



Received 30/06/2025
Accepted 19/08/2025
Published 15/09/2025

STUDY OF DIGITAL COMMUNICATION AND PARTICIPATION IN SOCIAL NETWORKS: EXACERBATED CONNECTIVITY AND DATA PRIVACY POLICY

Marta Abanades Sánchez:¹ European University of Madrid, Spain.
marta.abanades@universidadeuropea.es

Jose Jesús Vargas Delgado: European University of Madrid, Spain.
jjesus.vargas@universidadeuropea.es

Marta Esmeralda Vidal García: European University of Madrid, Spain.
martaesmeralda.vidal@universidadeuropea.es

Daniel Arnaiz Boluda: European University of Madrid, Spain.
daniel.arnaiz@universidadeuropea.es

How to cite this article:

Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda & Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel (2025). Study of digital communication and participation in social networks: exacerbated connectivity and data privacy policy. *Revista de Comunicación y Salud*, 15, 1-23.
<https://doi.org/10.35669/rcys.2025.15.e390>

¹ **Marta Abanades Sánchez:** Professor of Theory and History of Education. Lecturer in the Department of Legal and Political Sciences at the European University of Madrid. Director of the research group Learning Ecologies in the 21st Century: Social and Technological Competences Necessary in the Workplace.

Abstract

Introduction: The exacerbated connectivity that exists in the part of society is increasingly heard more frequently. According to data from the different information channels on exposure and harassment on networks and connectivity by adolescents, we found that 9 out of 10 adolescents connect to the Internet several times a day or are permanently on the Internet. This data does not go unnoticed, nor does the high demand in addiction centers and programs from adolescents. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the data privacy policies on social networks, which are mostly ignored and not very transparent. Our purpose is to investigate the exacerbated connectivity that students in our society currently have, to know their use of devices and to analyze their understanding of platforms and data privacy. **Methodology:** The methodology used in this research is mixed, quantitative and qualitative. In addition to a descriptive analysis, a questionnaire has been used as an instrument to understand both the students' connectivity and their understanding of data privacy policies. **Results:** The results confirm how students make massive use of social networks, and, in addition, they are unaware of both the implications and consequences of messages received with a degrading nature, as well as data privacy laws on digital networks. **Conclusions:** As first conclusions, deeper awareness is necessary in society, families and educational centers to know all the negative health implications that these types of actions can cause.

Keywords:

Social networks, Internet, Connectivity, Data privacy, Communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

In the midst of the digital era and immersed in the information society, we are witnessing an increasing loss of importance attached to the proper use of verbal communication, active listening, and even living daily life in a mindful and present manner. According to Scolari (2012):

The emergence of new interactive and collaborative forms of communication implied major changes in the media ecosystem. The new media species modified the relationships within an ecosystem where mass media —then referred to as broadcasting— had led the way. The new forms of communication were major predators of attention: whereas consumers previously devoted a great deal of time to a few media outlets (press, radio, or television), within only a few years they began devoting little time to many media outlets (websites, social networks, video games, blogs, mobile devices, etc.) (p. 338).

Communication through the Internet, social media, and other platforms where users can create, upload, and consume content has become a permanent feature of contemporary society. However, were we adequately educated beforehand to use them properly? If we examine existing sources of information regarding cyberbullying and adolescent connectivity, we find that almost 9 out of 10 adolescents connect to the Internet several times a day or remain permanently online. Fifty-eight percent use the Internet regularly from the age of 11, and nearly 1 in 3 begin using it before the age of 10 (Save the Children, 2024). It is widely acknowledged that information is power, but what type of information do parents possess regarding the appropriate management of the Internet and social media for their children? And do children themselves understand the risks they may encounter online? The media, for their part, do not always contribute positively in this regard and may at times be more harmful than beneficial (Abanades Sánchez, 2024).

Currently, through different communication channels, we increasingly hear about cases of aggression and sexual abuse in various professional, social, and educational settings. This phenomenon has become one of the most relevant issues both nationally and internationally, representing one of the most controversial challenges when proposing solutions. Cabrera García-Ochoa (2010) states that advertising influences attitudes through the symbolic models it represents. Individuals learn and reproduce models, considering that gender-based dichotomy is not something innate, but rather something learned through a cognitive and social process. It could therefore be said that “a society that perceives differences contributes to creating differences” (p. 207).

1.1. Digital communication: present or absent

Digital competence may be generally defined “as the safe, critical, and responsible use of ICT for achieving goals related to work, employability, learning, leisure, inclusion and/or participation in society” (Vuorikari et al., 2022, p. 3). Technology provides innovative solutions that allow educators to become active participants in comprehensive and high-quality lifelong learning, while also enabling students and citizens to access information and knowledge and to participate fully in online society, something crucial in the twenty-first century (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 2019). Such connectivity and digital communication present numerous advantages as well as disadvantages. Making use of digital communication with critical judgment may appear to be a difficult and complex task both for educators and for families. Today more than ever, the question arises as to whether the digital communication we engage in is present or absent. On the one hand, we have every possibility of being present in all the activities that involve us digitally (classes or meetings); on the other hand, it is necessary to evaluate which of these are truly effective, as it has been confirmed that after prolonged periods, people become more absent than present. Recent studies have highlighted the advantages of digital communication, such as its ability to overcome spatial and temporal barriers, especially through collaborative platforms that facilitate real-time interaction (Wolfenstein, 2024).

However, this evolution also poses significant challenges related to the quality of shared information and users’ critical perception. In line with other studies (Vargas Delgado et al., 2024), the growing dependence on digital environments increases exposure to unverified information, affecting individuals’ ability to distinguish between truthful and misleading content. Furthermore, according to Abanades Sánchez and Vargas Delgado (2025), it is necessary to review the emotional impact that these forms of digital connectivity may provoke. Although digital communication fosters connectivity, it may limit the quality of human relationships due to the absence of non-verbal elements such as body language and emotional cues. This represents an important challenge for maintaining empathy and depth in interactions, especially in personal contexts. For this reason, it is necessary to reconsider both the use and the purpose of the digital communication we are currently developing.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight another major drawback of digital communication: data privacy policies. Below are some considerations regarding data privacy that should be taken into account.

