

## CYBERBULLYING AMONG YOUTH: THE ROLE OF SNAPCHAT IN THE EXPERIENCES OF GENERATION Z

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper aims to investigate how parents perceive the presence and impact of cyberbullying on the social network Snapchat in the everyday lives of minors of Generation Z, and how informed they are about potential risks and protective mechanisms.*

**Methodology** - *A quantitative research method was used through a structured survey questionnaire. The research was conducted on a sample of parents of children under the age of 18 who use social networks, with an emphasis on the Snapchat application. The survey included a sample of 450 respondents.*

**Findings** - *The results indicate that parents are not sufficiently informed about the specific characteristics and risks of cyberbullying on platforms such as Snapchat, particularly due to its ephemeral nature and perceived privacy among youth. While the majority of parents express significant concern regarding their children's exposure to online violence, they simultaneously acknowledge a lack of active engagement in monitoring or guiding their children's digital behaviour. Many do not use available protection tools or parental control features, and a large portion report feeling inadequately equipped to recognise early signs of cyberbullying. Furthermore, the findings reveal a gap between parental awareness and concrete preventive actions, highlighting the need for more accessible resources, education, and communication strategies to empower parents in the digital environment.*

**Contribution** – *The paper contributes to understanding the role of parents in preventing and recognising cyberbullying among young people, with a particular emphasis on digital platforms such as Snapchat, which are characterised by ephemeral content and limited monitoring capabilities. The research indicates the need for systematic education of parents, not only about the forms of cyberbullying themselves, but also about the technical possibilities of monitoring,*

*setting limits and open communication with children about online risks. The paper also contributes to identifying gaps in parents' knowledge and encouraging the development of digital literacy programs in family and school contexts.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cyberbullying, Snapchat, Generation Z, Parental involvement, Digital literacy, Online safety

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The modern digital space offers young people a range of opportunities for connection, communication and expression, but at the same time brings significant challenges, among which cyberbullying occupies a particularly prominent place. Cyberbullying, defined as intentional, frequent and aggressive behaviour that takes place via digital technologies, social networks or applications, is extremely present among the younger population, especially members of Generation Z. Snapchat, as one of the leading platforms for communication among young people, is characterized by specific features such as the temporary nature of content, direct messages and apparent anonymity, which potentially facilitates the emergence and spread of cyberbullying. Young people are often unaware of the long-term consequences or underestimate the emotional impact of content that is shared in a short time and disappears quickly, which can lead to serious psychological consequences such as anxiety, depression, social isolation and, in more severe cases, suicidal thoughts and behaviour. At the same time, although Gen Z is adept at using technology, they lack the experience and maturity needed to recognize and effectively deal with potential threats.. Parents' digital literacy, i.e. their ability to understand and use technology, recognize online threats, and effectively communicate with their children about the dangers of the internet, is a key factor in preventing cyberbullying. Furthermore, research shows that parental involvement, in addition to supervision, should also include education, open dialogue, and trust between parents and children in order to ensure a safe digital environment. The aim of this paper is to explore the dynamics of cyberbullying among Gen Z youth on Snapchat, determine the level of parental involvement, and explore their digital literacy as an important factor in preventing online violence. Also, this paper aims to propose practical guidelines and strategies for improving the online safety of young people, with the effective involvement of parents as key actors in shaping a safer digital space for future generations. Most authors today indicate that there is a risk of a greater likelihood of engaging in risky and violent behaviors in the virtual environment and developing Internet addiction [Athanasίου et al., 2018; Cataldo et al., 2021; Tandon et al., 2021] .

