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Sociodemographic Factors and Predictors of Social Media Addiction in University Students

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Abstract

Introduction: Social media addiction in university students recognizes sociodemographic factors as a global public health problem, which calls into question the impact that it may have on the positive psychological and social functioning of this population. *Objective:* To analyze the predictive value of sociodemographic factors and usage habits in social media addiction in university students. *Material and method:* A quantitative, descriptive, correlational-predictive, non-experimental study. 710 students of both sexes, between 18 and 35 years old, from urban and rural areas of the Guayas province, Ecuador, participated during the period from January to June 2025. The sample was characterized socio-demographically and social media habits and use were measured. *Bivariate analysis* (Spearman's Rho coefficient 95%CI) and *multivariate analysis* (RLO) were performed with the Jamovi 2.3.28 statistical software. *Results:* There was a predominance of women (62.11%), urban residence (72.25%), single marital status (82.11%), low socioeconomic status (69.01%), connection time greater than 4 hours (67.89%), mostly used platform Facebook (32.12%), linked to the activities of viewing photos and videos (44.37%), with a high level of addiction to social networks (67.61%). The variables age, place of residence, socioeconomic status, connection time and need for connection were statistically significant in the inferential analysis. *Conclusions:* The findings of the ordinal logistic regression model predict that age and connection time contribute significantly to the explanation of addiction to social networks in university students.

Keywords: Addictio, Anxiet Dependence, Social Networks, Sociodemographic.

Introduction

The study of social media usage habits among university students has recognized sociodemographic factors as a global public health problem, which in turn calls into question the potential impact on the positive psychological and social functioning of this population. In contrast, social media addiction has been defined for decades as a set of behaviors expressed in tolerance, the need to increase connection time, withdrawal or discomfort with the accidental interruption of internet connection, the unsatisfied desire to stop using the internet, and excessive use of connection time ⁽¹⁾.

However, we can point out that a physical and socio-emotional illness is any daily or routine activity that creates a dependency or need for an action or relationship, characterized by a set of signs and symptoms, in which biological, genetic, psychological and social factors are involved. Furthermore, it is described that its excessive use can significantly affect mental health, and in this sense, the generation of addiction can suddenly appear, a negative aspect that can affect the

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health of the person at any stage of life, such as, interest in other activities, school/work performance or relationships with friends and family ⁽¹⁾.

Now, at the level of the young population, it is highlighted that addiction to social networks has been a topic of growing interest in academic research ⁽²⁾. It is mentioned that young people create an incessant search for connections within their social group, and the excessive and irresponsible use of social networks leads to medium- and long-term cognitive-behavioral problems that place them in a vulnerable situation, making them a topic of great interest for clinical research.

Internationally, several studies have emphasized this public health issue, where a significant relationship can be seen between social media abuse and psych pedagogical problems, such as dissociation during classes, aggressive behavior, social isolation, depression, loneliness, poor academic performance, and, in many cases, student dropout or abandonment ^(2, 3, 4). Another interesting fact is that, according to the "component model," people addicted to social media are unable to control the amount of time they spend on them, using these platforms to relieve states of negative affect and engaging in obsessive thoughts about social media. Furthermore, they experience negative consequences in their personal and professional lives due to the excessive use of these digital platforms ⁽⁵⁾.

However, it is also evident that the world is increasingly immersed in continuous change, where technological development prevails in every area of society, from the education of new generations to the activities and interactions of adults thanks to computer tools such as social networks. This virtual use refers to the use of connections established through interpersonal relationships, which allows for an exchange of feelings, expressions, and tastes, and is not uncommon among university students ⁽⁶⁾, where each of them actively participates in this technological exchange by continuously using social media, which causes symptoms of withdrawal, anxiety, hopelessness, among others.

Therefore, these platforms, in addition to aiding in educational and communication techniques, can transform young people's cognitive-behavioral behaviors by modifying lifestyles, eating habits, and sleep patterns. Therefore, the purpose of the research was to analyze the predictive value of sociodemographic factors and usage habits in social media addiction among university students.

Materials And Methods

A quantitative, cross-sectional, predictive, correlational study was conducted among university students.