1.2. Data privacy policy

At present, there is a growing phenomenon of social media dependency among minors and young people, and even among adults. Like many other resources, social media platforms are a source

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of opportunities for learning and interaction; however, they also pose serious threats in terms of mental health, exposure to risks, and the violation of fundamental rights, particularly among minors due to their stage of physical and mental development, which places them in a situation of particular vulnerability, while at the same time being the group most interested in this technology.

As pointed out in previous research, the growing interest of minors in platforms such as Instagram, TikTok, or YouTube frequently leads to situations involving a lack of adult supervision and a lack of understanding of the contractual, legal, or personal implications associated with such participation (Arnaiz Boluda, 2024).

In other words, the processing of personal data carried out through artificial intelligence systems must go hand in hand with guarantees for the protection of Internet users' privacy (Morales Cáceres, 2021). Maintaining this balance is important because, for example, when personal data processing is carried out through facial recognition applications operated by artificial intelligence systems, it becomes difficult for users to exercise their rights of access, rectification, or cancellation in the face of potential violations of their fundamental rights (Mendoza Enríquez, 2021).

From a legal perspective, the contractual incapacity of non-emancipated minors to register on social media platforms has already been studied in detail, despite the existence of explicit legal authorization allowing them to consent to the processing of their personal data—a legal framework with which the author strongly disagrees. This is because electronic adhesion contracts used by social media platforms are so extensive and contain such a wide range of clauses that they go far beyond the mere processing of personal data; therefore, without the intervention of their legal representatives, such contracts may be considered voidable (Arnaiz Boluda, 2024).

Nevertheless, technological development and society's growing interest in social media evolve more rapidly than legislation, although the explicit legal authorization allowing individuals over the age of 14 to consent to the processing of their personal data is particularly striking, as it appears to correspond more closely to the interests of lobbying groups than to those of minors themselves. According to data from the Childwise Monitor Report (2022), 57% of children aged between 5 and 16 use TikTok, and 40% of them connect daily.

The risks associated with this technological dependency on social media are not solely legal, although the law serves as an important limiting tool, but also psychological and social. It has been demonstrated that intensive use of social media may harm minors' mental health, affecting their self-esteem and generating symptoms of anxiety and depression (Bozzola et al., 2022). Immediate gratification, the need for external approval through "likes," and constant exposure to idealized models negatively influence adolescents' emotional development (De Felice et al., 2022). This situation is aggravated when parents or guardians themselves promote, manage, or monetize the digital activity of their children, turning them into influencers or kidfluencers without considering the impact on their privacy, autonomy, and future well-being (Arnaiz Boluda, 2025).

In this context, data privacy policy represents an opaque and largely ignored area for both users and legal guardians. Digital platforms require users to accept lengthy and ambiguous contracts, often drafted in technical language that is difficult to understand even for adults. As research on

Sign-In-Wrap contracts has shown (Benoliel & Becher, 2019), minors accept multiple clauses without the intervention of a legal guardian, thereby surrendering rights related to image, location, activity, and intellectual property, which raises serious ethical and legal concerns.

The legal response in Spain remains insufficient and fragmented. Although protection mechanisms exist, such as Articles 4 and 84 of the Organic Law on the Legal of Minors Protection (Ley Orgánica 1/1996) and Ley Orgánica 3/2018 on Personal Data Protection, respectively, their practical application is limited. The Public Prosecutor's Office has the authority to intervene in cases involving the improper exposure of minors on social media, but the enormous volume of content generated daily makes systematic intervention unfeasible (Arnaiz Boluda, 2025).

The law presumes parental protection as the principal safeguard; however, as Landa Reza (2024) points out, many parents perceive their children as a source of income and notoriety, exposing them without considering the long-term consequences.

One of the most advanced legislative proposals in this area is the French law on child influencers (Loi 2020-1266), which requires prior administrative authorization for the participation of minors in audiovisual content for commercial purposes. Furthermore, it establishes the obligation to deposit earnings into a blocked account until the child reaches the age of majority, holds advertisers and platforms accountable, and grants minors the right to have their personal data erased without the intervention of their guardians. Although this regulation has been criticized for being overly permissive, it represents a significant difference in terms of real and effective protection (Arnaiz Boluda, 2025).

In Spain, however, there is still no specific regulation addressing the phenomenon of “child influencers” or the economic exploitation of their image in digital environments. The current General Audiovisual Communication Law and Royal Decree 444/2024 contemplate the figure of the “user of special relevance” and regulate certain aspects of commercial communication, but they do not directly address children's participation in the digital economy (Zazo Correa & Martínez-Fresneda, 2024). Hence, there is a need to move toward a comprehensive regulatory framework that considers not only data protection and image rights, but also the pedagogical, emotional, and ethical dimensions of the phenomenon.

Most individuals remain unaware of the legal implications of accepting digital adhesion contracts, highlighting the urgent need to strengthen critical digital education from an early age. It is essential that schools, families, and society as a whole develop preventive and educational strategies to address growing technological dependency and its consequences.

Ultimately, exacerbated connectivity is not merely a problem of overexposure, but rather one of structural vulnerability at multiple levels: legal, psychological, and educational. The transformation of minors into active subjects of the digital economy requires a collective response combining effective regulation, institutional oversight, parental co-responsibility, and digital literacy. Only in this way can digital environments be guaranteed as safe and fair spaces for the comprehensive development of future generations.

