



Adicción a redes sociales en estudiantes de una universidad nacional de Junín (Perú)

Social media addiction among students at a national university in Junín (Peru)

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ABSTRACT

Addictions constitute one of the main sociosanitary problems worldwide. Their biopsychosocial impact, high prevalence, and complex treatment justify this. Specifically, social media addiction can be a disruptive factor in student life and academic performance. The research conducted aimed to determine the level of social media addiction among students at a National University in Junín. The study was of an exploratory descriptive scope and cross-sectional cut, through the application of a survey to a sample of 185 students. The results showed that the levels of addiction and obsession with social media are high, and the level of lack of personal control is also high, while the level of excessive use is medium. In addition, the study suggested the existence of a positive relationship between obsession and addiction, as well as between perceived lack of personal control and addiction. The findings indicate the need for further deepening the problem, as well as designing and implementing programs for the prevention and treatment of social media addiction.

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INTRODUCTION

Technology in the current context is very changeable. People use mobile devices or similar media (PCs, laptops) more frequently in their personal lives, whether for consumption, work, or recreational purposes (Aparicio-Martínez et al., 2020; Morewedge et al., 2021). This has allowed the configuration of new forms of communication and modalities in the social dynamics, making these new communication channels become the main channels of interaction (Balcerowska et al., 2022; Capriotti et al., 2021; Ross et al., 2019).



Primarily in youth, adolescent, and emerging adult populations, technology acquisition and time spent on social networks have increased (Stockdale & Coyne, 2020), as has the importance of social networks in emotional regulation, perceived success, and social participation (Yin et al., 2021). They are considered target populations for large promotional campaigns due to the high level of consumption and device replacement (Zollo et al., 2020).

The above situation can not only be seen in its negative connotations since electronic devices that allow access to social networks and messaging services have also brought multiple benefits (Hortigüela-Alcalá et al., 2019; Van Den Beemt et al., 2020). Among other benefits, they have facilitated remote communication, representing a common scenario to innovate and implement new functionalities (Manca, 2020). These interactive spaces based on virtual connectivity were established to satisfy user demands and represent mastery over communication. However, Petry et al. (2018) consider that the problem of internet addiction is a worldwide concern, manifesting indications of 0.8% in countries such as Iceland, 6.3% in China, and a significant 22.2% in Iran.

In turn, around 4.5 billion users worldwide enjoy the benefits of the Internet; however, 3.8 billion use social networks to communicate (Kemp, 2020). There is information that, in Peru, during 2020, a gain of 62 million dollars was achieved in promotions, which reflected the reach of social networks in that year. These showed an increase of 4.8% in new users compared to the previous period. According to previous results, it is known that, in Peru, 97.8% of those who access social networks do so through their mobile device (Kemp, 2020). In this sense, technological tools have changed the way people communicate with each other, resulting, among other phenomena, in the loss of direct and personal contact between human beings in physical spaces (Lin et al., 2022).

These new communicational and interactive configurations may interfere with the proper development of interpersonal relationships and the required social skills despite their contributions to the learning process in university institutions (Ansari & Khan, 2020). In addition to the naturalization of these communicative channels and their effects, there is the warning of professionals from various scientific disciplines about the abusive, compulsive, or addictive use of the Internet and technological tools. Given the above, it is necessary to highlight that students dedicate many hours to consuming digital products or using technological tools that are indispensable in their academic life, with greater or lesser awareness of their effects (Sun & Zhang, 2021). Among the most common effects are guilt, stress, significant distress, as well as experiences of anxiety and depression that move through a complex clinical spectrum (Hussain & Griffiths, 2021; Vaghefi et al., 2020).

