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- 1 -

Summary of the Doctoral Thesis

Social Media Addiction and the Academic Motivation of Youth

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The phenomenon of Internet addiction, manifested through social media addiction, smartphone addiction, video game addiction, or online gambling addiction, has been a widely debated topic internationally in recent years due to its effects on individuals, starting from a young age to youth and adults. Studies conducted over time have shown, in only a few cases, a series of positive effects from computer use, for example, in the teaching process at school, and many negative effects reflected in all areas of the lives of those exposed to these environments for extended periods, starting with attention deficit, memory and sleep problems, rapid mood changes, restlessness, superficiality, narcissism, depression, and even suicidal thoughts (Whang, Lee & Chang, 2003; Ko et al., 2006; Kircaburun, Alhabash, Tosuntaş, Griffiths, 2018).

Many of these studies focus on the Millennial generation (Generation Y) for its distinctive characteristics compared to previous generations. Following the intergenerational line from Traditionalists or the Silent Generation (born between 1925-1945) to Baby Boomers (born between 1946-1964), to Generation X (born between 1965-1976/1979), the Millennial generation (those born between 1980-2000) has been referred to by researchers as the "always connected" generation, according to Pew Research Center, USA, 2010.

The reasons why this research also focuses primarily on Generation Y, compared to the previous Generation X, are twofold: 1) qualitative – due to the specific characteristics of the studied Generation Y individuals and the break they introduce in generational continuity, caused by their intense exposure to new online and digital media (e.g., they have exceptional technological skills, rely on information from search engines, perform online actions rapidly, seek constant feedback, learn by doing, communicate more visually, are emotionally open, prefer teamwork and collaboration, are goal-oriented, and seek personalized interactive experiences), and 2) quantitative – given that, in terms of the number of individuals in this segment, it is currently the largest generation globally, actively contributing and bringing new energy to the labor market (Howe & Strauss, 2000).

Due to the fact that Internet addiction, studied as a source phenomenon, involves a vast array of facets and manifests differently across various distinct channels, almost impossible to study comprehensively in a single research work, this thesis examines the phenomenon of social media addiction (specifically, addiction to the social networks Facebook and YouTube) and its relationship with the academic motivation of young people in Romania.

Social media addiction has often been defined by researchers through its manifestations, specifically the large amount of time spent on social media, the growing desire to use them, using them to forget about other personal problems, the agitation felt when access is impossible, and the negative impact of their use on personal relationships, academic, or professional performance. Using recognized scales for measuring the phenomenon of social media addiction,

such as the Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale (BFAS), the first of its kind developed in 2015 by Dr. Cecilie Andraessen at the University of Bergen (UiB) in Norway, or the Uses and Gratification Theory (UGT), which analyzes the motivation behind using social networks, this paper will study, on one hand, the types of behaviors recorded on the two platforms, Facebook and YouTube, and on the other hand, the effects of these behaviors on young people's motivation to pursue a college degree or a higher education program. Author citations in this work follow the APA style.

The main objective of this research is to analyze how excessive use of social media influences the academic performance of young people, not in terms of recorded academic results, but in terms of their motivation to pursue and complete a higher education program. This possible relationship between the two variables will be analyzed by investigating the socio-economic, psychological, behavioral, and institutional mechanisms involved in these processes.

The intermediate objectives of the thesis are: 1) identifying the consumption patterns of Facebook and YouTube among young people in Romania from Generations X and Y, and how excessive social media use may influence their attitudes and behaviors towards education; 2) identifying the relevant values for the analyzed audience that influence the relationship between the manifestation of potential social media addiction and the academic motivation of the young people studied; and 3) identifying the factors that influence academic motivation for the studied generations, X and Y.

Furthermore, consideration has also been given to identifying and proposing possible educational and behavioral solutions for future research to mitigate the extent of the phenomenon at a social level.

In other words, the stages of the research consist of: a) building the theoretical foundation regarding the studied variables—social media addiction and the motivation to complete a higher education program; b) investigating factors interrelated with values and behaviors—particularly social factors (social models, lifestyles, cultural consumption, educational paths); c) identifying the generational characteristics of Generations Y (Millennials) and X, and creating a "generation portrait" through comparison (taking into account social and professional aspects); d) constructing a framework for evaluating social media consumption patterns, considering elements such as the intensity of the phenomenon (e.g., comparing the time spent on these social networks versus the time spent on reading or studying), the magnitude of the phenomenon (e.g., the number of group members addicted to social media), and so on; and e) correlating all elements into an explanatory model and testing the model through empirical research.