One of the most concerning—and yet most normalized—aspects of the hyperconnectivity of minors, and also of young people, is the systematic and unreflective transfer of their personal data to digital platforms. This practice, deeply rooted in society through the normalized and almost socially mandatory use of networks such as TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, or Meta Platforms, is usually carried out without any intervention from legal representatives and almost universally without reading the privacy policy, which constitutes a serious regulatory fraud disguised as digital consent. The minor, in their legal condition as incapable of entering into contracts, consents to what they are not legally authorized to accept and, even more seriously, relinquishes fundamental rights—such as privacy, intellectual property, and the inviolability of personal data (Arnaiz Boluda, 2023) in exchange for supposedly free access whose real consideration is the constant transfer of private data.

In this regard, previous research has already demonstrated that we are dealing with particularly aggressive and opaque adhesion contracts whose terms—lengthy, indeterminate, and technically complex—are unintelligible even to the average adult, let alone to a minor (Arnaiz Boluda, 2023). Accepting the privacy policy on platforms such as TikTok implies authorizing the collection, processing, storage, use, and commercialization of sensitive information: geolocation, interests, browsing history, contacts, interactions, created content, connection time, audio recordings, among others. In other words, it entails the construction of a complete digital profile that enables these companies to feed sophisticated monetization systems through targeted advertising.

This massive collection of personal data does not constitute a free service, as many users still believe. As has been argued, it is an onerous bilateral contract in which the user pays with private data in exchange for access to the service. This was affirmed by the Court of Justice of the European Union (2013), which acknowledged that the consideration in a contract does not necessarily have to be economic, but may consist of a non-monetary benefit or advantage. The problem is not only legal; it is also ethical: minors are allowed to voluntarily transfer their privacy in exchange for entertainment, social participation, or virtual visibility, without possessing the maturity necessary to understand the implications of such a transaction.

Although Spanish legislation—Organic Law 3/2018 on Personal Data Protection and Guarantee of Digital Rights, in its Article 13—authorizes individuals over the age of 14 to consent to the processing of their personal data, and although this article will be amended through the Draft Organic Law for the Protection of Minors in Digital Environments of 11 April 2025, raising the age to 16, this regulation remains largely ineffective.

No effective verification of parental consent is required. The actual age of users at the time of registration is not monitored. There is no supervision regarding whether the contracts accepted by minors comply with the requirements of transparency, proportionality, and fairness. Digital platforms, aware of this systemic impunity, shield themselves behind a “declaration of legal age” entered by the minor—simply by falsifying the date of birth—in order to operate with impunity within a framework of simulated legality. Moreover, the content of these digital contracts goes far beyond the mere processing of data.

The paradox is striking: while a minor cannot legally sign an employment contract, rent a home, or purchase insurance without adult intervention, they are nevertheless allowed to transfer their image, voice, preferences, movements, and digital behavior to technological giants with no mediation other than a click. This constitutes a form of silent and massive exploitation that

undermines the protection of minors as a guiding principle of the legal system and transforms the Internet into an unregulated market in which the best interests of the child are subordinated to the commercial interests of digital platforms.

It is therefore urgent to reverse this inertia. A system in which the renunciation of privacy becomes the currency of exchange for accessing services that, by definition, should guarantee rights rather than erode them, can no longer continue to be legitimized.

2. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the present study are outlined below. The general objective is:

To investigate the use and overexposure to connectivity currently experienced by students on digital platforms, in order to determine whether they are aware of the risks and threats inherent in such platforms, as well as of data privacy policies and their possible consequences.

The following specific objectives are proposed:

- To understand the current scenario regarding students' use of and connectivity to digital platforms in their daily lives, as well as the possible consequences that such connectivity entails for their lives.
- To investigate how students use the Internet and whether they truly understand the resources and consequences associated with interactivity and the use of digital channels and networks.
- To examine electronic contracting, including the terms and conditions of some of the most relevant platforms, such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.
- To examine the data privacy laws governing social networks and different digital platforms and to determine to what extent users download and understand them.

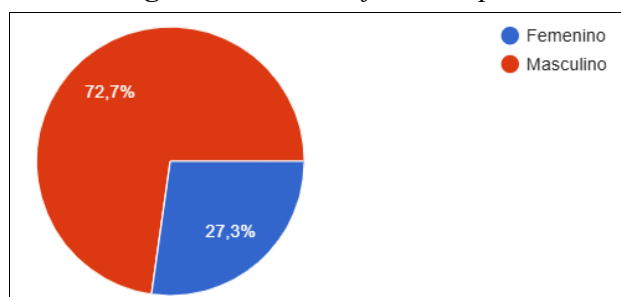
3. METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this research adopts a mixed approach, both quantitative and qualitative. According to Lynch (1990), this involves immersion in the everyday life of the situation selected for the study, the assessment of and attempt to discover students' perspectives regarding their own worlds, and the consideration of research as an interactive process between the researcher and the students. The qualitative component is based on a descriptive analysis of precise and specific sources related to the context of the problem of students' exacerbated connectivity. In addition, a Google Forms questionnaire was used as an instrument, including open-ended and closed-ended questions as well as a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5. In attempting to understand students' self-perception within the higher education context, Sandín (2003) argues that it is necessary to seek an in-depth understanding of educational and social phenomena, the transformation of socioeducational practices and settings, decision-making processes, and the discovery and development of an organized body of knowledge. Students were informed prior to completing the questionnaire about the study and gave consent for the use of the results for research purposes.

3.1. Sample

This research includes a sample of 193 participants (Figure 1), consisting of students and individuals highly familiar with the media and social networks. Participants were selected through convenience sampling. The participants' years of birth range from 1978 to 2004. The gender distribution within the sample is presented below..

