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“How Young People Use the Internet: Habits, Risks and Parental Control”¹

“...If I’m on Internet and a friend calls and asks me to meet him or something... I come off the Internet and go out with my friend.”
Boy, 13 years old, Madrid

“They know I’m surfing... but for quite a while... they’re out all day... and then they don’t know how to use the computer... not even how to turn it on... that is, they don’t... they don’t know where I’m surfing...”
Girl, 16 years old, A Coruña

“I’ve got three reasons (for not shopping on Internet)... I distrust it, it’s expensive and my father would kill me”
Girl, 12 years old, Madrid

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¹ This research was carried out as part of the program “Safer Internet Plus Programme”, within the specific project “Eukids On Line” (<http://www.eukidsonline.com>), which brings together research centres and universities from 21 European countries and is directed by Professor Sonia Livingstone of the London School of Economics. This project is represented in Spain by the authors of this document. The fieldwork was funded through research grants of the University of the Basque Country (UPV-EHU) project UPV05/63 for the years 2006 and 2007).

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1. IMPORTANCE OF EMPIRICAL RESEARCH²

Throughout Europe, and in many other countries, an increasing number of children and youths are regularly connecting with Internet to pursue numerous activities. In the Europe of 25 states half the children (below 18 years of age) have used Internet. This percentage coincides with that for children of 8 and 9, but is much higher in older age groups. Amongst adolescents aged 12 to 17, four out of every five youths have used the Internet³. There are substantial differences between European countries and the proportion of users oscillates from one in three children in the case of Greece and Bulgaria to two in three in Estonia and Denmark.

² EU Kids Online *What Do We Know About Children's Use of Online Technologies? A Report on Data Availability and Research Gaps in Europe*. European Research on Cultural, Contextual and Risk Issues in Children's Safe Use Of the Internet and New Media (2006-2009)

<http://ec.europa.eu/saferinternet>

³ Source: Eurobarometer survey (May 2006)

In Spain, according to data gathered by the *Observatorio para la Sociedad de la Información* (Information Society Observatory - www.red.es) in the first six months of 2006, nine out of every ten youths aged between 16 and 24 connected to Internet on some occasion, while seven out of ten connected to the Internet at least once a week⁴.

There is growing agreement in the scientific and institutional sphere that it is necessary to adopt a multiple research perspective that will promote a safer use of the Internet and the new technologies, in order to protect children and youths and to provide parents and teachers with tools that will contribute to a safer environment. In this respect, empirical research is required that will make it possible to determine which (and how many) children have access to the new information and communication technologies, and to what type of technologies, in order to determine the real incidence of risky practices and parental control.

Within this context of European research, this work is centred exclusively on studying habits of adolescent Internet users in Spain.

2. RESEARCH AIMS

The principal aims of this Research are to determine:

- The attitudes, uses, habits, competence and behaviour of young adolescents (from 12 to 17 years of age) on the Internet.
- The effects and consequences of surfing on relations amongst youths, and on relations of youths with their parents.
- The potential risks for youths on Internet.
- Parental regulation and control.

3. QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

It was decided to employ a qualitative research perspective for two reasons. The first is of a methodological order, and the second is due to the need to adapt the resources available to us at the time to the development of the research⁵.

From a methodological perspective it seems more suitable to approach the habits of young people from an *open* position, making it possible to detect Internet behaviour and uses that would not have been foreseen when designing the project. This aspect turns out to be especially interesting in that the number of users and different uses of the Internet is undergoing a phase of expansion.

In this respect, the aim of this research is fundamentally *exploratory* insofar as it tries to identify different uses, habits, perceptions of risk and patterns of parental control. This

⁴ Source: Observatorio para la Sociedad de la Información, www.red.es, Perfil Sociodemográfico de los Internautas, Análisis de datos INE, 1º semestre 2006.

⁵ The research was set out in two phases: in the first we envisaged using a qualitative methodology, and in the second a quantitative one. The project budget from the University of the Basque Country UPV05/63 made it possible to cover the first, qualitative stage; further funding in the future will enable us to complete the quantitative phase.

will not prevent subsequent quantitative research from trying to determine how the different patterns detected are distributed amongst Spanish youths.

On the other hand, our interest in carrying out qualitative research has grown due to the fact that practically all of the research undertaken to date concerning Internet use in Spain has had a quantitative character⁶. For this reason, qualitative research contributes to widening the perspective on the object of study.

4. METHODOLOGY

The technique employed for gathering the data was the *focus group*. One of the main advantages of this method is that the *focus group* has a *provocative* function. The spontaneity of the youths is much greater because the group itself creates a context in which there is a stream of assertions and it is the members of the group who freely generate its discourse (Ruiz Olabuenaga and Ispizua, 1989:162)⁷.

A total of 6 focus groups were held, formed of youths aged between 12 and 17, all of whom were *regular users* of Internet, at home, at school, at Internet cafes, etc.

These groups were formed of 8 adolescents, one half boys and the other half girls, at least half of whom had television, video/DVD and a computer at home, their own mobile phone and home access to Internet. As can be seen in the file annex, practically all of them have all of the above electronic equipment, including a mobile phone and an Internet connection, except for some rare exceptions.

The field work was carried out in the second fortnight of May 2007 (between the days of May 18th and 25th) by the *Gabinete Sociológico Biker* (Biker Social Studies Consultancy).

The two groups of 12 and 13 year olds were held in Barcelona and Madrid. The Barcelona group had the following family and personal equipment: all of the homes had a television receiver, video/DVD, the youths had their own mobile phones (6 of them) and home access to Internet (2 home modem, 3 cable modem and 3 DSL). Everyone in the Madrid group had a television receiver, video/DVD, their own mobile phone and home access to Internet (1 cable modem and 7 DSL).

The two groups of 14 and 15 year olds were held in Bilbao and Valencia. All of the adolescents in the Bilbao group had a television receiver and video/DVD at home, their own mobile phone and home access to Internet (all except one, 2 home modem, 3 cable modem and 2 DSL). Everyone in the Valencia group had a television receiver, video/DVD, their own mobile phone and home access to Internet (6 cable modem and 2 DSL).

⁶ One of the few qualitative works realised in Spain was that carried out by the Directorate-General Information Society and Media, in April 2007, which was undertaken in 29 European countries (the 27 countries of the Community plus Norway and Iceland), including Spain, with the title "*Safer Internet For Children. Qualitative Study in 29 European Countries*". The age groups were 9-10 years and 12-14 years and it was centred on the use of Internet and the mobile phone. In the Spanish case the four focus groups were held in Madrid.

⁷ Ruiz Olabuenaga, J.I e Ispizua, M.A., (1989): "La descodificación de la vida cotidiana", Ed. Deusto, Bilbao.

The two groups of 16 and 17 year olds were held in A Coruña and Seville. The youths in the A Coruña group had a television receiver, video/DVD, their own mobile phone and home access to Internet (all except one, 6 cable modem and 1 DSL). Everyone in the Seville group had a television receiver, video/DVD, their own mobile phone and home access to Internet (all except one, 4 home modem and 3 DSL).

5. HABITS OF USE, FREQUENCY AND TIME OF USE

Place of Connection

The most frequent thing is for the youths to connect to Internet from their home, although some also do so from school. They rarely do so from Internet cafes, unless they have a specific reason, such as not having Internet at home or being away from home, such as during school holidays.

The computer is usually located in a room used in common, such as the lounge or sitting room or the study, and frequently in a bedroom shared with a brother or sister. It is rarer to find a youth with an Internet connection in an individual bedroom, although there are young people starting to have this, and parental control therefore becomes even more difficult. Nearly all the youths connect to Internet from school although for less time, and they normally do so in Computer classes.