In the attempt to study the relationship between the two variables—social media addiction, specifically Facebook and YouTube, and the current values and behaviors of young people in Romania, with a focus on their motivation to complete a higher education program— this research aims to examine important characteristics of the subjects' lifestyle. The goal is to develop a set of recommendations for reducing the observed negative effects and redirecting the concerns of young people towards reading and studying, with the aim of increasing the perceived value of education among the youth. This would be achieved by enriching their knowledge, developing their skills, shaping their character, understanding the world around them, and enhancing their ability to contribute through creativity and critical thinking to the social and economic progress of the society in which they live.

In the first stage of the quantitative research, conducted through an online questionnaire in Romanian via Google Forms, a sample of 219 respondents, both men and women from rural and urban areas, who are currently enrolled in or have previously completed a higher education program, both at public and private universities in various regions of the country (Bucharest, Brașov, Timișoara, Cluj, Constanța), was analyzed. A series of relationships were examined between the independent variable of Social Media Addiction—VI1 Facebook Addiction and VI2 YouTube Addiction (using the adapted Bergen Facebook Addiction Scale – BFAS for both platforms)—and the dependent variable of Academic Motivation—VD Academic Motivation (using the adapted Academic Motivation Scale – AMS-C for higher education), through the lens of three segments identified in the specialized literature as the most relevant for higher education institutions in shaping retention strategies: the psychological segment, the socio-economic segment, and the institutional segment. These three segments are part of Tinto's integrative theory, which has been criticized for not adequately addressing the psychological component.

Thus, starting from the desire to analyze the academic motivation of the respondents and evaluate the potential decision to drop out over the course of their studies in relation to excessive use of social media platforms, the quantitative analysis was initiated through an online questionnaire. The second stage involved a qualitative analysis, carried out through semi-structured individual interviews with a secondary, smaller sample drawn from the primary sample of the quantitative study (N = 219). Specifically, the participants were those respondents from the online questionnaire who hesitated in making a final decision to abandon their higher education studies or who had, at some point, dropped out, and who voluntarily agreed to participate in the second stage of this research.

Based on the three segments considered, a series of items were established, with which the relationships between the two types of variables, VI and VD, were measured.

Thus, for the psychological segment, two items were designed and measured in relation to VI1 Facebook Addiction, VI2 YouTube Addiction on one hand, and VD Academic Motivation on the other hand. These items consisted of values based on the Schwartz Value Scale (2012) and the item related to grit, according to the Grit Scale (Duckworth et al., 2007).

Therefore, according to the data analyzed using IBM – SPSS Statistics, Version 28.0.1.1 (15), it was found that the stronger the values, the higher the Academic Motivation (H1.3). The relationship between the AMS variable and Values had a significant coefficient of < 0.01 (thus, $p < 0.05$), with the Pearson test showing a significant medium positive correlation ($r = .371^{**}$, between .300 and .700). Thus, it can be said that individuals with strong personal values also have higher academic motivation.

Additionally, in this segment, the hypothesis was confirmed that the stronger the grit, the lower the Facebook Addiction (H2.1). The relationship between the BFAS variable and Grit had a significant coefficient of 0.004 (thus, $p < 0.05$), with the test being significant ($r = -.196^{**}$), although with a weak negative correlation (Cohen's d effect size was weak). This means that individuals with greater grit also have lower Facebook addiction, and the same applies to YouTube addiction.

Moreover, in the same segment of the analysis, also through the Pearson test, the data showed that the stronger the grit, the lower the YouTube Addiction (H2.2). The relationship between the BYAS variable and Grit had a significant coefficient of < 0.01 (thus, $p < 0.05$), with the test being significant ($r = -.247^{**}$), but again, with a weak negative correlation (Cohen's d effect size was weak).

Therefore, the hypotheses H1.1 – The stronger the values (I13), the lower the Facebook Addiction (I11), and H1.2 – The stronger the values (I13), the lower the YouTube Addiction (I12) were refuted, while the hypothesis H1.3 – The stronger the values (I13), the higher the Academic Motivation (I32) was confirmed.

At the same time, the hypotheses H2.1 – The stronger the grit (I14), the lower the Facebook Addiction (I11) and H2.2 – The stronger the grit (I14), the lower the YouTube Addiction (I12) were confirmed, while the hypothesis H2.3 – The stronger the grit (I14), the higher the Academic Motivation (I32) was refuted.

