

FROM THE NEED TO SOCIALIZE TO DIGITAL FAST LEISURE: AN INFINITE CONVERSATION OF YOUNG INDIVIDUALS IN SOCIAL NETWORKS

De la necesidad de socializar al fast-ocio digital: una infinita
conversación juvenil en redes sociales

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The aim of this study is to analyze to what extent the daily activity undertaken by young individuals on the most widely used social media platforms is directed towards fulfilling their socialization needs. As they connect with other young individuals, creating communities in the virtual space, this study also explores how their participation in these platforms typically occupies their leisure time.

Methodology: A survey was conducted with 900 individuals aged between 18 and 25, enrolled in both university and compulsory secondary education or intermediate and

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higher-level vocational training programs. The survey results were complemented by several focus groups with university students. **Results:** While young individuals explicitly associate social media with entertainment, they acknowledge that their activity on these platforms is more driven by a need to socialize than a leisure experience. The majority admits that their engagement on social media is primarily linked to the obligation they feel to fulfill the digital feedback expected by their contacts, rather than the desire to enjoy social media as a leisure activity. **Discussion and conclusions:** The perception among young individuals is that they exercise controlled use of social media, rarely engaging excessively. The obtained results highlight the limited interaction young individuals have with social media when these channels are not associated with entertainment. Given the significant value that social media holds in democratizing citizen participation and engagement in daily life, it becomes necessary to propose and implement educational initiatives that help younger individuals understand the true possibilities of social media. This way, as they grow, their usage of social media can evolve towards practices that go beyond entertainment, rather than diminishing their participation.

Keywords: social networks, young individuals, interaction, participation, perception, prosumers.

RESUMEN

Introducción: El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar en qué medida la actividad diaria desarrollada por los jóvenes en las redes sociales con más usuarios está dirigida a satisfacer sus necesidades de socialización, en tanto que conectan con otros jóvenes creando comunidades en el espacio virtual, y de qué manera su participación en ellas ocupa su ocio habitualmente. **Metodología:** Se ha encuestado a 900 jóvenes con edades comprendidas entre los 18 y los 25 años que cursaran tanto estudios universitarios como de Enseñanza Secundaria Obligatoria o Ciclos Formativos de Grado Medio y Superior, cuyos resultados se han completado con la realización de varios *focus groups* con jóvenes universitarios. **Resultados:** Aunque los jóvenes identifican de forma explícita las redes sociales con el entretenimiento, reconocen que su actividad en ellas responde más a una necesidad de socializar que a una experiencia de ocio. La mayoría admite que su labor en las redes está sobre todo vinculada a la obligación que sienten de cumplir con el *feedback* digital que sus contactos esperan de ellos, que a la voluntad de disfrutar de las redes como una actividad de ocio. **Discusión y conclusiones:** La percepción de los jóvenes es que realizan un uso controlado de las redes sociales, casi nunca excesivo. Los resultados obtenidos ponen de manifiesto la escasa interacción que los jóvenes tienen con las redes sociales cuando estos canales dejan de estar asociados al entretenimiento. Teniendo en cuenta el importante valor que las redes tienen para democratizar la participación e implicación de la ciudadanía en su vida diaria, se ve necesario plantear y desarrollar acciones educativas que ayuden a los más jóvenes a conocer las verdaderas posibilidades de las redes sociales, de manera que, según van creciendo, el uso que realizan de las mismas vaya evolucionando hacia prácticas que excedan el entretenimiento, en lugar de disminuir su participación.

Palabras clave: redes sociales, jóvenes, interacción, participación, percepción, prosumidores.

1. INTRODUCTION

Social networks have brought about important changes both in the way we communicate and in the way we relate, inform ourselves and entertain ourselves, especially among young individuals, in addition to "improving the quality of life of many people" (Segarra-Saavedra et al., 2022, p. 3).

While the emergence of the Web transformed audiovisual viewing, with varied content that could be accessed in an unlimited way, from anywhere and at any time (García-Jiménez et al., 2018), social networks allow us not only to consume content produced by traditional media, but there is also the option for the user to create and/or modify it, as well as to share it with other users, thus contributing to build a digital image of their own (Masanet et al., 2020).

Some authors relate this situation to the "important paradigm shift brought about by the irruption of Web 2.0, turning the user into an active agent who not only receives information but also provides it, promoting a more collaborative and participatory communication" (Arriaga et al., 2016, p.198). Whereas until the early 2000s the creation of content, whether informative, cultural or entertainment, was in the hands of broadcasters, large companies, knowledge institutions and governments, the advent of Web 2.0 and social networks has allowed extensive use of online collaborative technologies, leading to the emergence of a new consumer who can now also be a content creator, with the ability to influence other users (Pérez, 2009). In the case of younger users, there are researchers who even talk about the relationship that this possibility of participating in the creation of content has on youth empowerment, since it gives them the opportunity to make their voices more visible and powerful (Reig, 2013).

