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ORIGINAL

Social networks addiction and self-perception in students, according to Marjory Gordon's Theory

Adicción a redes sociales y autopercepción en estudiantes, según Teoría de Marjory Gordon

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: the use of social networks has been essential around the world, given their conditioning capacity, they can influence people's self-perception.
Objective: to determine the relationship between addiction to social networks and alterations of the Self-Perception Pattern in students.
Method: quantitative with correlational and cross-sectional scope, the sample consisted of 70 students. The Social Network Addiction Questionnaire and the section corresponding to pattern 7 of the Functional Patterns Assessment Guide were used.
Results: a moderate positive correlation was found between Social Network Addiction and alterations in Self-Esteem (Rho = 0,374) and Body Image (Rho = 0,334). The strongest and most positive relationships were between the Excessive Use dimension with Body Image (Rho = 0,729) and Obsession with Self-Esteem (Rho = 0,667).
Conclusion: there is a moderate positive relationship between Social Network Addiction and alterations of Self-Esteem and Body Image.

Keywords: Body Image; Social Networking; Nursing Students; Self Esteem; Self Perception.

RESUMEN

Introducción: el uso de redes sociales ha sido imprescindible alrededor del mundo, dada su capacidad condicionante, pueden influir en la autopercepción de las personas.
Objetivo: determinar la relación de la adicción a redes sociales y alteraciones del Patrón Autopercepción en estudiantes.
Método: cuantitativo con alcance correlacional y corte transversal, la muestra fue de 70 estudiantes. Se empleó el Cuestionario de Adicción a Redes Sociales y el apartado correspondiente al Patrón 7 de la Guía para valoración de Patrones Funcionales de Marjory Gordon. Para correlación se usó el Coeficiente de Spearman.
Resultados: se encontró una correlación positiva moderada entre Adicción a Redes Sociales con alteraciones de la Autoestima (Rho = 0,374) e Imagen Corporal (Rho = 0,334). Las relaciones más fuertes y positivas se dieron entre la dimensión Uso excesivo con Imagen Corporal (Rho = 0,729) y Obsesión con Autoestima (Rho = 0,667).
Conclusión: existe una relación positiva moderada entre la Adicción a Redes sociales y alteraciones de la Autoestima e Imagen Corporal.

Palabras claves: Autoestima; Autopercepción; Redes Sociales; Imagen Corporal; Estudiantes de Enfermería.

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INTRODUCTION

Digital technology is transforming people's lives at an accelerating pace, with more and more children coming online at younger ages to interact. Data indicates that young people are the most connected age group, with 71 % of users aged 15-24 compared to 48 % of the general population.[1] During the year 2023, the use of social networks has been essential around the world, so the following platforms have registered monthly active user data: Facebook, 2,91 billion, YouTube 2,56 billion; Instagram, 1,44 billion; TikTok, a rapidly growing 1,39 billion.[2]

Social networking sites have not only fostered social interaction but have also impacted many areas, such as education. They have become open, multidirectional learning spaces where user teamwork and interaction are encouraged. They also foster the collaborative construction of knowledge and autonomy in the search for information. Their influence also extends to the commercial sphere, where companies use them as an alternative channel to access consumers more quickly and efficiently. Consumers use these platforms to exchange information and opinions on products and services.[3]

However, there are also negative aspects to their use; they are said to be designed to be as addictive as possible. This is not surprising since behavioral addictions, such as social media addiction, share the same brain circuits as substance addictions.[4] Given the conditioning capacity of social networks, they can also influence people's mental health in terms of self-perception.

