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Social network addictions and their impact on work productivity and academic performance

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Abstract
The increasing penetration of online social networks (OSNs) and smartphones, particularly among young people, raises questions about their effects on academic performance and workplace productivity. This research aimed to assess the degree of addiction, gender differences, and the relationship between addiction to OSNs and smartphones, as well as discrepancies in perceptions among students, teachers, and academic directors. A mixed-methods design was employed, including in-depth interviews and questionnaires validated in Spanish, surveying 88 faculty members and 461 undergraduate students in Buenos Aires. The results indicate that academic directors believe excessive use of OSNs distracts and decreases productivity. Although they do not see the need for regulation, there is consensus on the crucial role of teachers. Faculty members report concentration problems in students, and a correlation is observed between addiction to smartphones and OSNs, with higher levels of addiction found among women.

Keywords: project management; online social network; labor productivity; academic performance; addiction.

Adicciones a las redes sociales y su impacto en la productividad laboral y el rendimiento académico

Resumen
La creciente penetración de redes sociales online (RSO) y smartphones, especialmente entre jóvenes, plantea interrogantes sobre sus efectos en el rendimiento académico y la productividad laboral. Esta investigación tuvo como objetivos evaluar el grado de adicción, las diferencias de género y la relación entre la adicción a las RSO y smartphones, así como las discrepancias en las percepciones de alumnos, profesores y directores académicos. Se empleó un diseño metodológico mixto incluyendo entrevistas en profundidad y cuestionarios validados en español, encuestando a 88 docentes y 461 estudiantes de pregrado en Buenos Aires. Los resultados indican que los directivos académicos consideran que el uso excesivo de las RSO distrae y disminuye la productividad. Aunque no ven necesaria una regulación, coinciden en el papel crucial del docente. Estos reportan problemas de concentración en estudiantes, y se observa una correlación entre la adicción a smartphones y RSO, con mayores niveles de adicción en mujeres.

Palabras clave: gestión de proyectos; redes sociales online; productividad laboral; rendimiento académico; adicción.

1 Introduction

Since its inception, online social networks (OSN) have grown exponentially, with new and varied platforms emerging, with users from all over the world [1]. By 2024, nearly 5,22 billion people worldwide are active on social media, with the average user spending 2 hours and 23 minutes daily on these platforms [2,3] Numerous studies show that young people are the most likely to use OSN [4]. In addition, this growth in OSN was accompanied by a significant increase in the average time that people spend in these interaction spaces [5], opening new questions regarding user behavior and its consequences [6,7], due to the addictive behavior/problematic use that these networks encourage [8-10].

While numerous studies highlight the benefits that came with the use of OSN [11-15] there is also a dark side: individual and social costs can be identified [8,11,16-21]. Previous research has observed heterogeneous effects (positive and negative) on academic performance [22] and work productivity with the use of OSN [23], highlighting the

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need for further research on the topic [9]. In fact, previous researchers emphasized the importance of adding qualitative analysis [24] and the need to find a common instrument to compare different sampled results [25].

Consequently, this article introduces, not only a new sample to compare results with previous research which used the same instruments [16,21,26,27], but also it contributes to a further and deeper comprehension of OSN' impact in academic and work productivity, since incorporates the vision of teachers and academic managers in addition to the student's vision of their own behavior. This allows to visualize if there are any differences between the perception that under degree students have, to their teachers and academic managers perception, regarding the effect of OSN and smartphones on academic and work performance. This is not a minor issue since part of the differences in the results observed from previous research are associated with different types of performance measurement: while there are instruments that measure self-perception of the student or worker who is being surveyed [15,28,29]; other instruments use hard indicators of academic and work performance such as grades or performance evaluations [30,31].

In this way, this research seeks to better understand the effects that OSN and smartphone have on the academic and work performance of young university students, having set the following objectives:

- To contribute to a better understanding about if there are any differences between the perception of students, users of OSN and smartphones and teachers and academic managers vision of their student's behavior.
- To know the degree of addiction to OSN and smartphones (understanding the latter as a tool to access OSN), in undergraduate students from Buenos Aires.
- To analyze whether there are gender differences in the behavior of young undergraduate students regarding OSN and smartphone addiction patterns.
- To analyze the relationship between addiction to social networks and smartphone addiction.

With this, we formulate the hypothesis which follows:

- H1: There are different perceptions between students, teachers and academic managers about OSN and smartphone optimal rate of use and its consequences in academic performance and work productivity.
- H2: Undergraduate students present high grades of addiction to OSN and smartphone.
- H3: Women are more prone to be addicted to OSN and smartphones.
- H4: There is a strong correlation among OSN addiction and smartphone addiction.

2 Methodology

This research non-experimental descriptive correlational and cross-sectional nature, with mixed qualitative-quantitative design, used in-depth interviews plus 3 questionnaires. Eleven in-depth interviews, guided by semi-structured questions, were made to academic managers.

