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# ENVIRONMENT, POLICIES AND ADDICTIONS TO SOCIAL NETWORKS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

ENTORNO Y POLÍTICAS EN RELACIÓN A LAS ADICCIONES A LAS REDES SOCIALES ENTRE UNIVERSITARIOS

Alvaro Fernando Valdez Roca [1,a], Alberto Valdez Barboza [1,b]

### Dear Editor:

Through this letter, and motivated by the article titled "Impact of social media addiction on the mental health of medical students during COVID-19"[1], I would like to address two essential topics. First, and of great concern in the university environment, is the issue of addictive behaviors in social media use by students. Second, less addressed in our country, are the various policies being applied to tackle this phenomenon. It is well-known that smartphones are present, directly or indirectly, in various aspects of daily life. As educators from different institutions in the capital, we have observed that these mobile devices are a very useful tool for students when performing their educational tasks. With internet access, they can instantly gather information to solve any academic activity, communicate to complete assignments, and meet virtually to study in groups. Additionally, they can access educational applications that reinforce specific topics of interest.

It should be emphasized that the benefits of new information technologies described above are only part of the picture. However, we have also noticed a series of behaviors that could be detrimental to mental health and subsequently affect students' academic performance. For example, some students frequently check their phones to attend to or browse their social media, seek entertainment, or play online games in places where they should be focused, such as in the library or classrooms. It is even common to hear them say they intended to watch a couple of minutes of TikTok videos but ended up spending hours, repeatedly postponing their activities, which is a clear example of procrastination.

On the other hand, although the behaviors mentioned in the previous paragraph could be tangible indicators of a certain level of addiction, there is empirical evidence that the use of social media and the internet generates addiction. If not treated promptly, it can lead to poor academic performance, lack of attention[2], anxiety, stress, depression, poor sleep quality[1], as well as a range of problems in the individual's family and social sphere[3]. Another important aspect to mention is the various changes that occur in the human nervous system, specifically in adolescents, due to excessive use of smartphones[4].

[1] Universidad Ricardo Palma. Lima, Peru.
[a] Doctor in Administrative Sciences.
[b] Economist, University Professor.

Journal home page: http://revistas.urp.edu.pe/index.php/RFMH

Humans are not isolated beings; they constantly interact with their environment. It is this environment, combined with other factors, that generates the risk of developing an addiction[5]. The university is a fundamental part of the students' environment, where they spend many hours a day. This raises the question: What policies have these institutions developed and implemented to address this phenomenon that many of their students may be immersed in? If they have been implemented, has their effectiveness been measured? From our experience, we have only observed individual actions by teachers in their respective classrooms.

At the government level, in the health sector, there are also no clear strategies perceived from the responsible agencies, nor are there coordinated efforts to work together with universities to combat this problem. Countries like China have already taken action on this issue, specifically regarding online video games, with measures directly aimed at regulating the behavior of adolescents and the operations of service providers[6-8].

Finally, in conclusion, both social media addiction and policies aimed at mitigating its consequences are topics that should be addressed within the framework of public health, as they aim to improve the health of the population through combined medical and management efforts. It is recommended that future policies developed in this field be based on scientific evidence to ensure their effectiveness in meeting the needs of the targeted population.

*Correspondence:* Alvaro Fernando Valdez Roca.
*Address:* Jr. Los Algarrobos Mz D Lote 43, Santa Anita, Lima-Perú.
*Telephone:* (+51) 944630490
*Email:* **alvarovaldez84@gmail.com**

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