Article

Socially Disadvantaged Youth: Forms of Expression and Communication in Social Networks as a Vehicle of Inclusion

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Abstract: Socially disadvantaged youth are a group to which prejudices are attached which question the appropriateness of their participation, communication and language in the digital setting. From this perspective, the aim of the present research proposes to identify the forms and expressions of communication used by socially disadvantaged young people from the city of Madrid in social networks. This will be examined as a tool for the development of interpersonal and social relatedness processes, which will enable inclusion and socialisation in contemporary society. To this end, a qualitative approach was proposed which enabled a set of core memos, codes, networks and categories to be established, through which study data were interpreted. WhatsApp images and interviews conducted with 78 informants were analysed using Atlas.ti 9 software. All participants belonged to a social group characterised by circumstances of social vulnerability. Of the main findings, it should be indicated that these young people exhibit a social network use that is not limited to engagement in digital leisure but, instead, is based on the exchange of communication. For this reason, these individuals have developed their own language, a fact that highlights specific traits of the digital culture to which they belong and contributes to disproving the idea that these young people use the digital setting inappropriately.

Keywords: youth; social disadvantage; digital expression; digital communication; social networks; inclusion

1. Introduction

The present study proposes to examine the forms of communication and expression used on social networks by socially disadvantaged young people. This group, whilst forming part of the hyperconnected generation, is often questioned in relation to its form of interaction and participation in the technological setting. This occurs despite the fact that, as indicated by Melendro et al. [1], the behaviour of this social group, regarding ICT, is similar to that of other young people from their generation.

From this perspective, the present work considers questions around whether social networks are useful for the communication processes of socially disadvantaged young people and their relationship with learning. Through this work, we seek to urge the possibility that, beyond the digital leisure experiences that young people from this social group put into practice, communication and language mediated via social networks acts as an instrument that supports the establishment of personal and social relationships. This makes possible their participation and inclusion in the information and knowledge society.

2. Literature Review

In consideration of this focus, the present research begins with a scientific review of literature which addresses work that has examined, from different perspectives, social networks, the hyperconnected society and youth in the 21st century.

From a general point of view, it can be stated that none of the examined research questions the hegemony of the Internet, in which social networks and the virtual context provide one of the main spaces for communication within the digital culture in which young people are referents [2]. In this sense, as indicated by Olives [3], it can be stated that technology has renewed communication processes, facilitating forms of interaction online. This makes it possible for the communicative dimension to transcend to a ubiquitous context in which individuals can express feelings, emotions, needs and thoughts through the screen of their smartphone.

In consideration of the forms of expression used in networks and the specific communication and language that this entails, work such as that performed by Arias et al. [4] has analysed orthographic and lexical-semantic features, alongside the function of the language used by young people attending university online. This study examined various texts obtained from Facebook and, in this way, revealed that the exchange of communication of a group of young people was characterised by the use of colloquial expressions, elimination of vowels and use of words from other languages. This highlighted a huge creative capacity for language, in which its phatic and emotive function prevailed.

These forms of expression on social networks, alongside the communication and language use that takes place in them, form part of the socialisation process. According to Fernández and Gutiérrez [5] (p. 186), during this process, young people shape their digital identity as a result of "joint processes of mediation and hybridisation between technological devices, individuals and their significant others. In this sense, in the same way as has been highlighted in research conducted by Pérez-Torres et al. [6], communication processes taking place between young people and YouTubers in the digital setting, are not only a means of entertainment but, also, are fundamental for the development of personal identity, strengthening self-esteem and developing gender identity. This is essential for the development of inclusive processes in young people at the greatest social disadvantage.

Statements such as those presented above, demonstrate the educational potential of communication and cyberlanguage for the development of personality in disadvantaged young people. This is also important for the advancement of skills and abilities that are useful for daily living, and access to knowledge in both formal and informal educational settings [7–9], within which social education is also found.