## 2. THE ROLE OF SNAPCHAT IN SHAPING THE IDENTITY AND INTERACTION OF GENERATION Z

Snapchat is a social network based on sharing photos and videos that disappear after a short period of time [usually 24 hours] . This platform was launched in 2011 and, due to its specific dynamics, quickly became popular among younger users, especially members of Generation Z [Yau & Reich, 2020] . According to a report by Datareportal [2024] , Snapchat currently has over 750 million active users worldwide, with the majority of users aged 13 to 24. Snapchat differs from other social networks such as Facebook, Instagram or TikTok due to several unique characteristics: Content transience: The main feature of Snapchat is the disappearance of content after a limited time, usually 24 hours. This is precisely why users often feel a lower

level of inhibition and are more free to share content that may have risky consequences [Alhabash & Ma, 2021] . Focus on visual communication:

- Communication is primarily based on photos and videos, which further increases the appeal of the platform to younger users [Hu et al., 2020] .
- Privacy and anonymity: Snapchat allows users to communicate with a relatively high level of privacy control, which is both positive and can lead to abuses, such as cyberbullying or sharing inappropriate content [Vaterlaus & Barnett, 2022] .
- Research shows that young Snapchat users prefer this platform because of the sense of privacy, immediacy, and dynamism of the content. In their study, Yau and Reich [2020] identified the main motives for using Snapchat among Generation Z, including communicating with peers, self-presentation, and having fun by sharing everyday activities.
- However, despite the appeal of the platform, Snapchat has been recognized as a potentially risky social network due to certain behavioural patterns. Research indicates a connection between the use of Snapchat and an increased tendency towards risky behaviors, such as sharing inappropriate content or cyberbullying [Alhabash & Ma, 2021; Vaterlaus & Barnett, 2022] . Also, Hu et al. [2020] state that the temporary nature of the content additionally encourages young users to more impulsive behaviour that can have long-term consequences.

In the digital age, platforms such as Snapchat—characterized by ephemeral content, direct messaging, and limited parental oversight—have become fertile grounds for cyberbullying, harassment, and other forms of digital aggression. Generation Z, as digital natives, extensively use Snapchat not only for communication but also for constructing social identity, making them particularly vulnerable to online victimization. Parents play a critical role in mitigating these risks. However, research suggests that digital literacy among parents often lags behind that of their children, creating an intergenerational digital divide that limits the effectiveness of parental mediation [Šimunić & Marković, 2022] . Effective prevention requires not only technical supervision, such as monitoring apps or screen time controls, but also the development of trust-based communication, where adolescents feel safe disclosing problematic interactions.

### **3. VIOLENCE ON SNAPCHAT: THE ROLE OF PARENTS IN PREVENTING DIGITAL VICTIMIZATION OF GENERATION Z**

Snapchat is a platform where cyberbullying often occurs precisely because of the apparent anonymity and transience of the content. Research conducted by Vaterlaus and Barnett [2022] indicated a significant occurrence of cyberbullying among adolescents on this social network. According to the results of their study, adolescents often underestimate the emotional impact of negative content shared via Snapchat, which can cause serious psychological consequences, including anxiety, depression, and reduced self-esteem. In addition, a study by Alhabash and Ma [2021] confirmed that young Snapchat users, due to a feeling of reduced responsibility due to the short-term display of content, often engage in behaviors that can be harmful to themselves or other users. However, research shows that it is very easy to save content permanently through screenshots, which enables the further spread of inappropriate content, further traumatizing the victim [Alhabash & Ma, 2021] . In addition to sharing offensive images and videos, a common form of violence on Snapchat is verbal abuse, threats, blackmail and harassment via private messages ["snaps"] or group messages. This type of violence is particularly problematic because it often takes place outside the sight of adults, which makes detection and timely

