

**BOOK TITLE: Thriving in Digital Workspaces: Innovations in theory, research
and
practice**

**"Empathy, morality and social and emotional competencies in interpersonal
interactions online"**

Abstract

Information and Communication Technologies are used in education, leisure and working spaces. In those contexts, individuals interact through electronic devices daily, usually for several hours. Individuals and groups communicate, learn and work through cyberspace. They feel, think, act and make decisions while interacting online. Social and emotional competencies, morality and empathy, highly used in informal communication, have been found to be important components of face-to-face interpersonal interactions and new research advancements focus on their role in interpersonal interactions online. These competencies may also play an important role in prosocial versus antisocial interaction online, but research on this topic is still in its infancy. This chapter reviews studies focused on social and emotional competencies, morality and empathy as related to cyberspace. Similarities and differences between face-to-face and online interactions will also be reviewed. This chapter will further present recent findings specifically focused on these competencies as expressed online. Some implications for policy and practice will be discussed and future research lines will be suggested.

Keywords: online interpersonal interactions, social and emotional competencies, empathy, morality, online behaviour

Introduction

We live connected. In the broadest sense of the word, people talk, make decisions, laugh, suffer and have fun while using electronic devices. According to the Nielsen Report (2018) more than 4 billion people (53% of the global population) are Internet users. The majority of Internet users (92.6%) use mobile devices to connect to the Internet, with many (85%) connecting daily and with increasing frequency, spending more than six hours a day online. Internet access, mobile phone technology and digital innovations are redefining people's interactions. Improvements in security and connectivity contribute to this constant growth in Internet use. Nowadays, people's lifestyles require faster, simpler, easier and digital ways to perform daily activities. Young people are seen to hold an advantage in the use of the Internet, with the term "digital natives" (Prensky, 2005), used to describe those who have been born in a world where technology is frequently used, including also a constant advancement in new technologies.

There are myriad activities that can be performed through electronic devices such as shopping, booking services, watching online content, using social media sites, instant messaging/video calling, online banking, etc. Millions of users spend time on virtual social networks, listening to music, watching videos and playing games online. Electronic devices are considered to be useful tools for informal communication and entertainment, even more so when considering the pace and need for immediacy at which today's society lives and the level of stress of people living in the modern societies.

Young adults are the heaviest users of mobile apps; with those aged 18-34 years being the age-group who spend the largest amount of time using mobile apps (Lipsman & Lella, 2017). The use of mobile apps by young adults is often considered essential for their social activity. A large number of people access online social networking sites or communities in order to make friends, develop relationships and give and receive emotional support (Horrigan, Rainie & Fox, 2005). In fact, communication technologies

are used widely for a large number of activities in relation to education, leisure and work among this age-group.

Many variables are involved in shaping human behaviour and they can be observed in interpersonal interactions. Some of the factors that have been found to be important in influencing interpersonal interactions and relationships include social and emotional competencies, empathy and morality. According to Gibbs, Basinger and Grime (2003), empathy is crucial for behaviour in terms of considering other people's needs, as well as respecting both current norms and legality. Given the importance of social and emotional competencies, empathy and morality in interpersonal interactions, it is crucial to analyse these variables in relation to online interaction. Thus, this chapter reviews studies focused on social and emotional competencies, morality and empathy in relation to cyber-behaviour. Similarities and differences between face-to-face and online interactions regarding these variables will be reviewed.