Figure 1. *Gender of the sample.*



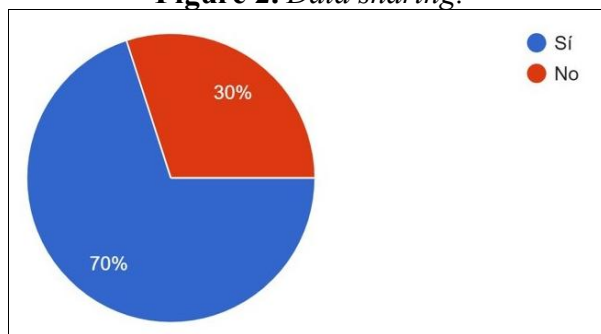
Source: *Own elaboration.*

4. RESULTS

The quantitative and qualitative data extracted from the questionnaire are detailed below in the analysis of results.

In response to the question regarding awareness of data sharing when activating a new mobile phone, 70% of participants were aware that, when setting up a new mobile device, they are agreeing to share private data (ranging from demographic information to random voice recordings) with companies, whereas 30% were unaware of this practice (Figure 2).

Figure 2. *Data sharing.*

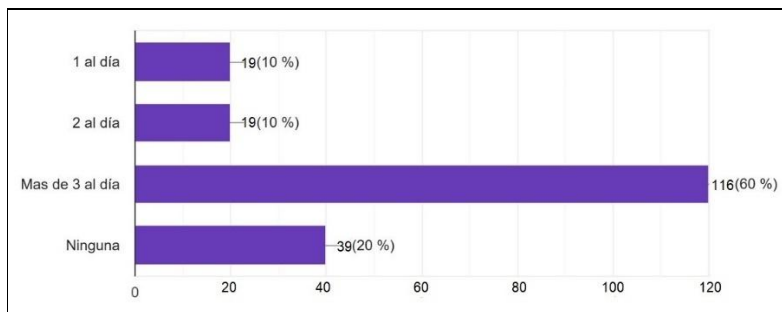


Source: *Own elaboration.*

With regard to reading the privacy policy of the phone's operating system, 100% of respondents confirmed that they had not read the operating system's privacy policy the last time they purchased a mobile phone.

When participants were asked about the number of daily phone calls they make in order to assess the use of verbal communication, the results (Figure 3) show that 60% of participants make more than three calls per day, 20% do not use their mobile phones to make calls, and the remaining 20% make one or two calls daily.

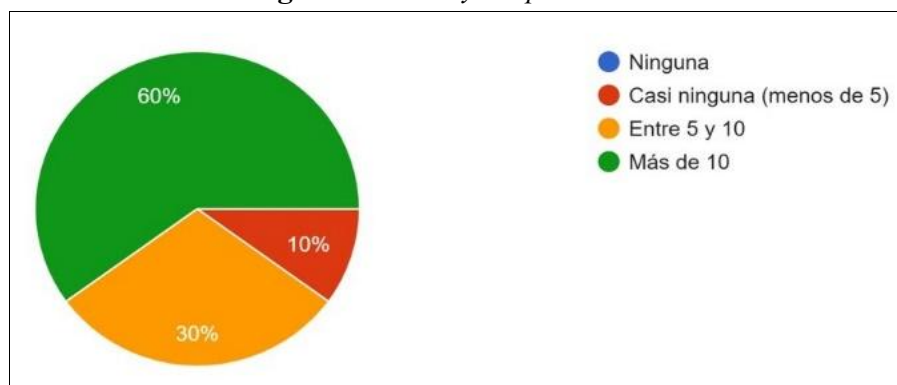
Figure 3. *Daily telephone calls.*



Source: Own elaboration.

When participants were asked about the number of phone calls they make on a monthly basis (Figure 4), 60% stated that they make more than ten calls, 30% make between five and ten calls per month, and the remaining 10% practically do not use the telephone for making calls (fewer than five per month).

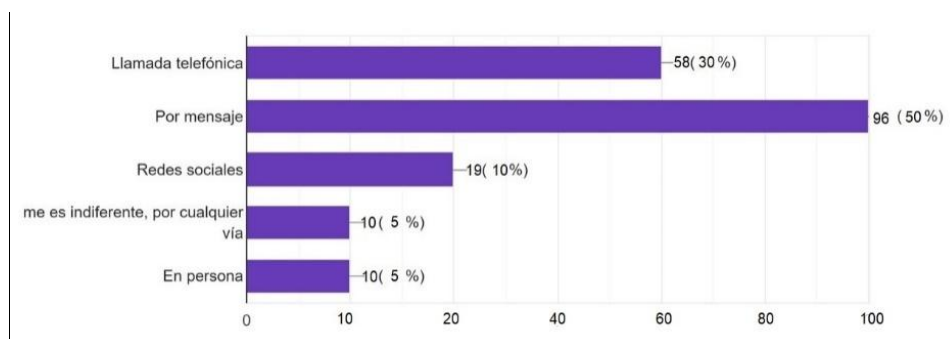
Figure 4. Monthly telephone calls.



Source: Own elaboration.

When the sample was asked how they prefer to be congratulated on their birthday or for an achievement or accomplishment, 50% of respondents preferred to receive congratulations through a text message (e.g., WhatsApp), 30% preferred a telephone call, 10% preferred through social media, and the remainder were indifferent or preferred to be congratulated in person (Figure 5).