The study population consisted of 710 university students of both sexes, between the ages of 18 and 35, from urban and rural areas of the Guayas province, Ecuador, from January to June 2025. The sample comprised 100% of the total population using a purposive, non-probability sampling method. Selection criteria included university students, those aged 18 to 35, regardless of gender or ethnicity, residing in different urban and rural neighborhoods of the Guayas province, and those who agreed to participate in the study. Para la recolección de los datos se utilizó el método observacional y la encuesta aplicada, las variables estudiadas fueron: Factores sociodemográficos: género, lugar de residencia, estado civil y estatus socioeconómico.

Social Media Addiction: The Adapted Social Media Addiction (ARS) Test by Velecillos ⁽⁷⁾, the questionnaire consists of 24 items and is divided into three dimensions: obsession with social media (10 indicators); lack of control (6 indicators); and excessive use (8 indicators). These indicators are assessed using a five-choice Likert scale, where 1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = sometimes, 4 = almost always, and 5 = always.

To determine the levels of social media addiction with the total scores, the maximum score was 117 points, and the minimum score was 26 points, divided into three ranges: low (26 to 56 points), medium (57 to 87 points), and high (88 to 117 points). It should be noted that increasing scores for social media addiction correspond to higher scores in each of the two dimensions of the scale. The instrument's reliability was $\alpha = 0.80$. Dependence on social networks: The Scale of perception of the degree of dependence on social networks and the time spent on them was used, an internationally validated instrument by7, which consists of two dimensions: need for connection and connectivity time, distributed in 10 items with closed responses using a Likert-type scale with three response options: Never/sometimes and always. The first dimension answers the question: 1. Do you prefer to use social media at school rather than read books? 2. Do you feel like you are dissociated in class because of your use of social media? 3. Have you stopped doing your homework to spend more time on social media? 4. What activities do you do on social media? 5. Which social media do you use most frequently? 6. Do you think there are different risks when using social media? 7. After getting home, do you keep your social media open while doing other activities?

The second dimension on connectivity time answers the following questions: 8.- Every time you connect, do you spend more than an hour on social media?; 9.- Do you think you could go without connecting to social media for more than two days?; 10.- Do you think you could go without using social media during the time the professor teaches his classes? The instruments were first subjected to evaluation by expert judgment. Once revised, the instruments were subjected to exploratory factor analysis, reliability assessment, and confirmatory factor analysis, so the reliability of the scale scores ranged from a Cronbach's alpha of $\alpha = 0.80$ to 0.91.

The procedure was carried out once the 710 participants who comprised the study sample were selected. They were contacted in the community setting of their respective places of residence. The university students' participation was voluntary with prior authorization from the highest institutional authority. The questionnaire was administered through an online platform, where the general objectives of the study were explained, the platform was shown to them, and instructions were given on how to access and complete the survey. The first page obtained informed consent, allowing participants to accept and respond to the survey. Finally, all questions had to be answered; therefore, the research was approved by the Institutional Ethics Committee, guaranteeing the anonymity of their responses.

Data was captured and analyzed using Jamovi 2.3.28 and R-Studio statistical software. Statistical techniques used included descriptive analysis using absolute and relative frequency distribution measures. Inferential analysis was performed using Pearson's Chi-squared coefficient to determine the relationship between qualitative variables, and Spearman's Rho rank correlation coefficient for the dimensions of social media dependence and addiction, using an ordinal measurement scale, with a 95% significance level, after analyzing the assumptions of normality and homoscedasticity.

For the multivariate analysis, the ordinal logistic regression method was applied using the intercept and final models. Parameters were first estimated using the maximum likelihood method, the chi-square statistic, and the degrees of freedom and significance level were determined using a logit link function. The external validity of the fitted model was then assessed using goodness-of-fit. Finally, the parameter estimators were analyzed using the explanatory variables found to be significant in the inferential analysis. The data were presented in tables for a better understanding of the results.

