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Media literacy as intergenerational project: skills, norms, and mediation

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Digital Media Literacy of Children with Parents Working Abroad

Case Study of the Romanian Northeastern Area

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Abstract

Romania is one of the countries in the European Union that has been confronted with a large intra-EU migration of population towards countries such as Italy, Spain, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom in the last two decades. Thus, one or both parents work abroad for several months or sometimes for years and their children are left in the care of their grandparents or other close relatives. This phenomenon has large implications for the Romanian society and certain regions, such as the Northeastern, are dealing with the consequences. The paper addresses the question of media literacy of the children whose parents are working abroad and adds to the current discussions, in particular to a discourse that does not position children of migrant workers as automatically disadvantaged. As a foundation for our study we used a skills-based model of media literacy (Riesmeyer, Pfaff-Rüdiger, and Kümpel 2012; Dewe and Sander 1996; Groeben 2002; Livingstone 2004). We conducted thirty in-depth interviews with children and adolescents from the Northeastern region of Romania between January and April 2018. Romanian children and adolescents with parents working abroad live in a favourable economic context and have better access to communication technology than their peers. The migration situation influences the motivational dimension of media skills but probably has little influence on legal media skills. Social media offers them technical support in order to see their parents, to share their problems and worries. It is often used for educational purposes in this particular situation.

Digitale Medienkompetenzen von Kindern, deren Eltern im Ausland arbeiten. Eine Fallstudie aus Rumänien

Zusammenfassung

Rumänien, als eines der jüngsten Mitglieder der Europäischen Union, wurde in den letzten zwanzig Jahren mit einer hohen Migration konfrontiert. Es handelte sich um Arbeitsmigration aus Rumänien in Richtung Italien, Frankreich, Deutschland und Grossbritannien. Bei einigen Familien handelt es sich nicht nur um ein Elternteil, sondern oftmals um beide

Elternteile, die für einige Monate oder sogar Jahre ihre Kinder bei Grosseltern oder Verwandten lassen und ins Ausland gehen. Dieses Phänomen prägt die rumänische Gesellschaft, insbesondere den Nordosten Rumäniens. Unsere Studie widmet sich der digitalen Medienkompetenz der Kinder, deren Eltern im Ausland arbeiten. Wir möchten dabei die Idee betonen, dass diese Kinder und Jugendliche nicht benachteiligt sind. Die theoretische Grundlage bietet das Medienkompetenz-Modell (Riesmeyer, Pfaff-Rüdiger, und Kümpelel 2012; Dewe und Sander 1996; Groeben 2002; Livingstone 2004). Leitfadeninterviews wurden im Zeitraum zwischen Januar und April 2018 mit Kindern und Jugendlichen aus der Region Nordosten Rumänien durchgeführt. Sie haben eine bessere ökonomische Situation und einen besseren Zugang zu Kommunikationstechnologien als deren Freunde. Der Migrationshintergrund beeinflusst die motivationalen Fähigkeiten und hat wenig Einfluss auf die rechtliche Medienkompetenz. Soziale Netzwerk-Plattformen bieten technische Unterstützung, um Probleme und Sorgen mit den Eltern zu teilen.

Introduction

Romania is one of the countries in the European Union (EU) that has been confronted with a large intra-EU migration of population towards countries such as Italy, Spain, France, Germany and the United Kingdom over the last two decades. In search of a better-paid place of employment, a significant number of parents have left their children at home with their relatives. The intra-European migration movements towards Western countries started even before 2007 when Romania joined the European Union and significantly increased after the accession. Even between 2015 and 2018 the number of children with parents working abroad increased. The official Romanian data reveals that at the end of 2017 about 95.000 children were registered to have at least one parent working abroad and about 18,000 children had both parents working abroad. There are significant differences between the figures published by the Romanian Child Protective Services and those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the latter reporting over 150.000 children that had at least one parent working abroad at the beginning of 2018 (Digi24 2017; presidency.ro 2018). The differences in the data provided by the Romanian Child Protective Services (DGASPC) and the Romanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs occur due to the fact that not every parent working abroad notifies the authorities about the situation of their child or children, even if the Romanian law requires it.

The Northeastern part of Romania, one of the poorest regions in the EU, is especially affected by the consequences of this work migration phenomenon, which has raised concerns at the level of the local and national authorities. The official data from the Romanian Child Protective Services (DGASPC) mentioned 31.391 children from the Northeastern Region with at least one parent who registered as working abroad at the beginning of 2018 (presidency.ro 2018).