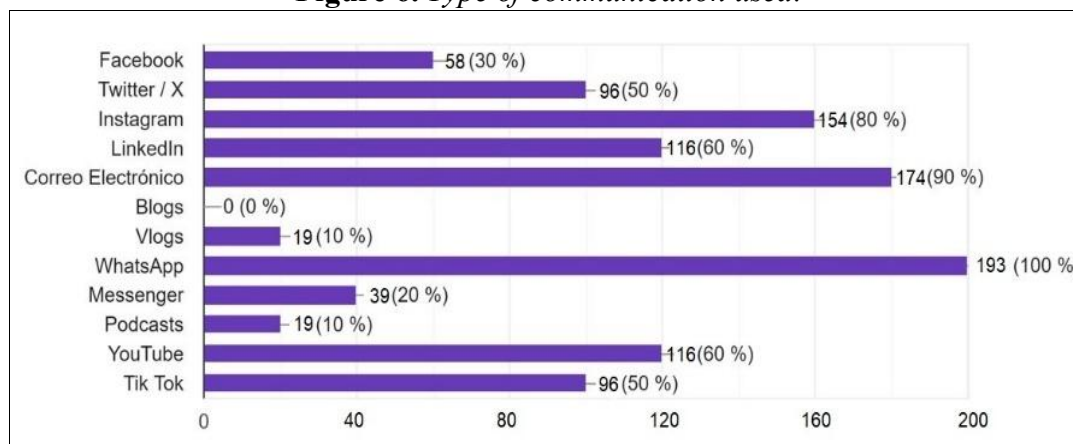
Figure 5. Ways of congratulating.



Source: Own elaboration.

Regarding the type of digital communication currently used or previously used by respondents, Figure 6 shows that 100% of the sample uses applications such as WhatsApp, followed by email (90%), social networks such as Instagram (80%), LinkedIn or YouTube (60%), X and TikTok (50%), and to a lesser extent Facebook (30%), Messenger, as well as vlogs and podcasts.

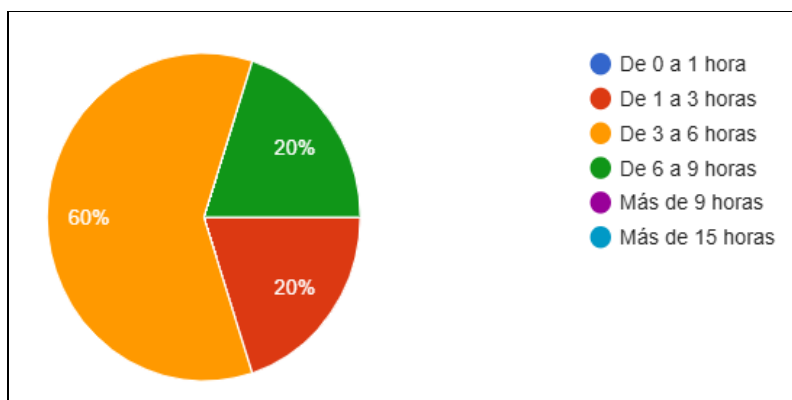
Figure 6. *Type of communication used.*



Source: *Own elaboration.*

When asked about mobile phone use, 60% of respondents reported using their mobile phones between 3 and 6 hours per day (for any purpose). Twenty percent use them between 6 and 9 hours daily, while the remaining 20% use them between 1 and 3 hours per day (Figure 7).

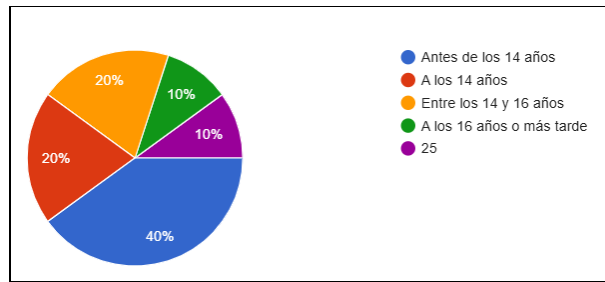
Figure 7. *Horas de uso diario del móvil.*



Source: *Own elaboration.*

Another relevant question concerns the age at which participants first created a profile on social media platforms. Figure 8 shows that 40% of the sample created a social media profile for the first time before the age of 14, 20% did so at exactly 14 years old, another 20% between the ages of 14 and 16, 10% from the age of 16 onwards, and the remaining 10% were already over 25 years old when they created a profile for the first time.

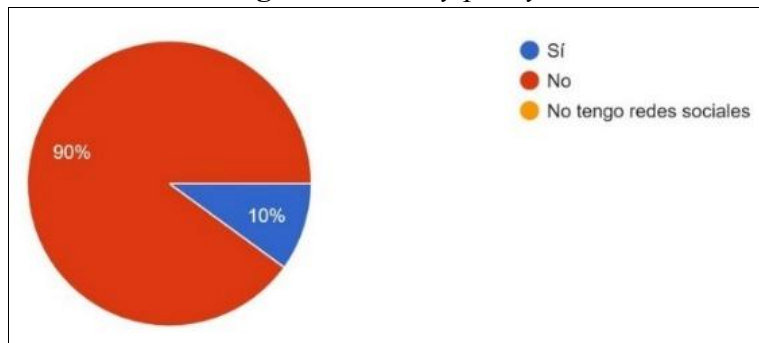
Figure 8. Age at which participants joined social media.



Source: Own elaboration.

The 90% of those who created a social media profile at the age of 16 or older did not previously read the terms of service and privacy policy, compared with 10% who did read them (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Privacy policy.



Source: Own elaboration.

Likewise, the questionnaire asked participants for their opinion regarding whether excessive use of social media can have negative consequences for mental health, such as depression, isolation, irritability, insomnia, or anxiety, among others. The entire sample acknowledged the possible negative effects that excessive use of social media may have. The main reasons provided are detailed below:

“Of course, the younger someone starts, the greater the psychological risks. You have not yet finished forming your personality or your own criteria, and therefore you are exposed to many risk factors”.

“Isolation, yes. In the end, you focus on being on social media rather than with family or friends”.

“Yes, it can lead to constant comparison, since seeing such perfect lives may cause someone to feel inadequate. It can also lead to isolation due to the dependency it generates, or even depression”.

“Yes. Above all, anxiety and depression”.

“Yes, because of the dependency it can generate”.