The entire study was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles for the protection of

human participants in research, in compliance with the Regulations of the General Health Law, which require respect for the dignity, rights, and well-being of those involved, guaranteeing both anonymity and confidentiality of information, supported by informed consent. It was also reviewed and approved by the Ethics Committee of a university institution, as recorded in the CA-24-CEISH-UG-0010 report of the institution.

Results

The sample consisted of 710 university students, of which 62.11% (441) were female and 37.89% (269) were male; 72.25% (513) lived in urban areas, while many of them were single, representing 82.11% (583). 69.01% (490) of the sample had a low socioeconomic level, while 25.78% (183) had a medium level, as evidenced in the table (Table 1).

Table 1. Sociodemographic characteristics of the study sample. Ecuador, 2025

Sociodemographic Factors	Descriptive statistics		
	Total	Age	
		18-26 years	27-35 years
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Gender			
Male	269(37,89)	185(26,06)	84(11,83)
Female	441(62,11)	345(48,59)	96(13,52)
Place of residence			
Urban	513(72,25)	355(50)	158(22,25)
Rural	197(27,75)	82(11,55)	115(16,20)
marital status			
Single	583(82,11)	414(58,31)	169(23,80)
Married	35(4,93)	10(1,41)	25(3,52)
Free Union	92(12,96)	22(3,10)	70(9,86)
Socioeconomic status			
Low	490(69,01)	365(51,41)	125(17,60)
Medium	183(25,78)	165(23,24)	18(2,54)
Medium/high	37(5,21)	23(3,24)	14(1,97)

Within the habits in the use of social networks, it reflects that 67.89% (482) of university students connect more than 4 hours a day to platforms such as Facebook with 32.12% (228), followed by Instagram with 30.00% (213), WhatsApp 15.49% (110), Tik Tok 12.39% (88) and YouTube with 10.00% (71); Regarding the activities that students carried out on the networks, a significant predominance is observed in viewing photos and playing videos in 44.37% (315), chatting with friends 30.98% (220) and publishing content in 21.83% (155) respectively (Table 2).

Table 2: Characteristics of habitual social media use among university students. Ecuador, 2025

Usage habits	Descriptive statistics		
	Total	Age	
		18-26 years	27-35 years
	n (%)	n (%)	n (%)
Connection time			
Less than 1 hour	50(7,04)	12(1,69)	38(5,35)
Between 1 and 2 hours	58(8,17)	22(3,10)	36(5,07)
Between 2 and 4 hours	120(16,90)	88(12,40)	32(4,50)
More than 4 hours	482(67,89)	395(55,64)	87(12,25)
Type of platform used			
Tik Tok	88(12,39)	37(5,21)	51(7,18)
WhatsApp	110(15,49)	58(8,17)	52(7,32)
YouTube	71(10)	35(4,93)	36(5,07)
Instagram	213(30)	135(19,01)	78(10,99)
Facebook	228(32,12)	126(17,75)	102(14,37)
Activities carried out			
Post content	155(21,83)	104(14,65)	51(7,18)
Chat with friends	220(30,98)	190(26,76)	30(4,22)
View photos and videos	315(44,37)	168(23,66)	147(20,71)
Share memes	20(2,82)	12(1,69)	8(1,13)

Continuing with the results, regarding the degree of addiction to social networks, it is evident that 67.61% (480) of the participants have a high degree of addiction to social networks, followed by 26.06% (185) of them with a medium degree of addiction to these electronic devices and last but not least, 6.33% (45) of the sample had a low degree of addiction (Table 3).

Table 3: Level of social media addiction in the study sample. Ecuador, 2025

Addiction level	Descriptive statistics	
	n	%
Low (0-33)	45	6,33
Medium (34-64)	185	26,06
High (65-96)	480	67,61
Total	710	100,00

On the other hand, an associative analysis was also carried out between the degrees of addiction to social networks, sociodemographic factors and usage habits, where it can be observed that in terms of sociodemographic factors and age, a p value of 0.001 was obtained ($p < 0.05$); as well as sex obtained a p value = 0.238 ($p > 0.05$); the place of residence yielded p values p value = 0.000 ($p < 0.05$); marital status reaches values $p = 0.121$ ($p > 0.05$) and socioeconomic status with values $p = 0.001$ ($p < 0.05$). On the other hand, the results obtained in the habits of use to social networks were found that the connection time factor reached a value of $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.005$); the type of platform used obtains a figure of $p = 0.273$ ($p > 0.05$); and the activities they perform reached a $p=0.376(p>0.05)$ (Table 4).

