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Scientific articles

Las habilidades socioemocionales y el uso de las redes sociales de los jóvenes universitarios

The impact of social networks on the development of socio-emotional skills

Habilidades socioemocionais e o uso de redes sociais de jovens universitários

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Resumen

La importancia del desarrollo de habilidades sociales en estudiantes universitarios radica en poder enfrentar situaciones de la mejor manera tanto en el ámbito personal como en el profesional. Al finalizar la pandemia por covid-19 los estudiantes enfrentaron diversos retos, entre los que se destaca la adaptación y socialización después de haber permanecido aislados y únicamente interactuando a través de medios digitales como lo son las redes sociales. El objetivo de este estudio fue identificar las habilidades socioemocionales y el uso de las redes sociales de estudiantes universitarios. En el estudio participaron 872 estudiantes de la Universidad Veracruzana, de diversos programas educativos, la metodología de investigación fue predominantemente cuantitativa incluyendo aspectos cualitativos para alcanzar una mejor comprensión del tema de estudio. Resultados de un análisis descriptivo indican que los estudiantes relacionan significativamente el uso de las sociales con la forma en que se relacionan los estudiantes, las redes sociales son consideradas importantes para el desarrollo socioemocional por parte de los estudiantes pero también identifican algunas posibles desventajas. Se puede concluir que debe existir un equilibrio entre el uso de las redes sociales para el desarrollo personal y social, aprovechando sus beneficios para el crecimiento intrapersonal, interpersonal y transpersonal, evitando la comparación negativa y la dependencia excesiva.



Palabras clave: Estudiantes universitarios, habilidades socioemocionales, tecnología, redes sociales.

Abstract

The importance of developing social skills in university students lies in being able to face situations in the best way, both in the personal and professional spheres. At the end of the covid-19 pandemic, students faced various challenges, among which adaptation and socialization stand out after having remained isolated and only interacting through digital media such as social networks. The objective of this study was to identify the socio-emotional skills and use of social networks of university students. 872 students from the Universidad Veracruzana participated in the study, from various educational programs. The research methodology was predominantly quantitative, including qualitative aspects to achieve a better understanding of the study topic. Results of a descriptive analysis indicate that students significantly relate the use of social networks to the way in which students relate; social networks are considered important for students' socio-emotional development but also identify some possible disadvantages. It can be concluded that there must be a balance between the use of social networks for personal and social development, taking advantage of their benefits for intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal growth, avoiding negative comparison and excessive dependence.

Keywords: University students, socio-emotional skills, social networks, technology, social networks.

Resumo

A importância do desenvolvimento de habilidades sociais em estudantes universitários reside em conseguir enfrentar da melhor forma as situações, tanto no âmbito pessoal quanto profissional. No final da pandemia de covid-19, os estudantes enfrentaram vários desafios, entre os quais se destacam a adaptação e a socialização após terem permanecido isolados e interagindo apenas através de meios digitais como as redes sociais. O objetivo deste estudo foi identificar as competências socioemocionais e utilização de redes sociais de estudantes universitários. Participaram do estudo 872 estudantes da Universidade Veracruzana, de diversos programas educacionais. A metodologia da pesquisa foi predominantemente

quantitativa, incluindo aspectos qualitativos para alcançar uma melhor compreensão do tema do estudo. Os resultados de uma análise descritiva indicam que os alunos relacionam significativamente a utilização das redes sociais com a forma como as redes sociais se relacionam são consideradas importantes para o desenvolvimento socioemocional dos alunos, mas também identificam algumas possíveis desvantagens; Pode-se concluir que deve haver um equilíbrio entre a utilização das redes sociais para o desenvolvimento pessoal e social, aproveitando os seus benefícios para o crescimento intrapessoal, interpessoal e transpessoal, evitando comparações negativas e dependência excessiva.

Palavras-chave: Estudantes universitários, competências socioemocionais, tecnologia, redes sociais.

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Introduction

The study of social networks and socio-emotional skills is considered a topic of great importance given the high number of users. According to Galeano (2024) in January 2024 more than 5,000 accounts were identified in use on social networks, which represents an area of opportunity for the identification of students' socio-emotional skills.

Some researches such as Boyd and Ellison (2013) have studied from the conceptualization to the repercussions of the use of social networks, other researchers such as Kirschner and Karpinski (2010) identify opportunities through these for communication and expression, also identifying some disadvantages resulting from excessive use in academic performance. For their part, Mayer et al. (2016) consider emotional intelligence to be important, and it has also been identified that early attention to the development of socio-emotional skills has a positive impact on people (Mahoney-et al., 2018).

This research is based on the question: What is the relationship between socio-emotional skills and the use of social networks? Studies such as those by Rosen, et al. (2013) and Verduyn et al. (2015) have explored this dynamic, revealing both the disruptive potential of social networks in concentration and emotional well-being and the complexities of their impact on long-term mental health.

The interweaving of socio-emotional skills and social media use is a dynamic area of research of great relevance to contemporary society.

Conceptual and theoretical framework

Social networks

They are groups of people with diverse profiles who meet through digital platforms to share topics of affinity and interact with others (Boyd and Ellison, 2013).

