

## CULTURAL DIFFERENCES IN YOUTH PERCEPTION ABOUT GHOSTING BEHAVIOR

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**Abstract:** *Ghosting or the art to disappear suddenly and without a trace from one's life represents an old phenomenon and is increasingly met by many people. Ghosting is a relatively new term, aroused a few years ago and specific to our generation, which has become more and more popular as society accepted it as if it were a normal online behavior among people, although it is not normal at all and can also have a negative impact on both the practitioner and the affected person. Our research team has developed the project Keeping youth safe from Cyberbullying, aiming to deeper understand the dynamics of cyberbullying in online environments among youth. Our focus was in analyzing the cultural differences between Romanian, Belgian, Turkish and Spanish youth perception about online ghosting behavior, in 507 high school students. Results show that there are statistically differences in the opinion of Romanian, Belgian, Turkish and Spanish youth regarding the emotional effects of ghosting on internet. Conclusions and implications are discussed.*

**Key words:** *cyberbullying; ghosting behavior; cultural differences;*

### 1. Ghosting in online

Ghosting is a relatively new term, aroused a few years ago and specific to our generation, which has become more and more popular as society accepted it as if it were a normal online behavior among people, although it is not normal at all and can also have a negative impact on both the practitioner and the affected person.

People experiencing this phenomenon are primarily focused on avoiding their own emotional discomfort without thinking about how to make others feel. The lack of social connections, because of the ones created online, also means that there are fewer social consequences to give up on someone. The more often it happens, the more people become less sensitive to this phenomenon (Pickett, C et.al., 2004).

Ghosting or the art to disappear suddenly and without a trace from one's life represents an old phenomenon and is increasingly met by many people. Before disappearing suddenly and without a trace from one's life, practitioners (ghosters) have more questionable and incongruent behavioral manifestations, which, for lack of information are misinterpreted.

These disputable behaviors are intended to help the ghoster test whether the ghosted is willing to let himself/herself be controlled and manipulated. All these are actually power games, where asymmetry is obvious, though they cannot be correctly defined, but felt. Power games mean abusive behaviors (some very well camouflaged by the mask of seduction) and have three clear features: intentional, repetitive, and power imbalance.

For many people, ghosting can lead to contradictory feelings. People feel disrespected, used and discouraged. If people have known the ghoster beyond simple data, then the situation may be even more traumatic (Williams, C., 2012).

In the virtual environment, there appeared the term of "orbiting" that renews the term "ghosting".

Already the "old" ghosting appeared in 2017 and defines the sudden and unexpected disappearance of a Facebook account (or other social media) of a person with whom you have / had a close relationship, friendship or even love. This creates a sense of frustration or alienation. The year 2018 introduces a new concept, the "orbiting" concept that has no connection with the physics or movement of the stars. Orbiting is a behavioral form of social networking that drives the "annoying" ghosting further. The boyfriend, the girlfriend, the ex, turns into a "ghost", acts passively-aggressive, and in darkness follows the detainee in detail. Maybe the phenomenon is not of cardinal importance and would not be perceived as a tragedy, however, let's not forget that there are segments of the population for which 95% of their social and even professional lives take place in the virtual environment, Facebook or other networks, the dependence being a reality, malignant as any addiction.

## **2. Research**

If we look at the last decade, we can argue that the new communication methods, social networks, have had a positive impact in all societies. Both researchers and specialists in various fields believe that new technologies contribute to generating civic movements, community reconstruction, and the ability to connect people in a variety of ways. Connecting has become the mantra of our world that determines our way of communicating. The stories about online tragic separations show on the other hand the dark side of online communication. In the age of social networks, connecting means that people are much easier to be replaced. Ghosting is a term that has become

popular in recent years and refers to the sudden ending of a relationship by interrupting communication. Although leaving someone without warning is not new, the habit has intensified in social media times.

The project *Keeping youth safe from Cyberbullying*, ID 2016-3-TR01-KA205-036619 under Erasmus+, had been developed by our research team aiming to deeper understand the dynamics of cyberbullying in online environments among youth, to develop educational resources for professionals involved in youth activities in order to prevent these type behaviors. One of our objectives is to analyze the cultural differences among the 4 participant countries related to youth online ghosting behavior. In this regard, our team has designed an online questionnaire aiming to gather descriptive data, general perception about the frequency and typology of cyberbullying type incidents, perceptions about the safety of the educational environment, perceived parental support, and an auto evaluation scale centered on self-efficacy perceptions.

This research that is focused on measuring online youth perceptions about ghosting behaviors. Single item measures owns the same efficacy in identifying statistical trends like multiple items scales; the procedure has been successfully used by researchers when measuring quality of life (Zimmerman et al., 2006). Single item scales are usually used to represent global constructs that are conceptualized as mono dimensions, like the one we have focused on, ghosting behavior.