Interpersonal interactions online

The Internet has become a key tool for communication, entertainment and accessing information in modern society. Many of these activities involve interactions between individuals, meaning that interpersonal interactions through electronic devices are constantly taking place. Social and emotional competencies, morality and empathy, highly used in informal communication, have been found to be important components of face-to-face interpersonal interactions (Marín-López, Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Hunter, 2018; Marín-López, Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Monks, 2019). New research advancements focus on their role in interpersonal interactions online. These variables may play an important role in prosocial versus antisocial interaction online, but research on this topic

is still relatively underdeveloped. Prosocial behavior is understood as those behaviors that aim to be helpful to other people (e.g. helping others, sharing with others, comforting people or cooperating, among others) (Dovidio, 2001); prosocial behaviors happen when interacting online (Wang & Wang, 2008; Wright & Li, 2011) through online videogames, social networking sites, mail, chats or text messages. Antisocial behavior is defined as those hostile conducts that aim to attack the welfare of an individual, group or society (Walker, Ramsey, & Gresham, 2004); antisocial behaviors happen in cyberspace (e.g. cyberbullying, trolling, cyberstalking, flaming or griefing) (Barton, 2016).

Findings from neuroscience show that internal representation of actions is triggered when observing or listening to someone else's actions in both monkeys and humans (Gallese, Fadiga, Fogassi, & Rizzolatti, 1996; Kohler et al., 2002; Rizzolatti, Fadiga, Gallese, & Fogassi, 1996; see Rizzolatti, Fogassi, & Gallese, 2001, for a review). Wicker and colleagues (2003) demonstrated that similar mechanisms may apply to emotional fields: observing the emotional facial expression of an individual triggers neural activity distinctive to one's own emotional experience. The mirror neuron system allows us to decode and understand other people's actions (Carr, Iacoboni, Dubeau, Mazziotta, & Lenzi, 2003; Decety, 2010; Iacoboni & Dapretto, 2006; Rizzolatti & Craighero, 2004). It is suggested by Carr et al. (2003) that when the brain areas which are related to action representation and emotional content are activated, an individual recognizes and empathizes with another individual. In this sense, face-to-face interactions are important for the understanding and shaping of emotional responses.

An individual's accurate perception of another's emotions and feelings is not completely possible when interacting through electronic devices such as instant messaging or email. The inability to see and feel and to be seen and felt could result in fewer social and emotional cues being available, resulting in decreased levels of empathy, and even in

biased moral reasoning possibly because of some mechanisms present in cyber-behavior such as “deindividuation” and “disinhibition” (Silke, 2003; Suler, 2004) that will be defined later.

Small and Vorgan (2008) analysed the impact of technology use on the human brain and how the use of electronic devices alters brain function related to individuals’ skills. These authors pointed out that frequent use of technologies can have consequences such as poor development of abilities including social skills, direct communication skills and the ability to perceive nonverbal cues. They argue that excessive Internet use contributes to psychological difficulties such as loneliness, confusion, anxiety, depression, fatigue and abuse, and may even be related to creating or exacerbating social and emotional distance from family and friends.

Social and emotional competencies used in cyberspace

Social and emotional competencies are defined as effectiveness in prosocial interpersonal interactions and relationships (Gómez-Ortiz, Romera, & Ortega-Ruiz, 2017) including the expression, perception, understanding and management of emotions (Fernández-Berrocal, Cabello, & Gutiérrez-Cobo, 2017). These competencies involve applying knowledge, skills and attitudes to understanding and managing one’s own emotions and influencing others’ emotions in a prosocial way, while being empathetic and able to initiate and maintain desirable interpersonal relationships and make responsible decisions (CASEL, 2015).

Social and emotional competencies are key to an individual becoming and developing as a good student, worker and citizen. Also known as “noncognitive skills”, these social and emotional competencies are crucial for success in school and in the workplace (Mattern et al., 2013; National Research Council, 2012). Also, longitudinal studies have shown

that increasing these competencies prevents and reduces risky behaviours such as aggression, delinquency, substance use, and academic failure (Aspy et al., 2004; Bradshaw, Rodgers, Ghandour, & Garbarino, 2009; Moffitt et al., 2011).

Social and emotional competencies have been studied within the context of online communication, although the number of studies in this domain is still very low. Some research has confirmed that people express, perceive, use and manage emotions during online communication (Bazarova, Taft, Choi, & Cosley, 2013; Kramer, Guillory, & Hancock, 2014; Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Marín-López, 2017). Research has also indicated that online emotional content (termed e-motions) is expressed, perceived, used, understood and managed while interacting online (Zych et al., 2017).

