



Digital Skills' Role in Intended and Unintended Exposure to Harmful Online Content

Among European Adolescents



 irtis.muni.cz

 @irtis_muni

Natalie Tercova – IRTIS, Masaryk University

David Smahel – IRTIS, Masaryk University

73RD ANNUAL ICA CONFERENCE: Reclaiming Authenticity in Communication

Toronto, Ontario, Canada 26th of May 2023

Harmful online content (HOC)

=> wide range of content that depicts or promotes psychologically and physically harmful behaviors, attitudes, and experiences

(Keipi et al., 2017)

8-17% European adolescents stated that they were exposed to various types of harmful online content at least monthly

(Smahel et al., 2020)



Harm from exposure



Lower subjective
well-being

(Keipi et al., 2017)

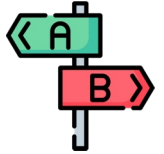


Risky offline
activities

(Branley & Covey, 2017)

Differences in exposure

Unintentional vs Intentional exposure



Different individual factors and digital practices?

Unintentional exposure

Content risk (i.e., exposure to potentially harmful content)

(Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021)

Intentional exposure

Conduct risk (i.e., active engagement in potentially harmful conduct)

(Livingstone & Stoilova, 2021)

Digital skills



Technical
& Operational



Communication &
interaction



Knowledge

Protective factors



Family support



Friend support

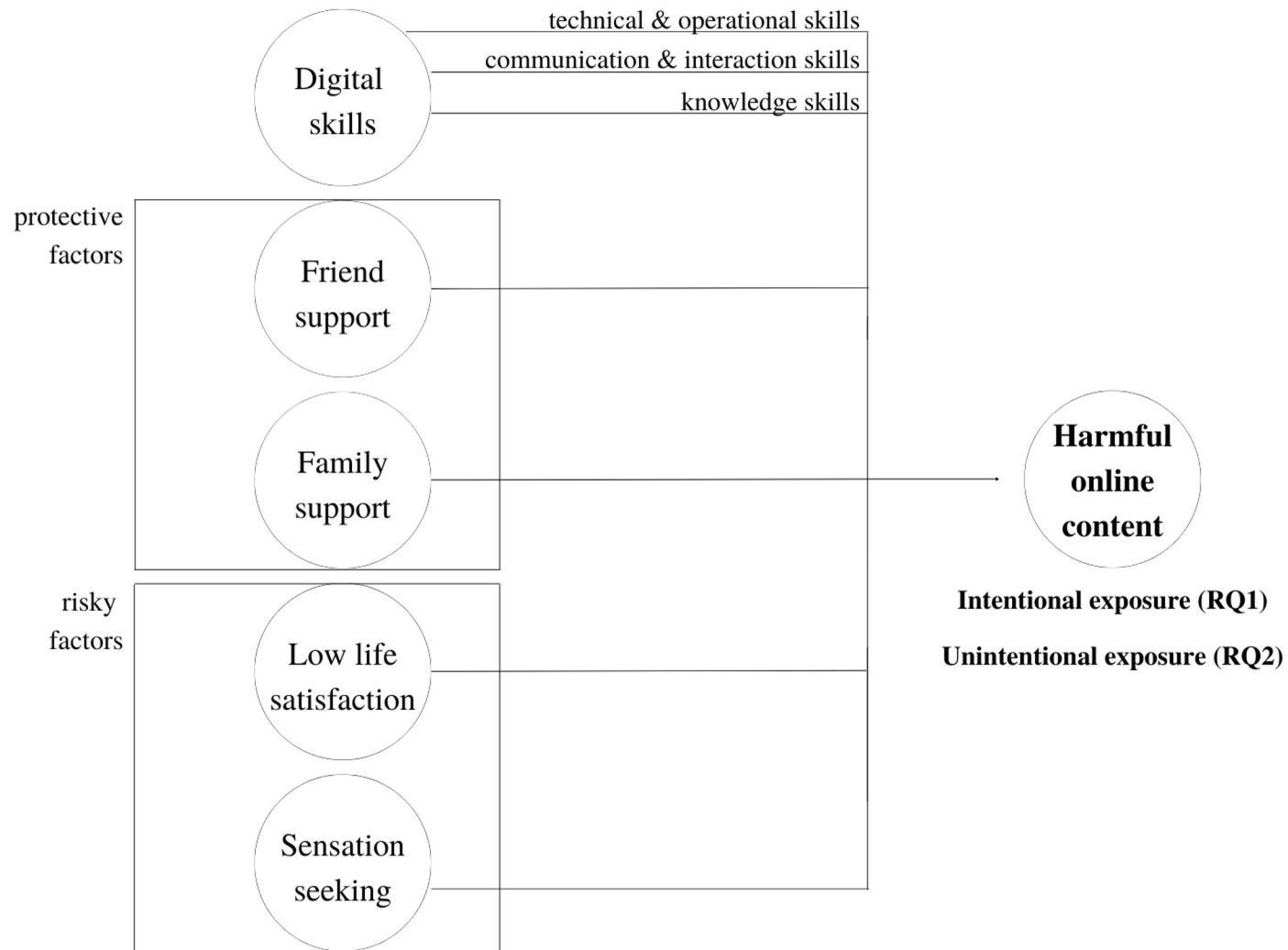
Risky factors



Sensation seeking



Low life satisfaction



2021 survey (1st wave)

$N = 3,934$

12-17 yo, $M = 14.4$, $SD = 1.30$

51 % boys

Estonia $n = 1,221$

Finland $n = 713$

Italy $n = 943$

Poland $n = 1,057$



Sample

Dependent variables

ON THE INTERNET, you may encounter content that is not healthy or that can be harmful. This includes content about taking drugs, alcohol, unhealthy dieting, or other behaviour which can be harmful for your health.

In the PAST YEAR, have you seen something like this online or on a phone?



Dependent variables

Unintentional HOC exposure

*How often have you seen something like this when you **DID NOT INTEND** to see it?*

6-point scale

Intentional HOC exposure

*How often have you seen something like this when you **INTENDED** to see it?*

6-point scale

Never,	
Once,	
A few times,	rare
At least every month,	
At least every week,	
Daily or almost daily.	more frequent
I do not know,	
Prefer not to say	

Independent variables

Digital skills



Technical
& Operational

7 items

E.g., I know how to use private browsing (e.g. incognito mode)

5-point scale



Communication &
interaction

6 items

E.g., I know how to report negative content relating to me or a group to which I belong

5-point scale



Knowledge

6 items

E.g., The first search result is always the best information source

3-point scale

Independent variables

Protective factors



Family support

3 items (**EUKO IV**; Zlamal et al., 2020)