Self-perception is a fundamental component in people's health; according to the Nursing Diagnosis (NANDA), it is defined as how an individual sees themselves and values their image. Within this section, there are three classes: Class 1, Self-Concept: Perception(s) about the totality of the self; Class 2, Self-Esteem: Appraisal of one's worth, ability, significance, and success; Class 3, Body Image: Mental image of one's own body.[5] Several studies show how social networks influence the dimensions of self-perception due to the characteristics of easy virtual interaction, unsubstantiated ideas of comparison, and social acceptance or idealization of aesthetics.[6,7]

Marjory Gordon's theory of functional patterns conceptualizes the person as a holistic being with physical, spiritual, emotional, and social needs. Her theory speaks of the existing balance between 11 functional patterns that determine a human being's health. These patterns are behavioral configurations for maintaining good physical health, well-being, and adaptability within an environment. That is, if one of these patterns is altered, a person is not in an optimal state.[8]

A study conducted by the Royal Society of Public Health (RSPH) and the University of Cambridge estimates that 91 % of 16-24-year-olds use the internet to interact on social media, while rates of anxiety and depression in this age group increase by 70 %. Participants say that four of the five most used platforms (Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat) worsen feelings of anxiety and contribute to lower self-esteem.[9]

It is known from Statistics Ecuador that most people use social media via their smartphones, an increase that has occurred in the wake of the pandemic, leading people to spend more time online and transmitting information to each other. There are 13,6 million internet users and 14,6 million social network profiles, representing 81,1 % of the population with access to and using social networks. Adolescents and young adults spend most of their time online.[10]

At the local level, a study conducted at the Technical University of Ambato aimed to establish the relationship between social network addiction and self-esteem in university students; the results showed a negative relationship between the levels of addiction to social networks and their dimensions; the lower the level of self-esteem of university students, the higher the level of addiction to social networks.[11]

Also, in another study within the same institution, a latent complication of the alteration of this dimension was analyzed; this research reveals that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and positive suicidal ideation with a slight intensity, indicating that the higher the self-esteem, the greater the positive suicidal ideation. On the other hand, a slight negative correlation was found between self-esteem and negative suicidal ideation, showing that the higher the self-esteem, the lower the negative suicidal ideation.[12]

This original article contributes to understanding the relationship between addiction to social networks and the Self-Perception Pattern in students, thus contributing to identifying vulnerable groups, developing effective interventions, educating the population, and guiding public policies to avoid future complications. The findings can be a fundamental pillar to serve as a reference to help create more positive educational programs, support tools, treatments, and social networks. Within the field of nursing, they could contribute to establishing addiction to social networks as a factor related to alterations in the pattern 7. Self-perception, in turn, achieves a timely assessment and identification of these conditions.

METHOD

This research has a quantitative approach, non-experimental design, cross-sectional, with correlational scope, focusing on the analysis of the relationship between addiction to social networks and self-perception in nursing students, was carried out in the province of Tungurahua, canton Ambato, to students of the Nursing Career of the Technical University of Ambato, Faculty of Health Sciences, Ingahurco campus, during the period September 2024 - August 2025.

Participants

The population consisted of 70 students enrolled in the Nursing course at the Technical University of Ambato from the first to the seventh semester during the study period, 10 for each level, by means of convenience sampling, which established a homogeneous sample in relation to biological sex: female-male.

Inclusion criteria were Students who use social networks and those who signed the informed consent form, while exclusion criteria included Students who were absent at the time of data collection. Prior authorization was obtained from the coordinator of

the degree course to collect the information and obtain informed consent; the primary author explained everything about the research to the students. The time taken to apply the questionnaires was approximately 20 minutes.

Instruments

For the collection of information regarding addiction to social networks, the Addiction to Social Networks Questionnaire (ARS) (Appendix 1), developed by Escurra and Salas in 2014, was applied; it is a reliable and valid tool to assess the level of addiction to social networks in students. The developers of the ARS note that it is valid (GFI = ,92; RMR = ,06; RMSEA = ,04; AIC = 477,28) and reliable(α= ,88); and its reliability within their study was good (α = ,94), and for the dimension obsession with social networks (α = ,85), lack of personal control in the use of social networks (α = ,82) and excessive use of social networks (α = ,90).