Suceava is the second largest county in Romania but occupies the first position regarding the number of people that are working abroad. There are 140,000 people that have left the country in order to find a better job. Thus 20% of the total population is working outside Romania. According to the latest statistics of Child Protective Services (DGASPC) Suceava, at the end of the first trimester of 2017, there were 9.031 children from 6430 families in Suceava County with parents working abroad (DGSVA 2018). Some of the parents leave their homes to work abroad for six months each year; others do so for as many as several years. In fortunate cases, they sometimes return home for Easter or Christmas and during the summer vacation. There are also sadder cases of children not seeing their parents face to face for years. From the perspective of the economy in the region, the positive effects of this phenomenon have been observed. There is also an impact on other dimensions of the social and cultural life in these communities (Sandu 2010).

There is a body of literature on Romanian migrants working in other EU countries (Sandu 2010; 2016), but there are no publications that deal with the children left at home and their media competences, even if media plays an important role in the child-parent relationship under these circumstances. Because of the family conditions, the way they use digital media and especially their media literacy is an interesting topic to explore. On the one hand, we assume that there is an additional motivation in gaining media competencies for both children and parents, but on the other hand, parents are less involved in the media activities of their children. They are not physically present in order to properly supervise their children.

Within the media menu, the Internet has developed into an important source of information and communication in the last decade, sometimes even to such an extent that it has become indispensable for certain audiences. It has also become one of the main ways to spend free time especially for children and adolescents (Livingstone and Bulger 2014; Livingstone and Third 2017). Romanian children and teenagers are no exception to the global trend when it comes to their preferences for using the Internet and social media. Among the social media applications, Facebook is highly used in Romania: in December 2017, there were 9.6 million Facebook users in Romania (49% of the population and 66.7% of the Internet users). YouTube has 858,630 users with visible activity and Instagram is in third place with 581.849 users. Twitter is not so popular in Romania, with just 377.783 users (zelist.ro 2018).

The particular situation of the Internet and social media literacy of children and adolescents left in the care of their grandparents or close relatives, with one or both parents working abroad is the subject of the present research. Daily communication via emails, calls or social media between children and adolescents on the one hand and their parents who work abroad, on the other hand, is actually recommended by the Romanian authorities. It is one of the ten recommendations that the Child Protective Service Suceava formulated in a paper dedicated to the parents working

abroad. Mediated communication with their children is advised. The parents are urged to have a close dialogue with the educators in the school in order to see if something is wrong with their children. However, no word is mentioned about media education. The skills required for using Internet-based tools of communication are taken for granted. A closer look at the way media competencies are gained in this particular situation can be a challenging, but useful task for future media education projects that can be developed in the region.

Media Literacy in a Changing Media Environment

The theoretical background of our research should start with a definition of media literacy. In the changing media context, how is media literacy defined nowadays? What are the particularities of digital media literacy? Are there any suitable models for the digital media literacy of children? These are some of the questions that we posed with respect to the theoretical framework of the present research. Media literacy is often defined as «the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and create media in a variety of forms» (Christ and Potter 1998, 7). Media access creates a link between the social framework and the technological skills and opportunities to go online. Media literacy focuses on knowledge, culture, and participation through media. Media-literate users have the technological skills to create and share content within their communities (Livingstone 2004). In a diversified media environment where the role of social media in the daily media diet of different types of audiences has increased, the particularities of the digital media literacy must be addressed in the sense that «the priority now is to develop a subtle and detailed account of how people understand, trust and critically evaluate information and communication contents delivered on new platforms» (Livingstone and van der Graaf 2010, 1).

Potter (2004a; 2004b) synthesizes the major ideas from different media literacy approaches. At first, media literacy was seen as the ability to recognize different symbols in visual media and on the printed page, while also being concerned with the construction of meaning by humans that are exposed to media messages; the second idea is that literacy requires different skills, such as critical thinking, analysis or evaluation; third, literacy requires knowledge, which is then used to evaluate the accuracy of media messages; fourth, the goal of media literacy is to improve individuals in their media knowledge and the fifth idea is that media literacy must deal with values (Potter and Christ 2007). Thus, the literature on media literacy focuses not only on conceptual concerns, definitions, models and importance but also on the implementation of media education through existing institutions, such as family and school in case of children (Potter 2010). Other scholars emphasized the particularities of audio-visual media literacy, which has some similarities with Internet media literacy. In the last decade, the research on media literacy has focused on new

literacies based on the technological, cultural and historical specificity of particular media such as computer literacy, cyber-literacy, Internet literacy, network literacy, digital literacy or information-literacy (Livingstone 2004).