For the socio-economic segment, two items were designed and measured in relation to VI1 Facebook Addiction, VI2 YouTube Addiction on one hand, and VD Academic Motivation on the other hand. These items consisted of the parents' or guardians' higher education and the offline activities practiced with the immediate family.

Regarding the parents' or guardians' higher education, the premise that if at least one parent/guardian has higher education, then Social Media Addiction would be lower, and Academic Motivation would be higher, was not confirmed following the application of the T-test for independent samples. None of the tested relationships were significant ($p > 0.05$ in all three variants of hypothesis H3).

However, data analysis revealed that the more offline activities (AO) individuals practiced with their immediate family, the higher their Academic Motivation (H4.3). This was observed through the application of the Pearson test, which showed that the relationship between the AO variable and AMS had a significant coefficient of < 0.01 (thus, $p < 0.05$), with the test being significant ($r = .298**$), indicating a weak positive correlation, though almost on the borderline of a medium positive correlation (Cohen's d effect size was weak). Thus, it can be concluded that individuals who have spent more time over the years practicing offline activities with their family during leisure time have higher academic motivation than those who have not practiced offline activities with their family.

Therefore, none of the hypotheses H3.1 – If at least one parent/guardian has higher education (I18), then Facebook Addiction is lower (I11), H3.2 – If at least one parent/guardian has higher education (I18), then YouTube Addiction is lower (I12), and H3.3 – If at least one parent/guardian has higher education (I18), then Academic Motivation is higher (I32), were confirmed.

Additionally, the hypotheses H4.1 – The more offline activities practiced with the immediate family (I22), the lower the Facebook Addiction (I11), and H4.2 – The more offline activities practiced with the immediate family (I22), the lower the YouTube Addiction (I12), were refuted. However, the hypothesis H4.3 – The more offline activities practiced with the immediate family (I22), the higher the Academic Motivation (I32), was confirmed.

Regarding the institutional segment, three items were designed and measured in relation to VI1 Facebook Addiction, VI2 YouTube Addiction on one hand, and VD Academic Motivation (AMS) on the other. These items were related to the quality of the university, the use of modern teaching methods, and the value attributed to education.

Regarding the concept of university quality (CF), the Pearson test showed that the relationship between the CF variable and Academic Motivation (AMS) had a significant coefficient of < 0.01 (thus, $p < 0.05$), with the test being significant ($r = .348**$). This confirmed that those who perceive the university's quality as low have lower Academic Motivation (H5.3), with a medium positive correlation (Cohen's d effect size was medium). Therefore, it means that individuals who perceive their university as having a lower quality level also have lower academic motivation than those who perceive the university as having higher quality.

Additionally, regarding modern teaching methods (MMP), applying the Pearson test showed that the relationship between the MMP variable and Academic Motivation (AMS) had a significant coefficient of < 0.01 (thus, $p < 0.05$), with the test being significant (r = .420**). This result indicated that the more university professors use modern teaching methods, the higher the students' Academic Motivation (H6.3). Therefore, the hypothesis was confirmed with a medium positive correlation (Cohen's d effect size was medium). Thus, it can be said that individuals whose university professors teach using modern teaching methods (such as: student-centered courses (focusing on needs, desires, interests, etc.), collaborative learning (group-based, not individual), segmented instruction (breaking lessons into smaller parts, rather than long lectures), parallel learning (introducing multiple new concepts simultaneously, not sequentially), multimedia learning (incorporating technology), learning through experimentation (rather than listening), learning for understanding (rather than memorization), frequent evaluations (not just at the end), prompt and timely feedback, and the development of critical thinking) have higher academic motivation than those who are not taught using these methods.

Regarding the value attributed to education, Spearman correlations were used to verify if, as the perceived value of education decreases, Academic Motivation decreases, and Social Media Addiction increases. The results showed that the relationship between the value of education (VE) and Academic Motivation (AMS) had a significant coefficient of < 0.01 (thus, $p < 0.05$), with the test being significant ($\rho = .287$**), indicating that the lower the perceived value of education for an individual, the lower the Academic Motivation (H7.1), with a weak positive correlation (Cohen's d effect size was medium). Therefore, it can be said that individuals who perceive education itself as having a low value also have lower academic motivation, thus seeing less purpose in the intellectual effort required to complete higher education.

Thus, the hypotheses H5.1 – Those who perceive the quality of the university as low (I25) have higher Facebook Addiction (I11) and H5.2 – Those who perceive the quality of the university as low (I25) have higher YouTube Addiction (I12) were refuted, while the hypothesis H5.3 – Those who perceive the quality of the university as low (I25) have lower Academic Motivation (I32) was confirmed.