These platforms facilitate the connection between people and organizations, allowing communication and the exchange of information quickly and globally, and have thus emerged as a crucial phenomenon in the contemporary digital age.

There are different types of social networks, classified according to their purpose and functionalities such as: General Social Networks: Such as *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Instagram*, which allow sharing varied content such as photos, videos, messages and links; Professional Social Networks: Examples are *LinkedIn* and *Xing*, aimed at the creation of work networks and job searches; Thematic Social Networks: Such as *Pinterest* and *Goodreads*, focused on specific interests such as photography, fashion or literature and Multimedia Content Social Networks: Such as *YouTube* and *TikTok*, where videos and audiovisual content are shared. (Boyd and Ellison, 2013).

To fully understand its functioning, impact and relevance in society, a multidisciplinary theoretical framework covering various perspectives is presented.

The node-tie theory is key to understanding social networks, as it is based on the idea of nodes (actors) and links (relationships) between them. This theory, according to Wasserman and Faust (2020), offers a conceptual approach to analyze how connections are established and maintained in networks.

The six degrees of separation theory points to connectivity in social networks, where any person can be connected to another person in no more than five intermediaries (Milgram, 2016). It highlights the relevance of weak connections in the diffusion of information and the spread of influence (Granovetter, 1973).

Social capital theory analyses the value of social relationships in networks. According to this theory, connections facilitate the exchange of resources and promote trust and cooperation (Putnam, 2000).

Social network analysis provides tools to study the structure and properties of social networks, identify key patterns and nodes (Scott, 2017), being essential to understand their formation and evolution online.

Online self-representation theory studies how identity is managed in virtual environments such as social media. It highlights the importance of constructing a digital identity and managing online impression (Goffman, 1959; Zhao et al., 2020).

Together, these theories provide a solid foundation for understanding the complexity and importance of social networks in contemporary society, as well as for investigating their impact on socio-emotional skills.

Social-emotional skills

They refer to a set of capabilities that allow people to understand, express and regulate their emotions, as well as interact effectively with others and adapt to various social situations (Mayer et al., 2016).

Socio-emotional skills include: a) emotional intelligence to recognize and manage emotions (Salovey and Mayer, 2016); b) empathy to understand and respond to the feelings of others (Cuff et al., 2016); c) social skills for positive relationships and communication (Gresham and Elliott, 1990); and d) resilience to adapt to and overcome adversity (Masten, 2018).

Socio-emotional skills are essential for personal development, contributing to emotional well-being and self-regulation (Brackett & Rivers, 2014); they improve interpersonal relationships by fostering effective communication and empathy (Eisenberg et al., 2010); and they are linked to academic and work success, improving performance, leadership and adaptability (Mahoney et al., 2018; Jones & Bouffard, 2012).

Thus, the development of socio-emotional skills occurs throughout life and is influenced by factors such as education, family environment, social experiences and the practice of emotional self-regulation strategies (Zins et al., 2004).

Socio-emotional skills “are the ability to recognize emotions, both one's own and those of others, and to manage our response to them. It can be defined as the set of skills that allow a person to better adapt to changes. It also has to do with self-confidence and self-assurance, emotional control, and self-motivation to achieve goals. Understanding the feelings of others, managing relationships, and having the power to influence are essential to achieving positive changes in the environment” (Goleman, 2020). This set of skills is essential for personal well-being, academic and professional success, and positive adaptation to diverse social contexts (Mahoney et al., 2018).

Some theories of social-emotional skills to consider are:



The theory of emotional intelligence, by Salovey and Mayer (2016) and popularized by Goleman (2020), emphasizes the relevance of socio-emotional skills. It focuses on recognizing and regulating one's own emotions, as well as understanding and responding to the emotions of others as key elements of emotional intelligence.

The theory of socio-emotional development, based on Piaget (1965) and Vygotsky (1978), places social interaction and experience as a fundamental basis for the development of socio-emotional skills.

According to CASEL (2020), socio-emotional education promotes the development of individual, social and self-regulation awareness skills, which enables responsible decision-making.

On the other hand, Freire (2018) and Nussbaum (2001) developed the theory of equity and justice that seeks precisely to promote empathy, cooperation and mutual respect between people.

Contextual framework

The Universidad Veracruzana (UV) is a higher education institution located in the state of Veracruz, Mexico, which this year celebrates 80 years of its creation.

It can be said that UV is an institution of great presence and quality in the promotion of education, research and culture in Veracruz. During its first years, the university experienced rapid growth, expanding its academic offering and establishing close ties with the local community (Jiménez, 2017).

Over the decades, UV has faced various challenges and has undergone important transformations. During the 1970s, the university faced a period of student unrest and political conflicts, which affected its functioning and its relationship with society (Ríos Ángeles, 2014). All of this was left in the past and UV was consolidated as one of the main higher education institutions in Mexico (Universidad Veracruzana, 2020).

The Universidad Veracruzana has played a fundamental role in the history and development of the state of Veracruz, contributing to the advancement of education, research and culture in the region and beyond.