Some approaches distinguish between media literacies that emphasize tool use, such as technology literacy, computer literacy, and network literacy and those that are essentially literacies of representation, such as information literacy, visual literacy and media literacy. Other voices highlight the idea of a pan-media literacy (Hobbs and Frost 2003). Media literacy does not only mean the four practices: to access, to analyze, to evaluate and to create media messages that support each other as part of a «nonlinear, dynamic learning process» (Livingstone 2004), but it can also have an empowerment function (Hobbs 2011). For some scholars, media literacy represents «(1) the symbolic and material representation of knowledge, culture, and values; (2) the diffusion of interpretative skills and abilities across a (stratified) population; and (3) the institutional, and especially the state, management of the power that access to and skilled use of knowledge brings to those who are literate» (Livingstone and van der Graaf 2010).

The growing use of the Internet and of social media, the accessibility of the mobile technology has made it easier for everyone not only to access the Internet and social media but also to become a media content creator. Therefore, the analysis and evaluation of media content have become a very important dimension of media literacy. It involves the critical abilities to understand knowledge and to relate it to one's own practices (Riesmeyer, Pfaff-Rüdiger, and Kümpel 2012). Digital users have to be able to see relevant cultural traditions and values, have interpretative skills, address questions of media agency, media categories, media languages, media audiences, and media representations. Evaluation is related to the contextual and critical knowledge, taking into consideration the changing of criteria of quality, authority, and standards (Livingstone 2004).

This research focuses on the digital media literacy of the children from the area affected by the above-described phenomenon. This particular case is an opportunity to analyze the inter-generational digital media skills transfer (Ponte and Aroldi 2013; Abad 2014; Sanchez, Kaplan, and Bradley 2015). The pedagogic argument that people learn more about media by using it has become more relevant in the digital context. There are benefits to learning how to use and create digital content in terms of cultural expression and civic participation.

The theoretical background of our research is a skills-based model of media literacy within the framework of the self-determination theory that includes cognitive, evaluative, emotional and social skills. According to the self-determination theory, media literacy is related to the successful fulfillment of needs by using the media (Riesmeyer, Pfaff-Rüdiger, and Kümpel 2012). The communication with one or both parents working abroad is in our particular case a need that has to be fulfilled by

using the Internet and social media. The model was developed in the context of the Internet use of German children and adolescents. It differentiates between three dimensions of media literacy: expertise (media knowledge and awareness of mediality), self-competence (evaluative skills, motivational skills, emotional skills, creative skills) and social competence (participatory skills, communicative skills, educational skills, moral skills). The four elements of Potter's media definition are to some extent integrated into the model. In addition, we consider that the dimension of accessibility should be integrated for the purpose of our research.

One of the core issues of media literacy nowadays is the gap between the media skills of children on the one hand and those of their parents on the other hand (Livingstone and Helsper 2008; 2012). Regarding these dimensions, we have taken a closer look at the interaction between children/adolescents on the one hand and caregivers and parents working abroad on the other hand in order to analyze the inter-generational transfer of skills.

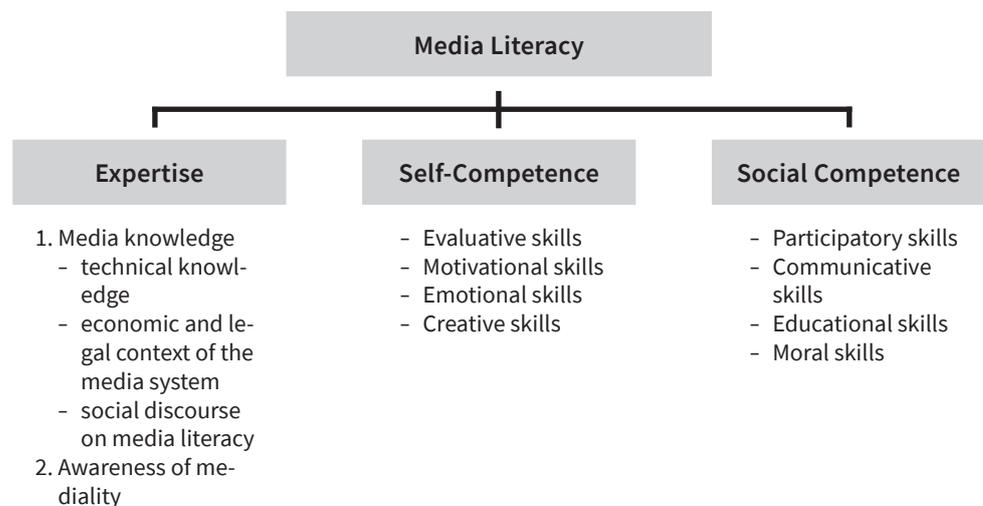


Fig. 1.: Media literacy model (following Dewe and Sander 1996; Groeben 2002; Livingstone 2004; Pfaff-Rüdiger, Riesmeyer and Kümpel 2012).

