Manifestations of violence among students of higher education: The uses of WhatsApp

Manifestaciones de violencias entre alumnos de educación superior: Los usos del WhatsApp

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Abstract

In this article we present the results of an investigation regarding violence demonstration through WhatsApp among students of Higher Education, carried out in 11 educational programs. To learn the new types of mistreatment that faculty students enrolled in a public university in the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico do and suffer through WhatsApp. 541 students were surveyed as part of a probabilistic sample of a population of 17 000 students, working with a 95% confidence level to estimate a proportion by means of a bilateral interval with a conservative approach obtaining an error limit of. 041 (4.1%).

Among the most relevant results, we found that 48% of the sample has felt uncomfortable and disgusted by pornographic photographs that their contacts have sent without their consent; the same happened with 37.4% of the sample of students to whom pornographic videos were sent. These types of messages constitute new abuses that offend those who receive them, which is also the case for 18.7% of the students who have been targets of seemingly harmless memes, however, those who appear in them suffer ridiculing. Another important finding was the one related to indifference and how it has become a new type of violence suffered by 77.8% of students.

Keywords: Violence, students, social networks, WhatsApp, cyberbullying.

Resumen

En este artículo se presentan resultados de una investigación sobre algunas manifestaciones de violencia

a través de WhatsApp entre alumnos de Educación Superior, realizada en 11 programas educativos. Conocer los nuevos tipos de maltratos que hacen y sufren a través de WhatsApp los alumnos de facultad inscritos en una universidad pública de la ciudad de Guadalajara, Jalisco, México. Fueron encuestados 541 alumnos(as) en una muestra probabilística de una población de 17 000 estudiantes, trabajando con un 95% de nivel de confianza para estimar una proporción por medio de un intervalo bilateral con un enfoque conservador obteniendo un límite de error de .041 (4.1%).

Entre los resultados más relevantes encontramos que un 48% de la muestra se ha sentido incómodo y disgustado por fotografías pornográficas que le han enviados sus contactos sin haberlas solicitado y sin que le notificaran del envío de estas imágenes; los mismo ocurre con un 37.4% de la muestra con alumnos(as) a los que enviaron videos pornográficos. Este tipo de mensajes constituyen nuevos maltratos que ofenden a quienes los reciben, como ocurre además con un 18.7% del alumnado a quienes les han hechos memes aparentemente inofensivos, pero que hacen sufrir a quienes en ellos aparecen al ser ridiculizados. Otro hallazgo importante, fue el relacionado con la indiferencia y cómo está se ha convertido en nuevo tipo de violencia que sufren un 77.8% de alumnos.

Descriptores: Violencia, alumnos, redes sociales, WhatsApp, ciberbullying.

1. Introduction

It is not a secret that adolescents and youth spend most of their time in activities that involve the use of internet. They are in the so called Network of networks, at every moment getting in and out intermittently, and in that continuous go and come they seem to live a double life, one in the actual reality and the other on the virtual reality. As stated by Area, Borrás Machado and San Nicolás (2015), it is evident that their consumption, production and diffusion ways related to the culture, represent a breakup with the uses and traditions of his family and surroundings, because his/her relationships with peers, family and school are actually shaped by the online interactions with which they socialize and show his/her face to the world.

Social networks have given youth visibility and have socialized their ways of living; internet use has become a modus vivendi for a large number of users. In this context of presence of the digital world and augmented reality (Ortega-Ruiz, Del Rey and Sánchez, 2012, p. 45), social networks play an important and fundamental role as a socialization factor for youth, being on a par with friends, family and school premises, formerly essential elements in the generation of coexistence between individuals; coexistence which was regulated and perhaps monitored by parents in the home environment and by teachers in the school ambit.

Since digital communication is mediated by personal electronic devices such as mobile phones, tablets and computers, it takes place away from adults' attention and close to peers that are hyper connected in school premises. In this context in which students develop, they are assimilating forms of violence that cannot be ignored by parents and teachers; taking into account that school is an important space for students to learn to live together in a pacific manner.

