A Predictive Model of Youth Bystanders' Helping Attitudes

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Abstract: One of the direct effect of current COVID-19 pandemic' social distancing on an unspecified period of time urges us to compensate our lack of physical connection with our readiness in the online environments, especially social media platforms. Present research investigates to which extent the internet content awareness construct, difficulties in emotional regulation and online duality have an impact on predicting future helping attitudes of bystanders. In order to investigate the eligibility of this prediction model, our team has advanced the Erasmus+ funded project Hate's Journey. In 2019, our research team has designed a multiple specific sections online questionnaire addressing 206 youth from Latvia, Turkey, Spain and Romania. We have used a multiple linear regression analysis. The obtained results validate our hypothesis, confirming that if an individual is characterized by a decreased internet content awareness, a high level of difficulties in emotional regulation and increased online duality, then there is a 37% probability that the youth bystanders will develop a lack of helping attitudes towards the victims when facing a digital hate speech context. Conclusions and implications regarding to the current pandemic social distancing and digital closeness effects over the prosocial behaviour are discussed.

Keywords: *social distancing; internet content awareness; emotional regulation; helping attitudes disposal; online duality; hate speech.*

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1. Introduction

COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly, rapidly and measurably changed our daily lives, but could a longer period of social spacing create a society that is less close to the others once it is overcome?

Will people avoid physical contact with others, not only now, but also in a post-coronavirus world? Imaginable, this reality has the potential to become the biggest social experiment in the world. Currently, the research literature is abundant with online research questionnaires investigating the effects of lockdown over citizens' general wellbeing index worldwide. In the following months, much research conclusions will flourish in databases and recommendations for enhancing our own wellbeing will exponentially bust, along with a spike of whistleblowers that will catch our senses with incredible stories of hate narratives. In our opinion, the instigation to hate discourse towards politics and the medical system will become the main social media them for the following months.

One of the direct effect of current COVID-19 pandemic' social distancing on an unspecified period of time, urges us to compensate our lack of physical connection with our readiness in the online environments, especially social media platforms.

In the present research, we wish to emphasize a predictive model of youth bystanders' helping attitudes towards the victims of hate speech, having in mind that this research data was collected during the summer of 2019, in 4 European countries.

While some people distance themselves and deviate from social norms and values, by developing antisocial behaviors, others are placed at the opposite spectrum of this behavior and they are not only protecting, but, on the contrary, strengthening social norms and values, developing prosocial behaviors. Prosocial behavior represents the object of psychosociology. The concept has polarized and continues to polarize the interest of many researchers. At present there is an important volume of observational facts, numerous experimental data, various hypotheses and explanatory theories on the topic.

Polish sociologist Janusz Reykowski (1982), one of the founders of the new study guideline, defines prosocial behavior as that type of behavior that is oriented towards helping, protecting, supporting, and developing other people, without expecting any external reward. There are also authors who consider that this behavior can be defined as an action that brings no benefit to other than the one receiving help. Finally, there are other authors who define prosocial behaviors as those intentional acts that could have

positive consequences for others, without anticipating any reward. The following conditions are necessary for the identification of prosocial behaviors: intention to help other people, freedom of choice, granting aid outside professional obligations and besides the intentionality and the absence of the service obligations, the behavior must be executed without expecting extrinsic rewards (Foster, Wenseleers, & Ratnieks, 2006; Batson, Ahmad, Powell, & Stocks, 2008).

Thus, in the opinion of the psychosocial researchers, the following conditions are necessary for the identification of prosocial behaviors:

(1) intention to help other people. Prosocial behavior should not be confused with altruism, which is only a subspecies of the former. Altruism is defined as that intentional behavior, realized outside the professional obligations and oriented towards the support, conservation and promotion of social values (Piliavin & Charng, 1990; Fehr & Rockenbach, 2004; Stevens & Hauser, 2004). The concept of prosocial behavior defined in this way has a much greater extension and includes very different phenomena: helping others, defending property, self-sacrifice for justice, for homeland independence. The central place in the system of prosocial behavior is occupied by helping, protecting and supporting the development of our fellow human beings, being the supreme social value. Not any behavior that has positive consequences can constitute prosocial behavior, but only that behavior that has an intentionality to support social values and which is consciously produced, such as the implementation of the moral norm offers valid ethical behavior, independent of the outcomes (Sandu & Caras, 2013). We subordinate ourselves, not to being rewarded, but because we feel satisfied when we reach internal moral standards.