Within these collaborative platforms, social networks share space with other communicative channels such as blogs, microblogs, video sharing platforms and, also, photo sharing platforms (Candale, 2017). However, social networks are the channels that have contributed the most to consolidate the so-called e-democracy, understood as a new form of participation of society, this time digital, in which citizens, through social networks, publish their daily lives, interests and hobbies (Moreno-Cabanillas and Castellero-Ostio, 2023), but also express their opinions, speak, comment or criticize what they think needs to be modified; interacts, communicates, shares and receives information, becoming part of the "digital citizenship" (González-Andrío et al., 2020, p. 68).

In this context, there is a coexistence of what Establés et al. (2019) have called participatory cultures, which include practices such as "remix, collective intelligence and the culture of collaboration between prosumers and fans, and cultural industries, characterized by the homogenization of production processes, profit and corporate merger" (p. 216).

Likewise, the network, together with the different channels and platforms derived from it, has become the backbone on which much of the leisure of the digital era is based, which now has the advantage of being able to adapt to the free time available to users.

As the Argentine professor and researcher Roberto Igarza explains, leisure has come to be conceived in "small pills of fruition, brevities that can be enjoyed in the micro-spaces left by work activities or in the fragments of idle dedication that the user allocates to him/herself during commuting or in his/her free time at home" (2009, p. 243).

That is, "leisure bubbles" considered by the author as part of an interstitial interactive, more selective, less long-lasting, based on micro formats leisure time. Where entertainment, pleasure, relaxation, recreation, and fun is what prevails (Viñals Blanco, 2013, pp.158-159).

For Internet users in general, and for young individuals in particular, social networks are part of their daily lives, being the platforms through which they establish many of their daily social relationships and their information and entertainment channels. However, do young individuals take an active role in the networks? Do they give a socializing role to the networks? Are these channels part of their leisure time? Are they satisfied with their activity and presence in them?

In order to answer these questions, the research results are presented in the following pages as part of the R+D+i project of the Ministry of Science and Innovation entitled "Truth and ethics in social networks. Perceptions and educational influences in young users of Twitter, Instagram and YouTube" (PID2019-104689RB-I00).

1.1. The impact of social networks on today's young individuals

The number of social network users is growing steadily. In May 2023, 85% of Internet users between the ages of 12 and 74 were using social networks, a figure that rises to 94% in the 18-24 age group (Interactive Advertising Bureau (IAB, 2023). Moreover, the use of social networks is starting at an increasingly younger age. According to research carried out in the Region of Murcia among teenagers, almost 90% of students in the third and fourth year of Compulsory Secondary Education have access to social networks, compared to 10% of those surveyed who are still not engaging with them. Among those who do access networks, 71.4% do so from their own profile (Ballesta Pagán et al., 2021) and to feel integrated into the group (Ballesteros et al., 2018).

One of the activities most performed by younger users is to show their degree of agreement or disagreement with something:

Content engagement by young individuals is especially focused on likes, with 44% among Millennials increasing to 50% in Generation Z. Comments to publications decrease with the generational change, as do retweets or sharing on a blog or own page, which, in the case of Generation Z, is nonexistent, with 0% of responses. (López and Gómez, 2021, p. 549).

Just as there are differences among young individuals in their participation in social networks according to their age, there are also differences in which ones they indicate as their favorites. Thus, when what they want is to post something for others to see, they point to Instagram as their favorite network, while they opt for YouTube to see content of various kinds, Twitter to follow their idols and Facebook to keep in touch with distant friends (Ballesteros and Picazo, 2018).

Within the activity that young individuals carry out on social networks, Vizcaino-Laorga et al. (2019) speak of two participatory visions: one from an opinion-based point of view, to which young individuals say they see little use; and the other from an informative point of view, which they consider to be positive. The authors indicate that most of the participants in their research -young individuals in Madrid between 18 and 25 years of age- agree that social networks are of little use as a participatory tool, as they consider that they are useful for listening to other points of view, but not for modifying the thinking of others or for the personalities who participate in them to listen to them or respond to them.

Consequently, there is a contrast between the opinion that young individuals have of social networks as channels in which anyone can participate to express themselves (Buckingham, 2019) and the low valuation they make of them in terms of the influence and capacity for change that these contributions have on social networks.

Young individuals believe that the comments of ordinary people on social networks do not have a transformative capacity in areas of relevance such as political or social. However, when it comes to more concrete issues, they do give greater consideration to the effect that comments posted on social networks can have. (López-de-Ayala et al., 2020, p. 10).

1.2. Social networks as a new social environment

Young individuals openly acknowledge that they keep themselves informed through social networks (Gómez and López, 2022) and the greatest attribute they value about them is the possibility of participation that they provide. That participation contributes to the fact that these platforms are for the young public authentic means of interaction that allow them to share with their peers what they are doing at any given moment, turning that possibility into a way of life and of being in contact with those who matter to them (García et al., 2017). Therefore, in addition to informational channels (Hopp, 2021), they are a valuable resource that they use to create their own communities, as well as integrate into existing ones. Gértrudix et al. (2017) point out that young individuals monopolize social networks, becoming part of communities in which they "experience a group existence detached from spatiotemporal subjections, attenuated from the bonds of synchrony and physicality" (p. 63).