Furthermore, a sample of 88 teachers were surveyed with an online questionnaire elaborated with the purpose of contributing to understand the differences that may exist between student and teachers' perception about OSN and smartphone optimal rate of use and its consequences in academic performance and work productivity. In addition, to know students' degree of addiction to OSN and the use of smartphones, 2 other instruments were used with a 461 student sample of a university of Buenos Aires: 1) Social Media Addiction Scale-Student Form (SMAS-SF; Sahin, 2018) [32]: Spanish version adapted by Cabero Almenara et al. (2020) [26] and 2) Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short version for adolescents(SAS-SV; Kwon et al., 2013) [33]: Spanish version adapted by López-Fernandez (2015) [34]. SMAS-SF instrument is 5-point Likert type scale of 29 items grouped in 4 factors (virtual tolerance, virtual communication, virtual problem and virtual information). SAS-SV is self-diagnostic scale of 33 item scales grouped in 6 factors (daily-life disturbance, positive anticipation, withdrawal, cyberspace-oriented relationship, overuse and tolerance).

Before completing the survey and being interviewed, the respondents gave their consent having been informed of the procedure and characteristics of the research and data processing. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were accessed online for the surveys from the databases provided by the university that finance under D23E02 code this research project. Ethical approval was obtained from the university as well.

The surveys were carried out between November 2023 and February 2024.

The sample contained 551 respondents (students, teachers and academic managers of a university of Buenos Aires). From those, 5 were rejected for being minors or for not having completed the questionnaire with valid data, thus leaving a sample of 546 people, of which 461 (84%) of them were students (283 women and 178 men; 225 (49%) only study and 236 (51%) work and study). Furthermore, the sample contains 84 university professors (43% women and 57% men), with 13% of these that also were academic managers. The sampling was non-probabilistic, for convenience [35]. 86% were residents at Buenos Aires AMBA region, 11% resided in other locations in the province of Buenos Aires and only 3% from the rest of the country. Ages range were as follows: 18 to 71 years, with an average of 27 years (SD = 11.174) for all the sample, 18 to 71 years, with an average of 24 years (SD=8.900) for students, 24 to 67 years, with an average of 44 years (SD=11.081) for teachers. 72% of the sample do not have a complete university degree and the students, on average, take 4.42 subjects (SD=2.059) and have approved 3.95 (SD=2.154) subjects per semester.

The analysis was carried out with SPSS 27 software and descriptive statistics were used for objective number 2, mean deviation, minimum and maximum. For objective number 3, a Student's T was performed and for objective number 4, a Pearson correlation was performed.

3 Results

From the in-depth interviews carried out with academic managers, there is a consensus that there is excessive use of online social networks, with distraction problems associated with this. Most agree that social networks have their benefits, when they are used to obtain and make information available,

to generate collaborative environments, shortening distances, fostering links and communicating. However, there is a consensus that, if these networks are not used appropriately, they lead to losses in productivity, both academic and work-related, because of the distractions they generate for students and workers. Regarding whether they consider it appropriate to establish a standard from universities to regulate the use of social networks, the majority say they do not agree with establishing a standard but instead encourage education and awareness campaigns that misuse of networks can generate.

There are several managers who affirm that it is the responsibility of the teacher in the classroom to generate sufficient interest and motivation in the students so that they are not distracted by the smartphone. Regarding whether they consider that the impact on academic/work performance depends on the user's profile, or the type of social network used, the majority believe that the profile is more important, although they do not rule out that there are differences in the types of networks which may make some of them less productive than others.

From the questions asked to the teachers who participated in the survey, the following results stand out:

- 70% affirm that their university students, due to the use of smartphones and ONS, have had concentration problems in class, during class or while doing their homework.
- 54% agreed that smartphone and OSN use has addictive behavioral traits that decrease the academic performance of university students.
- 20% indicated having tried to ensure that their university students do not use their smartphone in class for uses other than the proposed activities, finding it impossible.
- 59% stated that their students are constantly checking their smartphone and OSN for recreational purposes, even during class.
- 31% say that their students prefer class activities in which they must use smartphone and OSN rather than working on paper or another format.
- 53% of teachers believe that the use of smartphones and OSN in the classroom should be something that university teachers could allow or deny.

When comparing the perceptions of teachers and students, the following agreements and differences can be remarked:

- Both teachers and students recognize the loss in productivity as a result of the use of social networks.
- While 54% of teachers agreed that smartphones and OSN use have addictive behavioral traits, only 36% of the students recognize feeling impatient and restless when they don't have their smartphone. Despite this, only 20% of teachers indicated that they had tried to prevent their university students from using their smartphone in class for uses other than the proposed activities, finding it imposible. This could reinformce the idea that teachers still have power to enforce the rules in class. In fact, 74% of students say they disagree that they would feel bad if they were forced to reduce the time, they spend on OSN.
- While 59% of teachers stated that their students constantly check their smartphone and OSN for recreational purposes, even during class, only 37% of the students recognize being constantly checking your phone so you don't miss conversations with other people on social media.