(2) freedom of choice, granting aid outside professional obligations.

(3) besides the intentionality and the absence of the service obligations, the behavior must be performed without waiting for the external rewards, the latter constituting the third condition imposed by the psychosocial researchers (Svetlova, Nichols, & Brownell, 2010).

Referring to the personal attributes that trigger the prosocial behavior, most researchers acknowledge the value of competence and empathy:

Regarding competence, for a person competent in the field in which help is requested, the cost of prosocial behavior is lower than for less competent people, who do not know how to intervene. Competence increases if we are familiar with the social and natural environment in which the activity takes place, (Ollhoff et al., 2004). Increasing people's skills allows the frequency of prosocial behavior to rise.

Referring to empathy, the person's perspective produce a genuine altruistic motivation to help. Affective communication with peers ensures the premises of the comprehension of the other's suffering. Once the empathy towards a person in suffering is realized, other affective mechanisms are triggered, which allow the installation of feelings of sympathy, compassion, which evade the conscious judgment processes (Zahn-Waxler et al., 1992). By empathetic knowledge, one can gain an understanding of the motivation of the other but also a stimulation of the motivation of one's own behavior through the need for human help (Hoffman, 2007). The responsibility by which the voice of conscience dictates the person to make decisions in order to get involved in the act of supporting another person in suffering, indifference and selfishness appears in some situations as “crimes”, of not helping the peer in need.

There are two types of factors that influence prosocial behavior: contextual and personality factors. The contextual or situational factors are: emergency situations, situations that involve a danger to a person and situations that require immediate intervention. Research has shown that the presence or absence of others has a decisive influence on the granting of aid, most often the presence of others is a factor that determines the delay of the intervention. Research conclusions (Latane & Darley, 1970; Bekkers & Wilhelm, 2006) formulated the transient effect: people are more likely to give help in an emergency situation when they are alone with the person in need of help than when they are with others in their presence. In a crowd, there is a diffusion of responsibilities to the situation where being an individual alone realizes that it is entirely the responsibility of granting the aid (Bekkers & Wilhelm, 2006). Positive psychological states (feeling good, having a good mood) are more favorable to help than negative psychological states (feeling unwell, worry).

Research into the social life of adolescents' shows that over 70% of people under the age of 18 often feel lonely (Blackburn, Eunson, & Bishop, 1986; Axelson et al., 2006). The feeling of loneliness can become frequent and acute due to: lack of communication skills, relationship, shyness, low self-esteem, inability to express emotionally, inefficient assertiveness skills. Loneliness has long-term consequences for the development of depression

and social anxiety. Based on these considerations regarding the prosocial behaviors and age characteristics of adolescents, in our opinion, training and development of helping behaviors in young people is a chance to prevent the negative emotional states that affect adolescents and which have multiple adverse consequences.

Why is the manifestation of prosocial behavior especially in adolescent age so important? We refer to this age because it is now the acceleration of intellectual development, youth are more hypersensitive, and some motivational and affective conflicts arise. From a psychosocial point of view, adolescence is viewed through the perspective of cultural and social integration, through the formation of groups of adolescents with common concerns and specific subcultures. Regarding adolescence, opinions will be expressed, although contradictory in their essence, but at the same time, reflecting the special complexity of this stage of human life: with a strong dynamic, with the uncertain position that the adolescence occupies in the evolutionary periods of life.

It should be noted that these transformations are not identical for all adolescents, not at the same rate and with the same intensity. Obviously, the manifestation of a prosocial, self-help behavior would facilitate adolescents' relationships with others, would bring them a series of benefits, raising their level of personal happiness, such as: they would learn to communicate in different situations, to relate more easily with others, to engage in altruistic behaviors, which will become part of their personal identity (Stocks, Lishner, & Decker, 2009). Kindness, compassion, gratitude and empathy are qualities that teach children that helping others means helping yourself.

