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SOCIAL MEDIA ADDICTION AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE IN NURSING STUDENTS AT A PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN GUAYAQUIL

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Abstract: INTRODUCTION: Social media has become an essential pillar for interaction and assertive communication between people. However, its excessive and incorrect use could have negative consequences for health. OBJECTIVE: To determine the relationship between social media addiction and emotional intelligence in nursing students at a public university in Guayaquil. METHODOLOGY: An observational, descriptive, correlational study was conducted during 2024. The universe consisted of 932 students aged 18 to 25, from which a sample of 272 students was obtained using a simple random probability sampling method. The survey technique was used, along with instruments such as the Social Network Use Questionnaire (ARS) and the Bar-On Emotional Inventory. The variables were processed using the statistical package SPSS version 19.0 and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. RESULTS: The average age was 19 years, with a predominance of women (80.15%), single marital status (92.28%), who mainly used the WhatsApp platform (60.29%), with a connection time of more than 120 minutes (40.81%). The students had a medium level of addiction (54.41%) and an average level of emotional intelligence (37.1%); there is a statistically significant association between social media addiction and emotional intelligence with a value of p=0.001 and Rho= -0.537. CONCLUSION: It is concluded that there is a relationship between social media addiction and emotional intelligence in nursing students during their academic training.

Keywords: addiction, nursing, students, emotional intelligence, social media.

INTRODUCTION

Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have revolutionized social processes, providing innovative alternatives to challenges that were previously complex. Advances in computing have enabled the rise of digital social platforms, which have become fundamental pillars for the dissemination of knowledge. These tools stand out for their efficiency in creating immediate interconnections between users and facilitating the exchange of ideas on a global scale [1].

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of Internet users worldwide stood at 5 billion, of which 3.6 billion were active on social media. At the end of 2023, the highest use of social media was recorded in North Asia and North America, with rates of 70 percent and 61 percent. Growth was mainly driven by teenagers and young adults, with 13 new users joining every second [2].

In Latin America, social media use has experienced significant growth, with 9 out of 10 internet users accessing these platforms, representing a total of 392.6 million people. This figure is expected to continue to rise through 2026, driven by the growing popularity of various social networks.

According to a report by the Mentinno Group, Ecuadorians stand out among users with the highest use of digital platforms. Facebook is the leading social network with 13.3 million consumers, followed by TikTok with 10 million and Instagram with 6.2 million users. The coastal region stands out as the area with the highest level of access and use of social networks, accounting for 18 percent of the national total. The most common age range among those who use these platforms in the city of Guayaquil is 18 to 34, and women constitute the majority, representing 54 percent of total users.

On the other hand, Pedrouzo et al.[5] highlight that the inappropriate use of electronic devices can have negative consequences for students' psychological health and emotional intelligence (EI). EI is understood as the ability to identify and manage one's own emotions, fostering empathetic and effective communication, and facilitating problem-solving and the reconciliation of challenges in personal interactions. Excessive use of social media could indicate poor EI development, negatively impacting the individual's environment and leading to complications such as recession, dis-

tress, distortion of physical image, sleep disorders, and feelings of isolation.

With the COVID-19 pandemic and the reestablishment of in-person classes, a significant proportion of students have been found to use social media both inside and outside the academic environment. The Student Welfare Department at the University of Guayaquil has pointed out the possible influence of mental health disorders on the emergence of atypical patterns of Emotional Intelligence (EI), which has led to growing motivation and interest on the part of university authorities to understand and address this situation.

Given the problem identified, it is essential to analyze the relationship between ARS and EI. This investigation is of paramount importance in identifying risk factors that can help prevent such addiction. In this context, and taking the situation outlined above as a starting point, there is a research interest in determining the relationship between social media addiction and emotional intelligence in nursing students at a public university in Guayaquil.

From a pragmatic perspective, this research facilitates the design of effective interventions aimed at the prevention and treatment of students' emotional well-being. Additionally, it lays the foundation for the establishment of guidelines in the creation of programs and protocols aimed at optimizing academic performance and raising the level of grades of nursing students.

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative methodological study was conducted, using a cross-sectional sequential design with prospective directionality and an observational, descriptive, correlational design. The study population consisted of 932 students enrolled in the first three semesters of the nursing program at the University of Guayaquil, whose ages ranged from 18 to 25 years.

