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## Facebook Use in University Students: exposure and reinforcement search

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### Abstract

Social networking sites have impacted usual ways of relating, leading to new interaction scenarios. We focus attention on Facebook, which is the most widespread social platform (3 out of four global internet users participate in it), whose potential lies in the possibility of sharing information, tastes, feelings and experiences. The main goal of this research is to assess the use of Facebook and its relationship with the following variables: (a) personality traits (introversion, extroversion) and self-esteem (self-concept, self-worth); (b) use and abuse of mobile phone. The research involved 410 college students between 18 and 40 years ( $M = 22.38$ ,  $SD = 4.53$ ). Of the total, 69.3% were women and 30.7% were men. Self-report measures were used to evaluate the variables of interest: Questionnaire of Exposure and Reinforcement through Facebook (QERF) and Scale of Smartphone Dependency and Addition (EDAS). Results showed that high-extroversion and high-self-esteem participants obtained higher scores on the degree of exposure and reward in Facebook. Moreover, those participants who present high rates of anxiety when they stop using mobile phone, and high device interference in their lives, they scored higher on the QERF. In relation to gender, different pattern of using Facebook between men and women was found. Finally, significant differences in accordance with age were found, being the younger ones who scored higher in reinforcement and exposure of their personal life through this social networking site.

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## 1. Introduction

The fast development of information and communication technologies (ICT) has changed the traditional ways of relating and identifying ourselves. Some studies refer to the supplementary communication provided by ICT (Ellison, Steinfield and Lampe, 2007), while others identify alternative personal relationships that occur exclusively via internet (Kujanth, 2011). Of all ICT platforms and tools, social networking sites have the most attractive features. In turn, Facebook has been pointed out as the highest risk platform with regard to the use which is made of it. The most agreed definition of social network site is the one proposed by Boyd & Ellison (2008), who describe them as sites that allow individual to (a) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (b) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (c) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.

According to the Interactive Advertising Bureau of Spain (2015), Facebook is the most used and known social networking site by the Spaniards (99% know what it is and what it is for). Among the services that Facebook offers, we can highlight: the possibility of searching and creating an online social networking of friends; the creation of cliques and pages; the “wall”, which allows users to share information and images with the rest of users; creating albums of videos and photos with possibility of labeling; online chat; sending virtual gifts; call for events and games section. In short, a multi-offer that turns Facebook into a varied, interesting and enjoyable platform, which -like other rewarding activities- is potentially addictive (Griffiths, 2008).

The kind of use that young people make of ICT tools deserves a special attention, because these technologies impact on the socialization process, influencing their behavior and attitudes (Levis, 2000; Jimenez-Albiar, Piqueras, Mateu-Martínez, Carballo, Orgilés & Espada, 2012). Some previous researches have shown several negative effects that may result from its use. However, there is not enough studies focus on the most popular social networking site yet. The present research aims to relate the type of use that young people and adults make of Facebook with factors such as age, sex or certain personality traits.

Previous studies on the topic have identified an addictive potential on these technologies, which can lead to negative feelings, self-esteem issues or withdrawal (Echeburúa, 2012). Other researches have explanatory models in which personality profile predisposes to an excessive use or addiction to ICT (Caplan, 2002; Jiménez-Albiar, et al., 2012). For the specific case of Facebook, studies carried out by Butt & Philips (2008) conclude that those who score high in neuroticism or emotional instability use online communication to avoid loneliness. By contrast, the research carried out by Ross, Orr, Sisic, Arseneault, & Simmering (2009) and conducted with Canadian students, does not found a statistically significant difference between some personality factors (neuroticism, extroversion, openness to experience, agreeableness, and conscientiousness), and use of Facebook. These authors suggest analyzing other elements of personality that might be involved, such as self-esteem, narcissism or shyness, among others. Along these lines, a recent analysis carried out in Peru has found certain associations between the intensity of use of Facebook and self-esteem and narcissism variables (Tarazona, 2013).

In order to complement these previous findings and to improve the knowledge in the context of Spain, this research aims to analyze the relationship between the use of Facebook and some personality traits (self-esteem and extroversion), as well as Smartphone addition, gender and age.

Hypotheses 1. We believe that personality variables produce different scores on the use of Facebook. Extroversion is characterized by tending to sociability and seeking novelties and emotions, including risk behaviors as a result of disinhibition, carelessness and impulsivity. Taking it into account, we expect that high participants in this variable gain further strengthening and gratification, leading to a higher level of exposure of private life through this platform. Regarding self-esteem and taking into account previous findings, we expect to find differences regarding the use of the platform, being high self-esteem participants those who get a greater reinforcement and reward.

Hypotheses 2. Participants with a high score in addictive behaviors will get a significantly higher mean in reinforcement and exposure compared to low score ones.

Hypotheses 3. Gender differences regarding the use of Facebook will be found.

Hypothesis 4. The mean scores on reinforcement and exposure to Facebook will be significantly different depending on age. The youngest ones will gain greater gratification and exposure of their private lives through the social network site.

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