Prosocial behavior often involves initiative, creativity, imagination and effective communication skills. All this helps the adolescences to think more rationally, to be more informed about the reality around them and to feel strong and capable enough to bring about a positive change in the lives of other people. Similarly, students who exhibit such behavior tend to have fewer problems and risk behaviors, but also better family relationships (Boncu, 2005). According to some specialists, relief or consolation behaviors appear from the first years of life, when children do not yet have the capacity to understand the emotions of others and to show empathy. This shows that prosocial, altruistic actions are important for our survival.

Research has shown that in the structure of prosocial behavior, not only the innate predispositions of the person promoting it are present, but also social learning. Reward, the positive reinforcement and sanction, the negative reinforcement, are the social consequences of behavior that influence the probability of its repetition (Sidman, 2006).

2. Methodology

2.1. Objective and hypothesis

In multiple research contexts, there is evidence of the correlation between psychosocial factors, like internet content awareness, helping attitudes, online duality, and difficulties in emotional regulation (Suler, 2004; Eisenberg, 2000; Harris, Rowbotham, & Stevenson, 2009; Herz & Molnár, 2012; Janssen, Erkens, Kirschner, & Kanselaar, 2012; Williams, 2006; Frewen, Dozois, Neufeld, & Lanius, 2012; Rad, Demeter, Roman, Dughi, Ignat, & Rad, 2019; Rad, Dughi, Roman & Ignat, 2019). Therefore, this research's focus is to examine if there is a significant prediction coefficient and how much variability of the helping attitudes of bystanders towards the victims of hate speech is accounted by the internet content awareness, difficulties in emotional regulation, and online duality, under tensed digital environments like online hate speech.

With the purpose of exploring interactions of the youth strategies regarding emotional regulation in the digital space, our team has designed and developed Hate's Journey project, funded under Erasmus+. Our multidisciplinary research team has designed a multiple sections online questionnaire addressing core concepts that are lately used in investigating the digital wellbeing index.

2.2. Participants

Our research targeted a pool of 206 participants from Romania, in percent of 24.8%, Latvia in percent of 24.8%, Spain (24.8%), and Turkey in percent of 25.7%. The average age is 30, male respondents (39.8%) and female respondents (60.2%), with an educational level of 3.9% - elementary school, 1.9% - technical school, 29.1% - high school, 32% - Bachelor, 29.1% - Master and 3.9% - PhD level. Unemployed respondents represent 5.8%, students represent 43.7%, volunteers represent 1% and employed are 49.5%. Regarding the online time spent by sample participants, 1% declared - never or hardly ever, 8.7% - every week, 20.4% - almost daily, 46.6% - several times per day, 23.3% - and almost all the time, the number of frequent internet users is 69.9% (Rad, Dixon, & Rad, 2020).

Our research utilized convenience sampling technique, as the purpose of this investigation is explorative. The total of participants were consecutively selected according to the order of appearance when completing the online questionnaire shared on social media platforms by each of the 4 project partner countries, each country targeting at least 50 respondents, according to the convenient accessibility principle. Data

collection procedure was coordinated by 4 partner organizations: Asociación Cultural Social y Educativa Segundas Oportunidades (Spain), Aurel Vlaicu University of Arad (Romania), Ucarli Genclik Dernegi (Turkey) and Young Folks (Latvia). The sampling process ended by the time each of the 4 project partner countries reached their sample saturation of 50 valid respondents and the 3 month time saturation, during the summer of 2019 (Rad, Dixon, & Rad, 2020).

2.3. Instruments

For the purpose of this research, we have included in our online investigation the following instruments.

For assessing youth's difficulties in emotional regulation, we have used DERS - SF the short version for Difficulties in Emotional Regulation Scale. The DERS - SF was developed to determine the perceived capacity to regulate emotions at a trait level (Kaufman, E. A., et al., 2015). The measure is scored on a 1 to 5 scale, where 1 stands for almost never and 5 for all the time, higher scores indicating a deficiency in the regulation process. Exploratory Factor Analysis revealed a structure of six factors for the difficulties in emotional regulation (Victor & Klonsky, 2016; Pontes, Taylor, & Stavropoulos, 2018). The design of six factors was considered more interpretable and converted into six subscales, as following: (1) lack of emotional awareness - reverse-scored – items 1, 4, 6; (2) lack of emotional clarity - items 2, 3, 5; (3) regulating behaviour difficulty when distressed - items 9, 14, 17; (4) difficulty in target-oriented cognition and conduct while in distress - items 8, 11, 13; (5) refrain in embracing certain emotional reactions - items 1, 12, 16; and (6) failure of accessibility to approaches to feel secure in moments of distress - items 10, 15, 18.

