

Human interaction, online identity, the role of media content, engaging in cyber- aggression and prosocial behaviour

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to investigate whether exposure to prosocial content predicts prosocial behaviour and whether antisocial content predicts cyber-aggression. Therefore, exploring whether social learning takes place in an adult population. The study aimed to examine whether hours spent online would form an online identity, that is aggressive or non-aggressive.

Methods

Design: A quantitative, correlational and cross-sectional design, using convenience and snowballing sampling was employed. The survey circulated around Facebook and Instagram. A retrospective study design was implemented to investigate past media exposure.

The sample consisted of 114 participants, with an age range of 18 to 52 ($M = 22.42$, $SD = 7.93$). There was a gender imbalance of 109 females and 5 males.

Materials: Google forms were used to create the online survey. Demographic questions included gender, age and hours spent online weekly. A debrief sheet was attached at the end with support contacts such as aware and the Samaritans if any difficult feelings emerged.

Introduction

- The Bobo doll experiment (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961) displayed that children imitate aggression through observational learning. The current study aimed to further test this theory online in an adult population to investigate whether identity and behaviours can be shaped by media content exposure.
- Young people can be influenced by their peers due to their normative standards, which can result in preferences for behaviour being internalised (Biddle, Bank and Marlin, 1980).
- Research has found a significant link between bullying and media violence (Lee & Kim, 2004).
- Conflicting evidence suggests online violent gaming has no significant long-term impact on an adult population (William & Skoric, 2005).
- Previous research displayed a significant relationship between viewing prosocial content and prosocial behaviour (Mares & Woodard, 2005).
- Males have been found to have more of a tendency to automatically aggress than females (Uhlmann & Swanson, 2004).

Results

The scatterplot below depicts that most participants spent more than 20 hours online weekly, especially the younger age groups. Furthermore, there was a decline for 20-year olds in comparison to those of the ages 18 and 19.