Media literacy in the migration context

Previous literature on media literacy highlighted the role of parents in media education. Family is the first place where children come in contact with media. Among other relevant actors such as schools, social and civic institutions, parents help children in developing media literacy (DeGaetano and Bander 1996; Potter 2016). For nowadays children who spend a lot of time using media, parental media mediation as a part of family education process become more relevant (Valkenburg et al. 2013; An and Lee 2010). The role of parents in media education consists not only in setting boundaries

but also in showing interest in their children media use, delivering inspiring practice. Being good role models and helping the children to develop a critical understanding of media content are parts of appropriate media education. For media educational purposes parents have to take a closer look at the risk and opportunities of the media use of their children (Pereira 2015).

For parents working abroad and not being physically close to their children, those tasks can be hard to accomplish. Children will not have the possibility to watch their parents using media on a daily basis; parents will not have the possibility to discuss with them about their media interests. The development of the critical thinking component (Adams and Hamm 2001; Potter 2010) that is considered to be one of the most relevant dimensions of media literacy will suffer. Other members of the families such as siblings, grandparents, or other caregivers will be involved in media education of the children. Lack of time, lack of media knowledge, or even lack of authority are the common obstacles when it comes to media literacy provided under these circumstances. Modern information and communication technologies are not solving the problems of separation within families but can contribute to a new experience of migration and parenting (Madianou and Miller 2012).

Method

Our research objective was to explore the media literacy of the children with one or both parents working abroad, using the skills-based model (Riesmeyer, Pfaff-Rüdiger, and Kümpel 2012). We also took a closer look at the inter-generational interactions between children on the one hand and grandparents (in this case, caregivers) on the other hand with respect to the digital skills and norms.

The research method consisted of in-depth interviews with 30 children in the time frame January-April 2018. The interviews were conducted face to face at the children's homes or at school with the consent of their tutors. The children and teenagers were aged between 10 and 18 years old; we spoke to 16 girls and 14 boys. Our sample consisted of 14 children aged between 10 and 15, 16 children aged between 15 and 18. 5 children had both of their parents working abroad. Out of the remaining 25, 15 children had their father working in another country and 10 children their mother. Taking into consideration that children and adolescents were the interviewees, we adapted our instruments to the particularity of this group (Meyen et al. 2011; Paus-Hasebrink 2005; Keuneke 2005). The interviews lasted between 35-40 minutes and the children were interviewed in pairs, while the adolescents were interviewed one at a time.

The interview guide included questions on how they used social media in the interaction with their parents working abroad, based on the theoretical framework of the media skills model (Riesmeyer, Pfaff-Rüdiger, and Kümpel 2012) we relied on.

We asked them how and to what purpose they used social media in order to evaluate the technical media knowledge of the children and of their parents and caregivers (according to the children's perspective). We paid special attention to the knowledge transfer issues between children and adolescents on the one hand and adults on the other hand. We asked if the children were aware of the risk they faced on social media, on the norms and moral aspects of using it. We asked them if they talked about school and daily problems with their parents through social media. We talked about their motivation and their parents' motivation to use social media in this particular situation. For data analysis we followed a theory-driven approach, using theoretical coding based on the media skills model that we applied.

Throughout the entire process, we paid attention to the ethical aspects of this type of research, which involves working with children and adolescents. We informed the adults (parent or other caregivers) about the purpose of the present research and the interview guide. Thus, we obtained informed consent for the participation of the children and adolescents. We also informed the participants that the aim of our study was to explore the way they use social media. Their participation in the present study was voluntary.

