REDES SOCIALES Y LA ADICCIÓN AL *LIKE* DE LA GENERACIÓN Z

Social Media and the Like Addiction of Generation Z

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Resumen

Psicólogos y expertos del mundo de la tecnología vienen advirtiendo, desde hace tiempo, que el uso frecuente y continuado de las redes sociales puede resultar en una adicción, lo que, a su vez, podría derivar en ansiedad, dependencia emocional, pérdida de motivación, falta de autocontrol e irritabilidad. Un estudio realizado por la Chicago *Booth School of Business* (2012) señalaba que las redes sociales tienen una capacidad de adicción mayor incluso que la del tabaco porque, entre otros motivos, acceder a estas plataformas resulta sencillo y, además, gratuito. Con el presente estudio, planteamos como objetivo principal analizar la importancia e impacto que supone el *like* en la generación Z, así como estudiar el contexto social de las redes sociales e investigar si el *like* afecta a esta generación y de qué manera. Para la elaboración de esta investigación se ha realizado, por un lado, una revisión bibliográfica sobre las redes sociales y el uso que los jóvenes hacen de ellas, identificando cuáles son sus

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favoritas, cuánto tiempo le dedican y las implicaciones que estas tienen sobre el cerebro humano. Por otro lado, se ha realizado un estudio de campo que se ha llevado a cabo en España a una muestra de 500 jóvenes de 18 a 26 años (los correspondientes a la generación Z), con el objetivo de conocer el uso que hacen de las redes sociales y analizar el impacto que tienen los *likes* sobre ellos. Entre las conclusiones principales destacamos un uso de redes sociales de más de tres horas diarias, siendo Instagram y WhatsApp las redes favoritas por esta generación. Si bien algunos miembros de este grupo social afirman sentirse inseguros, enfadados e incluso tristes si no reciben la respuesta esperada (traducida en *likes* o comentarios pospublicación) no modifican ni adaptan el tipo de contenido que comparten públicamente en base al número de *likes* que puedan conseguir. Finalmente, a pesar de que dicen no darle demasiada importancia a la retroalimentación recibida, suelen activar sus notificaciones en las redes sociales para estar a la última de posibles interacciones.

Palabras clave: comunicación, redes sociales, adicción, generación Z, internet.

Abstract

Psychologists and technology experts from all over the world have long warned that the frequent and continuous use of social networks can result in addiction, which, in turn, can lead to anxiety, emotional dependence, loss of motivation, lack of self-control and irritability. A study carried out by the Chicago Booth School of Business (2012) pointed out that social networks have a greater addiction capacity even than tobacco because, among other reasons, accessing these platforms is simple and, moreover, free. With the present study, we propose to analyze the importance and impact of 'likes' on generation Z, as well as to study the social context of social networks; we aim to investigate if these 'likes' affect generation Z and in what way. A bibliographic review on social networks and the use that young people make of them has been carried out, identifying which are their favorites, how much time they dedicate to them, what activities they carry out and how that affects the human brain. Also, a field study has been carried out in Spain with a sample of 500 young people between the ages of 18 and 26 (those corresponding to generation Z), with the aim of understanding the use they make of social networks and analyze the impact that 'likes' have on them. Among the main conclusions of this research, we found out that gen Z uses social networks for more than three hours a day, with Instagram and WhatsApp being their favorite networks. Although some members of this social group claim to feel insecure, angry and even sad if they do not receive the expected response (translated into 'likes' or post-publication comments) they do not modify or adapt the type of content they share publicly based on the number of likes they can get. Finally, despite the fact that they say they do not give too much importance to the feedback received, they usually activate their notifications on social networks to be up to date with possible interactions.

Keywords: communication, social media, addiction, gen zers, internet.

1. INTRODUCTION

Addictions are characterised by the dominance of a person's will over a dependence on a substance, relationship or activity. According to the World Health Organisation (WHO), addiction is considered a brain disease, just like other recognised neurological or psychiatric disorders. It is a disease that affects neurotransmission and interactions within the structure of our brain.

Like other chronic diseases, addiction develops, sometimes with relapses. Without appropriate treatment, the disease is progressive and can lead to irreversible disability and/or premature death. It is a neurological disease and needs to be treated by professionals. Addicted patients are recoverable patients and, with the right treatment, can be completely rehabilitated (Fundación hay salida, 2020).

Addictions can lead to serious problems for both our physical and mental health. It is important to detect them at an early stage in order to achieve an effective diagnosis and treatment. Likewise, the collaboration of friends and family is very important, both in the detection and in the treatment and subsequent follow-up. This dependence can cause harm to other people as well, those around us, as we can cause them to suffer from anxiety or stress due to worry, without realising what we are causing. This illness can arise for many reasons, one of them being the continued use of social networks (Top Doctors, 2020).

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objective of this research is to analyse the importance and impact that like has on generation Z. In order to achieve this, the following specific objectives are proposed:
1. To study the social context of social networks.
2. To investigate whether and how liking affects generation Z.