In this work it was also noted that perceiving, using, understanding and managing emotional content online is positively related to some aspects of emotional intelligence such as emotional attention, emotional clarity and perceived emotional intelligence, but was also positively related to difficulties in identifying and perceiving feelings (Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Marín-López, 2017). It was reported that social and emotional competences act as a protective factor, while an excessive use of online emotional content is a risk factor for cybervictimization (Marín-López, Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Hunter, 2018). A high level of social and emotional competencies is related to a high frequency of use of emotional content online. Frequent use of emotional content online is a mediator variable that seems to buffer the desirable effect of social and emotional competencies against cybervictimization (Marín-López, Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Hunter, 2018). Thus, it is possible that a high level of social and emotional competencies contribute to better interpersonal relationships that protect against cybervictimization. Nevertheless, a high level of social and emotional competencies is also related to a high use of emotional content online which, in turn is related to more cyberbullying. It was also found that a

high level of social and emotional competencies was related to less technology abuse, as defined by Beard and Wolf (2001, p. 378) “use of the Internet that creates psychological, social, school, and/or work difficulties in a person's life” (Nasaescu, Marín-López, Llorent, Ortega-Ruiz, & Zych, 2018). Furthermore, using emotional content in online communication, bullying victimization, and perpetration were all positively related to more abuse of technologies. Thus, it seems that an excessive use of emotions in online interactions can be a risk factor for cyberbullying and even technology abuse.

Suler (2004) and Silke (2003), respectively identified two latent mechanisms that might explain changes in cyber-behaviour, via so-called “disinhibition” and “deindividuation”. The online disinhibition effect consists of people saying and doing things in online interactions that they would not say or do in face-to-face interactions. Feelings of restraint that may be present in face-to-face encounters may disappear when an individual is in front of a screen, replaced by a freedom of thought and speech. This feeling of “online freedom” can work in two opposite directions, either as benign disinhibition (e.g. sharing personal information or thoughts such as self-emotions, secrets, wishes, and desirable behaviours) or as malignant disinhibition (e.g. threats, criticism, rude language or behaviour) (Suler, 2004). The deindividuation mechanism (Zimbardo, 1969), happens in social situations as a result of becoming part of a group and thereby losing individuality. Once the inner restraint of the individual is lost, the deindividuated state leads them to act freely as if no one is watching or paying attention to them. In a case study of group identification and deindividuation, users of an online site characterized by its large-scale and its anonymity, experienced both identification with the site and its users and perceived deindividuation (Mikal, Rice, Kent, & Uchino, 2016). Thus, evidence suggests that social and emotional competencies used in cyberspace could be protective, but could also be a risk factor if they are used in an undesirable way.

Morality in face-to-face and online interactions

There are several ways to define and understand morality. Kohlberg (1969) focused on morality in relation to justice, while Gilligan (1982) added a care-based perspective to Kohlberg's definition of morality, understanding it also as caring about personal relationships and community. There is a certain agreement regarding morality referring to how well or how badly people treat each other. Turiel (1983, p.3) defined a moral domain as "prescriptive judgments of justice, rights, and welfare pertaining to how people ought to relate to each other." There is also a social convention or personal choice domain that does not involve values such as "justice, rights, and welfare" and therefore, can change according to the context or situation (Turiel, Hildebrandt, & Wainryb, 1991).

Some cross-cultural studies focused on different countries including India (Shweder, Mahapatra, & Miller, 1987), Brazil and the United States (Graham, Haidt, & Nosek, 2009; Haidt & Hersch, 2001; Haidt, Koller, & Dias, 1993; Jensen, 1998) found that many moral concerns are related to rules in social hierarchy and moral expectations of loyalty toward a community or nation (Graham et al., 2011). Thus, there are different perceptions of morality depending on culture, social status, politics, and even time period. Nevertheless, there is also a broader definition of the moral domain that, to some extent, seems to be universal.