Currently, for young individuals, everything happens through social networks, understanding them as spaces where the public and the private coexist in an almost always harmonious symbiosis, where everything can be looked at and where everything can be shown, constantly promoting and participating in "extimacy", that

is, the public exposure of what has traditionally been considered to be part of the private (Merino, 2011, p.39).

This exposure on the networks also has a direct influence on the process of youth socialization, since it is no longer enough to go out on the street, to go to school, work or the usual places of leisure, but to these physical places and face-to-face meetings are added digital spaces and contacts, causing young individuals to have to socialize in a conventional and digital way:

On the one hand, new technologies and the spaces they offer have been domesticated to the point of becoming everyday contexts through which the development of the socialization process also takes place. On the other hand, the interactive potential of new technologies enables, in adolescence, a continuous flow of relationships and exchange, which constantly reinforce sociability and the process of socialization with peers. (Merino, 2011, p. 36).

It is here where we can find justification for the prevailing need of young individuals to share and expose their experiences and experiences; but also their opinions and comments, maintaining their uniqueness as individuals, something that the increasingly accessible technologies of social networks enhance (Tur-Viñes et al., 2019).

This need to socialize sometimes causes young individuals to fall into a hyper-exposure to others, which Gértrudix et al. (2017) explain from:

a level of involvement stimulated by a certain Hawthorne effect: performance enhancement, in this case that of sharing better photos, more elaborate videos, contributing more to a community or being a more active participant. It thrives on the seductive and immediately gratifying hyperstimulation of getting feedback from every micro-action we perform. (p.65)

As digital media, social networks offer young individuals new contexts in which, in addition to exploring aspects of their identity, they can create different identities "that are changing at very fast speed and that can generate enriching or destructive interpersonal and intrapersonal experiences, depending on how online communication is used (time of use, type of virtual social group chosen, among others)" (Arab and Díaz, 2015, p. 8).

Thus, young individuals whose dexterity, creative capacity and digital skills allow them to participate in social networks not only by uploading content and waiting for others to answer them, but also by encouraging debate on the content created and shared (Pérez Tornero, 2009). This fact contributes to the fact that these users can become influencers for others, due to the interest of the contents they disseminate (Ramos and Herrero, 2014). However, we also find young individuals who, whether or not they have the necessary skills to create and publish content on networks, prefer not to do so for fear of the consequences of their actions being published on social media (López-de-Ayala et al., 2020), so that these users limit themselves to consulting what is published by others.

2. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

This paper analyzes to what extent the daily activity developed by young individuals in social networks with more users is aimed at satisfying their socialization needs, as they connect with other young individuals creating communities in the virtual space, and how their participation in them occupies their leisure time on a regular basis. The analysis will observe whether differences are shown depending on the age and academic level of the young individuals.

The methodology proposes three levels of approximation to their reality around this objective: firstly, it addresses how they perceive the time they spend on social networks and the use and participation they make of them; secondly, it compares whether their answers coincide with the reasons they give to justify some of the most common practices developed on the networks; finally, it tries to see to what extent they identify the different activities they develop on these platforms as part of their process of socialization and enjoyment of their online leisure.

The hypothesis underlying this analysis is that young individuals aged between 18 and 25 years show a perception that is discordant with the reality of their daily use of social networks, while their motivation as users of these networks is more related to the need to contact their peers than to enjoy their leisure time.

The networks analyzed were Instagram, TikTok, Twitter², Facebook and YouTube because they have the largest number of users in Spain.

3. METHODOLOGY

The research starts with a quantitative analysis based on the questionnaire, the results of which were completed and qualified with the implementation of six focus groups and direct observation.

For the survey, a questionnaire was designed with fifteen questions, ten of which were closed, offering several response options organized on a Likert scale. The form was structured in four blocks:

- Habits of young individuals in social networks.
- Preferred social networks.
- Confidence of young individuals in the content posted on social networks.
- Sense of identification with the profiles followed.

With regard to the sample analyzed, 900 valid questionnaires were collected from young individuals between 18 and 25 years of age in Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO), High School, Intermediate or Higher Level Training Cycles, University Undergraduates and Post-Graduates, trying to ensure that the sample was equitable between university and non-university students. In the case of university

²The fieldwork for this article was carried out during the first quarter of 2023, before Twitter's name change in April 2023, which is why Twitter and not X is used throughout the article.

students, the questionnaires were carried out in three Spanish universities by the professors involved in this research, while the surveys of non-university students were carried out by a specialized company. Here again, the surveys were carried out in educational centers in several autonomous communities. Likewise, young individuals who have already completed their studies have been surveyed, regardless of the academic level they have passed.

Table 1

Composition of the analyzed sample.