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“Yes, because people on social media want to show a reality made up of positive and ideal scenarios, but in reality nobody shows the bad moments. That generates comparisons and other feelings such as those mentioned”.

“Yes, it can cause irritability and isolation”.

“Yes, I believe it can generate a dependency on being connected to the world through technology”.

Finally, respondents were asked to comment on the advantages and disadvantages they considered digital communication to have brought about, taking into account the context in which we currently live, where digital technology has succeeded in eliminating geographical barriers in communication. Despite this, experts affirm that oral communication (both telephone and face-to-face communication) has weakened considerably. The most notable responses provided by participants are presented in the following table:

Table 1. *Advantages and disadvantages of digital communication.*

Advantages of digital communication	Disadvantages of digital communication
If you have not seen someone for a long time and want to talk to them, for example through a video call, you will feel happier because you have seen that person again; additionally, you can send each other videos, photos, audio messages, etc...	If this continues, telephone or face-to-face communication may eventually disappear if we excessively abuse mobile applications; therefore, we should pay more attention to other means such as landline telephones or letters...
Greater connectivity, communication, and information.	Biases, fake news, manipulation, personal and child exposure, etc.
We can stay in immediate contact.	People have become accustomed to relationships based on immediacy without allowing space for reflection, and this has weakened interpersonal relationships because people no longer interact in the same way since the emergence of social networks and digital communication.
It brings people closer together.	Loss of communication quality.
Being able to stay more informed and up to date.	Mobile phones are like a drug, and many advantages of oral communication are lost.
Being able to communicate with anyone at any time regardless of distance.	Human isolation and the sedentary lifestyle it causes.
Greater knowledge about other parts of the world and their news.	Too much misinformation and false information.
Speed and immediacy.	Loss of eye contact and empathy.
You remain close to people who live far away, you can report emergencies very quickly, and you can stay in contact with many people at the same time.	None; it depends on how each person uses it.

Immediacy and the possibility of staying informed at all times.	Information overload and fake news, the loss of personal interaction, immediate dopamine gratification, psychological and health problems, and the limited possibility of being alone or remaining disconnected.
Maintaining daily contact with people who live far away.	The addiction generated by this use.
Greater connection with society.	Excessive time spent in front of screens.
You can talk to people who are very far away, communicate instantly, and it is also a very practical tool not only for communication but also for work purposes.	Less “person-to-person” communication. We depend on it.
It is very easy to maintain contact with people over long distances.	There is increasing anxiety surrounding telephone conversations.
It has enabled us to communicate from different places and in almost any situation.	We have often lost personal contact
Real-time access. It allows people to communicate at any time, adapting to their schedules and overcoming time-zone limitations.	Lower quality of interpersonal communication: the lack of physical contact and gestures in digital interactions can lead to misunderstandings and less emotional and empathetic communication.
Ease of access to information.	Dependency and distraction: the constant accessibility of digital media can make people dependent and distract their attention from face-to-face interactions.
Instant connection and rapid communication.	Social isolation: although we are more digitally connected, the ease of virtual communication can reduce efforts to maintain in-person relationships, generating loneliness or disconnection in real social environments.
Convenience.	<i>Cyberbullying</i> . Adicción.
Instant communication.	It is used for crimes or the spread of hatred.
You can maintain contact with people who live far away.	Loss of physical contact. Reduction of face-to-face communication, dependency, isolation, and loss of in-person communication skills.
It allows real-time communication across millions of kilometers. Breakdown of geographical barriers.	Many people lack deep emotional interaction because they rely too heavily on online communication and neglect face-to-face communication. It causes isolation, anxiety, depression, attention deficits, and a reduction in face-to-face contact.

Accessibility and speed: We can send messages and receive responses instantly, regardless of physical distance. This not only improves efficiency at work, but also enables immediate communication between people in different countries and time zones.	Depersonalization: Digital communication can be less personal than face-to-face or telephone communication. The absence of eye contact and tone of voice may lead to misunderstandings and makes it more difficult to express emotions and empathy, which are key elements in human relationships.
Global connectivity: Digital communication has broken down geographical barriers, allowing people and companies to connect and collaborate globally. This has promoted multiculturalism and the exchange of ideas, while also facilitating international trade.	Distractions and information overload: The constant availability of messages and notifications can become overwhelming and affect concentration. This information overload may lead to less effective communication and a reduced ability to pay attention during face-to-face interactions.

Source: *Own elaboration.*

5. DISCUSSION

We are faced with one of the most concerning dilemmas affecting young people in our society. On the one hand, the era of globalization in information technologies has empowered them in terms of connecting to digital platforms. They know how to access these platforms, record and send videos, meet people through social networks, and share their private data without understanding the implications this entails regarding each individual's intellectual property, in addition to the addiction associated with exacerbated connectivity, among many other aspects.

The theoretical framework of this research has highlighted how communication is changing at an extraordinary pace. The Internet, social media, and platforms for creating, uploading, and viewing content have become the preferred communication channels for young people. The risks associated with this technological dependence on social media are not only legal, but also psychological and social. It has been demonstrated that intensive use of social media can harm minors' mental health, affecting their self-esteem and generating symptoms of anxiety and depression (Bozzola et al., 2022).

In this research, several relevant points have been identified and should be highlighted:

- Communication: although young people today use their own mobile phones, giving rise to exacerbated connectivity, it is necessary to examine which traditional communication channels they have stopped using. As observed, more than 60% of students still use their phones to make a couple of calls per day, thereby fostering verbal communication, an essential skill for entering the professional world; in contrast, 40% prefer to send messages to communicate, without the need to actively listen to the other person. Even when participants were invited to comment on how they prefer to receive congratulations, 50% preferred WhatsApp messages, while another 10% preferred social media. This leads us to reflect on how traditional communication channels are falling into disuse in favor of more digital forms of communication. Following the studies by Abanades Sánchez and Vargas Delgado (2025), although digital communication fosters connectivity, it may limit the quality of

human relationships due to the absence of non-verbal elements such as body language and emotional cues.