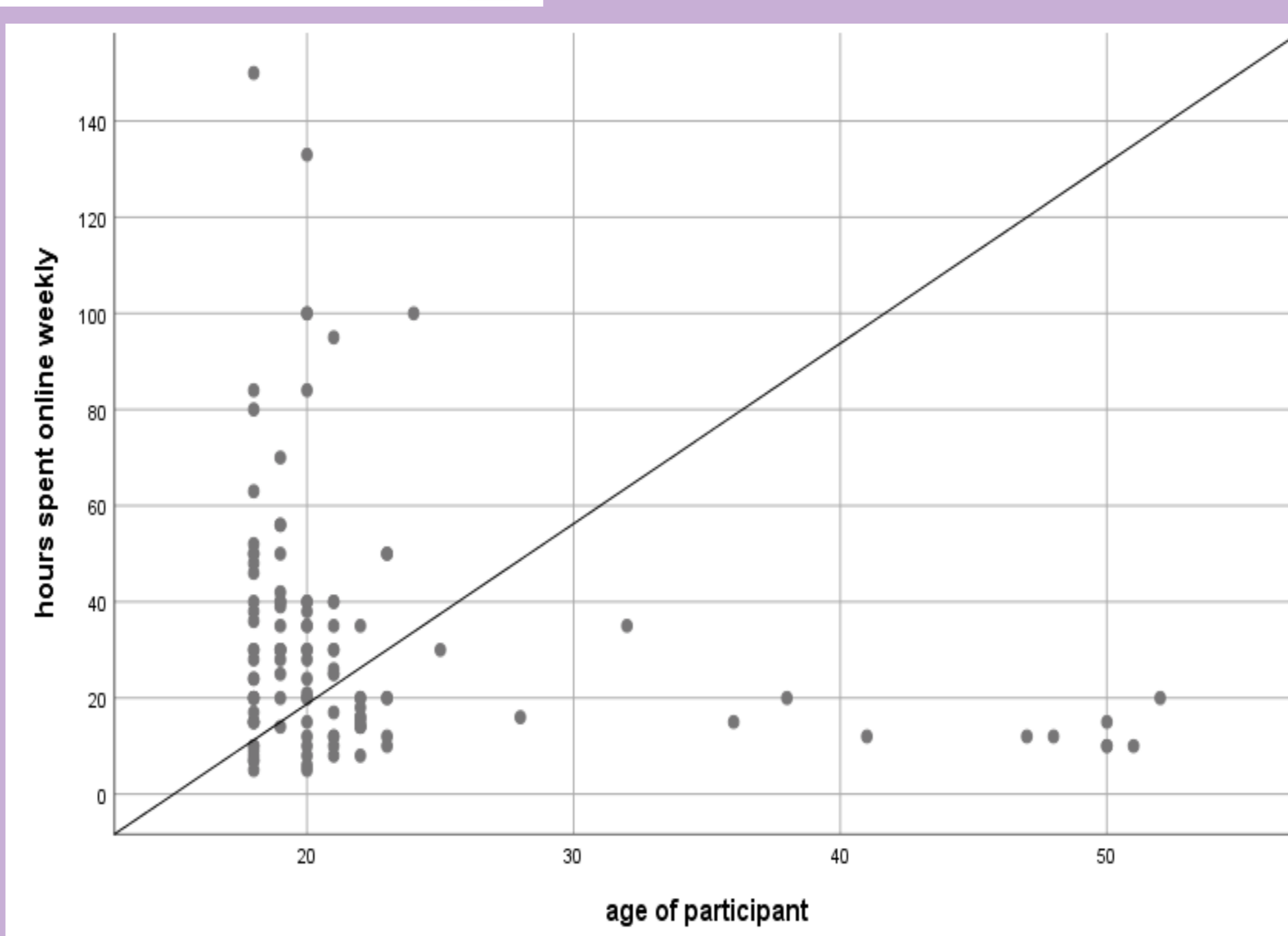
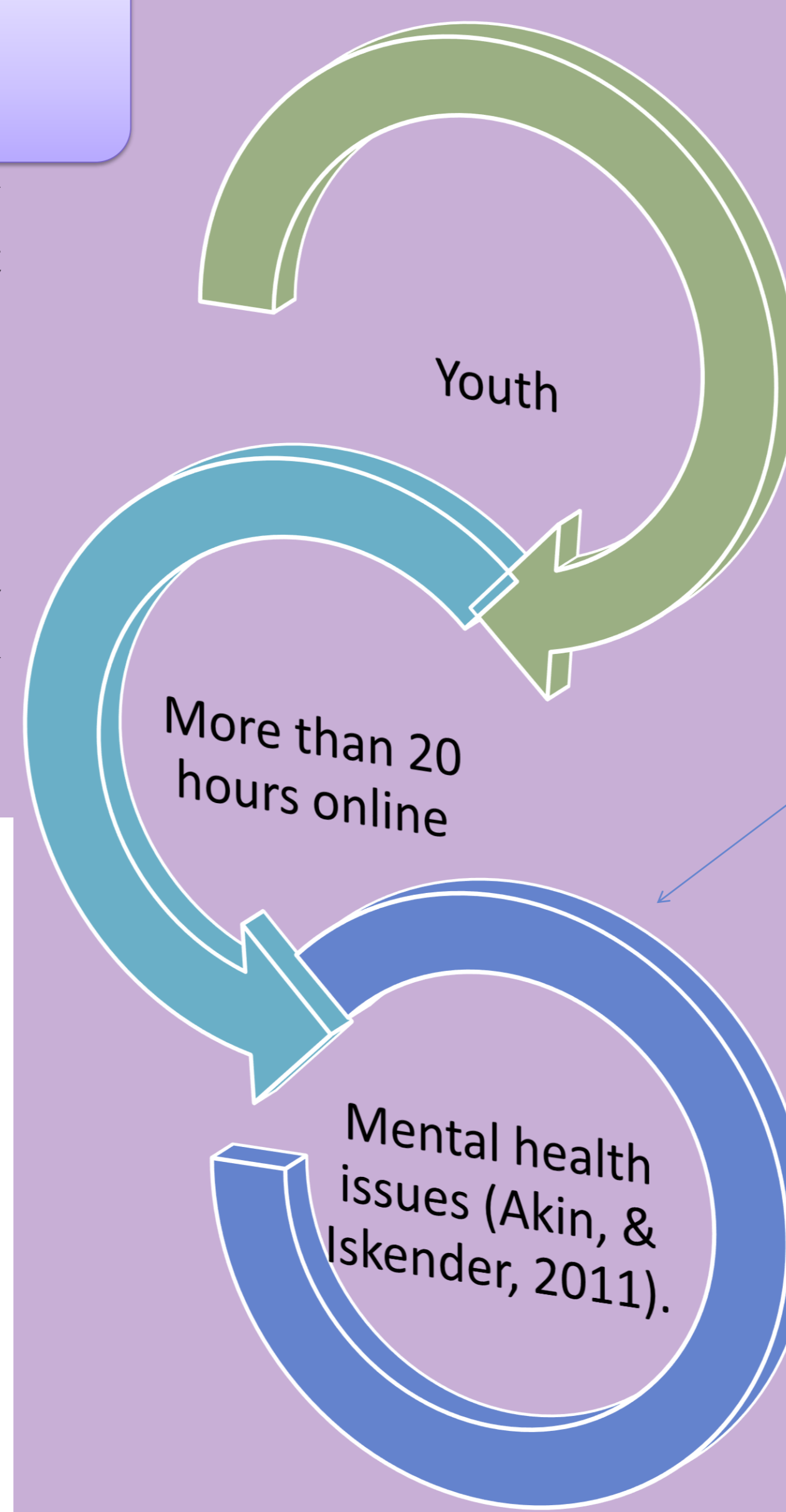