Non-university students		University students		Young individuals who have completed their studies	
Compulsory Secondary Education	26	University Undergraduate	405	50	
Intermediate level training cycles	59				
Higher level training cycles	143	Post-graduate	38		
High School	179				
TOTAL		TOTAL		TOTAL	TOTAL
408		442		50	900
45.3%		49.2%		5.5%	100%

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The surveys of university students were supplemented by the conclusions drawn from six focus groups carried out in three Spanish public universities, in which a total of 70 students participated.

Table 2

Composition of the focus groups.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5	Group 6
Participants	Participants	Participants	Participants	Participants	Participants
13	10	10	12	12	13
Men	Men	Men	Men	Men	Men
7	5	5	5	6	6
Women	Women	Women	Women	Women	Women
6	5	5	7	6	7
Degree	Degree	Degree	Degree	Degree	Degree
Journalism	Journalism	Journalism	Audiovisual Communication	Audiovisual Communication	Audiovisual Communication

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

These discussion groups were conducted by university professors; in each of them there was a sixty-minute discussion around six questions. All sessions were recorded for later transcription and analysis. A data collection form was used for data collection, taking into account: place of the session, name of the speaker, subject matter, excerpt of the speech, replies to the speech by the rest of the participants and observations by the teacher moderator. The sessions were held in the first quarter of 2023.

4. RESULTS

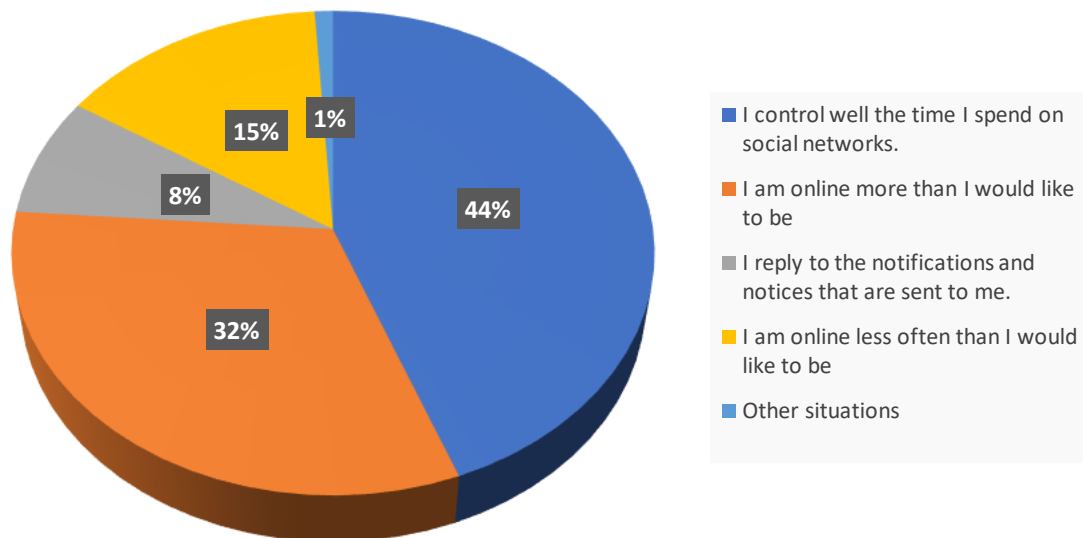
4.1. Young individuals and social networks: between habit and leisure

Aware that for them it is a daily habit that they admit they do not realize they are doing, they equate it with the rest of their daily activities. Most of those questioned said that "just as when you get up, you don't think you have to go to class or have breakfast, you don't think you have to look at social networks, you just look at them". They say they check them several times a day and, in addition, on a good number of occasions they say they do so "not on their own initiative", but through the notifications and alerts they receive, as well as through links sent to them by their contacts.

This perception explains why almost half of those surveyed consider that they "control" the time they spend on social networks well and do not believe that their use of social networks prevents them from carrying out other activities. However, 3 out of 10 young individuals think that they are connected to social networks for a longer period than they would like, just twice as many as those who think they spend less time on social networks than they would like.

Figure 1

How young individuals feel about the time they spend on social networks.



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

When asked about this question in the focus groups, it can be seen that young individuals do not identify social network consultation with leisure, but rather the opposite, since they say they feel "the need to reply to all the notifications that are sent to them", especially those coming from their immediate environment. Thus, it seems that young individuals feel obliged to at least read these notifications, while acknowledging that they only respond to those from contacts with whom they are interested in maintaining this digital feedback.

Likewise, in the conversations held with them, most of them recognized that they prefer to interact "without intervening too much" in the content published on social networks, responding, for example, to the notifications and notices they receive, either with a like or a comment, rather than creating their own content. Although they say they feel "admiration" for all those profiles that have become well-known creators of content for these channels, they say they feel more comfortable consuming this content than producing their own.

University students are those who on a greater number of occasions have indicated that they connect to social networks less than they would really like to. This is indicated by 18.8% and 19.4% of respondents who are pursuing an undergraduate or postgraduate degree, respectively, who are precisely those who expressly state that they would like to use the networks for more than just being in contact with their groups, while alluding to the scarcity of new initiatives by, for example, influencers and the media on social networks.