intervention difficult [Vaterlaus & Barnett, 2022] . Another specific form of Snapchat violence is ostracism, the intentional exclusion of individuals from group communications or social activities on the platform, resulting in feelings of isolation and rejection among victims. This form of violence particularly affects adolescents because their social identity is being intensively formed at this developmental age, and a sense of belonging to a peer group is crucial for emotional health and self-esteem [Mishna et al., 2021] . Cyberbullying on Snapchat can lead to a number of serious psychological consequences for young users. According to recent research, the most common consequences include increased anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, sleep problems, as well as reduced academic performance and avoidance of social activities [Hinduja & Patchin, 2021; Vaterlaus & Barnett, 2022] . In more severe cases, frequent and intense cyberbullying can lead to suicidal thoughts and behaviour in victims, which requires timely response from parents, schools, and mental health professionals. Specifically for Snapchat, the problem is that cyberbullying often occurs hidden from the eyes of parents and teachers due to the ephemeral content and lack of clear clues, which makes it even more difficult for victims to seek help [Mishna et al., 2021] . Victims often feel misunderstood, fear additional stigmatization, or the inability to prove the violence, which is why they do not report incidents. Snapchat's ephemeral content can create a false sense of security and anonymity among users, leading them to engage in risky behaviors such as sharing inappropriate photos or engaging in negative peer communication [Alhabash & Ma, 2021] . The misconception that content disappears permanently can lead young users to engage in behaviors they would not otherwise engage in on other social networks with permanent content such as Instagram or Facebook. However, content can often be preserved, which can lead to further abuse or blackmail in the future. Also, the anonymity that Snapchat partially enables can empower aggressors, giving them a sense of security that they will not be identified or punished for their actions, further exacerbating the intensity and frequency of violence [Mishna et al., 2021] . Although parental controls have limited options on Snapchat, research shows that parental awareness of this social network and active involvement in children's digital lives is one of the most important factors in preventing cyberbullying [Rashid & Ramey, 2023] . Parents should be educated about the specific risks of Snapchat so that they can recognize signs of violence in a timely manner and intervene before the consequences become more serious. Parental education should include understanding the specifics of Snapchat, recognizing changes in children's behaviour, creating an open and supportive atmosphere for talking about online experiences, and encouraging children to report any negative incidents without fear. In addition, it is important to educate young Snapchat users about the possibilities of reporting violence within the platform itself, in order to develop a sense of responsibility for their online activities [Šimunić & Marković, 2022].

#### **4. METHODOLOGY AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH RESULTS**

Modern society is characterized by the increasing use of digital technologies, especially among adolescents, who carry out a significant part of their daily activities in the online environment. Despite the numerous advantages of digital communication, the risks associated with electronic peer violence [cyberbullying] are increasing, especially through popular social networks such as Snapchat. Although young users are very familiar with the functions of social networks, their emotional and social maturity is often not sufficient to recognize, prevent or adequately deal with violence in virtual space. In this context, parental involvement and parents' digital literacy can play a key role in preventing cyberbullying among adolescents. Although there is a lot of research on the impact of young people's digital literacy on safety in virtual space, the impact of parents' digital literacy has been less investigated, especially with regard to their ability to

recognize, prevent and intervene in cases of violence via Snapchat. Therefore, this research aims to determine how the level of parents' digital literacy and their involvement in adolescents' digital activities affect the prevention and reduction of cyberbullying among young people, with a special emphasis on Snapchat as a specific platform with pronounced risks for this type of violence. In accordance with the above, the research objectives were defined:

- to determine the relationship between digital literacy and parental involvement and the prevention of cyberbullying among adolescents on Snapchat;
- to analyse the level of digital literacy of parents of adolescents who actively use Snapchat;
- to determine parents' perceptions of the risks of using Snapchat among adolescents. To examine the impact of parental involvement and open communication on the frequency and consequences of cyberbullying on Snapchat;
- to identify obstacles that make it difficult for parents to effectively monitor and respond to online bullying on Snapchat. Based on the set research objectives, the following hypotheses were formulated.

**Hypothesis H1:** There is a statistically significant positive relationship between the level of digital literacy of parents and their ability to recognize cyberbullying on Snapchat among adolescents.

**Hypothesis H2:** Parents who have a higher level of digital literacy are more likely to actively communicate with their children about online safety, which leads to a lower frequency of cyberbullying on Snapchat.

**Hypothesis H3:** Open and ongoing communication between parents and adolescents is associated with greater willingness of adolescents to report cyberbullying on Snapchat.