Media Skills of the Romanian Children with Parents Working Abroad

All the children and adolescents that we interviewed had Internet access at home or on their mobile phones and tablets. Even if their homes are situated in one of the economically weakest regions of the European Union, Internet access is not an issue. The majority of the children and adolescents had smartphones, with the only exceptions of the youngest ones (aged 10-12), who only had a simple mobile phone with a prepaid card. But even the ones in this particular situation reported having internet access on their tablets or laptops at home and being capable of using these devices: «I have learned to use the Internet by myself, nobody showed me how to do it», said Bogdan, a 10-year-old boy. The majority of adolescents use Facebook and Facebook Messenger, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat in order to communicate with their peers, or even to see what their favorite celebrities are doing online. Facebook Messenger and WhatsApp are preferred in communication with their parents who are working abroad. The conversations are on a daily basis, sometimes several times a day. Usually, the parent that works abroad initiates the communication after finishing work. Sometimes, when adolescents are faced with problems or need some advice or approval, they are the ones who call their parents. Video calls are preferred. In the case of younger children, parents sometimes call them on their phones, but usually, they communicate in the evening via Facebook Messenger or WhatsApp on their grandmothers' smartphones or laptops. Generally, mobile communication is preferred over the use of the Internet on laptops. Having relatives abroad is a good

motivation to learn how to use social media: «my grandmother asked me to teach her to use Facebook because her girls are working in Ireland and she needs to communicate with them» (Camelia, 16, f). Applications such as Skype or Viber were also mentioned in some cases, but Facebook and WhatsApp have replaced them in terms of the frequency of use over the last two years. Several adolescents that have a long experience of communication with their parents abroad emphasized the advantage of new technologies compared to phone calls, which had been the only option in the past. Smartphones allow them to have access to communication tools, through which they not only speak with their parents but also see them. They have developed this notion of being able to reach their parents any time they need them and the other way around.

The Internet and especially social media are the most important items in the media diet of the adolescents we talked to. Sometimes they watch TV, but they do not listen to the radio or read books apart from the ones that are compulsory reading for school. They enjoy listening to music via YouTube or even Spotify, watching series online or playing online games. The children we talked to were much more interested in TV shows and they mentioned watching cartoons as one of their favorite media-related activities.

Expertise

Technical Media Knowledge

Using the media taught our interviewees about digital media. Technical competences in the field of social media use, smartphones and applications were never a subject during classes at school, nor did the parents or grandparents introduce the children and adolescents to this type of knowledge. In some cases, they learned from their siblings, cousins or other older children. They know many things about the applications they use and what these can offer them in terms of advantages and disadvantages for the communication process with their parents. The adolescents and some children use smartphones and the related applications that they would need to communicate with their peers: Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Snapchat, Hangouts, etc. Some of them use this type of media to communicate with their parent(s) who is (are) in another country, especially Facebook and WhatsApp, as we mentioned above.

The children are aware that they are more familiar with this type of technology than their parents. They even introduced their parents to this type of media that facilitates communication: «Two years ago my elder brother made a Facebook account for my father and taught him how to use it (the father works in Germany) and then I made one for my mother and we both taught her how to use it. This is how

we can communicate more easily (using video calls... we did the same with their smartphones» (Valentina, f, 18). Parents and tutors are the ones who learn from their children and teenagers when it comes to digital media technology: «I created my Facebook page, my brother's and my sister's and then I helped my parents to create one» (Teodora, f, 17). Alex, an 11-year-old boy said: «my sister is the one that knows how to use Facebook Messenger better. She made one account for my grandma, too. Sometimes, grandma asks her for help, too.» A sort of pride was expressed in relation to the technical competencies that they have and to the fact that they can help their parents and grandparents to get familiar with the technology. When it comes to the use of media technology, this type of know-how transfer from the younger to the older generation is a common practice not necessarily related to the migration situation. The motivation to do this is related to migration in these particular cases: «grandmother wanted to use Facebook in order to communicate with her daughter, my mother and with other relatives that are working abroad» (Alex, m, 11). Especially the adolescents' digital skills influence their parents' and caregivers' digital skills too.

Legal and Economic Context

Young users are not aware of the legal framework of the Internet and social media usage. They did not talk about this subject in school or with their parents or tutors. None of them were even curious to read the terms of use or the privacy settings of any application they had installed. Even adolescents automatically agreed to the terms and conditions of use. They only checked if the applications were free and tried to avoid paid ones, usually by uninstalling them. Illegal downloads, copying homework from the Internet are not problematic issues at all for the children and adolescents we interviewed. With respect to the legal context of digital media usage, the children and the adolescents we talked to pointed out that their parents working abroad or their grandparents never expressed any concern. This aspect gave the children a false sense of freedom. They are not aware of the large economic and legal frame of the use of social media. We cannot find a connection between the lack of legal knowledge about media of children and adolescents and the fact that their parents work abroad. Certainly, the interaction between children and adolescents and their parents mostly takes place over social media and from the point of view of the duration, it is not as intensive as the interaction of a family living together. A lack of basic legal knowledge about the use of the Internet is a common situation for many parents or grandparents as previous research suggested (Livingstone and Helsper 2008).