- “I go onto the Internet at home... in my sister’s bedroom... nearly everyday” (girl, aged 13, Madrid).
- “I go onto the Internet at home, at school and nowhere else” (boy, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “I have Internet in my bedroom... I’m on the Internet for 3 or 4 hours... and at weekends I hardly use it” (boy, aged 17, A Coruña).
- “If you have a modem at home, you don’t spend 2 euros every half hour at an Internet cafe... Apart from the convenience... You’re in your home... Besides, they’re all immigrants in the area where I live, so they take advantage and charge double” (boy, aged 17, Seville).
- “If you’re on holiday and you don’t have a computer... yes... you go to an Internet café” (girl, aged 14-15, Bilbao).

Length of Time Online

The adolescents go onto the Internet everyday, or nearly everyday, when they get home from school, and/or after having supper. The length of time spent on-line varies from one to another, but oscillates between one and two hours daily, during weekdays. Some adolescents get involved in marathon sessions: “I normally play on the computer and I sometimes play at weekends, and I can spend up to twelve hours” (boy, aged 13, Barcelona). The time spent on-line at weekends is exceptional in a double sense. Because they have more free time, some youths go on-line for longer, which is the most frequent case, and other adolescents, as they have activities with their friends outside their home, go on-line for less time.

- “I go on-line more during the week, because at weekends my father spends more time working at the computer. I like going on-line around ten, nine-

thirty, thereabouts. During the week I have to go to bed... but at weekends I stay up to one o'clock" (boy, aged 12, Barcelona).

- "I go on-line less at weekends because I go out more...at school I don't go on-line, because my optional subject isn't computers" (girl, aged 15, Valencia).
- "I go on-line after 6 o'clock, when I leave school" (girl, aged 17, Seville). "I got hooked when I was little and I had long-sightedness which is why I use glasses with the computer... only for the computer... I used to finish my homework early and go on-line... I went on-line without them seeing me... and when they came in I turned everything off... (and I'd say) I was tidying up the closet..." (boy, aged 12, Madrid).

6. PRINCIPAL USES OF INTERNET

Messenger

Without any doubt, adolescents spend the greater part of their time on Internet using Messenger, because it enables them to talk with their friends instantaneously and rapidly, as email seems less immediate to them. Besides, it allows them to keep in constant contact with their friends: "If you're by yourself, you turn on Messenger" (boy, aged 17, A Coruña).

Perhaps this is similar to the use they make of the mobile telephone, with the difference that Messenger doesn't require "having credit". However, they use Messenger for conversations that are more informal and entertaining; for more serious conversations they prefer the telephone. Obviously, when they are outside the home they are obliged to use SMS. "When I'm at home I use Internet... but if I'm out or somewhere that doesn't have a computer... by mobile phone" (boy, aged 13, Madrid). Besides, with Messenger they exchange photos, music, they play, etc.

- "I use Messenger to talk with my friends... about anything that occurs to us... the thing is that email takes a long time... and Messenger is immediate (girl, aged 12, Madrid).
- "When I'm on my own I'm on Messenger..." (boy, aged 16, A Coruña).
- "I also use Messenger and I use it to talk to my friends, also so that they send me things...music, photos, and those things" (boy, aged 13, Madrid).
- "I installed Messenger because everyone had it, to talk more. With the email, which my mother has, you don't talk directly with them. They send you a message and after a while you send one back. With Messenger we can talk directly" (boy, aged 12, Barcelona).
- "For example, if you're on-line and you have something important to say...then you use the mobile phone or the telephone... but if it's to find out how you are or how... any old nonsense... you use the Messenger" (boy, aged 15, Valencia).

Games

Games are often one of the most regular uses of the computer and the Internet. Adolescents visit pages where the games are free, or on Messenger as well. They also like network gaming, although this is somewhat less frequent, taking part in on-line games with youths from other towns and other countries. In some cases, they are afraid

that network gaming could be a source of viruses or problems. Less interest in games was found amongst older adolescents.

A large part of the youths prefer to play with game consoles. *Play Station* and *Nintendo* are the most frequently cited.

In any case, those who like violent games (“fights”, “punching”, “shooting”, “killing”, etc.) do not think that this class of game might have a negative influence on their behaviour. Boys and girls without distinction like this class of game, although the boys probably more so.

The content of the games is highly varied: requiring skill, strategy, cars, fights, punching, shooting, questions and answers, role games, clan games, wars and sports (football)...amongst those expressly cited are Mario Bros, Pictionary, Charade, Mine Detector, Trivial, chess...

- “You can access thousands of games there and play for free” (girl, aged 15, Bilbao).
- “I play on *ten*... There are ten games on each theme... There are the typical classical games, Pacman, brainteaser, Mario Bros... there are different classes” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “I prefer Nintendo” (girl, aged 17, Seville).
- “I play alone and with friends who come round... and games of skill... questions and answers... and sometimes ones about punching” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).
- “...then I sometimes I go where it’s like in games arcades... an arcade where you can go freely without having to identify yourself... and you play with people... Then I also play a lot in the type of arcade where there’s Pictionary... because I like it” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).
- “I’m not attracted by the Play Station or the computer for playing, it all bores me... I don’t know... Because I’m not an adolescent any more” (boy, aged 16, Seville).
- “I like games with shooting... you kill people... they’re entertaining... I don’t see them as dangerous” (girl, aged 17, A Coruña).
- “If I want to play in a network game I go to the Internet cafe... In case there’s some wise-guy who wants to hack into my computer... let them hack each other” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).

It is not frequent to find addiction to games amongst the youths, although on occasion they say that they do get hooked and spend many hours playing. Besides, they are aware that excessive game playing, or excessive use of the computer in general or Messenger, has a greater effect on their studies than on their relations with friends, which they try to preserve. But, however, in the focus groups it was always common to find some young person who would speak about a school mate or some friend who was truly hooked on the games. But not themselves directly.

- “I know people who play those games and whose habits have changed... they don’t go out... they stay in front of the computer and don’t leave... then they think they’re superheroes... There was a kid in my class who didn’t leave his

home... he was in front of the computer all the time... in one of those games... he was there all day... 7 or 8 hours” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).

- “My sister-in-law is really hooked... You see her at six in the morning and she’s still... What can you do about it?... Nothing, on the “*Limu*”... She doesn’t go out... She’s there all day” (boy, aged 14, Bilbao).

Music, Film and Photo Downloads

Other frequent uses of Internet are downloading music (and related activities: information on singers, music websites, inlays, etc.) and films, activities related to photography (posting photos on pages, creating albums, creating MSN Spaces, etc.), above all amongst older adolescents, as well as viewing videos, principally on *Youtube*, together with other highly varied and different uses, including (with boys) reading the sports press. But for practically all of them, boys and girls, these uses are cited after Messenger.

- “(I use) Messenger, to see discotheque pages... if there’s some video or other on *Youtube*... and little else... well, for movies... some game or other... but not in a network, I don’t know how it works... I don’t have much time” (boy, aged 16, A Coruña).
- “I look for music, inlays and I download them into the equipment” (boy, aged 16, Seville).
- “Me, for example, the type of music I like most is on *emule* and I see the names that come up, and then I make a selection, you know. And if not, later I visit pages of friends of mine and I download the sessions. And there are also websites of DJ’s and you can also download them over there” (another boy, aged 17, Seville).
- “(I use) Messenger... to visit pages that interest me... music ones... to download music, films... I used to play before... I usually play solitaire games at home... and if I want to play in a network game I go to the Internet cafe...” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).
- “For Messenger and for photologs and so on... and for downloading music... my sister uses it a lot for gaming... I never play” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).
- “About a year ago, more or less... I got the Messenger pack... but I started to do it and it tired me a bit... a lot of people started talking to me... then the next day I began to post photos” (boy, aged 13, Madrid).