Haidt and Kesebir (2010) proposed a functional definition of moral systems as an intertwined set of psychologically evolved mechanisms, values, conventions, identities, technologies and institutions that contribute to make social life possible by restraining or managing selfishness. It is inferred that human morality emerges from both cultural innovations and hereditary coevolution (Richerson & Boyd, 2005), finding different ways

to foster the potential of the human mind to build communities far from selfishness. People internalize moral norms and values within a context through different cognitive processes that require some self-regulation of behaviour. In morally competent people, moral behaviour is regulated and an assessment of one's own behaviour takes into account its consequences for self and others. People self-regulate their behaviour through the application of consequences to themselves, trying at the same time not to damage their own self-esteem and self-satisfaction (Bandura, 2002). As a result, an individual can differentiate morally desirable and undesirable behaviours. Nevertheless, there are some cognitive mechanisms that might be applied to some behaviours that do not seem to be morally desirable, through which people disengage from moral principles. Moral disengagement refers to a set of mechanisms that people use to justify their immoral or harmful behaviours in order to avoid self-punishment for moral transgressions (Bandura, 2002).

Cyberspace is characterized as being a virtual space where different virtual scenarios are possible. In that sense, it is a space with, at least, potential for moral ambiguity, which refers to the absence of certainty about what is right and what is wrong. Since interpersonal interactions are established through Internet, morality is also expected to play a role in these relationships, but it may be that cyberspace is considered differently, as "not real life" and so the line between right and wrong blurs. An example of this potential moral ambiguity is demonstrated by an episode that happened in an online community called LambdaMOO. In that community a virtual rape occurred when a user called Mr. Bungle, using a program to act as if he was another character, described sexual acts performed between other avatars. His actions were considered to be a sexual violation of the characters who were forced to act sexually (see Turkle, 1995). This upset some

users involved while other users asserted it was only a game. As a result, Mr. Bungle's account was deleted.

Morality, as in other human behaviours, is present in cyber-behaviour. Thus, cyberspace has become a new context for moral and immoral actions. There is evidence supporting moral disengagement when interacting online (Runions & Bak, 2015) regarding for example some violent phenomena such as cyberbullying and cyber-aggression (Gini, Pozzoli, & Hymel, 2014). In a recent study (Marín-López, Zych, Ortega-Ruiz, & Monks, 2019) moral disengagement when using technology was studied and an instrument for its measurement was created and validated. Some interesting results found in the above-mentioned study are that significant and positive relationships between moral justification through technologies (using excuses to justify reprehensible and destructive cyberconduct) and online empathy (including both affective and cognitive dimensions) were found. Online cognitive empathy was also positively and significantly related to overall levels of moral disengagement through technology. Pornari and Wood (2010) examined how cyberspace may encourage moral disengagement by creating an illusion of actions not causing harm based on the inability to see the reaction of the cybervictim and also the distance between the cyberperpetrator and the cybervictim. This has led Pornari and Wood (2010) to argue that cyberspace has some particular structural characteristics that could foster the use of moral disengagement mechanisms and consequently, increase the occurrence of cyber-aggression.

Haidt (2003) defined moral emotions as those originated as a response to moral violations and also those that trigger moral actions. This means that moral emotions are expected to emerge when observing immoral actions (that trigger anger and standing up for the victim's rights) or as a self-regulation mechanism (triggering shame and guilt, and stopping the immoral action). Some studies have examined the mediating role of moral

emotions in the relationship between moral standards and moral behaviour (Olthof, 2012; Tangney, Stuewig, & Mashek, 2007). Moral emotions have proven to be a useful element when anticipating negative outcomes of moral transgressions in order to subsequently adjust moral behaviour to moral standards (Malti, Gasser, & Buchmann, 2009).