Table 4: Associative analysis between social media addiction, sociodemographic factors, and usage habits among university students. Ecuador, 2025

Variables		Level of social media addiction					
		Low	Medium	High	Total	Chi 2	worth p
		n	n	n	n		
Age	18-26 years	12	130	274	416	11,772	,000*
	27-35 years	33	55	206	294		
Gender	Male	25	94	295	414	2,5123	,238
	Female	20	91	185	296		
Place of residence	Urban	15	112	356	483	23,560	,000*
	Rural	30	73	124	227		
Marital status	Soltero	32	123	418	573	3,214	0,121
	Single	5	10	2	17		
	Married	8	52	60	120		
Estatus socioeconómico	Free Union	4	34	420	458	54,785	,001*
	Medium	6	145	35	186		
	Medium/High	35	6	25	66		
	Less than 1 hour	36	58	91	185		

Connection time	Between 1 and 2 hours	2	48	87	137	22,733	,000*
	Between 2 and 4 hours	1	40	120	161		
	More than 4 hours	6	39	182	227		
Type of platform used	Tik Tok	7	24	56	87	6,115	,273
	WhatsApp	8	30	63	101		
	YouTube	3	6	17	26		
	Instagram	12	57	151	220		
	Facebook	15	68	193	276		
	Post content	10	44	58	112		
	Activities carried out	Chat with friends	12	51	161		
	View photos and videos	20	78	234	332		
	Share memes	3	12	27	42		

Note: * $p < 0.05$ (Statistically significant)

Consequently, a Spearman correlation analysis was performed between the dimensions of social media addiction and dependence, which resulted in a moderate positive correlation between the dependence dimension (need for connection) and the dimensions of social media addiction (excessive use and obsession with networks) with Rho values ranging from 0.512 to 0.569. The dependence dimension (connectivity time) had a moderate positive correlation between the dimensions of social media addiction (obsession with networks and excessive use) with Rho values between 0.643 and 0.711 (Table 5).

Table 5. Spearman Correlation Analysis between the dimensions of addiction and dependence on social networks

Dimensions of Dependency	Dimensions of social media addiction		
	Obsession with networks	Lack of control	Excessive use
Rho	0,569	0,017	0,512

Need for connection	p	0,001*	0,321	0,000*
Time for connection	Rho	0,643	0.044	0.711
	p	0,001*	0,458	0,001*

Note: * $p < 0.05$ (Statistically significant)

For the multivariate analysis, the goodness-of-model test was performed, which reflected a significance <0.05 , which statistically accepts the null hypothesis that states that the predicted values do not have significant differences with the observed values. The deviation has a value of 0.812 and shows that the model has a good fit. Subsequently, the analysis is carried out in the model equation, where the results reflect that the variables socioeconomic status and need for connection were not in the model, so there is no statistically significant association. However, factors such as age and connection time were statistically relevant and are predictive factors in social media addiction in university students (Table 6).

Table 6. Relationship between social media addiction and different predictor variables in university students. Ecuador, 2025

Variables	Social media addiction						IC for Exp(B)	
	B	Typical Error	Wald	g l	Sig	Exp (B)	LI	LS
Age	1,45	,333	8,21	1	,000*	2,54	1,214	6,846
Estatus socioeconómico	,219	,142	,744	1	,114	,147	,106	,846
Need for connection	,218	,160	,470	1	,019	,861	,233	1,155
Time for connection	,947	,304	4,88	1	,001*	1,258	1,112	2,891
Constant	-1,647	1,086	2,472	1	,117	,283		

Note: CI: Confidence Interval. LI: Lower Limit, LS: Upper Limit. * $p < 0.05$

Discussion

The research aimed to determine the relationship between sociodemographic factors and usage habits and social media addiction among university students in the Guayas province of Ecuador. The alternative hypothesis (H1) is tested, finding a significant relationship between at least one of the predictor variables (age and connection time) in the subjects studied. Statistical analyses

showed that these variables are significantly associated, confirming the relationship between at least one of the sociodemographic factors and usage habits in social media addiction. This result is consistent with the study conducted in Spain ⁽⁷⁾, where they find that young university students, especially women, include symptoms such as depression, anxiety, and addiction.