- Exacerbated connectivity: this research has considered the implications of the excessive amount of time young people spend connected to tools, platforms, and similar resources. Immediate gratification, the need for external approval through “likes,” and constant exposure to idealized models negatively influence adolescents’ emotional development (De Felice et al., 2022). The results show that 60% of respondents use their mobile phones between 3 and 6 hours per day (for any purpose). Twenty percent use them between 6 and 9 hours daily, while the remaining 20% use them between 1 and 3 hours per day. These are considered excessively high amounts of time, although participants are fully aware of the possible consequences (the entire sample acknowledged the potential negative effects of excessive social media use, including isolation, depression, dependency, irritability, among others).
- Data privacy: today, we know that it is very easy to access digital platforms, accept certain conditions, and remain completely unaware of what has been accepted and how personal data will be processed. These are electronic adhesion contracts used by social networks, so extensive and containing so many clauses of all kinds that they go far beyond the mere processing of personal data; therefore, without the intervention of legal representatives, they may be considered voidable (Arnaiz Boluda, 2024). Regarding the reading of the privacy policy of the phone’s operating system, 100% of respondents confirmed that they had not read the operating system’s privacy policy the last time they purchased a mobile phone. Most individuals ignore the legal implications of accepting digital adhesion contracts, highlighting the urgent need to reinforce critical digital education from an early age. Ninety percent of those who created a social media profile at the age of 16 or older had not previously read the terms of service and privacy policy, compared with 10% who had done so. It is necessary not only for families to be aware of data privacy laws and the risks involved when minors access digital platforms in an almost unconscious manner, but also for educational institutions to be informed so that they may develop preventive strategies for young people.

Finally, when participants were asked about the advantages and disadvantages of digital communication, they acknowledged that we can remain instantly connected with our loved ones even when they are thousands of kilometers away. We can also stay more informed about events occurring in other parts of the world due to the ease, immediacy, and accessibility of information. Geographical barriers have been broken down, benefiting both organizations and individuals through global connectivity, multiculturalism, the exchange of ideas, e-commerce, among other aspects. Nevertheless, the challenges and disadvantages remain numerous and concerning: biases, fake news, manipulation of information, identity theft, the overexposure of minors to certain channels, the loss of communication quality and mindfulness, isolation, sedentary lifestyles caused by excessive screen exposure, information overload and fake news, the loss of personal interaction, immediate dopamine gratification, and psychological and health-related problems. The quality of interpersonal relationships has been diminished by the lack of direct contact and the reduced use of non-verbal communication in digital interactions, something that can easily lead to misunderstandings and less emotional and empathetic communication (Abanades Sánchez & Vargas Delgado, 2025). Other concerning aspects include cyberbullying, criminal activities, and the dissemination of hate speech. Distractions, information overload, and the constant

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availability of messages and notifications affect concentration capacity. This informational overload may lead to less effective communication and a reduced ability to pay attention during face-to-face interactions.

There is no doubt about the enormous possibilities and advances brought about by digitalization and communication through social networks and other digital platforms. However, the challenges, threats, and risks they present such as the exacerbated connectivity of young people cannot be ignored.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions drawn from this research are discussed below.

- A large part of society makes an exacerbated use of digital communication, and currently places no limits on it either.
- People prefer to communicate through messages rather than through calls. There has been a shift from the traditional communication of talking on the telephone to the use of constant connectivity through different mobile devices.
- Young people acknowledge not being aware of all data privacy policies when they access or create profiles on social networks or other platforms.
- Young people confirm that constant connectivity over time is harmful to health, causing problems of depression and anxiety.
- They acknowledge the loss of present relationships in favour of more liquid relationships, since maintaining relationships digitally cannot be compared with experiencing them in person through the use of non-verbal communication, empathy, and emotions.
- Although there are many advantages to digital connectivity and being connected with thousands of people despite distance, there are also disadvantages such as depersonalization, addictions, loss of physical contact, and the social isolation caused by digital communication.

With regard to the objectives we had set ourselves, we can confirm our general approach: to investigate the use and overexposure to connectivity that students currently have on digital platforms, in order to determine whether they are aware of the risks and threats, as well as of data privacy policies and their possible consequences.

Following the descriptive analysis of the study framework and the analysis of results, the overexposure to digital communication has been described, as well as the excessive use that students make of digital platforms and social networks. The limited knowledge they possess regarding data privacy policies is also confirmed. They are aware of the advantages and disadvantages presented by such exacerbated connectivity.

The specific objectives set out are analysed below:

- To understand the current scenario regarding the use and connectivity of students in their daily lives, as well as the possible consequences that this connectivity entails in their lives.

The sample states that, in most cases, there is an exacerbated connectivity, and that in their daily lives they opt more for the use of digital connectivity than for face-to-face communication. They prefer a message to a call, leaving the need to telephone another person as a secondary option.

- To investigate the use they make of the internet and whether they truly know the resources and consequences entailed by interactivity and the use of digital channels and networks.

Although they are aware that excessive connectivity may cause them mental health problems, depression, or anxiety, they continue to make massive use of digital communication.

- To understand electronic contracting, the terms and conditions of some of the most relevant platforms such as YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok.

The data show that they currently do not know the terms and conditions of the platforms, in addition to confirming that these are platforms with a high demand from users according to the data collected.

- o examine the data privacy laws governing social networks and different digital platforms and to determine to what extent users download and know them.

The results obtained confirm that young people scarcely know the existing data privacy laws on networks.

Ultimately, there is no doubt that digital communication has expanded the possibilities of connection, but it is crucial to balance its use with more personal forms of communication. While digital interactions are convenient and easily accessible, telephone and face-to-face interactions remain fundamental for maintaining deep, empathetic, and emotional interpersonal relationships. All this fosters the development of social skills.