Gadgets such as smartphones and tablets are favorite gifts for the children and adolescents we talked to. They usually received them for birthdays, for Christmas or during the summer vacation when their parents came home to visit them. The migration background provides them with a superior economic status compared to their peers in school and they are aware of it.

Social Discourse about Risks and Norms

Some of the interviewees seemed to be aware, to varying degrees, of the risks connected to the use of digital media. For example, the fact that some people might change their identity is a phenomenon that some of them have already experienced or applied, but, «just for fun» (Claudiu, m, 17). Cyberbullying is a phenomenon that they are aware of and condemn. They are aware that this is not a practice that they should apply: «It is not ok when a friend commented rudely on one of my classmate's photos » (Denisa, f, 15).

Regarding the cyber-bullying phenomenon, there were some discussions during classes, led by one of their informatics teachers. Also, concerning data security, some of them apply the knowledge they acquired, but only when it comes to laptops or home computers, not when it comes to smartphones. No child or adolescent we talked to reported to have suffered from this type of issues, so they never talked to their parents about bullying. Cyberbullying cases related to the migration situations were not reported during our interviews. They never talked with their parents or grandparents about social norms on the Internet and in social media or about online threats.

Some of the children and adolescents mentioned the fact the parent at home or the grandmothers took their smartphone away for one or even several days when they misbehaved, as a form of punishment. It was a difficult time for them since smartphones play a very important role in their daily life taking into consideration a large amount of time they use them (between 2 and 5 hours a day based on their self-reported usage behavior). Nevertheless, the smartphone deprivation did not apply to the daily communication with the parent working abroad, for which the smartphone of the other parent or of the caregiver was used.

Awareness of Mediality

The children and adolescents we interviewed consider the Internet to be primarily a space for socializing, communicating, playing and even finding answers to different problems or even for homework. Some of them see it as an indispensable element of their daily lives, spending almost all their free time in front of their electronic devices: «I spend more than 5 hours a day from Monday to Friday and during weekends, almost the whole day» (Lenuta, f, 17). Some of them interact in groups with their close friends: «I like to update my friends about my activities by posting daily snaps on Snapchat.» (Mihaela, f, 14).

Awareness of mediality is strongly linked to evaluative and moral skills. The children often do not realize that their online actions may have consequences in real life. The Internet is seen as an important resource for learning: «I use the Internet in order to learn the lessons of life», was the answer of the 10-year-old Bogdan when he was asked about the reasons for using this type of media.

Self-competence

Evaluative Skills

Self-competence is related to the need for autonomy and identity (Riesmeyer, Pfaff-Rüdiger, and Kümpel 2012). Almost all the interviewed children are aware that they reveal personal information about themselves when using the Internet or social media. They have some privacy settings activated on their Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat accounts but do not seem to care much about sharing private information. When they download and install the applications they do not pay much attention to the privacy settings. But, in some cases, especially the adolescents have a strategy for following and unfollowing people on the Internet, or even blocking colleagues or friends for behavior that they consider to be inappropriate. Apparently, they do not see many risks in using social media applications: «Nothing bad has ever happened to me since I started using these apps (Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, WhatsApp, Viber)» (Andrei, m, 15). Others prefer Snapchat: «I share what I want people to know about me. I mainly use Snapchat especially for this reason: everything disappears after my friends see it». (Alex, m, 17). No parents or tutors are active on Instagram or Snapchat, just the older siblings in some cases. The former only have accounts on Facebook and WhatsApp.

Motivational Skills

The internet seems to fulfill the majority of young people's needs in terms of interaction and entertainment: «I can find anything I want: friends, books, movies, games, news» (Alex, m, 13) They abandon their physical activities or hobbies in favor of spending more time online, sometimes discovering new hobbies, such as online gaming. Prioritizing activities is often influenced by parents or, in their absence, by caregivers. Following TV stars or influencers online is also one of the reasons to use social media, especially Instagram. Sometimes they do this for fun, only for entertainment purposes or simply because they are curious to see what other people post. Influencers and TV stars tend to be role models for them.

Communication with their parents is not the main reason they use social media, but it proves to be a relevant component. The young people are the ones that encouraged their parents to use social media applications: «before, we only used the

phone (audio calls). Now, when we have so many new social media applications, why shouldn't we use them? I made them both Facebook accounts and now it's easier» (Alex, m, 17). Media and social media applications play a very important role in our interviewees' lives, as far as communicating with their parents is concerned: «I am happy that now there are so many applications that we can use to communicate. We mostly use video calls now, instead of only audio calls, like we used to. We used Skype, but now it has some technical problems, so we use Facebook Messenger instead» (Ionela, f, 17). The children's and adolescents' perception of their parent's motivation to use the technology is mainly to communicate with them: «definitely, my father only learned to use Facebook in order to communicate with me» (Ana Maria, f, 18).