**Hypothesis H4:** Lack of parental digital literacy is associated with higher frequency of cyberbullying among adolescents on Snapchat, as well as more severe consequences of this violence.

A total of 300 respondents participated in the survey. While the sample is demographically diverse in terms of age, gender, education, and employment status, an important limitation emerges: respondents are not parents of teenage children, and thus do not represent the primary parental demographic targeted by studies on adolescent digital safety and parental mediation. Furthermore, respondents were active users of Snapchat, which suggests that the findings reflect perspectives of individuals with firsthand experience of the platform, rather than those concerned with monitoring or mediating its use by minors. This is particularly relevant when analyzing phenomena such as cyberbullying, privacy risks, or the role of parental control, as the insights provided may lean more toward user experience rather than parental attitudes or behaviors. Despite this, the socio-demographic diversity of the sample—particularly in terms of education and urban/rural distribution—offers valuable insights into general attitudes toward social media and perceptions of digital environments..

Table 1. Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Variable	Category	Frequency [%]
Gender	Female	62.3
	Male	37.7
Age Group	18–29	15.2
	30–44	28.4
	45–59	32.6

	60+	23.8
Education	Primary	12.5
	High School	34.2
	Bachelor's	28.9
	Master's or higher	24.4
Marital Status	Single	21.5
	Married	56.7
	Divorced/Widowed	21.8
Residence	Urban	64.1
	Rural	35.9
Employment	Employed	48.6
	Unemployed	12.3
	Retired	28.5
	Student	10.6

Source: Author's own work"

The socio-demographic analysis provides important insights into the composition of the respondent group. A majority of participants were female [62.3%], indicating potential gender-based perspectives in the dataset. Age-wise, the largest proportion of respondents were aged between 45–59 [32.6%], followed by those in the 30–44 [28.4%] and 60+ [23.8%] age groups, reflecting a sample dominated by mature individuals likely to have stable life experiences. retired [28.5%], which may influence their views on stability, healthcare, and social services. Students and unemployed individuals comprised a smaller but relevant segment. Overall, the diversity across age, education, and residence location allows for a comprehensive analysis of social and economic perspectives among the respondents.

Table 2. Summary of Research Results Related to Snapchat Usage and Violence

Question	Response Category	Frequency [%]
Child's Daily Use of Snapchat	Half an hour	93 [45.4%]
	One hour	51 [24.9%]
	Several hours	55 [26.8%]
	Half a day	3 [1.5%]
	All day	3 [1.5%]
Child Owns Technical Devices	Yes	197 [96.1%]
	No	8 [3.9%]
Child Uses Snapchat	Yes	180 [87.8%]
	No	25 [12.2%]
Parent Uses Snapchat	Yes	17 [8.3%]
	No	188 [91.7%]
Child Victim of Online Violence	Yes	17 [8.3%]
	No	188 [91.7%]
Parent Witnessed Violence on Snapchat	Yes	49 [23.9%]
	No	156 [76.1%]

Source: Author's own research using IBM SPSS Statistics.

The results of this study provide a comprehensive overview of parental observations and experiences related to Snapchat use among children. The data suggest that Snapchat is a widely used platform by minors, with 87.8% of parents reporting that their children use the platform. In terms of daily usage, a significant proportion of children spend 30 minutes [45.4%], one hour [24.9%], or even several hours [26.8%] on Snapchat, indicating the platform's high level of engagement among youth. Although smaller in number, the presence of responses indicating usage for half a day [1.5%] or the entire day [1.5%] raises concerns about potential overuse and digital dependency. A notable 96.1% of children possess personal digital devices such as smartphones, laptops, or tablets, confirming the widespread accessibility of technology that facilitates unregulated access to social networks. This discrepancy highlights a generational and technological gap that may hinder effective parental oversight and limit their understanding of how Snapchat operates and the potential risks it entails. These findings underscore the urgent need for targeted digital education programs for both parents and children. It is clear that while access to technology and social platforms is widespread, the capacity to monitor, guide, and protect children in these digital environments is uneven. Future research should aim to incorporate longitudinal designs and direct feedback from adolescents to triangulate parental reports and capture a more holistic picture of youth digital experiences and vulnerabilities.

