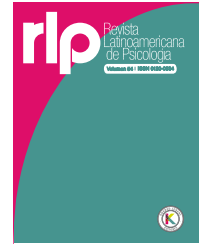




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ORIGINAL

## Netiquette, implication of online emotional content and empathy in adolescents according to gender

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### KEYWORDS

Cyber coexistence, school climate, netiquette, empathy, emotion, gender, adolescence

**Abstract Introduction:** Education in netiquette (social norms that promote cyber coexistence) has become an alternative proposal for helping prevent online expressions of discrimination and violence. Specifically, empathy and online emotional content are key in antisocial behaviours. **Method:** Our objective is thus to differentially analyse the relationships between netiquette, online emotional content, and empathy in adolescents according to gender. 774 adolescents (55.4% girls) enrolled in 13 Spanish educational centres participated ( $M = 13.82$  and  $SD = 1345$ ). **Results:** Results show that girls achieve higher scores in netiquette, online emotional content, and empathy. E-emotional expression in girls and the facilitating use of e-emotions in boys are exclusionary factors of netiquette; however, the understanding and management of e-emotions for both genders, as well as cognitive empathy in boys, are promoter factors. **Conclusions:** It would be advisable to educate young people in netiquette, where the moderate use of emotional expression online can be an effective strategy to promote it.

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### Netiqueta, implicación del contenido emocional en línea y empatía en adolescentes según el género

### PALABRAS CLAVE

Ciberconvivencia, clima escolar, netiqueta, empatía, emoción, género, adolescencia

**Resumen Introducción:** Educar en la netiqueta (normas sociales que promueven la ciberconvivencia) se ha convertido en una propuesta alternativa para ayudar a prevenir las expresiones de discriminación y violencia online. En concreto, la empatía y el contenido emocional online son claves en los comportamientos antisociales. **Método:** Nuestro objetivo es, por tanto, analizar de forma diferencial las relaciones entre la netiqueta, el contenido emocional online y la empatía en adolescentes según el género. Participaron 774 adolescentes (55,4% chicas) matriculados en 13 centros educativos españoles ( $M = 13,82$  y  $SD = 1345$ ). **Resultados:** Los resultados mostraron que las chicas alcanzan mayores puntuaciones en netiqueta, contenido emocional online y empatía. Además, la expresión e-emocional en las chicas y la facilitación del uso de las e-emociones en los chicos son factores amortiguadores de la netiqueta; sin embargo, la comprensión y regulación de las e-emociones para ambos géneros, así como la empatía cognitiva en los chicos, son factores promotores. **Conclusiones:** Sería recomendable educar a los jóvenes en la netiqueta donde el uso moderado de la manifestación emocional en la red puede ser una estrategia eficaz para promoverla.

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The Internet has become an essential tool in adolescent socialisation, with the smartphone being one of the most widely used devices. In Spain, according to data from the National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2020), 88.1% of 13-year-old adolescents use a smartphone, and 95.9% use the Internet. In addition, as this report indicates with regard to social networks, they comprise the age segment with the highest level of participation (93.0%, aged 16-24). Amongst them, the activity of girls is slightly higher (66.4%) than that of boys (62.9%).

The appearance of new applications has expanded communication forms and languages, generating possibilities for positive exchanges, but also multiplying the options for sending messages of hostility, disrespect, and rejection. In most European countries, approximately 15% of adolescents between 12-16 years of age report having seen online hate messages “very frequently”, and 30% have seen “them a few times a year” (Smahel et al., 2020). Education in netiquette, i.e., in social norms that promote respect and positive coexistence on the Internet (Soler-Costa et al., 2021) has thus become a relevant issue in the endeavour to prevent and mitigate expressions of discrimination or cyberaggression (Ang, 2015).

Netiquette expresses the attitude of a good citizen including values such as commitment, responsibility, tolerance, trustworthiness, honesty, and kindness (Mistretta, 2021). This implies the integration of aspects such as respectful treatment of others on social networks, preserving their privacy, and contributing to a harmonious environment in the virtual domain (Flores, 2010). Another term used is “responsible use of the Internet”, defined as the conduct that incorporates compliance with online rules and social conventions (Ortega et al., 2012). Netiquette has the potential to reduce antisocial behaviour by setting prosocial norms in online interactions (Ang, 2015). Results of empirical studies reveal that netiquette is related to the reduction of behaviours such as cyberbullying. In a study with more than 4000 students Kumazaki et al. (2011) showed that good netiquette significantly reduces bullying, and it moderates the effects of cyberbullying specifically at the secondary education level. Park et al. (2014) showed that netiquette and the amount of communication time spent with parents negatively correlate with cyberbullying. Yudes-Gómez et al. (2018) found that responsible use of the Internet is a protective factor for both sexes, although it acquires greater force in girls.

