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ANALYSING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORK AMONG PREADOLESCENTS

ANALISI DEL RAPPORTO TRA INTELLIGENZA EMOTIVA E UTILIZZO DEI SOCIAL NETWORK TRA I PREADOLESCENTI

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ABSTRACT

Emotional intelligence is a skill built through social interactions; over the last few years, the massive use of social networks has changed the methods of interaction and communication of today's young. The study aimed to understand the use of social media, emotional intelligence, and the relationship between these variables in a sample of 236 early adolescent. Preliminary analyzes show a negative correlation between the amount of social media use, social addiction, and emotional intelligence.

L'intelligenza emotiva è un'abilità costruita attraverso le interazioni sociali; negli ultimi anni l'uso dei social network ha cambiato le modalità di interazione e comunicazione dei giovani. Lo studio mira a comprendere l'uso dei social media, l'intelligenza emotiva e la relazione tra queste variabili in un campione di 236 preadolescenti. Le analisi preliminari mostrano una relazione negativa tra la quantità di utilizzo dei social media, la dipendenza dai social media e l'intelligenza emotiva.

KEYWORDS

Social media; social network; emotional intelligence; early adolescence;

Social media; social network; intelligence emotiva; preadolescenza;

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1. Introduction

With the rise of the smartphone, applications (apps) on mobile phones have become the more dominant usage especially social media apps (Chen & Li, 2017). Social media is considered as an umbrella term that includes various online platforms, including popular social networking sites. These online platforms facilitate the establishment of interpersonal relationships among users by allowing them by creating personal profiles and sharing content such as text, images and videos. The use of devices such as smartphones, tablets and PCs and the Internet is increasing also during adolescence and pre-adolescence, in fact, ISTAT surveys have shown an increase in daily Internet access by adolescents (11-17 years) from 56% in 2014 to 72% in 2018 (ISTAT, 2019). Furthermore, despite the age restrictions set by the different providers and platforms, young people are using social media starting from an ever earlier age, in particular, the age of first accessing a social media has reduced to 12 -13 years (Bozzola et al., 2019).

Pre-adolescence is characterized by biological, cognitive and social transition and today's young people, simultaneously, become part of social platforms and complex digital environments (Bell, 2016) . These technologies can play a significant role in adolescent development, as they offer young people the opportunity to meet and make new friends, interact with different peer groups, explore identity (Best et al., 2014).

On the one hand, social media can offer a wide range of opportunities to foster the sharing of emotional experiences, knowledge of a variety of social environments, influences, values and wider cultural trend. Among early adolescents, Antheunis and colleagues found that social media use had a positive association with friendship quality and social capital (Antheunis et al., 2016). On the other hand, abuse of social media can lead to negative effects such as social isolation, insecurity, addiction and difficulty in emotion regulation (Nesi et al., 2018; Quaglieri et al., 2021; Song et al., 2014; Zhao, 2021). The amount of time young people spend on these platforms raises concerns about the impact of these activities on different aspects of their lives; their emotional wellbeing, their body image, their levels of physical activity and their ability to interact with others in real life. Emotional intelligence could play a key role in helping adolescents use social media. Emotional intelligence is defined by Salovey and Mayer as: "the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, to discriminate between them, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions" (Salovey & Mayer, 1990).

While there is a large body of empirical research on the use of social networking sites among students and older adolescents, there appears to be less research on early adolescents. Therefore, this study will attempt to investigate these issues in the pre-adolescent age group. The following research questions will be addressed: How much time do preteens spend on social networking activities? What are the main social networking platforms they use? What is the relationship between the level of emotional intelligence, the amount of time spent on social networks and problematic use of social networks?

2. Methods

236 pre-adolescents (48% female, 50% male, 2% non-binary) within the age of 10 to 15 (Mean= 12 years \pm .96SD) from lower secondary schools were included in this study. An anonymous questionnaire was administered to investigate the time spent daily, the level of social media addiction and the level of emotional intelligence. In order to calculate the amount of time spent daily on social networks, respondents were asked to indicate the daily amount of time spent online on each social network used (15–30 minute; 30-60 minute; 1 to 2 hours; 2 to 4 hours; more than 4 hours). The Bergen Social Media Addiction Scale (BSMAS) contains six items reflecting core addiction elements and each item is answered on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from very rarely to very often (e.g., I use social media to forget my personal problems). The scores of each item are added to get the overall score of the BSMAS. The total score of BSMAS ranges from 6-30 (Andreassen et al., 2016). Higher scores are associated with a higher risk of social media addiction. The alpha reliability coefficient was 0.775. The short form of the "Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire – Child" (TEIQue-CSF, Mavroveli et al., 2008) was used to assess emotional intelligence. This instrument is formed by 36 short statements answered on 5-point Likert scale, ranging from completely disagree to completely agree (e.g., I'm very good at understanding how other people feel). In our sample, the alpha reliability coefficient was 0.812.

