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Editorial: A connected or isolated generation? The impact of positive and harmful online communications on children and adolescents' wellbeing

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Editorial on the Research Topic

A connected or isolated generation? The impact of positive and harmful online communications on children and adolescents' wellbeing

Existing research has pointed to the opportunities that online communication offers to young people, including the development of digital literacy skills and the possibility to overcome social isolation through connecting with peers online (Stoilova et al., 2021). Simultaneously, research has also pointed to the increasing concerns regarding the risks and harmful behaviors that young people may encounter online, among which coming into contact with unknown people, identity thefts, exposure to potential offenders (Wachs et al., 2021), and cyberbullying (Strohmeier and Gradinger, 2022). By acknowledging the central role that online communication has in the lives of young people, the six contributions included in this article collection expand our knowledge in relation to the psychosocial outcomes of online experiences among young people. The article collection includes both quantitative and qualitative research studies, providing evidence for the need to adopt different methodologies in order to gain a deeper understanding of young people's online experiences.

The survey study by Milosevic et al. in this article collection investigated the association between time spent online, life satisfaction, and parental mediation in a large sample of children and adolescents across 16 European countries. Although the study found a negative association between time spent online and life satisfaction, yet, the contribution of time spent online to children's life satisfaction was not remarkable in terms of the variance explained in the regression model. The study also provides evidence that distinct components of parental mediation (restrictive and enabling mediation) are

positively associated with life satisfaction, indicating the role of parental mediation in terms of capitalising on children's online opportunities.

The study by Walrave et al. explored sharenting and related privacy concerns from the perspective of parents and adolescents in Belgium. This study uncovers the role played by sharenting in the creation of adolescents' online identity. By giving voice to young people's and parents experiences, this study uncovers the existing tension between the online identity that adolescents build for themselves and the one that their parents build through sharenting. Moreover, the study points to the importance of educating parents about the risks of sharenting, along with the need to protect children's privacy online.

Jensen et al. provide evidence of the complex interaction between individual and contextual factors predicting cybervictimisation in a sample of Chilean adolescents. Results reveal that children with low socio-economic status (SES) and multiple minority identities (sexual; ethnic) are at higher risk of being cyberbullied as compared to their peers belonging to majority groups and high SES. Taken together, the findings point to the importance of approaching the issue of cybervictimisation with an intersectional perspective, while implementing intervention programmes that are tailored to the needs of young people belonging to minority groups.

El Asam et al. examined exposure to online risks and the associated mental health outcomes in a large sample of young people across different regions in England. The study compared young people presenting one or more vulnerabilities (disadvantaged families, mental health, and physical issues) with their peers who did not present any vulnerabilities. Findings show that, compared to non-vulnerable adolescents, young people presenting either one or multiple vulnerabilities face more online risks (including content and contact-based risks; cyber-scams, identity thefts), and experience higher levels of psychological distress. The study enhances our understanding regarding the online experiences of vulnerable young people, and contributes to the literature showing that disadvantaged children are disproportionately susceptible to online risks.

Importantly, recent research suggests that the COVID-19 Health crisis has considerably increased the time that adolescents spend on the Internet (Chen et al., 2021). However, little is known in relation to the outcomes of adolescent online communication during the COVID-19 Health crisis. The papers by Pfetsch et al. and by Mariën et al. contribute to the emerging literature in this field. In particular, Pfetsch et al. add new knowledge to the literature investigating the psychosocial outcomes of cyberbullying perpetration. Interestingly, findings of this study show that in the context of contact restrictions (lockdown), cyberbullying perpetration is related to higher levels of self-reported wellbeing among adolescents with a high

need to belong. These findings indicate that when lacking meaningful offline contacts with peers, adolescents with a strong need to feel included in peer groups might use cyberbullying as a maladaptive strategy to reach out to others. Overall, the study provides new insights in terms of prevention and intervention programmes aimed to tackle cyberbullying in times of contact restrictions.

The study by Mariën et al. builds on previous theory and research to investigate the association between online writing about a stressful event (the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown), and young people's emotional reactions to the stressful event itself. The study provides evidence to the assumption that expressive writing instructions focused on positive aspects are beneficial in terms of adolescent ability to cope with a stressful event.

Taken together, the findings from the papers included in this article collection offer new empirical insights in relation to children and adolescents' online experiences, while paving the way to future longitudinal research studies exploring the psychosocial developmental outcomes of these experiences.

Author contributions

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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