

CASE STUDY. IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA ON MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS

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Abstract

Considering the significant and constant use of social networks in the world, mostly by young women, we reflect in this article on the relationship between digital communication technologies and their influence on student perspectives, as well as their repercussions on mental health and academic performance. The aim was to describe the reasons that lead university students to access social networks; outline the harms of using these platforms, if any, in their life experiences; investigate the influence of social networks on their productivity, thus seeking to understand the use of social networks and their interface with the mental health of these students. This is a descriptive-exploratory study, with a qualitative approach, carried out with 16 students of Kimyo International University in Tashkent (Samarkand Branch). A semi-structured interview was used, and thematic content analysis was followed for its interpretation. Information collection took place in November 2019 and all ethical aspects were respected. The results indicated different perceptions regarding the use of social networks that produce impacts on the mental health, personal and academic lives of the university students interviewed.

Furthermore, it was found that social networks contribute to the dynamism and autonomy of the learning process, while the excessive use of these platforms can have a detrimental effect on students' mental health and academic performance.

Key words: Social networking, Mental health, Academic performance and Students.

Introduction

From the 1960s to the present day, computer processing power has increased by about a trillion times, surpassing any other existing technology. Consequently, during the current century, telecommunications technologies have expanded massively, gaining increasing popularity as they represent innovative, attractive, and versatile tools. The internet has established itself as a facilitator of human activities, with

emphasis on the popularity of social networks that are configured as channels for producing and consuming content, obtaining information, expressing ideas, and fostering communication links.

The widespread adherence to connectivity, especially among students, reflects its importance as a source of diverse information and as an essential resource for the academic and professional environment. The 2020 COVID-19 pandemic and resulting social distancing have brought about significant changes in virtual relationships, making the impact of social media more pronounced, both positively and negatively.

Literature Review

The use of the internet by this audience was highlighted mainly for watching programs, films, and series, in addition to making voice or video calls. The cell phone was cited as the most used device to access the internet at home, representing. A study with 100 academics from two courses at a public university in Paraná revealed that 97% use social networks to obtain information and updates, 84% for academic and professional purposes, 81% to see products and promotions, 74% to maintain relationships, and 65% as a form of marketing that influences their purchasing decisions. Apart from that, 24% purchase after watching online influencer content, 19% purchase through WhatsApp and 13% through Facebook. These statistics reflect the application of social networks in information, relational and consumption patterns of university students, serving as evidence for research into their impact on the mental health of this age group.

Symptoms that cause psychological distress, such as anxiety and depression, fall under the heading of Common Mental Disorders (CMD). These disorders were identified at a prevalence of 19% to 55.3% in a sample of 18 articles, with a higher frequency than those identified in international studies with university students, national studies with the general population and with other specific samples. These data highlight the urgency of mental health measures, also considering the growing impact of the internet and social networks, which are increasingly intrinsic to society's daily life.

People with serious mental health conditions face a reduced life expectancy of, on average, 10 to 20 years compared to the general population, largely due to preventable physical illnesses. In the context of Latin America, Brazil stands out as the country with the highest prevalence of depression. Highlights the need to improve the use of social media in mental health promotion and prevention strategies, with global goals to transform the sector.

In this context, the correlation between the use of social networks and the mental health of university students stands out. Despite the growing number of studies addressing the topic, the constant evolution and everyday influence of these technologies express the need for continuous research to better understand their

dynamic and complex effects. This dialogue aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the academic community and the general population to support preventive actions. We envision, based on this study, contributing to the debate on the repercussions of social networks on the mental health of university students, within the scope of a health course in the face-to-face modality. It is estimated that this dialogue will contribute to the reflection of participants and society on the use of these platforms in relation to mental health.

Methodology

The study was carried out at the Occupational University in Samarkand. The use of the qualitative method is applicable to knowledge of history, relationships, representations, beliefs and opinions, results of the interpretations individuals have regarding themselves, the way they live, feel and think.