The sampling strategy applied was a simple random probability method, thus ensuring that each student had the same probability of being in-

cluded in the study. To determine the sample size, the sample size formula for finite populations was applied, with predefined parameters to be considered as the total population (N=932), with a confidence level of (95% CI) and a margin of error of (5%). The result was a sample of 272 students from the first three semesters, aged between 18 and 25 years.

The selection criteria were that they had to be enrolled in the nursing program, be between the ages of 18 and 25, and voluntarily agree to participate in the research through their informed consent.

The hypothetical-deductive theoretical method was used, whose logical sequence began with the precise definition of the research problem, the formulation of the general objective, and the establishment of the central hypothesis of the study. At the empirical level, the observation method was used. The survey was applied as a technique for the description and evaluation of the variables inherent to the study, and the instruments used were the Data Collection Form, the Social Media Use Form (ARS-2014), and the Bar-On Emotional Inventory.

The procedure was carried out administratively through the application, and authorization was subsequently received from the director of the Nursing program to apply the instruments to the students. The director then coordinated a meeting with the Student Welfare Department to present and disseminate the purposes and goals of the study to the students, emphasizing the importance of confidentiality.

The protocol for administering the data collection instruments was explained in detail, emphasizing the requirement for students to sign an informed consent form. Participants were identified and selected at random to ensure equal probability of inclusion in the study. Once defined, the questionnaires were administered until the target sample size was reached.

Once the collection and evaluation phase of the measurement instruments was completed, the

primary information was systematically organized into a digital data matrix and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 19.0 statistical software. The statistical techniques used were descriptive analysis through measures of absolute and relative frequency distribution for categorical variables, and for numerical variables, the arithmetic mean was used as a measure of central tendency and the standard deviation as a measure of dispersion.

Inferential analysis was also performed using Spearman's rank correlation coefficient Rho to relate the dimensions of the ordinal measurement scale, with a significance level of 95%, after analyzing the assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity.

The study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles aimed at protecting the participants, safeguarding the integrity and comfort of the fundamental rights and safety of the students involved in this research. Formal approval was sought and obtained from the Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Guayaquil (CEISH-UG), in strict compliance with the previously established research protocol. Each student's participation was based on the principle of voluntariness and autonomy, formalized through the signing of an informed consent form, and they were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without justification.

RESULTS

The analysis of the 272 respondents yielded an average age of 19.57 years. The distribution by gender showed a majority representation of females, with 80.15% of the sample (218 cases), in contrast to 19.85% for males (54 cases). In terms of marital status, 92.28% of students (251 individuals) identified as single, followed by those in a civil union (4.04%) and married (3.68%). In terms of social media platforms, WhatsApp was the most widely used (60.29%), followed by TikTok (13.24%) and Instagram (9.56%). Regarding daily connection time , the largest group (40.81%) re-

ported more than 120 minutes. This was followed by students with a connection time of 61 to 120 minutes (30.15%) and those who connected for between 31 and 60 minutes (24.53%) (Table 1).

With regard to the level of addiction to social media, a predominance of the medium level was found, covering 54.41% of the sample. The high level of addiction also exhibited a substantial representation, constituting 43.75% of the participants, while the low level was manifested in a minority, comprising only 1.84% of the total. In relation to emotional intelligence, the average and low levels had a similar relative frequency, with values corresponding to 37.13% and 32.35%, respectively (Table 2).

Table 3 shows the levels of social media addiction dimensions. Excessive use, lack of personal control, and obsession were predominantly observed at the medium level of addiction, with percentages of 62.1%, 59.2%, and 53.7%, respectively. These dimensions were not significantly represented at the low and high levels of addiction.

Table 4 shows the levels of the dimensions of EI. It was observed that the intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood dimensions were predominantly manifested at the average intelligence level, with percentages of 41.2%, 32.7%, 46.3%, 42.3%, and 40.1%, respectively. These dimensions were not significantly represented in the low, high, and very high EI levels of the students studied.

The analysis of the association between social media addiction and IE, presented in Table 5, yielded a two-tailed asymptotic significance of 0.01 (p<0.05). This result led to the rejection of the null hypothesis (H0) and the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis (H1), indicating a significant relationship between the variables. The Spearman correlation coefficient (Rs) obtained was -0.537.