Morality might be a part of both face-to-face and virtual life and moral disengagement might not only be present in interpersonal face-to-face but also in online interactions. Our individual level of morality is important in influencing the ways in which we perceive and respond to others and clearly has implications for our social interactions, be they in person or mediated via new technologies. Similarly, although individual propensities to moral disengagement impact on social interactions, certain characteristics of cyberspace may actually amplify some of the moral disengagement mechanisms.

Empathy in face-to-face and online interactions

Empathy is a complex construct defined as “understanding and sharing in another's emotional state or context” (Cohen & Strayer, 1996, p. 988). Empathy is usually divided into two dimensions: cognitive empathy, understood as the capacity for understanding other peoples’ emotions; and affective empathy, which is the capacity for experiencing and sharing other peoples’ emotional states (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006). Affective empathy is developed during childhood. It works through mirroring and emotional resonance during interactions between the children and social agents from their context. There is empirical evidence that observing someone experiencing an emotion activates the same neuropsychological regions that are activated when experiencing an emotion in oneself (Decety, 2011; Walter, 2012).

Later in childhood, children develop the capacity to take another person’s perspective. This capacity is a requirement for the development of mature empathetic responses

(Decety, 2011). Mature empathetic responses require both self-conscious and perspective-taking cognitive processes. Usually, affective and cognitive empathy co-occur when empathetic responses take place (Walter, 2012). Empathy is positively related to intelligence, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006) while low empathy levels are related to antisocial behaviours (Jolliffe, & Farrington, 2004; Zych, Baldry, Farrington, & Llorent, 2019). Moral reasoning, prosocial reasoning and empathy are positively interrelated (Retuerto, 2002). Since all these constructs are involved in affective and cognitive processes and are positively interrelated, it seems that a positive relationship exists between affective and cognitive processes in an individual's moral development (Retuerto, 2002).

Empathy may also play an important role in cyber-behaviour. Small and Vorgan (2008) stated that online interactions decrease face-to-face empathy and the amount of time spent in face-to-face interactions. They suggest that this decrease in face-to-face empathy may be because non-verbal communication cues such as facial expressions, body language or eye contact are usually absent in online interaction, which are considered to be crucial elements to perceive and understand emotions.

However, Carrier, Spradlin, Bunce and Rosen (2015) suggested that it is possible to show "virtual empathy" through online communication and argue that interacting online does not seem to decrease people's empathy in face-to-face interactions. These authors even found that spending time in cyberspace on activities that could promote later face-to-face interactions can even foster face-to-face empathy. Significant and positive correlations between face-to-face empathy and virtual empathy were found, with virtual empathy scoring lower than face-to-face empathy (Carrier et al., 2015). They also found that affective empathy showed lower scores than cognitive empathy, and cognitive empathy's scores decreased more in the cyberspace than the affective ones. In this vein, research has

indicated that online empathy exists and an instrument for its measurement has been created and validated (Marín-López et al., 2019). Caplan and Turner (2007) go further by proposing that empathy could be facilitated or even increased by communication through electronic devices. For example, it is often easier to find other people online who are in similar situations to yourself and this can be especially comforting, particularly when the topic is difficult to address in face-to-face interactions (Van Zalk, Van Zalk, Kerr, & Stattin, 2014). However, other evidence suggests that being exposed to violent video games is a causal risk factor for decreased empathy and prosocial behavior, as it is for increased aggressive behavior (Anderson et al., 2010).

In short, it seems that empathy does exist in online interpersonal interactions. It is possible that some online activities can foster people's empathic response in both face-to-face and virtual interpersonal interactions (e.g., if the Internet is being used to connect with people with similar interests or to be a part of certain communities where people feel protected and comfortable). Or it can decrease empathy within face-to-face encounters (e.g., if an individual spends several hours exposed to violent online games they may become desensitized to violent behaviour off-line).