Staying online or frequently accessing in order to keep up to date with events that are significant to them, the abuse of messaging services, and the establishment of inadequate limits for social relationships in virtual environments, among other behaviors, can be harmful to mental health. These difficulties must be analyzed from a complex perspective involving understanding education for digital consumption, human interaction in social networks, and the benefits and risks of exploiting these platforms. In this regard, it is considered that the attachment to social platforms and technological communication channels is growing (Salas-Blas et al., 2022). If this continues, normal consumption could reach levels of dependence, which would lead to the familiarization of new lifestyle habits that could well be categorized as addictive behaviors in users.

In summary, the authors of this article considered it imperative to explore the problem and the scope of its magnitude. To this end, the focus was on studying multiple attitudes, as their expression is most frequently seen in violent and impulsive behaviors. The initial approach to the context and the experience of the researchers suggested that most of the situations occur in undergraduate studies and during university studies. This led to a study focused on students at the Universidad Nacional Intercultural de la Selva Central de Junín, as there is concern on the part of authorities, faculty, and even students concerning addiction to social networks.

METHODS

The approach assumed was quantitative. According to Hernández and Mendoza (2018), this approach is based on a rigorous order and is appropriate for estimating the prevalence of a phenomenon or behavior. To this end, the instruments and fieldwork were based on data collection that allowed the characterization of the level of addiction to social networks from the measurement of the designed indicators. The study was conceived as descriptive exploratory since its general purpose was to examine a phenomenon that was not studied in the specific context (Hernández & Mendoza, 2018). The aim was to identify the main trends in addiction to social networks so that the data collected would make it possible to refine the responses offered by the university to these problems and create the basis for more complex and in-depth studies.

Its design was non-experimental of transactional type since its purpose was to describe the level of addiction to social networks in a specific period. For the design of the survey, the set of principles proposed by Johnson and Christensen (2019) for the development of questionnaires was taken into account. This allowed the design to respond to the research objectives based on understanding the study sample. A clear language adapted to the sample was used, based on closed questions and a scale of activity to virtual platforms in the university context.

The study population comprised 254 students distributed among the professional school of International Business Administration cycles. The sample design was non-probabilistic, so it was determined intentionally. In the words of Hernández and Mendoza (2018), in this type of sample, the choice of participants does not respond to statistical procedures to ensure representativeness but to reasons that the characteristics of the context can explain.

The sample consisted of 185 students from cycles I, II, III, IV, V, and VI of the Universidad Nacional de la Selva Central. The inclusion/exclusion criteria used responded to voluntary participation, survey completion, and response validity. Data analysis was carried out based on frequency distribution. The data obtained, and their processing were subjected to two triangulation procedures to enrich the results:

Triangulation of sources: the data collected and their processing were contrasted with the literature.

Triangulation of researchers: the data collected and their processing were contrasted by the researchers with their fieldwork notes in the initial approach to the problem.

These procedures facilitated a better understanding of the problem, contrasted the professional and research experiences and elaborated recommendations for future studies and agendas aimed at addressing the problem.

RESULTS

The results of the distribution of frequencies according to indicators are presented below. In addition, the results obtained through the procedures used are integrated.

Table 1.
Levels of addiction to social networks

Level	Frequency	(%)
Very low	18	9,7
Low	13	7,0
Medium	46	24,9
High	77	41,6
Very high	31	16,8
Total	185	100

Source: Own elaboration based on surveys.

Table 1 shows that 41.6% of the students surveyed stated that their addiction was high, 24.9% medium, 16.8% very high, 9.7% very low, and only 7.0% low. These percentages indicate that the greatest proportion of these (41.6%) is located in the high level, which not only evidences the strong attachment of students to social networks but also alerts us to the frequency of the extreme (16.8%) and the preceding substrate (24.9%). Although, in percentage terms, these frequencies may offer a distorted image, the analysis reveals that, out of 185 students, 154 fall within the risk zone since their representation of the problem expresses the existence of addictive behaviors. The fact that 83.2% of the sample directly assumes the existence of an identified addiction suggests that the seriousness of the problem is severe.