The study of netiquette has focused on the description of guidelines designed to guarantee adequate communication (Hammond & Moseley, 2018), along with their application in online interaction between students and teachers (Linek & Ostermaier-Grabow, 2018). Also, netiquette is positively related to family supervision and negatively to the intensity of interaction on social networks, as well as to the time spent online (Ortega et al., 2012; Park et al., 2014). In this respect, there seem to be gender differences with regard to Internet use, where girls spend more time with the smartphone and social networks, whereas boys spend more time with video consoles and games (Díaz-López et al., 2020; Twenge & Martin, 2020). Girls communicate to a greater degree with others (Yepez-Tito et al., 2020) yet, according to Tifferet (2019) they are more aware of the need to protect privacy.

On the other hand, in adolescents, emotional factors are essential to preventing antisocial behaviour such as cyberbullying on the Internet (Kowalski et al., 2019; Zych et al., 2019), so it could be hypothesised that this is also true in the case of netiquette. Among these emotional variables, the study of online emotional content and empathy are of great interest since adolescence is a stage of special emotional exchange and intensity (Bailen et al., 2019).

Regarding emotional online content, although the study of online emotions is in its early stages, it has been ascertained that emotions are perceived, expressed, understood, and managed in virtual interactions (Zych et al., 2017). Derks et al. (2008) found that negative emotions are transmitted more frequently than in a face-to-face environment. Despite the fact that a characteristic of online communication is its limitation in the use of non-verbal language, a variety of expressive resources have been developed to overcome that limitation, such as emoticons, GIFs, and other elements of paralanguage (Jibril & Abdullah, 2013). Social networks, by pursuing the purpose of creating and maintaining links with other people, promote emotional exchange. On social networks, adolescents experience a sense of belonging to the group; they can express their identity (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011) and share feelings, values and interests, as well as receive and give social support (Best et al., 2014). In addition, social networks are designed with features such as “likes”, which operate as affective reinforcements (Rosenthal-von der Pütten et al., 2019) and as elements of status negotiation: a person’s degree of recognition increases through the number of likes, rankings of views, etc. (Svensson, 2014). This recognition is linked to feelings of satisfaction, and its absence to feelings of rejection (Wolniewicz et al., 2018) and in situations that expose them to negative peer evaluation adolescents show greater difficulty in regulating emotions triggered by social stimuli (Silvers et al., 2012).

Research results have shown that online emotional content could be relevant to cyberbehaviour, and vice versa, since the Internet influences the way emotions are used (Serrano-Puche, 2016; Tur-Porcar et al., 2019). Stieglitz and Dang-Xuan (2013) found that tweets are more likely to spread if their content is emotionally charged. Thus, a requirement for a message or video to go viral is that it generates emotions, especially surprise and joy, favouring large-scale emotional contagion by way of platforms (Eckler & Bolls, 2011). Another phenomenon of social networks, where opinions and ideas are emotionally mobilised and can convey hate messages, are memes. These are images and videos containing cultural information that is usually modified and are widely shared, especially if the resulting meme provokes an affective reaction (Guadagno et al., 2013). Emotions have important social functions and can influence the behaviour of those who experience them: take, for instance, the negative relationship found between emotional intelligence and aggression (Kokkinos et al., 2021). Studies have linked online emotional content with the promotion of online and offline antisocial behaviour. Specifically, those adolescents who use a great degree of online emotional content are more likely to participate in cyber-perpetration and cyber-victimisation, which suggests an overall need for the management of online emotions and the promotion of positive interactions (Marín-López et al., 2020). Therefore,

knowledge regarding the relationship between online emotional content and netiquette can be crucial if we want to obtain more information on ways of promoting attitudes of respect and coexistence.