School Tasks

They also use Internet to search for information for school work. Principally using the *Google* search-engine and the *Wikipedia* and *Encarta* encyclopaedias, although some of them are not beyond finding works on the website www.rincondelvago.com (*the lazy person’s corner*), which all of them know about. The method of working frequently involves “cutting and pasting”, perhaps making a few minor adjustments, although there are adolescents who take the trouble to extract information, summarise and edit it, and present their work after using the linguistic corrector of a word processor, to avoid spelling mistakes. In short, there is very little personal elaboration after the search for sources.

- “I go to the *Wikipedia* and I nick it all. I write down the subject, look for mistakes, and put the corrector on it” (girl, aged 12, Barcelona).
- “I look for information on *Google*, move it to *Word*, read it through and take out the sentences that aren’t important, I don’t know, I do it like that” (girl, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “I use Internet to look for finished works... and that’s it, then I change them a little bit... I look for it on *Google*... and I elaborate on it some more” (boy, aged 15, Valencia).
- “If I can’t find what I want on *Google*, I go to www.rincondelvago.com. I cut and paste” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “I don’t know. On *Wikipedia*, for example. Because in my class a lot of people use www.rincondelvago.com and all their work is the same” (another girl, aged 16, Seville).

Internet Shopping

It is not normal for youths to shop on Internet. In the first place, they cannot see any advantages in this type of shopping compared with going to a shop or department store, where they can see the article they are buying. In the second place, because young people have a generic distrust that the purchase will not be what they want, that they will be “cheated” (“cheat”, “rip off” and “I distrust them” are the words most often used by youths referring to Internet shopping), that the purchase will be more expensive, that the purchased goods will never arrive, etc. A girl from Madrid, aged 12, sums this up in a very graphic way: “I’ve got three reasons (for not shopping on Internet)...I distrust it, it’s expensive and my father would kill me”. And in the third place, they do not have the normal means of payment, a credit card, and when they do make a purchase, on the few occasions that they buy on-line, they have to turn to an elder brother or sister, and often to their parents, to lend them their credit card; or else they pay by cash on delivery, which is not always possible. The elder adolescents, who do have the means for payment, are very reluctant to provide their bank account or credit card number, and in general refuse to do so. And finally, because some of the youths, especially the youngest, have been forbidden from doing so.

Amongst the items bought that they mention are cinema tickets, travel tickets, games and game extensions, clothing (T-shirts), books and magazines... although very few say that they shop. However, they do use Internet to compare different offers, the qualities and characteristics of products, which they then buy in the store.

When young people are asked whether their parents shop on the Internet, their replies are in general negative. This would suggest that they do not live in homes accustomed to on-line shopping, where Internet shopping is viewed favourably, although it is possible that the youths are not really aware if their parents carry out such activity. The only websites expressly mentioned are *e-bay* and *El Corte Inglés* (www.elcorteingles.es), an important department store chain in Spain), because guarantees are given that they will not be cheated.

- “I’ve never bought anything... I’m distrustful... it’s more expensive than in the shops... I would never buy anything on Internet” (girl, aged 13, Madrid).

- “I don’t buy anything and nor have my parents ever bought anything; I don’t think it’s very safe and so on. In case they get information about you or something...” (girl, aged 12, Barcelona).
- “I don’t shop... because I’m not interested... I prefer to go and choose and see everything... it’s not the same to shop on Internet, they could send you something different...” (boy, aged 14, Valencia).
- “I never shop on Internet... because they don’t let me... Since I pay with my money, (my parents) don’t want me to be cheated... So I’m forbidden from doing so... And if I buy something on Internet, they stop my pocket money” (boy, aged 12, Barcelona).
- “(I don’t shop)... because I’m wary... that they’ll go to my bank account, for example, and clean me out” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “(I prefer the shops) so as to be able to explain... to see the person... and for them to understand what I need a little” (boy, aged 16, Seville).
- “But for expensive things they ask for your credit card number... I wouldn’t give out my bank account or credit card number” (boy, aged 17, A Coruña).

Solidarity, Social and Political Work

Practically none of the youths interviewed had carried out any civic, solidarity and/or political activity on the Internet, save for the occasional reference to a family member.

- “My sister sponsored a child” (girl, aged 16-17, Seville).

7. INITIATION, COMPETENCE AND LEARNING ON INTERNET

The youths started to use computers at an early age, in general they mention 6 to 10 as the age when they began to use the new technology. They started because they could see, or were taught by, some member of the family who used it, frequently the father, but also the mother or a brother or sister; others learnt in the Computer class at school. Later the youths taught each other, above all about communication programs that use Internet, especially Messenger and its applications.

Friends are a decisive factor in later phases for completing their understanding and subsequent advances, although, as we mentioned in the previous paragraph, initiation is usually in the family or at school. They also frequently cite a large measure of autodidactic training, of apprenticeship on their own initiative, which involves trying out programs and applications, above all when they already have some mastery and have overcome the initial phase.

- “I don’t remember any more... I saw my father... my brother” (boy, aged 13, Madrid).
- “At first my father taught me the basics, how to get onto Internet, use Word, and then my friends taught me more, and that’s it. I learned the latest stuff myself” (girl, aged 12, Barcelona).

- “When I was 8... by myself... I started with the usual things... downloading things from Internet... I froze the computer more than once... and that’s it... when I froze the computer my father fixed it” (boy, aged 14, Valencia).
- “Since I was quite small... there were computers at home... I read some things... in the Computer class... I learned by myself... my brother taught me some things” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).
- “My sister taught me Messenger and then it was me on my own” (girl, aged 17, Seville).
- “(I began) aged 6 too... At school, in first year, they already showed us how to get onto Internet, Google... the basic stuff” (girl, aged 12, Barcelona).
- “Me, experimenting in the computer class... from time to time in class they took us to the computer room... and I tried things out there... I started when I was 9 or 10... because it bugged me that everyone laughed at me... because at first I didn’t have a clue... it bugged me, so I learnt and wow!” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).

When they have a technical problem with the computer or on an Internet connection, the youths manage to fix it. The normal thing is for them to fix it themselves, consult a friend or Internet forums, and, if their parents know about computers, they ask them for help, generally the father. Although the first thing they have all learnt to do is to switch off the computer, to see if it fixes itself. If the problem is serious, the older youths consult some friend who is an expert, some relative who knows about computers (parent, cousin or uncle/aunt) or go to a computer shop, in the case of older youths. Exceptionally, they have a technical service contract to help them out.

- “I don’t know, sometimes by myself, or a friend, or in the last resort my father” (girl, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “Then, at first, when he was at home my father helped me, then later I solved it myself” (boy, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “When I have problems I switch off the computer... I normally sort it out myself... and if some day it’s really serious... well, I call someone...” (girl, aged 15, Valencia).
- “It depends how serious it is... if it’s really messed up... some virus or something like that, you search Internet for how to get rid of it and you do... and if the problem is really serious, you format it... and you install Windows again...” (boy, aged 14, Valencia).
- “I call a friend to see if he knows how to fix it, and if not I take it to a computer shop” (boy, aged 16, A Coruña).

8. EFFECTS AND CONSEQUENCES OF INTERNET ON YOUTH RELATIONSHIPS

Internet use does not cause any deterioration in the relations of youths with their friends, with their peers. In many cases, for example, the use of Messenger, like short messages on the mobile phone, strengthens and accentuates these relationships, to such a point where one youth stated that he had installed Messenger because everyone in his circle had it. Besides, there is a loss of inhibition in the personal relations of a young person in comparison with face to face contacts.