The instrument consists of 24 questions, the ARS is composed of three dimensions or latent factors: Obsession with social networks: This dimension, is composed of 10 items, which measure the tendency to intrusive thoughts and excessive worries related to social networks. Lack of personal control: This dimension, consisting of 6 items, measures the difficulty in regulating the use of social networks and the experience of withdrawal symptoms when access is limited. Excessive use: This dimension, consisting of 8 items, assesses the time spent on social networks and the negative impact their use has on different areas of life. The total scores for each dimension are interpreted according to an established weighting under a five-point rating system: (0) never, (1) rarely, (2) sometimes, (3) almost constantly, and (4) always A score close to 0 indicates an absence of addiction, while higher scores indicate a higher level of addiction.[13]

To assess Pattern 7. Self-perception and its three classes: Self-esteem, Self-concept, and Body Image; we used the section corresponding to pattern 7 of the Guide for Assessment of Functional Patterns by Rendón M. et al., according to Marjorie Gordon's theory, which consists of 10 multiple-choice and open questions.[14] The alterations were identified using the researchers' judgment and the information in the student's answers. With this data, defining characteristics of the actual nursing diagnoses of each dimension were sought to determine whether or not alterations exist.

Statistical Methods

The instruments were applied to the students in their classrooms using the Google Forms application, after which a database was created in Excel to assess the dimensions of the self-concept. The IBM Spss Statistics application was used to calculate the variables that makeup Social Network Addiction, according to their categorization, followed by creating frequency tables. In addition, when attempting to analyze the relationship between ordinal and dichotomous variables (which follow a non-parametric distribution), we opted to implement Spearman's correlation coefficient, whose representation is valued according to the proximity to +1 and -1. Thus, when Spearman's Rho is positive (+), it is interpreted as a direct relationship, while a negative value (-) shows an inverse relationship.

Ethical Criteria

At the institutional level, the research underwent a review and approval process by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Technical University of Ambato, Faculty of Health Sciences, with code 273-CEISH-UTA-2024, to guarantee ethical principles and methodological aspects. During the application of the instruments, the students received information about the research, emphasizing the anonymity of their participation, the non-obligatory nature of their involvement, and their freedom to withdraw at any time. Finally, it is noted that there was no conflict of interest on the part of the authors.

RESULTS

Table 1. Social Networking Addiction with respect to Age and Gender

Media		Age	Sex			
			Female		Male	
			n	%	n	%
Obsession	Under	21	2	5,7 %	5	14,3 %
	Medium	22	14	40,0 %	13	37,1 %
	High	21	19	54,3 %	17	48,6 %
Lack of Control	Under	22	3	8,6 %	6	17,1 %
	Medium	21	32	91,4 %	29	82,9 %
	High	0	0	0,0 %	0	0,0 %
Excessive use	Under	23	2	5,7 %	4	11,4 %
	Medium	21	15	42,9 %	16	45,7 %
	High	21	18	51,4 %	15	42,9 %
General Addiction	Under	23	3	8,6 %	8	22,9 %
	Medium	21	29	82,9 %	25	71,4 %
	High	21	3	8,6 %	2	5,7 %

Source: Survey applied to the students of the Nursing Career.
Prepared by: Franklin Arias IRE.

The average age remains relatively constant across all categories and for both sexes, ranging between 21 and 23 years. This suggests that age is not a determining factor in the distribution of these styles.

Obsession with Social Networking: High obsession (48,6 % and 54,3 %, respectively) is prevalent among males and females, with no significant difference. However, this suggests that women tend to experience higher levels of obsession compared to men.

Lack of Control: In men and women, the average lack of control is overwhelmingly predominant (91,4 % and 82,9 %, respectively). This indicates that most individuals in this sample experience a medium level of lack of power.

Excessive Social Networking Use: The distribution is similar to obsession, with a slight predominance of excessive use in females (51,4 %). This also indicates a tendency for females to manifest higher excessive use.

General addiction: Average general addiction is more prevalent in both sexes (82,9 % in females and 71,4 % in males).