Methodology

The aim of this study was to identify the socio-emotional skills and social media use of university students. To do so, it explored how social media use affects emotional awareness, emotional regulation capacity, social skills, and responsible decision-making.

Methodological design

The methodological approach of this research is based on the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods (Johnson and Christensen, 2015). This mixed approach involves a systematic and critical process of data collection and analysis, allowing for joint integration and discussion to generate meaningful inferences and a greater understanding of the study, as mentioned by these authors. The strength of this research lies in the synergy achieved by integrating both approaches.

The objective of mixed research is not to replace quantitative or qualitative research, but to take advantage of the strengths of both and minimize their potential weaknesses (Guelmes and Nieto, 2015). This strategy allows for a more complete and clear perspective of the data, taking advantage of the benefits of each approach for a deep and broad analysis.

The adopted methodological design is a dominant model concurrent nested design (DIAC), as recommended by (Palacios et al., 2023). This design involves the collection of quantitative and qualitative data in the same instrument, giving greater weight to the quantitative approach in this specific case. The qualitative approach complements this analysis by allowing a richer interpretation and integration of the results obtained.

A significant correlation is hypothesized between social media use and the development of social-emotional skills in college students. More time on social media is expected to be positively related to greater emotional awareness, regulation, social competence, and decision making. However, excessive use may be associated with difficulties, suggesting a non-linear relationship between time and skill development.

To this end, the following variables have been identified: a) Independent Variable: Use of social networks: represents the time spent by university students using online social networks, including platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, among others. It can be measured in hours per day or week. b) Dependent Variables: Socio-emotional skills: defined as the ability to recognize and regulate one's own emotions, as well as social competence and responsible decision-making (Gardner et al., 2011; Salovey and Mayer, 2016).

The following important concepts emerge from these variables:

1. Emotional regulation: ability to manage emotions effectively, using strategies such as mindfulness and cognitive reappraisal (Gross, 2015).
2. Social skills: ability to interact effectively with others, including communication, empathy and conflict resolution (Lopes et al., 2005).
3. Responsible decision making: evaluating situations, considering alternatives and making informed and ethical decisions (Pascual et al., 2013).

Based on these variables, the instrument was designed and validated to carry out the specific measurement for each socio-emotional construct. The validity and reliability of the data collection instrument was carried out through an expert judgment that is defined as "an informed opinion of people with experience in the subject, who are recognized by others as qualified experts in this, and who can provide information, evidence, judgments and assessments" (Pedrosa et al., 2014). Seven teachers specialized in the subject participated. The validity was carried out through email. Each teacher was provided with an Excel sheet that included their full name, academic training, areas of professional experience, current position and institution where they were working at that time.

Following the general data, the indicators to be rated in each of the items were presented (sufficiency, clarity, relevance, and coherence) as well as the rating they could occupy (1. does not meet the criterion, 2. low level, 3. moderate level, 4. high level), in the next section of the Excel the questionnaire of socio-emotional skills was presented divided by dimensions (Intrapersonal, Interpersonal and Transpersonal) and use of social networks, integrating the categories that contained each of the items to be evaluated, at the end of each category a space was placed to make observations or recommendations.

To determine the degree of agreement between the judges, the kappa coefficient assessment was used, "the kappa index (κ) is used to evaluate the agreement or reproducibility of measurement instruments whose result is categorical (2 or more categories)."

Based on the interpretation of Landis and Koch (1977), where the interpretation of the strength of agreement is discussed with the following data (0.00: poor agreement / 0.01 - 0.20: slight agreement / 0.21 - 0.40: acceptable agreement / 0.41 - 0.60: moderate agreement / 0.61 - 0.80: considerable agreement / 0.81 - 1.00: almost perfect. The values obtained show a Fleiss kappa between 0.61 and 0.80, which means that the strength of agreement between the judges is considerable.

The research also considered control variables, such as demographic characteristics of participants (age, gender, socioeconomic status) and the use of other communication technologies, to ensure the validity of the results and control possible confounding variables. According to Kothari (2004), quantitative research allows the collection and analysis of numerical data, facilitating the identification of patterns, trends and causal relationships and it can be stated that the integration of quantitative and qualitative analysis guarantees the validity and reliability of the findings.

Population and context of study

The research was carried out in January 2023, with the participation of students from the educational programs of the bachelor's degrees in: Accounting, Administration, Administrative Computer Systems, Business Management and Direction, Law, Industrial Relations, Development of Human Talent in Organizations, Political Science and Public Management and Advertising and Public Relations of the Universidad Veracruzana.

The study population consisted of 1,863 students from the educational programs mentioned above, considering a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 3.49% and a conservative standard deviation of 0.5 to maximize the accuracy of the results, the sample was 872 students.

Instrument

After an exhaustive review of the literature, a questionnaire was developed consisting of four dimensions of analysis: I. Demographic data, II. School data, III. Socio-emotional skills: intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal, IV. Technological infrastructure and V. Social networks; in addition, open questions were integrated for the measurement of qualitative aspects. The final questionnaire consisted of 39 questions on a Likert scale.