1.1. Some theoretical and methodological fundamentals

Nowadays, there are multiple manifestations of violence, now reinforced by the use of the different social networks that provide new faces, languages and communication ways between youth, which through information technologies acquire distinctive features because of the impacts and consequences that these form of virtual interaction have on the individuals. There have emerged many phenomena and situations that can hardly be inventoried in a definite way; what is feasible is detecting that they now represent the metamorphosis of processes related to different situations of harassment, violence and aggression,

with the use of diverse digital devices and a heterogeneous gamut of technological applications.

> In recent years there has emerged a new form of aggression, usually called cyber harassment, in which such aggression takes place through computerized means, and more specifically through mobile phones and the internet (Smith, 2006).

This researcher defined that phenomenon as cyber harassment, remarking that it is "an aggressive and intentional act carried out repeatedly and constantly along time, by a group or individual using electronic contact ways, against a victim that cannot defend himself/herself easily". Many types of cyber harassment can be highlighted, such as text messages, intimidation by phone, intimidation by photos and videos, siege by e-mails, siege by chat sessions, intimidation through instant messaging programs and siege by web sites.

With the time, it was found that bullying was closely related to cyber harassment, after discovering that, in the academic ambit, the school aggressors continued the mistreatment in the cyberspace, which is considered as an indirect bullying. From this perspective, authors such as Hinduja and Patchin (2008) stated that cyberbullying resulted from an unfortunate merge of bullying with electronic communication and mobile telephony.

One of the predispositions that presently tend to prevail analogously in the usages of mobile telephony, in particular smartphones and iPhones, to carry out harassment among youth has been documented through different studies conducted in diverse latitudes.

In Spain, a study carried out in Cordoba by Calmaestra (2011), involving a sample of 1671 secondary school students, found that a 8.3% of them had been mistreated through the mobile phone. Similarly, another research conducted in the community of Extremadura in the same country by Del Rio, Leon, Castaño and Gomez (Year), found that 8.8% of a sample of 620 students of fifth and sixth years of primary school had been harassed through mobile phones.

In Mexico, Velazquez Reyes (2010) carried out a research with a sample of 594 secondary school students and 31 students of bachelor's degree, finding a 10.5% of cyber victims; Lucio López and González González (2012) conducted a study in which the interviewed 1066 students from 28 high schools, and found that 49.9% had been insulted through mobile phones, 18% had been threaten, 9.7% were victims of extortion, 9.8% were sexually harassed through messages, 15.8% had been affected in their reputation and dignity, and 7.6% were ridiculed with videos that were taken and distributed.

The data formerly provided show certain structural analogies of the trends that in different regions of the planisphere, related to the increasing use of expressions, conducts and behaviors linked to situations of aggression and violence using these devices. This shows the magnitude that the phenomenon has been acquiring, which is fundamental for its understanding and explanation.

A key antecedent of the present study is the research conducted by ourselves (Prieto, Carrillo and Lucio, 2015) in this same school, where an analysis was carried out from a broader perspective to identify bullying and cyberbullying situations.

As opposed to such previous work, this research pursues highlighting different aspects linked to the youth, in their bond (harmful in this case) with Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). This is an essential element to consider, due to its role and influence in the cultural level and, particularly, in the educational aspect. Among the most important issues revealed, it was found that WhatsApp is one of the most common means of communication in the student community to carry out diverse forms of aggression and violence.

1.2. Origins and new uses of WhatsApp

Whatsapp was created in 2009 by Jan Koum, director of the operations team of Yahoo (Moreno, González, Torres and Hernández, 2017), these authors point out that it was origi-

nally called What´s up app, and it quickly grew with great success and popularity among users, as a multiplatform which is easy to use because it takes data from such users.

It might be highlighted that one of the drawbacks of this application is that all information is sent as simple text, and any person with some knowledge of this social network may enter and use it incorrectly. Being careful about what is shared in social networks is fundamental. One of the risks that WhatsApp entails is the use that can be given to this social network, for instance the many possibilities that appear among young users to publish messages, pictures and videos with compromising words and/or images that allow aggressors to extort, mistreat or ridicule with memes, taunts or derisions, among others. In general, there does not yet exist enough normative and legal frameworks that regulate and control the manifestations of violence in the diverse technological applications that are used as a mean for communicating, which makes more fragile its different uses; WhatsApp is not an exception.