Table 2. Count of disturbances of the Self-Perception Pattern

		Count	% of N columns
Autoconcept	Not Altered	52	74,3 %
	Altered	18	25,7 %
Self-Esteem	Not Altered	33	47,1 %
	Altered	37	52,9 %
Body Image	Not Altered	42	60,0 %
	Altered	28	40,0 %

Source: Survey applied to the students of the Nursing Career.
Prepared by: Franklin Arias IRE.

Self-concept: Most individuals (74,3 %) have an unimpaired self-concept, suggesting a relatively positive perception of their abilities and characteristics.

Self-esteem: The distribution is almost even, with a slight majority (52,9 %) showing signs of impaired self-esteem. This indicates that a significant number of individuals may experience feelings of low self-worth.

Body Image: A higher percentage (60 %) report an unimpaired self-image, suggesting a positive perception of their physical appearance. However, 40 % report an altered self-image, which is also a value to be taken into account.

Table 3. Relationship between general addiction to social networks and alterations in self-concept

		Autoconcept	Self-Esteem	Body Image
General Addiction	Correlation coefficient	,106	,374	,334**
	Sig. (bilateral)	,383	,001	,005
	N	70	70	70

Source: Survey applied to the students of the Nursing Career.
Prepared by: Franklin Arias IRE.

The correlation coefficient between General RS Addiction and Self-Concept Disturbance is 0,106. This indicates a very weak positive correlation between general addiction and self-concept. With a significance value of 0,383, i.e., there is no significance. The correlation coefficient between General RS Addiction and Self-Esteem Disturbance is 0,374*. This represents a moderate positive correlation, suggesting that as levels of general addiction increase, self-esteem problems tend to increase. With a statistical significance of 0,001, this implies existing importance. In turn, the correlation coefficient between General RS Addiction and Body Image Disorders is 0,334, which shows a moderate positive correlation, which means that as general addiction levels increase, body image problems tend to grow. The significance is 0,005, which also confirms the statistical significance.

Table 4. Relationship between dimensions of Social Network Addiction and dimensions of Self Perception

		Body Image	Self-Esteem	Autoconcept
Social media obsession	Correlation coefficient	,434**	,667**	,010
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	,000	,935
	N	70	70	70
Lack of Control	Correlation coefficient	,314**	-,021	,226
	Sig. (bilateral)	,008	,865	,060
	N	70	70	70

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Excessive use	Correlation coefficient	,729**	,235	,081
	Sig. (bilateral)	,000	,050	,505
	N	70	70	70

Source: Survey applied to the students of the Nursing Career.
Prepared by: Franklin Arias IRE.

Body Image: Shows positive correlations with the dimensions to be related, having the strongest and most significant correlation with the Excessive use of Social Networks (Rho = 0,729, p < 0,001). This suggests that the greater the excessive use of social networks, the greater the alteration of Body Image.

Self-Esteem: Shows a robust and positive correlation with obsession with social networks (Rho = 0,667, p < 0,001) and a weak and positive correlation with excessive use of networks (Rho = 0,235, p = 0,050). Lack of control shows no significant correlation. This indicates that obsession and, to a lesser extent, excessive network use are associated with higher self-esteem.

Self-Concept: Does not show significant correlations with any of the independent variables.

DISCUSSION

Regarding the close relationship evidenced between Body Image and Excessive Use of Social Networks, the findings obtained in the research resemble those presented by Camacho et al., who show how the use of the social network Instagram affects the body self-image of adolescents in Spain; this research used a cross-sectional design with a sample composed of 95 adolescents. The results indicated that the use of social networks influences the relationship with the body and self-image and that the number of daily hours spent on social networks, as well as family supervision, are variables that influence adolescents' body image.[6]