For assessing youth's helping attitudes towards the victims of hate speech, we have used the Helping Attitudes Scale (HAS), as presented by Nickell, G. (1998). HAS consists of a 20 items assessment of the views, emotions, and attitudes of the respondents associated with support, and relationships with others. Every item is responded on a Likert scale of 5, ranging from 1=strong disagreement to 5= strong agreement. The reversed score items are 1st, 5th, 8th, 11th, 18th, and 19th. The scores for each item are summed to create an aggregate value, with a minimum of 20 and a maximum of 100. An above 70 score represents a higher level of helping attitudes (Nickell, 1998). As resulted from research on prosocial behaviour, generosity was directly correlated with the level of education, social trust, and prosocial value prioritization (De Cremer & Van Lange, 2001; Bekkers, 2007).

The following single research items were used:

- for online duality ($M=2.41$, $SD=0.94$) assessment this research used a single item measure – Item 8.5. On a one to five scale (1 standing for strong disagreement and 5 standing for strong agreement), respondents were asked to select one value according to the agreement with the statement: I talk about different things online than speaking to people (Rad, Dixon, & Rad, 2020).

- for internet content awareness ($M=3.88$, $SD=1.00$) assessment this research used a single item measure – Item 25.3. On a one to five scale (1 standing for strong disagreement and 5 standing for strong agreement), respondents were asked to select one value according to the agreement with the statement: I understand the role social media websites/apps play in shaping the information and content I see (Rad, Dixon, & Rad, 2020).

2.4. Research design

Our team has computed a multiple regression analysis, to predict the value of the DV helping attitudes towards the victims of hate speech, based on the value of participant's internet content awareness, online duality and difficulties in emotional regulation.

3. Results

For the variables used in the present study the descriptive results are: helping attitudes ($m=70.50$; $SD=11.77$), internet content awareness ($m=14.89$; $SD=3.4$), difficulties in emotional regulation ($m=43.22$; $SD=8.86$), and online duality ($m=2.41$; $SD=0.94$).

Table 1. Regression coefficients of the DV helping attitudes and the IVs internet content awareness, difficulties in emotional regulation and online duality.

Descriptive Statistics			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Helping attitudes scale - HAS	76.50	11.772	206
ICA	14.8932	3.40992	206
Emotion regulation scale - ERS	43.22	8.865	206
Online duality	2.41	.942	206

A Predictive Model of Youth Bystanders' Helping Attitudes
Dana RAD et al.

Model Summary^b										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	.623 ^a	.388	.378	9.281	.388	42.601	3	202	.000	1.583

a. Predictors: (Constant), Online duality, ICA, Emotion regulation scale

b. Dependent Variable: Helping attitudes scale

ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	11008.297	3	3669.432	42.601	.000 ^b
	Residual	17399.198	202	86.135		
	Total	28407.495	205			

a. Dependent Variable: Helping attitudes scale

b. Predictors: (Constant), Online duality, ICA, Emotion regulation scale

Coefficients^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	66.277	4.732		14.006	.000
	ICA	1.785	.192	.517	9.319	.000
	Emotion regulation scale	-.240	.075	-.181	-3.211	.002
	Online duality.	-2.495	.700	-.200	-3.566	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Helping attitudes scale

As depicted in Table 1, our research's independent variables IV₁, IV₂, IV₃ account for 37% variance of youth helping attitudes towards the victims of hate speech, with all the independents variables internet content awareness (Beta=0.51, at a p<0.01), difficulties in emotional regulation (Beta=-0.18, at a p<0.01), and online duality (Beta=-0.20, at a p<0.01), computed as significant predictors.

Figure 1. Plot of regression standardized residual for the DV helping attitudes and the IVs internet content awareness, difficulties in emotional regulation and online duality.

Looking at the plot of regression standardized residual for our computed MRA (Figure 1) we can assume normality as there are no drastic deviations from the normality line.