From this perspective, Andújar-Vaca and Cruz-Martínez [10] present evidence about the capacity of communication, through the creation of a WhatsApp group in mobile phones, to improve the English-language skills of young people. Along the same lines, Zihui [11] indicated the possibility of learning Chinese through social networks. Further, this corroborated a study conducted by Yelashkina et al. [12], which evidenced the way in which social networks not only contribute to improving the linguistic capacity of this and other languages but, also, favour development of intercultural competence which is one of the aspects most worked on in the socio-educational ambit.

With regards to formal educational approaches, we point to the work of Fadhil et al. [13] who investigated university students' use of social networks and their influence in social and academic ambits. Their results highlight the educational possibilities of these means of social communication via digital technology.

It is important to highlight standpoints that contrast with those presented in the aforementioned studies and warn about the risk factors young people are being exposed to through digital means of communication [14–17]. In this sense, Montes-Vozmediano et al. [18] indicate that, in virtual platforms such as YouTube, some of the messages that are shared can put young people in vulnerable situations. This is because the content of the topic being dealt with, in addition to the audiovisual language used, places the protection and development of their identity at risk.

This being said, despite evidence pointing to the importance of communication and forms of expression in social networks for young people in current society, this issue is rarely observed to take on a leading role in the context of young people. This group is relevant given that, as defined by García et al. [19] (p. 19), "it is broad and diverse, increasingly includes more individuals from increasingly disparate backgrounds who face serious difficulties in normalising their life trajectories".

Some studies with socially disadvantaged young people have analysed the relationship of this social group with digital technologies and social networks, taking an approach linked to leisure, training or occupational experiences, and relating these with the inclusion and socialisation processes of this group [1,20–24].

Nonetheless, no references are found which have examined the interaction of socially disadvantaged young people with digital means of communication, from an approach based on online communication and forms of expression. This outlines the importance of the work being presented, highlighting the need to respond to the problem of the usefulness or lack thereof of social networks as tools that improve the communicative processes and enrich the personal relationships of young people in difficulty through shared learning. In this sense, based on the research question around whether communication in social networks can facilitate the social inclusion and socialisation of these young people in current society, the study aim proposed to identify the forms and expressions of digital communication used by socially disadvantaged young people. This use is considered to be a tool that is useful for the development of interpersonal and social relationship processes, facilitating participation and relatedness with the environment.

3. Materials and Methods

The present research seeks to observe socially disadvantaged young people's use of social networks in order to analyse the communication processes engaged in by young people within digital settings. Principally, examination is based on the ambit of passive leisure and inappropriate use of norms pertaining to communication and language.

With regards to the research design, it is necessary to state that the present study addresses a group of young people who, due to set of personal, family, social and educational difficulties (Brunet, Pizzi and Valls [25]), have developed a negative and insecure identity which makes access to informants more difficulty. For this, given the complexity of the group to which the research is directed, a qualitative design was considered appropriate, combining hermeneutic phenomenology and phenomenology. The aim of this was to examine a determined phenomenon from the perspective of the subject themselves, based on data emerging inductively over the course of the research.

This enables events to be interpreted in a way that social phenomena are understood, according to its own landscape and language [26].

Taking this methodological approach as a reference, it was decided to elaborate a group interview, including twenty-eight questions grouped according to three dimensions or variables. Questions pertained to leisure, training and digital communication via social networks. The interview guide was submitted to an expert panel made up of six experts who, with the aim of verifying its validity, based their evaluation on criteria pertaining to redaction, content adequacy and clarity. The positive outcome of examination of the interview allowed use of the instrument to be considered without changing the number of items or their content.

As an initial phase of fieldwork, the gradual approach to information was proposed, drawing up a list of social entities from Madrid who could respond to the research interests. Finally, selection of these entities was determined by their socio-educational work, mainly in vulnerable settings, and whose intervention focused on dealing with socially disadvantaged young people.

Once contact was established and permission was obtained from the Sub-directorate General for Family and Children, informants were selected. This process was performed using purposeful sampling, for which the following classification criteria were applied: Par-

ticipation of informants in socio-educational programs directed to socially disadvantaged young people, voluntary participation, balanced gender representation, adequate social and communication skills, and possession of basic technological knowledge. Following application of these criteria, the following stand-out characteristics of participating informants were identified: lack of economic resources, unemployment or precarious contracts, being from single-parent families or with young parents, immigration and slight disabilities.