Regarding the relationship between addiction to social media and the dimensions of IE (Table 6), a significant correlation (p<0.05) was found between addiction and stress management (Rs=0.581) and general mood (Rs=0.652). There

Variables	Descriptive statistics	
	fi (n)	hi (%)
Age: 18-25 years ($\overline{x}$ ± SD)	(19.57 ± 1.373)	
Gender		
Male	54	19.85
Female	218	80.15
Marital status		
Single	251	92.28
Married	10	3.68
Common-law marriage	11	4.04
Type of platform		
Facebook	21	7.72
Instagram	26	9.56
WhatsApp	164	60.29
Tik Tok	36	13.24
Telegram	7	2.57
X Twitter	18	6.62
Connection time		
0-30 minutes	12	4.41
31-60 minutes	67	24.63
61-120 minutes	82	30.15
More than 120 minutes	111	40.81
Total	272	100

Abbreviations: $\bar{x}$ (Arithmetic mean) SD (Standard deviation)

Table 1. Characterization of the study sample. Guayaquil, Ecuador, 2024.

Variables	fi (n)	hi (%)
Levels of addiction to social media (RRSS)		
Low	5	1.84
Medium	148	54.41
High	119	43.75
Emotional intelligence levels		
Low	88	32.35
Average	101	37.13
High	69	25.7
Very high	14	5.15
Total	**272**	**10**

Table 2. *Levels of social media addiction and emotional intelligence, Guayaquil, Ecuador, 2024.*

Dimension of social media addiction	Levels of social media addiction					
	Low		Medium		High	
	No	%	No.	%	No.	%
Obsession	46	16.9	146	53.7	80	29.4
Lack of personal control	24	8.8	161	59.2	87	32.0
Excessive use of social media	6	2.2	169	62.1	97	35.7

Table 3. *Dimensions and levels of social media addiction in students. Guayaquil, Ecuador, 2024.*

Source: SPSS statistical software version 19.0.

Dimensions of EI	EI levels							
	Low		Average		High		Very high	
	No	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Intrapersonal	20	7.4	112	41.2	97	35.7	43	15.8
Interpersonal	32	11.7	89	32.7	80	29.4	71	26.1
Adaptability	25	9.2	126	46.3	57	21.0	64	23.5
Stress management	87	32	115	42.3	48	17.6	19	7.0
General mood	73	26.8	109	40.1	67	24.6	23	8.5

Table 4. *Dimensions and levels of EI in students. Guayaquil, Ecuador, 2024.*

			Addiction to (SSN)	(EI)
Rho correlation coefficient Spearman	Social media addiction	Rs	1.00	-0.537
		Mr.	-	0.001*
		n	272	272
	Emotional emotional	Rs	-0.537	1.00
		Sig.	0.001*	-
		n	272	272

Note: n: sample. Rs: Correlation coefficient. Sig. Bilateral asymptotic significance. $p < 0.05$*: Statistical significance.

Table 5. *Analysis of the relationship between levels of addiction to social media (RRSS) and levels of internet addiction (IE) in students, Guayaquil, Ecuador, 2024.]*

Source: SPSS statistical software version 19.0.

was also a significant relationship between the two (p=0.01, Rs=0.733). No significant relationships were found with the other dimensions.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the research on the relationship between social media addiction and emotional intelligence in nursing students at a public university in Guayaquil revealed a moderate negative correlation (Rs= -0.537), which was statistically significant at a very high level (p < 0.001, Sig. Bil = 0.000). These findings support the acceptance of the alternative hypothesis, which posits an inverse relationship between the two variables, such that a higher degree of addiction to SNS is significantly associated with lower EI development in students.

The average age in the study was 19 years. This result is consistent with the results reported in previous studies. Chandrasena [7], Rathakrishnan B et al. [8], and Mou Q et al. [9] reported comparable mean ages in their respective study samples, which ranged from 19.48, 19.31, and 20.20 years, respectively, in their research. In this vein, Chandrasena [7] posits that young people are increasingly vulnerable to developing an addiction to social media platforms, attributing this phenomenon to the intrinsically e need to exert broad social influence and the propensity for identity reaffirmation within the context of the social reference group.