On the other hand, non-university students are the ones who report being connected to social networks for more time than they would like (40%), a fact that contrasts with

their reported use of these networks, since they indicate that they normally use them to respond to notifications and notices that are sent to them, but that "otherwise, they do not make an outstanding use of them, with some exceptions". In fact, 20% of students in ESO and Intermediate Level Training Cycles say that the only use they make of the networks is to respond to notifications and notices, compared to 3.2% of those studying for a university degree. Therefore, it is the university students who adopt a more active role in social networks, understood as that which goes beyond the mere consultation of different notices and notifications that are sent to them through these platforms.

4.2. Activity of young individuals on networks and, digital leisure?

The young individuals surveyed in this study do not identify, at least in the majority of cases, the activity they carry out on the networks as part of their leisure time. While those in higher education and, for the most part, older, differentiate between conventional leisure and digital leisure, the younger ones admit "not having thought about this differentiation". The latter indicate that "when we talk about leisure, we include everything, for us there is no digital leisure and another type of leisure, but everything is leisure time". They develop in parallel digital and conventional activities, while sharing both physical and virtual spaces and companions at the same time: "We are often in a bar with a group of friends and we talk to those who are not there through social networks, we send them photos of what we are drinking, etc., so that we can share that meeting even if we have not all been able to go physically".

Based on this situation, some of the activities most frequently carried out by users on social networks were asked to find out whether they identify them as practices carried out during their leisure time and to observe how often they perform them. The activities posed are:

- Searching and watching content from aggregated profiles.
- Sharing content created by others among my friends and acquaintances.
- Looking at contents of profiles that appear in suggestions.
- Commenting on the profiles of my group of friends.
- Uploading recommendations and ratings on content.

To collect the answers given by the young individuals when asked about their identification of the above-mentioned activities as leisure activities, a Likert scale was used, where 5 is the maximum value as an activity they relate to their leisure time and 1 is the minimum value.

Table 3

Identification of activities as leisure time.

	Majority Likert score	% of the majority of responses
Searching and watching content from aggregated profiles	4	43.5%
Sharing content created by others among friends and acquaintances	3	55.2%
Looking at contents of profiles that appear in suggestions	3	38.9%
Commenting on the profiles of my group of friends	3	59.7%
Uploading recommendations and ratings on content	2	33.6%

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Searching for and viewing the contents of aggregated profiles is what most of the young individuals surveyed identify with leisure. The rest relate them more to activities linked to the socializing process itself than to leisure.

Of all these, sharing content among their friends and acquaintances is the practice that the greatest number of participants carry out most frequently: more than half of those surveyed (54.7%) say they do it every day or several times a week. In most cases, this is content that they have not created themselves, so that their activity on the networks consists of disseminating this content among their contacts. This is a practice especially carried out by those studying ESO, where 46.2% say they share these contents several times a day, a percentage that drops to more than half among those studying Intermediate Level Training Cycles (20.3%) and High School (19%), the percentage being irrelevant among university students, who indicate that they do consume these contents, but do not share them regularly "unless it is something viral or that could be of great interest".

The second most frequent action is to search for and watch content from aggregate profiles. The highest percentage of participants (27.5%) indicate that they do this several times a week, followed by those who do it several times a month (22.6%). As is the case in the sharing of content among friends and acquaintances, here too it is the ESO students who do this practice most often several times a week (46%), followed by High School students (34.1%).

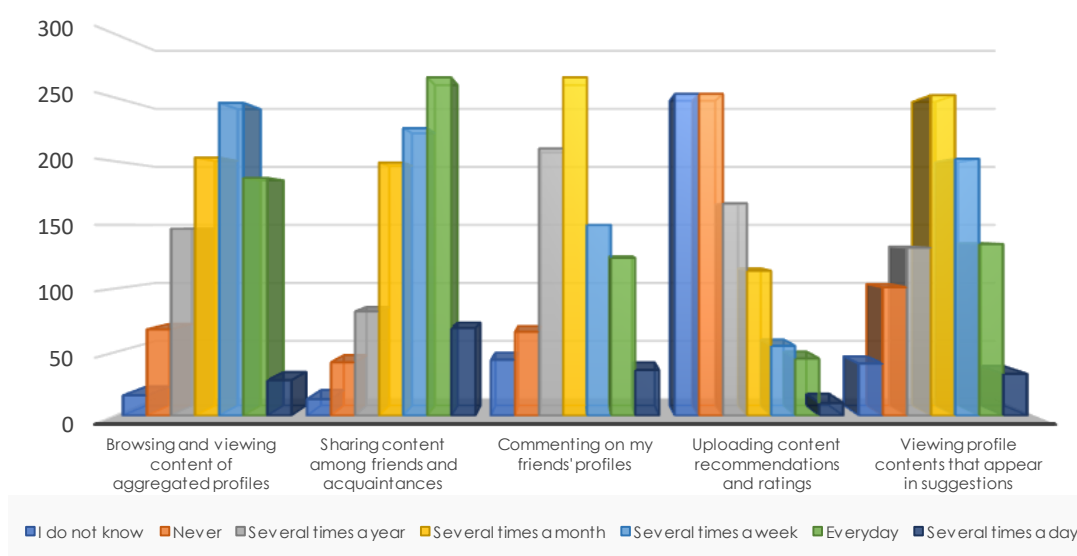
In contrast, those who are least likely to do this activity several times a week are those who have already completed their studies (16%). According to the responses collected in the focus groups, this group, as well as those who have completed their university studies, are more selective in their browsing of aggregated profiles. "The mere fact of having a profile added is not enough reason to look at everything it publishes; it depends on who it is or what it is about", "in the end you have many profiles added,

but not all of them interest you equally and you always end up consulting the same ones".