Emotional Skills

The emotional state of these children and adolescents may often be influenced by their activity on social media: «I am part of several groups on Facebook: sometimes we laugh, sometimes we have fights about different subjects and then I get angry» (Ionut, m, 14). This is why some of them, as a protective measure, prefer to stay offline: «when my friends or classmates start to have a fight on our Messenger group, I just don't join them and stay offline for a few hours until I stop receiving notifications... this being a sign that it is over» (Alina, f, 16). The Internet can provide a way to escape for our interviewees: «I tend to play online with my friends when I am tired or sick. I could play the whole day and forget about my problems» (Marius, m, 17). The Internet and social media have the function of a mood management tool and to the ability to deal with emotions online (Riesmeyer, Pfaff-Rüdiger, and Kümpel 2012). This is the reason why sometimes they search for a funny video on YouTube.

Creative skills

The children and adolescents we talked to consider themselves to be creative in the digital media. Most of them were able to open and manage their own accounts on Facebook, Instagram or Snapchat. In some cases, they even started a WhatsApp group with more relatives that work abroad in order to see photos or videos. Some of them also created a YouTube account but only for the purposes of subscribing to some channels for access to unlimited content. They even helped their parents or caregivers to open their own accounts on social media. One of the girls started a vlog, influenced by the public figures she follows on YouTube and by her friends: «I created my own vlog after my friends encouraged me. I follow some vloggers and I thought it could be interesting to have my own vlog» (Adina, f, 16). The majority confessed that they have the knowledge to create content, which is predominantly related to creating profiles on social networking sites and on smartphone applications. Taking

pictures with their smartphones, improving them with the help of apps or filters, or hashtags on social media is a common activity for them. Some of the results of these activities are shared with their parents abroad via WhatsApp, which they consider to be the best option from the point of view of image quality.

Social Competence

Participatory Skills

Missing the parents who are not physically present in their daily lives makes young people see the need for communicating with them as a priority. They started using almost only different social media apps instead of the classical phone calls: «I like that Facebook Messenger offers us the opportunity of video calls. We can see our parents and they can see us and our grandma as well. Our grandmother is taking care of us» (Teodora, f, 17).

They use several applications in order to communicate with their parents, such as Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, Viber, Hangouts, Skype. Their availability online is almost permanent, the Internet no longer being an expensive service: «I communicate with my father (who works in Germany) anytime I need to talk with him or when he needs to. If something happens, I call him immediately. We prefer WhatsApp video calls» (Sanziana, f, 17). Usually, it is the parents who buy them smartphones and other gadgets, sometimes also in order to substitute their presence.

Communicative Skills

As stated before, in some cases, parents are the persons they approach with the aid of smartphones when it comes to daily life problems. As we mentioned before children and adolescents call or text their parents when advice or approval for important issues is needed: «my parents play the most important role in my life. In order to have a closer relationship to them even if they both work abroad, I talk to them about my personal life. The simple act of hearing them does wonders for me» (Teodora, f, 17). There are also other not so fortunate cases in which the parent working abroad is not the first person they turn to when it comes to solving problems. One of our interviewees' explanation was the distance between them: «I don't call my father (who is in Greece) for every minor problem that I believe I can solve on my own.» (Alexandros, m, 17).

Educational Skills

The children and adolescents we talked to have developed media skills and some of them even share their knowledge with their peers, with their parents and caregivers. Adolescents consider themselves to have a high level of mastery when showing

others how to use the Internet and different applications. The reported problem is that they usually learn from their own mistakes, as they do not have specialized staff around, who could show them what they did wrong. They even use media for educational purposes, some of them using several websites and applications: «I and my brothers... we use Brainly for homework. It's free and easy» (Mihaela, f, 14). Even Wikipedia is mentioned to be an important tool for education even if it is not a reliable one. But this is something that the adolescents and children are not aware of. They had not discussed this issue in school. They were also asked about how they evaluate the quality of information they find online and use for their homework. They mentioned Wikipedia as a reliable source for this, as well as the opinions of other colleagues. This is certainly not the appropriate way of doing research for homework.