- “You have more contact... you talk... you agree to meet... and you go” (boy, aged 14, Valencia).
- “If you don’t have Messenger, you’re out” (girl, aged 14-15, Bilbao).
- “Messenger is the second option (the first is going out with friends)” (boy, aged 14-15, Bilbao).
- “I’m a bit of an oddball because I don’t go on-line very much... most of the time I’m reading a book and things like that...” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).
- “I think with Messenger people let their hair down more than when they’re speaking in front of another person (everyone else agrees)” (boy, aged 14, Valencia).
- “Well, perhaps something you wouldn’t say to their face you say to them on Messenger... because you don’t feel so bashful... it’s the same with declarations of love and with insults” (boy, aged 15, Valencia).
- “If you come on all friendly, then me too... but if you get on my nerves then I delete you (from Messenger) and that’s it” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).

Nor does it seem that the Internet has a negative effect on the relations of youths with their parents, and in many cases it seems to favour them, for example, when youths turn to their parents for help with computer problems and for information searches, above all related to school work. And vice versa, in many aspects, above all with questions related to Messenger and Internet use, it is the youths who help their parents out, downloading music and films, or advising them on communication programs.

- “(Our parents) don’t ever use it... if they need something, they ask us to look into it” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).
- “They also tell me *look into this for me* and that’s it” (another girl, aged 16, A Coruña).

It is true that, on occasion, the use of Messenger tends to strengthen relations with friends in detriment to relations with parents; the youths go on-line with the computer to talk to their friends and thus abandon the family “space”. Frequently, children will leave the common space, the sitting room where the television is, because they do not like their parents choice of television program, or because they do not want to argue with them, and take refuge in their bedroom, surfing the Internet or talking with their friends. In many cases, they identify the television with the family space, and the computer-Internet with their personal space, the space they share with their friends.

- “Well, they must think that I’m in there, always in my bedroom... no... I can’t be bothered to go to the living room, and then they start to get on your nerves... and I go to my bedroom... and that’s it... And since they know I’m in there, they don’t come in... I prefer to be there than to be watching... I don’t know... *Los Serrano* (a Spanish sitcom)” (girl, aged 14, Bilbao).

With respect to activities that the youths feel they do less frequently, or less than before, it is basically television that is mentioned the most. It seems that there is an inversely proportional relation between use of the television and use of the computer/Internet. If they spend more time on the computer it is because they are watching less television. It seems to be a clear conclusion: they watch less television; although some of them carry

out numerous activities that they combine at the same time – surfing Internet, watching videos and listening to music.

- “If you have a little time, instead of going to the TV you go on Internet...” (boy, aged 17, A Coruña).
- “...either you’re watching TV or you’re on the computer...” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).
- “...I do it all at once...I’m on Messenger...I’m watching a video...I’m listening to music” (boy, aged 14-15, Bilbao. Some of the group confirm that they also do several things at the same time).

With some adolescents, it seems that there is also a negative effect on their school work, perhaps because they go to bed later, but they admit that this can also happen with a TV program or film.

- “...I get home, I go on-line and I’m off... I don’t study... I don’t do my homework or anything... and my parents get angry... and they’re right” (girl, aged 14-15, Valencia).
- “Stop studying, no, but if I’m doing some homework and speaking to my friends... it takes longer than if I wasn’t talking... but I get it done” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “(I stop) studying. You start playing... and you say to yourself, half an hour... and you spend the whole night playing” (boy, aged 16, Seville).
- “But if you play on Internet it’s very engrossing... it’s not dangerous... but with respect to your studies... you don’t study or anything” (boy, aged 14, Valencia).

But, in general, nobody feels that they play less or go out less frequently with their friends than before. On the contrary, they consider instant messages as a means of being much more closely connected with their peers. On occasion the Internet is a way of staving off boredom. If they have other things to do, they do them and come off the Internet. “So if I go on Internet, it’s because I’m bored, and I’m on-line... so it doesn’t really deprive me of time” 8girl, aged 16, A Coruña).

- “ If I’m on the Internet and a friend calls and wants to meet or something... I come off the Internet and go out with my friend” (boy, aged 13, Madrid).
- “If I didn’t have Internet, I’d be watching TV... as much as possible...I’m on Internet when I’m at home and haven’t got anything else to do” (boy, aged 16, A Coruña).
- “There’s one boy who comes to our school, but then he lives in Las Rozas (a suburb near Madrid) and since he doesn’t have anyone to play with... besides he lives in the country... so he spends all day on the Internet or in front of the TV... because he doesn’t much like... reading and all that” (boy, aged 12, Madrid).
- “I didn’t stop going out with my friends either... or studying either... perhaps some day when I was playing on Internet I could have been with my friends” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).
- “Because with Messenger it isn’t like there are people who stay in and don’t leave their computer and Play Station... you’re on Internet and you go on

Messenger when you're at home and bored... you don't spend all day on-line"
(girl, aged 14-15, Bilbao).

9. POTENTIAL RISKS OF INTERNET

The chief fear regarding Internet amongst young people is that a virus will get into their computer. That is their real fear, the rest are secondary. They are not conscious that the Internet represents a direct danger to them. They believe that they do not place themselves in a situation of risk if "you don't visit pages that you have no business visiting". They feel in control of the situation, that closing the page, moving to another page, or turning off the computer is enough. That if at some time "something happens to someone, it's because they asked for it".

- "It's not that I feel in any danger... rather, since I know what the risk is... I don't go there" (girl, aged 16, Seville).

Nor do many youths – especially girls – like entering chat-rooms, since that is where they perceive situations of greater risk, although in general they think they can remain removed from the dangers because they do not provide any personal information (name and surnames, address, telephone number, and very importantly their Messenger address, which they keep secret). They have the impression of being in control, that there is no danger beyond the risk situations that one creates for oneself (above all by going to chat-rooms), but even then everything can be resolved by cutting off communication and not providing personal details. They think of danger as something real, made of flesh and blood, so it seems that they think, "What danger can come from a virtual world?", which disappears when they turn off the computer.

- "I don't see any danger (in Internet)... I don't think you're in any danger on the Internet... the computer is though... because of viruses..." (several members of the group interrupt him when he mentions viruses with comments of "yes", "undoubtedly") (boy, aged 17, Seville).
- "The most dangerous thing is the *emule* downloads" (boy, aged 14-15, Bilbao).
- "(The most dangerous thing is) the viruses... a trojan" (boy, aged 14-15, Bilbao).
- "(Internet) is neither a nuisance nor dangerous. I see it as being as normal as life itself. What danger is there? So long as they don't come to my home... there's no danger at all" (boy, aged 16, Seville).

They have access to violent contents through the videos that circulate on Internet and which they access, or which they circulate amongst themselves, especially the older adolescents. And access to *jackass* videos that they can normally see on *Youtube*, or on Spanish pages dedicated to such videos. The contents of the latter are not particularly edifying, although they provoke laughter at the misfortune of others. While it is true that some youths do not like violent contents, they are in general not conscious of being affected or influenced by such material, or that their behaviour is conditioned by it. They watch such videos, especially the *jackass* videos, because they find them amusing, while they watch the more violent ones out of curiosity.

- “I usually watch videos where people take knocks (*schadenfreud*) ... it’s good for passing the time... people who are doing something stupid and take a knock” (boy, aged 14, Bilbao).
- “I watch videos where people fall over or bump into something...” (girl, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “I watch people taking knocks and people appear on the video and their face is all bruised, and they’re roller skating and they fall over...” (girl, aged 12, Barcelona).