Indeed, it is established that the level of the addiction variable in these students is high and that it represents an aggravated problem in the context. This implies that fewer and fewer students show healthy behaviors concerning the use of social networks.

Table 2.
Level of obsession with social networks

Level	Frequency	(%)
Very low	18	9,7
Low	11	5,9
Medium	27	14,6
High	86	46,5
Very high	43	23,2
Total	185	100

Source: Own elaboration based on surveys.

Table 2 shows that 46.5% of the students consider the level of obsession high, 23.2% very high, 14.6% medium, 9.7% very low, and only 5.9% low. The cross-analysis with the data obtained in the previous indicator reveals that the problem may be more serious than that represented by the respondents in terms of addiction. Likewise, a high number of students in a situation of vulnerability to addictive behaviors to the consumption of social networks (n=156), which represents 84.3% of the sample studied. This implies that the thought processes and distribution of actions are often related to the use of social networks or the contents and interactions consumed and produced in them. In addition, the existence of an inadequate representation of addictive behavior in itself and others is assumed. From these data, we see the need to delve deeper into the social representation of addiction, addiction to social networks, and the self-perception of students concerning this problem. To this end, a psychosocial perspective of the phenomenon is vital.

Table 3.
Level of lack of personal control

Level	Frequency	(%)
Very low	25	13,5
Low	16	8,6
Medium	54	29,2
High	64	34,6
Very high	26	14,1
Total	185	100

Source: Own elaboration based on surveys.

From table 3, it is evident that 34.6% of the students consider the lack of personal control high, 29.2% medium, 14.1% very high, 13.5% very low, and only 8.6% low. This indicator, therefore, refers to two closely related dimensions, personality regulation in terms of regulatory control and behavior towards the object of addiction, which shows that the problem goes beyond intrusive thoughts or postponement of consumption since almost half of the participants (48.6%) show signs of low regulatory control, the results suggest that the prevalence of addiction established as a stable behavior and a relationship of solid dependence goes beyond psychological aspects. This points to the need to explore the effects of reduced personal control over the subjects and their contexts.

Table 4 shows that 34.1% of the student, stated that excessive use is medium, 28.6% high, 14.1% very high, 13.5% very low, and only 10.3% low. These results reaffirm the complex relationship between behavior and representations associated with the use of social networks. As can be seen, only 23.2% of the sample studied perceive excessive use as very low, while 76.7% recognize high access, which is considered a risk. The medium and high values suggest a prevalence of addiction to social networks, very similar to those collected in the previous indicator, which reaffirms the notion that addiction to social networks has become a stable behavior. In this sense, the dependence expressed in time consumption, delegation of activities, or transfer of these to virtual environments suggests a connection that goes beyond the psychological aspects and that can affect the integral development and well-being of students.

DISCUSSION

The research allowed us to identify that the level of addiction among university students in the context studied is high. Although the extreme values were less frequent, the distribution suggests that addictive behavior in the sample studied constitutes a serious socio-health problem. Due to the social context generated by the COVID-19 pandemic,

this phenomenon has had a more notorious impact on adolescent and youth populations regarding the use of social networks (Karakose et al., 2022). In this regard, authors such as Khan et al. (2002) and Tarafda et al. (2020) state that this phenomenon is attributable to the fact that social networks are seen as sources of entertainment or a means to deal with stress and loneliness, however, it is not possible to ignore that there is also a strong relationship with mental disorders and symptomatology resulting from their use (Hussain & Griffiths, 2021).

Table 4.
Level of excessive use of social networks

Level	Frequency	(%)
Very low	25	13,5
Low	19	10,3
Medium	63	34,1
High	53	28,6
Very high	26	14,1
Total	185	100

Source: Own elaboration based on surveys.