With regard to consulting the content of profiles that appear in suggestions, the largest number of respondents (28%) admit to doing so several times a month, with only 3.7% indicating that they do so several times a day and 15.1% every day. Students in Compulsory Secondary Education and Intermediate Level Training Cycles are significantly different from the rest, since 38.5% and 35.6% of those surveyed, respectively, indicate that they do this activity every day.

Figure 2

Interaction of young individuals in the content posted on social networks.



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

If the focus is on contributing new content, posting comments on the profiles of their group of friends is the practice most frequently reported by participants in the survey. The highest percentage (29.8%) corresponds to those who indicate that they do this several times a month. This figure drops significantly as the frequency of this activity increases, with only 4% of those who admit to commenting on the profiles of their group of friends every day.

Students in Intermediate Level Training Cycles are those who do this practice most frequently (33.9% do it every day), followed by students in Compulsory Secondary Education, where 38.5% say they do it several times a week. In the remaining academic levels, the majority percentages are concentrated around those who comment on the profiles of their friends several times a month or several times a year, themselves recognizing that it is "a rather sporadic practice".

This participation, and its frequency, decreases even more significantly when it comes to uploading recommendations and evaluations about personal experiences, as well as about different products, services or sites they visit, with the aim that their opinions

serve as a reference for other users. The majority response is that given by those who are studying postgraduate studies, where 50% say that they never write this type of recommendation. For students of ESO, High School and University Undergraduates, as well as those who have already completed their studies, the option of never is also the one with the highest number of responses. Only students in intermediate vocational training indicate that they do this practice on a regular basis: 22% say that they post recommendations every day.

In any case, these are practices to which they only dedicate a few minutes. Despite consulting social networks many times a day, young individuals admit that they do not stay on any of them for long. "You still get on the same profile several times, but each time for something different: once to watch, another time to like some content, another time to look at something new that has just been posted." In terms of leisure, therefore, they develop an activity that for the most part they do not identify as such and that they carry out quickly.

4.3. Young individuals as content creators on social networks

One of the main values that young individuals attribute to social networks is that "they allow us to keep up to date with what is happening in our group of friends", as well as "to share with the members of our groups personal things that we are interested in making known or that we consider of interest to the group". These channels also offer them the possibility of becoming creators of their own content, an option that, however, is not equally appreciated in all social networks. Twitter, Instagram and TikTok are the most frequently mentioned when asked about the networks they use to publish content created by themselves, and the networks through which they receive the greatest amount of content created by their acquaintances. They are also the networks most explicitly related to leisure.

These responses are complemented by the data obtained in Table 4, which shows that Instagram is the preferred network for keeping in touch with friends and acquaintances and sharing experiences; Twitter for staying informed; Facebook for keeping in touch with friends and acquaintances; TikTok for entertainment and YouTube for learning, training and resolving doubts.

Table 4

Preferences of young individuals in social networks.

	Instagram frequency		Twitter frequency		Facebook frequency		TikTok frequency		YouTube frequency		No network frequency	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
Showing how I am	657	13.1	214	10.5	78	10.8	84	7.4	40	2.7	135	20.4
Entertaining myself	573	11.4	175	8.6	54	7.4	385	33.9	302	20.6	8	1.2
Being informed	330	6.6	488	24.1	118	16.3	46	4	138	9.4	122	18.5

Following my interests, hobbies, etc.	711	14.2	202	10	56	7.7	292	25.7	292	19.9	16	2.4
Knowing what's going on	397	7.9	498	24.6	106	14.6	51	4.5	86	5.9	97	14.7
Being in touch with friends and acquaintances	790	15.7	145	7.2	143	19.7	53	4.7	13	0.9	41	6.2
Learning, training, resolving doubts	180	3.5	44	2.2	44	6.1	70	6.2	529	36.1	179	27.1
Sharing experiences	765	15.2	169	8.3	95	13.1	27	2.4	27	1.8	63	9.5
Gaining followers and recognition	621	12.4	89	4.4	31	4.3	129	11.3	39	2.7	0	0
TOTAL	5,024	100	2,024	100	725	100	1,137	100	1,466	100	661	100

Source: Elaborated by the authors.