Following these parameters, a sample of 78 young people was obtained. Participants were aged between 16 and 21 years and were being provided for by one of the programs delivered by Madrid council, working towards the integration and social development of socially disadvantaged young people throughout the entire capital city (see Tables 1 and 2). Data collection was carried out in four sessions which lasted approximately one hour. Sessions took place in the five socio-educational centres distributed across the areas covered by the program. Distribution of this program guarantees access of young people in all districts of Madrid to this resource.

Table 1. Distribution of young informants.

Informants	Age						Total
	16 Years	**17 Years**	**18 Years**	**19 Years**	**20 Years**	**21 Years**	
Boys	11	8	12	4	6	-	41
Girls	9	6	7	5	9	1	37
Overall	20	14	19	9	15	1	78

Table 2. Distribution of informants according to sessions.

Young Interviewees	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5
Session 1	5	4	6	5	3
Session 2	5	5	3	4	6
Session 3	6	-	2	5	4
Session 4	2	4	4	3	2

4. Data Analysis

The analytical process was conducted based on that proposed by Corbin & Strauss, [27]. It followed a Grounded Theory approach, allowing the researcher to move backwards and forwards between data with the aim of comparing between categories, codes and concepts in a systematic way. In order to tackle this process, the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti 9 was used to construct at hermeneutical project or unit based on three fundamental aspects. The first of these was descriptive analysis which was carried out through open coding and obtained 98 categories. The second of these fundamental aspects enabled determination of the relationships existing between text components. This was conducted through thematic or semantic matching criteria, supporting us in the conceptual examination and making it possible to reveal three main categories (see Table 3). These categories, together with the networks obtained through the process of axial coding, enabled examination and interpretation, giving rise to study outcomes.

Table 3. Example of main categories and associated codes.

Core Categories	Social Networks as Facilitators of Interpersonal Communication in Socially Disadvantaged Young People	Forms of Expression, Language and Communication in social Networks	Communication in Social Networks as a Vehicle of Formal and Informal Learning for Socially Disadvantaged Young People
Associated Codes	Easy communication Emotions Multi-tasking	Textspeak Loanwords Speed	Easy communication Learning Visual language

5. Results

5.1. Social Networks as Facilitators of Interpersonal Communication in Socially Disadvantaged Young People

The qualitative examination confirmed that, within this group, both males and females identify social networks as a tool whose usefulness transcends beyond its use in leisure. Indeed, social networks are viewed as one of the main elements of communication exchange. Thus, as observed by the entire informant group, virtual social networks provide the common vehicle through which communication is established with the individuals in their immediate surroundings. Further, they maintain constant interaction through instant messaging applications which were identified by those interviewed as being the most used channels, in this regard, in the present day. Specific applications referred to in participant responses, in order of mentioned citations in respondent discourse were WhatsApp (330), Instagram (110) and TikTok (79).

In another sense, analysis unveiled significant differences in the communicative intention of young people in this group. This revealed that certain social networks were chosen depending on the purpose of the message that they wanted to transmit. In this sense, coincidences when examining the data indicated that WhatsApp was the network used by these individuals to exchange messages, photos and "more formal" content emojis, with either friends or families. This was also the chosen network for initiating conversation which, from their point of view, presents a more appropriate and correct type of language.

Relative to WhatsApp, the applications of Instagram and TikTok were identified as being the most appropriate for initiating less formal interaction. This type of interaction is maintained through communication which is, mainly, visual, for which reason they make use of gifs, emojis and photos. As stated by interviewees, these tools are supported by visual aids which illustrate the idea, thought or feeling they seek to transmit through the image or video they have shared.

In the analysis, it was also confirmed that, for socially disadvantaged young people, the interactions established in social networks have an added value as a meeting space in which they can communicate with distant relatives. In this regard, of the 78 young people interviewed, more than half (85.3%) insisted that the transfer of oral, written and visual messages through communication channels without a time–space barrier, as offered by these applications, made them feel close to their loved ones and that they could form a part of family life despite being far way.