Sixteen students from first, second and third year university participated in this research on a regular basis. Twelve women from the participants were present, out of which four were 18 years old; two were 20 years old; one 19 years old; one was 25 years old; one was 21 years old; one was 42 years old, one 22 years and one 35 years) and four men (20 years, 22 years, 27 years and 29 years). Hence, the participants' age range is between 18 and 42 years. Hence, semi-structured interviews were used as a data gathering instrument. The interview, a dialogue with clear and determined objectives, is achieved as the most common process in field work and, through the interview, the researcher collects the information provided in the statements of the subjects. In the semi-structured interview, the interviewee responds spontaneously to the proposed subject and simultaneously answers a series of questions that have been established in advance. The semi-structured interview guide script used as the first strategy, questions to collect student identification data; on the second axis, we went on to use orienting questions on the proposed theme.

Such questions facilitated the determination of thematic centers presented in research discussion themes. The interviews were recorded completely on a digital tape.

Results

This habit is particularly prevalent among young people, who spend up to four hours a day. Excessive use of electronic devices, as highlighted by the Ophthalmology Portal, can also result in the development of Computer-Related Visual Syndrome (CRVS), characterized by a variety of signs and symptoms associated with prolonged screen use. It is estimated that more than 90% of users present some symptom related to the syndrome.

The 20-year-old student's concern about sleep loss, in relation to the context of social media use, stands out as a substantial aspect for physical and mental well-being, especially in academic contexts, in which other situations can aggravate this sphere.

Disorders such as nighttime awakenings and nightmares can adversely impact quality of life, affecting people's physical, occupational, cognitive and social functioning.

Of the 16 students participating in the study, one was unable to clearly state whether the use of social networks interferes with their productivity or not; three mentioned that they positively help with studies; seven indicated that they hinder their concentration and productivity; five highlighted that they both positively help their productivity and also cause negative interference.

Below are the statements of students who stated that social networks help them positively in their studies, favoring contacts with other students in the university community, and also being important for the areas of knowledge of the profession.

[...] there are many Instagrams in the health area, videos, these things and this helps me understand what I'm studying, for example, I'm studying something in college and suddenly I see something about embryonic development, then I see something on Instagram and a disease appears that affects the development of the embryo (woman, 18 years old).

I have contact with some university students, Instagram has pages about my course, I have access to some questions, news, and there is also the college's Instagram that brings news when, for example, there is a vacancy, something, so you can follow it more easily on a day-to-day basis (woman, 20 years old).

I think it is important in relation to the areas of knowledge that are related to the profession. On the networks we find a range of information, we have access to professionals who are working, the way they work [...] in this sense it is a good influence and helps us a lot (woman, 35 years old).

Seven students highlighted that social networks considerably hinder concentration and productivity. They highlighted that notifications that arrive on their cell phones cause distraction, so they end up spending a lot of time on social media, having difficulty organizing their time in their daily lives.

[...] it really gets in the way because I'm doing work or something I have to do and if a notification arrives I look at it and when I realize it, a long time has already passed and I have a lot of difficulty concentrating, because then I'm always like that, when I go back to what I was doing, I can't finish, so it really gets in my way (woman, 22 years old).

To feel more productive I need to step away from social media for a bit. I think she takes it off when I'm in it too much (female, 42 years old).

One student interviewed stated:

I think it interferes. There are more negative things than positive things. We end up not organizing our time and spending a lot of time on social media. (man, 22 years old)

Discussions

The way in which social networks have been used by students points to an important discussion about the hierarchy of technologies, which are created to be dominated and not the opposite. The relationship is marked by consumption in which time limits and priorities are not established by users, resulting in unbridled consumption and the occupation of the object's place in the digital environment.

The reports from Occupational Therapy students lead us to reflect on how difficulty concentrating may be related to the overload of information and entertainment present in contemporary everyday life. This exposure can make the process of focus and attention difficult, leading the individual to feel empty even when faced with important demands.