Although they are aware that some of those videos are harmful and/or illegal, they see Internet as a world where many things can be found that are on the margins of legality, where there are no clear responsibilities, no authorities and no possibility of making demands against anyone.

- “I saw a video of three girls hitting another girl, you should have seen the state they left her face in” (boy, aged 16-17, Seville).
- “My God, (I saw) a video of a neck being cut on Internet... and the head was thrown away... It was real... real soldiers... you see how they cut his neck and throw his head away... (the same youth adds)... Just because I saw that video of someone getting his neck cut... I’m not going to go to class, cut someone’s head off and throw it in the wastepaper basket” (laughter) (boy, aged 16-17, Seville).
- “I’m also afraid of the ones who have the videos from Africa on their mobile phones, they cut his neck, and they have the video on the mobile phone, how they cut someone’s neck” (girl, aged 12 Barcelona).
- “It’s in real life where they’ve cut someone’s neck” (girl, aged 16-17, Seville).
- “If you want to denounce something, it would be the whole of Internet... because it’s all over the place” (boy, aged 16-17, Seville).
- “I think if you had to denounce everything you saw on Internet... the lawsuit would last your whole life... and something would escape your notice... and you probably wouldn’t win the case against them” (girl, aged 16, Seville).

In general, pornography reaches them through links which come with Spam mail, with advertising, with pop-ups, but no youths in the focus groups stated that they access it directly, or that they search for it. There is probably a factor of concealment in this, but we did not receive the impression in the six focus groups that there is an active attitude towards pornography: it arrives, they open it, perhaps they look at it and they close it. “I just close it and that’s it” (boy, aged 12, Barcelona).

If they do cite a direct relationship to pornography, this is always attributed to a friend or a classmate, not directly to themselves. Besides, they directly relate pornography to their worst enemy, a virus getting into the computer.

- “You have to be careful, because your computer gets infected with the things that get in” (boy, aged 16-17, Seville).
- “The ones who think they’re really smart (access dangerous pages)... the smart ones who show off... but then they have to buy another computer... because theirs has crashed... that’s what they get for being idiots” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).

The youngest are the most remote from pornography, and girls have much less contact with pornography than boys, although they are subjected to more sexual harassment, above all in chat-rooms.

- “A little while ago... a friend... I’m not exactly sure... visited a dirty page... not exactly by mistake... he was searching for it... he recommended it to me... but I haven’t visited it” (boy, aged 12, Madrid).
- “There’s one boy in my class who visits porn pages and so on” (boy, aged 12, Barcelona).

Chats and Dates with Strangers

The ones most interested in chat-rooms (*Terra* in particular is mentioned, which is a webpage owned by *Telefónica*, the most important Spanish telecommunications operator) are the older adolescents, and there is a clear division in their attitudes to them. In general, the majority of youths view chat-rooms as a source of danger, especially the girls, while what is probably a minority see them as an opportunity for getting to know people.

- “I don’t enter *Terra* because I’m wary... I prefer it if I know who you are... you give me your Messenger and I talk with you... You don’t know what people are there (in the chat-room)... I prefer to know who I’m talking with... people that I really know” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “I think people visit chat-rooms for that reason (sexual offers). If you lie on the couch, I’ll give you God knows what... That’s what people want... everything’s related to obscenities” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “If you want to meet someone... you’ve arranged to meet because you want to... if you say ‘yes’ and then something happens to you... that’s your problem” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).

The youths who visit chat-rooms gradually establish a relationship with their interlocutors. The first step is usually to give their Messenger to the new person whose acquaintance they have made, and when there is a certain degree of trust, after a few weeks, personal details can be given and a meeting can even be arranged.

- “A friend of mine now, she was from *Terra*... I spent two weeks without really seeing her... only her photo... until the day I arranged to meet her... I took a friend... a cousin of mine... just in case” (boy, aged 17, Seville).
- “I once met a guy in *Terra*, and he gave me his Messenger, and I gave him mine... and I talked to him and so on... he was a really nice guy... and it was OK... and I agreed to meet him... and in the end everything went well” (girl, aged 17, Seville).

On many occasions no personal details are given, except for their Christian name and age, as the best way of preserving safety; or if personal details are given, they are usually false. There might be cases of disappointment, in general nothing traumatic, but

the results of these relations, which sometimes end in personal meetings, can be highly positive for friendships and finding a boy/girlfriend.

- “There are people who get let down... a girlfriend of mine agreed to meet someone who said he was 16... and when he arrived, he was an old man... she gave him her personal details and everything... and it turned out badly” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).
- “I don’t get involved in these things... since I wouldn’t agree to meet a stranger... give him my telephone number... and certainly not my address in case he’s one of those pederasts... I don’t give out information about me... I’m not going to get to know someone in a chat-room... and then agree to meet him... and he’s 50 years old for example” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “If I give (a name), I give a false one... Sometimes they tell me to add someone (to his Messenger)... and I speak to her and she says, ‘What’s your name’... I give a different name... I don’t give my real identity to people I don’t know” (boy, aged 12, Madrid).
- “The first thing I give is a nickname... and that’s it” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).

Adopting personalities different from one’s own

Part of the fun with chat-rooms, on Messenger and in gaming, is adopting personalities different from one’s own (changing one’s age or sex). In some cases, we would say that this is in order to live as another person, but without malice, nor out of any desire to deceive the other for wrongful ends; and in other cases, for reasons of safety, concealing personal details. On occasion it is simply for amusement or to have a laugh on Messenger.

- “I don’t usually connect with a chat-room... I don’t like it... sometimes I’ve connected with my friends... all of us, there are five of us, we say we’re aged 24... And we invent things... because it’s just not possible that all the boys who are connected up are tall, blonde and blue-eyed” (girl, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “Changing your personality on Messenger, everyone does it...” (boy, aged 16, Seville).

Harassment, Insults and Cyberbullying

Although it is difficult to measure the degree of severity of the insults received by the youths, nearly all the adolescents say they have received them; however, in many cases it seems to be cases of rudeness between mates, rather than serious contempt or anything severe. There are also some cases involving threats, but it is equally difficult to evaluate the real danger in these threats, although on occasions they give rise to fear. “Well, at times it’s a bit frightening” (girl, aged 12, Barcelona). The reactions of the youths are very similar in nearly all cases and involve “removing”, “deleting”, “not accepting”... the unwanted contact, generally on their Messenger.

- “On Messenger yes... but the fact that you speak to someone... and you insult him... or he insults you... I have to sort out my problems with my friends... only if they make me angry or I make them angry... well, they insult you... or you insult them back... and you block them” (boy, aged 12, Madrid).

- “(I receive) an insult from a girl that I don’t know at all... she catches on that I’m connected and she gets *I don’t know* ... I block her, I delete her and that’s it” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).
- “They start calling you stupid, a hippy, what’s your name and so on, and then you get suspicious, and then they say they’re going to kill you” (girl, aged 12, Barcelona).

The older girls spoke of cases of harassment and sexual demands, in exchange for presents (mobile phone credit, for example), and to a lesser degree the older boys as well. In any case, the younger ones are not free from harassment. The attitude to these problems is that, on the one hand, the youths are asking for it by visiting pages where they should not be, and on the other, that closing the page and turning off the computer puts an end to the problems. “No one’s is going to do anything to you from the computer” (boy, aged 16, A Coruña).