3. Results

Descriptive statistics of the percentage of use of the main social media and the average time of use for each social are shown in table 1. The most used social networks in descending order are WhatsApp, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram and Snapchat. The average usage time for each social network varies between about one hour and two hours a day. Means, standard deviations and correlational analysis between emotional intelligence (TEI), amount of time spent online (TO) and addiction to social media (BSMAS) are presented in Table 2. Emotional

intelligence showed negative association with time spent online and with the addiction to social media use. Moreover, daily time spent online, and social media addiction were positively correlated.

	% of use	% (F)	% (M)	% (NB)	Mean (time)	SD	Mean (F)	Mean (M)	Mean (NB)
Instagram	66	45	52	3	2.1	1.2	2.1	2.1	2.5
Snapchat	36	53	45	1	1.6	0.9	1.6	1.6	3
TikTok	70	45	52	3	3.3	1.2	3.3	3.3	4.2
WhatsApp	94	59	50	1	2.6	2.6	2.7	2.6	3.7
YouTube	83	44	53	3	2.8	1.3	2.8	3.1	2.8

Table 1 (Descriptive statistics of time spent on social media and percentage of use; (Legend: (1) 15–30 min a day; (2) 30-60 mins a day; (3) from 1h to 2h a day; (4) From 2h to 4h a day; (5) More than 4 hours a day.)

	Mean	SD	Min	Max	1	2	3
1 TEI	3.30	.46	2.17	4.69	-	-	-
2 TO	13.29	8.02	1	43	-0.158*	-	-
3 BSMAS	12.52	5.14	6	28	-.251**	.439	-

Table 2 (Descriptive statistics of TEI, TO and BSMAS and correlational analysis). * <0.05 , ** <0.01

4. Discussion

The results of this study confirm a massive use of social media by adolescents, in fact, almost all (98%) have a device of their own to access to Internet and use instant messaging apps (97%). It should be noted that the group of nonusers of social media, in the total sample, was relatively small (20%). Similarly, 80% are members of social networks in the 10-13 age group, although, in Italy, the minimum age for accessing social networks, established by law is 14 years. The preliminary analyses of this research confirm the growing trend of time spent on social networks and have also highlight some characteristics of the use of the main social media. TikTok, for example, is used by 70% of our sample. On average, it is used between one and two hours per day. Instagram and WhatsApp are used by 65% and 94% respectively with an average usage time that varies between varies between thirty minutes and an hour a day. Moreover, the total time spent is even higher than six hours per day if we add up the daily average for each social network we use. No particular gender differences emerged, some are slightly more used by boys (Instagram, TikTok, YouTube) and others by girls (Snapchat and WhatsApp).

Even the time of use seems to be homogeneous, except for non-binaries who have a higher average time of use, however, in this sample they are very few.

Another aspect investigated by this study is the relationship between emotional intelligence, the daily time spent online and the problematic use of social networks. These findings suggest that preadolescents with higher levels of emotional intelligence tend to spend less time online and are less likely to become addicted to social media, instead, preadolescents with lower ability to understand and manage their emotions may be more susceptible to more time-consuming social media use and problematic use that can lead to addiction development. These findings are consistent with previous research, for example, the study, by Arrivallaga and colleagues, also indicates a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and problematic internet use, particularly among girls (Arrivallaga et al., 2022).

Anyway, there is a paucity of studies investigating these aspects in the preadolescent period, despite the relevance of this period in the development of individuals. In this phase, young people are called to face numerous changes, cognitive, physical and social, which can be influenced by digital tools.

The cross-sectional nature of the study does not allow establishing a causal relationship between the variables, perhaps, emotional intelligence could influence the ability to use social media in a balanced and conscious use of social media requires an understanding of one's emotions, needs and limitations and the ability to regulate one's emotions. Therefore, it seems appropriate to collect and process further qualitative and quantitative data. This will allow for the future promotion of preventive measures regarding the possible risks associated with the use of these technologies.

5. Conclusions

The rapid and pervasive development of new technological tools and of new social media involves everyone's daily life and today's early adolescent grows up in an environmental context strongly characterized by the presence of mobile devices and social platforms which they use as a personal extension. The purpose of this study is not to raise alarmism regarding social media, how new generations use it or how much time is spent on it, since these platforms, and digital in general, are part of the present and future. Understanding how young people use them and making them aware of how to use them responsibly, could help to promote a safe use of these technologies, considering social media as a means to communicate, without forgetting the real world and the role they play in it. A promotion of emotional and digital skills should probably go hand in hand. Emotional skills are

essential for a correct understanding of the messages conveyed on social media and for the management of the resulting emotions. Also necessary is a promotion of digital skills, they should be taught how to use privacy settings, how to deal with inappropriate content. It is important that they learn to manage time on social networks and to balance their use with other activities, for example, physical activities and sports.

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