3. METHODOLOGY

In order to conduct the research in an appropriate manner and achieve the objectives set, on the one hand, a documentary research has been carried out, making use of primary and secondary sources, analysing and consulting different websites, textbooks, scientific journals, repositories and doctoral theses. On the other hand, quantitative research was carried out using the survey as the main tool. For this purpose, a closed questionnaire was developed, with 33 questions, the result of a combination of dichotomous, polytomous and multiple-choice questions, as well as open and semi-open questions. With this questionnaire, an online survey was conducted between November 2020 and February 2021, reaching a sample of 500 participants, aged 18-26 years, recruited mainly through email, WhatsApp and social media advertisements.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1. Use of social networks

When smartphone use has a negative impact on the development of daily social, work, student or family life, it can be defined as "problematic mobile phone use" (the consequences of which can be: loss of time, alterations in behaviour, sleep rhythms, lack of control, isolation, poor performance, etc.) (Cuesta et al., 2020).

Young people today have a dependence on social networks and the opinions of others that can be detrimental, trying to show only the good side of things instead of showing themselves as they are. The entertainment products that young people demand are characterised by features that configure new forms of communication with which they feel more identified, such as constant action, immediacy, the possibility of doing two things at the same time together with portability, participation and the great importance of image (Bernal, 2010).

Another characteristic of the new generations is the need for acceptance through social networks; members of generation Z broadcast their lives in order to attract attention, camouflage the image with filters and show small parts of their lives. A priori, these actions seem to be a symbol of transparency and accessibility, when, in fact, the opposite is true: it releases dopamine in the human brain, which, as with other addictions, is responsible for our feeling of pleasure or satisfaction. As with everything else, when used well, the tool becomes fantastic; when used to excess, the problems begin (Colombo, 2020).

It has been proven that social networking processes increase the production of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that is produced in states of pleasure and opens cognitive channels, which also explains addictions to technology and emotional dependence on social networks (Rodríguez, 2017).

Not obtaining the social repercussions they expect is a failure for them, an emotional frustration that sometimes has serious consequences, which is why there are studies that show the need to control emotions (Barrientos-Báez et al., 2020). On Instagram alone, there are more than 4 billion likes per day. The need to be connected or to constantly look at likes can become a well of vulnerability from which it will be very difficult to escape because it never satisfies the person, on the contrary: they always want more (Catalán, 2020).

In short, new technologies and social networks are creating a psychological and emotional dependence that experts, doctors and psychologists are already warning us about, although not everything is negative in this use of new technologies, as these addictions can be detected and, above all, combated through their use (Sancho-Escrivá et al., 2020).

The digital is present, but without proper guidance, one can experience psychological problems such as addiction to likes, living in a fantasy world in which one thinks that one can be perfect, with a body according to certain standards, optimal economic conditions, pretending to be something that one is not and being accepted by others, as well as having multiple personalities or even developing digital skills that are not achieved in people's lives, all in an attempt to fit in. This brings added ease of aggression or digital bullying*.
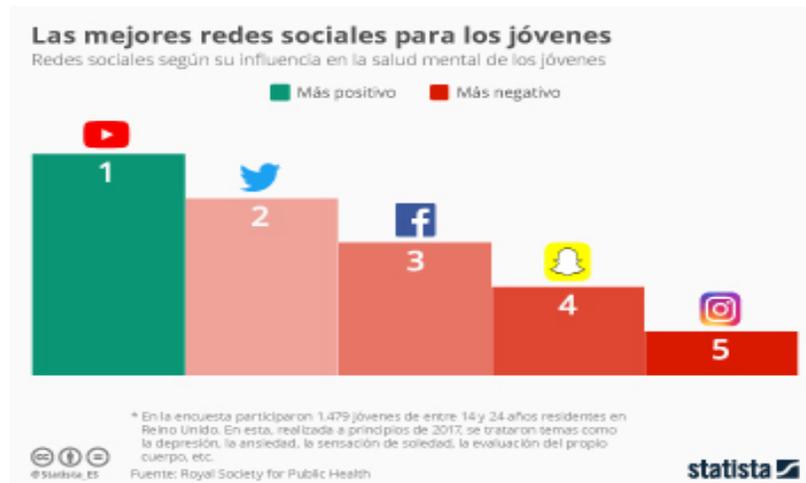
Figure 1. Top social networks for young people
Source: *Statista, 2020*

Dependence on social networks is aggravated by the permanent use of these tools; it is estimated that we look at our mobile phones at least 150 times a day, in a permanent interconnection between the real and the fictitious. In this image, in figure 1, we can see how the use of social networks can have a positive or negative influence, depending on the platform in question.