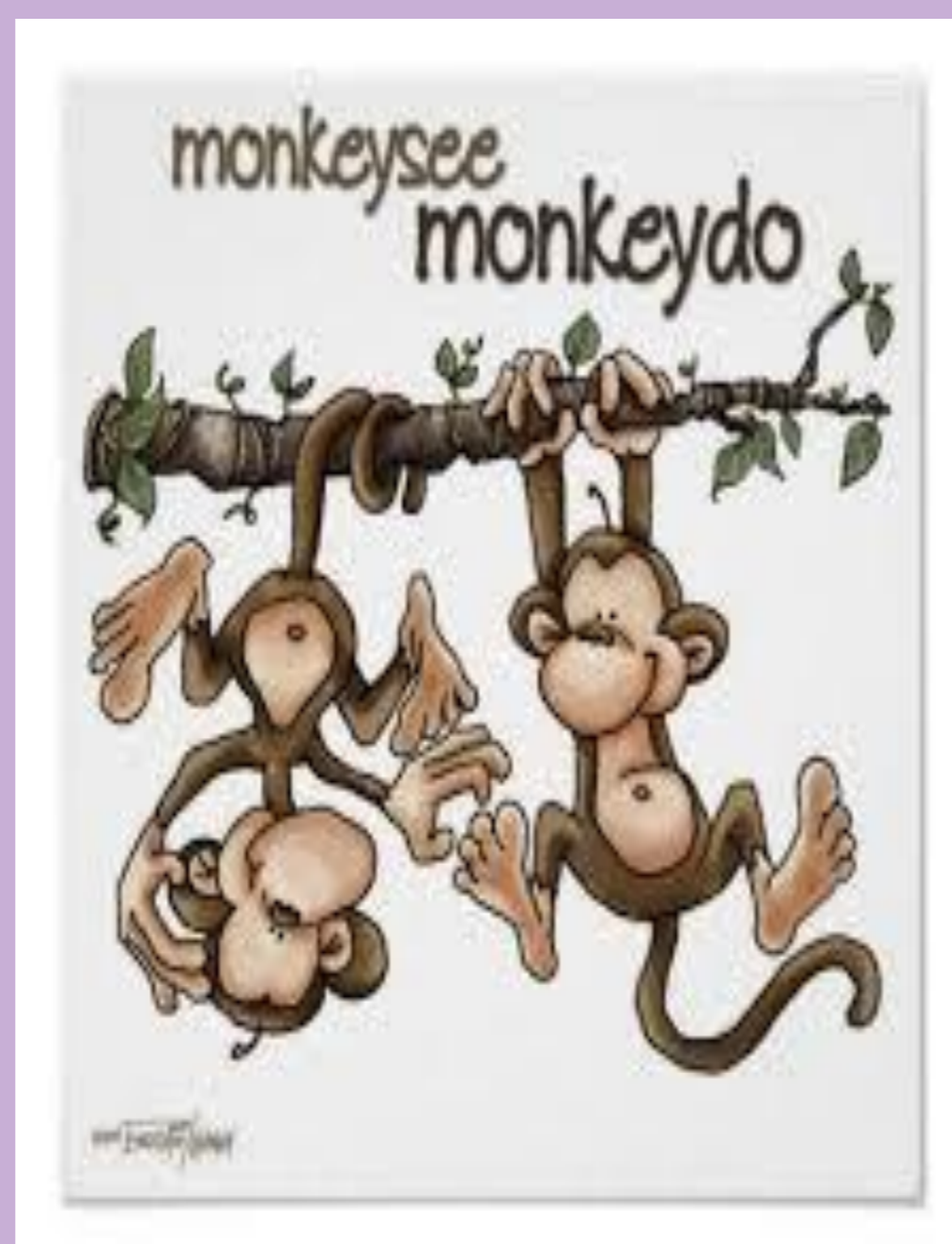