Results

I. Demographic data

The instrument was answered by 872 students, of which 62% were women, 37% were men and 1% did not specify their gender. Regarding the age of the students, 38% declared to be between 18 and 19 years old, 43% are between 20 and 21 years old, 10% between 22 and 23 years old, 3% between 24 and 25 years old and the rest between 26 and 27 years old. 98%

of the respondents indicated that they were single. 78% of the respondents live with their family. 75% do not work, of the 25% who work, 70% do so as employees while 30% work in family businesses.

II. School data

The educational programs in descending order of participation were: Advertising and Public Relations, Law, Administration, Human Talent Development in Organizations, Accounting, Business Management and Administration, Administrative Computer Systems and Industrial Relations. 37% of the participating students were in their third semester, 24% in their fifth semester, 17% in their seventh and first semesters respectively, so it can be said that participation is varied at different levels.

III. Socio-emotional skills: Intrapersonal, Interpersonal and Transpersonal

After returning to in-person classes, emotional changes were observed in students. 22% reported anxiety, 7% experienced depression, and 25% felt stress. Frustration affected 12% of participants. On the other hand, 15% showed enthusiasm and another 15% experienced joy. These results reflect a variety of emotions, with stress being the most common, followed by anxiety, frustration, enthusiasm, joy, and depression to a lesser extent, as can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Emotional changes



Source: Own elaboration

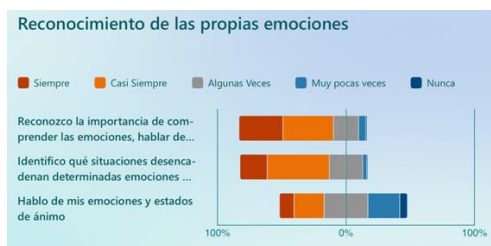
Intrapersonal Analysis

For the intrapersonal analysis, the following subvariables have been considered: self-awareness, self-concept, self-care, self-management, self-discipline.

Self-awareness

In Figure 2, it can be seen that 34.2% and 39.2%, representing the majority of respondents, understand the importance of recognizing and managing their emotions instead of avoiding them. They also identify the situations that trigger emotions, although some do not do so with such clarity.

Figure 2. Self-awareness



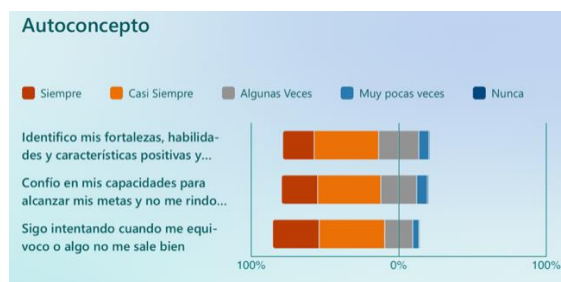
Source: Own elaboration

Students indicated that through social networks they can communicate, reflect and recognize their emotions, but they are also aware that they can generate negative comparisons.

a) Self-concept

Figure 3 shows that most respondents identified strengths and areas for improvement; in terms of confidence and resilience, most were doing well. Some students indicated that social media can help improve self-concept by allowing them to identify strengths and areas for improvement.

Figure 3. Self-concept

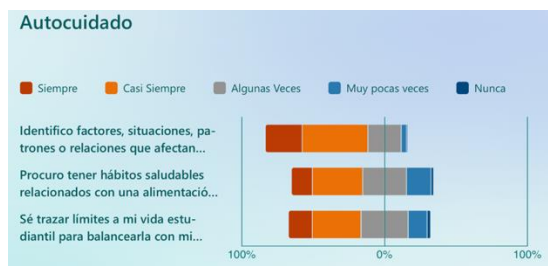


Source: Own elaboration

b) Self-care

Figure 4 shows self-care and wellness practices among respondents. Most of them recognize factors that impact their well-being, such as exercise and diet.

Figure 4. Self-care



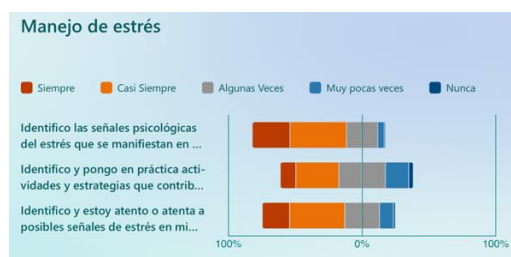
Source: Own elaboration

Students indicated that through social media they can identify those aspects that will allow them to decide on issues that promote their well-being and those that represent negative aspects.

c) Self-management

Figure 5 shows that the majority of respondents (28.2% always, 42.3% almost always) recognize the signs of stress and its impact on emotional well-being.

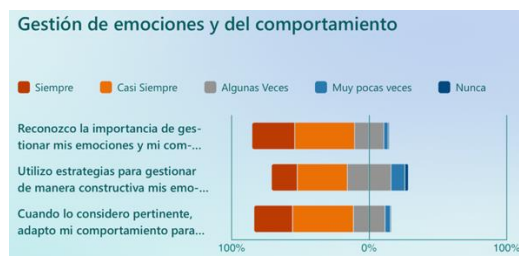
Figure 5. Stress management



Source: Own elaboration

In managing emotions and behavior, the majority recognizes its importance in avoiding harm (31.1% always, 43.5% almost always) (see Figure 6).