Thanks to social networks we can entertain ourselves, interact, they make us feel connected, they facilitate even easier communication with people we know, or even with strangers. According to Antoni Gutiérrez-Rubí:

> *Millennials consider themselves more independent and critical due to the "autonomy" that the internet provides them, the possibilities of accessing sources of information with different points of view and the opportunities for participation and debate that spaces such as forums or social networks offer them (Lago et al., 2016).*

Currently, if we exclude the multi-purpose WhatsApp as a social network, the most widely used are: Instagram, with 68% of users, YouTube, with almost 80% of users and Facebook, with an average of 70% (IAB, 2020). Some of these social networks, such as

Instagram, allow the option of uploading photos and videos with different effects such as filters, retro colours, frames, etc., which makes them very intuitive and easy to use applications.

   Facebook is positioned as the best known social network in the world, the main one, the one with the most users, as it is close to 2 billion active users at the moment. However, the use of social networks such as Facebook presents broader possibilities that do not escape the world of marketing, sustainability (Cervantes-Sintas, 2020; León León et al., 2018), group loyalty and a wide range of other areas, such as humanitarian communication and health (Arroyo-Almaraz et al., 2018) and even to spread hoaxes about it (Piqueiras Conlledo et al., 2020). The aim of this is to share and produce content with family and/or friends, even strangers. It can also be used to expand or expand a business, i.e. to make oneself known and then move forward and see how far one can reach. This social network is also very good for locating events or looking for contacts (Gonçalves, 2016).
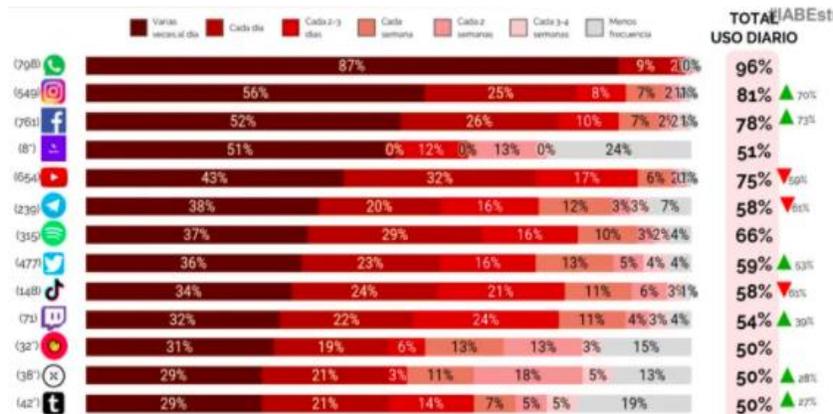

Figure 2. Frequency of use of social networking sites
Source: *IAB, 2020*

Figure 3. *Intensity of social media use*
Fuente: *IAB, 2020*

According to Claudia Martínez, the frequency and hours per day of social media use has increased significantly due to the global pandemic, which can be seen in the IAB report if we compare 2019 and 2020 having increased on average by 55 minutes. Topping the list, we find WhatsApp, whose role in maintaining health in certain niches is beginning to be studied (Barrientos-Báez et al., 2017), the study includes it as a social network rather than as a messaging or instant call service, followed by Twitch, Youtube, Spotify, House Party or Tiktok, as we can see in figures 2 and 3, which contrasts with the data from the previous year in which social networks such as Spotify, House Party or Tiktok were practically non-existent in terms of percentage of use (Martínez, 2020).

4.2. Social media profile

According to the IAB study (2020), at present, almost 90% of the Spanish population uses social networks and the age range is between 16 and 65 years old; although due to the pandemic this percentage has increased in the last year. On the other hand, the user profile is very similar between both sexes (men 49% and women 51%).

1. Use, preferences and rating: The networks that lead the ranking of use are: WhatsApp (85%) which continues to position itself as the favourite network, Facebook (81%) used by an older target, and Youtube (70%) and Instagram (59%) used largely by women and the youngest. In fifth place is Twitter, which is mostly used by men. However, the network that has experienced the greatest growth compared to the previous ones is TikTok, which has gone from 3% to 16% in one year. The youngest target group (16-24) are the users who use the largest number of networks. In terms of rating, the best rated applications are: WhatsApp and Youtube (8.4) as well as Spotify (8.2).
2. Frequency of use: WhatsApp continues to lead among users with 96% using the application on a daily basis, followed by Instagram with 81% and Facebook with 78%. In terms of time, users typically spend on average 1 hour and 43 minutes on WhatsApp, 1 hour and 39 minutes on YouTube, 1 hour and 38 minutes on Spotify and finally 1 hour and 34 minutes on House Party. Facebook has decreased its frequency of use over the last year. In total, users spend 1 hour and 19 minutes a day, with men under the age of 40 making the most intensive use of social networks.
3. RSS (Really Simple Syndication) activities and access: A study states that 65% of users prefer stable content compared to fleeting content, i.e. consumers have moved from snack content to more lasting and permanent content. The most used devices are: the mobile phone (97% prefer this device over any other) and the computer, which is more widely used with 93%.
4. Relationship with brands: Undoubtedly, social networks have boosted the increase in sales, since, thanks to these platforms, the consumer is more up-to-date with the latest trends, as well as creating a closer relationship between customer-company. In addition, social media is a much cheaper form of

advertising compared to TV, radio, etc. The banner or graphic format is the preferred advertising format (53%).

