their relationship with communication technologies.

## Implications For Parents About

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

## Other Parent Implication

Migrant parents and the need of digital literacy to mediate their children´s online activities

## Implications For Educators About

* School networking
* Other
* Digital citizenship
* Professional development

## Implications For Policy Makers About

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

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

Developing new school inclusive digital literacy policies directed to develope immigrant families and students digital literacy

## Implications For Stakeholders About

Industry

# Abstract

This article describes the use made of the Internet by immigrant children living in Spain and the opportunities and risks it involves. Specifically, it deals with children from the Maghreb, Ecuador, and Sub-Saharan Africa, three regions which account for a quarter of Spain’s foreign-born population. A qualitative methodology was used, based on in-depth interviews with 52 children from these countries and educators from their support centres. Immigrant minors usually access the Internet via their smartphones rather than via computers. They have a very high rate of smartphone use and access the Internet over public Wi-Fi networks. However, they make little use of computers and tablets, the devices most closely associated with education and accessing information. Internet usage is fairly similar among immigrant and Spanish teens, although the former receive more support and mediation from their schools and institutions than from their parents. The Internet helps them to communicate with their families in their countries of origin. As one educator puts it, “they have gone from sending photos in letters to speaking to their families every day on Skype”. Some teens, particularly Maghrebis, sometimes suffer from hate messages on social networks.

# Outcome

The authors conclude that the penetration rate of smartphones and the uses that immigrant minors make of them are, to a large extent, very similar to those of Spanish minors. In this context, communication tools such as WhatsApp or Instagram take precedence over all others. Casado et al. (2019) point out the need for public policies that provide immigrant homes with equipment and connections to the Internet as far as "the opportunity for immigrant children social progress may be curtailed by the reduction in the use of these devices that are linked to creativity and information" (p. 61).
The results remark the absence of digital skills and computer devices in the home, which hinders young people when performing some school tasks. As children rise through the school structure, there is an increasing number of activities that require digital equipment and skills, and "a deficit in this area will hold them back, perpetuating the situation of inequality and exclusion" Casado et al. (2019: 61-62). Results also show that Immigrant children connect to the Internet from their homes less often than their Spanish peers; connection from the school and other support centres helps to reduce that gap. Casado et al. (2019: 62) point out "the need for initiatives providing Internet access to underprivileged children, to allow them to acquire the necessary skills and follow their academic career".
Because of their particular circumstances, immigrant children are especially vulnerable to online risks. Given the important role played by parental mediation in preventing and managing Internet risks and improper usage, specific actions are required where such mediation is lacking. In most cases, the children receive either very restrictive mediation strategies by their parents or, conversely, the absence of such measures, normally as a result of their parents’ lack of digital literacy. Casado et al. (2019: 62) remark that "where family intervention is lacking, schools and child support centres must attend to this issue". As positive outcomes, Casado et al. (2019) stress that although physically removed from their immediate or extended families, the technology allows them to retain their cultural heritage and social capital which helps cultivate a sense of transnational belonging in accordance
with their preferences, which can combat their sense of rootlessness. Technology allows them to access new ideas, interests and hobbies, opening up new possibilities for future employment and personal development. The authors remark that access to such opportunities is unquestionably positive. In parallel, immigrant children are exposed to similar risks than their native peers are, except for the existence of easily accessible xenophobic online content which might be classed as hate speech. The authors conclude that as well as preventing the development of healthy coexistence, "such content has a negative effect on immigrant
children by perpetuating stereotypes and victimisation and further hindering integration and preventing them from overcoming pre-assigned limitations" Casado et al. (2019: 62).

[Translated by the Coder]