The results of the adapted questionnaires of the SMAS-SF and SAS-SV show that women had a higher average in the descriptive analysis. A student's T test was performed to analyze whether these differences were significant according to gender (See Table 1 and 2).

Table 1.
Gender differences in Social Media Addiction Scale-Student Form (SMAS-SF; Sahin, 2018) [32]: Spanish version adapted by Cabero Almenara et al. (2020) [26] - T student.[1]

	Men N=165 M (SD)	**Women N=295 M (SD)**	**T (461)**	**p**
Satisfaction with being connected to OSN	13.9030 (4.46698)	14.5201 (4.58675)	1.399	.162
Problems	10.3455 (3,61679)	11.0772 (3.56716)	2.103	.036
Obsession with being informed	18.9394 (4,74560)	19,1074 (4.16599)	0.395	.693
Need/Obsession to be connected	18.200 (5,67321)	20,7181 (4.97750)	4.956	.000
Social Media Addiction	61.3293 (15.47382)	65.4381 (13.49019)	-2.989	003

Source: Own calculations

Table 2.
Gender differences in Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short version for adolescents (SAS-SV; Kwon et al., 2013) [33]: Spanish version adapted by López-Fernandez (2015) [34] – T student.[2]

	Men N=165 M (SD)	**Women N=295 M (SD)**	**t (461)**	**p**
Smartphone Addiction	28.7939 (7.95835)	30.8926 (7.31553)	2.864	.004

Source: Own calculations

Table 3.
Correlations between the 2 instruments: Social Media Addiction Scale-Student Form (SMAS-SF; Sahin, 2018) [32]: Spanish version adapted by Cabero Almenara et al. (2020) [26] and 2) Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short version for adolescents (SAS-SV; Kwon et al., 2013) [33]: Spanish version adapted by López-Fernandez (2015) [34].[3]

	Social Media Addiction [26]			
	Satisfaction with being connected to OSN	**Problems**	**Obsession with being informed**	**Need/Obsession to be connected**
Smartphone Addiction [34]	.468**	.599**	.528**	.654**

** Significant correlation at the p<.001 level.
Source: Own calculations

[1] The values in this table are not in percentages. Instead, they are in units of the SMAS-SF questionnaire measurement scale.

[2] The values in this table are not in percentages. Instead, they are in units of the Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short version (SAS-SV) questionnaire measurement scale.

[3] The values in this table are correlation coefficients.

When comparing our results with those obtained by previous research that worked with samples from other countries, using the same measurement instruments, the following differences are observed: While the results of our study show on the adapted SMAS-SF scale higher scores in women than in men, in the following 2 factors: “Problems and “Need/obsession to be connected, (See Table 1), with alevel of significance ($p<.01$); The same does not occur in the results obtained by [26] where men register higher scores in the factors, “Satisfaction with being connected to online social networks and “Problems.

On the other hand, a strong correlation is seen between addiction to the smartphone and the different factors thatmeasure addiction to OSN, such as, "satisfaction for being connected to online social networks", "problems", " the obsession to be informed and “the need/obsession to be connected. In particular, the dimension “Need/Obsession to be connected presents the highest correlation with smartphone addiction ($r=.65$, $p<.001$). (See Table 3: Correlations between the 2 instruments: Social Media Addiction Scale-Student Form (SMAS-SF; Sahin, 2018) [32]: Spanish version adapted by Cabero Almenara et al. (2020) [26] and 2) Smartphone Addiction Scale-Short version for adolescents (SAS-SV; Kwon et al., 2013) [33]: Spanish version adapted by López-Fernandez (2015) [34]).

With all these results it could be concluded that H1, H2, H3 and H4 are fulfilled.

4 Conclusions

The results obtained were conclusive with respect to the proposed hypotheses. With respect to H1, the findings were that students, teachers and academic managers all found that there exists an overuse of OSN and smartphone, higher than the optimal rate of use and the majority believe this could represent a threat to academic performance and work productivity. With respect to H2, the results show that undergraduate students present high grades of addiction to OSN and smartphone, being women are more prone to be addicted to OSN and smartphones, confirming H3. Furthermore, it was found a strong correlation among OSN addiction and smartphone addiction, as in H4 was postulated.

The differences observed in the perceptions of students and teachers regarding the use of OSN and smartphones suggest that educational institutions, as educators, have the responsibility to guide students not only in their academic education but also in addiction prevention. This aligns with the findings of [36], a study that, using the same SMAS-SF scale, also identified differing perceptions between teachers and students and recommended preventive policies to address the potential addiction caused by OSN.