Such spaces are highly attractive and stimulating, where each click represents a stimulus, an image or a new opportunity to encounter different situations that arouse curiosity. Academic demands, more often than not, represent less stimulating activities compared to interactions on social networks. The pedagogical methodology does not always consider the student's sociocultural context, which can reduce interest in learning.

On the other hand, these platforms use mechanisms and algorithms that seek to identify the user's profile, capturing their time and attention by exposing them to a variety of content of personal interest. It points out that platform mechanisms use unpredictable reward systems, which can have a physiological, psychological and social impact, keeping users increasingly engaged. The infinite scroll bar on platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and YouTube is a mechanism that induces, consciously or unconsciously, an incessant search for random content that brings well-being.

Thus, the recommendation system for posts, videos and images gradually aligns with user preferences.

This narrative demonstrates that, although social networks make it possible to check the exact amount of hours and minutes spent online, users end up not realizing how much time they spend immersed in these environments.

In view of this, we can understand that the frequency and quantity of notifications received have made the process of organizing time difficult, bombarding the attention of academics and affecting their performance. Information commonly appears in parallel with university activities, contributing to the triggering of anxiety and procrastination behaviors in students.

Studies on social media addiction report the impacts of excessive use on users' lives, leading to symptoms of other addictions and difficulty controlling impulses and emotions.

Five university students highlighted that social networks present these two dimensions: they both positively help their productivity, and they also cause negative

interference, highlighting content similar to that already highlighted by other students interviewed in this study.

Recommendations

To address the potential harm that exposure to social media does to the mental well-being of students, there must be a move towards a transdisciplinary strategy. This is not just an issue of coordinating what is already available at the university level, but also putting subject matter related to mental health into the curriculum. Finally, there is a call for a methodology that involves addressing problems of hate speech and cyberbullying within social media. Lastly, the universities themselves need to assume an honest democratic commitment towards society, in the creation of a pedagogy of liberation of freedom and emancipation.

Studies like this one highlight the demand for dynamic content that keeps up with students' technological reality. This requires teachers to incorporate and use new technological tools in the learning process.

We understand, through the interviews, that digital skills aligned with education make the internet a valuable pedagogical artifact in the construction, search and deepening of teaching.

Conclusion

By carrying out this study, we understand the repercussions of the use of social networks in the lives of Occupational Therapy students.

We identified different perceptions regarding the use of social networks, which have an impact on the mental health, personal and academic lives of those interviewed. In the academic context, current demands alter the configuration of students' daily lives, resulting in changes in the ways they relate to family and friends. Access to social networks is motivated by ease of communication, social interaction and obtaining academic content.

We observed that the use of social networks promotes greater protagonism and autonomy in the students' learning process, contributing to the dynamism of teaching and learning. However, we also found that the use of these platforms requires a more critical stance on the part of users, as they can facilitate access to unreliable content and practices that are potentially harmful to mental health.

The statements also showed us that excessive use of these tools can also harm students' academic performance and mental and physical health. These points were highlighted through reports of anxiety, sleep disturbances, visual fatigue, distraction, disorganization, procrastination and or unproductive behaviors.

We found in this research that social networks are used more expressively by young women, which shows a greater tendency towards their access and their

repercussions for the student population of the Occupational Therapy department at UFPB.

Considering the challenges of academic experiences, this study aimed to contribute to the analysis of the relationship of university students in the social and academic context with communication technologies and their interface with mental health. Therefore, the limitations of the research that includes a specific sample cut and the methodological approach used are highlighted. Therefore, the results must be interpreted considering these aspects, in order to avoid decontextualized generalizations.

We suggest that new research be developed with different methodologies and more representative samples to discuss mental health demands in the academic environment. These initiatives can inspire the academic community, health professionals and the community in general to adopt strategies that promote quality of life and well-being, aligned with transformative educational practices. This requires the creation of institutional spaces to debate mental health policies that meet the needs of university students and promote self-care with autonomy and protagonism. Furthermore, it is important to establish a support network to encourage a culture of care in universities.

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