DETERMINANTS OF ONLINE SAFETY AND SECURITY AMONG HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN FINLAND

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Risto Hotulainen *, Attila Pásztor **, Sanna Oinas *, Lauri Luumi *

* University of Helsinki
** Institute of Education, University of Szeged

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In the contemporary digital landscape, characterized by the interconnectedness of the internet, users are exposed to a myriad of threats. In order to mitigate these risks, it is imperative that users protect their devices, develop a comprehensive understanding of the risks inherent in digital environments, and acquaint themselves with the available safety and security measures that can safeguard their privacy. In this regard, the European Commission has recently proposed a framework for digital competence, with the aim of providing citizens with a common understanding of this critical issue (Vuorikari et al., 2022). The present study seeks to identify the variables that contribute to enhancing online safety introduced in the framework. In our study, online safety is defined as behaviors that impede external tracking and profiling, and is referred to as conservative online use. In contrast, liberal online use is characterized by behaviors that are somewhat opposite. It is hypothesized that online conservative safety behaviors are associated with and predicted by users` reading comprehension, inductive reasoning, and self-reported digital skills. For the present study, we utilized pilot research data (N = 179) collected from a high school in Eastern Finland. Multivariate statistics revealed that all predictor variables were statistically significantly intercorrelated. However, when studying more precisely the determinants of online safety behaviors, the reading comprehension overcame the effects of the other variables. Proper proficiency in reading skills, measured here as reading comprehension, appears to promote online safety behaviors among Finnish high school students. The outcomes of this study underscore the importance of reading skills in promoting online safety behaviors. This study contributes to our understanding of how individuals can protect themselves online, and the results can be used by individuals, teachers, and educational stakeholders interested in promoting online safety behaviors. Prior to the conference, we were able to replicate our study findings with a sample collected from two additional cities and conduct a re-analysis with the structural equation modelling.