5. Generation Z vs Millennials: Generation Z uses social networks more frequently with an average of 5.4 accounts. These users prefer to use networks such as Instagram, followed by WhatsApp and Youtube. On the other hand, millennials add Facebook to their most used networks (IAB, 2020). In addition, according to María Gabriela Palazzo, Generation Z users are more anxious, curious and expect faster and faster answers in all areas, they research everything on the Internet and are not at all surprised by the expansion of networks (Palazzo, 2014).

4.3. Implications of social networks on the brain

The use and regular use of social networks has effects on our brain as they exposed in the meeting 'Networks III', organised by the biomedical company Pfizer on 19 April 2016.

From a biological point of view, it has been shown that social networks cause changes in neurotransmitters such as oxytocin, adrenaline, dopamine, serotonin, testosterone and cortisol. This activates the reward centres and increases the feeling of happiness. These are the main reasons why, when we see products on social media, they are perceived as better than they really are. Serotonin, on the other hand, makes us modify our social behaviour when it comes to prioritising individualism over the social group. Testosterone, on the other hand, could be associated with the ability to relate and make new friends and, finally, cortisol would have an impact on loyalty to friendships.

Several neurological experts point to the influence of social networks on issues such as decreased ability to concentrate or loss of attention.

Some positive effects, on the other hand, would be the new learning methods created by the neural connections that have adapted to the use of these social networks, which confirms the plasticity of the human brain. But on the other hand, there are important negative effects, such as the possibility of causing dependence, given that part of the brain processing of social networks takes place in circuits related to rewards, and their uncontrolled use could be associated with some psychiatric disorders such as addictions (Bermejo, 2016).

On the effects of social networks on the brain, Dr Pedro Bermejo, neurologist and president of the Spanish Association of Neuroeconomics, explains:

They have already been tested on digital natives and it is known that they learn in a slightly different way than non-digital natives. On the one hand, digital natives are able to multitask with better results and, on the other hand, they are quicker to search for information to answer specific questions (Bermejo, 2016).

And he adds: "it has been found that they have greater difficulty in discerning between reliable and unreliable sources of information, giving more importance to the

information they get from their friends and acquaintances, and less importance to official and more reliable websites" (Bermejo, 2016).

During this meeting, topics such as how the use of smartphone touch screens changes the way thumbs and brains work together and how internet use can reactivate the adult brain have also been addressed. The expert committee highlighted the problems of excessive use of social media, as certain inflammatory or auditory diseases have been linked (Bermejo, 2016).

Continuous connectivity and social networks lead the user to make impulsive and compulsive use of the device, a consumption habit that becomes a threat to concentration and self-control of internet and network use (Franco and Barrio, 2015).

4.4. The influence of the like

One of the big problems that social networks are generating is that young people are so immersed in these platforms that they do not see beyond what they offer them.

Nowadays, young people depend on the number of likes their posts can get. Moreover, they are so focused on showing their lives through a camera so that their followers can see what they are doing at any given moment, that they do not enjoy their own reality, or what they are experiencing at the time.

Increasingly, social networks tend to be used as a showcase for the positive things in users' lives, which is why these platforms show a distorted reality, since life does not consist of a straight line, but has its ups and downs, and that is partly the beauty of life.

As noted above, it is young people who are most affected, but in reality it also affects adults, only the consequences for the former are more severe. This is because adolescents are in a period where, in addition to fully defining their identity, they have lower self-esteem than adults. Therefore, criticism, comments and not having as many likes as expected can affect them more (Quintanilla, 2020).

The most important thing in order not to let users' lives depend on likes is to prioritise the use of common sense. Make them do and publish what they like and not feel obliged to do something because of the repercussion (the number of likes). Also, make them see that, if they do what they like, it doesn't matter whether others like it or not.

One of the reasons why today's society wants to have so many likes is mainly because, nowadays, what matters most is the image that people give to others and the responses they receive from others, i.e. nowadays they depend on the responses that come from the outside. The fact that users depend on the number of likes they receive shows us that they start from a low self-esteem. This means that the number of likes influences them when it comes to valuing themselves and allowing themselves to be influenced by others (Quintanilla, 2020).

According to a study by María José Establés, on social networks it is common to use attention economy tactics such as relying on a WhatsApp group to gain popularity. Thus, friends share the post on their respective networks, asking their followers to become followers of the friend's account, to comment or like the post. The importance of likes and comments is what leads to the use of a self-branding strategy such as directly addressing the followers themselves to promote participation in their account. In addition, it is highlighted how young people conceive their identity on social networks, mainly on Instagram, as an extension of their offline identity (Establés et al., 2019).

> There are fewer and fewer limitations to be able to mix different expressive substances (sounds, lyrics, images...) that can make up a narrative or a discourse constructed as a platform for participation, conversation and interaction. We find ourselves in the remix culture, a culture that, supported by technological development, is presented as a social revolution that seeks an architecture of collaboration and complicity between individuals (Cuesta and Menéndez, 2009).