Figure 6. Emotions and behavior



Source: Own elaboration

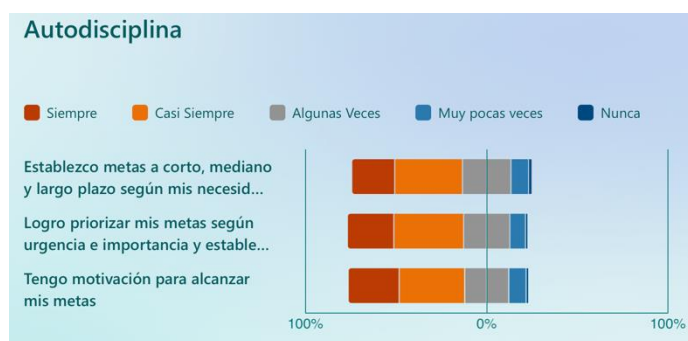
Regarding the adaptation of behavior to social norms, the majority (28.1% always, 44.2% almost always) adjusts to the norms of the context.

Students acknowledge that they have identified issues of emotional intelligence, empathy and consequences of impulsive actions, but do not consider that, according to their topics of interest, these are recurring elements or of discussion among them.

d) Self-discipline

Most respondents (23.7% always, 37.4% almost always) set short, medium and long-term goals, showing the ability to plan and set objectives for different time frames, as can be seen in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Self-discipline



Source: Own elaboration

Regarding prioritizing goals and establishing steps to achieve them, there is balance: a significant group (25.6% always, 38.5% almost always) manages to prioritize and plan.

Regarding motivation to achieve goals, the majority (28.1% always, 36.2% almost always) show they have it, reflecting willingness to work towards personal and professional objectives.

Students say that through social media they can sometimes feel inspired by examples of success, but at other times they become depressed when seeing unattainable stories.

Interpersonal Analysis

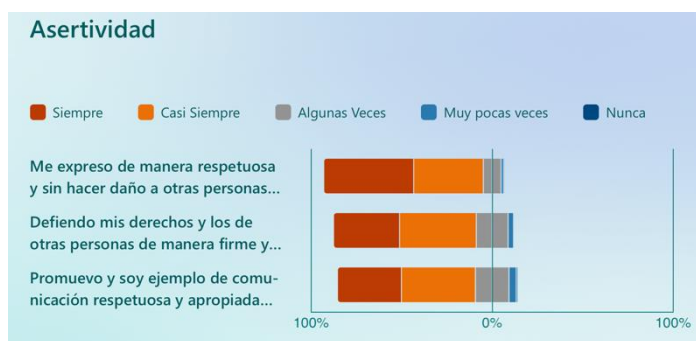
The interpersonal analysis was based on the identification of relationship skills such as: assertiveness, active listening, teamwork, resistance to negative social pressure and the identification of social awareness such as: perspective taking, empathy, willingness to non-violence, forgiveness and reconciliation and, finally, inclusion.

Relationship skills

Assertiveness

The majority of respondents (49.7% always, 38.5% almost always) express themselves respectfully in personal and virtual communication media, showing high competence and concern for maintaining a respectful online environment, as seen in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Assertiveness



Source: Own elaboration

According to the students surveyed, social media serves as a space to practice and improve digital communication skills, encouraging respectful and assertive expression.

a) Active listening

43.2% of the students surveyed indicated that they understand different points of view despite not always agreeing, and 46.4% indicated that they consider it respectful to show interest and respect when talking to someone, this can be observed in Figure 9.

Figure 9. Active listening

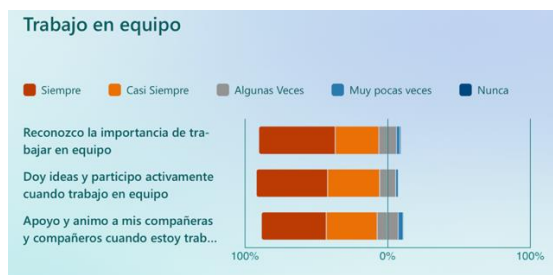


Source: Own elaboration

a) Teamwork

53.6% of students recognized the importance of teamwork, this can be seen in Figure 10.

Figure 10. Teamwork



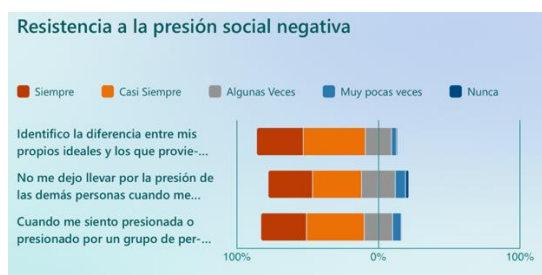
Source: Own elaboration

Students indicate that social networks facilitate communication and coordination with known friends and make it easier for them to meet new friends.

b) Resisting negative social pressure

In Figure 11 it can be identified that the majority identify the difference between their own ideals and external negative pressure.