In this sense, the study and the triangulation conducted suggested that, although addiction can be conceived as a severe problem with high prevalence, it is necessary to explore the students' representations, beliefs, and attitudes toward the definition of addiction to social networks (Sun & Zhang, 2021). The data reviewed allow us to assume that, although students do recognize the existence of addiction, it does not have the expected negative connotation due to its biopsychosocial effects. This may be due to the perceived benefits and positive mental states that social interaction in these contexts can produce, which must be compared with the symptoms and conditions caused by inappropriate use (Lee, 2022).

The research results also imply establishing the design of mixed studies aimed at the main variables explored as a priority. Psychodynamic and sociocultural aspects should be deepened so studies with a holistic and interpretative approach could facilitate understanding the problem. These efforts should not be conducted exclusively from the students' perception, as the data point to an extensive network of educational and social agents involved in the awareness and treatment of this addiction; issues related to support mechanisms such as guidance and tutoring, access to psychological services, educational policies regarding educational technology, the use, and abuse of ICTs in daily life, among others, should be examined.

In the case of the last issue mentioned, it is necessary to emphasize that students' exposure to electronic devices with Internet access could trigger social networks use, even in formal academic spaces (Stockdale & Coyne, 2020). This aspect, which appeared in the field notes of all authors, represents a disruptive behavior, and its frequency is pertinent to evaluate in the university community, not only because of what it implies in terms of discipline and disruption of learning but also because it could represent an important predictor or expression of restaurant addiction and potentially distorting academic development (Stockdale & Coyne, 2020).

Recommended actions to address the phenomenon.

As expressed in previous paragraphs, addiction to social networks is an issue that involves the participation of multiple actors in the university community; below are a series of strategies and recommendations, a product of the reflection on the findings of the research, to mitigate the effects of this phenomenon in the student population of the university involved.

To educational authorities

- It is suggested to elaborate and implement workshop systems on mental health care, the biopsychosocial impacts of addictions and specifically addictive behavior towards social networks.
- It is suggested to design and implement workshops to promote the development of social competencies, emotional education and other processes that contribute to the development of protective factors.
- The strengthening of psychological care and educational guidance services within the institution. Psychological counseling, both remedial and preventive.

- Design and carry out campaigns for health promotion and disease prevention that contribute to raise awareness among the university community about the repercussions of excessive use of social networks.

To the academic coordinators

- Implement programs that favor peer-to-peer support, strengthen face-to-face social relationships, whenever appropriate, and contribute to the development of teamwork skills.
- Provide the necessary recognition, through appropriate feedback, to healthy behaviors that contribute to the non-dependence of ICTs, especially those that favor their proper use.
- Coordinate the educational agents involved in the training of students and other external agents (specialists in the subject, psychologists, doctors) for the implementation of various activities aimed at educating for self-diagnosis and non-professional help to people suffering from this addiction.

CONCLUSIONS

Addiction to social networks represents a serious health problem and is a potential disruptor of the lives of college students. The strong attachment to electronic devices that allow access to virtual environments and media is an indicator of the presence of potentially addictive behaviors. Thus, whether encouraged for leisure, as a means of coping with stress, or as a consequence of procrastination, they have an impact on the accelerated rise in addiction levels and the increase in its prevalence, fostering the expansion and entrenchment of this health problem.

The social representations of adolescents and young people currently contribute to these virtual environments being perceived as indispensable elements in a person's normal development. These beliefs not only normalize addictive behavior but also constitute a mechanism of social marginalization for those who do not participate with equal frequency in these environments. Therefore, promoting salutogenic behaviors and education is necessary to show the possibility of existence and a full life without continuously being connected to a social network.

In the case of the sample studied, lack of control over the time spent on social networks is relevant, which shows students' difficulties in allocating adequate time and space to them. Phenomena such as nomophobia could be acting in a problematic way and integrate the complex scenario analyzed in this study. In this sense, providing solutions to this problem goes beyond individual responsibility, although it contains it. Therefore, the different university authorities and educational and social agents must get involved in designing and implementing alternatives that contribute to mitigating the effect of addiction to social networks.

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