Figure 1: scatterplot displaying age differences in terms of hours spent online weekly

It was discovered that hours spent online weekly did not significantly predict online social identity. There was no statistically significant sex difference for cyber-aggression found. Antisocial media content did not significantly predict cyber-aggression. Prosocial media content did not significantly predict prosocial behaviour.

Discussion

- The current study aimed to investigate whether viewing prosocial content predicts prosocial behaviour and whether antisocial content predicts cyber-aggression, that is the type of identity an individual may acquire from exposure online and the effect this may have on human interaction in an Irish context.
- The current research found that the participants who were under 20 spent more hours online, on average ranging from 30 to 60 hours weekly. This is an implication in terms of the mental health of young Irish individuals as previous research shows a direct link between internet addiction and mental health (Akin, & Iskender, 2011).
- Previous research depicted that the cyber environment impacts identity formation (Lee & Kim, 2004). The current findings show hours spent online weekly did not significantly predict online social identity in an adult population.
- There was no significant sex difference found in relation to cyber-aggression. However, the gender imbalance of 109 females in comparison to 5 males likely impacted this result.
- Previous research has displayed males as the cyberbully (Dehue, Bolman & Völlink, 2008). The current research could not support or reject these findings in an Irish context due to the gender imbalance present in this study.
- The current research found no direct significant link between content exposure and the modelling of the behaviour observed in an adult population.
- This indicates adults can separate what they are seeing online, while children do not display this same ability (Linder & Gentile, 2009).

Conclusion

The study has found social learning does not occur in an adult population and supports previous research that as age increases influence decreases (Mares & Woodard, 2001). This indicates identity has been fully formed in the participants of this study, suggesting this is not the case for younger age groups which is a task for future research to explore. There appears to be a right and wrong age to have an online presence.

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Rationale

Previous research has focused on juveniles in terms of cyberbullying (Renati, Berrone & Zanetti, 2012). Research on prosocial and antisocial behaviour together is limited (Radke-Yarrow, Zahn-waxler & Chapman, 1983). In order to fill these gaps in the literature, the current research aimed to examine the two behaviours together in an adult population.