In relation to the factors that contribute to addiction to social media among young people, Mou Q et al. [9] argued that the platforms available on the internet are perceived as teaching tools, and that this accessibility is due to the fact that they do not require the development of complex comprehension, interpretation, and analysis skills, which makes them exclusively attractive and useful resources not only for academic purposes but also for managing the unequal scenarios of everyday life in youth.

The gender variable was another relevant factor in this research, with a female predominance in the sample (80.15%), coinciding with previous findings such as those of Burén et al. [10] where they report 81.32%. These authors attribute this trend to the fact that women tend to use social media more frequently to express emotions, strengthen social bonds, and share personal or cultural content (images, traditions), as well as to seek validation in digital environments.

The predominant marital status in the sample studied was single, with a representation of 92.28%. This result is in line with the observations of various previous studies in the scientific literature, such as those carried out by Guclu et al. [11], Rachubińska K et al. [12], and Pwlikowska A et al. [13], who reported similar prevalence figures, specifically 91.74%, 90.89%, and 92.35% in their respective study samples. These studies suggest that although there are platforms for finding partners on social media, young people often experience loneliness and seek partners online despite mistrusting deception and the difficulty of maintaining virtual relationships due to fake profiles [11].

The study by Rachubińska et al. [12] highlights a current preference among young people for prioritizing physical appearance as a central criterion in choosing a partner. This behavior is also linked to the regular use of digital environments where sexually explicit content is consumed, which acts as a recurring visual stimulus. The authors argue that this continuous exposure shapes attitudes, romantic expectations, and cognitive patterns in adolescents and young adults, creating a distortion in the perception of intimacy and interpersonal relationships.

In another study conducted with young people, the authors were able to identify a preference for single status and the freedom it affords to engage in seduction and falling in love. They stated that entering into a formal relationship implies a restriction of their intimacy, privacy, and personal time availability [13].

The WhatsApp platform was among the most used social media platforms, with about 60.21%. This finding is entirely consistent with the results reported in the literature, such as those presented

			Addiction to social media	Intrapersonal	Interpersonal	Adaptability	Stress management	General mood
Linear correlation coefficient's Rho Spearman	**Social media addiction**	Rs	1.00	-0.004	-0.259	0.341	0.581	0.652
		Sig. Bil.	-	0.947	0.231	0.08	0.001*	0.001*
		n	272	272	272	272	272	272
	Intrapersonal	Rs	-0.004	1.00	-0.159	0.173	0.106	-0.041
		Sig. Bil.	0.947	-	0.08	0.785	0.182	0.942
		n	272	272	272	272	272	272
	Interpersonal	Rs	-0.259	-0.159	1.00	0.045	0.003	0.068
		Sig. Bil.	0.231	0.08	-	0.456	0.675	0.062
		n	272	272	272	272	272	272
	Adaptability	Rs	0.341	0.173	0.045	1.00	0.220	0.143
		Sig. Bil.	0.08	0.785	0.456	-	0.151	0.190
		n	272	272	272	272	272	272
	Stress management	Rs	0.581	0.106	0.003	0.220	1.00	0.733
		Sig. Bil.	0.001*	0.182	0.675	0.151	-	0.001*
		n	272	272	272	272	272	272
	General mood	Rs	0.652	-0.041	0.068	0.143	0.733	1.00
		Sig. Bil.	**0.001***	0.942	0.062	0.190	0.001*	-
		n	272	272	272	272	272	272

Note: n: sample. Rs: correlation coefficient. Sig. Two-tailed asymptotic significance. $p < 0.05$*: statistical significance.

Table 6. *Analysis of the correlation between addiction to social media and the constituent dimensions of EI in the study sample, Guayaquil, Ecuador, 2024.*

Source: SPSS statistical software version 19.0.

by Bhandarkar AM et al. [14], who argue that the free nature, operational simplicity, immediacy, and wide accessibility of WhatsApp favor the establishment of patterns of behavioral addiction. This addictive potential is based on the mechanism of intermittent reward, where uncertainty about the receipt of a message generates states of anxiety and irritability, promoting repetitive behaviors such as forwarding the message or constantly checking its delivery.