Figure 11. Resistance to negative social pressure



Source: Own elaboration

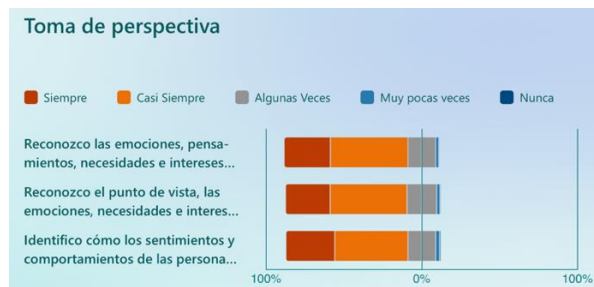
Students note that social media challenges their expression due to societal pressures and negative external influences, such as comments and likes that encourage conformity, leading to social comparison and acting according to other people's values.

Identification of social consciousness

a) Perspective taking

Most students (29.7% always, 49.8% almost always) feel that they can show empathy through what they see on social media. See Figure 12. And on average 78% say they have openness and understanding for others when it comes to what they see on social media.

Figure 12. Perspective view



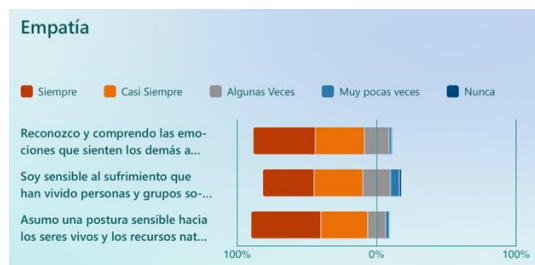
Source: Own elaboration

Students indicated that through interaction on social media, different opinions, perspectives and emotions can be considered and this allows empathy to be forged.

b) Empathy

Through the way they present themselves on social networks (44.5% always, 35.3% almost always) students can be sensitive to the emotions of others, as shown in Figure 13.

Figure 13. Empathy



Source: Own elaboration

They have also identified (around 71.8%) that there is empathy between various groups of people, towards the environment and natural resources.

c) Disposition towards forgiveness, asking for forgiveness and personal reconciliation

The majority of respondents (41.7% always, 35.9% almost always) show a willingness to forgive, ask for forgiveness, and reconcile, reflecting a constructive attitude in conflict resolution. They also recognize norms, agreements, and assertive communication as crucial tools to prevent aggression and abuse (40.4% always, 45% almost always). They also value forgiveness, reparation, and reconciliation in the resolution of social conflicts (46.3% always, 35.1% almost always), demonstrating an understanding of peaceful and constructive solutions. The majority show a positive and favorable attitude towards peaceful resolution and conflict prevention, as shown in Figure 14.

Figure 14. Disposition towards non-violence



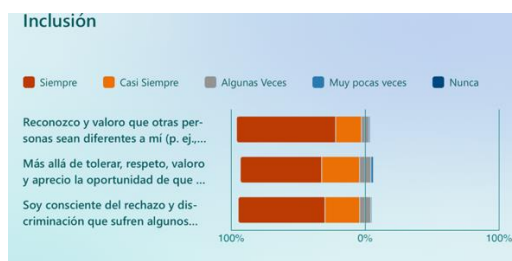
Source: Own elaboration

Students say that sometimes cases of forgiveness and reconciliation occur through social media.

d) Inclusion

In Figure 15 it is identified that the majority of respondents show a positive attitude towards inclusion and respect for diversity in personalities, cultures and physical characteristics (around 93.2% on average).

Fig. 15. Inclusion



Source: Own elaboration

Students say that “through social media, diversity is made visible by making it easier for people from different backgrounds to share their experiences, thus fostering understanding towards different groups.”

Transpersonal Analysis

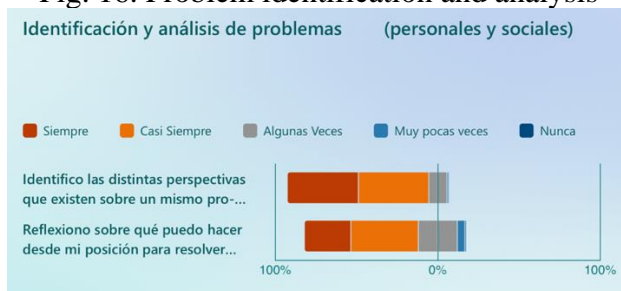
Transpersonal category analysis considers: problem solving: identifying and analyzing problems, implementing solutions to problems, and responsible decision making: considering consequences and critical thinking.

a) Troubleshooting

Figure 16 shows that the majority of respondents (87.1% always, 43.3% almost always) demonstrate a strong ability to consider multiple perspectives when analyzing problems,

including different viewpoints of those involved. Furthermore, the majority (70.1% always, 41.5% almost always) show a proactive and reflective attitude toward problem solving at different scales, considering what they can do from their position in the classroom, school, community, and society at large.