For Arturo Pilco Mindiola, also a clinical psychologist, it is very easy to depend on positive feedback and that happiness has to do with it. It is an addiction that is difficult to overcome. "Your mobile device is a means of communication, but you are actually being held hostage," he says. That's why she mentions that the first step in learning to escape is to understand that the constant need for them (the likes) is often a symptom of low self-esteem. "If you can learn to increase your self-esteem, you can break the mental and emotional chains that bind you. Of course, having good self-esteem is no easy task, but it's not impossible either. You have to work hard and practice the most effective tips and techniques," she advises. It is important to note that not everyone has equal control over this dependency and the use of social networks does not affect everyone equally (Mindola, 2019).

Instagram experimented, for a few weeks, with a version of the social network in which likes would not appear, i.e. would not be visible to followers. Depending on the results of these tests, it will soon be decided whether to implement the changes as the definitive version of the application. The aim is for users to interact with content in a more genuine way, not guided by the precedent set by those who have seen it before them. It also aims to achieve more complex interactions that encourage communication beyond the mechanical repetitiveness of double tap, scroll, double tap. Facebook, on the other hand, shows no signs of wanting to move in this direction; on the contrary, it seems to favour "reactions".
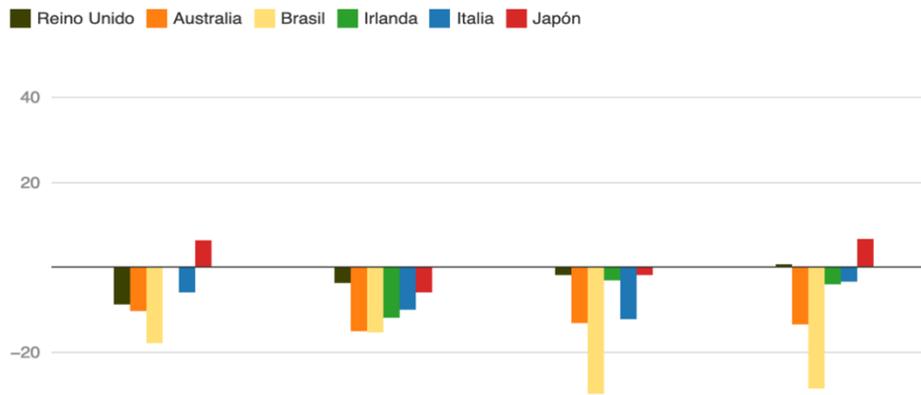
Figure 4. *How likes fall if the like is hidden.*
Source: *El Confidencial*

As we can see in figure 4, other countries (apart from Spain) have tried to hide the like in their social networks. We can think that there are people who give likes as a matter of approval, of feeling part of a community and fitting in with a group, rather than showing themselves as they are. This has been demonstrated by a study carried out by Hype Auditor. The company analysed the accounts of 154,000 famous Instagrammers who met two conditions: one, that they were paid to advertise brands; and two, that at least 30% of their followers came from one of the countries where Instagram had hidden the number of likes: Australia, Brazil, Ireland, Italy and Japan.

This study was divided into four levels, depending on the number of followers: between 1,000 and 5,000, between 5,000 and 20,000, between 20,000 and 100,000 and between 100,000 and one million. In almost all cases, the result was a dramatic drop. Particularly striking is Brazil, where the likes of influencers with an average of between 20,000 and 100,000 followers fell by 29.63% and those with between 100,000 and one million followers by 28.33%. There is only one curious exception: that of Japan, which timidly increased its likes in two of the four groups. Otherwise, a general failure (Otto, 2019).

According to Elliot Benjamin, a philosopher in the fields of humanistic and transpersonal psychology, in the last four years, people seem to have become increasingly addicted to social networks. The need to see and be with people has moved from the foreground to isolating ourselves and interacting through electronic devices and social networks (Benjamin, 2020).

Network addiction is a variety of psychological addiction that affects our behaviour. It is like an impulse that we cannot control. There is a higher percentage of users who become addicted and engage in excessive or compulsive use of social media. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat or TikTok produce the same neural circuits that cause gambling and even drugs to keep consumers (users) using them. Studies have

shown that the constant stream of retweets, likes and shares on these sites have affected the reward area of the brain to trigger the same type of chemical reaction as other drugs (Huaytalla, 2016).

One of the main drivers of social media addiction is FOMO (fear of missing out), which drives us to do things even when we don't want to do them. It is the same as when the phone rings, you experience more fear of missing something, in case you don't pick it up (Varchetta, 2020).

Social networks increase our self-esteem. Having our own online space means that we have absolute freedom to post about any topic or about ourselves. It's your own profile and it's your own rules, you are not bound by anything. We see all the highlights of people's lives and all the fun things they are doing, we never see the other side "behind the scenes". That happens because people want to look good in front of others and social media presents you with that opportunity to have a perfect life (Huaytalla, 2016). This use of networks presents in our case a more practical reading in terms of health communication, both in screening and in guidelines (Cofré-Soto, 2020).