Regarding age, the results of this study agree with that described by ^{(8), (16,17)}, where he stated that young people are at greater risk of developing social media addiction due to their need for broad and expansive social influence and their tendency to assert their identity within their social group. On the other hand, in another study they expressed that one of the reasons why young people are more addicted to social networks is because the platforms available on the Internet are learning tools in which they can find information faster and easier, which does not require comprehension, interpretation and analysis skills, which is easy not only for academic life but for their daily lives ^{(9), (18,19)}.

Regarding gender, women predominated in the study with 62.11%, these results are in contrast to those carried out by ^{(10), (20)} where 66.3% were mostly male, and expresses that men have a more marked difficulty controlling the time they spend on social networks, this could be closely related to the fact that they are also the ones who are most obsessed with social networks, the fact that they need to carry out this activity to obtain more satisfaction, favors presenting the obsession, thus presenting a difficulty in which the person starts the activity but does not have the capacity to finish it, in addition they invest more hours a week in using social networks.

Regarding marital status, researchers state that single young people have greater autonomy and freedom to connect to networks without questioning from their partners, since having a commitment implies reducing their intimacy, privacy and shared time ^{(11), (21)}, they mention that 78% of the population studied is a member of the Facebook social network. In this regard, they also highlight the tendency to use social media from a very early age, and that they don't just use it for fun or leisure, but also to communicate with people, share their daily experiences and interests.

On the other hand, at an international level, other authors highlight ^{(12), (22,23)} that Facebook is the most in-demand social network worldwide, and allows users to share different information about their personal lives and belong to different social groups depending on their interests, which users can access without complications from the creation of the account, facilitating all the advantages that the network offers.

Regarding the results of the level of addiction to social networks in students, they show a predominance of a high level with 67.61%, results that agree with a study carried out in Spain, where students had a 72% high level of addiction, and support that this high percentage is due to low self-esteem, personal dissatisfaction and depression that make them seek refuge in obsession and excessive use of social networks ^(24,25,26).

Also, another study conducted by ^{(14), (27)} contrasts with the results of this study, which shows that the use of social networks is increasingly common in students' daily lives, and they use this resource to communicate, which ends up influencing social interaction between them, which can become harmful and even addictive.

Regarding connection time, 67.89% connect for more than 4 hours. This result agrees with the one described ^{(15), (28,29,30)}, they found evidence that 78% of schoolchildren spend up to 6 hours online, abusing the internet and often lose track of time, becoming absorbed on the internet. This leads to a lack of control as one of the worrying factors in social media addiction.

This research provided an effort to better understand the predictive factors of social media addiction in university students, providing a more complete view of how these digital platforms

impact the sociodemographic context and their dependence.

The results have provided useful information for the design of intervention and awareness strategies, allowing health professionals and university professors to address social media addiction more effectively and comprehensively. It is considered that the results obtained serve as a foundation for other prospective, longitudinal studies, with a larger sample size, to identify those students who use the networks on a prolonged basis. This will allow us to improve the information on the psychometric characteristics of the instruments, explore the way in which the dimensions of addiction to social networks are modulated by sociodemographic factors and usage habits, and could prevent future technological and digital dependencies and addictions.

Conclusions

Of a sample of 710 students studied, there was a predominance of women, residents of urban areas, single, with a low socioeconomic status, who mainly used Facebook, with a connection time greater than 4 hours, linked to activities such as viewing photos and videos, presenting a high level of addiction to social networks.

The variables age, place of residence, socioeconomic status, and time online were statistically significant with a high level of addiction, and when the dimensions of social media dependence and addiction were correlated, there was a positive and moderate correlation between the duration and need for use with obsession and lack of control.

The sociodemographic factors age and time online were the predictors that explained their relationship with social media addiction.

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