Fig. 16. Problem identification and analysis



Source: Own elaboration

Regarding the transpersonal perspective, the students surveyed consider that social networks “by offering a diversity of opinions and approaches on diverse topics, broaden understanding and foster an inclusive vision”, in addition to “facilitating reflection on how to address problems at different scales and motivating proactive action to find solutions”.

b) Implementing solutions to problems

The majority of respondents show a proactive and flexible attitude when implementing different alternative solutions to personal problems (around 85.3% on average), demonstrate the ability to consider different approaches and strategies (around 76.4% on average) and a reflective and adaptable attitude when evaluating and redirecting their actions (around 77.3% on average).

Consideration of consequences

Most students indicated that they feel capable of solving problems that arise; Figure 17 identifies the characteristics of decision-making.

Figure 17. Implementing solutions



Source: Own elaboration

Figure 18 shows that the majority of respondents (81.7% always, 92.5% almost always) demonstrate a responsible attitude by identifying the potential damage of their decisions and evaluating the positive and negative consequences at different levels, from their personal environment to the environment.

Figure 18. Consideration of consequences



Source: Own elaboration

In this regard, students indicate that “social media influences the consideration of consequences by increasing awareness of social impact, exposing people to diverse perspectives, mobilizing for positive change, and providing education and awareness on various issues.”

c) Critical thinking

73.5% of students surveyed indicated that if they question the veracity of social media posts, they believe that they should be cautious and not believe everything that is published.

Personal perception

a) Strengths and weaknesses identified

The strengths most mentioned by the students surveyed were honesty, respect, camaraderie and responsibility, while the most common weaknesses were tardiness, selfishness, cowardice, arrogance and antipathy.

A high percentage of 79% indicated that they consider it necessary to receive training on the subject of socio-emotional skills.

IV. Technological infrastructure

91.1% of students indicated that they own a computer, while 97.5% own a smartphone, which has been identified as the main means of using and managing social networks.

V. Social networks

In descending order, the use of social networks is: *WhatsApp* with 97.6% followed by *Instagram* with 81.8%, *Facebook* with 76.3% and *YouTube* with 60.3%

WhatsApp was identified with intensive use at 85.8% followed by *Instagram* with 48.7% and *Facebook* regularly with 41.6.

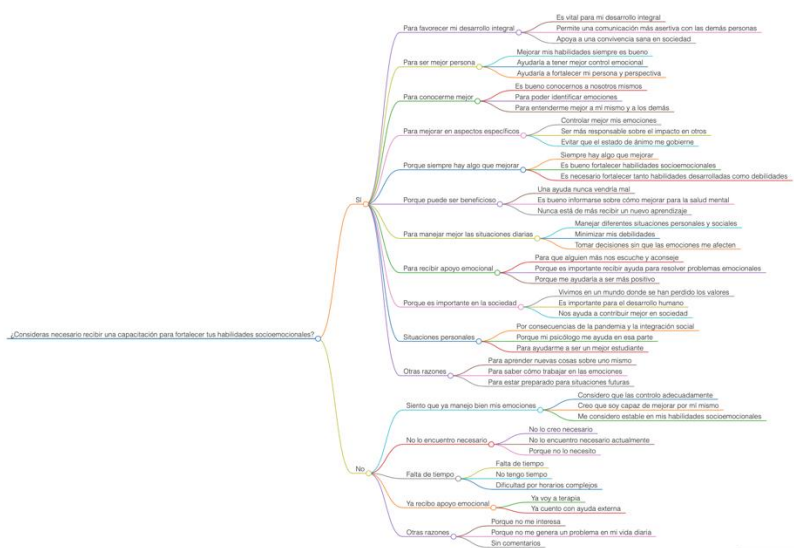
Entertainment is the main use given to social networks, indicated by 66.3% of the students surveyed, followed by 50.1% who use them to communicate with friends, 47% to read news, 42.5% use them to find friends and a significant 40.7% use them to express thoughts and 36.6% of respondents use them to feel good.

As for academic use, 46.8% use them a lot for class work, followed by 44.8% who use them to resolve doubts with other students.

88% of respondents say that the use of social media has influenced the way they relate to others and 71% say that they can express how they feel through social media.

The result of the qualitative analysis can be seen in Figure 19:

Figure 19. Student perceptions of socio-emotional support



Source: Own elaboration

When investigating students' perceptions, many agree that the use of social media improves their social skills. They believe that “digital platforms provide a space to interact with others, share experiences and build relationships,” however, this perception varies depending on the time and quality of online interactions. In this context, words such as “interaction,” “relationships,” “experiences,” “communication,” and “improvement” are recurrent in the description of these perceptions.

Some students indicated that they use social media in a moderate and conscious way, which directly relates to improved self-awareness and self-regulation. The ability to reflect on their emotions and experiences *online* can help some students better understand their own emotional states and behaviors. In this domain, the words “self-awareness,” “self-regulation,” “emotions,” “reflection,” and “understanding” are prominent.