E.g., *I feel safe at home*

4-point scale



Friend support

3 items (**EUKO IV**; Zlamal et al., 2020)

E.g., *My friends really try to help me*

4-point scale

Independent variables

Risky factors



Sensation seeking

Brief Sensation Seeking Scale
(Hoyle et al., 2002)

4 items

5-point scale



Low life satisfaction

Short Depression-Happiness
Scale
(Joseph et al., 2004)

6 items

4-point scale

Control variables

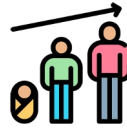


SES

(CBOS, 2014)

Which of the following best describes your financial situation and that of the people with whom you live?

5-point scale



Age



Country



Time online

About how long do you spend on the internet during a regular weekday (i.e., school day)?

7-point scale



Gender

Analysis



multinomial logistic regression was conducted

with SPSS v28.0.1.1.

Results



Unintentional exposure

Digital skills

Higher **technical and operational skills** found to be related to higher rare unintentional exposure to harmful online content.

Higher **knowledge skills** increased the likelihood of unintentional exposure to harmful online content in both frequency categories.

Regarding **communication and interaction skills**, no relationship was found.

Results



Intentional exposure

Digital skills

No relationship was supported for **any of the three types** of examined skills.

Results



Unintentional exposure

Protective factors

The findings **did not support any relationship** between friend and family support and unintentional exposure to harmful online content.

Results



Intentional exposure

Protective factors

Family support has been shown to act as a protective factor in more frequent intentional exposure to harmful online content (i.e., it reduced the likelihood of such exposure).

Lower **friend support** was related to lower rare intentional exposure to harmful online content.

Results



Unintentional exposure

Risky factors

The role of both **sensation seeking** and **low life satisfaction** as risk factors was supported for unintended exposure to harmful online content in all frequency categories.

Results



Intentional exposure

Risky factors

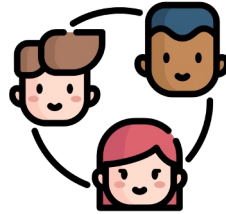
The role of both **sensation seeking** and **low life satisfaction** as risk factors was supported for intended exposure to harmful online content in all frequency categories.

Discussion



digital skills:

- a) provide opportunities & may help avoiding the online dangers
- a) provide access to risky content



friend support
may act inversely
as a risk factor



having certain digital
skills $\neq$ adolescents
protecting
themselves

Thank you!

Natalie Tercova

natalieterc@mail.muni.cz

Interdisciplinary Research Team on
Internet and Society

<https://irtis.muni.cz>

stay in touch



Natalie Tercova



NatalieTerc



<https://yskills.eu>