From the data, it emerged that 95% ($n = 74$) of interviewed young people agreed that they felt more relaxed communicating through social networks and stated that in this space they were less shy to enter in conversation. This was the case with both strangers and individuals from their environment, with respondents maintaining that it was "easier" to say what they thought as shown in the utterance presented in the network relating the codes describing easy communication and emotions. This link with the main categories is established in an associative relationship (Figure 1). From this, two interpretations emerged from the analysis. On the one hand, the first interpretation is that young people from this group express themselves and say things online that they would not dare say out loud in an offline context of communication (1.15 p. 7 Informant 2). On the other hand, another

interpretation is that social networks are, for those interviewed, a tool with which they feel more empowered to maintain a conversation, whilst also optimising the time they dedicate to other simultaneous activities (4.24 p. 13 Informant 16).
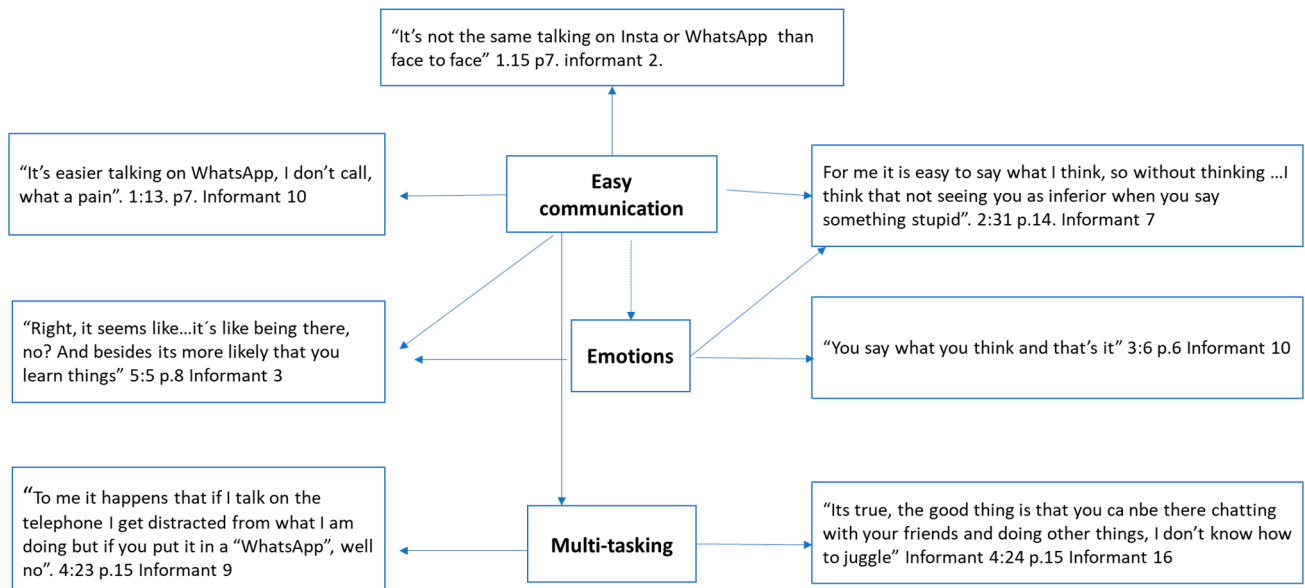

Figure 1. Example of utterances with the codes associating them to core category 1.

5.2. Forms of Expression, Language and Communication in Social Networks

Another of the aspects highlighted by the data shows that the communication employed by socially disadvantaged young people does not strictly follow norms of general language use in the offline ambit. Thus, virtual conversations were observed to apply the same linguistic code (set of rules that regulate language) applied to writing in offline settings, however, differences emerged with regards to use of the linguistic register. (The notion of registration is understood as the linguistic use determined by the immediate context of production of a discourse. The register is considered a functional linguistic variety—also called diaphase variety—conditioned by four fundamental contextual factors: the means of communication (oral or written), the topic addressed, the participants and the intention.).