Implications for humans thriving in digital workspaces

The digital revolution and Industry 4.0 are redefining the nature of jobs, workplaces and human behaviour. This has meant that citizens must try to fit into the digital era by readapting and/or developing new sets of competencies. Demands and challenges arise; some people struggle to fit in with this digital age while others experience success and thrive. The review carried out in the present chapter has focused on gathering empirical findings about the role of social and emotional competencies, empathy and morality in cyber-behaviour and consequently their role in the digital workspace.

Social and emotional competencies, empathy and morality have proven to be crucial elements for humans to thrive in different workspaces (Bar-On & Parker, 2000; George, 2000; Mattern et al., 2014; National Research Council, 2012; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Findings from the fields of affective neuroscience and emotion have noted that emotions and the functioning of the human mind are innately interconnected (Izard, 2009; Lewis, 2005; Tucker, 2007). The inter-connection between cognition and emotion is undoubted, as is the level of complexity of human consciousness. The interplay between emotional activity and cognition enables mechanisms such as memory and attention to develop appropriately which facilitate learning (Tucker, 2007). Thus, social and emotional competencies, empathy and morality are key elements in educational settings, not just because of their role in human development, but also because of the importance of emotionality in learning itself.

Schools have an important role in preparing children and young people to be future citizens and workers. Promoting students' academic, social, and emotional learning, will contribute to supporting rounded and competent students with positive social and emotional competencies, work habits, meaningful careers and levels of citizenship (Dymnicki, Sambolt, & Kidron, 2013). Research has highlighted (e.g., CASEL, 2015; Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011) the need for fostering social and emotional competencies in school in order to prepare individuals in both work and life. These competencies are expressed in a certain way in face-to-face interactions and, as this chapter shows, can be expressed, used and managed in a different way in cyberspace. In this sense, it is necessary to further advance knowledge and understanding of human behaviour in digital workspaces in order to promote positive aspects, as well as acknowledging and preventing possible risks of cyber-behaviour.

Educational actions that explicitly focus on social and emotional competencies, morality, moral disengagement and empathy would be beneficial for individuals at both the intrapersonal and interpersonal level. It is advisable that promoting social and emotional learning (SEL) is understood as an aspect of lifelong learning, starting in nursery school and extending to postgraduate educational levels, including approaches focused on the workplace involving digital character education. It is vital to understand the differences between the expression and use of social and emotional competencies in face-to-face and online encounters as well as examining face-to-face and online empathy and face-to-face and online morality. Understanding the potential and risks of these elements is key.

Social and emotional learning includes the acquisition and effective application of knowledge, attitudes and skills to understand and regulate emotions, set and reach goals, feel empathy and be able to show it, establish and maintain positive relationships and make responsible decisions. We recommend that complementary training is developed, relating to these social and emotional competencies in virtual interpersonal interactions focusing on morality and tackling moral disengagement in cyberspace. It is possible that understanding cyberspace as an extension of face to face interactions rather than as a separate context with no connection to face to face interactions, could help to promote more careful consideration of human behaviour and the consequences of this behavior when interacting through electronic devices.

Such an educational enterprise entails a great responsibility and is a considerable challenge. Educators, teachers and every individual related to educational settings must be correctly trained before training other individuals. New educational opportunities continue to emerge in the online environment, and they must be addressed in order to prepare citizens for happy and productive lives in a technological world that is constantly evolving.

Conclusion

In the age of digital communication and in light of the massive use of electronic devices by adolescents, cyber-behaviour has become an online part of young people's life and social relationships. Social and emotional competencies, empathy and morality are important in both face-to-face and online interactions. They are relevant for success in school and in the workplace (Mattern et al., 2014; National Research Council, 2012) and have been found to prevent and reduce risky behaviours such as aggression, delinquency, substance use, and academic failure (Aspy et al., 2004; Bradshaw et al., 2009; Moffitt et al., 2011). They have a protective role for cybervictimization and technology abuse. Research studies examining the emotional aspects of cyber-behaviour, using measures of emotional intelligence, are demonstrating that an excessive use of online emotional content is a risk factor for cybervictimization as it is for abuse of technologies (Marín-López et al., 2018; Nasaescu et al., 2018). Beyond the possible requirement of finding other means of measurement, current studies suggest that social and emotional competencies used in cyberspace could also be a risk factor if they are used in an undesirable way (Mikal et al., 2016; Silke, 2003; Suler, 2004).