- “(They make you propositions and so on) like they do to everyone... but I don’t feel bothered” (boy, aged 17, A Coruña)
- “I met a guy who said that if I did such and such a thing, he’d give me I don’t know what, he’d give me money, or a mobile phone...” (girl, aged 16-17, Seville).
- “Yes they do say that... for example, I was talking to someone on the computer who had been told to turn on the webcam and she was told to... with the people she was talking to, to do things... If this girl does the things... or that boy... it’s because they feel like it... because everyone knows... if they know how to turn on a webcam, they know how to turn it off” (girl, aged 17, A Coruña).
- “They haven’t done it to me, but they’ve done it to others... I was in the (Computer) room...” (boy, aged 12, Barcelona).
- “Once in class, I entered a chat-room, they started to say those things to me. People get together on the Messenger and you don’t know who they are...” (girl, aged 12-13, Barcelona).
- “Yes... it would be my fault and I would be asking for it myself by going where I go...” (girl, aged 17, A Coruña).

Reactions to Harassment

Paradoxically, when adolescents encounter serious problems on Internet they conceal them from their parents, and it is only when really serious cases arise that they decide to take the step of telling them. They try to resolve the problems themselves, or they consult their peers. They always fear that facing any problem they might raise with their parents, the latter’s reaction will be to deny them access to Internet, punish them in some way or inform the parents of the others.

With their educators, tutors and teachers, according to the statements of the youths, the likelihood of consultation on problems that arise is nonexistent.

In any case, the most frequent answer of the youths to problems of harassment is “I couldn’t care less”, “I leave”, “I come off (the Internet)”.

- “The last people I would tell about that (a problem of harassment) are my parents... And the teachers, never. I’ve got my friends who can help me... you tell your father... either he gives me a slap or he tells me he’s going to talk to their parents... something stupid like that” (girl, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “... As a last resort would I tell my parents or the teachers... They’d forbid you from using Messenger, they’d forbid other things” (boy, aged 12, Barcelona).
- “If it’s something that really strikes you, you talk about it with a friend or you tell your brother... but my father... I wouldn’t tell him a thing... and certainly not my teachers... I’ve got enough on my plate as it is” (boy, aged 16-17, A Coruña).
- “I don’t report them (referring to illegal pages), I couldn’t care less about those pages” (boy, aged 16-17, Seville).

Unwanted Advertising

Very frequently, advertising reaches the youths in the form of Spam and pop-ups. This can be of every type, although the most often cited now are adverts for casinos and gambling, and a bit of everything: holiday trips, cars, dating, ring tones and songs for the mobile phone, music...

Their attitude towards advertising is that, in the first place, they are tired of it, since they receive a lot and it does not interest them; and their second reaction is to close it, although they will look at it if it catches their interest.

- “Advertising for everything, casinos... I don’t know... scores of things and you have to spend the whole day deleting it... there’s a heap of it... holiday trips... it’s a bore more than anything else, because you have to close it...” (boy, aged 16-17, A Coruña).
- “(I usually receive advertising) from the casino and all that... if you go to a casino they give you 24 chips... or something like that... I close it immediately” (girl, aged 13, Madrid).
- “On *Google*... when you go to a page you don’t know... sometimes... you receive a lot of advertising and... it freezes the computer” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).
- “What I get most is porn pages” (girl, aged 12-13, Barcelona).

10. PARENTAL CONTROL AND REGULATION OF INTERNET USE

Control by parents of the use made of Internet by the youths is scarce, apart from now and then going over to their children on the computer to find out what they are up to, and occasionally speaking with them about what they are doing on the Internet. There is more control of younger youths than of adolescents aged 16-17. But, to put it clearly, the statements by the youths give the impression that their parents are not very concerned and know very little about what their children are doing on Internet. Their main concern is about the amount of time spent on-line, which they try to control.

- “They know I’m surfing... but for quite a while... they’re out all day... and then they don’t know how to use the computer... not even how to turn it on... that is, they don’t... they don’t know where I’m surfing...” (girl, 16 years old, A Coruña).

- “They keep an eye on my sister... they control what she’s doing on Internet... I think it’s because she’s younger” (boy, aged 17, Seville).

The term that is most frequently used by the youths to describe this activity of parental control is “snooping” and in general it upsets them, to greater or lesser degree. They consider their parents to be “annoying”. However, nearly all of the adolescents show understanding about this parental protection and they frequently say that such activity seems “normal” to them, and at times this control is even appreciated as a sign of affection, of interest being taken in them, and that “they don’t ignore them”.

Although this control seems normal to them, the adolescents employ all the tricks they know (closing the door, switching to another page when their parents come into the room, minimising pages, going on-line when their parents are out, deleting the record, etc.) in order to be on Internet without any control, except for what is self-imposed.

- “I think it’s *normal* (parental control) although it *annoys* me a bit... because I’ve been used to independence since I was about nine years old... but I think it’s *normal* for them to keep an eye on me” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).
- “They keep an eye on me... but it *annoys* me, but I think it’s *normal*... because otherwise I’d do what I want and they... Why not?” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).
- “I think they protect you more like that than if you’re on the loose... the fact is *they don’t ignore you*... like that they protect you... they show their affection so that nothing bad will happen... because if they leave you on your own on the computer all day, doing what you want... it seems they couldn’t care less about you... that you can do what you want...” (boy, aged 14, Bilbao).
- “They’re a *bore*... because sometimes they ask in order to gossip... not because they’re worried” (boy, aged 12, Barcelona).
- “Yes... they’re a *bore*... perhaps they say, ‘stop doing that’... and you say, ‘OK’, then... maybe five minutes later they repeat it three times” (boy, aged 16, Seville).
- “At times it *annoys* me... Because I’m talking on Messenger... and ‘Who are you speaking with?’... and ‘What are you writing to her?’... and ‘What are you writing to them?’... (girl, aged 15, Bilbao).
- “Sometimes we’re in the room where the computer is... so I’m on Internet... my mother comes by and sees me there and when it’s supper time she tells me to come off... she’s usually right next to me... *I don’t like her watching me*... but it’s OK” (boy, aged 13, Madrid).
- “I close the door (of the room). And if they open it I change to another page” (boy, aged 12-13, Barcelona).
- “Every time I go on-line, I close the door” (boy, aged 16, Seville).
- “I delete (the record of) the pages I visit, they don’t know anyway” (boy, aged 14, Bilbao).

The main concern of the parents is probably about the length of time their children spend on Internet, depriving them of time for other activities (basically schoolwork), and they are less (or scarcely) worried about the content of the pages they visit, what they see or the relations they maintain. The youngest children frequently say that they are told to turn off the computer, to stop what they are doing, and that sometimes they

receive punishment (no Internet, for example), when parents think they are spending excessive time on the computer.

- “No parent likes you to spend a heap of hours on-line... Yes, they usually tell me to turn it off, because I’ve been on a long time... Nowadays, I say five more minutes... and carry on for much longer” (boy, aged 14-15, Bilbao).
- “My father always wants to see me studying... but if I’m on Internet he’s not worried about what’s there” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “I’m really annoyed when as a punishment they don’t let me use the computer. When he says, ‘*Come off the computer and go and watch TV*’. Time I don’t spend on the computer I dedicate to something else, so long as it’s not homework or reading. I don’t care.” (boy, aged 14, Bilbao).

On the other hand, the youths conceal everything from their parents that they think they will not like, or which they have had forbidden to them, especially violent contents, for example; and they might share lighter contents with them, such as *jackass* videos. For the youths there are no barriers in their access to contents save for what each one sets him/herself. “Whoever wants to see should see, and whoever doesn’t, shouldn’t” (girl, aged 13, Madrid).

- “Sometimes the videos that make you laugh... if my parents are around nearby... I show them to them and they watch for a while” (girl, aged 13, Barcelona).

On the other hand, some parents have difficulty in controlling their children’s Internet activity, as they are not computer literate, or less so than their offspring, and therefore cannot exercise any control over these activities with which they are unfamiliar. There are also cases of adolescents who are free of all control, although this is less normal. And on the other hand, one should consider the time when adolescents are alone at home and can do what they want without any supervision.