Similarly, the hypotheses H6.1 – The more professors use modern teaching methods (I28), the lower the students' Facebook Addiction, and H6.2 – The more professors use modern teaching methods (I28), the lower the students' YouTube Addiction, were refuted, while the hypothesis H6.3 – The more professors use modern teaching methods (I28), the higher the students' Academic Motivation was confirmed.

Additionally, the hypothesis H7.1 – The lower the perceived value of education for an individual (I29), the lower the Academic Motivation (I32) – was confirmed, while the hypotheses H7.2 – The lower the perceived value of education for an individual (I29), the higher the Facebook Addiction (I11), and H7.3 – The lower the perceived value of education for an individual (I29), the higher the YouTube Addiction (I12), were refuted.

Moreover, from the analyzed data, conclusions were drawn, separate from the testing of research hypotheses, regarding the differences between respondents based on their generation, Generation Y and Generation X.

Thus, after applying the T-test, it was found that, on the one hand, the average YouTube addiction was significantly higher in Generation Y than in Generation X (with $p < .001$, where the BYTAS average for Generation X = 1.4593 vs. the BYTAS average for Generation Y = 2.0902), and on the other hand, the average academic motivation was significantly higher in Generation Y than in Generation X (with $p = .021$, where the AMS-C average for Generation X = 2.9967 vs. the AMS-C average for Generation Y = 3.3188).

Therefore, the observed generational differences are related to the characteristic traits of each cohort, considering the environment in which they developed. It is evident that for Generation X, YouTube addiction is, on average, lower than for Generation Y, because for them, this platform emerged later in their developmental timeline, meaning they were less exposed to this online platform.

Nevertheless, academic motivation was found to be, on average, higher for Generation Y, the generation that used the online platform YouTube more and at an earlier stage, compared to Generation X, which we could say was not as affected by the temptation to excessively use social media platforms.

Additionally, regarding the frequency of social media use, after applying the T-test, it was found that the average frequency of social media use was significantly higher in Generation Y than in Generation X (with $p < .001$, where the average for Generation X = 2.0365 vs. the average for Generation Y = 2.7096).

This is easily explained once again through the lens of chronology, as the younger Generation Y was exposed to social media platforms earlier and more frequently, thus embedding these habits and behaviors more deeply than in Generation X.

Regarding the qualitative analysis conducted through semi-structured interview guides, in individual video sessions with a group of 20 people selected from the quantitative analysis sample, from Generations X and Y, using thematic analysis (TA) as the method of qualitative data analysis, to identify, organize, and provide information in meaningful patterns from all the data extracted and analyzed, within the framework of the three chosen themes, namely the theme

of dropout (T1), the theme of studies in general (T7), and the theme of academic motivation (T4)—all three related to the general concept of education, which is the central theme of this research—several key ideas emerged from the three subjects, which we will present below.

#1 The theme of dropout (T1)

- 4 out of the 20 subjects (2 from Generation Y students, 1 from Generation Y former students, and 1 from Generation X) indicated that their motivation for dropping out of higher education was the behavior of professors, either due to demotivation, lack of involvement, or lack of support.

- 13 out of the 20 subjects (7 from Generation Y students, 2 from Generation Y former students, and 4 from Generation X) indicated that the reason for dropping out was the courses themselves, either due to their difficulty, a mismatch with initial expectations, the perception that private universities were weaker than public ones, fatigue and age (commuting, evening classes), or the lack of passion associated with the courses.

- Regarding the perception of the act of dropping out, whether the decision to drop out of higher education was a deliberate choice or one that is now regretted, 15 out of the 20 subjects clearly categorized this process within their own experience. Specifically, 5 subjects stated that they regret the decision to drop out in the past (1 Generation Y student, 3 Generation Y former students, and 1 Generation X subject), 5 subjects stated that they do not regret the decision to drop out of higher education (2 Generation Y students, 1 Generation Y former student, and 2 Generation X subjects), while the remaining 5 subjects indicated that although they may have considered dropping out at some point, they never actually dropped out (2 Generation Y students and 3 Generation X subjects).

Thus, from the analysis of this theme, the most evident conclusion is that the main reason most frequently cited by subjects across all three categories for dropping out was the courses themselves.

#2 The theme of studies and education in general (T7)

- T 7.1.1. university – positive aspects: 35 positive aspects from different areas, such as: important theoretical foundation, practical aspect, professors who work in the field they teach, understanding for those who work, professors who are close to students or are good pedagogues, the material itself, career assistance, curriculum adapted to market needs.