The role of empathy as a factor that prevents antisocial behaviour in adolescents is widely acknowledged (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006; Kokkinos & Voulgaridou, 2019). It is defined as the emotional response that comes from understanding and sharing another person's emotional state or context (Cohen & Strayer, 1996). Currently, empathy is conceived as a multidimensional personality trait that combines affective and cognitive aspects (Decety, 2011). Cognitive empathy is perceived as the ability to understand the emotions that other people feel, and affective empathy is the affective response of experiencing and sharing emotional states and contexts with other people (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). The trend in studies that focus on gender differences shows that girls have more empathetic capacity than boys (Garaigordobil & Maganto, 2011). Regarding empathy in the virtual environment, certain studies associate low levels of empathy with cyber-aggression (Brewer & Kerslake, 2015). In a recent meta-analysis on empathy in the different roles of cyberbullying, Zych et al. (2019) found that cyberbullies achieve lower scores in both affective and cognitive empathy. They also found indications that cyber-victims may have a high degree of emotional empathy. Other studies on adolescents suggest that boys with low levels of empathy are more likely to be cyberbullies (Ang & Goh, 2010). It has been suggested that the prolific use of social networks can negatively influence empathy (Konrath, 2012). However, Vossen and Valkenburg (2016) demonstrate that, by intensifying that use, cognitive and affective empathy increase over time. Empathy could therefore be essential when it comes to promoting netiquette.

The literature thus suggests that a good level of netiquette is a critical factor in preventing online antisocial behaviour and that emotional factors such as empathy and online emotional content can exert an influence upon it, by the same token taking factors such as gender into account (Estévez et al., 2019; Cebollero-Salinas et al., 2022). However, there seems to be a lack of empirical studies that analyse these relationships. Hence, this study's objective is to differentially analyse the relationships between empathy, online emotional content, and netiquette according to gender in adolescents in compulsory secondary education.

## Method

### Participants

The sample was made up of  $n = 774$  adolescents enrolled between 1st and 4th year of secondary education (10-15 years-old), students in educational centres in the autonomous region of Aragon (55.4% girls), with an equitable distribution throughout the four years, and a mean age of 13.82 ( $SD = 1.345$ ). The sampling procedure had been initially random, but was affected by the pandemic situation: we were obliged to change it from probabilistic by quotas to non-probabilistic by convenience, although maintaining the quotas of gender, course, and type of centre in order

to ensure the representativeness of the sample. Data were collected during the academic year of 2019-2020.

### Instruments

Netiquette was evaluated through the "Responsible Use" subscale of the "Evaluation of the Quality of Cyberbehaviour in Adolescents" questionnaire, also called "EsCaCiber" (Ortega et al., 2012). The 4 items of the Likert-type subscale featuring 5 frequency points ("0" *never* to "4" *always*) refer to the assessment of respect, ranging from *I address others with respect on social networks*, to the protection of the privacy of others, i.e.: *When I post something about a person, I ask for permission*, and creating a good atmosphere on the Internet, i.e.: *If I feel attacked on social networks, I try to respond calmly and non-violently*. In our study, the scale reliability index was  $\alpha = .74$ .

The Spanish adaptation for adolescents of the "Basic Empathy Scale" (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006) was used to assess empathy (Oliva et al., 2011). The 9 Likert scale items, ranging from 1 ("*Totally disagree*") to 5 ("*Totally agree*"), evaluate global empathy and its two dimensions. Affective empathy (4 items,  $\alpha = .85$ ) refers to the emotional reaction caused by the feelings of other people, i.e.: *When someone is depressed, I usually understand how they feel*. Cognitive empathy (5 items,  $\alpha = .88$ ) refers to the perception and understanding of the emotions of others, i.e.: *After being with a friend who is sad for some reason, I usually feel sad*.

Online emotional content was evaluated by means of the "E-emotions Questionnaire" (Zych et al., 2017). It quantifies the emotional content perceived, expressed, used, and managed by adolescents in virtual communication. It contains 21 items ( $\alpha = .94$ ) responded to on a 5-point Likert scale (1 "*highly disagree*" to 5 "*highly agree*"), divided into four subscales: e-emotional expression (4 items,  $\alpha = .84$ ; i.e. *I express my emotions through social networks*), e-emotional perception (3 items,  $\alpha = .75$ ; i.e. *My contacts let me know through Facebook or Instagram if they are happy or sad*), Facilitating use of e-emotions (6 items,  $\alpha = .91$ ; i.e. *I express my emotions through Facebook or Instagram to overcome my difficulties*), and Understanding and management of e-emotions (8 items,  $\alpha = .87$ ; i.e.: *If I get angry, I control my emotions while avoiding my contacts paying for it*).