Another major drawback is the overload of new content generated day after day on social networks, which is difficult to control and highly dangerous for minors. In addition, there is a great lack of knowledge of data privacy laws on the part of users, which means that our data are voluntarily exposed and our identity can be easily violated.

Digital communication offers numerous advantages: it allows us to connect instantly without geographical barriers, provides immediacy, broad coverage, efficiency, ease for multitasking, and fosters creativity. However, it still has significant disadvantages: it reduces direct human interaction, generates digital dependency, may cause misunderstandings due to the lack of emotional tone, disconnects people from their environment, and causes information overload.

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In summary, it is necessary to be able to balance face-to-face interpersonal communication with digital communication in order to maintain meaningful relationships, improve understanding of the message, and strengthen social skills. It is essential to raise awareness in society and among all the agents involved of the relevance of training families, instructors, teachers, and students, since there is nothing more basic, vital, and important than effective communication, something in which all agents must become involved in order to improve.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS, FUNDING, AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Conceptualization: Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Methodology:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Software:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Validation:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Formal analysis:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Data curation:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Writing – original draft preparation:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Writing – review and editing:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Visualization:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Supervision:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **Project administration:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel. **All authors have read and accepted the published version of the manuscript:** Abanades Sánchez, Marta; Vargas Delgado, José Jesús; Vidal García, Marta Esmeralda y Arnaiz Boluda, Daniel.

Funding: This research has not received external funding.

Acknowledgements: This text originates within the framework of the research group “Learning ecologies in the 21st century: social and technological competences necessary in the workplace”. Our thanks go to the students who participated in the sample, as well as to the European University.

Conflict of interest: The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in relation to this study.

AUTHORS

Marta Abanades Sánchez

European University of Madrid

Professor in Theory and History of Education. Accredited for the positions of Contratado Doctor and Private University Professor. Awarded a six-year research period. Holder of a PhD in Education (Cum Laude) from the European University of Madrid. Graduate in Psychopedagogy and Diploma holder in Social Education. She also holds several postgraduate qualifications: International Master's Degree in Professional and Executive Coaching, Master's Degree in Human Resources, and University Master's Degree in Teacher Training. Lecturer in subjects such as social skills, managerial skills, competences, and leadership. She has held different positions such as director of postgraduate programmes and coordinator of subjects such as the Final Degree Project and internships in the area of Education. She has collaborated in research projects and is currently Principal Investigator of the internal project: "Learning Ecologies in the 21st Century. Social and technological competences necessary in the workplace".

marta.abanades@universidadeuropea.es

Índice H: 5

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4303-6332>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=yjyFbFcAAAAJ&hl=es&oi=ao>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Marta-Abanades/research>

José Jesús Vargas Delgado

European University of Madrid

Professor of Advertising and Transpersonal Communication at the European University. Six-year research period granted by ANECA. Accredited holder of a PhD in Persuasive Communication. Director of the Advertising degree programme (2021–2022). Director of the University Master's Degree in Marketing and Communication at the European University (2016). Dean of the European University of the Canary Islands (UEC) (2012–2014). Director of the Department of Advertising and Content at the European University (2002–2012). Twenty-five years of teaching experience at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, teaching multiple subjects linked to the areas of Creativity, Verbal and Non-verbal Communication, Public Speaking, Persuasive Communication, Transpersonal Communication, Emotional Intelligence, Strategy, Leadership, Managerial Skills, Mindfulness, Workplace Well-being, and Healthy Organizations. Multiple external collaborations as an invited expert lecturer with many institutions. More than 78 scientific publications. More than 57 national and international scientific conferences. Five doctoral theses supervised. Mindfulness consultant at the Onelife clinic (2017–2025).

jjesus.vargas@universidadeuropea.es

Índice H: 9

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4109-611X>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=E8VTKlwAAAAJ&hl=es>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Vargas-Delgado>

Marta E. Vidal García

European University of Madrid

Professor of Organization and Business Management at the European University. Accredited as a full professor by ANECA. Holder of a PhD in Business Management and Organization from the Complutense University of Madrid. Graduate in Business Administration and Management and MBA (ESADE Business School); CEMS Master's in International Management (Rotterdam School of Management); Master's Degree in Teacher Training (UCM). She has developed part of her professional activity as a consultant at PricewaterhouseCoopers and Accenture. Awarded for her participation in teaching innovation practices and conferences. Her main areas of research are Human Resources, educational innovation, corporate strategy, portfolio management, and corporate governance. Participation in numerous conferences and presentations, at national and international level, fourteen journal articles published in the first quartiles of JCR and SJR, and author of numerous book chapters.

martaesmeralda.vidal@universidadeuropea.es

Índice H: 14

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6872-2227>

Scopus ID: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=55876020000>

Researcher ID: <https://www.webofscience.com/wos/author/record/LCD-9525-2024>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?hl=es&user=Zio7y7gAAAAJ>

ResearchGate: <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Marta-Vidal-10>

Daniel Arnaiz Boluda

European University of Madrid

Professor with a PhD in Accounting, Statistics, and Econometrics in the degree programmes in Business Administration and Management, Business Analytics, and Sports Management. Holder of a cum laude PhD in Law and Economics (2019) from San Pablo CEU University. University Master's Degree in Business Law (2012). Double degree holder in Law (2009) and Business Administration and Management (2011). Practising lawyer at the Madrid Bar Association (2010). Coordinator of subjects with between three and six teaching staff members. Member of Final Degree Project and Final Master's Project examination boards since 2020. Member of the research teams [JER] Justice, Ethics and Responsibility and Digital Ethics.

daniel.arnaiz@universidadeuropea.es

Índice H: 2

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2564-5748>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=Daniel Arnaiz Boluda>