The data obtained in this research show that young individuals do not have a special predilection for creating content, despite this being one of the main values attributed to social networks. The highest frequency for this activity is several times a month, where one in four young individuals say they create content to share it with a small group of friends, while in the case of creating content to share it openly, the majority frequency is several times a year, an option indicated by 22.7% of those surveyed, while 21.6% say they never do it, compared to 11.5% of those who answered "never" when asked about their habit of creating content to share it with a small group of friends.

Students in Intermediate Level Training Cycles are the most frequent creators of content to share with a small group of friends: 32.2% say they do it every day. At the other end of the scale are those who are studying for a postgraduate degree, since 26.3% of those questioned indicated that they never do so.

When asked about the option of openly sharing the content they create, the frequency of this activity decreases at all academic levels. Once again, it is the youngest students who do it most frequently, but this time it is the students in Compulsory Secondary Education who do it most: 54% responded equally to creating and sharing content openly several times a month and several times a week.

In both cases, the majority option is the creation of audiovisual content and the publication of photographs, with Instagram and TikTok being the most used networks for this purpose. The main arguments used when it comes to justifying this response is that both taking photographs and recording small videos are practices that they carry out on a regular basis and that publishing them on Instagram and TikTok does not involve an effort "because they do not require to be professionals". However, when

asked about YouTube, most participants consider that publishing content on this website requires "prior preparation and editing work". The videos published on this channel they identify as "longer than those published on other networks" and for "many times more serious" purposes. While on Instagram and TikTok young individuals recognize that they seek to entertain and entertain, in the case of publishing something, on YouTube they say they are mainly looking for video tutorials to solve doubts.

4.4. Networks as an environment and social speaker for young individuals

Most of the young individuals surveyed say that being on social networks is a "necessity", because through them they establish "social conversations" that allow them to "keep up to date" with what is happening in their environment. "Just as if you never meet and hang out with your friends you don't find out anything and end up left out of the group, if you're not on social networks, you don't find out about other things either".

Thus, young individuals today have to maintain a double social and personal life: on the one hand, the one derived from personal relationships maintained through traditional mechanisms and, on the other hand, digital relationships. The young individuals questioned emphasize that it is essential to be on social networks "to be able to socialize" and recognize that it is "a social environment as important as the physical environment".

Despite considering themselves vindictive and active on social networks, the data indicate that their activity is mainly associated with viewing and sharing content published by third parties, with few occasions in which they take an active role. And this is not only the case when creating specific content to publish on social networks, but also when it comes to denouncing certain behaviors, attitudes or products. At most, they share opinions and exchange comments with friends, but when it comes to doing so in the open, only a minority make use of the networks as a social loudspeaker.

To check the veracity of these statements, they were asked about their experience on the networks in three common situations that, in physical spaces, are talked about openly and are part of group social chats, which are:

- Whether they have actively acted on any fake news.
- If they have given their opinion or supported any social issue, complaint or criticism.
- If they have sought the opinion of other users before making a purchase or hiring a service.

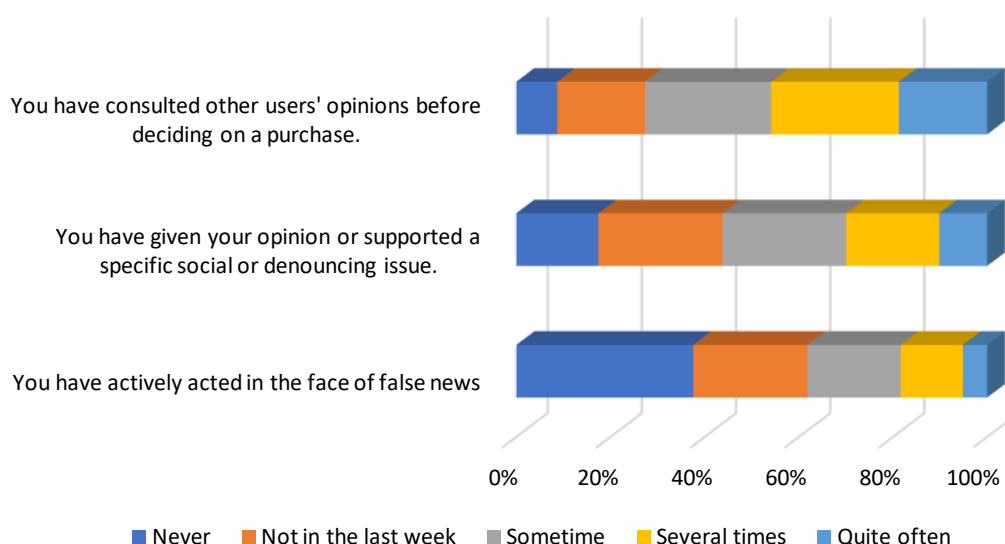
While 90% of the young individuals surveyed recognize that they do practically every day the three options mentioned when they interact in person, this percentage, as well as the frequency with which they do it, decreases significantly when they are in virtual environments, such as those created by social networks. It is also striking that they do not identify any of the three options as part of their digital socialization process, while

in face-to-face relationships they identify them as "something natural, something that comes up".