On the other hand, other authors point out that addiction to the WhatsApp application can lead to a significant decrease in concentration, negatively affecting performance in academic and work activities. It also promotes patterns of compulsive checking of mobile devices, often done covertly during meetings or formal settings, with the aim of avoiding detection. This dependence is also associated with a loss of self-control over the need to interact digitally, the onset of depressive symptoms, emotional instability, episodes of irritability, and the presence of sleep disorders, such as insomnia, as a frequent comorbidity [15,20].

The most prevalent time spent on social media among university students was more than 120 minutes per day, accounting for 40.81 percent of the population studied. This finding is consistent with the study described by Parlak [16,21], which found that 40.25 percent of the sample spent more than two hours online. According to the conclusions of their research, it is postulated that individuals who exceed two hours per day of internet

connection have a greater predisposition to develop mental health problems in the medium term, in addition to experiencing an impact on the rise and manifestation of their EI.

However, this statement contrasts with the findings of Marín V et al. [17,22] who indicated in their study that internet connection only becomes harmful when it exceeds five hours per day. In addition, they emphasized that the negative impact depends on each individual and the quality of their interpersonal relationships in the workplace and private life. The authors also argue that moderate use of technology is not inherently harmful and could even be beneficial in the context of a globally connected society.

The dimensions evaluated included recurring thoughts (obsession), self-regulation deficit (lack of personal control), and intensive consumption (excessive use) of social media. These areas range from the constant presence of ideas related to the use of digital platforms and difficulty limiting or managing connection time to prolonged and excessive use of these virtual environments, a finding that is corroborated by the study by Chang CH et al. [18] [-23,24][] who argue that when addiction to social media reaches intoxication levels, there is a high probability that performance in various activities and functions will be affected.

Regarding the revealing effects of stress management and general mood on emotional intelligence and its relationship with social media addiction, the study by Najeeb et al. [(19)-25,26,27)] who state that young university students often react negatively to reprimands for using cell phones in class, displaying defiant, irritable, and negative behaviors. These emotions of sadness and depression can lead them to take refuge in digital platforms as a form of escape, which contributes to addictive behaviors.

Among the main limitations of this study are the scarcity of previous comprehensive research on the subject, the short period of time allocated to data collection in the selected sample, and the absence of complementary measurement instruments or validated scales for application. These methodological restrictions reduced the scope of the derived effects, limited the interest in more robust and accurate statistical analyses, and made it difficult to establish a solid baseline, thus compromising the possibility of generalizing the findings with a higher level of reliability [28-29,30].

In future lines of research, it would be useful to employ qualitative designs to gain a deeper understanding of how participants interact with and respond to the influence of social media. Some aspects to explore include: students' attitudes toward these platforms, the specific areas of their curriculum that are most affected by the use of social media, and the strategies that educational institutions could implement so that the use of virtual platforms is perceived and used as a useful and positive tool in the learning process.

The strength of this research lies in its potential to provoke deep reflection and stimulate creativity in the scientific field. Therefore, they represent a significant basis for the planning, development, and implementation of training strategies aimed at strengthening emotional competencies within educational institutions, with the aim of enabling students to develop the necessary skills to make appropriate and beneficial use of social media, thus promoting their overall psychological well-being.

CONCLUSIONS

The results showed that the student population surveyed had an average age of 19, with a predominance of single women. The most frequent connection time exceeded 120 minutes per day, with WhatsApp being the most widely used platform among this group. Nearly half of the students showed a moderate level of social media addiction, as well as an intermediate average of emotional intelligence.

Manifestations of obsession, lack of self-regulation, and intensive use of social media were more frequent among students who showed a moderate level of addiction to these platforms. With regard

to emotional intelligence, it was found that the intrapersonal, interpersonal, adaptability, stress management, and general mood dimensions had greater weight in students who were at an average level for this variable.

There is a moderate inverse relationship between social media addiction and EI, i.e., as addiction to these platforms increases, the level of emotional intelligence in students decreases.

A direct, positive, and statistically significant relationship was identified between social media addiction and the dimensions related to stress management and general mood. This indicates that as the level of addiction to these platforms increases, so do the scores related to stress management and emotional well-being.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors report no conflicts of interest and are solely responsible for the content and writing of this article.

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