Children and especially adolescents played an important role in educating their parents or caregivers about the Internet and social media use from the technological perspective, but knowledge about a larger context is missing on both sides. The interaction with their parents via social media apps contributed to a closer bond. Video calls allowed both parents and children to express and evaluate their emotions. The parents can identify problematic situations their children are facing more easily and take action when necessary.

Moral Skills

The interviewees are aware of the moral dimension when it comes to digital media use. They talked about the immoral behavior of their friends: «I have a friend that has a fake Facebook account, but I think it's useless to have one and is not OK» (Bogdan, m, 16). They did not mention discussions with their parents or grandparents about morality on digital media. Digital media literacy means not only skills but also «an interpretative relationship with a complex, symbolically-encoded, technologically mediated text» (Livingstone 2004). This is a dimension of media literacy that is underdeveloped. Children and adolescents do not discuss the moral aspects of the Internet and social media use with their parents or with their caregivers.

Conclusions

Summarizing our findings regarding our research question, we can emphasize that young people's digital skills influence their parents' and caregivers', too. The information transfer usually goes from the young generation to the older generation. Learning is a «movement by movement» process and it is not a systematic one» (Johnson-Eilola 1998, 195). This is the usual learning pattern that is so frequent in postmodern society. The evolution of technology allows for better communication between the children and adolescents and their parents working abroad. The advantage of today's communication using audio-video calls instead of the classic phone calls was

mentioned several times during our interviews. It contributes to educational purposes in the sense that even if the parents are far away, they can still identify the problems of their children and adolescents. Bonding is also facilitated.

Facebook and WhatsApp are the top applications used by children and adolescents in order to communicate with their parents who work abroad. Technical knowledge is the dimension of media literacy that is usually transferred from children and adolescents to their parents and grandparents. Due to this particular situation, even grandparents are motivated to be active online and young people are supportive of this. Technical knowledge is much more developed than knowledge about the legal or economic context when it comes to media literacy of both children and adolescents on the one hand and parents or caregivers on the other hand. The migration situation influences the motivation dimension of media skills but probably has little influence on the legal media skills of young people.

Having one or both parents working abroad plays an important role with respect to the media literacy of their children at least when it comes to the acquisition of communication technology, but also for the motivation behind using it. The parents are trying to substitute the lack of physical presence in their children's lives by buying them expensive gifts. Smartphones and other gadgets are among their favorite presents. They are also seen as status symbols. As previous research on intra-EU children of migrants underlined (Sandu 2010), the majority of the boys and girls we interviewed have a superior material status compared to many of their colleagues. In our case, children of migrant parents are not disadvantaged. They have additional motivation to use media in order to communicate with their parents. Social media offers them technical support in order to see their parents, to share their problems and worries with them. In this particular situation, social media communication is used for educational purposes as well. Children of migrants prove not to be disadvantaged, their life situation contributing to the development of their media skills.

Children and adolescents play a very important role in the communication process between their parents and their grandparents at home. The first group mainly facilitates the use of technology (that is purchased for them by their parents working abroad), but parents or caregivers are not able to provide substantial support when it comes to legal, educational or moral skills. Our research has once again proved that media literacy of children and adolescents is developed even in the absence of explicit attempts to encourage and promote it (Buckingham 2005).

Coming back to the media skills model (Riesmeyer, Pfaff-Rüdiger, and Kümpel 2012), all the fields that define media competencies are influenced to a certain extent by the particular situation of having one or both parents working abroad. Children and adolescents tend to have high expertise in the use of digital media and especially of several social media apps, as they are strongly motivated to use them. This particular situation has a positive effect on developing digital media skills for their

grandparents and other caregivers who are motivated to communicate with their relatives abroad, while also being encouraged and supported by the children and adolescents that they are taking care of. Having one or both parents working abroad and not being able to see them for a long time is a strong additional motivation to use social media. But this is not the only motivation. There are also drawbacks to the digitally mediated relation between children, adolescents and parents that work abroad, such as using social media as a substitute for the parent that is far away.

Based on a qualitative methodology, the present research has its limits and the results cannot be generalized, nor causal relations can be established. Our research reveals only the children's and adolescents' perspective. Another limit of our study lies in the research design that includes exclusively children with parents working abroad. A control group of children whose parents do not work abroad would contribute to a comparative perspective. Our intention was to explore the relationship between children and their grandparents with respect to the media skills transfer to a greater extent, but not all the dimensions of the model that we applied reflected that relationship. Conducting interviews with parents that work abroad, with educators or policymakers can help us to draw a bigger picture of the phenomenon. This is an issue that is worth addressing in future research.

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