Table 3. Item-Level Pearson Correlation Analysis for Hypothesis H1

Digital Literacy Item	Recognition Item	Pearson r	p-value
DL1: I know how to adjust privacy settings on social media platforms.	RC1: I can identify signs that my child is being bullied online.	0.738	0.0
DL2: I can recognize fake profiles or suspicious behavior online.	RC2: I understand the types of cyberbullying common on Snapchat.	0.668	0.0
DL3: I know how to report inappropriate content on Snapchat.	RC3: I can distinguish between harmless jokes and harmful behavior online.	0.675	0.0
DL4: I am confident in guiding my child in safe online behavior.	RC4: I feel capable of intervening if my child experiences online abuse.	0.673	0.0

Source: Author's own research

All four pairs demonstrate correlation coefficients above 0.66 with p-values less than 0.001, supporting Hypothesis H1. This suggests that individual aspects of digital literacy—such as privacy management, identifying suspicious content, reporting mechanisms, and guiding children—are positively associated with specific capabilities to detect, understand, and act on cyberbullying threats on Snapchat. A simple linear regression was conducted to examine whether digital literacy predicts parents' ability to recognize cyberbullying. The results indicate a statistically significant positive relationship [ $\beta = 0.661$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ], supporting Hypothesis H1. The regression equation is:

$$\hat{Y} = 0.217 + 0.661 \cdot X$$

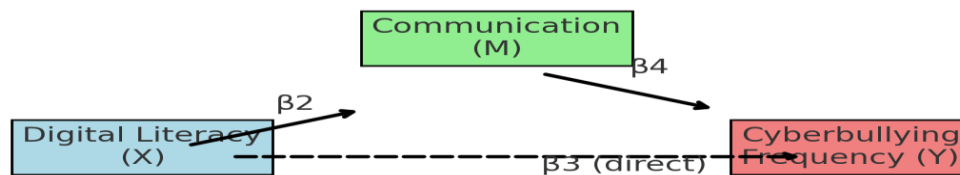
where  $\hat{Y}$  represents the predicted value of cyberbullying recognition and  $X$  represents the digital literacy score.

Table 4. Table Mediation Analysis Summary Table and SEM Notation

Model	Equation	R-squared	Coefficient[s]	p-value[s]
Model 1	$\text{CyberbullyingFreq} = \alpha + \beta_1 \cdot \text{DigitalLiteracy}$	0.064	$\beta_1 = -0.206$	0.0002
Model 2	$\text{Communication} = \alpha + \beta_2 \cdot \text{DigitalLiteracy}$	0.358	$\beta_2 = 0.521$	0.0000
Model 3	$\text{CyberbullyingFreq} = \alpha + \beta_3 \cdot \text{DigitalLiteracy} + \beta_4 \cdot \text{Communication}$	0.178	$\beta_3 = -0.002,$ $\beta_4 = -0.391$	0.9753, 0.0000

Source: Author's own research

Figure 1. SEM Diagram Illustrating How Parental Communication Can Reduce Cyberbullying on Social Media



Source: Author's own research

Understanding the complex relationships between digital competencies, communication practices, and problematic online behaviors is becoming increasingly important in the context of cyberbullying prevention among youth. The structural model presented in this research is based on a conceptual framework in which digital literacy is defined as a fundamental competency for the critical and responsible use of digital technologies. This skill not only enables functional internet use but also shapes the way individuals communicate and participate in digital communities. In this model, communication is positioned as a mediating variable that transmits the effect of digital literacy on the frequency of cyberbullying behavior. It is assumed that higher levels of digital literacy enable more advanced communication strategies grounded in respect, empathy, and social responsibility. Consequently, individuals with higher digital literacy are more likely to avoid aggressive and violent forms of digital interaction. In this context,  $\beta_2$  represents the positive relationship between digital literacy and the quality of communication, while  $\beta_4$  examines the negative relationship between communication and the frequency of cyberbullying. The analysis of the direct effect [ $\beta_3$ ] makes it possible to detect the extent to which digital literacy alone can reduce the likelihood of cyberbullying, independent of communication patterns. If  $\beta_3$  remains statistically significant in the presence of the mediator, it indicates partial mediation; if it becomes insignificant, this suggests full mediation.