The item that measured the perception about ghosting behavior is:

**Item F** – *Please rate your opinion regarding the following affirmation: I feel bad when my friends don't respond my messages when they are online.*

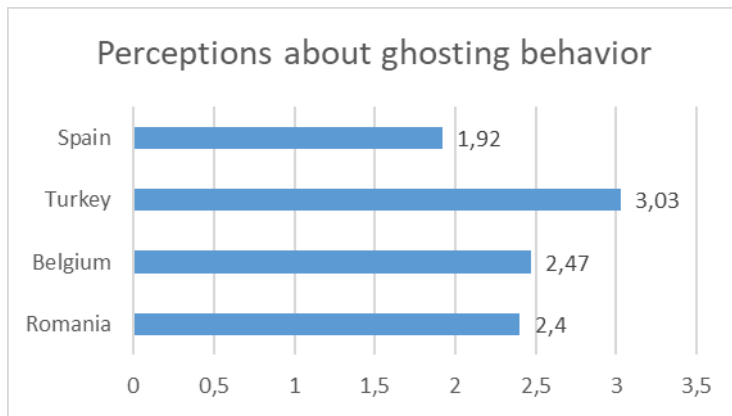
*1. Totally agree; 2. Agree; 3. Neutral; 4. Disagree; 5. Totally disagree.*

We start from the assumption that there is a statistical difference between Romanian, Belgian, Turkish and Spanish youth regarding the perception about youth ghosting behavior. In order to test our hypothesis, we have used SPSS' one way ANOVA analysis, where ghosting behavior perceptions were statistically observed based on residence country.

The study was conducted on a random sample of 507 high school students: 98 from Romania, 130 from Belgium, 224 from Turkey and 50 from Spain, aged 17-19, of both sexes, 68 male (48.6%) and 72 female (51.4%), from both rural and urban environmental origins.

In Fig.1, there are graphically depicted the mean differences among the four participant countries on the perception about ghosting behavior dimension. On scale from 1 to 5, where 1 stands for total agreement and 5 for total disagreement, Romanian youth has a mean score of  $m=2.40$ , Belgian youth score  $m=2.47$ , Turkish youth score  $m= 3.03$  and Spanish

youth score  $m=1.92$ . We can observe that Romanian and Belgian youth population show no statistical difference in between, slightly agreeing with the fact that ghosting behavior causes bad feelings in the online relationship environment. There is then a slight disagreement with the statement that says that online ignoring messages causes bad feelings in Turkish youth, and there is a strong agreement with this statement in Belgium youth population. In other words, Spanish youth feels the most threaten by ghosting behavior, then Romanian and Belgian youth are concerned about this phenomenon, then Turkish youth do not put too much emphasis on ghosting behavior.



**Fig.1** – Youth mean perception about online ghosting behavior

Checking for statistically differences among these results, we can observe in Table 1. that our hypothesis is partially confirmed, meaning that there is no statistical difference between Romanian and Belgian youth responses, only between these two and Spanish and Turkish responses.

**Table 1.** – Cultural differences on the perception of Romanian, Belgium, Turkish and Spanish youth about ghosting behavior

**Descriptives**

*I feel bad when my friends don't respond my messages when they are online.*

	N	M ean	Std. Deviation	St d. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minim um	Maxim um
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		

Romania	98	2.	1.233	.1	2.15	2.65	1	5
Belgium	13	2.	1.297	.1	2.25	2.70	1	5
Turkey	22	3.	1.403	.0	2.85	3.22	1	5
Spain	50	1.	1.122	.1	1.60	2.24	1	5
Total	50	2.	1.366	.0	2.53	2.77	1	5

### ANOVA

*I feel bad when my friends don't respond my messages when they are online.*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	69.518	3	23.173	13.343	.000
Within Groups	866.597	499	1.737		
Total	936.115	502			

When running one way ANOVA analysis, we have obtained the coefficient  $F=13.343$ , significant at a  $p<0.01$ , data that support the assumption of cultural differences among the 4 countries related to youth perception about the effects of ghosting behavior.

### 3. Conclusions and implications

But what are the consequences when someone decides to break all links on social networks and get out of someone's life? Apparently, ghosting is one of the worst ways of ending a relationship and can generate serious confrontations. Not surprisingly, it causes anxiety and problems in managing future relationships. Avoidance has an impact on whoever does it, it gets to burden it like any anti-social act.

Wondering if ghosting can be a morally accepted phenomenon is like asking if it's morally wrong to forget a book you read last year. When you are flooded with information, the forgotten part is inevitable. Similarly, when you are flooded by social connections, you have to give up some of them from time to time. No one can keep up with the extraordinary number of relationships available in a world so virtually connected. If you are

constantly forced to send more emails and messages than you like, you will end up losing your soul in the smartphone.

Ghosting has often been viewed by mental health professionals as a form of emotional cruelty. In essence, it leaves you powerless and gives you no chance to ask questions or receive information that will help you emotionally process the experience. It prevents you from expressing your emotions and being heard, which is important for maintaining your self-esteem. Regardless of the intention of the person who left, ghosting is a passive-aggressive interpersonal tactic that can leave psychological scars.

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