- “I’ve got the computer and I do what I want” (girl, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “They don’t say anything to me... at times they look (at the screen) from where they are... they usually come over and see... they open the bedroom door...” (boy, aged 17, A Coruña).
- “They (the parents) don’t solve anything by worrying...The more they tell me not to use Messenger... the more I use it when they’re not around” (girl, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “They don’t look at what I’m doing... but if they look, I don’t let them... if I’m talking to a friend, why should they look at what I’m saying?” (boy, aged 17, A Coruña).

It seems that older adolescents take it as a sign of distrust on the parents’ part towards their children if they carry out activities of control, and the youths feel appreciated when they understand that their parents consider them responsible enough to look after themselves when they are surfing Internet. They feel very proud that their parents “trust” them; the verb “*trust*” is the most repeated.

- “My parents *trust* me not to visit pages that I shouldn’t” (girl, aged 13, Barcelona).
- “They (her parents) have always told me, ‘*you know what you’re up to and where you want to go*’ ” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “They *trust* me... but they warn me beforehand... don’t go here, but don’t... They *trust* me” (girl, aged 12, Barcelona).
- “If a parent doesn’t *trust* their child, then they shouldn’t let him go on Internet, quite simply” (girl, aged 16, Seville).
- “They don’t supervise me. Not at all, my parents are like friends of mine. Apart from my parents being friends... they don’t tell me where I should or shouldn’t go... *they know that I know what I’m up to*” (boy, aged 16, Seville).

Very exceptionally in the focus groups, cases emerged of parents installing filter programs in their children’s computer, or activating the filter applications of Internet Explorer of Windows Vista. And this was in the younger age groups.

- “Yes but because they have one of those programs... I’ve got the computer connected to my father’s Internet... and he’s installed that program to keep an eye on me in case something’s wrong... it’s a program that’s installed and if he needs to look at it... he looks at it and that’s that” (girl, aged 12, Madrid).

11. PARENTAL COMPETENCE AND EXPERIENCE WITH INTERNET

The adolescents are highly computer literate, a literacy that is above all centred on Internet use, Messenger and communications applications. In the majority of cases they feel that they handle Internet much more competently than their parents; although at times such superiority in skill within the family is held by an elder brother or sister.

In the focus groups we asked, “How do your parents view the new technologies?” However, this is a question that the youths have never asked themselves and they are not exactly sure how to respond; although in general they end up saying that their parents view the new technologies as something positive.

- “I think so (my parents think Internet is positive)... I haven’t asked them... it’s something they might think that way about... I’ve never questioned them” (boy, aged 15, Bilbao).

We would say that, in broad terms, there are two groups amongst the parents. Those that have a good level of computer literacy, because they need this for their professional work, some of them are computer specialists, and others who have slight or no skill with computers. These are the ones that we said would have difficulty in controlling their children’s activities, and besides it is possible that this prevents them from evaluating the risks to which their children might be exposed. Even amongst computer literate parents knowledge of the use of Messenger, games and Internet is less than their children have.

- “My father knows more about programs... but about Messenger, games programs... I know more” (girl, aged 12, Barcelona).

- “At times they (my parents) think it’s more dangerous than it is, since they don’t know much, at least not my mother, they think you’re talking to people you don’t know” (girl, aged 14-15, Bilbao).
- “They trust me, because I’m the one at home who has always known more about this (computer-Internet)... my parents haven’t a clue” (boy, aged 15, Bilbao).
- “When there’s a problem with Internet at home, my mother passes it on to me” (boy, aged 15, Bilbao).
- “I don’t care what they say to me... I think that since they didn’t have Internet when they were little, now that they’re big they want to learn everything they didn’t learn when they were small, and now they’re afraid, and they set restrictions on you without knowing that you’re not running as much risk as they think” (boy, aged 14, Bilbao).
- “...They don’t know much about computers either... so they can’t be supervising me... My father trusts me...” (girl, aged 16, A Coruña).

12. FINAL REFLECTIONS

The results of this research provide us with detailed knowledge of the uses youths make of Internet, the risks they run and the control, or perhaps better put the lack of control, that their parents have over this activity.

The main use of Internet for youths is Messenger. Without question it has entered into their leisure time and has become an essential instrument for communication with their peers. When they get home, they go on-line and talk with their friends. When they become bored, they might go on-line and talk with their friends, or exchange photographs and homework. Messenger has also removed youths from family leisure, which is centred on the television. And it seems that there is an inversely proportional relation between the time dedicated to Internet and to television. The more Internet, the less television.

This work has contributed to a better knowledge of the principal uses of Internet by youths - gaming, downloading music and films, as we have described in previous pages - but some of the results came as a surprise to us.

In the first place, the indifference with which they view or tolerate violent contents on Internet, ranging from the least violent contents, such as *jackass* videos, which are enormously successful with them and often mentioned, to the more violent contents, such as videos they cite that are expressly related to terrorism in Iraq and in Africa, in which victims are cruelly decapitated, both on the Internet and on mobile phones. This is not fictional violence, and one girl makes this very clear when she says, "It's in real life where they have cut his neck" (girl, aged 16), as if to say that on Internet nobody's head is cut off. It can be seen there, but it happens in the real world. In any case, they observe violence as if it was not going to influence them. Nor do they see any limit on what each one wants to do on Internet. There are violent, pornographic contents... the person who wants to see them does so, and the person who doesn't want to, doesn't.

Besides, they consider the virtual world to be an anonymous world, where there are no responsibilities. There can be insults, harassment; there can be pornography... but there are no responsibilities involved. If you don't want to see any of this, don't go to pages where you shouldn't go, or delete the person you don't like from your Messenger.

With respect to pornography, which to a large extent enters their computers via Spam, advertising and pop-ups, there are three positive factors in the youths' attitude to this. Firstly, there does not appear to be an "active" attitude towards pornography: it arrives, they open it, perhaps they look at it and they close it, although evidently there might be a factor of concealment, since the interviews were conducted face-to-face. Secondly, few youths exchange pornography with their peers. And thirdly, because they relate pornography to their great enemy, the entrance of viruses in the computer, and they therefore have a natural attitude of prevention towards it as it might be a source of problems.

Evidently this does not have the social transcendence of what we have commented on so far, but the use made of Internet by the youths in preparing their school homework is also surprising. The youths show little interest in using Internet as a rich and diverse source of information; instead it is a source that allows them to get round the work they are set, to "cut and paste", to plagiarise works using *Wikipedia*, *Encarta*, and what is offered by *Google*, and the *rincón del vago* website (*the lazy person's corner* website), which they are all familiar with. Very little original work, very little use of the wealth

offered by Internet as a database and information source, could be deduced from the focus groups, but a lot copying instead.

Another aspect that surprised us is the scarce interest in digital shopping. We had supposed that the most computer literate sector of society, the youths, would show a very positive attitude to shopping and might be an avant-garde sector in the development of on-line shopping. However, their most frequent expressions concerning on-line shopping are “I’m distrustful”, “they rip you off” or “they cheat you”, etc. And these are prejudices, since they are not reactions to unsuccessful purchases. Quite the opposite, the few who have made purchases do not show the least suspicion and successfully completed their transaction; but they do not express a very favourable opinion either. It is true that the youths face several problems with on-line shopping. They do not have money freely available; many youths have been forbidden from shopping by their parents; and the older ones have problems paying since they do not have a credit card.

The only real dangers that they see in Internet are viruses and trojans⁸. And the only negative aspect of pornography, as we said before, is that it might be a source of viruses, as with advertising and Spam. They very seldom perceive other risks or other dangers.