Previous research highlights the existence of multiple questionnaires, each measuring different aspects of the issue [9], as one of the challenges in addressing the measurement of the impact of OSN and smartphone use on academic and work performance. Our research showed that the differences aren’t restricted to the different scales problem. In fact, even when the same instruments were used, some results agree and others do not. Comparing our results with [16], in both investigations there is an impression that OSN could be addictive and with a negative impact in the academic performance. But, in [16] women show better academic performance fact that do not match with the higher punctuation in OSN and smartphone addiction that was found in our sample. By the way, [21] remarks that smartphone addiction was associated with self-reported negative effects in work and daily lives productivity. This match with our findings as well, even more if we consider that research found SAS scores for female were higher than for males. According to the recommendation of [27] to contrast student versus teachers’ perceptions regarding OSN addiction, our work contributes to this field, confirming that teachers find students are with an excessive rate of OSN and smartphones’ use. It is in fact from the in-depth interviews with professors and academic directors where it can be observed that there is a certain consensus that a normal or regulation for the use of OSN and smartphone in the educational and work environment can be very difficult to implement, which in turn refers us to the need to find prevention and awareness policies about the effects that misuse of OSNs and smartphones can have on academic and work performance. This leads us to think about previous research that addresses the problem from the perspective of dual decision theories, which assume the existence of two cognitive-emotional systems of the human mind: the impulsive system (automatic) and the reflective system (inhibitory) [37]. In line with this, a recent trend among social media users highlights their increasing awareness of excessive usage, reflected in behaviors aimed at self-regulation [38] and practices such as "digital detoxing" [39]. Future research could further explore this phenomenon through the lens of dual decision theories.

Furthermore, considering the results obtained, which indicate excessive use of smartphones in classrooms, with implications for academic performance, it is pertinent to think about the possible decisions that educational administrators can make. These administrators could choose to prohibit the use of social media and smartphones in the classroom or, alternatively, take advantage of these technologies by incorporating them into the learning process. These debates are currently underway, particularly with the emergence of new technologies such as artificial intelligence. [40] address these types of dilemmas.

One of the findings of this research indicates that teachers believe they should have the authority to enable or prohibit smartphone use in classrooms. Previous studies have explored the advisability of imposing restrictions on smartphone usage in university settings. An insightful study by [41] investigates the opinions of students and faculty regarding four potential policies for smartphone use in the classroom: 1) No Use, 2) Use During Breaks, 3) Use for Academic Purposes, and 4) Laissez-Faire Approach. The study finds that both students and faculty agree that a policy of complete restriction on smartphone use would be the most effective in reducing usage rates and the easiest to enforce, even though students express a preference for greater flexibility. [42,43] evaluate policies prohibiting smartphone use in classrooms, which include penalties for noncompliance. In contrast, [44] examines reward policies for non-use. Future research on the outcomes of various policies implemented by educational institutions regarding

smartphone use in classrooms could be particularly valuable and illuminating in this emerging debate.

Perhaps an alternative way, and in tune with what has been observed in interviews with teachers and the academic managers, could be to establish an institutional policy for educational institutions, in which it is the teacher who has the power to authorize or deny the use of the smartphone in the classroom. This would allow the teacher to think of classroom strategies that allow him to combine the desire to be connected and informed that university students manifest, with the advantages offered by new technologies of providing easy access to information. After all, as suggested by [45], OSN can have a positive influence on the teaching and learning process, serving as a pedagogical tool in the classroom.

Of course, this must be accompanied by two additional tools: on the one hand, teacher training that the institution must guarantee to have teachers updated with new technologies that promote learning, and on the other hand, strong awareness campaigns for students and teachers of the damage caused by the misuse of smartphones in the classroom when they aren`t used for educational purposes.

In addition, to expand the scope of this research, future studies could focus more on the implications for workplace productivity, incorporating the perspective of agency theory. [46] noted that different work formats can influence employees' alignment with organizational goals. Analyzing the observed differences in performance perceptions, both academic and occupational, through this lens may yield valuable insights.

Regarding the limitations that we found in this work, it can be noted that the correlation found between addiction to OSNs and the smartphone, in some way may constitute a limitation itself, if the smartphone is understood as the vehicle to access OSNs. That said, future research could seek to re-ensure the theoretical separation between OSN and the smartphone. It could even be interesting to separate the analysis according to the type of network. In fact, among the results of the interviews, it was observed that, although the majority believes that the user's profile is decisive to know if he will fall into a higher than optimal rate of use of OSN, there is consent that the type of network can encourage this addiction. It would then be interesting to continue investigating whether it is feasible and recommended to establish some type of regulation that directly impacts those who design OSNs.

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