

Abstract

Online aggression is a global phenomenon with negative psychological, emotional, and social effects on the individual. The features provided by social media platforms allow individuals to present themselves selectively in the online environment, and the online identity management strategies they employ play a crucial role in how they are perceived by others. From this perspective, the way users manage their online identity on social networks can impose certain risk factors that increase the likelihood of becoming victims of online aggression. Furthermore, exposure to acts of aggression can influence how users adjust their identity within online social networks.

The present paper aims to investigate the link between online identity and two types of online aggressive behaviors, cyberbullying and hate speech, among Generation Z in Romania. Additionally, a key objective of the study refers to identifying how exposure to acts of aggression influences the way young people manage their online identity. Members of this generation are recognized as digital natives and face the highest rates of online harassment compared to members of other generations. Moreover, this research seeks to analyze the two phenomena of aggression due to recent studies which suggest that, although they are distinct phenomena targeting two different social entities (the individual and the social group), they often overlap within the victims' experiences.

Utilizing both qualitative and quantitative research methods, the paper outlines a detailed presentation of the connection between how Generation Z manage their online identity and the acts of online aggression to which they have been exposed as both victims and witnesses. The study reveals that young people use complex online identity management strategies, it presents the ways in which they are exposed to forms of aggression, as well as the management methods they use to overcome situations of exposure to aggression. The paper also examines how young people act when witnessing an act of aggression and the social implications of this behavior. Furthermore, the research addresses concepts such as online disinhibition, the role of artificial intelligence in creating materials used in harassment, and the normalization of online aggression.