Likewise, orthographic differences were identified with regards to common guidelines for writing. This consisted in the epenthesis and elimination of phonemes and graphemes which, as mentioned by a large section of those interviewed (*n* = 65), enables "quicker and more immediate" conversation which is adapted and interpreted in line with intentions, needs and the communicative context in which these young people find themselves. For this reason, as indicated by one of the interviewees, norms exist which "everyone knows and has learned innately" "by imitating their peer group" Note that in Figure 2, on the left side you can see, among others, the sample of the code and linguistic register used by young people on the network accompanied, on the right side, by the transcription made later in accordance with the use of language in the analogy environment (Figure 2).

Figure 2. (**Left**) Snapshot of WhatsApp provided by an informant in which the suppression of phonemes and incorporation of loanwords is observed. (**Right**) Recreation of the transcribed conversation in accordance with the rules of the analog environment.

It serves to indicate that, for a meaningful group of informants (38.5%; $n = 30$), the exchange of information in other languages is a reality which forms part of the virtual context in which young people operate without any difficulty. In this sense, it was confirmed that, within this group of disadvantaged young people, expressions from other languages are shared via networks, games, memes, WhatsApp or tweets. This highlights the linguistic abilities that are traditionally associated with groups of young people in advantaged groups. Nonetheless, as clarified by those interviewed, this type of language tends to be supported by the context in which it takes place, in addition to by images in the form of gifs and emoticons. These help the message being presented to be understood. This line of argument is observed in association with analysis of the linguistic visual category, which outlined the importance given by interviewees to the exchange of images, gifs, emojis and memes as a means of transmitting and expressing feelings, emotions, anger or acceptance. One of the informants explained this in the following way: "An image is worth more than a thousand words".

In this regard, a wide range of opinions were presented by informants in relation to their use of this communicative resource, with responses varying as a function of the person to whom their message was directed. In this way, it was notable that more than half (57%; $n = 45$) of the sample stated that they only shared this type of resource with recipients who they trusted. Furthermore, 25.6% ($n = 20$) recognised using this resource regardless of who the recipient was, whilst 13 (16.6%) participating young people stated not being sure of where the line should be drawn. Nonetheless, overall, testimonies coincided with the opinion that when gifs, emojis or memes were of a higher tone, they tended to only be exclusively shared with members of the peer group.

The co-occurrence of visual language categories with categories pertaining to quick communication and emotions was notable, as it reiterates the finding that communication mediated through social networks is easier and more familiar for this social group. Further, it reveals the tendency of some of these young people to hide from their problems behind their social network profile.

Finally, with regards to the relationship established between the codes of this core category, alongside the utterances associated with them, it was confirmed that online

communicative exchange processes are related with the development of collective identity. This was seen from the way in which the young people interviewed recognised that, when engaging in social networks, they expressed themselves freely, according to their own rules and vocabulary. Consequently, this allowed them to feel as if they were integrated into the group that they themselves have denominated "young people of now".

In consideration of this perspective, from analysis of testimonies, a relationship emerged between communication established online and participation of this group in broader groups, with these being reached through friend invitations. In these groups, formed by peers from different social circumstances, solidary actions are promoted such as fighting against climate change or improving local services. Young people from the various participating centres expressed this point in the following way:

Codes: [visual language] [rapid communication] [activism] [friends].

" . . . *We organise ourselves in the group, we meet up and we see what we will do, messages get sent around and things and that's how it is done now*" 5:32 p. 27

" . . . *I found out because they added me to the group and that was it*" 1:56 p. 45

" . . . *It's a way to take part in what interests you or not, no of course, but you feel that you are part of something and it makes you happy to be with the people in the group*" 4:18 p. 23

" . . . *Man, I don't know everybody, but we are all there because we want the same, do you know what I mean?*" 1:49 p. 43

5.3. Communication in Social Networks as a Vehicle of Formal and Informal Learning for Socially Disadvantaged Young People