5. FIELD STUDY

5.1. Design

For the design of this research, which has the general objective of analysing the impact of like on young people from generation Z, as well as finding out how it can harm them mentally and physically, the following independent variables were used:
- Age (3 levels): 18-20 years, 21-23 years and 24-26 years.
- Presence in social networks (2 levels): yes, no.

On the other hand, the dependent variables were:
- Social networks: platform preference, number of active profiles, notifications.
- Usage pattern: passive/active, frequency of use, type of activity.
- Feedback: engagement, use of like and post-post comments.

5.2. Procedure

The study was conducted in two phases. First, a synchronous opinion survey was created on a particular phenomenon: the addiction to like in generation Z social network users. A closed questionnaire was constructed, with 33 questions, resulting from a combination of dichotomous, polytomous and multiple-choice questions, as well as open and semi-open questions. Using this questionnaire, an online survey was conducted between November 2020 and February 2021. We achieved a sample of 500 participants, aged 18-26, recruited primarily through email, WhatsApp and social media advertisements.

The second phase of the study consisted of data coding, organisation and analysis, which are presented below.

5.3. Results

As described in the previous sections, the aim of the survey carried out in this research was to determine the possible addiction to liking that Generation Z might have to social networks. Other variables measured in the survey were: the social networks most used by this social group, the time spent online, the content published, the active and passive use of liking (liking or receiving a like) as well as the activation of notifications on social networks, among others.

Generation Z is made up of young people currently aged between 11 and 27 years old. Of the sample obtained for this study (500 people) more than half (59%) are between 18 and 20 years old.

One of the issues studied was the presence on social networks and the total consumption of these networks. For this, questions were asked such as: Which social networks do you think you spend the most time on? How much time a day do you think you spend on social networks? Now look at the amount of time you spend on Social Networks on your phone. How much time do you actually spend on Social Networks?
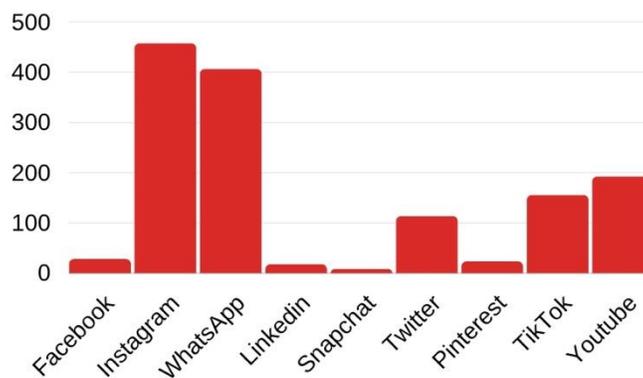

Figure 5. *Generation Z's preference for social networks*
Source. *Own elaboration (2021)*

A very high number of respondents (457 out of 500) consider Instagram to be the social platform they spend the most time on, followed by WhatsApp (406 respondents) and YouTube (192) as the third option, with Tiktok in fourth position with 155 respondents in favour. On the other hand, the social networks to which they say they dedicate less time and attention are: Snapchat (8), Linkedin (17), Pinterest (23) and Facebook (28). This data also coincides with the IAB's Annual Social Media Study (2020), which concludes that, although Facebook is the most popular platform, it is not the most used among the social media-using public. Instagram, on the other hand,

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continues to gain relevance and number of followers "especially among women and younger people" (Illa, 2020).

In terms of time spent on social networks, respondents were first asked how much time on average they "believed" they spent on social networks. Forty per cent said they use these platforms for more than three hours a day, 35% for between two and three hours, 22% for between one and two hours and 3% for less than one hour a day. This data coincides, with a margin of error between 2% and 3%, with the response that respondents gave us when we asked them to corroborate this data on their phones, checking the average social media usage time that their mobile device had calculated over the course of the week. The initial 40% who claimed to spend more than 3 hours a day on social media was joined by a further 2% (42%) and those respondents who claimed to spend less than an hour on these platforms (3%), when checking their mobile device, this number increased by a further 2% (5% total); however, those who believed they spent between 2 and 3 hours on social media decreased by 1% (34%) and those who claimed to spend between 1 and 2 hours a day dropped by 3% (from 22% to 19%). This means that, in general, Generation Z is aware of the time they spend on these platforms, although in some cases they may consider that they spend more or less time on them.