Table 5. Summary of Regression Coefficients

Predictor	B [Unstandardized]	p-value	Interpretation
Constant [Intercept]	-0.058	0.7948	Baseline level of reporting when communication = 0
Communication	0.628	0.0000	Effect of communication on willingness to report

Source: Author's own research

$$\text{Reporting} = -0.058 + 0.628 \times \text{Communication}$$

The regression model demonstrates a statistically significant positive relationship between communication and adolescents' willingness to report cyberbullying. For each one-point increase in communication [on a 1–5 Likert scale], the reporting score increases by 0.628 units. The model explains 32.8% of the variance in the dependent variable [ $R^2 = 0.328$ ].

Table 6. Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Digital Literacy	3.48	0.65	1.67	5.40
Cyberbullying Frequency	-1.01	0.61	-2.93	1.31
Severity of Consequences	-1.42	0.67	-3.15	0.45

Source: Author's own research

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for the three variables included in the analysis. Digital literacy scores among parents had a mean of 3.48, indicating a moderately high level. Cyberbullying frequency and severity of consequences were normally distributed, with comparable ranges and standard deviations.

Table 7. Pearson Correlation

Variable Pair	Pearson r	p-value	Interpretation
Digital Literacy ↔ Cyberbullying Frequency	-0.290	0.0000	Negative and significant
Digital Literacy ↔ Severity of Consequences	-0.387	0.0000	Negative and significant

Source: Author's own research

Table 7 shows that digital literacy is negatively correlated with both the frequency of cyberbullying and the severity of its consequences. The correlations are statistically significant [ $*p* < 0.001$ ], indicating that as digital literacy decreases, both outcomes increase.

Table 8. Regression Analysis Summary

Model	Equation	B [slope]	p-value	R-squared
Model 1	Digital Literacy → Frequency	-0.272	0.0000	0.084
Model 2	Digital Literacy → Severity	-0.397	0.0000	0.150

Source: Author's own research

Table 8 summarizes the results of two linear regression models. Model 1 confirms that digital literacy significantly predicts the frequency of cyberbullying [ $B^* = -0.272$ ,  $p^* < 0.001$ ], while Model 2 shows a similar significant negative effect on the severity of consequences [ $B^* = -0.397$ ,  $p^* < 0.001$ ]. In both cases, lower parental digital literacy is associated with worse outcomes. The findings provide strong empirical support for Hypothesis H4. All three analytical approaches—descriptive analysis, correlation, and regression—point toward a consistent pattern: parents with lower digital literacy levels tend to have adolescents who experience more frequent and more severe cyberbullying on Snapchat.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This study highlights the critical role of digital literacy and parental communication in preventing adolescent cyberbullying on Snapchat. Findings confirm that parents with greater digital competence are better able to recognize online risks and foster open dialogue with their children, which significantly reduces the likelihood and severity of cyberbullying. Effective communication also increases adolescents' willingness to report harmful incidents, allowing for earlier and more effective... Despite these contributions, the study has several limitations. Reliance on parental self-report data introduces potential bias, while the cross-sectional design limits causal interpretations. The absence of adolescent perspectives limits a more comprehensive understanding of family dynamics in digital spaces. To address these shortcomings, future research should adopt longitudinal and mixed methods approaches, include the voices of both parents and adolescents, and evaluate the effectiveness of targeted digital literacy programs. Such programs should go beyond technical skills to include strategies for building trust and empathetic communication. In an increasingly digital world, parents must move from passive observers to active digital mentors. Strengthening their digital and emotional literacy is not only crucial for protecting young people, but also for fostering resilience and well-being in the online environment.

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