Research has also noted that morality and moral disengagement are important aspects of face-to-face and virtual interactions (Gini et al., 2014; Marín-López et al., 2019; Pornari & Wood, 2010; Runions & Bak, 2015). It has been argued that cyberspace is a space where different virtual scenarios are possible, and this can lead to moral ambiguity when trying to establish what is right and what is wrong.

Moral disengagement may occur when interacting online (Runions & Bak, 2015) and has been found to be particularly relevant for some violent phenomena such as cyberbullying and cyber-aggression (Gini et al., 2014). Significant and positive relationships between moral justification through technologies and online empathy (including both affective and

cognitive dimensions) were found (Marín-López et al., 2019). It was also found that online cognitive empathy was positively and significantly related to overall levels of moral disengagement through technology. Since the stimuli and the emotional responses are different in an “emotionally cold” environment such as electronic devices, this may favour the greater ease of moral disengagement.

In this sense, it might be that the emotional aspect of the interaction may be a causal factor in the diversity of moral attribution. It might be an individual’s physical presence in an interaction may mean that the emotional content of the interaction is more apparent, but when the interaction is mediated through an electronic device, this is less visible. An individual level of morality impacts on people’s social interactions, in person or mediated via new technologies. Similarly, individual propensities to moral disengagement also influences people’s social interactions. Thus, new research lines are focused on discovering the impact of both social mediation in general and social mediation through digital devices.

Empathy is key in developing mature interpersonal relationships (Decety, 2011). It is positively related with intelligence, extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness and openness (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2006) while low empathy is related with antisocial behaviours (Jolliffe & Farrington, 2004; Zych et al., 2018). It appears that empathy does exist in online interpersonal interaction (Carrier et al., 2015; Marín-López et al., 2019). Research has indicated contradictory findings indicating that in some circumstances online interaction can even foster face-to-face empathy (Caplan & Turner, 2007), while in others it can act to decrease face-to-face empathy (Anderson et al., 2010; Small & Vorgan 2008). Empathy, a neuro-emotional and cognitive product, seems to be working slightly differently in online as opposed to face-to-face interactions. Carrier and colleagues (2015) found significant and positive correlations between face-to-face

empathy and virtual empathy, although virtual empathy scores were lower than the face-to-face ones. They also found that affective empathy showed lower scores than cognitive empathy and that cognitive empathy online decreased more in the cyberspace than affective empathy scores.

Similarities between the above-mentioned components of human behaviour in online and offline interactions might be explained by the capacity of maintaining social and emotional competencies, empathy and morality fully “activated” when interacting online. Differences may be due to the lack of normal face-to-face communication cues such as facial expressions, body language or eye contact which are absent in online interaction. The role of these offline communication cues in perceiving and understanding emotions together with the “emotional coldness” that may characterize online communication by making the user distanced or even emotionally disconnected from the individual on the other side of the screen, could provide some explanation for these differences.

Thus, despite these findings, further research is needed. A better understanding of these aspects is needed in order to support thriving and flourishing in digital workspaces. Future workers and citizens must be supported to be able to manage emotions, social and emotional competencies, empathic behaviour and morality when interacting through electronic devices. School and lifelong learning are key tools for achieving this aim. Future research lines could focus on carrying out prospective longitudinal studies of the online dimension of social and emotional competencies, morality and empathy. It would be also interesting to conduct this kind of research in different countries in order to facilitate cross-cultural comparisons.

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