### Procedure

First we requested the participation of the educational centres, submitting a brief report on the objectives of our research. Following the centres acceptance, and after the informed consent of the parents of participants under 14 years of age was obtained, we collected the students' responses. They replied to the questionnaires after having been informed of the study's objective. The participation was anonymous, voluntary and confidential. The schedule agreed upon was carried out in class with the presence of a researcher. We then analysed the collected information. Research was conceived according to ethical standards and was approved by the Coordinating Committee of Ethics for Biomedical Research of Aragon.

## Statistical procedure

Using the IBM-SPSS 25.0 statistic programme, we obtained descriptive statistics that enabled us to establish the participants' sociodemographic and psychological characteristics. For the contrast of group hypotheses, we used factorial ANOVA, considering the course (academic year) as a covariate, since e-emotions vary according to this variable in our study. For the same reason, we took the estimated marginal means into account after discounting that factor's influence. In the case of not fulfilling the equality of Levene variances, in order to be rigorous and as advised by Hair et al. (1999), we increased the level of significance from  $p < .005$  to  $p < .001$ .

We analysed the relationships among the study variables using bivariate correlations, differentiating according to gender. To verify the significant differences between the correlations, we applied statistics following the procedure advised by Lowry (2021). The reliability and validity index of the instruments we used was calculated by means of Cronbach's alpha. The predictive capacity of netiquette was explored with respect to the other analysed variables by applying multiple linear regression analysis using the stepwise method. This procedure was carried out on the subsamples of boys and girls. Compliance with the assumptions of multiple regression was taken into account (Pardo & Ruiz, 2013).

## Results

In the descriptive analysis of the variables by gender, the course was considered as a covariate, yielding the following results: e-emotional expression ( $F = 2.778$ ,  $p = .017$ ), e-emotional perception ( $F = 5.286$ ,  $p = .017$ ), facilitating use of e-emotions ( $F = 5.480$ ,  $p = .019$ ), and understanding and management of e-emotions ( $F = 11.207$ ,  $p = .001$ ). In the results (Table 1), we can observe that there are signifi-

cant differences among all of them, with the girls reaching higher scores in netiquette as well as in the dimensions of empathy and online emotional content. The largest effect sizes are attained in e-emotional expression ( $\eta^2 = .077$ ) and affective empathy ( $\eta^2 = .065$ ).

In our analysis of the correlation among the variables according to gender (Table 2), we found, in both cases, the most prominent relationship is with the understanding and management of e-emotions in a positive way ( $r = .230^{**}$  girls vs.  $r = .270^{**}$  boys). Besides, in girls, netiquette is significantly related to the dimension of e-emotional expression, whereas in boys it is significantly and negative related to the facilitating use of e-emotions.

In the relationship between netiquette and empathy, in the case of boys it is associated with both affective and cognitive empathy, while in girls it is only associated with cognitive empathy, reaching higher values in boys ( $r = .358^{**}$  boys vs.  $r = .172^{**}$  girls). This difference was significant  $Z = 2.76$  ( $0.0029$ ). Regarding the relationships between empathy and the dimensions of online emotional content, in both genders the understanding and management of e-emotions is associated with the dimensions of affective and cognitive empathy, with the highest values achieved by the girls, in whom the association with cognitive empathy stands out ( $r = .348^{**}$  girls vs.  $r = .310^{**}$  boys). In girls, additionally, all dimensions are associated with affective empathy; in boys, however, the facilitating use of e-emotions is not correlated.

Tables 3 and 4 show the results of regression analysis according to gender. The model explains 20.9% of the variability of netiquette for boys, and 10.4% for girls. However, in terms of variables, the results are not equivalent. In the case of girls, as shown on Table 3, netiquette is predicted only by the following three dimensions: 1) understanding and management of e-emotions, a factor with a positive coefficient ( $\beta = .219$ ), and which contributes the most to variability (5.3%); 2) e-emotional expression with a negative coefficient ( $\beta = -.182$ ) and explanatory of 4.5% of the variability, and 3) the facilitating use of e-emotions, also

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics and ANOVA of the variables according to gender

