

Comments on social networks also reinforce socialization during adolescence

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Cybergossiping is when two or more people make evaluative comments on social media regarding a third person who is not present. This kind of online behavior is common among adolescents. Cybergossiping directly impacts the group, and can foster or damage the quality of the relationships among its members.

Gossiping is a common casual behavior, and is found in all cultures. But gossiping also has to be interpreted as a mechanism that unites the group, facilitates information transfer, strengthens bonds and influences the behavior of the group's members. Since gossiping is entertaining, it is also satisfying. However, cybergossiping can also lead to risky cybernetic behavior such as cyberbullying. This is one of the conclusions drawn from the study led by University of Cordoba Developmental and Educational Psychology Professor Eva Romera. The study looks closely at online behavior and evaluative comments made by teenagers between 12 and 19 years of age.

Scientific research assessing the nature of this interactive behavior among teens has been limited, and is almost always focused on [negative behavior](#). This study by Professor Romera and a group of collaborators, which was recently published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychology*, turns the tables on this belief. According to Romera, though this research does not rule out the fact that cybergossiping can lead to negative behavior (such as exclusion from the group or harmed reputations), its "socializing function" also has to be considered. Accordingly, making evaluative comments online about somebody who is not present can have

a positive influence among teens because it lets them "feel better, feel more integrated in the group, better understand what others think and learn more about the people around them." Ultimately, according to the study, cybergossiping should be interpreted in a broad sense, in which it is a social learning mechanism that fosters new ways of social interaction.

Cybergossiping is a way to practice online communication skills, which are useful in building positive virtual relationships, because its complexity also includes critically reviewing and looking for ways to reconcile the contributions of each interlocutor.

In order to carry out this study, done in collaboration with the University of Seville and the University of Nariño (Colombia), the researchers conducted a thorough literature review on gossip and cybergossip. A questionnaire was designed and validated by interviewing 3,747 Spanish and Colombian secondary school students. The final questionnaire consisted of nine questions, chosen from a much higher number by means of rigorous statistical analysis. This method of self-report survey, according to Professor Romera, "allows for confidential responses regarding something linked to trust and discretion."

The analyses conclude that the notion of cybergossiping is similar in both countries, and that it is done at the same rate among males and females, overturning the idea that females are "bigger cybergossips" than males. A lower rate of cybergossiping among Colombian adolescents was detected in comparison to Spanish adolescents because, according to the study, there is a greater tendency in Colombia to abide by the rules and a lower rate of teenage social network use.

Another conclusion reached by the researchers is that cybergossip should be addressed in the classroom. Romera explains that the current educational system should include "learning how to interact on [social](#)

[networking sites](#). Tools that can allow for healthy, quality virtual relationships should be offered and these tools would promote the learning of new ways to interact. While the relation between cybergossiping and other kinds of risky behavior has been confirmed, the potential of cybergossiping should be considered when proposing educational ideas, and this potential should be researched further."

More information: Eva M. Romera et al. How Much Do Adolescents Cybergossip? Scale Development and Validation in Spain and Colombia, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2018). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00126](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.00126)

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