1.3. New forms of violence

One mistreat that has emerged in WhatsApp is sending pictures and pornographic videos to contacts that did not request them and were not informed about the content of these messages. In Mexico there have occurred cases of people that after ending a relationship, they upload to the network videos and pictures of his/her former partner as a form of revenge, causing a significant moral, physical and psychological harm on the victims. In light of this, senator Mónica Arriola Gordillo (2015) proposed an initiative for reforming the Federal Penal Code in order to penalize the felony of abuse committed when a someone photographs or films another person, partially or totally nude, and distributes the image or the video in any means without his/her consent, printed or in social networks.

Recently, one of the formats that has been commonly used in social networks are the so-called memes, which are employed with the purpose of ridiculing, harming, transmitting sarcasm and even deteriorating the image of an event or a person. In the mid 60's, Dawkins (1993, p.2018) coined the term meme in his book "The selfish gene", and conceived them as cultural ideas transmitted from brain to brain and from generation to generation. This could have been the imitation of a "catchy" tune, to call it someway, sons, slogans, dress fashions, ways of constructing pots or bows. As time has gone by, the concept has changed and now memes are photographs, videos, drawings, graphic forms that pretend to be good humor vehicles, but hide mock and ridiculing. They have become an emergent mistreat in social networks, which can be aimed at individual, groups and even organizations.

According to Hernández (2016) a meme is a technical term that refers to a kind of recurrent internet trend, whose feature is the tendency to create cartoons with particular drawn faces; its origin is not only the author but a community named 4chan in which all this phenomenon started. Nowadays such cartoons have been replaced by furtively taken pictures of extracted from a photo album in the network, with the intent to ridicule the persons in such pictures.

Montero (2016) defines meme as a montage of images and text that are on the internet; the phenomenon has taken boundless dimensions, and beyond humor and anecdote has revitalized the relationship between production and circulation of images. The author emphasizes that initially there is an appropriation of an image that is later transformed through a photomontage. In other words, a picture with original shape is later transformed by the author or by others. Azahua (2014) points out that there is violence when one or more pictures are taken without the consent of the photographed person; the camera, she states, works against the will of the photographed person. Arango (2014) expresses that in the actual digital culture, memes are understood as any other text, image or video -with a certain sense of humor- that

is shared in social networks, but warns that the subjects involved reinterpret definitions of the reality, creating their own meaning. In other words, the person who makes a meme transforms an image generating a new one according to his/her own subjectivity. Thus, who creates a meme may think that he/she is doing something comic, but he/she is really harming and, hence, generating violence.

The indifference is another phenomenon that has been acquiring importance and has been recognized as a symbolic form of mistreat or violence with the use of WhatsApp. Leaving as "seen" and ignoring the messages produces discomfort in the other person. The researcher Ianire Estébañez (2016) states that this type of conduct can be considered as passive violence, since this omission produces harm; the person that suffers the indifference is psychologically damaged, especially in his/her self-esteem

1.4. From tranquility to discomfort

Definitely (Ortega-Ruiz, Del Rey and Sánchez, 2012, p. 46):

> The cyberspace has become and exchange space, not only of information, but particularly images, many of them very personal, as pictures of emotional moments and relevant events that could compromise the intimacy of the protagonists..

With electronic devices and instant messaging applications such as WhatsApp, students expand their social networks including friendships and enmities. In them they live happy moments, but also discomfort because, unfortunately, cases such as abuse, bullying, lack of respect, harassment and unjustified aggressions occur.

The objective of this research paper was to know how the social network WhatsApp is used by the students of the different educational programs of the University Center of the University of Guadalajara, and the incidence of old and new mistreats, which may be linked to the phenomenon known as cyberbullying.

2. Methodology

This research is descriptive and transverse, whose purpose is to describe the cohabitation of students in WhatsApp and their use of this application, in the context of behaviors that are identified with the phenomenon of cyberbullying.

2.1. Participants

The participants are 541 students of a total population of 17 000 students of a university center of a public university in the city of Guadalajara, Jalisco, in Mexico. The sample was probabilistic with a confidence level of 95% to estimate the proportion by means of a bilateral interval with a conservative approach, obtaining an error limit of 0.041 (4.1%). The sample comprised 45.6% of men and 54.4% of women, mostly from 18 to 26 years old, with the exception of two cases of people of 40 and 43 years old, who were students of the bachelor's program.