Of the three situations, the greatest use they make of social networks is to seek the opinion of other users before deciding to make a purchase: 27% say they have done so several times, compared to 8.8% who say they have never done so. On the other hand, when it comes to acting on false news, 37.6% admit to never having done so, while only 5% say they do so quite often. At an intermediate point is the fact of expressing an opinion on a controversial issue, regardless of its nature, where 26.3% say they have done so at least once.

Figure 3

Reaction of young individuals in the content posted on social networks.



Source: Elaborated by the authors.

Young individuals who have already completed their studies are the ones who most frequently seek the opinion of third parties before buying or contracting a product or service: almost half of those surveyed admit to doing so quite frequently (24%) or several times (24%). On the other hand, ESO students are the least likely to make this consultation: 38.5% say they have not done so in the last week, in addition to the 19.2% who say they have never done so.

However, when it comes to expressing an opinion or supporting a controversial issue, the figures are practically inverted. In this case, postgraduate students (28.9%) and those who have completed their studies (30%) are the ones who most indicate that they never do so, while students in intermediate-level vocational training (30.5%) are the ones who most frequently express their opinions and support some cause through the networks. For the rest, the norm is never to do so or to do so sporadically.

Finally, when asked about their reaction on social networks to false news, most of the young individuals questioned (37.6%), regardless of their level of studies,

acknowledge that they never act, compared to 5% who say they do so quite often. "When it becomes clear that a piece of news is false, we comment on it among ourselves, but nothing more", and, in addition, they do not consider that they have any obligation or responsibility in the face of this type of news, while believing that "most of the time it is very obvious that it is fake news", so that they do not believe "that anyone could think that what they say is true". Those who say they act on false news most frequently are ESO students, among whom 15.4% say they have done so several times and 11.5% do so quite frequently.

At the other extreme are students in Higher Education, where only 9.7% say they have acted on fake news a few times and 2% say they have done so frequently.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The obtained results highlight the limited interaction young individuals have with social media when these channels are not associated with entertainment. Given the significant value that social media holds in democratizing citizen participation and engagement in daily life, it becomes necessary to propose and implement educational initiatives that help younger individuals understand the true possibilities of social media. This way, as they grow, their usage of social media can evolve towards practices that go beyond entertainment, rather than diminishing their participation.

To this end, it is worth asking what knowledge young individuals have of both the networks and the possibilities that collaborative technologies offer them. The fact that these young individuals were born into an interconnected world does not mean that they do not need to be educated in their use. Just as requirements are set to ensure proper education and teaching in traditional curricular subjects, it would also be appropriate to incorporate new subjects that provide them with the necessary competencies and skills so that young individuals can and know how to take advantage of the opportunities that new technologies offer them.

While it is true that one of the perceptions that this research leaves behind is that young individuals are not interested in adopting a more active role in the networks, their behavior denotes a lack of knowledge of the real possibilities of the networks beyond entertainment.

Despite the time that young individuals spend daily on social networks, their perception is that they make a controlled use of them and almost never excessive, since only 3 out of 10 young individuals recognize that they spend more time on the networks than they would like to. University undergraduates are the ones who say that, if they could, they would spend more time connected to social networks, while students in Compulsory Secondary Education and Intermediate Vocational Training indicate that they spend more time than they would like to. For the latter, the main motivation for accessing social networks is basically to respond to the notices and notifications that reach their profiles, without showing much initiative in their consultation. University undergraduates are the ones who make the most active use of the networks, generally motivated by satisfying some interest and/or need.

Regarding the place that social networks occupy in their leisure time, the young individuals questioned do not identify the activity they carry out on them as leisure, but rather as a necessity derived from the digital socialization to which they are subjected. They are not aware of many of the activities they perform and, in the case of the youngest, they do not differentiate between digital leisure and conventional leisure. In general, they see social networks as just another extension of the activities they carry out on a daily basis in the different areas in which they move, such as academic, social or family life.

Students at lower academic levels, especially those in Compulsory Education and those in Intermediate Level Training Cycles, are the ones who most frequently carry out the activities we have suggested to find out about their interaction on the networks. Thus, while for this group of students the most common way of carrying out some of the most common actions on networks, such as sharing content among friends and acquaintances, looking at the content of aggregated profiles and consulting the content of profiles that appear in suggestions, is to do so every day or, at least, several times a week, as the level of studies increases, the frequency decreases.

Although at all academic levels the participation of young individuals is greater when it comes to consulting what others are doing than when adding some type of content to what is created and published by others, again it is the students in the lower grades who are most encouraged to share content created by themselves on networks. The majority of users share their own content several times a month, when they do so for a small group of friends, and several times a year when they share content openly.

It can be seen that there is a paradox between the perception that users at lower academic levels have of their activity on social networks and the practice they actually engage in. Despite seeming to spend more time on the networks than they would like, these students indicate that their activity on the networks consists basically of responding to alerts and notifications. However, the answers given to the rest of the questions show that their participation and interaction with the networks goes beyond that, being active users who, in addition to seeing what others are doing, also create their own content which they then share with their group of friends and in the open, being those who most prefer to share content in the open.

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