- T 7.1.2. university – negative aspects: 25 negative aspects from different areas, such as: long handwritten courses, strict professors, little practical experience, lack of alignment with the market (outdated, unupdated courses), unprepared professors or those who use

non-interactive teaching methods, the distance learning (ID) system which requires a high degree of self-motivation, overloaded schedules.

- T 7.1.7. university – advantages abroad: 12 advantages indicated for higher education abroad, including: an entry-level job guaranteed at the end of studies, encouragement of individual study and personal contribution, the choice of modules with options to switch, easier admission but a continuous evaluation process throughout the semesters, and a better system of practices and values.

Thus, from the analysis of this second theme, it became most evident that positive feedback about the university prevailed, although some drawbacks of higher education in Romania compared to abroad were also expressed.

#3 The theme of academic motivation (T4)

- T 4.3. university motivation – intrinsic (desire to study, to evolve): 12 subjects (including 4 Generation Y students, 4 Generation Y former students, and 4 Generation X subjects) mentioned that they are/were pursuing a university degree out of intrinsic motivation, such as: a complex thinking system with information filtering, the ability to know where to find the necessary information, connection with people, intellectual growth, the pleasure of studying, argumentation skills and critical thinking, guidance and mentorship, intelligence, and general culture.

- T 4.5. motivation level for studies (from 1 to 5): 19 subjects (including 6 Generation Y students, 5 Generation Y former students, and 8 Generation X subjects) indicated the level of motivation they have now in university or that they recall having during their last university experience, on a scale from 1 (very little motivation) to 5 (very motivated): 6 subjects rated their motivation level as 5, 2 subjects rated their motivation between 4 and 5, 4 subjects rated their motivation as 4, 3 subjects rated their motivation between 3 and 4, 5 subjects rated their motivation between 2 and 3, and 1 subject rated their motivation at the minimum level of 1.

- T 4.6. key professors (if there are any, how many): 15 subjects (including 5 Generation Y students, 5 Generation Y former students, and 5 Generation X subjects) mentioned that they encountered at least one key professor during their university experience, often identifying the person or the subject through which they met them.

- T 4.7. key professor – ideal model (what they should be like): All 20 subjects (including 6 Generation Y students, 6 Generation Y former students, and 8 Generation X subjects) provided information about the ideal model of a key professor, identifying the following traits: good communicator, good pedagogue, humor, fairness, patience, modern (treating students as equals, using modern teaching methods), realistic, relaxed, authentic, open,

competent, close to students, passionate, empathetic, visionary, available, a leader, mentor, trustworthy, adaptable, interactive, motivational (valuing the student), good psychologist, willing to accept feedback, genuinely caring. Thus, the traits of an ideal key professor, as indicated by the interviewed subjects, were organized into six main categories: (1) approach to teaching, (2) profession-related skills, (3) subject-specific competencies, (4) behavior, (5) personality, and (6) values.

Final conclusions. Following a review of the specialized literature applicable to the analyzed themes and variables, as mentioned earlier, we believe that this research brings an element of originality because it examines the relationship between Social Media addiction and academic motivation, a topic that has not yet been studied in Romania with the combination of variables I have proposed. Until now, no possible correlations between the AMS scale and other phenomena, such as Social Media addiction, have been analyzed through the lens of the three segments examined—psychological, socio-economic, and institutional. The central focus of this thesis is precisely on determining how motivation for higher education correlates with Social Media addiction among young people in Romania.

A series of studies published in Romania up until July 2024 touch on these areas, but only tangentially, in different contexts, and with other combinations of variables analyzed. For example, in 2024, David et al. demonstrated that depression is significantly associated with social media addiction, anxiety, and poor academic performance among Romanian nursing students. Additionally, a 2022 study in the medical field examined the relationship between personality structure, motivation, and academic outcomes, specifically the score obtained in the National Residency Exam by medical students in Romania (Muntean et al., 2022). It shows that a combination of low openness and high conscientiousness can predict a better exam score, and both motivational involvement and motivational persistence are correlated with conscientiousness and the score obtained in the National Residency Exam (Muntean et al., 2022).

Social influence in relation to Facebook addiction among students from Romania and Lithuania was also studied (Lamanauskas, Iordache & Pribeanu, 2017). However, Facebook addiction was measured using a scale consisting of only three items (from the withdrawal item area), adapted from Masur et al. (2014). This scale is composed of three items adapted from a broader internet addiction scale, reflecting specific aspects of social media addiction, such as: the intense need to use Facebook, feelings of anxiety or irritability when access is restricted, and difficulties in controlling the time spent on Facebook. In this study, university students who reported a greater social influence also indicated a higher level of Facebook addiction (Lamanauskas, Iordache & Pribeanu, 2017).