2.2. Instrument

A survey with a self-report structure was used. This survey was deliberately developed for this research, inspired in the instruments employed by Calmaestra and Ortega-Ruiz and by Madrid's ombudsman, whose reliability was validated in their studies of bullying and cyberbullying.

2.3. Data collection and codification

Once the sample was obtained, the directors responsible of the 11 Higher Education Programs of the University Center were addressed in order to generate basic conditions to facilitate the research process and communicate the intentions and purposes of the work. Afterwards participants were informed about the purpose of the inquiry, emphasizing that the instrument was anonymous and asking them to respond sincerely because no case would be considered individually. At the end of the survey the students signed

a section giving their consent of participating part in the research and acknowledging that each one was 18 or older. Students from the first to the tenth semesters took part in the study.

The self-report was applied by three researchers, and participants took between 20 and 25 minutes to complete it. They handed the filled report to a students' representative, who place them on the professor's desk. The researchers picked and counted the 541 surveys, and further the answers were analyzed using the statistical software SPSS version 21.

3. Analysis and results

The most remarkable findings included information which was separated in the following groups: connection time, hours, role of the victim, role of the aggressor.

3.1. Connection time

The average connection time was 7 hours during weekdays and 9 hours during weekends. Regarding the addiction to WhatsApp, a 71.3% of the sample point out that such application is addictive, but only a 34.3% affirmed to have developed a kind of addiction to WhatsApp.

Regarding connection hours, it was found that students are connected most of the day, even during school hours, and at least one of every two connections during early morning.

Table 1. Connection hours

At what time do you use WhatsApp	Never	Sometimes	Very often
1.- From 5 to 9 am	24%	63.1%	12.9%
2.- From 10 am to 2 pm	8.2%	53.1%	38.7%
3.- From 3 to 7 pm	5.7%	37.2%	57.2%
4.- From 8 pm to 12 midnight	2.6%	40.1%	57.3%
5.- From 1 to 4 am	57.4%	37.1%	5.4%

As can be seen in table 1, there is no preferred connection time, since students can be connected at any moment, even at early morning, as stated by 5.4% who indicated that he/she connects at that time very often.

WhatsApp has become a key application in the communication and cohabitation of the students of this university center, since 29.3% of the sample stated that the application is Very important in his/her life, a 63.5% considered that it is somewhat important, and 7.2% considered that it is no important. This is because they participate in communication groups with their school classmates (97.6%), to keep abreast of the assignments and other academic activities, also in groups of friends (93.6%) for training activities and in family groups (59.3%) to be in touch with their loved ones.

3.2. The mistreats in WhatsApp. The victims

Regarding the mistreats in WhatsApp it can be observed that being ignored is the one with most incidence, since it affects 6 of every 10 students, followed by offensive language, insults and ridiculing. The creation of memes with the victim's image is a new mistreat that emerges, harming him/her with messages of apparent jokes.

Table 2. Mistreats to the victims

In WhatsApp, have you been victim of any of the following bahavior from any of your contacts?	Never	Sometimess	Very often
1.- Have you been insulted?	64.9%	29.6%	5.5%
2.- Have you been threaten?	90.2%	8.7%	1.1%
3.- Have you been ridiculed?	81.7%	15.9%	2.4%
4.- Has someone written offensive words to you?	58.6%	37.3%	4.1%
5.- Have you been told phrases that have made you feel sexually harassed?	69.1%	27.2%	3.7%
6.- Has someone created memes with your image with the aim of ridiculing you?	81.3%	16.3%	2.4%
7.- Has someone recorded videos of you without your consent with the aim of ridiculing you?	87.6%	11.5%	0.9%
8.- Has someone sent you offensive voice notes with verbal violence?	87.2%	11.5%	1.3%
9. Have you been ignored?	22.2%	58.4%	19.4%

Other mistreats that emerges is receiving pornographic images without having requested them and without being informed about the content, as indicated by 48% of the sample, i.e. almost one of every two students. The same thing happens with 37.4% of the sample, who have received pornographic videos without having requested them and without being informed about the content.