Following analysis of this core category, the importance was revealed of communication in social networks for the development of learning experiences in socially disadvantaged young people. Utterances given in response to interviews indicated that engagement in communicative process, when destined to leisure practices, is the main activity performed by disadvantaged young people in social networks. Nonetheless, as evidenced in the utterances associated with the codes describing easy communication and online learning, communicative exchange mediated via these same networks is also observed in this group as a route towards studying and learning curious things online (Figure 3).
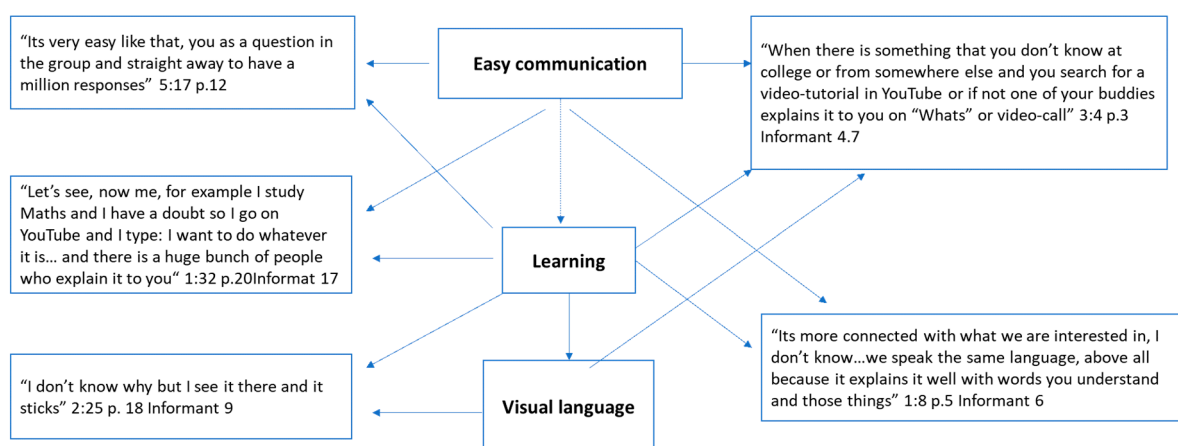

Figure 3. Example of utterances with codes associated with core category 3.

With regards to outcomes emerging in relation to the categories describing easy communication and online learning, the link between them highlighted that young people from this group frequently use these tools to incorporate diverse types of knowledge. In this aspect, all informants manifested agreement with the use of social networks, such as WhatsApp, or websites, such as YouTube, for the exchange of information directed towards

formal and informal learning. All 78 informants highly positively rated the opportunities offered by these applications to access, exchange, complete and improve their knowledge in a quick and effective way, whether through tutorials, messages of videocalls. From their viewpoint, this form of information exchange is more efficient than traditional learning which, according to them, is slower, more boring, and out of touch with young people's needs. It was observed that 64% of young people (*n* = 50) stated turning to the Internet to resolve doubts and problems pertaining to the broad array of issues they face. This emerged ahead of consulting an adult or teacher and was the case for both academic issues and issues of daily living. As confirmed through examination of the responses given by this group, the language used in WhatsApp, Facebook and YouTube channels was more familiar, easier and more understandable that that used offline. Thus, as reflected in the analysed testimonies, it awoke a greater interest and curiosity in the young people in this group.

Outside of these platforms, qualitative analysis revealed that disadvantaged young people are also interested in participating in virtual groups which, after typically being included by peers, help them to incorporate learning from specific ambits. As unveiled by the data, the speed of response, alongside the ability to share the same language and communicative context, provided the young people interviewed with an alternative to access different learning. This was considered by 88.4% (*n* = 69) of the sample to be more appropriate to the needs and uncertainties of young people in the present day.