		<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	$\eta^2$
Netiquette	Girls	11.94	.178	4.793	.009**	.012
	Boys	11.21	.201			
Affective empathy	Girls	13.77	.179	26.663	.000*	.065
	Boys	11.79	.203			
Cognitive empathy	Girls	19.18	.197	15.325	.000*	.039
	Boys	17.51	.223			
e-emotional expression	Girls	11.98	.155	32.13	.000**	.077
	Boys	10.18	.175			
e-emotional perception	Girls	9.60	.123	8.364	.000**	.021
	Boys	8.95	.140			
Facilitating use of e-emotions	Girls	13.52	.231	4.490	.012**	.012
	Boys	12.85	.262			
Understanding and management of e-emotions	Girls	28.55	.288	20.040	.000**	.049
	Boys	26.14	.326			

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 2.** Correlations among the different variables according to gender

	Girls						
	1	2	3	4	5	7	8
Netiquette		-.110*	.050	-.091	.230**	.056	.172**
2. e-emotional expression	-.097		.464**	.565**	.373**	.147**	.055
3. e-emotional perception	.054	.457**		.470**	.560**	.101*	.220**
4. Facilitating use of e-emotions	-.127*	.623**	.469**		.399**	.122*	.059
5. Understanding and management of e-emotions	.270**	.363**	.614**	.445**		.202**	.348**
7. Affective empathy	.171**	.185**	.031	.114*	.146**		.603**
8. Cognitive empathy	.358**	.080	.149**	-.003	.310**	.569**	

\*  $p < .05$ ; \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 3.** Regression analysis of “Girls”

	1 $\beta$	2 $\beta$	3 $\beta$	R2	$\Delta R2$	Change F
Understanding and management of e-emotions	.146	.200	.219	.051	.053	24.216**
e-emotional expression		-.257	-.182	-.093	.045	23.342**
Facilitating use of e-emotions			-.105	-.104	.012	17.703**

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

**Table 4.** Regression analysis of “Boys”

	1 $\beta$	2 $\beta$	3 $\beta$	R2	$\Delta R2$	Change F
Cognitive empathy	.324	.275	.238	.128	.128	49.077**
Understanding and management of e-emotions		.104	.181	.156	.028	11.209**
Facilitating use of e-emotions			-.204	-.209	.053	22.987**

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

with a negative coefficient ( $\beta = -.105$ ). In the case of boys, the regression introduces another variable: cognitive empathy, which is a positive factor ( $\beta = .238$ ), and explains 12.8% of the variability followed by: factors in common with girls, i.e., the facilitating use of e-emotions with a negative coefficient almost similar to cognitive empathy ( $\beta = .204$ ), and the understanding and management of e-emotions ( $\beta = .181$ ).

Among the predictive factors of the dimensions of emotional content, only the understanding and management of e-emotions is positive. In other words, the dimensions of e-emotional expression and the facilitating use of e-emotions emerge as buffer factors in their prediction for the two groups.

## Discussion

First, when analysing the differences in means according to gender, these results reveal that girls achieve higher levels of netiquette, empathy, and online emotional content. Tifferet (2019) states that there are several reasons why girls are more aware of the need to protect privacy, a tendency which could explain why they attain higher levels of netiquette than boys. They also achieve higher levels of empathy, which could be related to the fact that

they use social networks for longer periods of time (Díaz-López et al., 2020); this, in turn, would increase empathy, as suggested by Vossen and Valkenburg (2016). On the other hand, given that girls present a higher frequency of states of high emotional intensity (Bailen et al., 2019), it would be plausible that this intensity enhances higher levels of e-emotional expression, e-emotional perception, facilitating use of e-emotions, and understanding and management of e-emotions.

It is notable that the dimensions more oriented toward emotional manifestation, e.g. e-emotional expression in girls and facilitating use of e-emotions in boys, are negative predictors of netiquette, and yet these same dimensions are positively associated with affective empathy in both genders. We could deduce that those adolescents who express their emotions online are more empathetically affective, which protects them from antisocial behaviours such as cyber-aggression Zych et al. (2019), but which at the same time makes it more difficult for them to treat others respectfully online. We should bear in mind that adolescents on social networks experience a sense of belonging to the group while expressing their identity (Valkenburg & Peter, 2011); consequently, online emotional exchange can be intense in terms of laughter, anger, and the interchange of opinions and feelings. At the same time, it can be a complex task for these teenagers to manage their own affectivity