Another interesting fact: of all the time they spend on social networks, 37% of respondents estimate that they spend, on average, between 10 and 20 minutes (in a row) on each social network, while 27% think they spend between 20 minutes and half an hour on each social network. Some 14% say they spend between half an hour and 40 minutes on the same application in one sitting, while 16% say they spend no more than 10 minutes on social networks continuously.
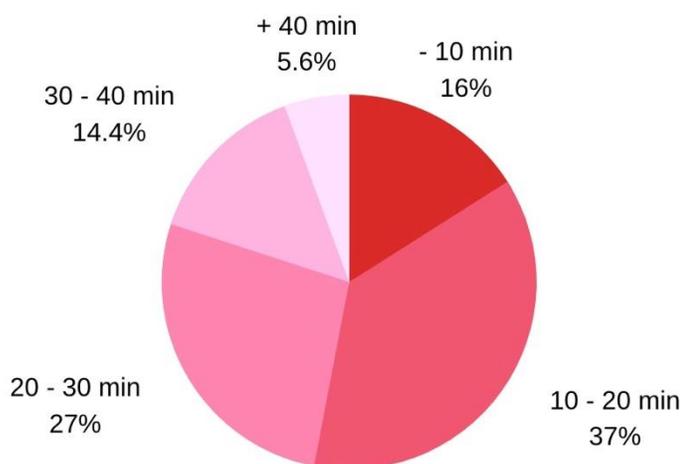

Figure 6. *Time spent on Social Media by generation Z*
Source. *Own elaboration (2021)*

69% of respondents say they look and are curious about who has liked their post, but 28% say they don't care too much. This data is backed up when compared to the

answer to the following question: "Do you have notifications on your phone to alert you every time you receive an interaction on social media? 62% of the sample say they "usually" have notifications active, although it sometimes depends on the social network, 16% think they always need these notifications and 21% say they do not activate them, as post-post feedback "can wait".

When asked how often they connect to social networks based on the number of likes received per post, "how often do you check if you have been liked on your photos, videos, files...?" 163 respondents said they check the likes update sporadically and 129 even said they "almost never" reconnect to check the number of likes on a post, 50 said they do it every time they open the app, motivated by the possible like and only 19 said they check the networks "constantly" in search of those "likes". This question is relevant when determining like addiction, the subject of this study, although there is no dominant answer among the group interviewed, the highest percentage of respondents (32.6%) consider that the like is not enough motivation to connect to social networks, on the contrary, 10% do confess that the "likes" are the reason to check this type of platforms.
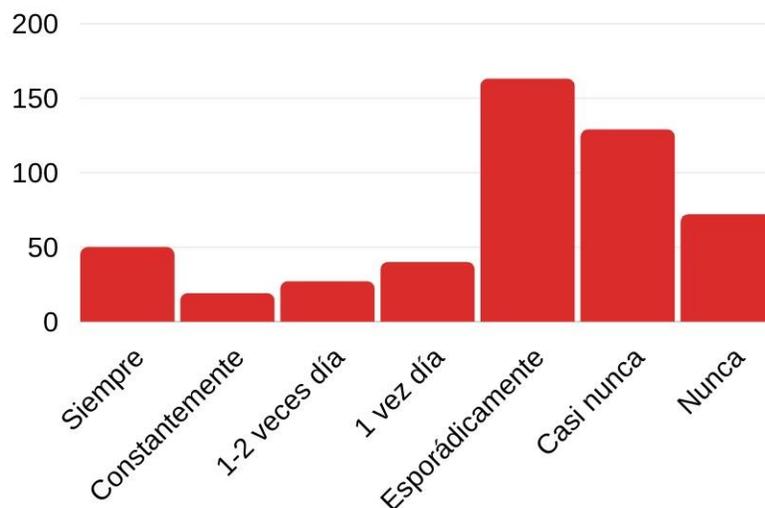
Figure 7. *Checking likes on social networks*
Source. *Own elaboration (2021)*

At this point, we thought it was worth finding out how Generation Z feels affected by the feedback on their posts, i.e. how they feel about posting content online and how they are affected by their followers' reactions or comments. When asked "how do you feel if they don't like a photo you have posted?" 73% of respondents (365 out of 500) said they were not affected, in fact they "didn't care a bit", 13.2% of them said they felt insecure and 11.8% felt weirded out; a minority, 2.2%, felt sad. Only 1% of respondents said they felt overwhelmed and angry. Despite the negative feelings this may generate, 70% of respondents said they would not delete a post even if they had received negative or unpleasant comments and 90% said they would not delete a post if it did not receive the expected "likes".

69
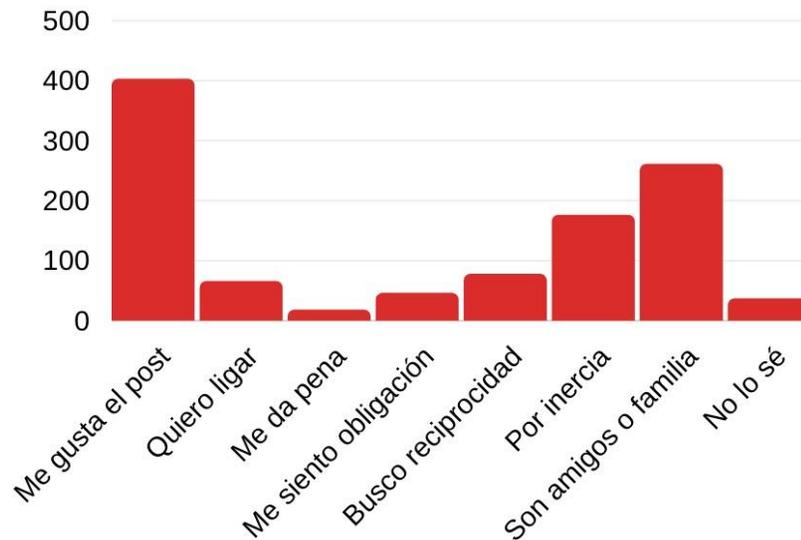
Figure 8. *Reasons for liking posts*
Source. *Own elaboration (2021)*