In an open question students mentioned that it made them feel uncomfortable the fact of seeing them. The received material included pornographic videos, obscene pictures with very disturbing images. According to the answers, this happened within the three months prior to the interview.

3.3. The agressors

The survey allowed them to express if they made any of those mistreats, being in the role of aggressors. Results indicate that the greater mistreat is ignoring the other's messages, since 8 of every ten students has made indifference a common practice, turning it a new type of violence. Results are not very different with respect to what victims claim to have received, which confirms that the inappropriate use of WhatsApp is affecting the cohabitation of students at the higher level, which it is expected to find a low number of mistreats.

Table 3. The aggresors

In WhatsApp , have you carried out any of the following behaviors against any of your contacts?	Never	Sometimes	Very often
1.- Have you insulted him/her?	64.7%	30.1%	5.2%
2.- Have you threaten him/her?	94.3%	4.8%	0.9%
3.- Have you ridiculed him/her?	74.3%	21.6%	4.1%
4.- Have you written offensive words on his/her wall?	88.5%	9.8%	1.7%
5.- Have you written him/her phrases that have made him/her feel sexually harassed?	93%	4.6%	2.4%
6.- Have you made memes with his/her image with the aim of ridiculing him/her?	78.6%	17.2%	4.3%

In WhatsApp , have you carried out any of the following behaviors against any of your contacts?	Never	Sometimes	Very often
7.- Have you recorded videos of him/her without his/her consent with the aim of ridiculing him/her?	81.5%	16.3%	2.2%
8. Have you sent him/her offensive voice notes containing verbal violence?	86.7%	10.2%	3.1%
9. Have you ignored him/her?	22.7%	53.6%	23.7%

Item 9 of table 3 indubitably confirms, from the aggressors' point of view, that the indifference has become a behavior which starts to characterize another aspect of a form of exclusion when individuals are ignored, as 53% manifest to have done it Sometimes and 23% Very often. Discrimination of individuals in these contexts of virtual communication interaction, in this case through WhatsApp, generates in the victim feelings of omission and vacuum that significantly impacts his/her emotional profile.

4. Discussion and conclusions

An aspect that result significant is the fact of finding emerging mistreats that are arising as time goes on, such as indifference, which albeit frequent in face-to-face reality, now shows in cyberspace and is in the WhatsApp messages left as "seen". Another finding is the fact that memes become instruments for violence, distributed in this social network as an apparent simple joke, but which causes significant harm whom appears as the protagonist of the images robbed from his/her profile or album, or of the pictures or videos furtively taken. An image taken without consent is an act of violence. Pornography results uncomfortable, upsets whom without requesting it receives it an ambit supposed to be private and intimate. For this reason it should be considered a mistreat, since it also puts at risk the freedom of the person who receives it without consent, and because cyber polices are aware of the material that circulates which is prohibited by the penal codes of the world.

As stated by Area Moreira, Borrás Machado and San Nicolás (2015), is time that parents, teachers and the society address these issues, see the clear and the somber of social networks; the adults play a fundamental role as a guide for our children and students to show a good digital bahavior in the construction of a healthy digital identity that does not jeopardize his/her reputation, privacy and security. The school has to contribute by adapting the curricula the new times; any reform in the educational field should take into account the development of abilities for cohabitation in the cyberspace, and promote a culture for good internet management that benefits a digital society.

As stated by italian phylosopher Luciano Floridi (2018):

It is necessary that social networks conduct the ethical impact of the information and communication technologies on us and on our environment. It is necessary that they improve the economic, social and political information dynamics…it is necessary that philosophy develops the correct intellectual framework which helps to give significance and understand our new situation…an information philosophy is needed as the philosophy of our era for our era.

The uses of social networks, their logics of production, consumption and communication require new ethic, legal, axiological and educational frameworks that regulate the new and emergent communicational interactions of our era. The development of technologies require specific forms of epistemological and philosophical reflection that make possible frameworks of understanding about the diverse implications of what Floridi has rightly called "the era of the

infosphere", since it is remodeling and transforming human reality.

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