and respect. Another emotional dimension that potentiates netiquette is the understanding and management of emotions online. However, based on the data obtained, this does not compensate for the influence of emotional expression, especially in girls. Previous research papers that studied emotional content online and cyberbullying (Marín-López et al., 2020) pointed towards a similar trend, since they found these same tendencies in the association between e-emotional expression and the understanding and management of e-emotions, on the one hand, and cyber-aggression on the other. Other studies also suggest that adolescents who make use of emotions online, even though they have good social and emotional skills, are more likely to suffer from cyber-risks such as Internet abuse (Nasaescu et al., 2018). For all the above, a strategy that could be critical in promoting respect and preventing online antisocial behaviour would be the moderate manifestation of emotion in the virtual environment. In view of our results, we could surmise that the adolescents who use netiquette in their online social relationships are those who facilitate their emotions in their communications: not indiscriminately, but only to the extent that those emotions improve personal relationships and help them to overcome difficulties in dealing with others, while this same process enables them to understand the emotions of others.

We have found differences between girls and boys in the predictor variables; e-emotional expression has only emerged as a buffer against netiquette in the case of girls. This result is plausible if we consider that research on adolescence has shown that girls are more oriented toward social relationships when they use the Internet (Twenge & Martin, 2020), which, in turn, possibly encourages emotional exchange. However, cognitive empathy emerged as a protective factor exclusively for boys. This suggests that, in boys, the more rational variables such as cognitive empathy and the understanding and management of emotions online may be of crucial importance when it comes to respectful treatment and adjusted online social behaviours. Certain previous research suggests the same in relation to cyberbullying (Ang & Goh, 2010). Most studies on this subject indicate that girls seem to be more homogeneous in achieving high levels of empathy (Christov-Moore et al., 2014; Garai-gordobil & Maganto, 2011) while there may be greater differences in empathetic development among boys. It would thus be recommendable to further investigate this aspect in order to optimise the development of netiquette and positive cyber-coexistence.

This research has important educational implications. On the one hand, the fact that netiquette has empathy in the face-to-face environment as well as online emotional content as predictive factors indicates that promoting respect online requires both face-to-face and online emotional education. It is necessary to raise awareness that the virtual environment is as real as the offline world, despite the fact that it is possible to interact anonymously online, which encourages situations of greater disinhibition (Suler, 2004), aggressiveness, and justification of actions, by not seeming so real.

On the other hand, our results indicate a negative influence of e-emotional expression and facilitating use of e-emotions on netiquette, contrasting with their positive

influence on empathy, suggesting that it would be advisable to plan educational forms that help students become aware of the need to express and facilitate emotions in the virtual environment, albeit moderately. In addition, the Internet is not only a space that arouses emotions and serves as a channel for their expression, but it also influences the way in which those emotions are displayed and modifies people's experiences and behaviour (Serrano-Puche, 2016). Due to this, the hitherto unexplored gender differences regarding online emotional content and netiquette found in our study suggest that netiquette is a relevant variable worthy of consideration in the context of emotional education that prepares adolescents for the challenges of the virtual environment.

In this study, the online understanding and management of e-emotions (in both genders) and cognitive empathy (in boys) have been found to enhance netiquette. It would thus be advisable to include netiquette in current emotional education programmes, especially if we consider that the Internet allows us to perceive emotions when looking at profiles or when reading social network messaging (although the reaction it produces in us is not expressed online (Zych et al., 2017) which makes mutual understanding difficult) and if we also bear in mind that the online management of emotions is more complex because emotional expressions such as tone of voice, body language, and facial expression are more limited (and thus misinterpretations and misunderstandings are more likely to occur).

The Internet is known to provide multiple communication opportunities that allow us to develop and maintain personal relationships, but at the same time it enables antisocial behaviour. It is therefore necessary to promote all possible strategies that take advantage of the potential of the Internet with the goal of minimising negative behaviours. Hence, within the already existing digital competence programmes, it would be advisable to educate youngsters in netiquette, including the moral and ethical values applicable to the online world (Pręgowski, 2009).

Regarding the limitations of the present study, on the one hand, self-reported questionnaires were used as the only source of data collection. Future research should gain a fuller understanding of netiquette by means of additional qualitative studies that examine the reasons certain adolescents choose to treat others with respect on the Internet. On the other hand, it would be necessary to expand the sample to a wider cultural diversity of participants, as well as to gather data in specific exclusion settings, in order to confirm the present results and to ascertain and identify the online social norms common to different contexts.

In any case, this study is the first to link netiquette to a series of emotional skills and explore gender differences, which represents an advance in learning how to improve respectful treatment online while promoting a use of digital competence that includes everyone.

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