The majority are also aware that chat-rooms can be a source of virtual problems, dishonest propositions, harassment, insults, threats, etc., and a real danger if they arrange to meet strangers and are deceived. But they always think that nobody is forcing them to enter a chat-room, nor to turn on the webcam of their computer, and if they do so – this is something they relentlessly repeat – it is because they want to. And if they encounter problems, it’s because they have gone looking for them.

For other youths, however, chat-rooms are a means of making new friends and for arranging to meet them in real life. Their reports of personal experiences in their meetings with strangers, whether for friendship or for finding a girl/boyfriend, are positive.

Those who enter into contact with strangers hold back their real identity; they do not reveal their surnames, address, telephone number or Messenger... anything that might serve to identify them. Sometimes even the Christian name they use is false. Little by little, as they come to trust their new contact on Internet, they give out their Messenger, which is the key to greater acquaintance and perhaps to a real meeting in the future.

Paradoxically, when the adolescents have a serious problem on Internet, they hide this from their parents, and only in really serious cases do they take the step of telling them. They try to solve their problems themselves or in consultation with their friends. They always fear that facing any problem they might raise with their parents, the latter’s reaction will be to deny them access to Internet, punish them in some way or inform the parents of others. If consulting their parents on problems is a very difficult step for them to take, the possibility of their doing so with their teachers, according to the declarations of the youths themselves, is practically nil.

⁸ “Parents and children have different opinions regarding the risks related to Internet use. Whereas parents seem to focus very much on the risk related to chat rooms, violence, pornography etc, the children consider the most serious risk to be virus on the Internet”, in “A European Research Project: The Appropriation of New Media by youth”, MEDIAPPRO, 2006, page 44.

Internet does not cause any deterioration in the relations of the youths with their peers or with their parents. On the one hand, with respect to their peers, Internet provides them with a rapid means of communicating and does not cost them anything, unlike the mobile phone, which they find useful but for which they need “to have credit”. With respect to their parents, on the other hand, while it is true that Internet use on occasion separates them from their parents (the youths stop watching television with the family, they go to their bedrooms to chat, etc.), it is also true that parents and children help each other with Internet. They teach each other programs or how to surf; parents can help their children with homework from school; the youths download music or films for their parents, etc.

The youths, except for rare cases where their parents are highly computer literate or are computer specialists by profession, are the ones who know the most in the home, above all about Internet, Messenger and home communications programs. On occasion, the youths admit that their parents know more than them about “Computers”, but they know more about Internet and games.

Parental control of the use made of Internet by their children mainly concerns the length of time spent on the computer. Parents are worried that their children spend too much time on-line, that they are neglecting their homework or becoming “hooked”, but they are hardly concerned about the contents and the personal relationships that might be established on the Internet. It is true that in general the parents try to keep a check on what their children are doing; when they are on the computer they go over to have a look; on occasion they talk about pages to be avoided... but it does not seem that there is any serious control over their activity.

For the children it is very important that their parents should “trust” them, that they do not control their activity on Internet because they are now old enough to know where they should and shouldn’t go. And the parents possibly prefer to strengthen that attitude of trust – especially with the elder children – because, according to our data, the children surf the Internet with the parents hardly realising anything about this. They use all types of tricks to avoid control, from closing the bedroom door so that they are forewarned when their parents come in, to changing the page or deleting the record.

And two small complementary notes to conclude.

The first is to emphasise that amongst the activities of the youths we have barely detected any solidarity, civic and/or political activity on the Internet.

The second is that Spanish parents make use of very few technical media, basically filter programs or the filters of Internet Explorer or Windows Vista, to control the activities of their children on the Internet.

13. ANNEXES

RECRUITMENT FILE BARCELONA GROUP

Date carried out: 25/05/2007

Time: 18:30 h

	NAME	AGE	EQUIPMENT THEY POSSESS				
			TV	Video/DVD	Own mobile phone	Home access to Internet	Specify type of Internet connection (Normal MODEM, ADSL, Cable, etc.)
1	MARTA	12	YES	YES	NO	YES	DSL
2	GERARD	12	YES	YES	NO	YES	CABLE MODEM
3	CRISTIAN	13	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
4	SOFI	13	YES	YES	YES	YES	DIAL-UP
5	CLAR	12	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
6	ADAM	12	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
7	YAIZA	13	YES	YES	YES	YES	DIAL-UP
8	MARIO	13	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL

RECRUITMENT FILE MADRID GROUP

Date carried out: 22/05/2007

Time: 18:30 h

	NAME	AGE	EQUIPMENT THEY POSSESS				
			TV	Video/DVD	Own mobile phone	Home access to Internet	Specify type of Internet connection (dial-up, DSL, Cable modem, etc.)
1	SARA	13	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
2	BELEN	13	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
3	SERGIO	13	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
4	RAFAEL	12	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
5	ALEJANDRO	13	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
6	ELENA	12	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
7	ALVARO	12	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
8	DEBORA	12	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL

RECRUITMENT FILE BILBAO GROUP

Date carried out: 18/05/2007

Time: 18:00 h

	NAME	AGE	EQUIPMENT THEY POSSESS				
			TV	Video/DVD	Own mobile phone	Home access to Internet	Specify type of Internet connection (dial-up, DSL, cable modem, etc.)
1	NEREA R.	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
2	NATALIA	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	DIAL-UP
3	DIEGO	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
4	BORJA	14	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
5	JON	14	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
6	MIKEL	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	DIAL-UP
7	TATIANA	14	YES	YES	YES	NO	
8	NEREA V.	14	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL

RECRUITMENT FILE VALENCIA GROUP

Date carried out: 24/05/2007

Time: 18:00 h

	NAME	AGE	EQUIPMENT THEY POSSESS				
			TV	Video/DVD	Own mobile phone	Home access to Internet	Specify type of Internet connection (dial-up, ADSL, Cable, etc.)
1	MARTIN	14	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
2	SAUL	14	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
3	LORENA	14	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
4	M ^a CARMEN	14	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
5	JUAN	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
6	ALFREDO	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
7	YESLVIA	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
8	ROSANA	15	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM

RECRUITMENT FILE SEVILLE GROUP

Date carried out: 23/05/2007

Time: 18:30 h

	NAME	AGE	EQUIPMENT THEY POSSESS				
			TV	Video/DVD	Own mobile phone	Home access to Internet	Specify type of Internet connection (Dial-up, DSL, cable modem, etc.)
1	MIRIAN	17	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
2	ESTEFANIA	16	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
3	J.ENRIQUE	17	YES	YES	YES	NO	
4	ANDREA	16	YES	YES	YES	YES	DIAL-UP
5	MARIA	17	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
6	J.MANUEL	16	YES	YES	YES	YES	DIAL-UP
7	F.JAVIER	17	YES	YES	YES	YES	DIAL-UP
8	DAVID	16	YES	YES	YES	YES	DIAL-UP

RECRUITMENT FILE A CORUÑA GROUP

Date carried out: 21/05/2007

Time: 18:00 h

	NAME	AGE	EQUIPMENT THEY POSSESS				
			TV	Video/DVD	Own mobile phone	Home access to Internet	Specify type of Internet connection (dial-up, DSL, cable modem, etc.)
1	ALBA	16	YES	YES	YES	NO	
2	CARLA	17	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
3	ESTEFANIA	16	YES	YES	YES	YES	DSL
4	CAROLINA	16	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
5	ANDRÉ	16	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
6	DANIEL G.	17	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
7	RUBEN	17	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM
8	DANIEL R.	17	YES	YES	YES	YES	CABLE MODEM