Although age was not an evident factor in the level of addiction to social networks in this research, a study conducted by Lucciarini et al.[15] in Argentina aimed to analyze the possible relationship between the use of social networks and the development of anorexia in adolescents using a systemic and cognitive behavioral approach. The concept of Anorexia Nervosa was described, and the social networks most used by this age group were studied. It is concluded that there is a significant relationship between the development of nervous anxiety and the use of social networks. The bodily changes in adolescents and the need for validation of their identity by their environment place them in a situation of vulnerability.[15]

Similarly, in terms of self-esteem and social networks, a study conducted in Colombia by García et al. found that Facebook addiction is associated with lower self-esteem in young people. The sample consisted of 570 participants, 47,71 % adolescents and 52,28 % young Colombians, who were administered the online Tetradimensional Self-Concept Scale APE and the Facebook addiction scale BFAS. Participants with low use of the social network had a better self-image, while those with addictive use had lower self-esteem.[7] Portillo Reyes, in his research, used the Addiction to Social Networks (ARS) questionnaire, as in this study, and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale. Analyses of variance showed that social network addiction is negatively related to the level of self-esteem.[16]

Results that are similar to the findings presented in this research, together with those of Pillaca J. in a private university in Lima, found that 33,9 % of university students have a low level of addiction to social networks, and 36,5 % have a high level of self-esteem. The results indicated that there is a moderate, inverse, and highly significant correlation between social network addiction and self-esteem. All sociodemographic variables, including gender, age, cycle, and employment status, established differences in social network addiction and self-esteem.[17]

However, Aguilera Vásconez et al.[18] determined in 2025 that there was insufficient evidence to determine a significant relationship between social network addiction (in terms of obsession, lack of personal control, and excessive use) and self-esteem in their sample of young people studied, using the Social Network Addiction Questionnaire and the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale.

The study was carried out in an academic environment, so there are several points to investigate that can be related to students' Self-Esteem Alterations. A meta-analysis of 33 articles by Hidalgo Fuentes[19] showed a negative relationship of medium intensity between self-esteem and student procrastination. Likewise, a study carried out by Arias Chiluisa on nursing students at the Technical University of Ambato in 2023, which aimed to find the relationship between academic stress and self-esteem, showed a considerable percentage of low self-esteem with 40,8 % of 85 seventh-semester nursing students using the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (EAR),[20] while in the present research a value of 52,9 % of self-esteem alterations was obtained in a population of 70 students from the entire degree program. Both values show a notorious vulnerability in how students express their self-worth but with different relationship variables.

These studies implicitly highlight the relevance of Nursing for the crucial role it plays in people's self-perception in all domains, influencing how they see themselves and how they cope with their health. Nurses not only focus on the physical aspects of illness but also consider each patient's emotions, concerns, and individual needs. This holistic approach helps patients feel valued and understood, strengthening their self-esteem and identity. Nurses can become a pillar of early identification of non-physical disturbances, thus working in a multidisciplinary way by referring to different professionals for optimal care, if necessary.

The scope of this research is of a comparative and correlational type so that only a relationship between addiction to social networks and alterations in self-perception is exposed; however, it is not possible to establish a cause-and-effect relationship between the variables studied, i.e., it does not imply causality so that it cannot be determined whether addiction to networks generates these problems of low self-esteem or body image, so it is recommended in future research to expand the sample in different universities and use a longitudinal design to verify results over a long period.

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CONCLUSIONS

We conclude that, in terms of social network addiction, age is not a relevant factor, given the similarity in the average age of the subjects between the groups. However, women show a higher propensity for high levels of obsession and excessive use of social networks, with the average general addiction being the most common. Regarding the pattern of self-perception, self-concept stands out as the most positive aspect, while self-esteem is the most vulnerable, with more than half of the individuals showing alterations, and body image is situated in an intermediate point, tending towards positivity, although with a significant percentage of alteration. A moderate positive correlation was established between general addiction to social networks and changes in self-esteem and body image. At a deeper and more salient level, social network obsession is strongly related to self-esteem, and excessive social network use has a robust correlation with body image impairment, suggesting that these specific dimensions of addiction directly impact self-perception; however, causality cannot be determined.

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