Another study from Romania in 2020 analyzed how young people in Romania interact with the Internet and its impact on academic results (Benchea, 2020). Besides analyzing the reasons why young people use the Internet and potential gender differences in its usage, the study only showed a negative correlation between Internet usage (not addiction) and academic performance (not motivation) among Romanian youth (Benchea, 2020). The following year, the same author analyzed the relationship between Internet usage and students' academic engagement (Benchea, 2021), once again not addressing the phenomenon of Social Media addiction or academic motivation.

Thus, as indicated in Chapter 4 of this thesis, the aim of this research was to analyze and construct a functional explanatory model to identify both the facilitating factors and the consequences of Social Media addiction on behaviors, values, aspirations, and lifestyles of the young people from the aforementioned generations, especially regarding their academic motivation, whether they are currently studying or have studied at various universities in Romania, both technical and non-technical. The conceptual framework presented in Chapter 4.2, "Research Methodology," served as the blueprint for both constructing the research hypotheses and testing them. For each variable—independent, dependent, and analysis factor—concepts were integrated into research hypotheses that were subsequently statistically tested in Chapter 5 quantitatively, and later, in Chapter 6, qualitatively analyzed in depth.

Additionally, the intermediate objectives were also achieved: 1) identifying usage patterns of Facebook and YouTube among young people from Generation X and Y in Romania and how Social Media usage can influence their attitudes and behaviors towards education, 2) identifying the relevant values for the analyzed audience, along with psychological, socio-economic, and institutional variables that influence the relationship between Social Media addiction and academic motivation of the young people studied, and 3) identifying the factors that influence academic motivation for the generations studied, X and Y.

These objectives contributed in a significant way to the accurate and functional construction of a relevant explanatory model, the conceptual framework on which the hypotheses of this research were built for testing the relationship between the three types of variables: the independent variable – Social Media Addiction (adapted Bergen Scale) – VI, the dependent variable – Academic Motivation (adapted AMS-C Scale), and the analysis factors, specifically: values and grit – in the psychological segment, parents' higher education and offline activities practiced with family – in the socio-economic segment, and university quality, modern teaching methods, and the perceived value of education – in the institutional segment.

Thus, out of the seven working hypotheses in the quantitative analysis, each with three sub-hypotheses related to Facebook addiction, YouTube addiction, and Academic Motivation, resulting in a total of 21 sub-hypotheses, seven were confirmed, or one-third. More specifically, the quantitative study showed that:

- H1.3: The stronger the values (I13), the higher the Academic Motivation (I32) – psychological segment;
- H2.1: The stronger the grit (I14), the lower the Facebook addiction (I11) – psychological segment;
- H2.2: The stronger the grit (I14), the lower the YouTube addiction (I12) – psychological segment;
- H4.3: The more offline activities practiced with the family (I22), the higher the Academic Motivation (I32) – socio-economic segment;
- H5.3: Those who perceive the quality of the university as low (I25) have lower Academic Motivation (I32) – institutional segment;
- H6.3: The more professors use modern teaching methods (I28), the higher the Academic Motivation of students – institutional segment;
- H7.3: The lower the perceived value of education for an individual (I29), the lower the Academic Motivation (I32) – institutional segment.

Therefore, it was demonstrated that from the psychological segment's perspective, strong values generate high academic motivation, proving a positive correlation between the two concepts, and grit negatively correlates with both Facebook addiction and YouTube addiction.

From the socio-economic segment's perspective, the only confirmed hypothesis showed that offline activities practiced with the family positively correlate with respondents' academic motivation.

The analysis of the institutional segment revealed that respondents who perceive the quality of the university as low, and those who perceive education as having low value, have lower academic motivation. However, when professors use modern teaching methods, students have higher academic motivation, proving a positive correlation between the two variables.

Thus, from the quantitative study's perspective, we can briefly conclude that:

- Academic motivation increases when: student respondents have strong values, have engaged in offline activities with their families, and professors use modern teaching methods.- motivația academică scade dacă studenții percep facultatea ca fiind de o calitate scăzută și percep educația în sine ca având o valoare scăzută.

- Facebook addiction is lower when grit is higher.

- Youtube addiction is lower when grit is higher.