4. Discussions and conclusions

Our Hate's Journey project aimed at addressing the subject of digital fingerprint, that is, the registration or the traces left by the activities people carry out online, such as interactions with social networks, personal website information, browsing history, online subscriptions, galleries photos / videos uploaded by youth online, aiming the in-depth analysis of the psychological triggers of hate speech.

Current research investigated if the difficulties in emotional regulation, internet content awareness, and online duality are powerful predictors of helping attitudes of bystanders in the context of online hate speech. The obtained results validate our hypothesis, confirming that if an individual is characterized by a decreased internet content awareness, a high

level of difficulties in emotional regulation and increased online duality, then there is a 37% probability that the youth bystanders will develop a lack of helping attitudes towards the victims when facing a digital hate speech context.

The digital fingerprint is closely linked to the notion of digital identity, namely the sum of someone's online activity as part of their identity and image to others. Electronic or digital reputation, whether from a personal or professional point of view, represents an essential aspect of individuals' life and career. Not being aware of this digital identity can have harmful consequences on personal and professional life, as well as on relatives, friends, colleagues, etc. Thus, awareness raising is the first step that stakeholders in the field must take, from the technology sector to the educational sectors. Secondly, it is very important to build youth competences in order to have a more responsible use of digital devices. This will ensure a safe internet for all, which is why all stakeholders need to commit to making the internet a safer place, from decision makers, educational stakeholders, digital experts and applications developers.

The socialization approach on the direction of empathy inducing altruistic motivations can use as strategy the actions of modeling the perception of another in need, adopting its perspective, experiencing the empathic emotion and realizing behaviors that achieve altruistic goals.

Youth must learn how to help oneself, thus becoming active person. Moreover, victims of hate speech have to learn to regain self-confidence and to motivate themselves in order to gain the autonomy and responsibility to successfully integrate into an activity to the extent of their social skills and competences by activating own resources. By developing prosocial behavior, capitalizing on it and promoting it when peers manifest it, there is an impact on the personality of people that can have the effect of learning and reproducing this type of behavior.

Certainly some of the worldwide cultures are more prosocial than other cultures. Youth educating, religious instruction and education can dictate the degree to which individuals are inspired to support their peers.

Pure interest for others is a utopia that can be easily crushed by selfish interests or flourishes when the good of the group is above individualistic wishes. Referring to the cultural aspect, as we have seen in the results section, for countries like Romania, Spain, Turkey and Latvia, the mean of sample aggregated helping attitudes ($m=70.50$) is considered high, thus youth from these countries are willing to demonstrate prosocial behaviors when assisting to a digital hate speech situation. It is interesting how these results can apply in other cultural contexts, and how this prosocial

behavior will change over the course of pandemic's lockdown. Specific behavioral patterns will be observed and researchers are called to identify main psycho-social stages of a pandemy, in order to better react to a future health threatening event.

Our current opinion is that the rate of digital hate speech will increase over the following months, in opposition to the prosocial behavior of helping somebody in digital distress, thus resulting in an overall picture of more aggressive narratives and instigation to digital hate speech, that counter narratives.

These aspects are to be highlighted by the different governmental approaches related to digital freedom of expression. The higher the pressure of silencing whistleblowers, the more hate speech reactions will follow.

Our lack of physical connection together with our readiness in the online environments, due to imposed COVID-19 social distancing is going to trigger more prosocial behaviors like counter narratives and benevolence or is it going to bring us in from of a fake news and anti-social behaviors reality display? As far as we are aware, currently the digital space offers us information much more connected to the anti-social behaviors and black humor, in an amalgam of hate speech.

The profound conclusion of this study is that the collective mind and repertoire of behavioral responses to digital information will influence the actual behavior of young people, to a greater extent than any other social factor of influence, especially now, when education has gone online. This is the main reason why digital environment, especially social media networks need to be seen as the next main influencer of the 2020 post-pandemic society. Educational institutions not only have to gain a voice over the online environment, but also have to higher the voice in order to silence the negative disruptive digital information, which is a double provocation.

Further inter-cultural analysis is needed to illustrate the effect of social distance and increased digital consumption in our 2020 society and ultimately to create positive social educational environments for youth.

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