It was also emphasized that social media can serve as a platform for empathy and social support. Many students perceive that they can express and receive emotional support through these platforms. However, there is also a risk that virtual interaction replaces face-to-face contact, which can negatively affect the development of genuine empathy. The words “empathy,” “support,” “emotional,” “platform,” and “interaction” are key in this perception.

Not all perceived effects are positive. Several students report that excessive social media use can lead to negative social comparisons, anxiety, and depression. The perception that others lead more successful or happier lives can erode self-esteem and emotional well-being. In this case, the words “anxiety,” “depression,” “comparisons,” “mental health,” and “self-esteem” are prominent in the discussions.

Another perceived negative aspect is distraction and dependency. Many students feel that social media can distract from studies and other important activities, as well as create a dependency that interferes with their ability to self-regulate. The words “distraction,” “dependency,” “studying,” “activities,” and “self-regulation” are frequently mentioned in relation to these problems.

The relationship between social-emotional skills and social media use in college students is complex and multifaceted – while social media can offer benefits in terms of social skill development and emotional support, it also presents significant risks to mental health and self-regulation. It is crucial to promote a balanced and conscious use of these platforms to maximize their benefits and minimize their risks. In summary, the words “skills,” “social media,” “emotional,” “health,” “interaction,” “self-regulation,” “anxiety,” and “empathy” capture the essence of the perceptions of the students surveyed.

Discussion

In the intrapersonal analysis, self-awareness is recognized by most students as a very important point to understand and manage their emotions, which coincides with Daniel Goleman's theory of emotional intelligence (2020). Regarding self-concept, respondents identify their strengths and areas for improvement, showing confidence in their abilities and resilience, however, it is also mentioned that social networks can influence self-concept by facilitating self-acceptance and social comparison, although they warn about the risk of destructive comparisons and dependence on external approval, according to the social comparison theory (Gerber et al., 2018), this result found in the study is maintained over time and now with the use of social networks as a communication and socialization tool.

Regarding self-care, students identified being aware of the factors that affect their well-being and practicing healthy habits to a certain extent, which is related to theories of self-care and psychological well-being (Keyes, 2002), who in his research argued about the evaluation of the quality of the relationships we maintain with society and with the community. However, students also pointed out that social networks have a dual impact on self-care by increasing awareness about mental health and the factors that affect well-being, but they can also generate challenges such as social comparison and difficulty in setting limits. Vogel in his research stated that social networks have become a place that facilitates social comparison behavior (Vogel et al., 2014).

In the analysis of self-management, it is observed that respondents identify signs of stress and apply strategies to manage it to a certain extent, reflecting the importance of emotional self-management and stress according to the coping and resilience theories of Lazarus and Folkman who put confrontation and resilience as a factor that strengthens socio-emotional skills (1999).

Self-discipline is identified by students in a positive way since it allows them to set goals and seek to achieve them; social networks sometimes associate them as motivational to achieve their goals.

Interpersonal analysis indicates the crucial importance of skills such as assertiveness, active listening, teamwork, resistance to negative social pressure and empathy in the personal, academic and social development of students, identifying them as fundamental for effective communication, healthy interpersonal relationships and active participation in society, which coincides with the research of (Cuff et al., 2016).

Transpersonal analysis focuses on the development of critical and adaptive skills in the digital and social environment of the respondents, in this sense, it is observed that the majority of respondents have skills such as problem solving, implementation of flexible solutions, consideration of ethical consequences and critical thinking, in this sense Kirschner and Karpinski in their research stated that the use of Facebook as a social network has repercussions on different aspects of human behavior such as emotions, motivations, satisfactions, personality factors or dimensions (2010).

Conclusions

This study revealed the importance of aspects such as self-awareness, self-concept, self-care, self-management and self-discipline in the lives of students. Regarding the connection with social networks, it is observed that these platforms have both a positive and negative impact on intrapersonal aspects. On the one hand, they facilitate self-awareness and emotional expression, but on the other hand, they can generate negative comparisons and dependence on external approval.

The importance of skills such as assertiveness, active listening, teamwork, resistance to negative social pressure and empathy in developing healthy relationships and adequate social awareness is also highlighted. Social media plays a crucial role in facilitating emotional connection and exposure to different perspectives, thus promoting empathy and positive relationships.

The relevance of critical and adaptive skills in the digital environment is highlighted, such as problem solving, flexibility, ethical decision making and critical thinking. These skills are essential to face challenges in contemporary society and are favored by exposure to different perspectives and information available on social media.

The importance of a balance between the use of social media for personal and social development is stressed, taking advantage of its benefits for intrapersonal, interpersonal and transpersonal growth, while avoiding associated risks such as negative comparison and excessive dependence.

Future lines of research

Based on the identified results, it is considered pertinent to train students on the importance of socio-emotional skills and the appropriate use of social networks to achieve emotional well-being that impacts on optimal and complete development in both their academic and personal training.

It is essential to carry out interventions with university students so that they recognize and accept the use of social networks for their own benefit, thereby promoting intra, inter and trans personal growth.

It is considered very important to follow up on this research by searching for self-care strategies in digital environments, exploring the field of social and digital skills and the ethical impact that the use of social networks brings about.

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