6. Discussion and Conclusions

In consideration of the research question and responding to our objective, it was highlighted that the communication and language implemented by socially disadvantaged young people in social networks transcends beyond engagement in passive leisure practices. Indeed, it favours development of their interpersonal and social processes, enabling them to be integrated into the society in which they live. From this perspective, present outcomes met the aim of identifying the forms and expressions of digital communication used by socially disadvantaged young people as a means to inclusion, participation and social relatedness. A group of young people was discovered which, as collaborated by work conducted by González-Andrío et al. [28], view social networks as an excellent means to keep in touch thanks to the characteristics inherent to the Internet (speed, immediacy and ease of use). According to Valdemoros et al. [21], these properties, which are inherent to social networks, help disadvantaged young people find an appropriate vehicle with the power to maintain a constant link with their surroundings. The present work revealed that this helps to strengthen family ties, friendships and social relationships by making use of language which combines written, verbal and visual approaches, amongst others.

In this way, young people in this group use a type of language online, or cyberlanguage, that, according to Medrano [29], presents particular characteristics that differentiate it from the language used in analogue settings. Thus, the present study reveals that communication maintained by socially disadvantaged young people online uses symbols, emoticons and expressions which obey norms guiding digital communication processes. This communication makes use of cyberlanguage which is characterised by written and spoken language but, in contrast, is conditioned by a virtual context in which communication takes place. As confirmed by statements made in other similar studies [22,30–33], this context is the reason why communication presents orthographic characteristics which differ from the norm and, as evidenced, results from adaptation and interpretation of language so that it meets the needs and interests of participants. All of this occurs as a function of the communicative circumstance and the intended outcome.

As another important aspect, in accordance with García et al. [34], it serves to highlight the importance of digital communication and cyberlanguage as a fundamental link between young people from different groups. As revealed in the present research, the shared language used by young people in social networks broadens the virtual spaces in which individuals interact which, in the case of the least fortunate, are usually very small.

This enables them to be integrated into broader networks through calls for participation and collective actions, which reach them via peers through platforms such as Facebook, Change.org and WhatsApp. According to Notley [24] this reality reveals the inclusive potential of communication in social networks and points to its potential as a space for interpersonal, social and communicative relationships. This, in turn, makes it possible for disadvantaged young people to feel that they are participating in the digital society and, furthermore, within a group in which social differences are not distinguished.

Further, through participation in these groups, the present research evidences that this group uses communication in social networks to improve their personal skills around topics and issues that are of interest to them. In this sense, coinciding with the work of Pereira et al. [9] and Valdivia-Vizarreta et al. [35], it has been shown that communication in networks through the use of ICTs "expands the possibilities of educational practices through leisure" and is an effective means for developing learning in formal and informal settings. This is because, as verified here, its specific characteristics, of which cyberlanguage stands out, turn this means of digital communication into the perfect instrument for implementing educational processes which meet the interests, needs and abilities of socially disadvantaged young people (Vasco-González et al. [22]).

From this perspective, in consideration of the research aims, it can be confirmed that, beyond leisure practices, the forms and expressions of digital communication used by socially disadvantaged young people act as a means for achieving inclusion, learning, participation and social relatedness. Present outcomes demonstrate that this is manifested through the development of collective identity and feelings of belonging which favour the development of interpersonal and social relatedness processes. This allows socially disadvantaged young people to participate and feel integrated in the society to which they belong. As a result, the achievement of some of the objectives for sustainable development laid out in Agenda 2030 can be considered. These include the reduction of inequality and promotion of social inclusion, which are two issues that are experienced more strongly within the group of interest and whose consideration permits us to move towards a culture of equality [36,37]. In this way, the research evidences, in response to the issue posed at the beginning, the usefulness of social networks as tools that improve socially disadvantaged young people's communicational processes and enriches their personal relationships through shared learning.

Finally, it serves to highlight that, despite having achieved the research aim, outcomes provided by this group pertaining to communication in social networks come from a highly specific sample of young people. This fact, together with the scarcity of literature addressing research with disadvantaged young people in this ambit, indicates the need to broaden examination to other groups, in which in-depth interviews can be performed. This will facilitate future comparison of the outcomes discussed above with those produced from a more integrative perspective.

Further, it is proposed that future work should address the uncertainty that persists in this area and examine the potential disadvantages for this group of young people which may arise from communicational exchanges with strangers on social networks.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare that the research was performed in the absence of commercial or financial relationships which could be interpreted as potential conflict of interest.

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