On the other hand, out of the total of 219 respondents with valid responses to the online questionnaire (43 from Generation X, 151 from Generation Y, and 25 from Generation Z), the qualitative study was conducted on a sample of 20 respondents (6 Generation Y students, 6 Generation Y former students/graduates, and 8 Generation X students or former students/graduates), drawn from the initial sample used in the quantitative research. This study focused on analyzing three themes, after reviewing all potential themes, which were considered most relevant to the research purpose: the theme of dropout (T1), the theme of studies/education in general (T7), and the theme of academic motivation (T4). The qualitative study revealed the following:

- The main reason most frequently cited by subjects from all three studied categories for dropping out was the courses themselves: 13 out of the 20 subjects (7 Generation Y students, 2 Generation Y former students, and 4 Generation X subjects) indicated that their reason for dropping out was the courses, either due to their difficulty, a mismatch with initial expectations, the perception that private universities were weaker than public ones, fatigue and age (commuting, evening classes), or a lack or dilution of passion for the courses (T1);

- Positive feedback about the university prevails, although some negative aspects were expressed regarding higher education in Romania compared to abroad. The most frequently mentioned positive aspects of the university by the subjects were: important theoretical foundation, practical aspect, professors who work in the field they teach, understanding for working students, professors who are close to students or are good pedagogues, the material itself, career support, and curriculum adapted to market needs (T7);

- Starting from the question that underpinned this thesis, namely whether it still makes sense to pursue a bachelor's or master's degree nowadays when everything you need can be found with a click on the Internet (I5), most respondents disagreed with this statement. Thus, the majority of respondents, specifically 12 subjects (4 Generation Y students, 4 Generation Y former students, and 4 Generation X subjects), mentioned that they are pursuing or have pursued a university degree out of intrinsic motivation, such as: a complex thinking system with information filtering, the ability to know where to find necessary information, connection with people, intellectual growth, the pleasure of studying, argumentation skills, critical thinking, guidance and mentorship, intelligence, and general culture (T4);

- The majority of respondents, specifically 15 subjects (5 Generation Y students, 5 Generation Y former students, and 5 Generation X subjects), mentioned that they encountered at least one key professor during their university experience, often identifying the person or the subject through which they met them (T4).

- All 20 subjects (6 Generation Y students, 6 Generation Y former students, and 8 Generation X subjects) provided clear information regarding the ideal model of a key professor, indicating the following traits: good communicator, good pedagogue, sense of humor, fairness, patience, modern (treating students as equals, using modern teaching methods), realistic, relaxed, authentic, open, competent, close to students, passionate, empathetic, visionary, available, a leader, a mentor, trustworthy, adaptable, interactive, motivational (valuing the student), good psychologist, willing to accept feedback, and genuinely caring. The ideal key professor traits, as indicated by the interviewed subjects, were organized into six major categories that proved to have the greatest impact: (1) approach to teaching, (2) job-related skills, (3) subject-specific skills, (4) behavior, (5) personality, and (6) values.

Therefore, the qualitative study revealed additional insights compared to the quantitative study regarding the most commonly cited reason for dropping out of university (the courses themselves). It also showed that while a perceived low value of the university correlates positively with lower academic motivation, many concrete positive aspects were highlighted regarding universities in Romania, such as: important theoretical foundation, practical aspect, professors working in the field they teach, understanding for working students, professors who are close to students or are good pedagogues, course materials, career support, and curriculum adapted to market needs. The majority of respondents mentioned that they pursued or are pursuing a degree out of intrinsic motivation, such as: a complex thinking system with information filtering, the ability to know where to find necessary information, connection with people, intellectual growth, the pleasure of studying, argumentation skills, critical thinking, guidance and mentorship, intelligence, and general culture. Furthermore, key professors proved to be a constant factor in respondents' memories, with all interviewed subjects indicating at least one. This helped shape a portrait of the ideal key professor, characterized by: good communication skills, good pedagogy, sense of humor, fairness, patience, modern teaching methods (treating students as equals), realism, relaxation, authenticity, openness, competence, approachability, passion, empathy, vision, availability, leadership, mentorship, trustworthiness, adaptability, interactivity, motivation (valuing the student), psychological insight, willingness to accept feedback, and involvement.

The primary goal of this research was to deepen the analysis of the phenomenon of Social Media addiction in Romania, its effects on young people's academic motivation, and ultimately, as much as possible, to develop a set of basic recommendations aimed at improving and balancing the lifestyle currently adopted by the younger generation, but especially at increasing the perceived value of education.