When respondents were asked if they ever varied the content they posted based on the likes they could potentially receive, the answer was virtually the same: 80% of them denied making posts strategically intended to increase their likes.

Finally, of the total number of respondents, only 1% say they like posts even if they do not like the content and 36% say they do so "often", while 54% "almost never" share "likes" if it is not something that really catches their attention, pleases them or appeals to them in some way. Only 9% are true to their tastes and feelings when it comes to liking posts. To probe this question further, respondents were asked why they liked a post even if they did not like it, 247 out of 500 said they did it out of friendship or family (121), 55 said they did it out of sympathy or not to disappoint (42), 21 out of 500 said they did it "to be liked".

6. DISCUSSION

Analysing the graphs of people who use social networks on a daily basis, we notice how young people are the most involved in these platforms, with YouTube and Instagram being the most used networks by Spanish teenagers. These data, extracted from the IAB study (2020), coincide with those of our research, where a sample of 500 young people between 18 and 26 years of age (younger target who use the largest number of networks) claim to prefer Instagram, WhatsApp and YouTube over other social networks.

Nowadays, the addiction to like continues to grow, we can take it as something positive if it is from a business point of view, since the more time users spend on your page, the greater the possibility of generating income; or negative, if it is from the point of view of the user who loses control over their time without being aware of it. Since this is something that affects us physically and mentally, we should start to control it. In the theoretical framework we present a surprising fact: we check our mobile phones at least 150 times a day. In this time, members of generation Z spend more than 3 hours a day on social networks, according to our research, and with an average of 10 to 20 minutes on the same platform, time that could be spent doing other more productive activities. According to IAB data (2020), of this consumption, users tend to spend on average 1 hour and 43 minutes on WhatsApp, 1 hour and 39 minutes on YouTube, 1 hour and 38 minutes on Spotify. This consumption habit can become, according to Franco and Barrio (2015), a threat to concentration and self-control of internet and network use.

According to Palazzo (2014), users belonging to generation Z are more anxious, curious and expect faster and faster responses in all areas. Hence the need to activate notifications on social networks in order to always be up to date with the latest likes and comments received. In this sense, Generation Z generally claims to have notifications active, although it sometimes depends on the social network. One of the reasons for allowing such notifications is to receive, in real time, any likes or comments that a post may have caused. This social group confesses to check their social networks sporadically to see if their posts have received feedback.

In response to the feedback received, the majority of the sample under study confessed that they did not feel affected by not receiving likes, while a minority did show feelings of insecurity, anger, frustration and even sadness. These data coincide with the opinion of Catalán (2020), who warns that the need to be connected or to constantly look at these likes can become a pit of vulnerability from which it will be very difficult to escape. Furthermore, according to Quintanilla (2020), young people have lower self-esteem than adults, so criticism, comments and not receiving as many likes as they would like can affect them deeply.

7. CONCLUSIONS

Generation Z prefers Instagram over other social networks, followed by WhatsApp and, as a third choice, YouTube, with Tiktok in fourth place. On average, this social group considers itself to be a passive user of social media, as they are more likely to look at other people's posts than to share their own content.

Forty percent of respondents say they use these platforms for more than three hours a day, 35% for between two and three hours, 22% for between one and two hours and 3% for less than one hour a day. Of all this time, 37% of the sample estimates that they spend, on average, between 10 and 20 minutes (in a row) on each social network, while 27% think that they spend between 20 minutes and half an hour on each social network.

In relation to the main objective of this research "how likes harm generation Z", 73% of respondents say that they are not affected by whether or not they receive likes, but 13.2% say they feel insecure and 11.8% feel weirded out; a minority, 2.2%, even feel sad. Only 1% of respondents say they feel overwhelmed and angry. Even so, 80% deny making posts strategically designed to increase their "likes". Despite these feelings, these young people say they do not modify or adapt the type of content they share publicly based on the number of likes they can potentially get.

Some 69% of respondents say they are curious to know who has liked their post, but 28% say they don't care too much about it. 32.6% say they sporadically check the likes update they receive and 25.8% say they "hardly ever" go back online to check the number of likes on a post; 10% say they do it every time they open any app, motivated by a potential like. In this regard, 62% of the sample say they "usually" have notifications active, while 16% say they "always" need these notifications. Some 21% do not activate them, as they are not interested in post-publication feedback.

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