In terms of research limitations, first, we must consider the self-reporting method of the questionnaire, which could involve a certain degree of bias. Additionally, the research design is cross-sectional, not longitudinal, and correlational, thus not addressing the cause-effect segment through regression analysis. Moreover, more advanced statistical methods could have been used, such as mediation, moderation, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), etc.

Another limitation of this research lies in the fact that the quantitative study had a sample size of only N=219 respondents, after excluding respondents from a total of 225 who did not fit the desired sample (those who either studied abroad or had never been students). Ultimately, 43 individuals from Generation X (aged between 41 and 55+/60 years at the time of the survey, born between 1960 and 1980), 151 individuals from Generation Y (aged between 21 and 40 years at the time of the survey, born between 1981 and 2000), and 25 individuals from Generation Z (aged up to 20 years at the time of the survey, born starting in 2001) answered the online questionnaire. For more extensive results, a larger number of respondents, especially from Generation X, would have been beneficial.

Additionally, given the complexity of the conceptual framework, the administered questionnaire was relatively long and cumbersome (41 main items, with fairly detailed scales for some of them, and responses were estimated to take 10-13 minutes, which may have led some to forgo answering). However, this was a mission assumed from the outset to achieve the main goal of the present thesis and its outlined objectives.

Furthermore, the pandemic period was an obstacle in the application of research instruments designed up until that moment (from October 2017, when the doctoral stage began, until March 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic started), given that the results would have been compromised during such a global crisis period if the variables and their relationships had been measured in such a non-generic, but rather extremely specific and unique context. Therefore, the long duration over which this study was conducted and completed may be considered a limitation, and we can assume that under normal conditions, the research would have been completed earlier, perhaps with a greater impact.

As future research directions, it would be recommended to expand the analysis to a larger group of participants. Additionally, a comparative analysis of the private versus public university sectors, technical versus socio-human profiles, etc., could be conducted. The segment of non-

traditional students could also be analyzed more deeply in Romania, such as those who begin a (new) degree at an older age. Of course, new variables or factors of analysis could be introduced into the research design across all three segments, such as resilience or self-confidence (in the psychological dimension), parental support in the educational process, the concept of "shared agency" from the specialized literature, or family climate (in the socio-economic segment), as well as more qualities derived from the ideal professor profile outlined in the qualitative analysis of this study, such as passion, availability, motivation, student appreciation, and the degree of involvement (in the institutional segment).

As potential future research directions, a primary focus could be on the new wave of technologization and the use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools, the benefits they may bring to the academic environment, but also the concerns regarding the possible or probable risks they entail.

Moreover, a closer analysis, similar or improved in terms of variables and research themes, should be conducted regarding Generation Z to be better prepared for Generation Alpha (those born between 2010 and 2024) coming up next.

At the same time, in the context of digitalization and technologization, recent studies have indicated that, even in the academic environment, traditional writing tools (handwriting, on paper, with a pen, pencil, or fountain pen) provide superior benefits compared to digital education tools for young people and children. The increase in digital usage in academia might need to be slowed down towards more sustainable educational technology (Selwyn, 2022). It is already being discussed in terms of digital detox, and a very important aspect related to the trend of entirely eliminating handwriting, especially in a well-known context where reading is an increasingly less practiced activity among young people, is that handwriting and taking notes by hand seem to be the best tools for a healthy cognitive process (Syvertsen, 2023).

In terms of practical implications and potential recommendations that can be developed following the completion of this study, the conclusions drawn from this research mainly point towards the necessity of shaping an institutional policy more adapted to the expectations of students from new generations. For example, the 25 criticisms expressed by respondents in the qualitative study, from different registers, such as: long handwritten courses, strict professors, limited practice, lack of market relevance (outdated, non-updated courses), unprepared professors or those using non-interactive teaching methods, the ID system which requires a high degree of self-motivation, and an overloaded schedule. Additionally, the qualitative study also highlighted the advantages of foreign universities over those in Romania, such as: having an entry-level job guaranteed upon graduation, encouraging individual study and personal contribution, offering module choices with options for change, easier admission but followed by

a continuous evaluation process throughout the semesters, and a better system of practice and values. In all these areas, and more, actions to improve academic activities that could increase academic motivation can be considered.

On the other hand, we believe that Social Media addiction cannot be addressed in a coherent and consistent manner within the academic or institutional environment, as it relates more to personal aspects of an individual's life. However, vocation is a critical issue in our education system. In this regard, new policies should be developed, both from the perspective of teacher training, focusing strictly on a vocational profession rather than just a regular job, and from the perspective of students, who should be guided early on in the school and academic environment, with attention and competence, to discover and pursue their vocation.

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